4-1-2021

# Perfect Being Attacked! Jeff Speaks's THE GREATEST POSSIBLE BEING

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# PERFECT BEING ATTACKED!
## Jeff Speaks's *The Greatest Possible Being*

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Jeff Speaks's *The Greatest Possible* Being criticizes several sorts of perfect being theology. I show that his main discussions target what are really idealizations of actual perfect-being projects. I then focus on whether Speaks's idealizations match up with the real historical article. I argue that, in one key respect, they do not and that it would be uncharitable to think that one of them does. If the idealizations do not represent what perfect being thinkers have actually been doing, a question arises about how much Speaks's critique should worry those pursuing projects modelled on real historical perfect being theology.

If there is a God, we'd all like to know what He's really like. If there isn't, a lot of us would still like to know what God *would* be like. Revelation gets us only so far, and many don't trust it, or aren't sure which purported revelation to trust. Thus philosophers rush in where angels fear to tread. Since Plato, one of their chief methods—perhaps *the* chief method—has been perfect being theology (PBT). This begins from a claim that God is or would be perfect. It then reasons about what a perfect being would be like, in hope that this will tell us what God is or would be like. PBT has long faced critics, of many sorts and on many fronts. Jeff Speaks's *The Greatest Possible Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) is the most thorough and extended broadside against it in the history of philosophy. It is first-rate work, careful and rigorous. As one of Speaks's more frequent targets, let me also say that he is a model of fairness and courtesy to those he criticizes. Speaks does not delve much into PBT's history, but whether your interest is in a historical perfect being thinker, or in theological method, or in the philosophy of religion, the book will repay your attention. In what follows, I first outline Speaks's overall argument, then raise some questions.

### Types of PBT

Perfect being theologies are machines to crank out divine attributes. As Speaks sees it, each has two moving parts. One is a claim that God is the

greatest being in some range—actual, possible, or conceivable beings. "Pure" PBT adds a greatness condition. "Impure" adds a bridge principle.

Attributes that meet a greatness condition add to a thing's greatness. (Speaks does not worry about what greatness is. He in effect spots PBT what it needs to get going, and argues that even so, it doesn't work.) Meeting the condition is supposed to entail being a property of the greatest actual, possible, etc. being.[1] To see how, consider a simple greatness condition,

$$GC: (w)(x)(y)((\Phi x_w \wedge \neg \Phi y_{w*}) \rightarrow (x_w > y_{w*})).$$

An attribute F satisfies (GC) just in case any F-thing in any possible world is greater in any world in which it is F than any non-F thing is in any possible world in which it is not F. As Speaks parses being the greatest possible, nothing in any world is greater than the greatest possible being actually is.[2] But then suppose that F satisfies (GC) and the greatest possible being is not F. Then *per* (GC), some F in some world is greater than the greatest possible being actually is. So, the greatest possible is not after all the greatest possible. But it is. So, it is F. The echo of *Proslogion* 2 (hereafter P2) is intentional.

Bridge principles assert that any greatest (actual, possible, conceivable) being has every "great-making" property.[3] If it seems a live option that not all "great-makers" be compatible, one might prefer a bridge principle asserting that a greatest being has the greatest consistent set of these. Impure PBT projects differ over just what the great-makers turn out to be.[4] Satisfying some greatness condition entails satisfying some bridge principle. For one can take a bridge principle's great-makers to be just the attributes that satisfy, say, (GC). Equally, satisfying some bridge principle entails satisfying some greatness condition. For one can set up a greatness condition that only a bridge principle's great-makers can satisfy. So, the pure/impure distinction does not go very deep in at least one sense: for any set of attributes premises of one type produce, premises of the other type do or would produce it too. But still, Speaks thinks that, in principle, there are six types of perfect being project: pure and impure versions of greatest actual, possible, and conceivable being theology.

## Speaks's Overall Argument

Speaks's critique of PBT's various possible versions is detailed and intricate—too much so to reproduce here. In broad outline, though, his case is as follows. Greatest possible being theology cannot yield genuinely

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[1]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 11.
[2]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 16. Thus Speaks's parsing supposes that God is actual. Those unwilling to speak so will prefer a biconditional—that something is God if and only if P. Pages 16–17 acknowledge this, and chapter 6 formulates such principles.
[3]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 73. Speaks's term for these is "G-properties" (73–74).
[4]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 74.

new information about God. Its arguments must do something like begging the question (chapter 3). Greatest conceivable being theology (chapter 4) cannot find a sense of "conceivable" that is fit for its purpose; and it also faces a dilemma. Either there are or there are not conceivable but impossible worlds. If there are not, greatest-conceivable projects are just greatest-possible projects under another name. If there are, this generates "troublemakers," better-making attributes God conceivably has but cannot have. The trouble these make is that if God does not have them, God is not after all the greatest conceivable being. For we can conceive that God has them. If He did, He'd be better. Thus, if He does not, we can conceive of something greater than God actually is.[5] He is not "that than which no greater can be thought."

Looming beyond all this is a more general worry, the problem of hidden attributes (chapter 5). Consider, for instance, a pure perfect being project built on (GC). An attribute satisfies (GC) only if whatever has it in any world is greater in that world than anything in any world that has any attribute incompatible with it. Now, perhaps we can establish this for all incompatible attributes we know about. But there might be ones we don't know about. For all we know, some of these are better to have. This (says Speaks) should lower our confidence that the attribute really does satisfy (GC)—perhaps down to suspending judgment on that. If we suspend, though, we can't use (GC) to warrant belief that God has the attribute. PBT has run aground.

Chapter 6 argues inter alia that "greatest possible being" can't be the core of our concept of God. For all we know, Speaks reasons, logical space might be inhospitable to traditional Abrahamic theism. Perhaps it allows so little greatness that Marcus Aurelius was the greatest being that really is possible.[6] If we learned that actually, Marcus Aurelius was the greatest possible being, we would not conclude that he was God. We would conclude instead that there never was a God. So, our concept of God isn't just, or isn't at its core, the concept of a greatest possible being. For if it were, we would conclude that Aurelius had been God.

I don't think this argument succeeds. For we could wind up saying that there had been no God even if being the greatest possible being *were* at the core of our concept of God. Perhaps our concept of God has two core components, being the greatest possible being and being "great enough," or

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[5]Speaks's parsing of "greatest conceivable" also treats God as actual. Again, Speaks later offers a way around this.

[6]For earlier versions of this point, see Peter Millican, "The One Fatal Flaw in Anselm's Argument," and Graham Oppy, "Perfection, Near-Perfection, Maximality, and Anselmian Theism."

[7]On the other hand, things could well be *this* way: our concept of God just is the concept of a greatest possible being. For us, to be God is to be the greatest possible being. But we think about what such a being would be like under the assumption that logical space lets it be omnipotent, omniscient, etc. Being omniscient etc. are not part of the concept. They follow from satisfying it given auxiliary assumptions about logical space. (122 comes close to this

perhaps worship-worthy—our sense of these latter usually being inchoate. If we found that Marcus Aurelius had been the greatest possible being, even an amorphous sense of "great enough" or "worship-worthy" would tell us that Aurelius wasn't. Thus, we would conclude that there had been no God.[7] This response leaves intact another thesis chapter 6 argues for, i.e., that just satisfying the concept *the greatest possible being* is not sufficient for being God.[8] That does seem fatal to the particular PBT move chapter 6 is directed against. But many other perfect being projects do not suppose the sufficiency claim.

Chapter 7 asks whether "God" means or abbreviates "greatest possible being" or "greatest conceivable being," and whether either is a Kripkean reference-fixer. Speaks's main move is that if it means or abbreviates either, then e.g.,

My five-year-old daughter believes that God exists

and

My five-year-old daughter believes that the greatest possible being exists

cannot differ in truth-value, but in fact, they do.[9] Presumably Speaks thinks this because Daughter assents to "God exists" but not "the greatest possible being exists." But while Daughter doesn't use "the greatest possible being exists" to express her belief, that's no guarantee that she doesn't believe that the greatest possible being exists. I can't express my beliefs in words I don't understand, but sentences using those words nonetheless express propositions I believe. Suppose that

1.  "God" abbreviates "the greatest possible being."

Daughter has not learned (1). That doesn't stop her from picking up a correct reference for "God" from others and knowing a lot of truths about God. (Someone could know truths about a country called "USA," but not know what the letters abbreviate.) Given (1), "God exists" and "the greatest possible being exists" express the same proposition. Daughter doesn't know that they do, and so does not agree that the greatest possible being exists. But this is only because she does not adequately understand "God exists." Now I am not suggesting that (1) is true. My point is that Daughter's assents and dissents are not enough to establish that the

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thought.) In Aristotelian terminology, being the greatest possible is the divine essence, and omniscience etc. are (we think) proper accidents that go with that essence. In the Aurelius case, we find that satisfying our concept did not have entailments we thought it had. We conclude that nothing ever had God's proper accidents. But there is a God, we think, only if something has both God's essence and God's proper accidents.

[8]Speaks pointed this out to me in correspondence.

[9]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 141, 143.

[10]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 142–146.

propositions above really do differ in truth-value, nor then that (1) is false. Speaks also offers harder cases: an adult orthodox theist who is skeptical about modal properties, an adult theist convinced by philosophical argument that there could not be a greatest possible being.[10] But being adult, etc. are no guarantee of knowing (1).

## The Second Stage

Suppose that there is a greatness condition satisfying which entails being a property of the greatest possible being.[11] Suppose too that possible greatness really does have a maximum. Then all attributes that satisfy the condition are compatible. If F passes this test, the greatest possible being is F. If G also passes, the greatest possible being is also G. So if F and G were incompatible, the greatest being would have incompatible attributes. So it would not be a greatest *possible* being. But we've supposed, in effect, that some possible being is the greatest possible being.

On these highly favorable assumptions, all attributes that pass are compatible. However, it does not follow that all attributes that *we think* pass are compatible. For our intuitions about greatness may be inconsistent. If they are, attributes that seem to us to pass could be incompatible. They might also seem so. If this happens, PBT needs to sort things out. Either the seeming to pass or the seeming incompatibility must give. For if neither gives, the greatest supposedly possible being is not a possible being. So, if this happens—as it does—PBT needs a second stage to deal with it. In *Proslogion* 5, Anselm seems initially to assume that just being better to have (i.e., satisfying a greatness condition) suffices for an attribute to be God's. But he then shows that he knows that more needs saying. For the next chapters of the *Proslogion* set out all the compatibility issues he sees and try to handle them.

As our intuitions may not be or may not seem consistent, actual historical PBT often has a second stage. This checks the compatibility of items that seem to meet the greatness condition. If problems appear, the second stage winnows out at least one best set from these. Chapter 1–4's picture of PBT does not include a second stage.[12] It is idealized, rather than a perfect reflection of the real historical article. In effect, Speaks there assumes idealized perfect being thinkers whose greatness intuitions neither conflict nor seem to. This is okay for dialectical purposes, if the problems he raises for his idealized versions do apply to what perfect being thinkers have actually done (or tried to do). The less his idealizations are like the real historical article, though, the more doubt there is about this. I now suggest that

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[11]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 11.

[12]Chapter 5 is about the possibility of conflicts. So while he does not treat dealing with them as a second stage of PBT, Speaks is certainly aware of the issue.

[13]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 19.

Anselm's PBT is significantly unlike Speaks's idealizations. If space permitted, I could make similar points about, e.g., Duns Scotus and Leibniz.

*Seeking a Greatness Condition*

I start with greatness conditions. Speaks toys with greatest actual being theology to set up problems for greatest-possible and greatest-conceivable projects. Speaks's first greatest-actual-being greatness condition is[13]

$$2.\ (x)(y)((\Phi x \wedge \neg \Phi y) \to (x > y)).$$

If F meets (2), then whatever has F is greater than whatever lacks it. (2) won't do. For if F has no instances, F's case of (2) is true. So, if (2) is the right greatness condition, the greatest actual being has every attribute nothing has, including the ones nothing *could* have. Requiring in addition that $(\exists x)(\Phi x)$ doesn't fix this, says Speaks. For then we can conclude that omnipotence satisfies the resulting condition only if we already think that something is omnipotent. But surely if we think anything is omnipotent, and believe that God exists, we think God is omnipotent. So, the resulting condition can't give theists new information about whether God is omnipotent.[14]

   (2) has a related problem. If there is a greatest actual being, to conclude that F satisfies (2), we'd have to premise inter alia that the greatest actual being was F. So, (2) can't lead us to truths about the greatest actual being which we don't already believe on some other basis. If we can't use (2) to argue that the greatest actual being is F without premising that the greatest actual being is F, (2) makes greatest actual being theology beg the question, on my preferred account of question-begging. This problem carries over to any other extensional greatness condition for greatest actual being theology.

   Our earlier (GC) was the analogue of (2) for greatest possible being theology. It faces an analogue of the problem with (2). Just as we must premise that the greatest actual being is F to conclude that F satisfies (2), we must premise that the greatest possible being is F to conclude that F satisfies (GC).[15] Any other greatness condition trading on properties' extensions within or across possible worlds will share this problem. To conclude that an attribute satisfies the condition, we would have to premise that the greatest being has it. This is just what we want to use the condition to decide. Thus, to provide new information, PBT needs to start with something that does not concern extension across possible worlds. It could start

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[14]Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 20–21.
[15]I saw this independently. Speaks notes that Duns Scotus saw it long before (95–97). Speaks's attitude toward Scotus's argument is a bit puzzling. Speaks gives it, then offers a response he calls "correct as far as it goes" (97), then says he thinks Scotus's argument sticks because we can't have good reason to conclude that a candidate output of PBT is compatible with the divine nature (97). But Scotus's problem concerns whether we can even be in the right position to arrive at a candidate output. It's irrelevant to that whether any output we arrived at would be compatible with the divine nature. That issue only arises at a later stage of the "process."

from something we learn by conceiving beings with and without F. Or it could start from something intensional—something about properties' content. The two approaches may overlap, for we might conceive beings with and without F as a way to clarify thoughts about properties' content.

There is a reason specifically to go intensional. I state it in reference to (GC), but it carries over to any other extensional greatness condition. The following seems possible: every possible F is greater in worlds in which it is F than every possible not-F is in worlds in which it is not. So, F passes (GC). Yet this is not because they're Fs. F-ness is neutral or negative. F-ness passes (GC) because necessarily, $Fx \equiv Gx$, and G is a great-maker. Let F = being the greatest possible being and G be having the attributes which earn its greatness. Being the greatest possible being is being greater than every other possible being. Being greater entails nothing about how great that is. It's compatible with having zero or even negative overall greatness—as long as every other possible being has less. So just of itself, being the greatest possible is a neutral property. The great-maker is G, to which F is equivalent, if the maximum of possible greatness makes it into positive territory. Thus, being the greatest possible being is itself an example of this problem.

Anselm does start with the intensional. Anselm's first pass at PBT, in the *Monologion*, speaks of what is "better to be than not to be" *simpliciter*. This is how he explains the notion:

> Though a just person who is not wise seems better than a wise person who is not just, it is not better simpliciter to be not-wise . . . whatever is not-wise, simply inasmuch as it is not-wise, is less than what is wise, for everything that is not-wise would be better were it wise.[16]

"Simply inasmuch as" signals an intensional claim, one that extension over worlds doesn't capture. We might state it with "qua" or "in virtue of"; the thought seems to be that the wise are, *in virtue of being wise*, better than—something. The text gives two ideas about what. One is "whatever is not wise." The other is it itself as not non-wise. The resulting claims are not equivalent, and while the second supports the first, it does not imply it. I suspect that Anselm believes both. There is a further tangle here. No begonia is wise. This is necessarily so. Further, being a begonia is (let's say) an essential property. So, no individual which is a begonia can be wise. So, one might wonder whether indeed "everything that is not-wise would be better were it wise." But if I'm right about begonias, the conditional

> Were the begonia wise, it would be better

has an impossible antecedent, and so is true. Anselm might accept it; he does say that a parcel of lead would be better if it were a parcel of gold.[17] The tangle lies a little further on. For even in the impossible circumstance

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[16]*Monologion* 15, I, 28. My translation.

[17]*Monologion* 15. Perhaps an alchemist stayed over at Bec one night and convinced him that being gold and being lead were not essential properties.

we're discussing, the plant would not be better solely in virtue of being wise. It would be better due both to wisdom and to the underlying changes that had made it capable of that. Only things already capable of wisdom can be better entirely in virtue of being wise.

What is clear, at any rate, is that for the *Monologion*, the condition which warrants asserting that the greatest being is wise is intensional. F meets it if Fs are in virtue of being Fs better than—whatever. This is true only if F-ness is better to have than any attribute whatever that is incompatible with F-ness. If it is better to have, then what acquires it, in virtue of acquiring it, is better. Thus, Anselm supports his intensional claim about wisdom by pointing out that it "behaves" this way: whatever else is true of anything not wise, it would be better were it wise. The intensional fact implies this further, distinct fact.

Claims like "everything that is not-wise would be better were it wise" power a P2-style *reductio*. For recall P2's "ontological argument": that than which no greater can be conceived would be greater if it existed than if it did not. That's because whatever does not exist would be greater if it existed. So, *Monologion* 15 gives us an intensional condition F's meeting which lets F generate a P2-style *reductio* and so get ascribed to a perfect being. At least, the *reductio* is sound if being better in this one respect does not carry with it a greater cost in another. But if that were true, the attribute in question would not be (as *Monologion* 15 puts it) *in every respect* better to have than to lack. Thus, *Monologion* 15's intensional condition plays the role of Speaks's "greatness condition."

The *Proslogion* is clear on the relation between its characteristic *reductio* and the *Monologion's* "*simpliciter* better to be." For in *Proslogion* 5, Anselm claims that P2-style *reductio* delivers "whatever it is better to be than not to be." That is, he claims that any attribute it is simpliciter better to have, gets ascribed to the greatest being that way. The *Proslogion's* argument form just applies the "everything that is not__would be better were it __" the *Monologion* inferred from its intensional starting point.

Thus, Anselm's own "greatness condition" may be that

3.   It is simpliciter better to be F than not to be F.

To judge whether something satisfies (3), we think about what it is to be F. That's why this condition is intensional. We may get a grip on this by comparing things that have and lack F. But we compare these just in respect of being F. They're ciphers, used only to get F-ness before our minds. We do not consider whether any actual being has F or whether any particular possible being does, though we might want to assure ourselves that it is possible for something to be F. Just how we compare such beings, further, may be implicit in the *Proslogion's* reiterated "than which no greater can be thought." We *conceive* beings with and without F. Then we compare them. We make a judgment about which is best. Then, perhaps, we somehow move from the conceivable to the possible—we do not after all want to conclude that the greatest being is something impossible—and run a P2-style *reductio*.

(3) gets around problems for (GC) and other extensional greatness conditions. We needn't know whether a greatest being has F to apply (3) to F. For we can grasp what it is to be wise, powerful, etc., without supposing anything about extensions. Again, unexemplifiable attributes don't meet (3). For it is greater to be than not to be a round square only if being a round square is greater than anything incompatible with it. Round-squareness is incompatible with any exemplifiable attribute. So, it satisfies (3) only if being a round square is better than having any exemplifiable attribute. This is not so, not least because being a round square entails not existing. Another problem Speaks raises is that some greatness conditions ascribe to the greatest being such attributes as having a functioning heart.[18] Such attributes flunk (3). Only animals have functioning hearts.[19] So having a functioning heart is better than any state precluding it only if being an animal is better than being anything precluding being an animal. It is not, at least if we accept a priori methods of finding what's possible. For these tell us that across logical space there are better things to be, e.g., an archangel. By generalization, (3) will not select belonging to a surpassable or limited kind or improving attributes tailored to such a kind.

Speaks's idealizations do not fit Anselm's intensional starting point, or the "start from conceivability, move to possibility" strategy that might figure in the *Proslogion*.[20] If space permitted, I could (I think) show that Duns Scotus and Leibniz use intensional greatness conditions. It's not clear that problems raised for an extensional-condition project really find purchase against Anselm and the rest.

## Against Great-Possible Extensional Theology

One of Speaks's idealized forms of PBT reasons about a greatest possible being, uses modal operators ranging over possible worlds, and uses an extensional greatness condition, e.g., (GC). This great-possible extensional theology, or GPET, is the subject of Speaks's chapter 3.[21] If the last section is correct, GPET isn't what Anselm and other pre-Leibniz perfect being thinkers had in mind or tried to execute. If it isn't, it is not correct to idealize what they were doing as GPET, and problems for GPET don't afflict

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[18]E.g., Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, 26.

[19]Or machines wired to use a heart. This variation gets the same result, in the end.

[20]This is not the same thing as chapter 4's "epistemic" PBT—PBT employing "greatest conceivable being." The latter moves from being the greatest conceivable being and a greatness condition phrased in terms of what is conceivable to a conclusion that God has an attribute.

[21]Try not to think of "chia pet" when you read this. Go ahead. Try.

[22]Of course, other problems may, including problems Speaks raises for other idealized forms of PBT, and it is open to Speaks to argue that "the real historical thing" collapses into GPET.

[23]So e.g., *Monologion* 25.

[24]So, *Monologion* 15.

the historic projects.[22] I now argue that taking Anselm and the others as doing GPET is in one respect uncharitable. If I'm right, we ought in addition to resist taking them that way.

As Anselm and the other pre-Leibnizian friends of PBT saw it, all intrinsic attributes of a greatest possible being were essential. Its only "accidents," they thought, were extrinsic and relational.[23] Further, to Anselm et al., such accidents do not add greatness.[24] Thus for them, perfect being theology's only possible outputs are divine essential attributes. I now argue that this claim about outputs is pretty near the mark. I then show what it implies for GPET.

I start with the idea of a universe-relative accident: making universe u, knowing all about universe u, etc. These can't be outputs of perfect being theology unless there's a best possible universe. For suppose that it's good to make (know about, etc.) only universe u. Either it is or it is not better to make (know about, etc.) only a universe or set of universes better than u. Suppose that it is not. Then no particular universe-relative accident is "simply better to have" than any other. Making (knowing about, etc.) only u earns, say, 2 greatness points. So do making $u_1$, making both u and $u_1$, etc. So none of these is better to have than any attribute incompatible with it. Thus, PBT selects no such accident.

Suppose now that it *is* better to make (know about, etc.) better. Presumably this is because the universe(s) involved is (are) better. If it is, then every such attribute is bettered unless there is a best possible universe or set of universes. There is not. Every such attribute is bettered. So, none is better to have than any attribute incompatible with it. So PBT selects none of them. Universe-relative accidents can't be outputs of PBT.

I now go a step further. Many divine accidents are relational. Knowing this or that contingent truth is knowing about some world in the class of possible worlds in which that truth is true. It involves a relation to a world. Again, having made this or that is having made some universe in the class of universes in which this or that exists. And so on. If such accidents supply greatness, presumably the quantity goes up with the value of what is known, done, actualized, etc. This has no maximum. So, in this class, for every divine accident another would be better. Still other divine accidents are parasitic on such relational accidents, e.g., God's knowing that He knows this or that contingent truth. For these the no-best problem recurs.

If I look for divine accidents that might be purely intrinsic, the strongest candidates, to me, are preferences. Actually, God preferred to make a universe containing me. This preference is contingent. He might have preferred one without me instead. There is always a better contingent preference to be had, as long as there are ever-better possible things to prefer. Perhaps preferring conscious to non-conscious things can't be improved on. Perhaps this is the ideal attitude to have in this comparison. But, plausibly, this preference would not be contingent, for this reason among others. If a preference is unsurpassable, then a perfect being could not lack it unless it could fail to be perfect—and no perfect being worth its salt could.

If a preference is surpassable, it has or it lacks an unsurpassable alternative. If it has one, a perfect being would have that alternative necessarily. If it lacks one, there is always a better contingent preference to have. This reasoning generalizes. If it is on target, no contingent divine attribute can be an output of PBT. For they're all surpassable. So only divine essential attributes can be outputs of PBT.

I now ask whether GPET can select a divine essence. GPET surveys beings in possible, not conceivable, worlds. So, it can select a divine essence only if something in some possible world has the essence. But to select a divine essence, PBT must compare candidate divine essences for greatness. Consider, e.g., a divine essence N that includes necessary existence and necessary moral perfection, and a divine essence C which includes necessary existence and contingent moral perfection. PBT asks whether having N or C would be greater. In GPET, we can answer only by comparing something that has N in some possible world with something that has C in some possible world. But if both N and C are possibly exemplified, both are actually instanced, courtesy of modal ontological arguments. So, monotheists will insist that we can't compare N and C by looking at *possible* worlds. We can only compare them in *conceivable* worlds.

PBT looking at possible worlds cannot compare candidate perfect-being essences involving necessary existence by means of an extensional greatness condition. For these, we need greatest conceivable, not greatest possible being reasoning, or else something purely intensional. But then, if a perfect being would exist necessarily, as most believe, GPET cannot pick a divine essence. Nor (I have argued) can it pick divine accidents. It cannot have any outputs at all.

An idealization that won't even let the PBT machine work is extremely uncharitable. So our presumption should be that GPET does not correctly represent historical PBT. We should think otherwise only if evidence forces us to. Speaks argues that other idealized forms of PBT may collapse into GPET under pressure. I don't think they must. But due to space limits, I can't take the discussion further here. I say only that the "collapse" point should worry projects modelled on historic PBT only if these other idealizations are decent representations of historic projects.

Some historical PBT starts intensionally. Some may start by comparing conceived beings and hope to get to possibility claims one can feed into a P2-style *reductio* whose quantifiers range over possible worlds.[25] Speaks discusses neither kind of project. Nor do his idealizations represent them well. (His other main idealization applies an extensional greatness

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[25]This is what I had in mind in *God and Necessity*, though it takes putting a couple of texts together to see it.

condition to beings in conceivable rather than possible worlds. This isn't clearly the same thing as comparing conceived beings.) So, there might be a way to end-run around the problems Speaks raises for his idealizations. That is worth thinking about. But so are the problems Speaks raises, and whether they show that PBT needs the end-run. I understand PBT better for having worked through those problems. You will too.

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