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## Abstract

Over the last century, philosophy has comprehensively criticised the 'common-sense' view of the proposition 'God exists' as being meaningful. The purpose of this thesis is therefore to show that instances of 'God exists' can be considered meaningful, whether or not God does in fact exist. From the intuitive premise of compositionality - that the meaning of a proposition is determined by the meaning of its parts - I ask what options 'God exists' presents. Its appearance is that of a simple subject-predicate sentence, restricting possible difficulties in interpreting compositionality; it appears to take a subject and attribute a property to that subject. However, several problems are apparent. The first is the concept of existence. The first chapter, therefore, compares the views of Bertrand Russell with recent work by Colin McGinn, arguing in favour of existence as a predicate.

McGinn presents a challenge to allowing the predication of existence of 'God', centred around the concepts by which ontological arguments characterise 'God'. The second chapter, as an historical-theological angle on the meaningfulness of 'God exists', takes up this challenge in an attempt to resolve it using Anselm's *Proslogion*, which is traditionally thought to demonstrate the existence of God by using the idea of God. Analysis of the *Proslogion* and the thought underlying it do not provide an entirely acceptable resolution, but lay the foundations for the remainder of the thesis.

The third chapter argues for the rejection of McGinn's challenge. Having provided arguments for seeing 'God exists' as a subject-predicate sentence, and noted the difficulties in conceiving adequately of God, I address the problem of what account to give of 'God'. Against a background of debate in the philosophy of language, I advocate understanding 'God' as a name in 'God exists', and argue for a view of the meaning and reference of 'God' based upon the work of Jerome Gellman.

Finally, I combine relevant elements from existence, reference and meaning - incorporating theological suggestions arising from Anselm - to provide a model for the meaningfulness of 'God exists' which, I argue, demonstrates 'God exists' to be a meaningful proposition if God does in fact exist *or* if God does not in fact exist.

**'God Exists': Meaning, Reference and Anselm's *Proslogion***

**Stuart Mark Foyle**

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M.A. Thesis

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I shall use the following abbreviations for three major sources in this thesis (a statement of the full detail shall be made at the first instance of reference to facilitate ease of use):

*CPBR* : Bertrand Russell, 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism [1918]' in John G. Slater (ed.) *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell* (London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd., 1986), vol. VIII

*ELP* : Colin McGinn, 'Existence', in *Logical Properties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)

*NNG* : Jerome Gellman, 'Naming and Naming God', *Religious Studies* 29 (1993), p.193-216

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'To say that 'God exists' is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false... [and] if the assertion that there is a god is nonsensical, then the atheist's assertion that there is no god is equally nonsensical...'

A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*

## Introduction

Ontological, cosmological and teleological arguments all have 'God exists' as their conclusion; all aim to assert the proposition as true. The question that can - perhaps must - be asked of each, however, does not concern so much truth or epistemology (although these are clearly vital) but *meaningfulness*. What do we mean when we say, think or write 'God exists'? The classical arguments for the existence of God might go furthest in answering the question; the ontological argument perhaps furthest of all, since it is traditionally held as an attempt to derive 'God exists' from the idea of 'God' and a concept of existence. But we may ask legitimately even of these 'what does it *mean* to say that God exists?'

The starting point of this thesis, then, is just this question of meaning. A common sense view might hold it as fairly obvious that 'God exists' is meaningful. On the other hand, influenced by reductive scientific projects and the philosophical pressures of logical atomism and logical positivism, a common sense view could be construed to be that 'God exists' is not meaningful, or perhaps is not meaningful unless God actually exists. The substantive argument of this thesis, however, is that 'God exists' is meaningful and, moreover, is meaningful whether or not God in fact exists. In order to achieve the aim of a model of meaningfulness for 'God exists' several issues need consideration. I shall outline below the structure of the thesis as regards analysis of the concept of existence, Anselm's *Proslogion* and its context, and the problem of meaning and reference for proper names and definite descriptions. However, there are broader issues which need to be addressed beforehand.

This requires preliminary attention to the philosophy of language - more specifically, to theories of sentential meaning. For if we cannot say what it is for a proposition to be meaningful, there seems little point in attempting to show that 'God exists' is meaningful. Although it not within the scope of this thesis to debate the details of a theory of meaning for sentences, certain assessments may be considered prudent at the outset. The most important, which I take as a premise, is compositionality. Broadly, compositionality states that the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of its parts. The precise mechanism by which this takes place, and the possibility of any exceptions to it, are up for debate. However, the difficulties that may arise in giving a comprehensive account are not, I suggest, present in the case of 'God exists'. At minimum, an analysis of the meaning of 'exists' and 'God' should provide some idea of

what it is to say that the former is conjoined with the latter. Compositionality should be an intuitive starting point; open to challenge, certainly, but not discarded without reason.

In this introduction, I wish briefly to note several fairly influential theories of sentential meaning to give a sense of where I stand, and of what alternatives may potentially be presented to the conclusions of the thesis. In this, I will broadly follow the structure of William Lycan's *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, which provides a more detailed treatment of the following, and other, theories of meaning. I choose not to cover ideational theories, verificationism and Quine's nihilism of sentence meaning because, under conditions of restricted space, they appear both the least defensible and (perhaps therefore) the least mainstream.

The first position to be entertained is the 'propositional' theory of sentential meaning.<sup>1</sup> Essentially, this holds that a sentence is meaningful if it expresses a proposition. 'Propositions are entirely general and, if you like, eternal.'<sup>2</sup> They are not dependent upon any specific language; 'my umbrella is green' expresses the same proposition as 'Mon parapluie est vert'. Propositions are truth-bearers; the two examples are both false because they express a proposition that is false. Propositions in this case are also entities.

There are several objections to this position (Lycan provides a range of examples<sup>3</sup>), but all that I should like to say here is that *if* 'God exists' means the proposition that God exists, then we still need some account of 'God' and some account of 'exists', and to that extent the loose premise and requirements of compositionality still hold. I would like also to note that, unless specified to the contrary, all uses of 'proposition' in this thesis will be of the non-entity-invoking variety.

The second position I wish briefly to consider is H. P. Grice's theory of 'speaker-meaning'. Lycan says of it the following.

Grice distinguished...speaker-meaning from [a] sentence's own standard-meaning [and] offered an elaborate analysis of speaker-meaning in terms of speakers' intentions, beliefs, and other psychological states.... It is generally agreed that some version of the analysis must be right.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This is also important as background to the treatments of Russell in following chapters.

<sup>2</sup> Lycan, William G., *Philosophy of Language a contemporary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p.80

<sup>3</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.83-86

<sup>4</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.101

Grice further provided an account of how standard sentence-meaning could be understood in terms of speaker-meaning.

I shall dwell on this only long enough to note the following points. First, the concept of a speaker's broad linguistic intention does indeed seem a necessary element of an analysis of the meaning of an utterance. Consequently, if the model developed in this thesis does not allow for an element of intention, then one might justifiably be dubious and demand some redress. Fortunately, the context of the question - what *we mean* when we state 'God exists' - holds out some hope that this sort of concern will be born in mind.

Secondly, we are again fortunate in that 'God exists' is not a long, convoluted or grammatically ambiguous proposition (at least not on the face of it). It is not like the famous example from Strawson: 'This is a fine red one.'<sup>5</sup> The options for confusion and complexity at the sentential level are minimised for the proposition 'God exists'; the number of things someone could mean by such a proposition is restricted. Once again, it seems reasonable to ask what is meant by 'God' and what is meant by 'exists' as a starting point.

The third position is that of 'use' or 'inferential' theories of sentential meaning. These focus upon 'the role an expression plays in human social behaviour.'<sup>6</sup> Wittgenstein used the ideas of 'language games' and rule-following, giving rise to a host of theories with accounts based upon the view that 'when we talk of [linguistic expressions'] meanings, we mean the functions they characteristically perform in the context of our current social practices.'<sup>7</sup>

Lycan provides two objections<sup>8</sup> that are, and will continue to be, particularly pertinent. The first is that proper names are difficult to account for in such a theory; what are the rules or social practices for 'Ludwig Wittgenstein' for example? The second is that we can comprehend, and react to, new and original sentence constructions - implying at least some form of compositionality. 'The sentence's meaning is in large part a function of its internal structure as well.'<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps there are some expressions for which the theory shows real insights. Perhaps many expressions involving 'God' fall typically within this category. However, I would argue that the use/inferential approach is not suitable for 'God

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<sup>5</sup> Strawson, P.F., 'On Referring', *Mind* 59 (1950), p.320-344 cited by Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.102

<sup>6</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.90

<sup>7</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.92

<sup>8</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.94. For further objections and replies, see p.93-98

<sup>9</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.94



exists', primarily because we do actually seem to be positing an entity, over and above anything that we say or do in practicing religion, and the 'social practice' accompanying it is frequently debate over whether it is actually true. It is not that 'God exists' fulfils some social function particularly; when we agonise over it, debate it, or compose arguments to prove it, we are clearly asking a question that means something, even if we are *erroneous* in our justification for asking that question. It is still *meaningful* to ask whether an entity exists. If we are in error, a good account of the meaningfulness of the proposition will accommodate and even explain our error. Likewise, the model I aim to construct in this thesis ought to show what we mean when we say 'God exists' and the argument over whether we are categorically mistaken in making such a statement will be separate from, but not incompatible with, that model. Further, as we have seen Lycan argue, there should still be a level of acceptance of some form of compositionality for the use/inferential theorist, and so the premise of my analysis is not adversely affected.

The final position for consideration is Davidson's truth-conditional theory. 'On this view, to know a sentence's meaning is to know the conditions under which that sentence would be true....'<sup>10</sup> As Lycan says<sup>11</sup>, Davidson emphasises the requirement for compositionality, and argues that truth conditions are a sentence's most salient compositional feature. So 'God exists' would be true if God does exist - and we should again require an account of the meaning of 'God' and 'exists'. Lycan canvasses a selection of objections and I provide his summary below.

One is that many perfectly meaningful sentences do not have truth-values. Some others are that his program cannot handle expressions (such as pronouns) whose referents depend on context, predicates which are not synonyms but happen to apply to just the same things, and sentences whose truth-values are not determined by those of their component clauses.<sup>12</sup>

I shall once again restrict my remarks to observing that 'God exists' is an apparently simple construction, without component clauses or other difficult features. Its appearance is that of a subject-predicate sentence; it names an entity and attributes a property to that entity. Consequently, if the meaning of the subject and the meaning of the predicate can be demonstrated, the way in which the sentence fits together ought not to provide many difficulties. If the model is constructed properly, an account should be

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<sup>10</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.131

<sup>11</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.130

<sup>12</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.130

available of the conditions under which the proposition is true, and also the conditions under which it is false.

In conclusion, then, although the above theories of sentential meaning and their respective objections may have something to say about the model resulting from this thesis, such considerations are proper to a subsequent project. For the present, it seems reasonable to analyse the meaning of 'God' and 'exists' on the assumption of some form of compositionality, and to explore further, more complex options only if the analysis fails also to account for the way in which 'God' and 'exists' fit together.

'God exists' on this analysis may not exhibit major difficulties in the complexity of the sentence structure, but that is not to say that there are no difficulties; far from it. In analysing the meaning of 'God' and 'exists' there are many problems. Consequently, the structure of my thesis will comprise several key elements.

First, there is the problem of whether 'God exists' really is a subject-predicate sentence. In Chapter I, I shall attempt to tackle the problem of the concept of existence, comparing Bertrand Russell's widely accepted view that it is a second-order property (a property of properties, meaning that a property is instantiated) with Colin McGinn's recent work criticising this in favour of a first-order property view - essentially that existence is a property of objects which we use to distinguish those that are actual from those which are intentional/linguistic. With certain reservations, I shall support McGinn's primary theses - also noting the implications for an account of 'God exists' from both the Russellian and McGinnian perspectives. However, both the ramifications of McGinn's theses, and particular comments made by him, add to the incentive to examine the ontological argument. As observed above, ontological arguments for God's existence might be considered to provide the best opportunity to assess the meaning of 'God exists' on the grounds that they traditionally attempt to derive it from the content of those terms.

Therefore, in Chapter II, I turn to Anselm's *Proslogion*. There are several reasons why this is more appropriate than other texts expounding an ontological argument, as will be seen, but the most important is the thought underlying the *Proslogion*. Anselm has a philosophy and theology of language that gives him a common ground both with McGinn and with subsequent elements of my thesis; vitally, he can be seen, in an historical-theological context, as contemplating strikingly similar challenges to those levelled by McGinn against the use and understanding of the word 'God'. Anselm's concerns are centred upon ineffability, whilst McGinn requires that the concept of 'God' be well-defined, and that we should know what it would be for an

entity to be characterised by one or more concepts before existence can be applied. Analysis of Anselm's thought provides a double movement in the investigation: looking back in conclusion on the *Proslogion*, used to introduce his thought, I suggest a perspective from which it can be understood (without debating as to whether its arguments work, which would be an entirely separate task). Looking forward to a model of meaningfulness for 'God exists', I argue that the only reasonable direction for an analysis of 'God' to take is to find a way of referring to God which takes into account the problems described by McGinn and Anselm – i.e. a tension between the demand to define God and the assertion of His ineffability.

Chapter III consequently engages in a discussion of meaning and reference. Arguing that McGinn's theses allow us to take 'God exists' as a subject-predicate sentence and that 'God' functions as a name in the broadest sense, I shall consider what account of meaning and reference could follow from this. Against a background of debate between the (broadly) Russellian and Kripkean positions, I shall examine a paper by Jerome Gellman which contends that we can fix a reference for 'God' whilst leaving open the semantic account of that term. Gellman further relates his position to Anselm's *Proslogion*, providing continuity with the rest of the thesis.

In a minor critique of Gellman, I shall argue that by demarcating a Kripkean semantic account, to which Gellman should (in consistency) adhere, and an account of 'associated descriptions' such as that suggested by Mark Sainsbury, it is possible to posit a model of 'God' – for both the meaning and reference elements – that employs appealing features of both. I shall also argue that McGinn's view of existence allows the composite theory of meaning and reference thus attained to withstand the major objections normally brought to bear against it.

In Chapter IV, I shall combine the salient arguments from previous chapters into a model of meaningfulness for 'God exists'. This will show how 'God exists' can be meaningful whether or not God actually exists by employing McGinn's view of existence in the context of the Chapter III account of meaning and reference. In the course of this, it should be apparent that the model both tallies with our use of language, fictional discourse and discussion about the existence of God, and accommodates some of the concerns raised in this introduction.

## Chapter I: Existence

It is generally supposed that the status of 'existence', as either a first- or second-order property, has some bearing on the matter of predicating it of God. The classical criticism of ontological arguments, for instance, is that existence is not a property that can simply be 'tagged on' to a list of God's attributes; rather, existence is a set of attributes having an instance.

Thus, in this chapter, I intend to deal with a famous view of existence as a second-order property from Bertrand Russell. I shall briefly consider how one might treat the issue of predicating existence of God with a second-order model, and the overall view that emerges demonstrates the first part of the philosophical challenge to the meaningfulness of 'God exists (the second Russellian part of this challenge will be considered in Chapter III).

I shall then deal with the refutation of Russell proposed by McGinn, and finally shall examine and expand upon the surprising and challenging points made by McGinn. These combine comments on the ontological argument with a challenge concerning predicating existence of God with a first-order model: The core of the former is McGinn's argument that our critical concern should be with the concept 'God' as defined by proponents of the ontological argument, instead of being with the concept of existence. The core of the latter is the corollary point that we may allow God the property of existence provided His definition warrants, combined with an argument concerning our being able to use certain concepts to refer to God.

### Russell *contra mundum*?

Russell's work arose for the most part out of the problem of grammatically singular negative existential sentences and their truth values. Thus, 'The golden mountain does not exist' is true, but for it to be meaningful, one would think that the term ought to refer (i.e. there should be a golden mountain), and if it referred, then the sentence would be false.<sup>13</sup> The Meinongian solution to this was to allow non-existents under a separate category of 'So-Being' objects<sup>14</sup>. Russell's overall response to this<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See articles Mark Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', in A.C. Grayling (ed.) *Philosophy 1: A Guide Through the Subject* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.61-122

<sup>14</sup> Alexius Meinong, "Über Gegenstandstheorie" in *Untersuchungen zur Gegenstandstheorie und Psychologie* (Leipzig: Barth, 1904)

was based on his dislike for the overly permissive ontology, and also on the apparent allowance of contradictions – such as the being of some  $x$ -which-is-not-an- $x$  – which should not even be meaningful<sup>16</sup>. I shall only be considering Russell's proposed solutions concerning existence here; the problems of reference I shall leave until Chapter III.

In his fifth lecture on logical atomism<sup>17</sup> Bertrand Russell lays out a structure for general propositions (e.g. 'All men are mortal') and an account of existence. He takes these to be 'the same topic, although it might not have seemed so at first glance.'<sup>18</sup> His first point is that general propositions can be seen in an affirmation/negation relationship with existential propositions. However, it is arbitrary which is the affirmative and which is the negative<sup>19</sup>. This brings us to Russell's first key statement:

All general propositions deny the existence of something or other. If you say "All men are mortal", that denies the existence of an immortal man, and so on.<sup>20</sup>

And his second:

I want to say emphatically that general propositions are to be interpreted as not involving existence. When I say, for instance, "All Greeks are men," I do not want you to suppose that that implies that there are Greeks.<sup>21</sup>

There are several issues here which must be untangled. It may help if we introduce a little formal logic. Russell's second point is that one must specify that there are Greeks separately to specifying what proportion of them are men. Thus:  $(\forall x)(Gx \rightarrow Mx)$  [for all  $x$ , if  $x$  is Greek then  $x$  is a man; i.e. all Greeks are men<sup>22</sup>] does not imply  $(\exists x)(Gx)$  [for some  $x$ ,  $x$  is Greek]. Rather, the latter is required in order to assert the full  $(\exists x)(Gx \ \& \ Mx)$ , or that there is a Greek man. Russell notes that failure to

<sup>15</sup> According to Mark Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic' in A. C. Grayling (ed.) *Philosophy 1: A Guide Through the Subject* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p.87

<sup>16</sup> Defences of Meinongianism have been attempted, for example K. Lambert, *Meinong and the Principle of Independence*, (London: CUP, 1983); Parsons, T., *Nonexistent Objects*, (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 1980)

<sup>17</sup> Slater, John G. (ed.) *The Collected Papers of Bertrand Russell*, vol. 8, *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism and Other Essays 1914-19* (London: George Allen & Unwin (Publishers) Ltd., 1986), p.201-211. Hereafter *CPBR*.

<sup>18</sup> *CPBR* p.201

<sup>19</sup> *CPBR* p.201

<sup>20</sup> *CPBR* p.201

<sup>21</sup> *CPBR* p.201

<sup>22</sup> Note that this is different to  $(\forall x)(Gx \ \& \ Mx)$ : for all  $x$ ,  $x$  is Greek and a man; roughly, all that there are are Greek men.

accept this results in fallacy; 'All A is B, and all A is C, therefore some B is C'<sup>23</sup>. The thought that a general proposition implied existence was present in the traditional doctrine of syllogism, and Russell observes that trust in this was the downfall of Leibniz in his attempts to form a mathematical logic<sup>24</sup>.

Russell goes on to talk about propositional functions; we have already seen some examples of these in the formal logic above. A propositional function is 'any expression containing ... undetermined constituent[s]... and becoming a proposition as soon as the undetermined constituents are determined.'<sup>25</sup> Thus, both the formal logic above and my translations, where these contain 'x', are propositional functions. This brings us to another important point to note (to which we shall return later on):

A propositional function is nothing, but, like most of the things one wants to talk about in logic, it does not lose its importance through that fact. The only thing really that you can do with a propositional function is to assert either that it is always true, or that it is sometimes true, or that it is never true.<sup>26</sup>

'All Greeks are men', then, says 'if  $x$  is a Greek then  $x$  is a man', and that the latter is always true (i.e. true for any  $x$ ). It is useful to make some distinctions here that will aid understanding both of the conceptual structure and of the requisite formal logic. Russell uses the example of 'All Greeks are men' as compared with 'No Greeks are men'. The former is  $(\forall x)(Gx \rightarrow Mx)$ , the latter is  $(\forall x)(Gx \rightarrow \neg Mx)$ , *not*  $\neg(\forall x)(Gx \rightarrow Mx)$  - which would mean that some Greeks could be men, but at least one is not. On Russell's model, if there are no Greeks, then both propositions ('All Greeks...' and 'No Greeks...') will be true simultaneously because the class expressed by 'Gx' is empty, and 'All statements about all the members of a class that has no members are true, because the contradictory of any general statement does assert existence and is therefore false in this case.'<sup>27</sup> In other words, the contradiction of 'All Greeks are men' is 'Some Greeks are not men', and this asserts existence<sup>28</sup> - which is false, if there are no Greeks - so statements about 'all Greeks' must be technically true. This leads on quite naturally to a problem that Russell famously dealt with concerning properties and non-existents.

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<sup>23</sup> CPBR p.202

<sup>24</sup> CPBR p.202

<sup>25</sup> CPBR p.202

<sup>26</sup> CPBR p.202

<sup>27</sup> CPBR p.202

<sup>28</sup>  $(\exists x)(Gx \ \& \ \neg Mx)$

The question is, what is the negation of 'the present King of France is bald'? This traditionally has the form  $Bf$ , where  $B$  is the property of baldness and  $f$  denotes the present King of France, and we would at first think its negation to be 'the present King of France is not bald', or  $\neg Bf$ . However, both of these are false because there is no present King of France, and the first statement says there is a bald one, whilst the second says that there is an hirsute one. This appears to violate the Law of Excluded Middle, which says that any disjunction 'P or not-P' must be true; in other words (in this case) something must either have a property or not have it. Russell's solution, the background ideas for which we can recognise above, is to say that the correct formulation is  $(\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ (\forall y)(Fy \rightarrow x=y) \ \& \ Bx)$  - i.e. there is exactly one thing which is the King of France, and that thing is bald. The negation is then  $\neg(\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ (\forall y)(Fy \rightarrow x=y) \ \& \ Bx)$  - i.e. 'it is not the case that there is exactly one thing which is the present King of France and which is bald'. L.E.M. applies to the new pairings, since one proposition in each pair is true and the other false (i.e. 'there is' versus 'there is not'), and does not apply to the original single pairing because there is not a proposition and its negation (i.e. it is not really 'P or not-P', it just seems to be at first glance). Working from Russell's arguments on general propositions, we can see that the reasoning about the L.E.M. problem fits with Russell's overall view. Propositions about the present King of France that begin  $(\exists x)$  will be false, as we have seen, and presumably - although this is somewhat artificial - if we spoke of 'all present Kings of France', all propositions would come out true on the grounds of the emptiness of the class 'present Kings of France'. Thus, any proposition concerning the present King of France of the form  $(\exists x)(Fx \ \& \ \dots)$  is false and any of the form  $(\forall x)(Fx \rightarrow \dots)$  is true because the former falsely asserts existence, whereas the latter ('truthfully') does not assert existence.

This provides us with a sketchy understanding of the question of existence and what Russell has to say about it, which must now be expressed more fully. Let us refresh our memories by going back to the idea of a propositional function as a proposition with an undetermined constituent. Russell goes on to say that a propositional function is termed

*necessary*, when it is always true;  
*possible*, when it is sometimes true;  
*impossible*, when it is never true.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> CPBR p.203

It will be helpful here to consider exactly what Russell had to say concerning this:

Much false philosophy has arisen out of confusing propositional functions and propositions. There is a great deal in ordinary traditional philosophy which consists simply in attributing to propositions the predicates which only apply to propositional functions, and, still worse, sometimes in attributing to individuals predicates which only apply to propositional functions. This case of *necessary, possible, impossible* is a case in point. In all traditional philosophy there comes a heading of "modality," which discusses *necessary, possible and impossible* as properties of propositions, whereas in fact they are properties of propositional functions. Propositions are only true or false.

If you take "x is x," that is a propositional function which is true whatever x may be, i.e., a necessary propositional function. If you take "x is a man," that is a possible one. If you take "x is a unicorn", that is an impossible one.

Propositions can only be true or false, but propositional functions have these three possibilities. It is important, I think, to realise that the whole doctrine of modality only applies to propositional functions, not to propositions.<sup>30</sup>

Only one link remains before our Russellian concept of existence is complete; Russell says that what 'existence' means fundamentally is that a propositional function is sometimes true - i.e. possible. 'You may express it by saying that there is at least one value of x for which that propositional function is true.'<sup>31</sup> Existence, on this reading, is virtually synonymous with 'possible', and is therefore a property of propositional functions. To assert existence is not to say anything about any individuals, according to Russell, and to make a claim to the contrary is to engage in the same sort of fallacy as to say that 'Men are numerous, Socrates is a man, therefore Socrates is numerous.'<sup>32</sup> Rather, 'x is a man' is possible; true for some value of x. The fallacy is 'of transferring to the *individual* that satisfies a propositional function, a predicate which only *applies to* a propositional function.'<sup>33</sup> (My italics).

In summary, then, Russell's view of existence is built upon his concepts of propositional functions and truth values. Whilst it is allowable to say 'men exist' (if one accepts that it means '(x is a man) is possible, or sometimes true') it is never allowable to say 'Socrates exists'. This has been taken as a classical defeating concept for the ontological argument, along the same lines as Kant's<sup>34</sup>. The accusation traditionally levelled is that the theist wants to add 'existence' to the list of properties defining God - in the same way as adding 'omniscient' or 'omnipotent' - and Russell shows that 'existence' simply does not work in this way, since it cannot be ascribed to

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<sup>30</sup> CPBR p.203

<sup>31</sup> CPBR p.204

<sup>32</sup> CPBR p.205

<sup>33</sup> CPBR p.205

<sup>34</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Oxford University Press, 1929) p.505



individuals, only to propositional functions. It has become common to shorten the entirety of Russell's view, as regards its application to the ontological argument, to the idea that 'existence' is not a (first order) property, but is 'instantiation', or the (second order) property of 'having an instance'; in other words, that 'x is F' is sometimes true.

What repercussions does this view of existence have for the question of meaningfully ascribing existence to God? One might choose either to treat 'God' as a name, or as a concept. For our purposes (and this will be made even clearer in Chapter III), either option will reduce, on Russell's view, to thinking of God in terms of a set of properties, of which existence cannot be one. The question of predicating existence will become a question of whether a statement of that set picks out any individual in the world – whether, in other words, the statement 'x is omnipotent, omniscient etc.' is true for some x.

The issue of meaningfulness seems to have been pushed back onto the analysis of the description or definition of God. For instance, one might choose to undertake an examination of each attribute in turn. Take omnipotence: if it was demonstrable that every possible interpretation of the attribute was self-contradictory, then it could be struck from the list. By processing each attribute in a similar manner, and taking into account the potential inconsistencies from holding several attributes simultaneously, one might come up with a list of 'logically acceptable Divine attributes'. What result would this achieve? One could, perhaps, say that this description (or, if one was bold, definition) represented a logically consistent model of a divine entity. This might provide the sought-after conclusion that to claim for this model that it was true for some x – was instantiated – could be considered meaningful, or at least was logically consistent, which implies some level of meaningfulness. It would not demonstrate that there was such an x, but then a demonstration of God's existence is not required; all that is needed is a demonstration that the instantiation of a list of attributes in one entity is a consistent and meaningful proposition.

The problems that this poses will be brought into sharp relief, both when we examine McGinn, and in Chapter III. However, to hint at the issues in advance, the following points might be made. First, do we really want to say that 'God exists' is in fact "'x is {properties}' is sometimes true'? Take the formulation 'the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob'. This indicates that a statement, to the effect that this entity exists, in fact means "'x is the God of Abraham, Issac and Jacob" is true for some x'. Does this really capture the essentials of what it is to say that *that* entity actually existed/exists and is not just a 'character' in the literature of an historical period?

Secondly, do we want to acquiesce to the demand that we need to define, or in some way thoroughly describe, 'God' before we can allow that 'God exists' is meaningful? It might be reasonable to require that we have 'some idea' of what we are talking about, but that is not the same thing.

Finally, the implication of the overall structure is that we need to know what it is for an entity to be God, but the way this is cashed out is distinctly empirical in flavour. This is entirely compatible with Russell's philosophical approach, but is not compatible with traditional considerations of 'God', and it may go some way to explaining the intuitions which underlie any scepticism about 'God exists' being meaningful. With these points in mind, I shall go on to examine McGinn's position.

### McGinn *contra* Russell.

I shall begin by sketching the 'orthodox position' as McGinn sees it. McGinn expresses Russell's model in three sub-theses<sup>35</sup>. The first is ontological. The content of it is the claim that existence is not a property which individuals instantiate, and that to say that  $x$  exists is to say that a propositional function has instances, or that a predicate gives a truth under certain substitutions. The second thesis is semantic. It argues that existence statements are higher-order statements referring to properties, concepts, predicates or propositional functions. The third is definitional. Existence, according to Russell, can always be paraphrased in terms of (a) a propositional function and (b) 'sometimes true', or 'possibility'.

McGinn also notes several features of the Russellian view. One is that 'Existence is what is expressed by the existential quantifier.'<sup>36</sup> Another is that this is conceived as a function from first order concepts to truth values, and further that the assumption is always made that, for Russell, 'Existence always means "there is an  $x$  such that..."'<sup>37</sup> Finally, for Russell, 'In a perfect language, the word ['exists'] need never occur.'<sup>38</sup>

McGinn makes four objections to Russell's theory. The first is that the notion of existence is 'smuggled in', the second is that the Russellian analysis of properties/propositional functions themselves as abstract entities leads to vicious regress, the third is that there are sentences which resist Russell's paraphrasing, and the

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<sup>35</sup> McGinn, Colin, 'Existence' in *Logical Properties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.15-51. (Hereafter *ELP.*) p.19-20

<sup>36</sup> *ELP*, p.20

<sup>37</sup> *ELP*, p.20

<sup>38</sup> *ELP*, p.20

fourth is that Russell's position holds 'bare existence' to be contradictory, without having a supporting argument. I shall deal with the objections in order, before moving on to McGinn's positive thesis.

McGinn argues foremost that the notion of 'has instances' smuggles in the concept of existence. He takes first the objectual account of the term; that objects (in the broadest sense) are required as instances of a predicate. In other words, argues McGinn, for some F there *are (exist)* instances of F. How else could we cash out 'F has instances'? The Russellian paraphrase drives us to think of the property 'instances of F' as instantiated, but this leads to regress: 'there are (i.e. exist) instances of instances of F'. Thus:

If we say that 'planets exist' is true because 'Mars is a planet' is true and 'Vulcan is a planet' is not, that can only be because 'Mars' refers to an existent object while 'Vulcan' does not.<sup>39</sup>

In other words, because Vulcan is not an actual planet (because it *doesn't exist*) it cannot count as a verifying instance. Yet it is a planet, conceptually, and the only reason there can be for it not being a verifying instance of 'planets exist' is its *non-existence*. Therefore 'it must be *existent* things that instantiate the property'<sup>40</sup>, and in this way existence is 'smuggled in'.

McGinn also considers Russell's favoured substitutional approach (exemplified by "'x is a unicorn" is possible'). This, as we have seen, involves the need for true singular propositions or sentences as instances of a propositional function (for example, 'Ralph is a unicorn' would instantiate 'x is a unicorn', making it possible/sometimes true). McGinn asks what the truth conditions for such singular propositions are.

Clearly we cannot allow 'Vulcan is a planet' to be a substitution instance [for ('x is a planet' is possible)], but that can only be because the referent of 'Vulcan' does not exist. For a singular statement to be true in the sense needed is for there to *be* an object referred to by the singular term and for that object to satisfy the attached predicate.<sup>41</sup>

The question, then, is what it *is* for a property to have instances. McGinn argues that the Russellian view of instantiation can be reduced to the non-Russellian phrase 'among extant objects, there is one which is F'. One option which McGinn does not

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<sup>39</sup> ELP, p.21

<sup>40</sup> ELP, p.22

<sup>41</sup> ELP, p.22

cover is that of viewing existence in terms of extension. Emphasising this element of Russell's view, a property is instantiated if the set of things having the property does not have zero content. If the set of 'unicorn-ness' has no members, it has no extension; thus, there are no unicorns. I anticipate that McGinn might respond to this by pointing out that the issue is pushed back onto the ontological status of those things which do or do not have the property - i.e. the truth-makers once again. So, one might argue that the set of 'unicorn-ness' has no extension just because no unicorns exist; it is the lack of extant unicorns that make true the statement that such a set is empty.

McGinn also argues that the problem is exacerbated by reliance upon classical formal logic to resolve issues such as the problem of existence, since the existential quantifier can be interpreted as containing a first level or a second level predicate; a more unusual first level predicate interpretation of  $(\exists x)Fx$  would take the form 'for some  $x$ ,  $x$  exists and  $x$  is  $F$ '. The Russellian way of viewing it, however, is 'there is an  $x$  such that  $x$  is  $F$ ', and this is very much embedded in the structure of basic formal logic. Thus, says McGinn, direct argument is the only solution; anything else simply brings latent assumptions into the argument as conclusions.

His second major objection to the 'orthodox' view arises out of consideration of properties and propositional functions themselves, as abstract entities. He argues that Russell's view cannot provide an account of their existence, which one might wish to hold if one adhered to certain metaphysical (realist) views<sup>42</sup> - indeed, one might point out that if one wished to let propositional functions do as much work as Russell seems to demand, a realist stance regarding them might be a reasonable request.

The objection is that a Russellian view will result in a vicious infinite regress, in that no property will exist without the positing of a further property to fulfil the instantiation requirements; and this further property will be open to the same questions of existence, requiring another property, and so on. McGinn qualifies that this is problematic only in the explanatory context ('The problem here is not that the existence of any given property requires the existence of infinitely many other properties...indeed, something like this appears to be manifestly *true* for the existence of numbers.<sup>43</sup>). In the explanatory case, we seem to presuppose that we know what is involved for the explanans to exist, but not for the explanandum - yet both of these are properties, so that each explanans is also an explanandum *ad infinitum*. McGinn speculates that Russell and his adherents take the existence of properties as given, and

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<sup>42</sup> Note that Russell can also be seen as holding a propositional theory of sentential meaning which would commit him to propositions as entities.

<sup>43</sup> *ELP*, p.25 n. 11

compares this to defending a thesis of existence as spatial occupancy, thereby refusing to treat the area of abstract objects<sup>44</sup>. He observes that, if properties do not exist on this view, then individuals cannot exist.<sup>45</sup>

McGinn goes on to consider a third objection<sup>46</sup>, that of sentences resistant to the usual paraphrasing, such as 'something exists', or 'nothing exists'. These sentences are meaningful, but are more problematic than singular reference (to which we shall return in Chapter III) in that 'something', for example, has no referent. Consequently, there is no predicate to quantify over and sheer quantification by itself is meaningless.

McGinn considers<sup>47</sup> the option of 'something exists' meaning that 'something is self-identical' -  $(\exists x)(x=x)$  - but highlights three problems: first that there seems to be no mention or indication of identity in 'something exists'. Secondly, that 'Venus exists' entails 'something exists', so if the latter means  $(\exists x)(x=x)$ , then the former must mean  $(\exists x)(x=Venus)$ . This means that singular existence statements assert identity with a named entity, which would require that we knew what it was for the entity to exist, and for us to refer to it, otherwise '=Vulcan' would secure existence by itself. The third criticism which McGinn makes of defining 'something exists' as 'something is self-identical', is that self-identity tends towards being treated as a property itself, and this 'has precisely the kind of universality Russell found objectionable in a predicate of existence.'<sup>48</sup> Presumably, one can then link *this* point to the criticism concerning the existence of properties.

There is some consideration by McGinn of the argument for bifurcating existence between first order for singular statements and second order for general statements. However, this fails, according to McGinn, on the grounds that it would require that a first order predicate proposition would entail a second order predicate proposition; for example, 'Terrence the tiger exists' entails 'at least one tiger exists', but there is no common term of existence between them. To spell this out, Terrence would have the property of existence, whereas 'x being a tiger' would be possible, and there

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<sup>44</sup> However, it is worth noting again, I think, that Russell only takes as his simple, indefinable, terms 'always true' and 'sometimes true'. This leaves us with three options: (i) that propositional functions are also simple and undefined, but Russell thinks this so obvious that he fails to mention it concerning existence, (ii) that he recognised the problem of abstract existence of propositional functions, but never solved it, or (iii) that Russell's view of language was such that the existence of propositional functions was a meaningless notion, with or without good reason. McGinn's criticism is of the first of these. As I have suggested, there is evidence that Russell would have supported propositions as entities, and therefore perhaps also propositional functions. However, cf p.12 n.26 above.

<sup>45</sup> *ELP*, 8 p.25-26

<sup>46</sup> *ELP*, p.26

<sup>47</sup> *ELP*, p.27

<sup>48</sup> *ELP*, p.27 n.13

does not seem to be enough in common between these for it to make sense for the former to entail the latter.

The last major objection that McGinn tables against the Russellian position is that it rules out as contradictory the notion of 'bare existence', i.e. something which exists but has no (other) properties. McGinn does not find this a *prima facie* impossibility - although he does express concern that it would imply that a thing could exist and yet not have the property of self-identity. However, he notes that self-identity 'seems precisely the wrong kind of property to invoke'<sup>49</sup> to defend Russell's position against bare existence, in view of previous arguments. Instead of pursuing this argument, he turns to an adjacent problem, that of the insistence of the orthodox position on each extant thing having a property unique to it, which is required in order to individuate objects. McGinn argues:

But this implies that in every possible world in which an individual exists that individual has some property that no other individual has. Surely that is a very strong claim, and not one that we ought to be obliged to accept just by the simple analysis of the concept of existence.<sup>50</sup>

McGinn's argument amounts to three points: first, that a theory of existence should be neutral over the question of the identity of indiscernables; secondly, that existence should not necessarily attach to that property which is unique among the properties of an entity, and, thirdly, that the Russellian view is committed to holding as contradictory the existence of objects that are distinct in no way other than numerically<sup>51</sup>.

Having laid out all of these objections, McGinn goes on to provide a thesis for a first-order property view of existence. The intuitive point from which he starts is essentially that in using 'exists', we are separating extant entities from intentional entities; existence is a property common to all things which exist, in the same way that blueness is common to all blue things. This leads to the 'traditional question' of whether 'exists' is a paradigm property such as blue - the oddity being that we end up with blue things which do not exist, using the intuitive formulation. Therefore, one might choose to see McGinn's positive thesis as an attempted justification of allowing 'blue non-extant things' as well as the problem-free 'existents which are not blue'.

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<sup>49</sup> *ELP*, p.28 n.14

<sup>50</sup> *ELP*, p.29

<sup>51</sup> In the case of existence 'attaching' to the unique property, I would argue that McGinn is conflating the means of distinguishing objects from the fact of their existence. It does not seem incorrect to say that on the Russellian view something exists if a set of properties is instantiated, and that it is a further matter to differentiate one set of properties from another.

The sub-theses of this position, corresponding to those in Russell's position, are as follows. Ontologically, existence is 'always and everywhere a property of objects'<sup>52</sup>. It holds of extant objects but not of all conceivable objects (in this respect it differs from what McGinn argues for the universal property of self-identity). Semantically, every occurrence of 'exists' is a logical predicate, and any existential statement can be analysed in terms of the predicate (this is also equivalent to the definitional thesis, inasmuch as the definitional collapses into the semantic).

According to McGinn, the only objection that Russell put to the argument of existence as a first order predicate was that it was 'too universal' to be a property, and that if it were first-order, it would be impossible for it not to apply. McGinn points out that, first, this view rules out various logical properties as being first order (such as 'not being red and not red simultaneously'), and indeed that Russell relies on such a property for his own thesis: 'being an instance of a property'<sup>53</sup>. Secondly, he notes that it is clearly possible for 'existence' not to apply, since that is a major part of how we use the term - determining which conceivable objects exist and which do not<sup>54</sup>. He suggests that this refutes arguments of the sort proposed by D. F. Pears<sup>55</sup>, who claimed that true singular existential propositions must be trivial and false ones contradictory, since reference presupposes existence (we shall see in Chapter III that the entanglement of reference and existence must be examined much more thoroughly than this). McGinn goes on to treat two major areas using existence as a property: quantification and non-existence.

In the area of quantification, McGinn argues for a re-assertion of the strict meanings of the quantifiers, which, he claims quite reasonably, have become confused. The proper meanings are 'for all' and 'for some' ( $\forall$  and  $\exists$  respectively), but whilst the former has been kept clear of existential import (he uses the example of 'all men are mortal' and its embedded material conditional - i.e. 'but are there any men?'), the latter has become known as the existential quantifier and  $(\exists x)(Fx)$  has come to be translated 'there is an  $x$  such that it is  $F$ ' in many cases. McGinn's concern is that we recognise that two distinct concepts have been combined in this traditional interpretation: that of

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<sup>52</sup> *ELP*, p.30

<sup>53</sup> Although, of course, Russell is taking 'sometimes true' as an undefined foundation.

<sup>54</sup> *ELP*, p. 31. This could be seen as a progression from the work of Gareth Evans (*Varieties of Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982)), who utilises a fictional/actual distinction, but who arguably comes unstuck with non-existence statements that do not seem to reference fiction – such as 'Vulcan' as a once-entertained scientific hypothesis. McGinn implicitly criticises Evans on p.22, where he argues that a fictional/literal distinction still presupposes a notion of existence.

<sup>55</sup> D. F. Pears, 'Is Existence a Predicate?' in Peter F. Strawson (ed.), *Philosophical Logic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967)

partial quantification, and that of existential import. He considers three options for interpretation of 'for some  $x$ ,  $x$  is  $F$  and  $x$  exists' with respect to the existential quantifier ( $\exists x$ ). It is worth making clear that any interpretation will have to provide, at least implicitly, an account of each part – i.e. (i) 'for some  $x$ ', (ii) ' $x$  is  $F$ ', (iii) ' $x$  exists' – and explain what ramifications follow for the ontology and semantics of the proposition. This is what gives force to McGinn's protestation that we should not rely on our formal logic rules to solve the problem that he is positing; such a reliance assumes or discards too much of the present challenge.

The first option canvassed is a Meinongian ontology, comprising both extant and subsistent entities. ' $\exists x$ ' is then a conjunction, with 'for some  $x$ ' having ontological import (and meaning, broadly, 'for a domain of existents and subsistents'). ' $x$  exists' then restricts the ontological domain within this. Thus,  $(\exists x)(Ex \ \& \ Fx)$  says that some entities both exist (rather than subsist) and are  $F$ .

The second option is substitutional, with ' $\exists x$ ' involving an explicit existence predicate conjoined with a substitutional quantifier. Therefore 'for some  $x$ ' has no objectual rôle and says that we may substitute a term for ' $x$ ' that gives 'true' as the truth value of the whole construction. Therefore, 'for some  $x$ ,  $x$  is  $F$  and  $x$  exists' becomes ' $x$  is a tiger, and  $x$  exists is true if we replace  $x$  with *Terrence*', to take an example employing our handy zoological friend.

The third option is to introduce what McGinn calls an 'intentional quantifier'<sup>56</sup>. This,  $Ix$ , he uses to abbreviate 'some of the things we talk/think about'<sup>57</sup>. Existence is then appended 'in the usual way'<sup>58</sup>, which I take to mean the way in which a predicate such as 'blue' is appended. Consequently, we obtain ' $Ix$ ,  $x$  is  $F$  and  $x$  exists', which translates into 'some of the things we talk/think about are both  $F$  and exist.'<sup>59</sup> Although it is not explicit in the text, I take McGinn's thought to be that normal use of  $\exists x$  could be understood as  $(Ix \ \& \ Ex)$ .

It is vital to note that, for McGinn, intentional objects neither exist nor subsist - he considers this further when discussing non-existence - and that 'some' is purely quantificational. Further, existence is always a property of individuals, never of generalities. Thus, it is not the case that 'some tigers exist' means ' $\exists x$ ' where  $x$ ='some tigers' and  $E$  is the property of existence. Rather, it would be  $(Ix)(Tx \ \& \ Ex)$ . There are several other important clarificatory points made by McGinn. First, there can be a

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<sup>56</sup> *ELP*, p.33

<sup>57</sup> *ELP*, p.33

<sup>58</sup> *ELP*, p.33

<sup>59</sup> *ELP*, p.33



universal and a partial intentional quantifier, and more importantly a disjunctive addition ('for some  $x$  we do not talk/think about', presumably<sup>60</sup>) allowing it to range over fictional objects *and* objects which exist but have not been referred to. He uses the example of 'all men are mortal'; this would become 'for all things we talk/think about, or that we do not, if they have the property of being a man then they have the property of being mortal', which comes out false in virtue of immortal fictional characters.

Secondly, it is not allowed that we infer existence from anything, except from the predicate of existence itself. 'Some' remains simply an expression of quantity, and only has existential import as a result of conversational implicature. Likewise, 'object' only has existential import from conversational implicature; McGinn argues that we can use phrases like 'objects of thought' without committing ourselves ontologically<sup>61</sup>. On McGinn's view, we might choose to see a Meinongian ontology as arising partly out of a confusion over the actual force of conversational implicature. In response to Russell's view of the perfect language discarding existence, McGinn emphasises<sup>62</sup> that his own view shows why we need existence in both normal and constructed language: 'some' is true to its appearance, and does not contain 'exists'; the latter is required to differentiate properly between quantification and ontology.

McGinn briefly notes a comparison between his own position and that of a free logic which removes existence assumptions from classical logic. Free logic primarily removes existential generalisation:  $Fa \vdash (\exists x)(Fx)$  is disallowed. However, McGinn removes existence from partial quantification:  $Fa \vdash (\exists x)(Fx)$  is allowed, but does not mean that anything exists. He uses the example of 'Sherlock Holmes is a detective  $\vdash$  someone is a detective'; on his view, this someone is not explicitly extant.

### McGinn's Resolution of Non-existence.

McGinn then moves on to the issue of non-existence. He summarises his purpose as being to ensure that non-extant objects 'don't end up existing after all'<sup>63</sup>, in other words to avoid a so-called 'Meinongian jungle'.

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<sup>60</sup> One might also suggest 'for some  $x$  which is either talked about or otherwise independently exists', although it is unlikely that McGinn would countenance placing existence *per se* in the quantifier at all.

<sup>61</sup> Although I presume that eventually this would entail some discussion of the ontological status of mental events.

<sup>62</sup> *ELP*, p.36

<sup>63</sup> *ELP*, p.37

The argument, which he outlines on the basis of his previous quantificational structure, is essentially that existence and non-existence are asymmetrical: There are mind independent extant entities, but there are no mind independent non-extant entities; thus 'non-existence is representation-dependent. Existence is not.'<sup>64</sup> The supporting argument which he provides for this is a comparison with Meinongian ontology, specifically that Meinong would have entities subsisting before they were conceptualised by anyone. McGinn sees this as the sticking point, and emphasises that for his theory individuation is reliant upon the content of the object itself for an extant object, but where an object is not extant, the only grounds for individuation are the ideas that are associated with an individual concept. Thus he says:

The notion of an entity not existing that has no individual concept associated with it is ill-defined: *what* is it, precisely, that does not exist?<sup>65</sup>

The form of general non-existence statements follows from this, and from the form of general existence statements; thus we obtain, for example,  $(\exists x)(Tx \ \& \ \neg Ex)$ .

Thus, McGinn seems to be arguing that it is the ideas that we associate with an intentional object that individuate that object; yet, one might say,  $(\exists x)(Tx \ \& \ \neg Ex)$  seems to be a meaningful proposition which corresponds to our imagining a *generic* tiger - if, for example, they were extinct - and although the formula is in the form of a particular proposition suitable to McGinn's structure, it does seem to pick out at best a paradigm, as opposed to an individual. This gives an opportunity to clarify McGinn's thought: the point he is making is quite restricted, and is that in order to speak of an entity as not existing, we require at least one concept to characterise it. This does not prevent us from talking about generic tigers (we simply say, logically, that there is something that we talk/think about that has a tiger-ish property – i.e. particularise it), nor does it require that we have a *specific* fictional tiger in mind. It only requires that if we particularise the proposition of generic non-extant tigers, we employ one or more individual concepts. It should be noted that this does seem to rule out  $(\exists x)(\neg Ex)$ , however it should likewise be noted that this is *not* equivalent to 'we think/talk about fictional things' but rather 'for **some**  $x$  we think/talk about, **that**  $x$  does not exist', giving rise to the question '*what*  $x$  does not exist?'

McGinn concludes his argument with a re-affirmation that non-existence is what picks out a solely intentional object from any other object, and that this is how we use

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<sup>64</sup> *ELP*, p.37

<sup>65</sup> *ELP*, p.38 n.24

the language of existence and non-existence in general; the classification of intentional objects as those which refer to a state of affairs in the world, or those which are solely intentional.

### McGinn's Resolution for Modal Objects

It should be noted that McGinn, in common with the majority of metaphysicians, does not work with the same modal concepts as Russell did in 1914. The main difference is the introduction - primarily thanks to Kripke - of the conceptual apparatus of 'possible world semantics', which has led to the use of 'possible objects', and propositions being 'possible', as a short-hand for a certain way of viewing things. Thus, in the Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy article 'modal logic', written by Graeme Forbes, we find, for instance, that 'to say that a proposition is possible, or possibly true, is to say that it is not necessarily false.... Equally, to say that a proposition is necessary, or necessarily true, is to deny that its negation is possible.'<sup>66</sup> The Russell of 1914 (*necessary, possible and impossible ... are properties of propositional functions. Propositions are only true or false*<sup>67</sup>) may not have been content with such a usage. Nevertheless, 'the solution [to the problem of truth-values for modal operators] is to regard  $\diamond$  and  $\square$  as quantifiers over entities called *possible worlds*....  $\square\phi$  is then interpreted as saying that  $\phi$  is true in *all* possible worlds, while  $\diamond\phi$  is interpreted as saying that  $\phi$  is true in *at least one* possible world.'<sup>68</sup> It is with this structure in mind, and not Russell's, that we should assess McGinn's use of modal concepts; a 'possible object', for example, would broadly correspond to an element of the state-of-affairs that comprises one or more possible worlds, but not the actual world (i.e. a counterfactual object). Although I believe that a thorough critique of McGinn's work would not be complete without an exploration of the ramifications of his and Russell's differing concepts of modality, this is not a project that falls within the remit of this thesis.

McGinn goes on to treat the topic of actual and possible objects, and whether they exist or not on his view. His concern is twofold. First, we should remember that non-existence is representation-dependent, whereas existence is independent of

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<sup>66</sup> Graeme Forbes, 'Modal Logic', in Robert Audi (ed.) *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1999), p.574 – this is a well-known defining feature of the modal operators.

<sup>67</sup> *CPBR*, p. 203

<sup>68</sup> Forbes, 'Modal Logic', p.575

representation. McGinn notes that the representation-dependence of non-existence is a logically separate thesis to existence as a property; thus he must maintain these distinctions when accounting for modal issues. Secondly, he has constructed non-existence as synonymous with (mind-dependent) intentional objects, and this must be likewise maintained.

McGinn's strategy is to take the claim that possible objects are mind-independent, and argue that there is a class of intentional objects which are not coherent possible objects. Thus, he argues that Sherlock Holmes is not one coherent metaphysically possible entity, because there are so many different descriptions of Holmes in stories that there is a glut of potential possible objects – or a lack of a single consistent possible object<sup>69</sup> - and therefore no definitive, coherent candidate for metaphysical possibility. This example is to be contrasted with that of a possible sibling, which McGinn argues is a concept which is a good candidate for coherent metaphysical possibility, and can be argued to be mind-independent<sup>70</sup>.

McGinn is obliged to accept that possible objects exist (on grounds of mind-independence), which he duly does by affirming the distinction of possible and actual, arguing that possible objects exist - but not *actually*. So, my possible sibling would have actually existed if he/she had been actual. Despite McGinn's protestations of separation of theses, I think that explanation of this can be aided through the idea of existence as a property, inasmuch as two lists of properties, of a possible entity and of an actual entity, could both include existence. Confusingly, McGinn has to attribute existence to a possible object, which can also be intentional; existence to an actual object, which can also be intentional (thought or spoken of); and non-existence to intentional objects which are neither possible nor actual. Since existence is a property, it seems to make sense to say that an object having it is possible or actual, and that consequently, in some sense, existence itself can be possible or actual, but it *sounds* dubious.

To clarify this, let us take a potential objection. One might ask, what happens if we posit a possible non-extant entity? In other words, a possible entity which is an intentional, Sherlock Holmes-like object. McGinn's response would be that the entity must be *either* non-extant *or* possible; if it is an intentional object which is a candidate

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<sup>69</sup> Depending on whether one sees each description of Holmes as a separate object which may turn out to be the same object, or as different attempts to describe a presumed single object. In the former case, there could be interesting repercussions for vague identity.

<sup>70</sup> This does not, of course, preclude my constructing various fictitious siblings with various properties, and which would not exist, but this is a very different entity to that which is 'a possible sibling', which is a simpler, modal, concept.

for metaphysical possibility, then it cannot be non-existent, and if it is genuinely non-existent, it is definitionally an intentional object, and cannot also be a possible object. The confusion comes in our tendency to think of possible objects as intentional, and to confuse non-existence with contingency, thereby misconstruing the relation between non-existence and possibility as one of synonymy, instead of exclusivity. McGinn points out once again that there is an asymmetry in the property of existence, which could be seen as the foundation of the confusion:

generally, if Fness is a contingent property of objects, then so is non-Fness – but not so in the case of existence...genuinely possible objects do exist, though not actually, while genuinely non-existent objects have that status necessarily.<sup>71</sup>

What, then, would be the difference between a possible object and a non-existent object, in a situation in which both are intentional (being thought/spoken of)? McGinn's response, I think, would be that the former is mind-independent, whilst the latter is mind-dependent. We must re-emphasise that if something relies on our ideas for individuation, then it doesn't exist. Returning to the quote above, we note that non-existents have that status *necessarily*; i.e. if something does not actually exist, one cannot posit an existent possible entity by negating this (remember, we require at least one individual concept - '*what* is it, precisely, that does not exist'). *Possibilia* are counterfactual; one takes an actual state of affairs and asks what would have been the case if it had been other than it was. I think that this is why *possibilia* are mind-independent for McGinn; they are based in actual facts and entities.

Although McGinn makes a strong defence of the position, I find myself unable to agree with him on the subject of modal entities. His argument is essentially that 'it seems wrong to insist that all possible objects must be conceived, because this makes possibility into a mind-dependent matter.'<sup>72</sup> Since he requires mind-independent possible objects, his only option is to have them exist, 'but not *actually*.'<sup>73</sup> In Chapter III, I will argue from certain points in philosophy of language that McGinn (and indeed, my own derivative arguments) would be in a far stronger position if he gave up mind-independence of modal entities. This would entail that modal entities are also representation-dependent, and the position demands an account of two things: first, the matter of distinguishing modal entities from entirely fictional ones (since there is clearly some difference), and secondly, a resolution of the problem with respect to McGinn's

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<sup>71</sup> *ELP*, p.39

<sup>72</sup> *ELP*, p.38

<sup>73</sup> *ELP*, p.39

statement that non-existents have their non-existent status necessarily. I shall address these in order.

McGinn asserts that it is contingent that what actually exists does exist<sup>74</sup>, and necessary that what is representation-dependent does not exist. I would argue that the solution to the modal problem is not to reject representation-dependence, saying that the coherency/consistency test determines which objects *exist* as *possibilia*, but to say that the coherency/consistency test determines which objects are *contingently representation-dependent* and which are *necessarily representation-dependent*<sup>75</sup>. For example (assuming representation-dependence for both fictional and modal entities): Sherlock Holmes is not a candidate for metaphysical possibility (this is agreed), and so it is necessarily the case that Sherlock Holmes could not exist. My having had a sibling is presumably acceptable to McGinn as a candidate for metaphysical possibility; thus, 'my sibling' does not correspond to a representation-dependent entity in every possible world, although it does in the actual world. So 'Sherlock Holmes exists' is false in every possible world and that entity does not indeed exist in the actual world, but 'Stuart Foyle's sibling exists' would be true for some possible world even though that entity does not exist in the actual world.

This will clearly be incompatible with McGinn's assertion that 'genuinely non-existent objects have that status necessarily'. Fortunately, the form of the assertion allows (without too much violence) that we read 'genuinely non-existent' as 'not a candidate for metaphysical possibility', thereby showing that the new distinction does not require extensive redevelopment of McGinn's overall position.

I suggest that McGinn's example of the truth conditions for 'Vulcan does not exist' requires close attention to account for the new development. His alternatives are first that Vulcan is a possible object, and such do not exist; secondly, that Vulcan is a possible object and the proposition asserts its non-actuality, and, lastly, that Vulcan is not a possible object and the sentence affirms its intentional – non-existent – status. He proposes the last view to be correct.

If the proposition had been 'Vulcan could have existed, and explained the eccentricities in the orbit of Mercury, but it turns out that Vulcan does not exist', then this would have made explicit that Vulcan is a case of failed intentionality – of hypothesis – and is necessarily non-existent. However, it also demonstrates the proximity of some modal entities to some fictional entities. If the proposition had been 'Venus<sup>α</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Putting aside ideas of God as a necessary being.

<sup>75</sup> I.e. where R is representation-dependence and E is the existence predicate:  $\Box(Rx \rightarrow \neg Ex)$  does not forbid  $\Diamond \neg Rx$

does not exist', where Venus<sup>α</sup> is a possible entity which is two miles closer to the sun (in a possible world W) than Venus actually is, then McGinn would presumably urge that Venus<sup>α</sup> exists. How different is this really from the Vulcan hypothesis-example? The only pertinent difference seems to be that the hypothesis comes before the actual state of affairs, whereas the modal object comes after the state of affairs. Yet, on McGinn's view, modal objects are mind-independent, so surely it should not matter when (relative to our experience of a state of affairs) we think/speak of them?

There appears to be a sliding scale between modal and fictional/hypothetical entities on McGinn's view that would give rise to an ontological 'grey area', and if this can be avoided it would seem best to do so; for example, I suggest that McGinn would support 'Pegasus does not exist' *and* 'A winged horse is a modal entity', but say that the latter exists whilst the former does not. I would say that neither of them exists, but for the latter this is contingent. The issue is whether or not an entity is a candidate for metaphysical possibility, and as we have seen there is no intrinsic demand in this for a directly ontological element. The test should determine whether something which does not exist could have existed, rather than whether something exists or not.

McGinn appeals to the need for precision in our treatment of such modal entities when he states that

There may be an element of stipulation in this way of talking, but it serves to protect what otherwise seems a compelling thesis, namely the identification of non-existence with merely intentional objects.<sup>76</sup>

However, I would argue that the modifications which I have suggested remove much of the need for such stipulation, in favour of treating ontological and modal elements in a fashion more in keeping with their respective characters. We know that modal entities by definition are not to be found in the actual world, but might have been, so why allot them a property which has been defined as describing objects found in the actual world, when what we want to say is that they might have had this property?

McGinn considers impossible objects as a counter-example to his arguments. A round square, he offers, can be considered as a mind-independent necessary non-existent. A round square is an impossible object regardless of anyone thinking about it; does this make it a mind-independent non-existent object? The answer McGinn supplies is that impossible objects have the property of existence *qua modal object*, but can never have the property in actuality. An impossible object could never be actual.

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<sup>76</sup> *ELP*, p.39 n.26

McGinn, I think, muddies the waters by attempting to head off accusations of Holmes being an impossible object and consequently existing after all. He endeavours to argue for extant *and* non-extant impossible objects, and I think that what he means to say is that Holmes' impossibility follows on from his non-existence conjoined with his inability to be metaphysically possible (from his indeterminate individuation), whereas the existence of a round square follows on from its conceptually determined individuation, and its impossibility is a separate consequence of its inability to be actualised.

Once again, I would argue that the modifications suggested above remove a source of confusion and streamline the argument. On my account, neither Holmes nor the round square exists, and for both of them their non-existence is necessary. For Holmes the reason is that he is representation-dependent in all possible worlds – because he lacks determinate individuation. For the round square, the reason is also that it is representation-dependent in every possible world – but because a mental act is required to conjoin the properties 'round' and 'square' (i.e. they will never be *found* conjoined in any world).

A summary of the ontological ground covered may be a welcome interjection at this point. I shall incorporate the alterations that were made above into the synopsis. The primary distinction is that what is mind-independent exists, and what is mind-dependent does not exist. This captures the way that we use language, particularly in discussing what exists and what does not.

Sometimes, we construct a mind-dependent entity in such a particular way that it represents a way the actual world could have been; it does not actually exist, but it could have done. Consequently it is contingent that we made it up (that it does not exist), and we can specify a state of affairs wherein assertions of its existence could have come out 'true'. Other mind-dependent entities are not constructed in this way, and would be made up by us in every possible world; there is no state of affairs wherein assertions of their existence could come out 'true'.

I shall now move on to McGinn's subsequent consideration of the ascription of properties to intentional objects. What occurs in this process, and is it really allowable? He argues that it is something that we clearly do; something does not have to exist for us to ascribe a property to it, in a similar way to that in which something does not have to be actual for a property to be ascribed to it (hence *possibilia*). He says that 'as a general rule, intentional objects have just those properties our mental acts confer on



them'<sup>77</sup>. For the important sub-class of fiction, McGinn is more specific: 'In the case of fictional objects, the origin and foundation of their properties is the story that refers to them.'<sup>78</sup>

What, however, is the analysis of an object failing to exist; what does predication mean in this context? That which makes a proposition predicating existence of  $x$  true is simply  $x$  having the property of existence, but that which makes a proposition predicating non-existence of  $x$  true is a case of failed intentionality. To explain his point, McGinn takes the cases of fiction and empirical postulation. In the former, we say 'it is a pretence that  $x$  exists', and in the latter 'it was a mistaken postulation that  $x$  exists'. The key concept is 'an entertaining of existence.'<sup>79</sup> Existence, on the other hand, is not intrinsically about successful intentional statements; it is about something having a property independent of our intentionality. Thus 'assertions of non-existence really are statements about mental acts, just as the representation-dependence thesis suggests.'<sup>80</sup>

This makes non-existence radically different from other properties and their negations; it is asymmetrical. McGinn speculates that this is the root of our discomfort over the treatment of existence as a property. To say that something is not blue is not to say that we think of it as blue but are wrong; non-existence, on the other hand, 'really does have a lot more to do with misfirings of the mind.'<sup>81</sup> I find this to be compatible with my alterations for modal entities.

McGinn finally considers an objection to his view which Russell might have made from a strongly empiricist position. The essence of the point is that one cannot perceive existence as a property of objects; it does not, as it were, form part of our sense-data. How can it be a proper property, therefore? McGinn argues that this points to the reason why scepticism about the external world is possible: simply, because we *cannot* treat existence as a sense-data-type property but only assume or infer it. Blueness, squareness, vanilla-ness all make a difference to sense-data, but we can be induced to hallucinate experiences of all of these, and so they can be extant or non-extant without our being able to verify them as such. The empiricist's objection is not so much a proof against existence being a property, as an explanation of why we have all sorts of problems verifying what objects have it as a property.

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<sup>77</sup> *ELP*, p. 42

<sup>78</sup> *ELP*, p. 42

<sup>79</sup> *ELP*, p. 43

<sup>80</sup> *ELP*, p. 43

<sup>81</sup> *ELP*, p. 44

McGinn's view of existence gives us a new option in thinking about the meaningfulness of 'God exists'. It can now be used as a property of objects, not of properties, which suggests that 'God exists' could be treated as a subject-predicate sentence after all. Needless to say, this would have repercussions for the ontological argument and makes it even more important to investigate whether ontological arguments could have something vital to say about the meaningfulness of 'God exists'. However, McGinn appends some comments concerning ontological arguments to his chapter on existence, and these sharpen the focus of the present enquiry, as we shall see.

### McGinn's Comments on the Ontological Argument.

McGinn goes on to make some remarks concerning the ontological argument, since, as he points out, he must be committed to saying that existence can act as a first-order property which can be appended to an entity – i.e. he must fault the original criticism of the ontological argument. His treatment of the ontological argument is separable into three criticisms of the view that the logical status of 'exists' is grounds for dismissing the argument, and a suggestion for a better-structured critique of the argument.

McGinn's first point is that it seems odd to claim the fallacy of the argument to be nothing more substantive than a simple error of the order of a logical predicate 'as if we just hadn't noticed that "exists" is logically on a par with "numerous"<sup>82</sup>; surely such a long-lived and at times complex argument would not have got off the ground if this were the foundation of it.

The second, and more fascinating, point is that McGinn sees no problem with reformulating the basic structure of the argument to encompass the Russellian second-order use of 'exists'.

Thus we can ask whether it is a part of God's definition that his attributes must have at least one instance...the concept 'perfect being' has to have an instance, or else it would not be the concept it purports to be.<sup>83</sup>

Finally, McGinn notes that there are so-called 'parody arguments' which assert the non-existence of a most imperfect conceivable being; he urges that whatever is wrong with the arguments must be independent of the logical status of 'exists'.

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<sup>82</sup> *ELP*, p.48

<sup>83</sup> *ELP*, p.49

McGinn makes several suggestions about critical approaches to the ontological argument. He begins by questioning the notion of existence as a perfection and non-existence as an imperfection, but argues that the idea of perfection can be removed from the argument and other definitional concepts used instead (he cites 'most impressive' and 'most powerful'). Consequently, he turns his attention to the concepts involved in the ontological argument.

For McGinn, allowing God the property of existence is not problematic, *provided that the definition of 'God' justifies the attribution.*

The problem with the [*ontological argument*] ... is that it trades on notions of the maximal forms of certain attributes, particularly perfection, that are inherently ill-defined.<sup>84</sup>

The key, then, for McGinn, is that conceivability and maximal attributes do not combine in such a way as to make sense:

We can make sense of being the most perfect being that exists, and we know what conceivability is, so we think we know what is meant by combining them.... We just don't know what it would be to be the most perfect conceivable [*item of a given type*].<sup>85</sup>

He uses the example of a most impressive conceivable daisy to illustrate his point; the ontological argument seems to be an obvious case of conjoining several concepts, of which we think we know the meaning – superiority, conceivability, perfection, existence, power - and thinking that the result is also meaningful and well-defined.

McGinn does not explicitly argue this, but I think that at least part of his criticism stems from the issues of conceptual individuation discussed above (p.24). If there is no well-defined individual concept, then we cannot individuate an entity. If an entity individuates itself (by existing) we cannot refer to it without a suitable concept. This makes it difficult to predicate existence of it in either case (i.e. truly or falsely). However, what McGinn does *not* argue, which one might expect him to, is that his criticism of the ontological argument makes God a fictitious entity which consequently does not exist. If he had argued, or even implied, that the problem with God *qua* well-defined is that there are too many descriptions and individual concepts vying for coherent individuation, then God would be a Sherlock Holmes-type fictional entity. Yet McGinn's argument seems to imply more that there is a lacking individual concept

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<sup>84</sup> *ELP*, p.50

<sup>85</sup> *ELP*, p.50

which is well-defined. If this is correct, then it is also not possible successfully to argue that God does *not* exist ('*what* is it, precisely, that does not exist?')<sup>86</sup>.

What options are now available for the meaningfulness of 'God exists'? On the surface, they seem to be as follows. 'God exists' can be treated as a subject-predicate sentence, but McGinn has issued a challenge on the concept of the subject; the sort of concepts found in ontological arguments, he contends, do not warrant the attributing of existence, and even cast doubt on the meaningfulness of 'God'. So, if we assumed that 'God' would never have a definition that is well-defined for McGinn in such a way as to warrant appending 'exists' then this would lead to the conclusion that 'God exists' is not logically meaningful. Alternatives must be found.

First, we could look for an alternative to 'greatest conceivable being' that is acceptable to McGinn as well-defined<sup>87</sup>. For instance, could we argue that, if McGinn's point is well-definedness, and he says that 'we can make sense of "the most perfect being that exists"'<sup>88</sup>, then this resolves the matter? For we know that 'we can let God have that property [of existence] so long as his definition really warrants it.'<sup>89</sup> It consequently might seem acceptable to McGinn to say that in some sense God is (definitionally) the most perfect being that exists. This provides a parallel with Augustine, when he argues in *De Libero Arbitrio* II ii §5<sup>90</sup> that if anything is higher than eternal truth it is God, but otherwise truth itself is God. In this case, however, we are arguing that whatever is the most perfect extant being is God; if God (as we think of God) actually exists, then He is this entity, otherwise whichever being is the most perfect extant, is that which is in fact 'God'.

There are evident problems with this approach (aside from the fact that it produces 'the most perfect extant being exists' – i.e. meaningful, but a tautology - if we apply it to 'God exists'). The main one is that it is referentially arbitrary. Do we want to countenance some specific, contingent, epistemically transparent entity 'becoming' God? If it was demonstrable that the most perfect extant being was a South American tree, for example? Or if reference to God turned out to be reference to different things at different times; for instance, if the tree dies and an elephant takes its place as most perfect extant being? It would appear that one requires either ostensive proof of God's

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<sup>86</sup> *ELP*, p.38

<sup>87</sup> Note that this is in many ways parallel to the 'list of attributes' quest resulting from the Russellian view, in that the method described of finding a 'model' of God that is logically consistent would be one way of going about this option.

<sup>88</sup> *ELP*, p.50

<sup>89</sup> *ELP*, p.50

<sup>90</sup> Cited by M. J. Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p.55, from the translation M. Pontifex, *The Problem of Free Choice*, (London, 1955), p77-78

existence, or an understanding of ‘most perfect extant being’ that removes the possibility that a tree or an elephant could correspond to it. This effectively means looking for another concept of God, and this again means submitting it to McGinn’s challenge. However, it also hints at the problems of meaning and reference that will have to be addressed, and to which we shall return frequently – particularly in Chapter III.

Secondly, we could argue against McGinn that ‘greatest conceivable being’ is logically meaningful after all, or that it leads to a concept which *is*, in the context of the Ontological Argument; this would not immediately validate the ontological argument, since there are many other criticisms that McGinn does not assess, but it might secure meaningfulness for ‘God exists’. In other words, we could accept McGinn’s challenge and find a concept to satisfy it. I shall follow this path in Chapter II, with an examination of Anselm’s *Proslogion* – although, as we shall see, it leads us inexorably back to issues of meaning and reference, and contributes vitally to them.

Finally, we could reject McGinn’s challenge, arguing that his basis for it is flawed. We could argue that it should be possible for ‘God exists’ to be meaningful in the same way that ‘Adolf Hitler exists’ is meaningful even when we do not have a ‘well-defined concept’ for Adolf Hitler – i.e. because it predicates a *property* of a *referent* – arguing that McGinn’s challenge presupposes a position in the philosophy of language which may be questioned. It should be noted that in the proceeding chapters, we should not discard arguments for the meaningfulness of ‘God exists’ if they imply that ‘God exists’ is a case of failed intentionality on a McGinnian view of existence. This would not make the assertion ‘God exists’ meaningless, simply false. This has particular application to some points arising from discussion of Anselm’s *Proslogion*, since my concern is not to ‘prove’ it, but to use it to explore how ‘God exists’ may be considered meaningful.

## Chapter II: Anselm's Legacy

In the previous chapter, we saw that McGinn had developed a compelling model of existence as a logical predicate and property of objects. However, accompanying this improvement on the Russellian conditions for the meaningfulness of 'God exists' was a challenge from McGinn concerning the concept of 'God'. He required a well-defined concept for 'God' before he would allow the proposition 'God exists' to be formed. In particular, McGinn criticised ontological arguments for employing a concept for 'God' that was ill-defined - the greatest conceivable, or most perfect conceivable, object. In this chapter, I shall examine Anselm's *Proslogion*, probably the most long-lived, redeveloped and hotly debated instance of an 'ontological argument', to see whether McGinn's challenge is justified, and whether it can be met through an understanding of Anselm's thought.

Why move to Anselm and not to Descartes, given McGinn's freeing-up of the 'existence as a predicate' point? Several reasons. First, Descartes' formulation seems to be a prime contender to run into the arms of the criticisms McGinn's view can bring to bear, from clear and distinct perception of the idea of the most perfect being, through the use of perfection in maximal attribution, to the conceivability of the entire structure in the first place. Anselm, on the other hand, provides more options. Quite apart from the scholarly debate as to what, exactly, is going on in the *Proslogion*, Anselm's work as a whole is concerned with the sort of issues in which we have an interest - i.e. talking about God. Descartes provides less room for manoeuvre in background analysis.

Furthermore, the objectives of Anselm and Descartes are quite different. Descartes requires God as a non-deceiving entity that is other than himself<sup>91</sup>; at the end of the day, Descartes needs knowledge of the external world. Anselm - however we read him - wants to say something about God (including that God exists), and what McGinn's arguments have introduced is a challenge on that point; if our concept of God is not well-defined, and we do not know what it would be for a being to be God, we cannot talk of that being as existing or not existing as far as McGinn is concerned.

Perhaps equally important is the fact that Anselm and McGinn share the feature of language as a root of their arguments, suggesting that greater clarity may be available

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<sup>91</sup> Indeed, there is some question as to whether he even succeeds in this respect; see Donald Gotterbarn, 'An Equivocation in Descartes' Proof for Knowledge of the External World', *Idealistic Studies* 1 (1971), p.142-148.

in a dialogue between them than between, say, McGinn and Descartes. McGinn has his intentional quantifier, objects of language/thought, and most of the points made in discussion of ontological arguments, whilst Anselm claims that for his argument to work - even for the Fool - all that is required is to 'speak the words'. Indeed, as we shall see later on, there are many further points to be noted concerning Anselm's 'philosophy of language'.

In what follows, I hope to do three things. I first aim to provide an outline of the most notable points of scholarship concerning the *Proslogion*. There has been a great deal of debate over the work and consequently some consideration is required of the differing views if one is to be fair both to Anselm and to subsequent scholars. Although I do not claim to make a complete resolution on all points, I hope to draw out what might reasonably be said and what cannot be accepted without doing violence to Anselm or his works. It is important to do this because applying McGinn's challenge to one 'model' of Anselm's thought could have very different results from applying it to a separate model.

Secondly, I shall examine Anselm's philosophy of language and the theology that complements it, which I think provides a far stronger insight into his thought. In this, I aim to accomplish two things: something more of a resolution concerning what Anselm does in the *Proslogion*, including the thought which underlies it, and consequently to develop Anselm's concept of God such that it can be compared with McGinn's criticisms.

Finally, I shall ask how much damage is done to Anselm by McGinn's argument that 'we don't know what it would be for such a being to exist'. I shall also look at Richard Campbell's treatment of a very similar objection to McGinn's, assessing the success of his response. All of these points will lead to some surprising conclusions, both for Anselm's project and for my own; however, it will be seen that the analysis of the *Proslogion* is central to understanding Anselm's view of language, and the latter is in turn essential to developing the arguments of this thesis.

Since much of the discussion of Anselm's *Proslogion* centres around *Proslogion* II-IV, I quote this extract below for ready reference.

[II] Well then, Lord, You who give understanding to faith, grant me that I may understand, as much as You see fit, that You exist as we believe You to exist, and that you are what we believe You to be. Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or can it be that a thing of such a nature does not exist, since 'the Fool has said in his heart, there is no God'? But surely, when this same Fool hears what I am speaking about, namely, something-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought', he understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his mind,

even if he does not understand that it exists. For it is one thing for an object to exist in the mind, and another thing to understand that an object actually exists. Thus, when a painter plans beforehand what he is going to execute, he has [the picture] in his mind, but he does not yet think that it actually exists because he has not yet executed it. However, when he has actually painted it, then he both has it in his mind and understands that it exists because he has now made it. Even the Fool, then, is forced to agree that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the mind alone, this same that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists both in the mind and in reality.

[III] And certainly this being so truly exists that it cannot be even thought not to exist. For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist. Hence if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought can be thought not to exist then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not the same as that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, which is absurd. Something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists so truly then, that it cannot even be thought not to exist.

And You, Lord our God, are this being. You exist so truly, Lord my God, that You cannot even be thought not to exist. And this is as it should be, for if some intelligence could think of something better than You, the creature would be above its creator, and would judge its creator - and that is completely absurd. In fact, everything else there is, except You alone, can be thought of as not existing. You alone, then, of all things most truly exist and therefore of all things possess existence to the highest degree; for anything else does not exist as truly, and so possesses existence to a lesser degree. Why then did 'the Fool say in his heart, there is no God' when it is so evident to any rational mind that You of all things exist to the highest degree? Why indeed, unless because he was stupid and a fool?

[IV] How indeed has he 'said in his heart' what he could not think; or how could he not think what he 'said in his heart', since to 'say in one's heart' and to 'think' are the same? But if he really (indeed, since he really) both thought because he 'said in his heart' and did not 'say in his heart' because he could not think, there is not only one sense in which something is 'said in one's heart' or thought. For in one sense a thing is thought when the word signifying it is thought; in another sense when the very object which the thing is is understood. In the first sense, then, God can be thought not to exist, but not at all in the second sense. No one, indeed, understanding what God is can think that God does not exist, even though he may say these words in his heart either without any [objective] signification or with some peculiar signification. For God is that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought. Whoever really understands this understands clearly that this same being so exists that not even in thought can it not exist. Thus, whoever understands that God exists in such a way cannot think of him as not existing.

I give thanks, good Lord, I give thanks to You, since what I believed before through Your free gift I now so understand through your illumination, that if I did not want to *believe* that You existed, I should nevertheless be unable not to *understand* it.<sup>92</sup>

It has been variously noted that the argument was not originally divided into chapters, but that 'chapters' were listed at the beginning of the manuscript,

<sup>92</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, trans. M.J. Charlesworth, in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.117-121



corresponding to marginalia, as a means of quick reference for readers.<sup>93</sup> Consequently, I have printed the extract without full chapter divisions. There have been several opinions expressed as to how many and what length of arguments are employed by Anselm. Early research tended to concentrate upon 'chapter two' as the proof of God's existence; subsequently, it was suggested that the first part of 'chapter three' was an alternative superior form of this argument which demonstrated God's necessary existence<sup>94</sup>. At the same time as Plantinga was famously developing a modal form of ontological argument from that starting point, a new turn of research suggested that 'chapters' two and three were three stages of a single argument, whilst one scholar claimed that the single argument was not in fact properly begun until *Proslogion* V<sup>95</sup>. I shall present below what I take to be the best arguments concerning the structure of the *Proslogion*, although the focus of that which follows will be the need to respond to McGinn's points. Nevertheless, some overall view is essential for placing the arguments in context.

McGill observes that there are three angles that have been taken in interpreting Anselm's *Proslogion*; those of the rational Anselm, the Anselm of faith and the mystical Anselm<sup>96</sup>. Arguments of the first camp attempt to portray Anselm as wishing to provide a straight rational proof of God's existence accessible to all; arguments of the second camp contend that Anselm is working within the faith, presupposes God's existence, and wishes to provide a fuller understanding of God. The third camp, represented most strongly (if not entirely) by Stolz<sup>97</sup>, believes that Anselm is engaged in a search for an experience of God. It should be noted at the outset that, with respect to McGinn's challenge, all of these angles (whether exclusively or partially correct) must contend with the same challenge if they claim that Anselm is working with 'something-/that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought' as a meaning, concept, or definition of 'God'.

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<sup>93</sup> E.g. Anselm Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology in the *Proslogion*' in J. Hick & Arthur C. McGill (ed.) *The Many-Faced Argument* (London: Macmillan Press, 1968), p.205 citing a letter from Fr. Francis S. Schmitt

<sup>94</sup> See Arthur C. McGill, 'Recent Discussions of the Argument' in J. Hick & Arthur C. McGill (ed.) *The Many-Faced Argument*, p.39

<sup>95</sup> Richard J. Campbell, *From Belief to Understanding: A Study of Anselm's Proslogion Argument on the Existence of God* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1976), p.21, identifies R. La Croix as having argued this.

<sup>96</sup> McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p.50-51

<sup>97</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.185-186 provides the clearest statement

Anselm: Faith or Reason?

I shall consider each of the three views in turn, evaluating their evidence and arguments. First, I shall examine the arguments for the rationalistic Anselm. Scholars have pointed to Anselm's overall respect for reason; his immediately prior work, the *Monologion*, he describes as being purposed to demonstrate certain truths about God by reason, and not by reliance on Scriptural or Church authority<sup>98</sup>. Further, in the same text he says

If someone - either because he has not heard or does not believe - is ignorant of the one supreme nature ... and of the many other matters which we necessarily believe about God and his creatures, I think that such a person, even if he has only a mediocre mind, can still in a large measure convince himself of these by reason alone.<sup>99</sup>

Indeed, in the *Epistola de Incarnatione verbi* he states that the *Proslogion* aims to prove Christian beliefs concerning God 'by necessary reasons without the authority of Scripture'<sup>100</sup>. Likewise, in many of his other works, particularly the *Cur Deus Homo?*, Anselm places his trust and effort in the realm of reason. More importantly, his approach to heretics and schismatics is to attack their reason and to propound doctrine by rational progress from what all can accept to what they claim they cannot; for instance, against Roscelin, 'his error must be demonstrated by the very reason on which he relies'<sup>101</sup>. His biographer Eadmer wrote, of the *Monologion*, 'he inquired and discovered by reason alone what God is.'<sup>102</sup>

Again, with respect to the *Proslogion* itself, evidence can be found in his use of the formulation that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought and his claim that it is accessible to anyone, and in his reply to Gaunilo where he provides an account of it formed from non-Christian premises<sup>103</sup>.

As McGill observes<sup>104</sup>, there is a problem in the rationalistic interpretation of Anselm, in that he often makes reference to the primacy of faith. He canvasses two responses to this from rationalistic interpreters. The first is that Anselm's 'faith' is

<sup>98</sup> We also know that Lanfranc was concerned about this emphasis on reason; see Southern *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) p.119 for example.

<sup>99</sup> *Monologion* I (I.13.5-11), cited by McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p.51. All such bracketed references refer to Dom Francis de Sales Schmitt (ed.) *Opera Omnia*, 5 volumes (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1945-1951)

<sup>100</sup> Anselm, *Epistola de Incarnatione verbi* VI (II. 20.17-19)

<sup>101</sup> *Epist. De Incarn. Verbi* II (II. 11.5-8)

<sup>102</sup> McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p.54-55. Note that McGill cites this without observing its scope (i.e. *Monologion*)

<sup>103</sup> Anselm, *Reply* VII in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.187

<sup>104</sup> McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p.55

*rectitude voluntatis*, or 'right willing' - in other words 'wanting what the faith teaches and seeking it with humility and purity of heart.'<sup>105</sup> Such right willing is received from God, and precedes Christian understanding only in so much as it precedes the making of what is understood by reason a part of Christian life - i.e. it precedes a Christian form of life, but not a rational understanding of Christian intellectual propositions.

The mind's conceiving [of the meaning of the preacher's words] by itself does not produce faith ... but faith is produced through grace, when rectitude of will is added to conceiving.<sup>106</sup>

The second response is to claim that in practice Anselm is 'rationalist' in an Aristotelian fashion but that this overlaps with older patristic notion of theology, leading him occasionally to portray his work in those terms<sup>107</sup>.

Having now presented the evidence for the rationalistic Anselm, I shall consider the opposing arguments for the Anselm of faith. Scholars have pointed to passages insisting on the primacy of faith, particularly his views expressing the need to believe in Christian doctrines before going on to examine and achieve understanding of them. In several places, Anselm argues that sin (particularly original sin) darkens the reason, a major example being his statement in *Cur Deus Homo?* that 'the right order demands that we must first believe the deep matters of the Christian faith before we presume to examine them by means of reason.'<sup>108</sup> More persuasively still, the *Proslogion* itself seems to claim that it is 'faith seeking understanding'<sup>109</sup>. He also says

Certainly if I, a contemptible little man, attempt to write something to reinforce the strength of the Christian faith, as if it needed my defence with so many wise and holy men present everywhere, we may presume that I will definitely appear, and be judged to be, ridiculous.<sup>110</sup>

The key theologian involved in propounding the 'Anselm of faith' has been Karl Barth<sup>111</sup>. Barth's salient arguments can be given in several points. Primarily, he argues

<sup>105</sup> McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p.55. McGill cites *Epist. De Incarn. Verbi*, rev. ed. I (II. 7.10 - 9.19), *De Concordia praesc.* III.2 (II. 264.26 - 265.7) and Adolf Köppling, *Anselms Proslogion-Beweis der Existenz Gottes im Zusammenghang seines spekulativen Programms: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (Bonn: Hanstein, 1939), p. 15-20

<sup>106</sup> *De Concordia praesc.* III.6 (II. 271.7-9)

<sup>107</sup> McGill cites Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.34-40 and Dom Vagaggini's remarks in *Spicilegium Beccense* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1959), p.106

<sup>108</sup> *Cur Deus Homo?* I.1 (II.48.16f), cited in McGill p.57

<sup>109</sup> *Proslogion* I in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.111-5

<sup>110</sup> *Epist. De Incarn. Verbi*, rev. ed., I (II.5.7-19), cited in McGill p.58

<sup>111</sup> See Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum*, trans. Ian Robertson (London: SCM Press and Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1960), re-printed in John Hick and Arthur C. McGill (eds.) *The Many-Faced Argument*. Page references are to this re-print.

that Anselm is interested in proving the existence of God and then the nature of God, by presupposing a 'Name of God'<sup>112</sup> (i.e. that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought). Secondly, Barth argues that this concept says who God is, couched 'in the form of a prohibition that man can understand'<sup>113</sup>; it is consequently not a definition<sup>114</sup>. Indeed, a second premise is required: some concept of God's existence and Nature attained from another (presumably revelatory) source. In summary, therefore, Anselm's formula

... is a genuine description (*significatio*), a Name of God, selected from among the various revealed Names of God for this occasion and for this particular purpose, in such a way that to reach a knowledge of God, the revelation of this same God from some other source is clearly assumed. All that can possibly be expected from this Name is that, in conformity with the program of Anselm's theology, it should demonstrate that between the Name of God and the revelation of his Existence and Nature from the other source there exists a strong and discernable connection. Only in that way and to that extent will statements about the existence and Nature of God inevitably follow from an understanding of this Name.<sup>115</sup>

Subsequently, Barth provides further evidence for his model, first by citing the 'introduction' of the formula in *Proslogion* II ('and we believe that You are...'<sup>116</sup>), then by citing Anselm's reply to Gaunilo concerning the challenged validity of the formula ('I use your faith and conscience as a most certain argument that this is false'<sup>117</sup>). He then reaffirms both that the Name of God is an article of faith, and that the context of the naming is of a creature/Creator relationship which prohibits, through the content of faith, conceiving of a greater being. Barth places the absurdity of the *reductio* in the absurdity of the creature thinking above the Creator.<sup>118</sup>

McGill notes that Barth's thesis concerning the Fool is that Anselm refuses to have anything to do with him; the Fool and the believer 'march along side by side with nothing in common, and once this is recognised, they can both save themselves all the trouble and excitement involved.'<sup>119</sup> McGill recounts that the basics of the Barthian line have been well-received by many scholars, but that it has been argued to ignore the evidence from the rationalistic camp. Certain scholars have argued that '[Anselm's] search for the *intellectus fidei* will not be true or complete as long as it excludes the

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<sup>112</sup> Barth, *Fides*, p.119

<sup>113</sup> Barth, *Fides*, p.121

<sup>114</sup> cf Campbell's arguments p.(below) concerning whether Anselm argues from a definition.

<sup>115</sup> Barth, *Fides*, p.121

<sup>116</sup> *Proslogion* II, Charlseworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.117

<sup>117</sup> *Reply I*, Charlseworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.170

<sup>118</sup> McGill p.123, cf Campbell's more explicit reasoning later w.r.t. III part ii.

<sup>119</sup> McGill p.63 n.105, citing Ian Robertson's translation of Barth, *Fides*, p.65 (see n.111 above)

fool<sup>120</sup>; thus the *Proslogion* can be seen as an 'advertisement' for God's revelation, but not an exercise in apologetics.

However, one might think that the evidence available from the rationalist camp requires more of a challenge than has been posed thus far. Charlesworth makes several apt points in favour of a more balanced approach to faith and reason in Anselm<sup>121</sup>. These can be divided into two categories: first, direct responses to Barth, using analysis of *Proslogion* and of the historical context; secondly, general arguments concerning faith and reason based mostly upon *Cur Deus Homo?* and Anselm's Augustinian background. I shall take these in reverse order.

Charlesworth argues that Anselm wishes to remain close to Augustine, citing his words in *Monologion* I<sup>122</sup>, and notes that Augustine himself has a complex position on 'faith and reason'. On the one hand, Augustine says 'So, therefore, if it is rational that faith precedes reason in the case of certain great matters which cannot be grasped, there cannot be the least doubt that reason which persuades us on this precept - that faith precedes reason - itself precedes faith.'<sup>123</sup> On the other hand, he says 'Understand my word in order to believe it; but believe the word of God in order to understand it.'<sup>124</sup> Charlesworth speculates that one might make a distinction between 'notional assent' (theoretical understanding) and 'real assent' (understanding through a form of life), but argues that the most one might conclude concerning Augustine is that the primacy of faith is restricted to revealed truths and not necessarily applicable to God's existence and attributes or other 'preambles of faith'. At a later point, Charlesworth demonstrates that Augustine 'clearly admits the possibility of a rational justification of belief in God'<sup>125</sup>. Charlesworth builds upon this by drawing attention to the conflict between 'dialecticians' and 'anti-dialecticians' in the early eleventh century. He characterises the camps essentially as systematicists and Scripturalists respectively and places Anselm firmly in the camp of the former, on the grounds of his insistence upon not basing his works in Scripture or Church authority directly. In doing this, Charlesworth implicitly argues that, given the choice between the 'faith' and 'reason' of the time, Anselm chose reason.

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<sup>120</sup> Andre Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm and the necessarily apostolic character of true Christian Reflection', trans. Arthur C. McGill, in J. Hick & Arthur C. McGill *The Many-Faced Argument*, p. 166; cited by McGill p. 63.

<sup>121</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 22-48 ('St. Anselm's System')

<sup>122</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 23

<sup>123</sup> *Epist.* 120; P.L. xxxiii. 453.; cited in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 27

<sup>124</sup> *Sermon* 43; P.L. xxxviii. 257-8; cited in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 27

<sup>125</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p. 56

Finally, Charlesworth looks at Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* He notes that it was written somewhat later than the *Proslogion*, but argues that 'Anselm did not begin writing his formal treatises until he was forty-three, and the main lines of his thought seem to have been well and truly laid by then and to have remained constant,'<sup>126</sup> consequently, 'there is no reason to think that Anselm's position on faith and reason had changed or developed in any radical way in that period of time.'<sup>127</sup> Charlesworth argues that Anselm is aiming to convince the unbeliever and to confirm the believer in their faith, but that the main direction of the work is to win over the 'unbeliever' (who accepts some of the Christian assumptions, e.g. the Jewish faith) and the 'pagan' (who accepts none of the Christian assumptions) 'by reason alone'. Thus, the Christian believer must 'believe before he understands', but the non-Christian can be satisfied 'by reason alone ... that the Old and New Testaments are true.'<sup>128</sup> Charlesworth argues that the *Cur Deus Homo?* is primarily concerned with the unbeliever, and is consequently more rationalistic, but he seems to apply this to all Anselm's works, a point that I shall raise again below.

Against Barth, Charlesworth makes three distinct points. First, he argues that Barth takes Anselm anachronistically, and assumes he has 'faced the question of the relationship between faith and reason and to have resolved it unequivocally in a neo-Barthian way.'<sup>129</sup> Charlesworth contends that, far from it, if one had to take Anselm in any one direction, a Thomist one would fit most with his aims.<sup>130</sup>

Secondly, he argues that Barth's interpretation disregards Anselm's theological program (as Charlesworth sees it expressed in *Cur Deus Homo?*) of convincing the unbeliever and the pagan. He observes that in Anselm's reply to Gaunilo, he distinguishes between appealing to the 'faith and conscience' of the believer, and using rational means of demonstration for the unbeliever, to show that that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is a meaningful concept<sup>131</sup>. As we have seen, Barth only cites the first part of this distinction to support his own argument, without supplying an explanation of the second part.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.30-31

<sup>127</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.30

<sup>128</sup> *Cur Deus Homo?*, II. xxiii; 133, cited by Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.32

<sup>129</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.41

<sup>130</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.41-2

<sup>131</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.42 cites *Reply VIII*

<sup>132</sup> Although it should be noted that Anselm appears to re-state a position he took in the *Mono.* at this point in his *Reply*; is Charlesworth therefore putting too much weight on this point than can support a 'rationalistic *Proslogion*'?

Thirdly, Charlesworth argues that on Barth's interpretation, Gaunilo is primarily mistaken in criticising Anselm's argument *qua* 'rational argument for the existence of God'; yet Anselm 'confronts Gaunilo's objections on Gaunilo's own ground and attempts to show that they are invalid.'<sup>133</sup> Thus, concludes Charlesworth, Anselm is agreeing with Gaunilo's treatment of the *Proslogion* as a rational argument for the existence of God. This criticism stems from the previous one in that, if, with Barth, we omit the 'rational means of demonstration' and rely upon the 'faith and conscience' half of the distinction, then we find Anselm disagreeing with Gaunilo's interpretation - however, we are hard pressed to explain the rest of Anselm's reply.

Charlesworth also gestures to the circumstantial evidence of Anselm's Augustinian background, and the concerns of, for instance, Lanfranc, that Anselm was putting too much emphasis on reason.<sup>134</sup> He argues that there is nothing to suggest that a Lutheran (i.e. a Barthian – for that is how Charlesworth sees it) doctrine of reason's corruption by the Fall has any place in the eleventh or twelfth centuries, and that Anselm's contemporary supporters and disciples expressed no thoughts that Anselm was innovative in a fideistic fashion.<sup>135</sup>

In considering these criticisms, we should note that Charlesworth's comments seem to presuppose a single coherent theological program, that Anselm's comments on Augustine are taken from the *Monologion*, that his 'position' on faith and reason is extracted from the *Cur Deus Homo?*, and that Charlesworth asserts that the "rationalist" strain ... became more and more pronounced in his thinking.<sup>136</sup> Yet the *Proslogion* represents a part of what Southern calls 'The first peak'<sup>137</sup> of his early work, in particular it was written about twenty years before *Cur Deus Homo?* and came at the end of his literary output of *Prayers and Meditations*. Although Charlesworth argues that 'the main lines of his thought seem to have been well and truly laid by then and to have remained constant,'<sup>138</sup> he does not give this the foundations that one might prefer for such a statement. Southern writes that 'the *Monologion* is presented as a philosophical meditation based on Augustine, while the *Proslogion* is a meditation arising from prayer addressed to God....The *Monologion* was a highly original work in form, but in substance it had the authority of Augustine behind it....But in the *Proslogion*, [Anselm]

<sup>133</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.42-43

<sup>134</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.43-4, and p.43 n.1 citing *Epist.* 77

<sup>135</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.44-5

<sup>136</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.37

<sup>137</sup> Richard W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.113

<sup>138</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.30-1

was on his own.<sup>139</sup> Further, Charlesworth's assertion that Barth is reading Lutheran thought into Anselm is not entirely well-placed in the manner of its expression, since Anselm does indeed repeatedly state that the rational faculties are darkened as a result of the Fall.<sup>140</sup>

Nevertheless, the broad bifurcation of the primacy of faith for the Christian and the primacy of reason for apologetics, an analysis which can be charitably extracted from Charlesworth, is fairly attractive. In *Epistola de Incarnatione verbi*, Anselm says 'May it happen that ... those who first try to ascend the ladder of faith by means of their understanding be forced to descend into all sorts of error because of the defectiveness of their understanding.'<sup>141</sup> This has a remarkable echo in the *Proslogion*, where Anselm says at chapter XVIII, 'I strove to ascend to God's light and I have fallen back into my own darkness. Indeed, not only have I fallen back into it, but I feel myself enclosed within it.' It is worth noting that Anselm says 'those who *first* try to ascend'; this implies that, as we have seen the 'Anselm of faith' and mixed models to propose, he believes that understanding can enrich Christian life, but only if one first believes. In the context of the *Proslogion*, where the 'Anselm of faith' presumably is working in the 'right order' of *Cur Deus Homo?*, does the bifurcated model give a good account of any emphases placed on reason?

We have three points to consider which might be put under the heading of 'reason'. First, the argument that, from his reply to Gaunilo, Anselm thinks that that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought can be made meaningful to one who does not accept sacred authority. Secondly, he replies to Gaunilo by using rational argument, and treats Gaunilo as having replied to reasoning by reasoning. The former can be understood in terms of the accessibility of the work for the unbeliever or pagan, the latter in terms of Southern's observation of Anselm's preferred methodology, which I expound below.

Thirdly, Anselm insists that all that is required for his argument is for the (non-technical) words to be heard and that 'if it is spoken in a known language and [the Fool] does not understand it, then either he has no intelligence at all, or a completely obtuse one'.<sup>142</sup> This, too, may be seen as the employment of reason for the purpose of apologetics. Incidentally, it rather dampens Hayen's assertion that Anselm's 'search for

<sup>139</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm*, p.118

<sup>140</sup> E.g. *Proslogion* I, *Proslogion* XIV

<sup>141</sup> *Epist. De Incarn. Verbi* ed. I (II. 7.10 – 8.1) cited in McGill, p.55

<sup>142</sup> *Reply* II; Charlesworth, p.173



the *intellectus fidei* will not be true or complete as long as it excludes the fool,<sup>143</sup> by which, McGill reasonably explains, he means that Anselm wishes to 'engage the thinking of all actual men'<sup>144</sup>. However, it also does not warrant Barth's assertion that Anselm will have nothing to do with the fool.<sup>145</sup>

There are certain elements of the historical and intellectual context of the *Proslogion* that, whilst supporting what is considered above, also lead to another perspective on it. Anselm writes that the *Proslogion* follows on from the *Monologion* in the sense that he wanted to find a single argument, rather than the complex of arguments in the *Monologion*. Southern goes so far as to call the *Proslogion* 'A supplement to the *Monologion*', the result of 'the task of consolidating the argument of the *Monologion* by formulating it in a way that was both simple and complete.'<sup>146</sup>

Southern argues that Anselm used a fairly uniform method of enquiry from the beginning of the *Monologion* onwards. His works were developed by discussion, he and his students wanted to proceed such that 'nothing should be put forward on the authority of Scripture', also that 'whatever conclusion was reached in the course of each investigation should be expressed in plain language with intelligible arguments and simple disputation.'<sup>147</sup> Finally, he commits himself to answering all objections. Southern also discusses the form, structure and approach of Anselm's meditations<sup>148</sup>. The most vital element of this is expressed by Southern thus:

This is the whole aim of meditation: to lead the inquirer forward along the road towards the final beatitude of the immediate experience of the object of faith. Until this final beatitude is enjoyed, reason will continue to have a contribution to make to faith.<sup>149</sup>

Given that Southern classifies Anselm's *Monologion* and *Proslogion* distinctively as 'meditations', there is clearly an aspect in the study of Anselm's thought which has been lacking thus far. We are aptly reminded of Anselm's religious context, and this is the basis for much of Stolz' argumentation, which emphasises elements of Anselm's work in the light of his distinctively Christian, and moreover monastic, involvement.

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<sup>143</sup> Hayen, 'The Role of the Fool', p.167, cited by McGill p.63

<sup>144</sup> McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p.63

<sup>145</sup> cf p.42 n.119 above.

<sup>146</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm*, p.127

<sup>147</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm*, p.118-9

<sup>148</sup> See particularly Southern, *Saint Anselm*, p.126-127, but more broadly p.120-125

<sup>149</sup> Southern, *Saint Anselm*, p.127

### A mystical Anselm?

The third interpretative option is that of Anselm as searching for an experience of God. Stolz argues that there are several elements of the *Proslogion* which allow us to conclude that it 'is essentially a piece of mystical theology,' and that 'Anselm wants to attain a vision of God through an understanding of what the faith says about God.'<sup>150</sup> Stolz' work is primarily written in response to Barth.<sup>151</sup>

His first argument compares the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* as depicted by Anselm in the preface to the *Proslogion*. This says of the *Monologion* that it is 'a little work produced as an example of a meditation on the rationality of the faith, in the person of someone who investigates what he does not know by silent reasoning with himself.'<sup>152</sup> Of the *Proslogion* it says 'Judging therefore that what I rejoiced to have found about this and certain other matters would, if written, be welcome to some readers, I have written the following little work, in the person of someone striving to elevate his mind to the contemplation of God and seeking to understand what he believes.'<sup>153</sup> Stolz interprets the former statement as 'a silent meditation which should lead to understanding'<sup>154</sup> and the latter statement as 'an effort of the soul to raise itself to a kind of vision of God.'<sup>155</sup> He goes on to say that 'Anselm specifies the How of this quest for God: "seeking to understand what he believes." Thus a general insight into the teaching of the faith is not at all intended.'<sup>156</sup> Stolz places emphasis on Anselm's tendency to provide preliminary comments on the purpose and method of his works, setting this over against Barth's view (and indeed Charlesworth's) of an Anselm with a general theological program. However, it may be worth bearing in mind a distinction at this point between the individual form of each work and his theological aims; if Barth stresses the latter to the neglect of the former, is it possible that Stolz is stressing the former as a *replacement* for the latter, rather than a complement to it?

Stolz proceeds in his argument by drawing attention to the original title of the *Proslogion*; *Alloquium*, or address, which Stolz correlates with the sense of an address

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<sup>150</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p. 185-6

<sup>151</sup> This is both evident from the form of the work, and explicitly observed in its content by McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p. 68 n. 131

<sup>152</sup> *Proslogion* Preface cited by Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p. 185

<sup>153</sup> *Proslogion* Preface cited by Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p. 185

<sup>154</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p. 185

<sup>155</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p. 185

<sup>156</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p. 185

to God, and also with the prefatory remarks and the first chapter. The first chapter, he claims, is woefully ill-attended by scholarship. In it, he finds the aim and plan for the work: an exhortation to the soul to seek God, an appeal to God for revelation and aid, a lament over the loss of direct experience of God through the Fall, and a further appeal to God to renew His image in the human soul to enable its experience of Him.<sup>157</sup>

Stolz then argues that Anselm writes the *Proslogion* as a Christian, not as a philosopher. His evidence for this is that Anselm makes several theological 'recognitions' (God as creator and redeemer, original sin, reliance upon God for attaining the happiness for which we were meant in Adam, and the introduction in *Proslogion* XXIII of the Trinity)<sup>158</sup>. Based on this, Stolz argues that Anselm's aim is 'to attain that for which he was created; the vision of God,' but that Chapter I notes that this is not possible because of original sin, and that therefore all that may be attained is 'an experience of God'<sup>159</sup>. Thus, claims Stolz, the following passage can be understood as a presupposition of God's existence, and, moreover, of God presence within us:

Enter into the inner chamber of your mind; shut out everything except God and what can help you in seeking him...<sup>160</sup>

The form of *Proslogion* I is echoed in *Proslogion* XIV, instigating a second phase of the search; Stolz argues that this adds weight to the thought that the intervening chapters have indeed been attempting to cultivate an experience of God.<sup>161</sup> Finally, Stolz claims that there is a theme of joy – sought and eventually found – which explains the hymn/prayer of joy concluding the *Proslogion* and connects it with the first chapter, thereby showing that Anselm finally succeeds in his aim of experiencing God.<sup>162</sup>

Stolz argues that *Proslogion* XIV is key in understanding the *Proslogion* as a whole; it reviews the previous chapters, finds them unequal to the challenge of finding an experience of God and heralds a new attempt. He cites

You have sought God and you have discovered that He is the supreme good, than which nothing better can be conceived; that this good is life itself, light itself, wisdom itself, goodness itself, eternal beatitude itself and beatific eternity itself; and that this is everywhere and always.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>157</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.187-8

<sup>158</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.188

<sup>159</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.188-9

<sup>160</sup> *Proslogion* I, cited by Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.189

<sup>161</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.189-190

<sup>162</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.190-1

<sup>163</sup> *Proslogion* XIV, cited by Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.194

Stolz argues that the second clause corresponds to *Proslogion* V-XII, the third clause corresponds to *Proslogion* XIII, and that the first clause must therefore correspond to *Proslogion* I-IV. This statement of content does not mention having proven God's existence, and so, concludes Stolz, that cannot be the concern in those chapters; rather they demonstrate that an extant God is that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought.<sup>164</sup>

Stolz' third major contention is that *Proslogion* II-IV do demonstrate something concerning God's existence, as previewed in the preface, but that this is, as the preface says, an argument 'which would be sufficient by itself for proving that God truly is...'<sup>165</sup>. Stolz consequently makes two points.

Firstly, he argues that '*vere esse*' ('true being') means a form of existence that cannot be thought of as not existing. This point is extended by Campbell, who argues that *vere esse* was a technical term, found in Augustine's work, which denotes a manner of existence more akin to 'immutability'.<sup>166</sup>

Secondly, Stolz argues that all that can be deduced from the text - especially of *Proslogion* XIV - is that *Proslogion* II-IV wishes to prove that God truly is (*vere esse*), and that he is that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, and not anything about the existence of God in general.<sup>167</sup>

Stolz' final major contention is that the form of an address takes precedence in the text, and that prayer and reasoning cannot be separated in the way that a modern writer might wish. He observes that, at minimum, the introduction of a thesis is in the form of addressing God, and the conclusion of each piece of reasoning shifts back to that form; 'thus, the result secured by the reasoning is fully used for the contemplation of God'<sup>168</sup>. In some cases (e.g. *Proslogion* VIII) the reasoning is confluent with the address. As McGill points out, 'Stolz' view collides with the modern assumption that logic and prayer are completely distinct and mutually exclusive areas of discourse. People today so objectivise logic and so sentimentalise prayer that each can only be seen as the negation of the other.'<sup>169</sup> Stolz concludes his contention by demonstrating that the opening of *Proslogion* II is in the address form, whilst the closure of the argument in *Proslogion* IV returns to that form, showing that the argument in II-IV is a single argument. *Proslogion* IV represents a sub-section of reasoning answering the

<sup>164</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.195-7

<sup>165</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.197

<sup>166</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.197, cf Campbell p.175

<sup>167</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.197-8

<sup>168</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.198-9

<sup>169</sup> McGill, 'Recent Discussions', p.68

problem of how the Fool could have said what he did, giving the conclusion that II & III form the main (single) argument.<sup>170</sup>

It should be noted that this provides a strong reason for seeing *Proslogion* II and III (and possibly including IV *qua* objection) as a single argument, as against a great deal of scholarship (including Barth) which has chosen to take II as a separate argument to III.

This does not, however, demonstrate that Anselm did not *also* have as an aim a rational argument with which to address the unbeliever; this is clear from his reply to Gaunilo, and from his insistence that all that is required is to hear the words which he speaks (i.e. that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought). Thus, if Anselm aimed primarily for an experience of God through increased understanding of belief, this does not preclude a demonstration that some nature (necessarily) exists, and that God is this nature. Stolz argues that the *Reply* shows that Anselm sees the reasoning as important, but does not show that the reasoning does not have a mystical aim, but, even taking this into account, the fact remains that Anselm (purportedly) demonstrates that that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought exists, and truly exists, *and* is God. This, essentially, is the argument employed by Campbell.<sup>171</sup>

Campbell also argues that Anselm makes an initial identification of God with that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, but that this is the first thesis to be proven in the work; it therefore cannot be a definitional starting point or premise. Campbell cites *Proslogion* XV where Anselm moves on to God as greater than can be conceived, arguing that this would be denying his previous argument if that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought were definitional.<sup>172</sup> He also cites the last paragraph of *Proslogion* I, where Anselm says 'I am not trying, O Lord, to penetrate your loftiness, for my understanding is in no way equal to it, but I desire in some measure to understand your truth,' and argues that '[t]his is not the way a man arguing from a definition of God speaks.'<sup>173</sup> Finally, he argues that 'logical consistency would require that claims about such a thing and claims about God must be both accepted or both rejected'<sup>174</sup> if the formula is definitional. In *Reply* VII, Anselm points out that one cannot deny certain claims about that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought as an entailment of denying those claims about God. He also, observes Campbell, argues that one can understand that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought without

<sup>170</sup> Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology', p.200f

<sup>171</sup> Campbell p.176-7

<sup>172</sup> Campbell p.25

<sup>173</sup> Campbell p.26

<sup>174</sup> Campbell p.27

understanding 'God'. Campbell concludes that if that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought *were* definitional of God, then Anselm would be stating wholly unreasonable points in these passages.<sup>175</sup>

One of Campbell's main theses, therefore, is that Anselm moves from 'can it be that such a nature does not exist?' as a starting point, to 'when the fool hears what I speak' as the first premise. This, he argues, explains why Anselm maintains that all that is required is for someone to speak the words.

### Synopsis

How can we characterise the issues and arguments at stake? First, I would argue that it is important to distinguish between Anselm's 'theological program', his 'methods' and his 'aims'. It seems reasonable to assert that he did not intend, or accomplish, a systematically worked out dogmatics or metaphysics; in this sense, he did not have a Barthian 'theological program'. It also seems reasonable to assert, concomitantly, that each work he produced had a specific aim, and that he chose a structure to suit that aim; in this sense, he had different methods and aims. However, neither of these imply that he did not have a characteristic approach to his work; namely, that identified by Southern as 'an origin in talking ... and the questions arising therefrom; a method which excluded the quotation of authorities; and a determination to leave no objection unanswered.' Likewise, the following might be taken as an expression of his approach regarding faith and reason:

Our faith is to be defended by reason against unbelievers, not against those professing to rejoice in the name of Christians.... The Christian ought to progress through faith to understanding, and not through understanding to faith.<sup>176</sup>

Neither of these run counter to the two assertions about 'aims' and 'a theological program' made above, but they do warrant the capacity to identify elements in Anselm's work as being rational - as opposed to rationalistic or fideistic - and distinctively Christian-theological (as opposed to purely philosophical), without seeing these as being in tension.

There is also the issue of the structure of the *Proslogion*. It seems reasonable to assert here that *Proslogion* II-III, with IV as 'mopping up' an outstanding point of

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<sup>175</sup> Campbell p.27-8

<sup>176</sup> Anselm against Roscelin, cited by Southern, *Saint Anselm*, p.123

criticism, represent a single argument in several stages; Campbell's evidence from the logical structure is compelling, and Stolz' evidence from the structure of prayer and address - whether or not we accept his overall argument - is also compelling.

Most importantly for understanding the *Proslogion* as a whole is that Stolz and Campbell hint that there is more to understanding it than deciphering the first four 'chapters'. This should indicate to us that more attention needs to be paid to the entirety of the *Proslogion*, and also to its context in Anselm's thought - not only to discover what Anselm is really doing in the *Proslogion*, but also to discover what concepts he is using for 'God', and why. This is underlined by Campbell's arguments against 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought' being taken as definitional rather than, as it were, descriptive or conceptual. What is required, then, if we are to understand Anselm's concept of God, is to look at the context of thought which gave rise to the *Proslogion*. It is this to which I now turn.

### Anselm's Views on Language and Theology

In what follows, I shall explore Anselm's philosophy and theology of language, thereby providing a basis for two concepts of God; that of God as in some sense the source of thought, and that of God as that which is found at the limit of human understanding. I shall link these findings into what has been said of the *Proslogion*, providing a more substantial conclusion to the debate than the observations gathered above.

Clearly, I also hope to show how critical engagement with Anselm's views provides some useful material to further the current discussion of predicating existence of God, with particular reference to McGinn's challenge of well-definedness.

G.R. Evans observes that Anselm's efforts tended to be focused upon particular issues, with attendant or tangential themes being addressed as and when the need arose.<sup>177</sup> Consequently, Anselm does not develop 'a philosophy of language' in much the same way as he does not develop 'a metaphysics'<sup>178</sup>. In this way, Anselm differs from Augustine (whom he follows in many respects), who specifically asks in the *De Magistro*, 'What do we do when we talk?'<sup>179</sup> However, Evans argues that Anselm has

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<sup>177</sup> G. R. Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p.15 - cf previous comments on Anselm's methods and aims.

<sup>178</sup> Again, cf Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.24

<sup>179</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p. 13

points of commonality with Augustine, and debts both to him and to Boethius (through his technical principles of language and dialectics).

As has previously been hinted, Anselm builds upon Augustine in many ways, not least in the Neoplatonic aspects of his theology and his view on faith and reason. Evans, however, chooses to concentrate, for her own purposes, upon Anselm's and Augustine's common goal; to 'attempt to glimpse something of the working of the Divine mind upon which they believe the human mind to be modelled.'<sup>180</sup> Anselm, says Evans, assumes that God's rationality and human rationality are the same 'in kind if not in degree.'<sup>181</sup> These two points can form an anchor for understanding Anselm's philosophy of language.

One of Evans' key contentions is that Anselm's model of language splits it into three levels. At the third level, there are 'bodily signs'; sounds, gestures and symbols; for example, the word or sound 'tree'. At the second level there is 'thinking the signs'; when reading the example above, one operates at this level (unless one says or writes 'tree' as one reads it). At the first level, which Evans calls 'primary language' and Anselm calls '*naturalia verba*', there are what one might term 'images', 'concepts' or perhaps 'universals'. Evans points out that Anselm was restricted in his descriptive capabilities by the lack of technical vocabulary available for a concept or idea conceived; 'he is obliged to fall back on verbs which describe the act of conceiving.... His use of pronouns (*id*; *aliquid*) would also appear to suggest that he is trying to avoid the use of nouns.'<sup>182</sup> Indeed, 'this lack of technical terminology helps to distinguish his account of the *naturalia verba* from the more familiar Platonic theory of Ideas. Anselm's images are, essentially, *verba*; they underlie all conventional human languages and they provide him with a foundation not only for his theory of knowledge, but also for his theory of language.'<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, Evans argues that because the same set of *naturalia verba* underlie all human languages, they must be common to all humans, although 'nowhere does Anselm consider how we know that all our mental images are alike; the first principles of his theory of language entail that they must be alike'<sup>184</sup>. The foundations that Anselm lays work from the premises that creation is *ex nihilo*, and that God must have thought out/planned his creation; hence Anselm's uses of the maker analogy in the *Monologion* and the painter analogy in the *Proslogion*. In both, the argument is that the

<sup>180</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.20

<sup>181</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.18

<sup>182</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.28

<sup>183</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.28

<sup>184</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.25



agent has an image in mind of that which they wish to bring about. In the case of God, whose thoughts are as eternal as God Himself, this means that there is a set of eternal images (*naturalia verba*), which may be apprehended by human minds, and in which consist 'primary language'. Creation is then understood as God 'speaking' the *naturalia verba*.<sup>185</sup>

Thus, following Evans, human apprehension of the *naturalia verba* comes from empirical experience (i.e. observation of that which has been created, which is spoken *naturalia verba*) or from the mind of God directly through some unspecified intuition<sup>186</sup>. Therefore, partially *contra* Evans, one might argue that we can know *a priori* that our mental images are all alike so long as we accept that God is the author of the complete set of *naturalia verba*, that humans are capable of apprehending them, and that they are the foundation of human language instead of an alternative to or derivation from it. In order to question this knowledge, an extra premise would have to be introduced concerning veridical perception (e.g. that the Fall resulted in faulty perception or intuition, giving rise to warped mental concepts/images), or the justification for Anselm's other premises questioned, which is a separate issue. There is some suggestion by Evans that a questioning of perceptual verity is present in Anselm when she paraphrases 'such images [in which our primary language consist] are more or less true, depending on how closely they approximate to the *res* they imitate.'<sup>187</sup> Nevertheless, under these circumstances, it is difficult to see how Anselm would respond to someone asking him *how* we can know all our mental images are alike, except by re-stating what has already been said. After all, Evans asks how we could know that our mental images are alike, not how we could know that they are the *same*, and it is unclear that Anselm's theory demands that they be identical.

One point that Evans observes<sup>188</sup> to be entailed by Anselm's view of language is that it is not possible for humans to invent original concepts; we can only work with that which is present: 'a man who speaks merely reviews in his mind the ideas that God has put there...he can be a craftsman only'<sup>189</sup>. This allows Anselm to provide a clear Creator/creature distinction, since a creature cannot 'create' what God has not already thought.

Anselm was also well aware of the need to reconcile his 'spoken creation' model with the orthodox view of the accomplishment of creation through a single Word of

<sup>185</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.24

<sup>186</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.27

<sup>187</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.32

<sup>188</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.27

<sup>189</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.32

God, expressing the single Truth, which is God. There is an obvious tension between a 'spoken' set of *naturalia verba* and the accomplishment of creation through a single Word (which also becomes incarnate in Jesus). Anselm's solution is to argue that limited human understanding means that we are unable to grasp the Word as a whole, and therefore grasp it through a plurality of images.

At this point the model being advanced seems to have become less coherent; a summary of the salient points is desirable. The key points are, first, that human primary language (mental concept-images) is closest to God's 'language' of *naturalia verba*, in a similar way to that in which divine and human rationality are close. Secondly, that these are the basis of all other human language. Thirdly, that humans cannot therefore originate concepts; they can only be 'conceptual craftsmen'. Fourthly, that the foundational nature of primary language/*naturalia verba* is characterised through human apprehension of it by empirical experience or direct intuition of God's thoughts. Fifthly, that the previous points are dependent on the idea that God 'spoke' what we are only able to understand as a set of *naturalia verba*, in a single Word, thereby effecting Creation.

There are three points of confusion which arise. Evans is clear that Anselm admits that we cannot speak of God in His essence: 'Anselm ultimately concedes, in the *Monologion*, that God is *ineffabilis*, beyond speaking of. The admission follows perfectly consistently from his earlier arguments. Only God possesses command of a language in which it is possible to speak fully and accurately of Himself.'<sup>190</sup> Again, 'There is simply no means, in the resources of language available to man, of devising a system of expression apart from God, by means of which we can talk about him. God can, quite literally, be described only in His own terms.'<sup>191</sup>

However, 'every created nature ascends the ladder of Being as it approaches more closely to the Word. To talk about God in his own terms is to come closer to God.'<sup>192</sup> Additionally, 'In God's mind there are many universal *verba*, spoken or thought by God Himself. But there can be only one Word of God.'<sup>193</sup> Finally, 'when God speaks, he speaks "to himself", or he may be said to "speak himself".'<sup>194</sup> The three questions that consequently arise address a confusion over the consistency of these points within the overall structure. Can we speak of/apprehend God or not? If the Word is the means of creation and God speaks Himself entirely, does God therefore

<sup>190</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.34-5

<sup>191</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.28

<sup>192</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.32

<sup>193</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.31

<sup>194</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.32

'create Himself'? Even if God does not, if God speaks Himself why can we not apprehend God?

I would be inclined to offer the following account. God expresses everything through God's Word, only some of which is creation (i.e. everything that was made was made through the Word but the Word is not restricted to everything that was made). God can only be spoken of in God's own terms, but we should affirm the distinction between talking about God and apprehending *naturalia verba* from God. As a result of limited human understanding, we cannot apprehend God's essence but since 'every created nature ascends the ladder of Being as it approaches more closely to the Word... [t]o talk about God in his own terms is to come closer to God,'<sup>195</sup> we might conclude that we can apprehend some things about God (e.g. relations between God and creation). However, this does not mean that we are able to reach God, and neither does it mean that a spoken/written human language is able to fulfil the same function as *naturalia verba*. This maintains the consistency of Anselm's statement that God is ultimately ineffable. This account would appear to make the position coherent, although, strangely, Evans does not seem to offer anything in the way of a similar attempt to resolve these tensions.

#### Anselm: Language and the *Proslogion*

This overall account of Anselm's philosophy of language, with its theological points of note, allows a keener analysis of certain elements of the *Proslogion*. Preliminarily, it provides some explanation for Anselm's concept in the *Proslogion* of 'apprehending the thing itself'. It also explains the universality which Anselm sees in the argument, since on his model he can be assured that everyone who grasps 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought' will grasp the *same* concept-entity.

The main *Proslogion* argument can be seen in the following structure: (i) Anselm sets up in tertiary language 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought'; i.e. by speaking the words. (ii) He transfers this through secondary structure ('in the mind') to primary language; thinking the concept of the thing itself, or grasping what that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is instead of only understanding the word syntax. Thus the thing itself - i.e. the concept rather than the meaning of the words - is 'in the mind'. (iii) Anselm argues that this *naturalia verba* must correspond to an actually extant thing, and then (iv) argues that this thing cannot be thought not to

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<sup>195</sup> Evans, *Anselm and Talking About God*, p.32

exist. Finally, (v) he argues that God is that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought. Vitaly, we can see from this why Anselm must go further and later state that the argument demands that God be greater than can be conceived; if God is definitionally that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought and we can grasp the *naturalia verba* of this, then we have understood God's essence. Thus, that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought must, first, be considered as a relational concept (not God's essence but God in relation to human thought), and, secondly, be able to derive God's ineffability as a result (hence that which is greater than can be thought).

It is important to note that the primary reason for the identification of God with that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is that if it were not the case then the creature could 'think something above the Creator, which is absurd.' We can now see that, whereas for the modern reader this may carry the limited weight of a distinction between creature and Creator, perhaps in terms of contingent creation versus necessary Creator, for Anselm it is a far stronger statement of his theology and philosophy of language. For him, it is absurd because all of our concepts come from God. If that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought were a human-originated concept, that this was *not* God would be absurd to the point of impossibility; the only alternative is that that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought originates with God, but refers not to God but to some other entity. By definition (at least in Anselm's historical context) there is nothing ontologically prior to the Creator but the Creator Himself, and since Anselm's theology quite reasonably precludes a Creator that creates something greater than Himself (such an entity would be contingent, for example, whereas God would be necessary), God must therefore be that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought.

A key part of the *Proslogion* is Anselm's claim that he has reached 'the light in which God dwells' but has been unable to penetrate it: 'Therefore, Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are also something greater than can be thought.... Truly, Lord, this is the inaccessible light in which You dwell.'<sup>196</sup> Here once again we can see Anselm laying out in the *Proslogion* format some of the points we have seen in his linguistic philosophy and theology; ideas of God's ultimate ineffability and our inability to use our language to describe Him.

Indeed, the conclusion to the *Proslogion* is quite surprising. Having discerned God's inaccessible dwelling place and that He is greater than can be thought, Anselm braces himself for another attempt at apprehending some form of concept of God: 'In You I move and in You I have my being and I cannot come near to You. You are

<sup>196</sup> *Proslogion* XV-XVI in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, p.137

within me and around me and I do not have any experience of You.’<sup>197</sup>; ‘Let my soul gather its strength again and with all its understanding strive once more towards You, Lord. What are You, Lord, what are You; what shall my heart understand You to be?’<sup>198</sup>. Anselm then moves on from the attributes that he has already demonstrated using that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, first arguing for God’s eternity and then using this to reinforce his model of God’s existence in the Augustinian *vere esse* mould. He then makes a switch, during XXII, to the affirmation that God is ‘the one and supreme good’. The final part of *Proslogion* uses this as its basis; a new argument is signified at the beginning of XXIV ‘Now, my soul, rouse and lift up your whole understanding and think as much as you can on what kind and how great this good is.’<sup>199</sup> He continues ‘For if particular goods are enjoyable, consider carefully how enjoyable is that good which contains the joyfulness of all goods; not [a joy] such as we have experienced in created things, but as different from this as the Creator differs from the creature.’<sup>200</sup> Anselm makes further analogies to illustrate this difference, in each case moving from a human experience to a ‘projected value’ of the goodness of God in that respect. He enumerates the goods and joys that will be available when we reach God in Heaven, concluding with

Indeed, to the degree that each one loves some other, so he will rejoice in the good of that other; therefore, just as each one in that perfect happiness will love God incomparably more than himself and all others with him, so he will rejoice immeasurably more over the happiness of God than over his own happiness and that of all the others with him. But if they love God with their whole heart, their whole mind, their whole soul, while yet their whole mind, their whole heart, their whole soul, is not equal to the grandeur of this love, they will assuredly so rejoice with their whole heart, their whole mind, their whole soul, that their whole heart, their whole mind, their whole soul will not be equal to the fullness of their joy.<sup>201</sup>

Thus Anselm is able to conclude that he has ‘discovered a joy that is complete and more than complete.’ Thus he prays ‘that I may know You and love You, so that I may rejoice in You. And if I cannot do so fully in this life may I progress gradually until it comes to fullness. Let the knowledge of You ... [and] Your love grow in me here and [in heaven] be made complete, so that my joy may be great in hope, and there be complete in reality.’<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> *Proslogion* XVI, in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm’s Proslogion*, p.137

<sup>198</sup> *Proslogion* XVIII in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm’s Proslogion*, p.139-141

<sup>199</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm’s Proslogion*, p.147

<sup>200</sup> *Proslogion* XXV in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm’s Proslogion*, p.147

<sup>201</sup> *Proslogion* XXV in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm’s Proslogion*, p.151

<sup>202</sup> *Proslogion* XXVI in Charlesworth, *St. Anselm’s Proslogion*, p.153

We can see Anselm's 'formula' in the *Proslogion* to be based upon the limit of thought. Evans argues that Anselm's formula is the ' $a+x$ '-ness of God in each respect, but I would argue that this only partially grasps Anselm's intentions; in fact, this should be applied to human experience, such that where  $a$  is maximal human experience or conception, God is always just beyond it by a value  $x$ . That-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought is useful as a tool to accomplish most of what Anselm wants, and as an illustration of method. The true innovation begins, however, when he applies the method to that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought itself, giving 'God is greater than can be thought'. Having made this iteration, he reaches a conclusion commensurable with his philosophy of language (i.e. that God in His essence is ineffable in that we cannot devise a language to describe Him; He is at the boundary of our thought and understanding), and proceeds in a different line. Having related human experience to different goods, and established that God is the supreme good, he uses his formula to illustrate how we can use our experiences to understand how God might be experienced. Since his philosophy of language portrays each human concept as in a sense an 'echo' of the pure concept in God's mind, he is able finally to work the formula backwards, arguing that we can experience a lesser form of the joys of God's goodness now in a creaturely way through our experiences, since these are a lesser form of what we may experience in the presence of God.

Stolz does not quite perceive what is happening in the *Proslogion*, therefore. He says that Anselm is after an experience of God. This is true, although we should note that this has a wider import given Anselm's philosophy of language; such an experience is one step away from a concept of God's essence (which cannot of course be apprehended itself). Stolz also says that at the end of the *Proslogion* Anselm expresses joy at having had an experience of God, resulting from his meditation. However, it is actually the case that Anselm's joy is itself the experience of God for which he is searching; his other option (experiencing God through apprehending God's essence) having been removed by his discovery of God's ineffability. This also makes the *Proslogion* a great deal more than an example of meditation and prayer that *might* give one an experience of God. It is actually a direct teaching and demonstration on what experience is available to us and why it is available to us, together with a justification of why other methods will not work.

Despite all of this, it is possible to argue that, given Anselm's linguistic philosophy, we can by-pass the *Proslogion* and argue directly for that which Anselm wants. Interestingly, this comes out looking more like a cosmological argument than an

ontological one. It runs as follows: (i) where does human language come from? (ii) We seem to have a set of concepts, most of which are common to several constructed languages. (iii) Therefore, the most reasonable question seems to be of where our concepts originate. (iv) We could say that they originate through experience of the natural world, or we could support a form of innatism and say that they were introduced into the human mind (either directly or through a biological explanation) by some other agent. In the latter case, one ends up with a God/Creator, since one requires an originator of concepts that is not itself given those concepts, in order to halt the regress. In the former case, one ends up with a God/Creator as a First Cause of the natural world. (v) If we attribute agency to this first cause, it seems reasonable to assert that intention is involved, and thus one might reasonably argue that planning is required. (vi) If the concepts planned are expressed in the objects created, then one might argue that sentient beings that only had their experience to work from would only apprehend concepts resulting from that creation. (vii) since the first cause would not itself be a part of that set of concepts (being uncreated), it would be correspondingly difficult to apprehend the first cause. This results in an ineffable Creator, and we have already seen that Anselm certainly ends up with this in the *Proslogion*, regardless of whether we opt in to the account of the subsequent 'experience of God' considered above.

This argument has remarkable similarities to one put forward by John Haldane<sup>203</sup>, which he calls the 'First Thinker' argument, and in expressing what can be extracted from Anselm I have made use of Haldane's terminology and structure (especially in the earlier points) to emphasise the connection between contemporary thought and terms, and the thought of Anselm.

The key concept arising from the discussion, which I would like to argue is very clearly presented in Anselm, is that the more accessible concepts of God as Creator, and God as source of thought, are inextricably linked with the idea of thinking of God in terms of a boundary, or 'limit of thought'. Although it is not immediately obvious that this is the sort of thing Anselm is aiming for, particularly when he uses 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought', previous points made concerning his philosophy of language can be called upon as evidence. First, we have seen that Anselm has a Neoplatonic tendency to his thought, and is inclined therefore to present things in terms of a hierarchy. In the *Monologion*, he asks his readers to think of God as the highest good – the *summum bonum* – in other words, the limit in the sense of apex.

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<sup>203</sup> John Haldane, 'The Source and Destination of Thought', in *Referring to God*, Paul Helm (ed.), (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), p.15-33

Secondly, if we see *Monologion* and *Proslogion* as companion works, or even if the latter is seen merely as resulting from a search for a single *argumentum* with which to do the work of the former<sup>204</sup>, it thereby inclines us to the view that that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought – or even better ‘that-which-is-greater-than-can-be-conceived’ – is expressing the same sort of ‘limit’ from a different viewpoint. Evans sees the *Monologion* as a ‘bottom up’ argument, establishing a hierarchy of goods based in experience and then asking readers to imagine the ‘highest’ of these, and then demonstrating certain theological points about it. The *Proslogion*, on the other hand, is a ‘top down’ approach, beginning with an abstract idea of that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought, and subsequently that-which-is-greater-than-can-be-thought, and basing the arguments on that.

Thirdly, as Evans points out, Anselm’s philosophy of language says that humans can apprehend the created hierarchy of goods, but cannot apprehend God (as we have seen, this has to do with the nature and origins of language, and of creation). Evans argues, following Anselm, that there cannot be anything in between the created hierarchy - which we can apprehend - and God, since this would demand either something not created by God, or something which was part of creation but not (at least abstractly, as a part of the hierarchy) graspable by humans. Likewise, if we could grasp the nature of God, it would violate the distinction between Creator and creature. This again implies that God is found at the limit of human understanding.

Campbell directly addresses his own version of McGinn’s contention that the combination of terms ‘that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’ is not meaningful. Campbell says ‘The fact that all the words which comprise a complex expression each have a use in public language, it may be pointed out with justice, is not enough to guarantee that the expression as a whole is intelligible.’<sup>205</sup> Campbell argues that Anselm’s formula *is* intelligible, because it is ‘derived by nominalisation of a structure of the form “something x (not (it can be thought (something y (y is greater than x))))”’, where the brackets mark scope; no-one who knew how to use these words could reasonably deny that they are here put together acceptably.’<sup>206</sup> Indeed, this may be placed within McGinn’s formal logic structure, whence  $(Ix)\neg(Iy)(y>x)$  provides something like the required form. Of this two things may be noted. First of all, the formulation is not quite the same, since Campbell’s is not ‘something x we talk/think

<sup>204</sup> Incidentally, this supports the importance of the movement to the highest good in the last section of the *Proslogion*.

<sup>205</sup> Campbell, *From Belief to Understanding*, p.40

<sup>206</sup> Campbell, *From Belief to Understanding*, p.41



about'. However, this could be the place for McGinn's 'disjunctive addition', which has been suggested by McGinn and which I took (in Chapter I) to be 'for some  $x$  that we talk/think about or that we do not' thereby covering things which exist but which have not been referred to. If so, we obtain something very similar to Campbell's formulation.

The second point of note is that the McGinnian formulation employs ' $\neg(Iy)$ ', which is an unresolved issue not considered by McGinn. In this instance, problems, which might arise from talking about a set of properties that we specify as not spoken/thought of, do not appear to arise because that which is stated is a relation, not a property *per se*. Likewise, possible problems with the disjunctive addition are weakened because a relation is used rather than a property. Taking into account the disjunctive addition, this gives us 'for some  $x$  that we talk/think about or that we do not talk/think about, it is not the case that for some  $y$  that we talk/think about  $y$  is greater than  $x$ '.

Interestingly, this leaves open the possibility that there is something that we do not talk/think about that exists and than which  $x$  is not greater. Even if we choose to remove this by making the  $y$ -quantifier disjunctive, this does not capture the sense in Anselm of what it is *possible* to think. Now, it is not within the scope of a project such as this to speculate over the application of modal logic to McGinn's quantifiers, but intuitively what seems to be required is something like 'for some  $x$  that we talk/think about or that we do not talk/think about, it is not the case that it is possible that for some  $y$  that we talk/think about,  $y$  is greater than  $x$ .' Note that I have not used the disjunct for the  $y$ -quantifier. This is for two reasons; first, that this would make the formulation equivalent to 'greater than all', which Anselm berates Gaunilo for using because it weakens his argument<sup>207</sup>. Secondly, it consequently makes clearer the connection to the concept of the 'limit of thought'. Analysis of whether this formulation would be acceptable to McGinn would rest upon the proper development of his thought for modal logic and for his suggested disjunct. Nevertheless, what I have argued above goes some way to showing how Anselm's concept could be considered 'well-defined'.

However well this analysis addresses the challenge of needing a well-defined concept for God, it does not engage with the thrust of McGinn wider challenge that we do not know what it would be for such an entity to exist. Indeed, in this respect

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<sup>207</sup> Anselm argues that this is because 'greater than all' does not fulfil the same function; first, 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought' will be 'greater than all', but it is not necessarily the case that 'greater than all' will be 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought'. Secondly, 'greater than all' does not have the advantage of 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought' in that it exists contingently and attributes such as being without beginning or end follow from it less directly than from 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought'.

McGinn and Anselm seem to be considering the same problem from very different angles. Anselm is concerned about God's ineffability: we cannot conceptualise God's essence, only God in relation to the created universe and human thought. For McGinn, if we cannot know what it is for something to exist we have difficulty in predicating existence of it. However, for McGinn this goes deeper. The implicit challenge in his phrasing is, I think, a challenge over *reference*, not just over meaning (well-definedness, or conceptualisation of an entity). The argument could be seen as 'if we do not know what exactly we are *getting at* when we use the term 'God', how can we use it – especially to predicate existence of it?'

This issue is directly confronted by the second option that I canvassed briefly at the end of Chapter I, because the use of the word 'God' in McGinn's structure is shaped by the view of language underpinning that structure. I suggested that we might in some way attempt to reject McGinn's challenge on the basis of the view of language that underlies it; that 'God exists' is meaningful because it predicates a *property* of a *referent*. Now we are in a position to see more clearly what form an argument against McGinn should take, and why our consideration of Anselm does not accomplish all that is required: Anselm seems in part to be trying to make available a way of referring to God, even though God is ineffable. In the next chapter, we shall see that his arguments can form a vital element in such an enterprise, but that in order to overcome McGinn's position, a more precise consideration of language will be necessary.

In Chapter III, therefore, I shall consider the treatment of 'God' as a name, examining the key positions, concerning names, available in the philosophy of language. Examining in particular a paper by Jerome Gellman<sup>208</sup>, who rejects McGinn's view of reference, I shall argue that a fusion of his position (slightly modified) with McGinn's metaphysics (slightly modified) results in a coherent approach to the meaning and reference of proper names, and the concept of existence, which overcomes the problems faced thus far and secures meaningfulness for 'God exists' whether or not God in fact exists. The role of theology in this process will become readily apparent through the example of Anselm's thought and work.

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<sup>208</sup> Gellman, Jerome, 'Naming and Naming God', *Religious Studies* 29 (1993), p.193-216 (Hereafter *NNG*)

### Chapter III: Referring to God

In previous chapters, we have engaged with the problems inherent in the concept of existence, and those arising from predicating existence of God. Although a resolution of the former through McGinn's model of existence was posited, the latter remained intractable due to recurring challenges to our ability to speak of God at all – challenges which pushed us deeper into the philosophy and theology of language.

In this chapter, I shall consider the core issue that, if 'God exists' is a subject-predicate sentence, then some model of meaning and reference is required for the subject. In other words, how are we to understand 'God' in 'God exists'? This requires engagement with the debate concerning the nature of proper names in language, as well as a wider appreciation of issues of meaning and reference. However, given both the constraints of space and the need to focus the treatment of the issue at hand, I shall endeavour to provide only the necessary elements of the structure. Fortunately, Jerome Gellman's paper *Naming and Naming God* brings together several of the most pertinent points, as well as constructing an argument for the proper treatment of 'God', criticising McGinn's position, and even linking the arguments to Anselm's *Proslogion* by way of example.

Therefore, the chapter will consider the following topics. First, I shall sketch another 'Russellian orthodoxy', this time concerning a theory of reference and naming. I shall then outline the response to this by, primarily, Kripke and Donnellan, and explain the salient features of the debate between the two models. Subsequently, I shall discuss Gellman's argument – which is based upon the Kripke-Donnellan side of the debate – relating it to the context of the debate as a whole. Finally, I shall examine the consequences of Gellman's argument for the discussion at hand; first, does it succeed in securing successful reference for 'God', and secondly, does it thereby contribute to the overall aim of describing/attaining the conditions of meaningfulness for 'God exists'?

#### Another 'Russellian Orthodoxy'?

There are three elements which constitute a discussion of Russell's theory. It is important to separate his theory of definite descriptions from his application of its ideas to proper names; further, one should consider the possibility that the latter has been misrepresented, and that consequently some criticisms do not engage fully with it.

As has already been seen, Russell responded to the problem of seemingly non-referring negative existential statements (such as 'the golden mountain does not exist') by arguing that these have a logical form based upon quantification; it is not the case that there is precisely one thing which is the present King of France and is bald, for example. Existence for Russell is simply saying that a propositional function is sometimes true. However, this is part of a wider enterprise which takes definite descriptions ('the *such-and-such*') and uncovers their logical form, thereby removing 'the', and, more importantly, demonstrating that singular terms do not refer.

Take an example such as 'The Prime Minister is English'. Russell's treatment of this is to say that, instead of picking out a person (the Prime Minister) and claiming that that person has a property (English-ness), what in fact is happening is that we are saying 'At least one person is Prime Minister, and at most one person is Prime Minister, and whoever is Prime Minister is English'. I.e. we have three general statements. Formally:  $(\exists x)(Px \ \& \ ((\exists y)(Py \rightarrow y=x) \ \& \ Ex))$ .

William Lycan provides an ideal way to combine what we have previously seen of Russell's ideas with the present issue. He takes the sentence '(1) The present King of France is bald', and then proposes a set of statements:

K1 (1) is meaningful (significant, not meaningless).

K2 (1) is a subject-predicate sentence.

K3 A meaningful subject-predicate sentence is meaningful (only) in virtue of its picking out some individual thing and ascribing some property to that thing.

K4 (1)'s subject term fails to pick out or denote anything that exists.

K5 If (1) is meaningful only in virtue of picking out a thing and ascribing a property to that thing (K1, K2, K3), and if (1)'s subject term fails to pick out anything that exists (K4), then either (1) is not meaningful after all (contrary to K1) or (1) picks out a thing that does *not* exist. *But:*

K6 There is no such thing as a "non-existent thing."<sup>209</sup>

Meinong had rejected K6 directly. McGinn, as we have seen, could be considered to affirm the second part of K5 and reject K6 in a modified form 'there is no such thing as a non-existent *object*.' Frege rejected K3, arguing that subject-predicate sentences have a sense as well as a reference<sup>210</sup>.

Russell, however, could be seen as rejecting K2 on the grounds that 'The present King of France' is not a singular term, but paraphrases three general statements, as noted above. None of the three statements denote a particular individual. Lycan notes that an alternative schema is that K2 is accepted on the proviso that it is about

<sup>209</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.13-14

<sup>210</sup> See for example Gottlob Frege, 'On Sense and Reference', in A. W. Moore (ed.), *Meaning and Reference* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)

‘superficial grammatical form’<sup>211</sup> but K3 is thereby rejected ‘on the grounds that a superficially subject-predicate sentence can be meaningful without picking out any particular individual because it abbreviates a trio of purely general statements.’<sup>212</sup>

Russell explains a number of things with this view. In (1) above, ‘there is exactly one thing which is the present King of France’ is false, which makes the whole proposition false. As we have previously seen, ‘the golden mountain does not exist’ comes out as ‘it is not the case that there is exactly one thing which is golden and a mountain’ or ‘(x is a golden mountain) is false’ if one wishes to accentuate his remarks on existence over those on definite descriptions<sup>213</sup>.

As Sainsbury notes, Russell says ‘If you understand the English language, you would understand the meaning of the phrase ... if you had never heard it before, whereas you would not understand the meaning of [the name] if you had never heard it before because to know the meaning of a name is to know who it is applied to’<sup>214</sup>. Sainsbury also gives the more direct argument that ‘Since “a” is to be understood in terms of the existential quantifier, so that “I met a man” is analysed as “there is something human which I met,” “the” must be the existential quantifier with uniqueness added; which is just what Russell’s theory offers.’<sup>215</sup>

One might summarise the ground covered in Russell’s position as a demonstration that, although perhaps singular terms refer, definite descriptions, despite their appearance as singular terms (e.g. the present king of France) are not in fact singular terms. Hence they do not denote anything (i.e. pick out an individual in the world).

Given this background of definite descriptions, providing a link with what has already been said of existence on Russell’s view, I shall move on to Russell’s theory of names.

Lycan observes the important separation of what he calls Russell’s ‘Name Claim’ from the theory of definite descriptions<sup>216</sup>. However, they often seem to merge due to the similarity of technique that Russell employs to argue for them – that is, he shows how they solve logical ‘puzzles’, such as the problem of negative existentials.

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<sup>211</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.18

<sup>212</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.18

<sup>213</sup> Note that this essentially means discarding uniqueness, but shows the interconnectedness of his various arguments.

<sup>214</sup> Sainsbury, ‘Philosophical Logic’, p.78

<sup>215</sup> Sainsbury, ‘Philosophical Logic’, p.78

<sup>216</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.38

The content of Russell's 'Name Claim' is purportedly that, just as definite descriptions turned out to have a different logical grammar to their 'surface grammar', so names, which appear to act as designators of objects and therefore semantically denote 'their object' in propositions, are not in fact any such thing. Indeed, Russell argues that the only logically proper names were 'this' and 'that' - in other words, denoting terms functioning in the role of immediate ostension.<sup>217</sup>

The intuitive element of Russell's view might be illustrated by a game of charades. The player doing a mime may choose to make use of objects in the room, usually through a process of pointing at them and hoping the other players will say the right word as a result. Now, this essentially maps to a person picking an object (a statuette, say) up and saying 'This...' in the hope that someone else will say 'is white', 'is a horse', 'is winged', 'is Pegasus'. This provides a key to Russell's theory, because although 'this' functions as a proper name, 'Pegasus' functions as an abbreviation for a list of properties and/or relations. Thus, the mime may need the word 'white' or 'horse' or 'wings' for the clue – *or* the word for all of them stuck together ('Pegasus').

At this point it is important to raise the concerns voiced by Sainsbury. He argues that there are two versions of Russell's theory for proper names: one a 'myth', the other the 'real' theory<sup>218</sup>. The 'myth' is that Russell means to equate each name with a corresponding definite description. Sainsbury sources this from Russell's comment 'Common words, even proper names, are usually really descriptions.'<sup>219</sup> Thus, the relation between 'Pegasus' and 'winged horse', say, is one of synonymity. It is as if we had a thesaurus of proper names combined with a dictionary of ordinary names: we could look up 'Pegasus' and find the synonym 'winged horse', and then look up 'wing' and 'horse', if we did not know what *they* meant, to find their descriptions.

Sainsbury emphasises, however, that if one reads on from the above comment, one will find 'That is to say, the thought in the mind of a person using a proper name correctly can generally only be expressed explicitly if we replace the proper name by a description.'<sup>220</sup> Sainsbury asks whether this implies that the 'thought in the mind' will be a common, public one – which one might expect for a 'meaningful' proper name – or whether something else is being argued entirely. He goes on to quote 'Moreover, the description required to express the thought will vary for different people, or for the

<sup>217</sup> *CPBR* p.201, cited by Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.70

<sup>218</sup> Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.70-72

<sup>219</sup> Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), p.29 cited by Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.70

<sup>220</sup> Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p.29 cited by Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.70

same person at different times. The only thing constant (so long as the name is rightly used) is the object to which the name applies.<sup>221</sup>

Sainsbury argues that 'this variability shows that the descriptions cannot, for Russell, give the public meaning of the name, for meaning should be common to the linguistic community.'<sup>222</sup> Russell's solution (or, more uncharitably, the solution which may be extracted from Russell) according to Sainsbury is that a name has a public reference in a community if an object 'satisfies all (or most) of the descriptions associated with it.'<sup>223</sup>

This gives rise to some confusion, which I shall attempt to straighten out here. The following we know can be attributed to Russell:

- (1) Proper names have 'the narrow logical sense of a word whose meaning is a particular.' 'The only words one does use as names in the logical sense are words like "this" or "that".'<sup>224</sup>
- (2) Descriptions express the thoughts in the minds of name-users, and vary with time and user.
- (3) 'The only thing constant (so long the name is rightly used) is the object to which the name applies.'<sup>225</sup>

There is an apparent conflict between (1) and (3), which can be resolved through specifying that a name does not *mean* a particular (i.e. denote an object), but that if the name is used correctly, the object is the only thing constant about the mechanism of name-use. The conjunction of this with (2) gives the impression that a name *means* a description (or a cluster of them), although since descriptions change the object named is the only constant. This leads to the 'mythical' Russell, or a similar theory to it.

Sainsbury wants to work this into a 'real Russell' theory by adding the following.

- (4) 'Public reference...has the stability and constancy to be the meaning of a proper name.'<sup>226</sup>

<sup>221</sup> Russell *The Problems of Philosophy*, p.29-30, cited by Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.71

<sup>222</sup> Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.71

<sup>223</sup> Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.71

<sup>224</sup> *CPBR*, p.178-179

<sup>225</sup> Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p.29-30

<sup>226</sup> Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.72

- (5) 'A name can be said to have public reference...provided that something satisfies all (or most) of the descriptions the users of the name associate with it.'<sup>227</sup>
- (6) '[Descriptions] are not required to have any semantic role of their own.'<sup>228</sup>

This requires very fine distinctions. (4) and (5) seem to give us the statement that a name can be said to have meaning if an object satisfies all/most descriptions associated with the name, yet adding (6) gives the proviso that these descriptions have no semantic role. So, either we are no closer to finding out what the meaning of a proper name is, because we only have the conditions for public reference and not what public reference actually *is*, or we are less picky and allow that public reference is its conditions, which gives 'the meaning of a name is the object satisfying all/most descriptions associated with the name.'<sup>229</sup> Yet, if the meaning is the satisfying-object we are thrown against the wall of Russell's statement (1): the meaning cannot be the object, rather the object is the only constant in correct use of a name. There is only one other option: the meaning of a name is *that* an object satisfies all/most descriptions associated with the name. To give an example, 'Pegasus flew to Athens' can be considered in the following ways<sup>230</sup>.

- (i) 'Pegasus' stands directly for a unique object, and the object flew to Athens.
- (ii) It means 'The winged horse flew to Athens.'
- (iii) 'Pegasus' means the unique object satisfying several descriptions associated with 'Pegasus', and says that it flew to Athens.
- (iv) It means that an object satisfies all/most descriptions associated with 'Pegasus', and it flew to Athens.

(i) is the simple view Russell wants to throw out, (ii) is the 'mythical' theory, according to Sainsbury. (iii) is what Sainsbury seems to want to replace the 'myth' with. (iv) is what can be charitably extracted from Sainsbury, and neither picks out an object directly, nor says that a name means one or more descriptions. The only thing constant in the use of the name is the object (Pegasus) but the name does not mean the object; the object can be referred to on the basis of it satisfying descriptions, but the name does not

<sup>227</sup> Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.71

<sup>228</sup> Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.72

<sup>229</sup> Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.71

<sup>230</sup> We assume that it is a true statement for simplicity.



mean the descriptions. Unfortunately, this becomes unworkable, not least because it seems to include information about existence, and we should be concerned if a name *means* that something exists. Even if we take McGinn's 'objects of language' view (i.e. the satisfying object does not have to be an existing object; it can be an object of language, or mental object), there are further problems: how can we understand a name meaning *that* an object satisfies descriptions? We can understand '*that* a name is used means *that* an object satisfies associated descriptions' because this is seen in terms of conditions for correct name use, but, as in the example above, there is a need to 'smuggle in' a reference to the object beyond the meaning as given ('an object... *it* flew to Athens') in order to make sense of the whole proposition. This places us back in Sainsbury's original position.

All that we have left, therefore, is to attempt a defence of Sainsbury's position that removes it from its contravention of Russell's main statement that a name does not mean a particular. Take the example that Sainsbury himself gives: Russell's example of 'Bismarck was an astute diplomat.'<sup>231</sup> Sainsbury asks us to imagine a situation where person *A* says to person *B* 'Bismarck was an astute diplomat,' and *A* and *B* have different descriptions - *x* and *y*, say - for Bismarck. Then *A* is not attempting to 'imprint' his whole thought - *x* was an astute diplomat - on to *B*; only that, of *B*'s thought *y*, the individual it describes was an astute diplomat. The contention would be that the only way that this could work is if there is an object that satisfies *x* and *y*. 'Bismarck' does not *mean* *x*, or *y*. It refers to the object satisfying *x* and *y*. One is tempted to say that a name means a description to an individual, but that it means a particular in public. Yet the particular is determined by the descriptions; perhaps the best we can do, therefore, is to say that a name means a 'satisfier'; after all, whilst an object which satisfies a set of descriptions is a particular, it is possible to use 'the object satisfying *x* and *y*' without knowing the object beforehand: thus a name does not directly *mean* (stand for) a particular object<sup>232</sup>.

Thus, subjective descriptions do not have a direct semantic function, but they could be said to provide the boundaries for the reference: the attribution of a property to a name is meaningful if the object publicly referred to by the name has the property cited. An object is publicly referred to if it satisfies most of the descriptions the public associate with the name. This is again supported by the quotation above: 'to know the

<sup>231</sup> Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p.31, cited by Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.71

<sup>232</sup> Although, as we shall see, this gives rise to serious objections to the position. If Sainsbury does not support it, however, it appears that he faces greater problems of compatibility with quotations from Russell which he himself uses.

meaning of a name is to know who it is applied to.<sup>233</sup> So, the 'myth' is that a name means a description; each name abbreviates a description, or, as Lycan puts it, 'the weaker contention that names are somehow equivalent in meaning to descriptions.'<sup>234</sup> Sainsbury's 'reality' is that each name may loosely 'mean' (be associated with) a description for each individual who uses it, but meaning 'should be common through the linguistic community,'<sup>235</sup> so that the name means the satisfier of all/most descriptions associated with the name. There are several examples which may be used to illustrate this. Let us take each of Russell's puzzles and show how the 'myth' and 'reality' each treat them.

- (1) 'Pegasus is a roan stallion.' (Reference to non-existents.)
- (2) 'Pegasus does not exist.' (Assertions of non-existence.)

On the 'myth' version, (1) becomes 'There is exactly one thing which is winged, and a horse, and that thing is a roan stallion,' which comes out false by virtue of the first clause being false. Likewise, (2)  $\neg(\exists x)(Px)$  is true, where P abbreviates  $(Wx \ \& \ Hx)$ .

What becomes of them in the 'real' version? Presumably, people can have different descriptions of Pegasus (for instance, 'winged horse', 'mythical beast from Greek literature', 'creature ridden by Bellerophon'). However, it is not guaranteed that there will be a description in common, or that any description will pick out an object in the world (if we lay aside fictional discourse for the time being). In other words, if we cannot guarantee a bearer for a name, we cannot guarantee a public reference, and if we cannot guarantee a public reference, then we cannot guarantee meaning. We might want to say that the name is subjectively 'meaningful' inasmuch as individuals associate descriptions with the name. So (2) relies upon  $\neg(x \text{ is a Pegasus})$ <sup>236</sup> being true for all x, whereas (1) would be false because there is nothing (description, existent) to anchor the name to the world, and because  $(x \text{ is a Pegasus})$  is false for all x, which makes the whole proposition come out false. Possible room for manoeuvre is introduced through the idea of including fiction as a possible domain, although this has its own problems.

- (3) Frege's puzzle: 'Hesperus = Phosphorous'

<sup>233</sup> Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p.29-30

<sup>234</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.40

<sup>235</sup> Sainsbury, 'Philosophical Logic', p.71

<sup>236</sup> Or, more correctly,  $\neg(x \text{ is an object which satisfies all/most descriptions associated with 'Pegasus'})$ .

The problem is that this seems to be both informative and contingent; so one or more of the terms must be meaningful beyond simply picking out an object in the world (since they both pick out the same object, and yet are not trivial in the way that Venus = Venus is). The 'mythical' Russell would have each of them as equivalent to a definite description ('The evening star' and 'the morning star' respectively); we can then see that the statement is saying that the two descriptions are of the same object. The 'real' Russell can say that the 'satisfier' is the same object for both, but that there are different descriptions associated with each name (giving cognitive values, but not semantic or referential values); this accounts for how the names can be placed in an identity statement *and* for how that statement can be informative.

Note that the semantic account of a name as 'that an object exists which satisfies associated descriptions' again creates problems here, in that again it is difficult to understand the identity statement without importing several extra terms which do not seem to be present.<sup>237</sup>

(4) Substitutivity: 'Alf believes that Hesperus is best seen on a clear evening.'

If we use 'Hesperus = Phosphorous' to remind ourselves that they are the same entity, then we can say of (4) on a purely denotative model that Alf believes Phosphorous - by substitution - to be best seen on a clear evening, which is false (he believes Phosphorous is best seen on a clear morning). The mythical Russell explains this by demonstrating that two different beliefs are attributed to Alf through the substitution and that this is why the truth value of the sentence changes. I.e. 'Alf believes that there is exactly one thing which is a star appearing in the evening, and which can best be seen on a clear evening' and 'Alf believes that there is exactly one thing which is a star appearing in the morning and which can best be seen on a clear evening.'

The 'real' Russell will have to use a similar explanation as for the identity example: because the two terms Hesperus and Phosphorous differ in cognitive value (i.e. the descriptions associated with the names), beliefs involving the names will differ from one another - even though there is only one 'satisfier'.

Where does this put us in respect of referring to God? Well clearly, on the 'mythical' Russell's theory, 'God' equates to a definite description. This provides a point of comparison with his comments on existence; however, the 'real' Russell

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<sup>237</sup> 'The fact that there is an object which satisfies "planet seen in the evening" is equivalent to the fact that there is an object which satisfies "planet seen in the morning" in virtue of the satisfying object being the same in each case.'

removes the option of simply checking a description of God for logical consistency, because the referential demands of the position are far more empirical in flavour. Before, remembering that existence was not a property, we could find a logically consistent description and did not require a demonstration that it was instantiated. Now, it seems that we cannot guarantee a public semantics for 'God' unless we can be sure that there *is* an entity satisfying the description. The situation becomes even more difficult, since the public meaning – the public reference – is the satisfier of all/most descriptions associated with the name. Given the number of descriptions (many of them incompatible, at least on the face of it) associated with 'God', one would be inclined to conclude that 'God' is the name *most* likely to be devoid of any public semantics, and must be beyond reference. Yet people spend a lot of time talking about what 'God' is like, and whether or not 'God' exists.

I shall go on now to discuss the objections to Russell (myth and reality), and to examine the main alternative available, keeping in mind the problem above in the hope of providing a model which explains its occurrence.

### Objections

Searle<sup>238</sup> proposed changes to Russell's theory on the basis that often there is no single definite description that a person has in mind when they form a proposition about someone. Lycan uses the example of the proposition 'Wilfred Sellars is an honest man.'<sup>239</sup> He observes that the objection picks out a curious feature; given that the proposition abbreviates 'There is exactly one x such that x is...[a list of predicates forming the complete description of Sellars]', 'Wilfred Sellars is an honest man' entails 'There is at least one philosopher with whom I had a fairly violent argument in George Pappas' living room in 1979.'<sup>240</sup>

Searle's solution was to adapt the theory such that a cluster of descriptions pertain to each name; the name refers to the thing instantiating most of these descriptions and communication is achieved when a sufficient number of the descriptions are shared. Note that this has both striking similarities and marked differences from Sainsbury's version of Russell's theory. In the latter, each person has a description in mind, and reference and meaning are secured if there is an object satisfying most of the descriptions the public use. In the former, each individual has a

<sup>238</sup> John Searle, 'Proper Names', *Mind* 67 (1958), p.166-73

<sup>239</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.40

<sup>240</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.40

cluster of descriptions in mind, and correct naming of an object is achieved when a sufficient number of the descriptions are satisfied by the object. What Sainsbury calls public meaning/reference only arises when a sufficient number of the descriptions are shared by users of the name (i.e. when clusters overlap by a minimum number of descriptions).

Lycan canvasses an objection to Sainsbury's 'myth' theory, which also lends credence to Sainsbury's claim for the 'real' theory. Lycan shows<sup>241</sup> that if two people had different descriptions for a name, given that each will be a generalisation according to the theory of definite descriptions, it would be possible for them to contradict one another and yet not logically contradict one another. For instance, take the Bismarck example. If *A*'s description of Bismarck is 'First Chancellor of Germany' and *B*'s description is 'The best diplomat of the 19<sup>th</sup> century', and they have a disagreement over whether Bismarck was fond of yodelling in the bath, this comes out as

- (i) There was exactly one *x* such that *x* was first chancellor of Germany, and *x* enjoyed yodelling in the bath.
- (ii) There was exactly one *x* such that *x* was the best diplomat of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and *x* did not enjoy yodelling in the bath.

These are quite compatible logically, and yet *A* and *B* certainly disagree, and there is a fair chance that they are both thinking of Bismarck. Given Russell's enthusiasm for building his theories on the logical form of language, it seems unlikely that he would have missed something this glaring, and the inclination is consequently towards Sainsbury's view, which provides the necessary mechanism for public meaning.

Donnellan gives two criticisms based on definite descriptions and reference<sup>242</sup>. The first is essentially that we can succeed in referring even if all the descriptions we use are wrong. He gives the example of someone at a party talking to a friend about 'the man drinking the martini'. In fact, no-one in the room is drinking a martini, and the individual in question is drinking water out of a martini glass. Reference is successful, however. In the instance of names, Donnellan uses the example of a child who is woken up at night and introduced to a person they have never met ('Tom'). In the morning, the child only remembers the name and that 'Tom was a nice man.' Even if the latter is completely false, and the child has no other descriptions associated with the individual, the child still succeeds in referring to the person they met, argues Donnellan.

<sup>241</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.41-42

<sup>242</sup> Keith Donnellan, 'Reference and Definite Descriptions', *Philosophical Review* LXXV (1966), p.281-394 & Keith Donnellan, 'Speaking of Nothing', *Philosophical Review* LXXXIII (1974), p.3-32

The second criticism is that we can refer to something that has descriptions associated with it even if something else happens to satisfy the descriptions. Donnellan considers the case of someone being discovered at the North Pole who matches all the descriptions associated with Santa Claus; he argues that this does not entail that this is the person we have been talking about up to the discovery, even though the descriptions have been satisfied. Rather, we have been talking about the fictional entity Santa Claus.

In both of these objections, the responses available to Russell or Sainsbury are severely limited. The first demonstrates successful reference without satisfaction of associated descriptions, the second shows how satisfaction of associated descriptions does not guarantee reference.

Kripke makes several criticisms of Russell's theory. One of his most famous concerns successful reference under false descriptive conditions<sup>243</sup>. He asks us to suppose that Godel's Incompleteness Theorem was stolen by Godel from a mathematician named Schmidt, who then died. Kripke's argument is that, when we speak of Godel and his work on the Incompleteness Theorem, we really are speaking of Godel; yet Russell's theory seems to demand that when we speak of Godel, we are actually talking about Schmidt; it is the description that is doing the work, not the name (since the name abbreviates the description). Kripke goes a step further, imagining that 'the proof simply materialised by a random scattering of atoms on a piece of paper.'<sup>244</sup> Russell's theory, he argues, demands that if the definite description 'there was exactly one  $x$  such that  $x$  proved the incompleteness of arithmetic, and  $x$  is ...F' is the logical form of 'Godel is ...F', then any statement of this form comes out false, because no-one proved the incompleteness of arithmetic. Surely, however, we want to say that we are talking about Godel and that the proposition will be true or false depending on whether or not '...F' applies to him?

Once again, we must ask what effect this has on the 'real' Russell. In this case, it can be considered fairly forceful. He would want to say that public reference is achieved when an object satisfies most associated descriptions. Kripke's objection is constructed from our intuition that if we only have one description corresponding to an entity and that description is false, then we can still refer successfully to the entity.<sup>245</sup>

There are three further objections. First, Kripke takes the proposition 'some people are unaware that Cicero is Tully' and argues that Russell cannot properly

<sup>243</sup> Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p.83-4

<sup>244</sup> Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p.86

<sup>245</sup> This will be taken up again later, since Sainsbury attempts a defence of Russell's position using an idea that will arise more directly in considering Gellman's paper.

interpret it<sup>246</sup>. Primarily, Cicero and Tully could have different descriptions associated with them, so no single fact is forthcoming of which people may be unaware. Further, if as Lycan points out, ‘I know that Cicero is Tully, [then] I associate the same set of descriptions (whatever they may be) with both names.’ One ends up with ‘Some people are not aware that one and only one person was a famous Roman orator ... [etc.] and one and only one person was a famous Roman orator ... [etc.] and whoever was a famous Roman orator ... [etc.] was a famous Roman orator ... [etc.]’<sup>247</sup> which does not communicate the meaning of the sentence.

The ‘real’ Russell could argue (as covered by the Hesperus/Phosphorous example) that the different descriptions will both be true of the same object. Thus, the fact that different descriptions are true of the same object constitutes the fact of which some people are not aware. In the second case, it seems to me that one is clear to argue that, even if the descriptions were ‘merged’, there would be an outstanding element of each which individuated them – namely, that the description for Cicero would include ‘also known as Tully’ and that of Tully would include ‘also known as Cicero’. Therefore the resultant would be ‘some people are not aware that one and only one person was a famous Roman orator known as both Cicero and Tully,’ which seems quite reasonable.

The second objection is that if every name is founded on a unique description (or a description applying uniquely to the referent), then people would not be able to succeed in using names for which they had only very general descriptions. Kripke uses the example of ‘Feynman is a leading contemporary theoretical physicist’<sup>248</sup>. He argues that people still succeed in referring, even though there is more than one person satisfying the description. Does this stand up against the ‘real’ Russell model? Russell can argue that, provided the satisfier satisfies the description, it is successfully referred to publicly. However, the ability of the Russelian model to provide individuation is still questionable, because there is no structure beyond reliance on satisfaction of descriptions. Kripke’s own position seems to offer a better fit in this respect, as will be seen.

The last objection I wish to look at concerns counterfactuals. If ‘Nixon’ abbreviates ‘The winner of the 1968 US presidential election’ and we ask what might have been the case if Nixon did not win – if it was *possible* that he might not have won – we are presented with a problem: ‘Is it possible that: one and only one person won the

<sup>246</sup> Kripke, cited by Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.45-46

<sup>247</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.46

<sup>248</sup> Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p.81

1968 election and whoever won the 1968 election lost the 1968 election?’<sup>249</sup> To eliminate a Searlean response (i.e. considering the question in terms of the possibility of one description among a cluster– ‘the winner... &c.’ - being false instead of true, where the remains of the cluster provide reference) Kripke argues that Nixon might not have done any of the things normally associated with him. The final force of the argument, then, is that if a name means one or more descriptions, then counterfactual considerations cannot make sense.

There are two defences of the position. The first (attributed by Lycan to Dummett<sup>250</sup>, and presumably assuming the ‘mythical’ Russell) is that there is a scope problem to be arbitrated, and that Kripke assumes the ‘wrong’ scope. Thus, the proper alternative is ‘It is the case that exactly one person won the 1968 election and of whoever won is it possible that they could have lost?’ This makes perfect sense, and treats ‘Nixon’ as meaning ‘The winner of the 1968 election.’

The second reply, specifically from the ‘real’ Russell’s perspective, succeeds but leads on to the criticism grounding Kripke’s positive thesis. ‘The winner of the 1968 election’ will perhaps only be one description (as per the Searlean response) but, unlike the Searlean position, the name does not mean the associated descriptions. So Nixon is the satisfier of most descriptions associated with ‘Nixon’, and plugging this into Dummett’s reply above gives a correct reading for ‘the satisfier of most descriptions associated with “Nixon”.’ However, what about Kripke’s point that Nixon might not have done any of the things commonly associated with him? The scope issue defends the point, because the associated descriptions still provide the reference for the individual before the counterfactual question is put, but intuitively there is something about the area of Kripke’s criticism that has been left unexpressed and unanswered.

Kripke’s positive thesis is grounded in another specific criticism of Russell, developing out of the problems assessed above<sup>251</sup>. In a modal context, he observes, the referent of a Russellian definite description changes with variations in possible world. For example, if ‘Nixon’ is ‘the winner of the 1968 US election,’ then in some possible worlds the referent of ‘the winner of the 1968 US election’ will not be Nixon. Indeed, the fact that the last sentence was comprehensible seems to support the argument that ‘Nixon’ is not functioning in the way that Russell suggests<sup>252</sup>. To make this more applicable to the ‘real’ Russell, one might say that the satisfier of the descriptions

<sup>249</sup> Kripke; cited by Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.43

<sup>250</sup> Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.44

<sup>251</sup> Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p.41-49

<sup>252</sup> Note the resonance between this and Donellan’s Santa Claus example.



associated with 'Nixon' changes with respect to possible world, even though the name means the satisfier and not the associated descriptions.

### Kripke *contra* Russell

The main thrust of Kripke's counter-thesis is that names are 'rigid designators' in a way that descriptions are not. Rigid designators pick out the same entity across all possible worlds, and the result is that a name *means* (picks out, stands for) an entity. This is what enables us to say 'Nixon might not have won the 1968 US election,' or, even better, 'Nixon might not have been [called] "Nixon".' Likewise it enables us to consider what might have happened if Nixon had never been born and his father, say, won the 1968 election. In this instance, it would be true that 'the winner of the 1968 US election was Nixon' but false that the 'Nixon' of this proposition was Nixon – i.e. the entity that we wish to talk about in our counterfactual statements. You can imagine a conversation (say a conspiracy theory that Yeltsin had been replaced by a robot) in which someone might say 'yes, but of course at that time Yeltsin wasn't Yeltsin.' This seems to be a good example of language users making a rigid/non-rigid designator split wherein the first occurrence of the name is made non-rigid by what appears to be a denial of self-identity, thereby securing the second occurrence as the rigid designator (the first name is being used to mean 'the President', or the person *called* Yeltsin). The conversation might continue by speakers using 'Yeltsin' as the rigid designator and employing some other term (robo-Yeltsin, perhaps) to pick out the new entity, which in turn becomes a rigid designator for that entity ('what would have happened if robo-Yeltsin looked more like Bill Clinton, so they sold him to the Americans to replace Clinton?' and so on). Russell's theory simply does not allow for this sort of linguistic and conceptual work - at least, not without a good deal of extra effort and argument.

It does not appear that Sainsbury could give a reply that would vindicate Russell on this ground, because both the mythical and the real theories depend upon descriptions – in the former, they provide the semantics directly, in the latter the object of reference is the 'satisfier'. One wants to say that the descriptions that should be associated with the satisfier have changed, rather than that a different object now satisfies the associated descriptions. Particularly on a referential point (i.e. not necessarily what we mean to say, but about what we wish to say it) Kripke has made a persuasive case.

As Lycan observes, there is a semantic and a referential element to Kripke's thesis. The semantic element is straightforward: a name means its referent; names pick out entities. The mechanism of reference needs to be made clearer than it has been thus far, however. Kripke's view is often called 'causal-historical', because the mechanism is essentially one of initial baptism and referential practice. An entity is named (initial baptism) by ostension or perhaps the satisfaction of some contingent description, whereupon it becomes a rigid designator. This initiates a practice of using the name to pick out the entity, which spreads throughout the linguistic community 'from link to link as if by a chain.'<sup>253</sup> Ambiguous names are differentiated by their initial baptism (e.g. Manchester, UK compared with Manchester, USA).

Lycan canvasses several objections. The first is reference to non-existents; he suggests that the best way to deal with this is to make the naming of the fictional entity the grounding of the referential practice (as opposed to the entity itself, which does not exist – again, McGinn's model will help as explained below).

The second is attributed to Evans and claims that Kripke's view cannot account for a name changing its reference; for example 'Madagascar' once named a portion of the mainland.

The third involves initial baptism of an imposter followed by a referential practice referring to the intended recipient (Lycan uses the example of acquiring a pet wherein the wrong cat is named 'Liz' but is subsequently switched with the intended cat, who is taken home and referred to by the name 'Liz').

The final objection, also from Evans, cites the example of people making category errors about the referent of a name; 'Evans cites E.K. Chambers' *Arthur of Britain* as asserting that King Arthur had a son Anir "whom legend has perhaps confused with his burial place.'" Yet Kripke's model would entail that any use of 'Anir' is grounded in the birth of Arthur's son (or in the naming of a fictional character as such).

It occurs to me that the latter three objections could all be addressed in a way that is commensurate with how we employ language, particularly names. In the second and third objections, presumably there will be a first instance of someone calling the new entity by the relevant name (i.e. the first use of 'Madagascar' for the island and the first use of 'Liz' for the correct cat). Why should this not be considered an initial baptism? It cannot be because something else already has the name, because ambiguous names have already been accounted for and the initial baptism grounds the new

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<sup>253</sup> Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, p.91, cited in Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p.60

referential practice. Perhaps the problem springs from the idea that initial baptism is more of a 'ceremony' than it is. Put another way, what I am arguing from is the fact that 'we just name things'. Mistakes occur; the same object receives more than one name or two objects receive the same name (the bases of many theatrical farces) but problems often have to do with the properties (I deliberately avoid using 'descriptions' although the properties describe the entity) associated with an entity or a name. In the case of the 'Anir' objection, we shall see that Gellman's model of rigid designation would allow us to argue that 'Anir' is a rigid designator for both Arthur's son and his burial place, and that both will have received an initial baptism at some point; however, the initial baptism of the burial place makes that 'Anir' a failed rigid designator because the path by which it occurred will have been faulty.

How does Kripke's account treat Russell's puzzles? After all, it is not enough for one theory to criticise another with a view to replacing it if there is no account given of what the old theory was trying to explain in the first place. It seems that the strength of Kripke's thesis is the model it provides of how names act in counterfactual/modal situations, and how names individuate entities. Kripke's thesis on its own encounters major difficulties. The problem of bearerless names (reference to non-existents, statements of non-existence) is highly problematic, since if a name means and refers to its bearer, and the bearer does not exist, then the name should be meaningless (this will be dealt with below by use of McGinn, to anticipate the obvious question).

Then there are the identity puzzles: 'Hesperus = Phosphorous' and 'Alf believes Hesperus can be seen on a clear evening'. As Russell put it (in response to a theory by Mill) 'Now George IV wished to know whether Scott was the author of "Waverley"; and in fact Scott was the author of "Waverley"'. Hence we may substitute *Scott* for *the author of "Waverley"* and thereby prove that George IV wished to know whether Scott was Scott. Yet an interest in the law of identity can hardly be attributed to the first gentleman of Europe.' If two terms just pick out the same referent, then such cases are a conundrum. Kripke could appeal to the circumstances of the initial baptism, but this runs the risk of falling into a 'satisfier' model, with all the objections and counter-examples that this carries.

It appears that a major part of the problem could be resolved by allowing that there are associated descriptions (as canvassed by Sainsbury, but without any mention of satisfaction) and appending them directly to Kripke's model. There does not seem to be any immediate difficulties thrown up by this procedure, since the descriptions are cognitive, not semantic, and we are not talking about satisfaction as a way of

determining meaning or reference. After all, is it not the case that essentially what we do when we state a subject-predicate proposition is to 'try out' a description against a referent? 'Anna is blonde' tries out the description 'blonde' against the referent of 'Anna'; but if the proposition is true, we do not take 'blonde' as part of the meaning of 'Anna', neither do we assume that 'Anna' *is* (i.e. definitionally) the satisfier of 'is blonde' (she might frequently dye her hair). This would resolve the identity puzzles in a similar way to that which Sainsbury suggests for the 'real' Russell (i.e. the informative content of 'Hesperus = Phosphorous' is explained by the fact of realisation that two separate sets of associated properties actually apply to the same object) but without the problems of 'satisfiers'.

For cases involving non-existents (i.e. reference to non-existents and statements of non-existence) Kripke's theory works particularly well with McGinn's.<sup>254</sup> For example, 'Pegasus is a roan stallion' can be treated as denoting the object of thought 'Pegasus'. The truth conditions for the proposition will depend upon the mental acts of name-users (i.e. associated descriptions composed by name-users), because there is no actual entity to act as truth-maker. In the case of Pegasus, there is also a body of written work representing the mental acts of the initial baptiser of Pegasus and this could be seen as a precedent of set truth-conditions for certain propositions about Pegasus. It does *not* mean that 'Pegasus' *means* any or all of the descriptions in that work. Thus, we have employed McGinn's thesis of representation-dependence, Kripke's model of meaning/reference and Sainsbury's concept of associated descriptions with solely cognitive value, to resolve the issue. Likewise, 'Pegasus does not exist' takes an object of thought – *denotes* an object of thought – and says that it is *only* intentional.

This structure of meaning and reference hints that there may be a way of looking at the subject 'God' in the subject-predicate sentence 'God exists' which removes the problems encountered through the Russellian models. However, there are plenty of unresolved issues to be addressed. After all, one cannot simply conclude that a name stands for an entity and refers to it rigidly and that therefore 'God' refers to God and 'God exists' correctly supplies the fact of His existence - this is just the sort of move that has been pinned onto ontological arguments, to the detriment of most of the works (friendly and hostile) involved. Can we, then, obtain reference without affixing to it an empirical content? After all, McGinn has argued that we use existence to separate

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<sup>254</sup> I believe that this is due to parallel inherent tensions between the areas of 'existence' and 'meaning/reference'. The tension in the latter is between pure denotation, and the need to explain our experience of name-use. The tension in the former is between pure correlation of object to existent, and the need to explain our experience of fictional discourse.

actual objects from fictional objects, and fictional objects have names. The first step is provided by Jerome Gellman.

### Gellman and Naming God

Gellman's paper is split into several sections. In the first, he examines what he calls 'the descriptive theory of names' and the objections available from rigid designator theory. He divides the descriptive theory into a theory about the meaning of names, and the reference of names. The former he expresses as

For every name N, there is a definite description 'the F' such that:

- (1) 'N is G' *means* 'the F is G' and
- (2) N in 'N is G' refers, if at all, to the object, if any, satisfying 'the F'.<sup>255</sup>

The latter he expresses as

For every N, there is a definite description 'the F' such that

- (1) N in 'N is G' refers, if at all, to the object, if any, satisfying 'the F'.
- (2) N does not *mean* 'the F'.<sup>256</sup>

Gellman characterises these as follows: the first model introduces N into language as any other term is introduced, and subsequent users learn to employ it with its given meaning. The second model uses a ceremony-like 'initial baptism' to fix N's use as being to refer to whatever satisfies a particular description that the first speaker 'has in mind'.

In contrast, Gellman characterises rigid designator theory through the phenomenon that having 'the F' in mind does not guarantee that a speaker is using N in the way that either of the descriptive models specify. Further

- (1) An initial baptism involves the choice of N to refer to an object O that presents itself.
- (2) N names O directly, and not on account of any definite description being satisfied.
- (3) N continues to refer to O even if all definite descriptions employed fail to be satisfied.

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<sup>255</sup> *NNG*, p.193

<sup>256</sup> *NNG*, p.193

Gellman lists the following objections<sup>257</sup> to descriptive theories, with their concomitant examples. First, we often use a name to refer to an individual for all counterfactual considerations, regardless of which definite descriptions are satisfied by which objects. Although Gellman uses a different example, this is essentially the same point as Kripke's, concerning Nixon as 'The winner of the 1968 US election.'

Secondly, names often designate an entity successfully when a speaker has no definite description in mind. Although Gellman uses a different example, the Kripkean objection employing Feynman as 'a leading contemporary theoretical physicist' is an ideal case in point; as we have seen, the argument is that it is still possible to communicate about him and successfully to refer to him.

Thirdly, we can succeed in referring to some entity even when our definite description for the entity picks out a different entity. For example, Kripke's Godel argument, wherein he contends that we still talk about Godel and truly/falsely predicate properties of him even though our description of him picks out Schmidt and the predications' truth-values would seem to rest on Schmidt's properties.

Fourthly, reference to an entity can be successful even when the definite description for the entity picks out nothing at all. For example, Donnellan's 'man with the martini' argument, wherein two speakers successfully refer to an individual at a party using 'the man with the martini' even though no-one present has a martini.

Finally, when naming fictional entities, if a real entity satisfies the definite description for a fictional entity, reference is still to the fictional entity. For example, Donnellan's 'Santa Claus' argument, wherein a man is discovered living at the North Pole dressed in red and white furs and driving a sleigh filled with gifts, but conversations about Santa Claus still refer successfully to the fictional character (presuming that the new discovery is not dubbed 'Santa Claus', in which case the argument would apply with the proviso of making a distinction between Santa Claus and 'Santa Claus').

Gellman goes on to relate the criticisms to the two descriptive theories, showing what damage is done by each criticism. However, he also makes a vital distinction between semantics and pragmatics (this is equivalent to the distinction between meaning proper and reference proper, since pragmatics has a slightly different technical attribution in philosophy of language, but I shall retain the distinction for ease of understanding quotations).

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<sup>257</sup> *NNG*, p.195-6

The semantics of a name has to do with the contribution that a name makes to the meaning of a sentence type, what knowers of a language have to know in order to understand a sentence type of the language in which the name appears. The pragmatics of names includes how a speaker uses a name to refer on the occasion of utterance of a sentence token.<sup>258</sup>

A sentence type, notes Gellman, passes on its semantics to all tokens, but it does not necessarily pass on its pragmatics, because they are reliant on the intentions of the speaker to refer.

Thus, Gellman identifies the third, fourth and fifth objections as the key arguments for rigid designator theory. These criticisms, he argues, show that the reference of a name is not dependent on satisfaction of 'the F' – however, this does not show that N does not *mean* 'the F'. In other words, descriptive theory applies to semantics, but rigid designator theory applies to pragmatics:

The *meaning* of a name as a description does not determine the pragmatic issue of how the speaker intends to use the name.<sup>259</sup>

Note that this clarifies the 'real' Russell problem, since as Lycan observes, Russell and Searle seem to collapse the semantics/reference distinction. For the 'real' Russell, the pragmatics demand that reference is secured by satisfaction of descriptions, whilst meaning is the satisfier. Gellman here shows that thus far there is no reason to suppose that names cannot mean descriptions, whilst at the same time pointing out that description-satisfaction is too restrictive a model for reference.

Gellman argues that the third and fourth objections show that an entity can be referred to even through a false sentence. There is no restriction in using the name to refer to the description-satisfier, but this does not entail that the name does not mean the description; the semantic/pragmatic distinction is upheld.

Likewise, he argues for the fifth objection that the issue turns on whether one intends really to refer, or to pretend to refer, and this is an issue of pragmatics. When employing a name 'I need not be referring to *whatever* happens to satisfy the relevant description.'<sup>260</sup> This again removes the 'satisfaction conditions' mechanism, but again does not disprove the semantic point because 'Santa Claus' could mean 'The...F' although I choose my reference as fictional rather than real.

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<sup>258</sup> *NNG*, p.197

<sup>259</sup> *NNG*, p.197

<sup>260</sup> *NNG*, p.198

Gellman claims that the first objection can be accepted and incorporated by the descriptive theorist; indeed, he argues in a similar line to that provided by Dummet and Lycan above: 'The object which is in fact [the F] is such that it might not have been [the F].'<sup>261</sup>

Finally, Gellman considers the second objection. He believes that this defeats 'N is G means "the F is G",' adding that 'even when people do know of definite descriptions true of an object referred to, it seems implausible to suppose that we would get a uniformity in their descriptions that could account for uniformity of meaning.' This seems to fall into the trap of assuming the 'mythical' Russell; we shall see later how this might affect Gellman's arguments overall. Gellman concludes with the observation that all that has been shown is that it is not normative that names behave as the descriptive theory states. This does not, however, show that a name *cannot* behave in this way: 'There may be some special names that come ... together with a given description.'

Gellman does canvass a response to (2) by Kent Bach, who argues that all names have a description that means the name, which is 'N means "the object having the name N".' Such 'nominal descriptions are 'thin and uninteresting,' claims Gellman, and he for the remainder of his paper takes (2) to be correct. However, it should be noted that Sainsbury considers a response to the Godel objection based upon this. He introduces the idea of 'weighting' of descriptions, wherein some descriptions carry more weight, or do more work in the public semantics of a name, and argues that the Godel example could be an instance where 'the entity called Godel' dominates all other associated descriptions, thereby removing the problem that Schmidt satisfies 'the author of the Incompleteness Theorem'. This tactic, as a whole, attempts to move Russell's work towards Kripke's by trying to get Russellian satisfiers to function as rigid designators. We have also seen that objection two could be countered on the 'real' Russell theory by allowing that the satisfier of 'a leading contemporary theoretical physicist' provides the public semantics for Feynman.<sup>262</sup>

Regardless of whether Gellman succeeds in his semantic aims, the most important point to carry through to the later stages of the paper is the semantic/pragmatic distinction; it is both what Gellman himself is most interested in,

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<sup>261</sup> *NNG*, p.196

<sup>262</sup> Compare the Bach/Sainsbury response with my example about Yeltsin above, p.79. Is it not the case that 'Yes but at that time Yeltsin wasn't Yeltsin' defeats the point, since it means 'the entity having the name Yeltsin wasn't [rigid designator] Yeltsin'?



and also what this chapter is seeking in terms of the meaningfulness of statements of God's existence.

In the second section of his paper, Gellman considers the conditions for initial baptism. The issue at stake is the relationship between speaker, name and object, when the speaker first rigidly designates an object by employing a name. The debate consequently centres around acquaintance, perception and ostension. It must be noted that Gellman wishes to go further than Kripke in two respects. In the first place, he develops an account of the conditions for initial baptism; about this he is very clear. However, he also takes a correlative position distinct from Kripke's which he does not make clear. In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke requires that some description be used to fix a name as a rigid designator, and in this respect Sainsbury is right to argue that *his* version of Russell is really not that far off of Kripke's own theory, save presumably that the 'real' Russell does not distinguish between initial baptism and subsequent use. Gellman, on the other hand, is pushing towards a model of pragmatic reference that is as free of descriptive baggage in initial baptism as it is in subsequent referential practice.

Gellman claims that Kripke's view is unclear, but that he seems to require perception and ostension for rigid baptism: 'usually, a baptiser is acquainted in some sense with the object he names and is able to name it ostensively.'<sup>263</sup> As we have already seen, Russell's model of naming is restricted to logically proper names, 'this' and 'that', which clearly requires immediate perception and ostension, but Gellman cites Jaegwon Kim as a rigid designation theory inheritor of Russell's view (without the restriction to logically proper names). 'The possibility of reference presupposes the possibility of direct ostensive reference,' which 'is possible only if some sort of direct cognitive contact is established with the object of ostension.' Thus 'perception is our only cognitive window on the outside world, and any epistemological contact with it must be mediated by perception.'

Thus far, then, models for reference seem to require an initial ostensive designation mediated by perception. However, Gellman goes on to consider the work of Michael Devitt, who contends that perception/ostension is not required at the time of the baptism. A 'grounding thought' (i.e. a mental representation) is required for baptism, but this means that the object could be perceived at time  $t$  and not 'baptised' until  $t^1$ . Further, a representation of the object can provide the mental representation grounding the baptism (for example, a photograph).

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<sup>263</sup> This makes sense if Kripke requires some description-satisfaction process in initial baptism.

Gellman asks whether a representation (mental or actual) must be faithful to the object represented. He argues that if rigid designator theory can provide arguments where reference is successful even though definite descriptions are incorrect, then surely it should not matter whether the representation is faithful. All that could be demanded would be *a* representation of the 'it' which is to be rigidly designated.

Gellman therefore follows up on this line of inquiry by asking what work is being done by the representation requirement. His conclusion (given the various examples of ways in which the representation can be faulty (lighting, distance, mirrors, distortions and so on), is that the representation essentially serves as a way of accessing the object, 'the possibility [of thinking] that it is *that* (calling up to mind the representation) object that [we mean] to be designating.'<sup>264</sup> Nevertheless, Devitt's view seems to be 'perception, not ostension'.

By contrast, Gellman cites McGinn's views<sup>265</sup> on reference as an example of 'ostension, not perception.' McGinn's argument for this position uses several examples to show that perception and reference can become detached whereas reference and ostension remain linked together. Gellman uses the general example of being able to ostend an object without seeing it. McGinn's key contention is that 'indexical pointings out over-ride descriptions, which explains how one can refer to an object that one misdescribes.' A major element of McGinn's view, as Gellman is swift to observe, is that entities outside space-time cannot be named/rigidly designated because they cannot be ostended. Notably, this goes some way to explaining why McGinn holds the view that he does concerning 'God' terminologically, and why he cannot see 'God exists' as predicating existence of a referent instead of predicating it of a well-defined concept.

The two criticisms which Gellman makes of Devitt and McGinn respectively, and on which he constructs his own position, are, first, that representations are 'generated' by the object, and that consequently any referential access yielding uniqueness (i.e. the capability of individuating an object) should be adequate to achieve rigid designation in an initial baptism. Secondly, in order to achieve rigid designation through ostension, it is not necessary for the object of ostension to be the object named.

Gellman begins his positive thesis by returning to rigid designator theory and observing the structure for reference subsequent to initial baptism. The requirement is that the speaker connects to a referential path which has the initial baptism as its starting point. So, when I talk about Russell, there is no perception, ostension or representation,

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<sup>264</sup> *NNG*, p.200

<sup>265</sup> Colin McGinn, 'The Mechanism of Reference', in *Knowledge and Reality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.197-221

but I partake in a referential practice which began when someone first called Russell ‘Russell’.

What Gellman wishes to argue is that initial baptisms can follow the same structure: ‘initial baptisms of rigid names succeed because an object has been picked out with the intention to refer to it. In order to be picked out, it is sufficient if the baptising act has a way of ending up at, or leading to, the unique object named.’ Thus, a referential path is enough for reference, provided it leads to the object. Perception or ostension of the object are not required; ‘in fact, there needs to be no *real* connection between the links of the ‘chain’ in the path. It need only be a way of, as it were, getting from the namer to the object.’

Gellman makes the following points about reference and rigid baptism. First, success depends upon the namer’s awareness of the path; the namer can be erroneous about the path, but for reference there must actually be a path and the namer must be aware of its existence. Secondly, ‘rigid reference is to be thought of as a category of the use of language for reference purposes’. Thus, thirdly, successful baptism requires the namer’s intention to include both the path and the unique object, and that the path exist and lead to the unique object. Finally, failed baptism occurs when the intention conditions are fulfilled but there is no path, or no object, or no unique object.

He then provides six examples to illustrate his theory. The first pair involve perception previous to baptism, the second pair involve perception by persons other than the namer previous to baptism. The fifth involves future, or anticipated, perception, and the last involves no perception or ostension.

Example (a)<sup>266</sup>: One is in a room amongst a group of strangers, and one of them leaves. That person is then referred to by name for the first time. The memory links the namer to the referent, and although this can be representational, it can also be the memory that a person was recently here and that *that* person is to be named. Therefore, the memory is the first link of a causal referential chain leading to the entity to be named, but the entity itself is neither perceived nor ostended at the initial baptism.

Example (b)<sup>267</sup>: One person in a conversing group talks about a drug dealer he knows, and decides to call the drug dealer ‘Marty’ to protect his identity. The group succeed in conversing and referring to ‘Marty’, even if it is subsequently revealed to all of them that the individual was not a drug dealer. Everyone still understands that it is

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<sup>266</sup> *NNG*, p.203

<sup>267</sup> *NNG*, p.203-4

‘Marty’ who was not after all a drug dealer. Thus, rigid designation was successfully initiated in the absence of the referent.

Example (c)<sup>268</sup>: Someone decides to rename Socrates ‘Frederich’. They intend, and succeed, in linking this to the referential practice of ‘Socrates’-use which leads back to the man himself. Although perception has never occurred and ostension is not presently occurring, rigid reference is still achieved. In order to remove the problem that the namer is simply using ‘Frederich’ as a synonym and thereby employing the same referential practice in continuation, Gellman supposes that an evil demon has tricked the namer into experiencing ‘Socrates’ for every occurrence of ‘Thates’. Thus, even though there is no awareness of the name ‘Thates’, the referential chain for ‘Thates’ is successfully employed (the speaker is aware of a path, there is a path, and the end object is the individual intended by the speaker). Although ‘Frederich’ is used as a synonym for ‘Socrates’, it does not affect the success of the rigid baptism ‘Frederich’ which uses the path for the referent ‘Thates’.

Example (d):

I read of someone in a newspaper story. I read, say, that John Smith is being held on charges of murder, and an interview is provided about how he was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, raised in Chicago, etc. I decide to call John Smith, “Bob”, because his story reminds me of a departed friend I once had of that name. Suppose it turns out that Bob (not my departed friend) was really not being held, but that a reporter believed the story of a psychologist who was in the jail to study criminal behaviour, and who told a fabricated story about himself to the reporter. Bob, it turns out, was not named “John Smith”, was not born in Nebraska, and other details of the interview were all wrong. The supposition just raised is coherent, which shows that reference is rigid, though I never perceived or ostended Bob.<sup>269</sup>

Example (e)<sup>270</sup>: Gellman argues that the referential path can be future-based as well as past-based. He gives the example of a Midrash which tells that ‘in Messianic times the righteous will dance a circle around God and point to God saying: “This.”’ Gellman argues that if no-one perceives or ostends God until that point, why should a name not be coined to refer to the entity that will be ostended in a ‘final baptism’?

Example (f)<sup>271</sup>: Gellman argues that lacking perception or ostension, past, present or future, can still allow rigid baptism independent of descriptive theory’s satisfaction conditions – provided a path and object exist and are intended by the namer. He uses the example of a new chain reaction, the activating agent of which has never

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<sup>268</sup> *NNG*, p.204

<sup>269</sup> *NNG*, p.204-5

<sup>270</sup> *NNG*, p.205

<sup>271</sup> *NNG*, p.205-6

been observed, but which a scientist has decided to devise an experiment to observe. The scientist calls the agent 'Boris' in lieu of its as yet unknown formula. Although 'Boris' could be synonymous with a description, it could also be a rigid designator picked out via the path of the chain reaction. The description could turn out to be wrong ('the activating agent of reaction number 13889',<sup>272</sup> when someone had mislabelled the experiment, for instance), but reference would still be achieved, and if Boris ceased to exist before anyone perceived or ostended it, reference would still be achieved.

Gellman provides a contrasting example<sup>273</sup> by using 'Mario' as 'the world's greatest baritone', when the namer does not know who the world's greatest baritone is, has no referential practice and no other path to follow. In this case, the referent of the name is whoever satisfies the description, and the namer could not discover that he had been mistaken as to the satisfying entity, because whoever satisfies the description will 'become' Mario.

Gellman summarises his points<sup>274</sup> as follows. First, reference in initial baptism where the object named is presented to experience or ostended is *direct reference*. Secondly, reference in initial baptism where the object named is presented at some other time is *indirect reference*. Thirdly, reference in initial baptism where the object named is never presented is *deferred reference*. Finally, initial baptism of a rigid designator is the same as subsequent use of rigid designators in that it ties in to a causal, or other varietal, path. It differs in that it does not have to employ a path of referential practice (which subsequent reference does), although it can employ such – as demonstrated by the Socrates example.

In the third section of his paper, Gellman considers 'the logic of "God"'.<sup>275</sup> He uses Anselm's *Proslogion* as an example, which fits with the purposes of this thesis quite well. Since the *Proslogion* has already been discussed, and Gellman's treatment is as likely to confuse as to elucidate, I shall concentrate upon his arguments concerning reference, and bring in *Proslogion* comments only when absolutely necessary. The essential thrust of Gellman's use of the *Proslogion* as an example is that the *Proslogion* depends upon taking 'God' as a rigid designator, and 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought' as non-rigid. Thus, he suggests that for the Fool, 'God' is a *failed rigid*

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<sup>272</sup> *NNG*, p.206

<sup>273</sup> *NNG*, p.206

<sup>274</sup> *NNG*, p.206

<sup>275</sup> *NNG*, p.207

designator, and the referential path does not lead anywhere<sup>276</sup>. The second part of *Proslogion* III is therefore an argument that ‘God’ the rigid designator ‘is as we believe Him to be’; i.e. is ‘that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’, and since the Fool cannot deny that ‘that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’ exists (according to *Proslogion* II), then if ‘that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’ describes God, the Fool must admit God’s existence.

What is particularly of interest is Gellman’s treatment of ‘God’ as rigid designator, and of the question of whether ‘God’ could also have semantic meaning. He makes the following points. He begins by noting that his arguments in his paper’s second section mean that ‘God’ could be a rigid designator regardless of previous commitments to His existence: ‘being a rigid designator is a category of the use of language for referential purposes.’<sup>277</sup>

Secondly, if ‘God’ is to be a rigid designator, Gellman observes that we need a path. He asks what Anselm’s path is in the *Proslogion*, and cites the opening chapter, where Anselm laments never having had an experience of God; as we have seen, there is a claim present in Anselm that perception of God has been lost on account of the Fall<sup>278</sup>. Gellman seizes on this to argue that since ‘Anselm trusts that Adam had a vision of God,’ the referential path can be established ‘and we may suppose that Anselm intends to use “God” to refer rigidly to God via the referential chain that reaches back to Adam’s original vision of God’<sup>279</sup>.

Gellman asks whether ‘God’ is the sort of name which also has semantic meaning (not nominal description meaning)<sup>280</sup>. He suggests that Anselm, or someone in his circumstances, would have been initiated into a referential practice and only later would learn possible definite descriptions of God<sup>281</sup>. Does this imply that ‘God’ is really, or primarily, referential, rather than semantic? Gellman argues that we cannot draw this conclusion simply from the temporal priority; it is consistent with the situation that the name be both semantic and referential<sup>282</sup>. He goes on to give the examples ‘the Creator’ and ‘that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’ as candidates for the semantic meaning of ‘God’, and then attempts a text-based demonstration of the way in which ‘Anselm could have been systematically using the name “God” both rigidly and

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<sup>276</sup> *NNG*, p.210

<sup>277</sup> *NNG*, p.209

<sup>278</sup> Charlesworth, *St. Anselm’s Proslogion*, p.111-115, cited in *NNG*, p.210

<sup>279</sup> *NNG*, p.210

<sup>280</sup> *NNG*, p.210

<sup>281</sup> *NNG*, p.211

<sup>282</sup> *NNG*, p.211

as synonymous with ‘that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’ [and indeed with ‘the Creator’].’ He is careful to note that if ‘that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’ is *not* the semantic meaning of ‘God’, then Anselm’s argument still stands (in this respect) in that ‘God’ as a rigid designator could still *satisfy* ‘that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought’, which is the minimum that Anselm requires.<sup>283</sup>

However, it is the following discussion of the arguments and objections for allowing ‘God’ as rigid designator, or as semantically meaningful, that is most interesting for current purposes. Gellman starts his discussion with an observation on the difficulties involved in attributing semantic meaning to a rigidly designated ‘God’: ‘we cannot turn to satisfaction conditions of a proposed semantically equivalent description in order to test whether substitution of the description yields the same truth values as the original.’<sup>284</sup> This is because a rigid designator can refer to something that fails to satisfy the description. So, this is the difference between Donnellan’s ‘man with the martini’ (corresponding to the ‘God’ case), and, say, ‘bachelor’ being ‘the unmarried man’, where the satisfaction conditions of ‘the unmarried man’ will, if satisfied, ensure the correct use of the term ‘bachelor’ for that individual.

Furthermore, Gellman observes that we cannot test for ‘N means “the G”’ by testing ‘N is not “the G”’ for necessary falsehood, because, first, ‘a token of “N is not the G” can be necessarily false, not because N means “the G” but because that very being which N names rigidly is necessarily G.’<sup>285</sup> For example, ‘Pegasus is not the winged horse’ could be false because Pegasus is the winged horse, but not because ‘Pegasus’ *means* ‘the winged horse.’

Secondly, ‘A token of “N is not the G” may be true even when N *means* “the G”’. This can happen because N is being used rigidly.’<sup>286</sup> For example, if ‘Fred’ means ‘the man with the martini’ for someone at Donnellan’s party, who then says ‘there’s Fred’ (in the circumstances of Donnellan’s example) then reference is successful even though Fred has a glass of water. I.e. ‘Fred is not the man with the martini’ is *true*.

Finally, Gellman argues<sup>287</sup> that the issue of whether ‘God’ has semantic meaning would have to be settled before we decide the truth value of ‘God is not the G,’ presumably (he does not make it explicit) because on a common-or-garden compositional model of semantics, a separate account must be given of the meaning of the subject, the meaning of the predicate and the meaning of the negation operator.

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<sup>283</sup> *NNG*, p.213

<sup>284</sup> *NNG*, p.213

<sup>285</sup> *NNG*, p.214

<sup>286</sup> *NNG*, p.214

<sup>287</sup> *NNG*, p.214

Gellman suggests that the main reason for the thought that ‘God’ must have semantic meaning is that many philosophers are unwilling to allow that ‘God’ could be a rigid designator. He provides two motivations for this position. First, he suggests that many philosophers ‘do not think that God exists and hence prefer to think of ‘God’ as meaning a description rather than as referring rigidly.’<sup>288</sup> Gellman points out, in line with his previous arguments, that God not existing is no reason for ‘God’ not to be a member of ‘the pragmatic category of rigid designators’<sup>289</sup> since failure of existence would simply mean that it was a failed rigid designator, rather than not a rigid designator at all.

Secondly, Gellman suggests that the Russellian demand for acquaintance to enable reference leads to the following argument:

- (1) “God” is a rigid designator for S only if S perceives or ostends what God designates.
- (2) No one can perceive or ostend what “God” designates.
- (3) Therefore “God” is not a rigid designator for S.

And then they conclude that “God” must have semantic meaning, otherwise it could not function in language at all.<sup>290</sup>

Gellman provides two major objections to this position<sup>291</sup>. The first is that (2) could be rejected if we upheld an argument for perceiving God, such as Alston’s theory of non-sensory perception of God. The second is that (1) could be rejected on the basis that perception and ostension are not required to achieve rigid reference; i.e. (1) can be rejected if we uphold deferred reference, in Gellman’s terms.

Gellman concludes his article with a consideration of what possibilities are available for ‘God’ as a rigid designator<sup>292</sup>. He begins by noting that partaking in a referential practice is sufficient for ‘a “path” from the believer to God.’ He goes on to argue for three options for deferred reference initial baptisms grounding such referential practices.

The first option is an incident experienced as a miracle. ‘God would be picked out as being the very being who was the cause of *this* miracle.’<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> *NNG*, p.214

<sup>289</sup> *NNG*, p.214

<sup>290</sup> *NNG*, p.215

<sup>291</sup> *NNG*, p.215

<sup>292</sup> *NNG*, p.215-6

<sup>293</sup> *NNG*, p.215



The second option is ‘mediated experience of God’; when one perceives something and ‘hears’ or ‘sees’ God ‘through’ or ‘in’ it (music, perhaps, or landscape). ‘God is thus being thought of as that very being who stands at the start of *this* path.’<sup>294</sup>

Gellman’s strongest option, which in some sense encompasses the previous two, is God as creator. In terms of other examples from the previous chapter, the ‘first cause’ and ‘first thinker’ arguments could both be examples of a suitable path for Gellman. However, as he is swift to point out, ‘it is not necessary that the believer be right about there existing a being [as source of an experience such as those above], in order for “God” to function as a rigid designator. It is sufficient that the name “God” be intended to refer in this way in order for it to function as a rigid designator. If God were not to exist, it would be a rigid designator that failed.’<sup>295</sup>

Gellman’s conclusion, therefore, is that ‘God’ can function as a rigid designator, and that there is no clear position consequent to this as to whether or not ‘God’ has semantic meaning.

I would argue that an extra option for a referential path is provided by the ideas of God as being at the limit of human understanding, discussed in the previous chapter. Presumably, the limit of human understanding is not something which can be perceived, and possibly not even ostended. Human understanding itself, however, is present to experience almost by definition. I would argue that this provides a suitable path to God, allowing ‘God’ as a rigid designator under Gellman’s conditions – i.e. this cannot be allowed to state anything about the semantics of ‘God’, only to secure reference.

### Referring to God?

The overall import of Gellman’s paper for the current discussion centres essentially around his appreciation of the distinction between meaning and reference (what he calls semantics and pragmatics), and the demonstration that reference understood ‘pragmatically’ can provide us with a way of referring to God independently of settling on a semantics of ‘God’.

This brings us back to McGinn’s challenge to ontological arguments. I argued that McGinn would be unhappy attributing existence to an entity that was not properly individuated. As we have seen above, McGinn’s position on reference demands ostension, and these two elements are fully compatible. However, it would appear that

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<sup>294</sup> *NNG*, p.216

<sup>295</sup> *NNG*, p.216

McGinn is an example of Gellman's philosophers who 'prefer to think of "God" as meaning a description rather than referring rigidly.'<sup>296</sup> Indeed, McGinn's concern was over whether 'God' was well-defined, and whether we could 'know what it would be'<sup>297</sup> for an entity to be defined by certain concepts.

This provides us with two options. The first is that McGinn thinks of 'God' as a concept, not as a name; the second is that McGinn would similarly be concerned with any instance of '{name} exists'. The former puts him in a position to be criticised by Gellman's objections, but the latter is potentially more dangerous to him. This is because it pushes him in the direction of Russell's account of proper name meaning: if '{name} exists' is to be allowed, the subject terms must be well-defined, which presumably involves a (consistent) description of some sort. He says of fictional entities that the reason they cannot exist is that there is no coherent/consistent description/definition as a candidate for metaphysical possibility<sup>298</sup>. Yet this begins to sound as if *McGinn* is smuggling in a *Russellian* view of existence, at least for modal objects, in that an object exists only if there is a coherent metaphysical entity - that coherence being provided by a consistent description-set of properties individuating the entity. So a modal object exists if a description could be true of something.

I contend – following up on the arguments I constructed in Chapter I on this point – that McGinn could avoid this entanglement by retreating on the point of modal existents: by arguing that modal entities are fictional but derive their properties from actual entities. In other words, we - our mental acts - individuate modal entities (say, in counterfactual examples) but we base this individuation upon existing entities, which explains why modal/counterfactual objects are better defined and less often a source of confusion in language-use than are fictional entities. For example, imagining what would have happened if Nixon lost the 1978 US election is easier than imagining what would have happened if Hamlet's father had not been murdered - not because loser-Nixon exists and Hamlet's father doesn't, but because it is easier to keep a mental grasp on loser-Nixon given that we have actual-Nixon's life and works to consult.

Subsequent to this, we affirm that names are rigid designators and allow that names can pick out fictional objects as well as actual objects. A rigid designator for a non-existent will succeed on the same grounds as Gellman's model of initial baptism, except that a path can be virtually instantaneous because individuation of the non-existent relies on the mental acts of the baptiser. This could be presented as 'I choose to

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<sup>296</sup> *NNG*, p.214

<sup>297</sup> *ELP*, p.50

<sup>298</sup> *ELP*, p.38

invent a new fictional character, and its name is {name}' such that the path and uniqueness of the object are provided by just this thought. The exception to this is a re-naming of a fictional character, which requires a path as supplied by a referential practice (cf Gellman's Socrates example<sup>299</sup>).

The rigid designator will fail for a non-existent if there is no object with that name, or no path of referential practice, and no intention to compose a fiction through initial baptism (e.g. if I make a statement about 'Osrik' but have no idea who 'Osrik' is and have no intention of founding a fiction about 'Osrik', then, even if there is a fictional character called 'Osrik', the reference fails. Indeed, if there *is* a fictional character called 'Osrik', the previous sentence proves the point, since in general I might as well have used '{name}' because the only function fulfilled is that of a grammatical place-holder<sup>300</sup>).

It should be remembered that names are still rigid designators, but that they can be successful or failed rigid designators. We already have an account from Gellman as to how rigid designators for actual entities can succeed or fail. To this has been added an account of how rigid designators for fictional entities can succeed or fail. As a result, I aim to construct a model of how 'God exists' can be considered meaningful whether or not God actually does exist. This is the task of Chapter IV, to which I now turn.

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<sup>299</sup> *NNG*, p.204

<sup>300</sup> I suggest that a good way of understanding this view of names is to contrast an entity-invoking (in the broadest sense) use with the use of a name as a grammatical place-holder. A good example of the latter would be the phrase 'You wouldn't know him from Adam.' The intention of course is for the name-use to be equivalent to 'any named person', but it is not as if we expect to have a conversation in which 'Adam' will stand for an entity.

**Chapter IV: The Meaningfulness of 'God exists'**

I began this dissertation by proposing an intuitive semantic requirement of compositionality for the meaningfulness of 'God exists'; since compositionality was both straightforward and appealing, the outstanding question was one of how to understand it. Fortunately, 'God exists' has the surface form, at least, of a simple subject-predicate sentence which reduces the possibilities of structural difficulty. Nevertheless, difficulties became immediately apparent: most importantly, how to treat 'God', but more immediately what account to give of 'exists' - and this demanded that a solution be given, primarily, for the traditionally thorny problem of the property of existence, since first- and second-order views would give rather different accounts of the composition of 'God exists'. In the course of investigating this issue, a challenge was presented concerning the remaining element (i.e. 'God') and the conditions for applying the property of existence to it, which was grounded in a criticism of ontological arguments. This dovetailed with an area already worth looking at, since the traditional remit of ontological arguments is meaningfully to join together the terms 'God' and 'exists' with minimal appeal to anything outside of those terms. The first response, then, to the demand for one or more well-defined and comprehensible concepts of 'God', was to examine Anselm as a target of that demand, in an attempt meet it.

Having turned to a study of Anselm's position, a number of interesting ideas emerged. First, I moved away from the issue of proof (since this thesis is interested in the meaningfulness of 'God exists' and not in proving that proposition) in an attempt to get beyond the entangled debate and examine what thought underlay Anselm's arguments in the *Proslogion*. This uncovered Anselm's philosophy (and theology) of language, and the struggle he himself had had in talking about God. More importantly, it seemed to affirm and clarify the challenge found in Chapter I, for Anselm himself was forced to conclude that God was to be found at the limit of human understanding; was, in terms of essence, ineffable - although it might be possible to speak of God in terms of relation to the created order. This emphasised the elements of McGinn's view that barred meaningful predication of existence to any entity for which we did not have an essential characterising concept that we understood. Everything pointed to the problem of locating a non-relative account for the reference and meaning of 'God' (i.e. one unlike 'the most perfect existing entity,' which is referentially arbitrary) that would

provide a foundation for being able to predicate things of God - preferably without already presupposing God's existence.

The third chapter, therefore, introduced an attempt to find some way of fixing the reference for 'God', providing an individuated subject of which to allow the predication of existence, thereby holding out some hope that 'God exists' could be considered meaningful. A possible solution was discovered in the form of Gellman's 'deferred reference' theory of pragmatic (referential) rigid designation. This supposedly left open the semantic (meaning) account of 'God', but in any case did allow us to fix a reference for 'God' in order to explore the semantics; in using, for instance, 'God exists', we are pragmatically picking out an entity and attributing a property to it, but this does not necessarily tell us what the subject term *means*; it could simply stand for the entity, it could abbreviate a description and so on. However, the challenge levelled by McGinn was partly answered – essentially by replacing his conceptual demands with the idea of referential 'paths'. An account was given of how rigid designators could function for fictional entities, a problem that needed addressing if McGinn's view of existence as a first-order property was to be countenanced in conjunction with such a view of reference. This brings us to the present chapter of the thesis.

I aim to do a number of things. Primarily, I wish to explore the idea that God could have a Kripkean-based semantics, in such a way as to leave open the issue of God's existence. I shall note that this is compatible with 'God' having associated descriptions, provided that we keep these at a cognitive level. This first strand of argument will be grounded in a demand for clarification of Gellman's commitments to meaning as well as reference.

Subsequently, I wish to sketch a structure for meaningfulness using what has been covered so far, bringing together Gellman's critique of reference with McGinn's defence of first-order existence, which (*contra* Russell) gives the ability to talk meaningfully of God existing without having to demonstrate – or even commit to – 'God exists' as a fact.

Finally, I would like to offer an addendum concerning some potential applications and ramifications of the thesis for philosophical theology and philosophy of religion. The discussion of these points will necessarily be brief, but some treatment is required in order to explore the issues arising and the way in which they fit together.

'God': A Semantic Suggestion

As we have seen, Gellman argues that 'the *meaning* of a name as a description does not determine the pragmatic issue of how a speaker intends to use the name.'<sup>301</sup> In other words, meaning does not determine reference. He also suggests at the end of his paper that some names of God could have semantic meaning and others might only refer (he cites a Jewish tradition of 'Elohim' and 'Adonai' having semantic content, and 'YHVH' not having semantic content<sup>302</sup>). However, we have also seen that the Kripkean basis for Gellman's work has a meaning *and* a reference strand to it; a rigid designator means the object it picks out, and that is how we can talk about the same entity across possible worlds. If we are strict with Gellman, we should demand that he take this into account, or risk accusations of a faulty understanding of Kripke's position. This demand leads most directly to the view that all names mean the entity that they pick out, but some names might also have 'extra meaning'. There appear to be two options for this 'extra meaning'; the first is that a name actually means both the entity it picks out and some further description, say. I think this would be problematic; it risks dragging us back into the whole debate about meaning of names by demanding, for instance, some explanation of the way in which some names act in the Kripkean fashion whereas others also act in a more Russellian fashion.

The second option, which I suggest is the most stable one, is to link the 'extra meaning' to the associated descriptions already posited, by arguing that some names lead language users to assume certain associated descriptions on the grounds, for example, that the name is also a separately functioning word. The sort of name I am thinking of here is, for example, 'Mr Baker'; historically, one could probably find a period in which the majority of language users would think that 'Mr Baker' denoted an individual, but that that individual was a baker. At present this is unlikely; 'Mr Baker' would usually be treated as a rigidly designating name. At some time long past, perhaps, 'Master Baker' was not yet used as a name (was not a rigid designator).<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> *NNG*, p.197

<sup>302</sup> *NNG*, p.216

<sup>303</sup> It should be noted that this does not represent a concession to an 'inferential theory' of meaning; at best it shows that if one supports such a theory then the class of expressions which cause difficulties (i.e. provision of rules for proper names) could be curtailed in this way. Of course, this might demand that the inferential theorist accept a Kripkean account of proper names first. (We have already seen in the Introduction why the inferential theory is unappealing as a basis for analysing 'God exists').

This has some application to 'God', since 'God' - or, more properly 'god' - can be used to attribute a role or characteristic; for example 'Zeus was the supreme god in Greek mythology'. Clearly, 'God exists' should not be taken in this sense, not least because it becomes a fragment, similar to 'baker exists'. It also goes some way to explaining the attraction of the approach which attempts to find a coherent and consistent set of attributes for God; perhaps there is a distinction to be emphasised between 'what is God?' ('what is Mr Baker?') and 'what is [it to be a/the] God?' ('what is [it to be a/the] baker?'). In view of this, I would like again to make clear that the issue at hand is concerned with 'God' as name, not as attributive concept<sup>304</sup>.

Some possible cause for misunderstanding or criticism hopefully having been addressed, I shall now move on to a suggested semantic account for 'God'. Based on what has gone before concerning McGinn, Kripke, Gellman and Sainsbury, one might argue as follows. First, 'God' can be considered as a rigid designator; the term picks out an object (reference) and stands for that object (meaning). Debates concerning the attributes of God can be understood in terms of what descriptions ought (consistently, coherently or just uniquely) to be associated with the name 'God'. There is a parallel here with the 'Hesperus = Phosphorous' example, in that someone might want to say 'In fact, Allah and God are the same entity, so Christians and Muslims worship the same being'. This would be understood as, first, a statement that two names denote the same object (and, incidentally, an identity statement can be an *a posteriori* discovery of a necessary truth, according to Kripke<sup>305</sup>) and, secondly, as informative on the grounds that very different sets of descriptions are associated with the names 'Allah' and 'God'. This seems to be an acceptable account of what is occurring in such an instance.

None of this commits us to asserting that God actually exists, because the object picked out by 'God' could be a fictional object. 'God' could fail as a (actual) rigid designator when the path and object intended are actual, and this would entail that 'God' succeeds as a (fictional) rigid designator when (indeed, probably because) the path and object are fictional. A more familiar example of a failure of an actual rigid designator entailing success as a fictional rigid designator can be seen in the case of 'Vulcan'. The failure of the hypothesis that Vulcan exists and explains irregularities in the orbit of

<sup>304</sup> Although it is noteworthy that the path which enables reference in the first place will invariably involve some sort of concept. However, this escapes circularity on the grounds that all that is required for reference is that there is a path and that it picks out a unique object; so presumably 'the Creator', say, could be an inaccurate or imperfect descriptive concept but still succeed in providing the path.

<sup>305</sup> For more on how this works, see Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1981), particularly p.100-5



Mercury entails that 'Vulcan' picks out the fictional object that is the subject of a fictional account of Mercury's orbital irregularities.

Could 'God' fail as a rigid designator for a fictional object? The conditions under which this could occur would be when there is no fictional object with that name, or no path of referential practice, and no intention to compose a fiction through initial baptism. Given the number of models, ideas and historical associations of 'God', this could be argued to make 'God' one of the least likely candidates for failed rigid designation (as opposed to the problematic Russellian view mentioned in Chapter III [p.74] in which 'God' is one of the most likely candidates for *zero* semantic and referential content). The closest possibility might be a use of 'God' such as 'This is the honest-to-God truth.' Presumably there is no intent to create a fictional object here, it is uncertain that the name is linked with a referential practice, and there is probably no intended fictional (or actual) object. There are problems with employing this example; mainly that it makes a foray into the philosophy of metaphor since it could be questioned whether 'God' is actually being used here at all. Nevertheless, it gives a sense of the scope for exceptions to successful rigid designation.

Before going on to present the complete suggested model for the meaningfulness of 'God exists', I would like to consider some of the detail of how the arguments above relate to states of affairs and truth values for 'God exists'. The first and most straightforward option is provided by the state of affairs in which God actually does exist. Under these circumstances, 'God' names a unique entity picked out by some intended path, such as 'the Creator', first thinker, or entity lying at the limit of human understanding. The rigid designator actually succeeds. The proposition then comes out true because it says of this entity that it is actual.

The second option is that the rigid designator fails as an actual rigid designator (i.e. there is no existing entity picked out by 'God') but that it succeeds as a fictional rigid designator. The proposition comes out false because it claims of a fictional entity picked out by 'God' that that entity is actual, not fictional. A good example of this would be a cynical reading of the first Anselmian path suggested by Gellman; the entity picked out by the path 'the original vision of Adam'<sup>306</sup>. One could argue that the story of Adam and Eve is quite literally that - a fiction - and that consequently 'Adam', 'Eve' and 'God' are all successfully rigidly designating fictional characters. Indeed, perhaps more successful than many because of the combined authority (in the sense both of not giving rise to other stories about its characters, and having ecclesiastical authority) and

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<sup>306</sup> *NNG*, p.210



uniqueness of the Bible for most language-users. 'God exists' is therefore a serious 'misfiring...of the mind'<sup>307</sup> on this account, since it entertains the possibility that the fictional character 'God' is not in fact a fictional character.

Technically, there is a third option; that 'God' is a failed rigid designator both in fiction and in actuality. However, it is difficult to see how this could apply to the sentence 'God exists' since the form of the proposition seems to demand that the speaker has some notion of what they mean by 'God'.

Interestingly, there is a curious fourth option; that God actually exists, but that a speaker refers to 'God' using a referential practice and path that picks out a fictional object. This would be very similar to Donnellan's Santa Claus example, and affirms its insight; as with Santa, we want to say that the person who had been talking about God-*qua*-fiction really had been talking about a fictional object, not about actual-God - even if all that was said of fiction-God happened to be true of actual-God. Likewise, it would be correct (if pedantic) to reply to the now epistemically advantaged individual who says 'Ah, so God exists!' by saying 'Well, if you intend to mean the object that you have been talking about all this time, then no, it is still a fiction, but if you are referring to this new discovery and realising the comparability of its properties with your fiction-God, then yes.'

Having covered this detail, I shall now move on to presenting the overall model for the meaningfulness of 'God exists', drawing together previous arguments into the proper structure and thereby enabling the key points to be seen clearly.

### 'God exists': A Model of Meaningfulness

The premise on which this investigation was built was that, if we wished to characterise, or provide criteria for, the meaningfulness of 'God exists' then a reasonable starting point was that each term was meaningful and contributed to the meaning of the whole: compositionality. This led directly to the problem of deciding how existence was to be treated. A second-order view, as championed by Russell, would imply that 'God' could be a concept, or – if 'God' was a name – that it was a name for one or more concepts (or the satisfier thereof). A first-order view, on the other hand, provided the option of 'God' as a name which had an alternative to a conceptual-descriptive account. Given what has been argued in the thesis since that point, I wish to suggest the following model of meaningfulness.

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<sup>307</sup> *ELP*, p.44

- (1) Existence is to be treated as a logical predicate and a property of objects (McGinn's semantic and ontological theses).
  - a. This is correlated to the view that objects of thought and language are viable and accurately portray our use of language, the way the world is, and the relationship between them. In short, we use the concept of existence to distinguish between what is 'actual' and what we have made up. An object, therefore, is not (logically) necessarily an existent.
- (2) The distinction between existence and non-existence can be understood in terms of the thesis of representation-dependence, as follows.
  - a. What is mind-independent, exists: the individuation of an existent depends upon that existent, and the truth-values of propositions (in the general, not entity-invoking, sense) about an existent rely upon the existent itself as truth-maker - (putting aside epistemological issues about veridical perception).
  - b. What is mind-dependent (representation-dependent) does not exist: the individuation of a non-existent depends upon the mental acts of a thinker, and the truth-values of propositions (again in the general sense) about a non-existent rely upon the mental acts of language-using thinkers as truth-makers.
- (3) Stipulating 'God' as not including the use of 'G/god' as attributive, as in 'x is a god' or 'The Lord is our God' – since this would make 'God exists' a fragment – 'God exists' may consequently be viewed as a subject-predicate sentence. N.B. This does *not* stipulate that 'God' could not be associated with a concept or description.
- (4) Names are rigid designators.
  - a. They pick out (refer to) the same object across all possible worlds containing that object, and they stand for (mean) that object.
  - b. Names have properties/descriptions associated with them which do not contribute to the meaning or reference conditions of names, but are separate associated cognitive content of language-users.
- (5) Rigid designator reference is to be understood by way of the following mechanism.
  - a. Reference is fixed by an initial baptism.

- i. Initial baptism can be direct, indirect or deferred. Direct reference involves the object named being immediately presented to experience or ostended. Indirect reference involves the object named being presented at some other time. Deferred reference involves the object named never being presented.
    - ii. One object may receive more than one name; two or more separate objects may receive the same name. Reference will still be successful. In all cases what is required is a path from the namer to a unique object, and for the namer to intend a path and a unique object.
  - b. Reference is sustained by a referential practice, requiring a path from the name-user to the initial baptism.
  - c. A rigid designator fails if there is no path, or if a path picks out no object, or if a path picks out no unique object.
- (6) Rigid designator reference to non-existents is to be understood by way of the following development of the mechanism in (5).
- a. Reference is fixed by an initial baptism.
    - i. The path for the initial baptism of a non-existent is generally instantaneous, because the individuation of the non-existent relies on the mental acts of the baptiser. The exception to this is a re-naming of a fictional character, which requires a path as supplied by a referential practice (cf Gellman's Socrates example).
    - ii. Note that the one-name-several-objects and several-names-one-object cases remain, and reference is treated under the same conditions as (5) a.ii, b and c. The natures of the paths and the objects are such that fictional objects are potentially more numerous and more difficult to differentiate. This both tallies with our experience of fictional discourse and explains the McGinn/Kripke concern with coherent and consistent entities, the moderation of which I used to amend McGinn's view of modal entities.
  - b. Reference is similarly sustained by a referential practice requiring a path from the name-user to the initial baptism.
  - c. A rigid designator fails in a fictional context if there is no path of referential practice, or no object with that name, or no intention to

compose or continue a fiction through initial baptism. This makes it unlikely, but not impossible, that a fictional rigid designator could fail, and this fits with our experience of fictional discourse.

- (7) 'God' as a name can be considered to be a rigid designator.
- a. This requires a path that picks out a unique object. In accordance with the points above, this can be in the actual or fictional domains; i.e. 'God' could name an actual object or a fictional one. Therefore, 'God' as a rigidly designating name does not commit us to God actually existing.
  - b. Several options for paths are available. Those that have been considered in this thesis are:
    - i. 'The vision of Adam': Gellman's first suggestion for Anselm's path.
    - ii. 'The Creator': Gellman's second suggestion for Anselm's path.
    - iii. 'First Thinker': A path which can be extracted from Anselm's theology of language.
    - iv. 'The limit of human understanding': A second path which can be extracted from Anselm's theology of language and *Proslogion*.
  - c. The four paths noted above all have the potential to be fictional instead of actual.
    - i. The Book of Genesis could be purely mythological.
    - ii. 'The Creator' could be the result a false hypothesis about the universe (similar to McGinn's example of Vulcan as an 'entertaining of existence').
    - iii. 'The First Thinker' could be the result of a false hypothesis about the nature of human thought and language.
    - iv. 'The limit of human understanding' could be criticised for assuming a relation between mental acts and the actual world which does not obtain; the iterative process need not be actual, it could be fictional (i.e. we might be able to understand everything in the universe, but be unable to understand some feature arising from our own language, making the limit of human understanding a non-actual object).
- (8) 'God' may therefore succeed or fail as a rigid designator of an actual object; we can characterise this as follows.

- a. 'God' will succeed in picking out an actual object when a path – for instance one of those in (7)b - actually picks out a unique object.
  - b. If more than one of the paths actually picks out the same unique object, then this may be considered in the same light as, for example, the 'Hesperus = Phosphorous' case.
  - c. If none of the paths pertain, or if one or more pertain but do not pick out a unique object (or indeed any object) then the rigid designator *actually* fails.
- (9) The failure of 'God' as an actual rigid designator is likely to entail the success of 'God' as a fictional rigid designator (compare the case of 'Vulcan'). We can characterise this in the case of 'God' as follows.
- a. 'God' will succeed in picking out a fictional object when some path - for instance, one of those in (7)c - fictionally picks out a unique object. Note that the stipulative element of fictional discourse reduces or even removes the possibility that a path will not pick out a unique object, since uniqueness can be built into fiction in a way not available to actuality on account of the conditions of individuation (compare arguments pertaining to point 6).
  - b. More than one path can pick out the same object, although it should be noted that this has more to do with the individuating mental acts of the namer/name-user.
  - c. Given the dependence upon the mental acts of language users for rigid designation of fictional objects, the possibility of occurrences of the name 'God' as a failed rigid designator seems unlikely, especially in the context of an assertion such as 'God exists'. The conditions for the possibility of such an occurrence are as specified under point (6)c.
- (10) Given points (4), (7), (8) and (9), we may argue that 'God' means – stands for – the object, actual or fictional, picked out by a suitable path. This gives us a starting point for attempted accounts of how 'God' functions in language.
- a. Given points (5) and (6), we may argue that there is no reason why more than one entity may not carry the name 'God', provided that each is picked out by its own path (likewise, if it transpires that two or more paths which have given rise to a naming of an object as 'God' in fact name the same object, then this is acceptable as seen under points (5)a.2 and (6)a.2.). This gives us a basis for understanding both how different

persons can speak meaningfully of 'God', and how disagreements between different religions or theological positions can be meaningful.

- b. Given points (3) and (4)b we may argue that certain properties or descriptions may be associated with 'God' without contributing to the meaning or the reference of the name. This allows us to build upon the above in understanding the nature of debates about God's attributes, and lends credence to the aim of developing 'models' of God without first settling the matter of God's existence.

(11) Putting aside any more wide-ranging accounts of propositions incorporating 'God', which might find their foundation in the above argument, in favour of concentrating on the more essential and simple proposition 'God exists', I suggest the following account of the different possibilities comprising the meaningfulness of this proposition.

- a. 'God' could be an actual rigid designator, with a successful path picking out a unique entity. 'Exists' then predicates of this entity that it is actual.
- b. 'God' could fail as an actual rigid designator; with either no path or a path picking out no unique object, or no object at all. This entails (11)c. 'Exists' then predicates of such a non-existent entity that it is actual.
- c. 'God' could succeed as a fictional rigid designator, with a successful fictional path picking out a unique fictional entity. 'Exists' then predicates of this fictional entity that it is actual.

(12) As a conclusion to (11) the following truth values will follow.

- a. Under (11)a, 'God exists' predicates actual existence of an actual existent; it would therefore come out true.
- b. Under (11)b and (11)c, 'God exists' predicates actual existence of a fictional entity; it would therefore come out false.
- c. Note that if God actually exists, but someone states 'God exists' with the intention to participate in or begin a referential practice employing a fictional path, then technically their statement is false even if the properties of 'God' happen to be the same as God's properties. This can be understood on the same basis as Donnellan's Santa Claus example.
- d. Note also that the above gives rise to a predictable asymmetry of existence. If we talk about God, but God doesn't exist, this entails that we have been talking about a fiction (it is like a false hypothesis), whereas if we talk about God as a fiction when God actually does exist,

this does not entail that we have in fact been talking about the actual God. This again appears to account accurately for the way in which we talk about God.

### Applications and Ramifications

Clearly, the concern of this thesis has been to show how 'God exists' can be considered meaningful whether or not God actually exists – an apparently commonsensical view that has been comprehensively challenged in the last century. However, as I have tried to gesture towards in point (10), the model opens up possibilities of discussion which are more extensive than the necessarily restricted treatment that I have given for the simple (yet vital) 'God exists'.

The following three points are worth considering in light of this model of meaningfulness. First, there are distinct theological demands made by the requirement for a 'path', which stand to be met in any number of ways. Those examples which I have given here are simply those which emerge from a discussion of Anselm's *Proslogion*. This is no reason to think that a suitable study of other 'arguments for God's existence', or of revelatory and Christological theologies, should not be valuable in finding other possible paths.

Secondly, there would appear to be some application to the discussion of arguments for the existence of God, in predicating further attributes of God, and in clarifying the arguments concerning ineffability. In particular, it could serve as a mechanism providing a foundation for constructive theology regarding the arguments of 'analogy' in speaking of God.

Finally, I would suggest that this model might be a useful resource in the field of the philosophy of comparative religion, since it potentially offers an account, for example, of the way in which different religions could have different paths and names for their gods, and yet could conceivably and meaningfully be talking about the same entity. Likewise, it potentially gives an account of the way in which one religion might be 'right' and another 'wrong' - i.e. the way in which one god might be fictional and another actual.

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