AN ANSWER
ON BEHALF OF GAUNILO

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Abstract
The ontological proof is wrong because it can be used to prove
not only the existence of God, but also of imaginary entities such
as spirits of stones and trees, etc. It is faulty because it proves too
much; it can be used to prove not only the existence of God, but
also the existence of a vast number of imaginary entities to the
existence of which theists would not like to commit themselves.

Notwithstanding the many attacks on the ontological proof, it
does not seem to die. It has been claimed that the proof confuses
objective and mental existence (St. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Contra
Gentiles* I 11), that it confuses logical necessity and ontological
necessity (Immanuel Kant *Critique of Pure Reason* A593=B621),
that existence cannot be deduced by a conceptual analysis (Aquinas,
ibid.), that existence is not a real predicate (Kant, ibid. A598=B262),
and that the proof is circular. (See Yates [1986], and Davis [1976].
For a discussion of all major criticisms of the Ontological Proof see
McGill [1967].) These attacks on it have been rebutted, the
rebuttals refuted, and the refutations challenged and re-asserted in
a plethora of versions, elaborations and amendments. There are still
many scholars who defend various aspects of the proof or even take
it to be tenable (albeit with some amendments, or only in some of
its versions). (See Balaban and Avshalom [1990], Makin [1988],
Dore [1987], Plantinga [1974, ch. 10]. See also Hartshorne,
[1962[, Malcolm [1960], Cappuyns [1934], Schmitt [1933], Adams
[1971]. Adams comes closest to seeing the full force of Gaunilo's
criticism (pp. 34-38), but even he misses it (pp. 39-40).
    In this paper, I shall try to refute the ontological proof in
another way: I shall claim that it is wrong because it can be used to

prove not only the existence of God, but also of imaginary entities such as the perfect spirits of Wu-Shu-Lu, spirits of stones and trees, etc. In other words, the ontological proof is faulty because it proves too much; it can be used to prove not only the existence of God, but also the existence of a vast number of imaginary entities and creatures to the existence of which theists would not like to commit themselves.

In one respect, this refutation is inferior to others: unlike other criticisms, it does not explain *why* the ontological proof is wrong, but simply shows that it is. However, this characteristic also makes it advantageous to other challenges: whereas other challenges mostly rely on metaphysical principles, and hence are more open to disagreement, this challenge is more simple and technical, and thus more decisive. At the end of this paper the question of *why* the ontological proof is wrong will still remain open, but I hope that the question of *whether* it is will be taken to be closed.

To refute the ontological proof in this way I revive an old criticism which has traditionally been supposed, without justification in my opinion, to be weak. Gaunilo's criticism, already made during Anselm's lifetime, has usually either been treated lightly or altogether neglected. It has traditionally been viewed as an unsuccessful effort to disprove the ontological proof. I shall try to show in this paper that treating it seriously reveals it as a most interesting and powerful refutation of the ontological proof. True, in its present form Gaunilo's refutation is unsuccessful; but with small amendments, it does show that the ontological proof is faulty in all its versions. I aim in this paper, then, both to rehabilitate Gaunilo's criticism and to use it to disprove the ontological proof.

In section 1 I demonstrate how Gaunilo's type of criticism applies to Anselm's first version of the ontological proof, i.e. how this criticism shows that the proof can be used to prove not only the existence of God, but also that of other entities. In section 2 I show that this is true not only with respect to Anselm's first version of the ontological proof but also with respect to other, later versions. In section 3 I discuss various objections to Gaunilo's type of criticism and show that none of them are successful. In section 4 I discuss two stronger objections, and show that, although they may necessitate a slight modification of the actual examples Gaunilo used, his general criticism—that the ontological proof is unacceptable since it proves too much—is still correct.

In order that the discussion in this paper should make sense, I assume the following presuppositions:

(a) Existence is indeed a predicate.

(b) Existence is a kind of perfection.

(c) The debate between defenders and attackers of the proof is related to a theistic effort to prove to atheists, on the basis of reason alone and without appealing to any theological presuppositions, that God exists. Thus, defenders and attackers alike may base their arguments on reason alone, without appealing to any theological or metaphysical presuppositions which normally would not be accepted by atheists.

I

Anselm's proof runs as follows (based on Charlesworth, 1965, p. 117):

(1) That-than-which-nothing-more-perfect-can-be-thought can be thought (and thus can exist in the mind). (In my presentation of the different formulations of the ontological proofs in this paper I replace 'greater' (*maius*) and 'better' with 'more perfect'; 'greatest' and 'best' with 'most perfect'; etc. 'Perfect' seems to me to fit Anselm's and other authors' intention and to be more understandable to the modern reader in this context. The replacement does not change in any way the nature or strength of the different versions of the ontological proof nor of Gaunilo's criticism of it.)

(2) That-than-which-nothing-more-perfect-can-be-thought can be thought to exist not only in the mind, but also outside it (i.e. have objective existence).

(3) Whatever exists both in the mind and outside it (i.e. has both existence in the mind and objective existence) is more perfect than what exists only in the mind.

(4) That-than-which-nothing-more-perfect-can-be-thought must exist therefore not only in the mind, but also outside it (i.e. must also have objective existence). QED

That-than-which-nothing-more-perfect-can-be-thought must also exist outside the mind since if it existed only in the mind it would not be that-than-which-nothing-more-perfect-can-be-thought. It would be that-than-which-*something*-more-perfect-*can*-be-thought; it would be possible to think, in such a case, of

something more perfect than it, namely a thing which exists *both* in the mind and outside it.

But this very method of proof can also be used to prove the existence of the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought:

(1') The-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought can be thought (and thus can exist in the mind).

(2') The-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought can be thought to exist not only in the mind, but also outside it (i.e. have objective existence).

(3) Whatever exists both in the mind and outside it (i.e. has both existence in the mind and objective existence) is more perfect than what exists only in the mind.

(4') The-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought must exist therefore not only in the mind, but also outside it (i.e. must also have objective existence). QED

Just as before, then, the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought must exist not only in the mind but also outside it (i.e. must also have objective existence) since if it existed in the mind only it would not be the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought. It would be a-unicorn-than-which-a-more-perfect-unicorn-*can*-be-thought; it would be possible to think, in such a case, of a unicorn more perfect than it, namely a unicorn which exists *both* in the mind and outside it.

Put differently, since a unicorn which exists not only in the mind but also outside it is more perfect than a unicorn that exists only in the mind, the most perfect unicorn, or, to be more precise, the-unicorn-than-which-*no*-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought, must exist both in the mind and outside it. QED.

In this way one can also prove the existence of the-island-than-which-no-more-perfect-island-can-be-thought (as indeed Gaunilo himself showed), the existence of the-elf-than-which-no-more-perfect-elf-can-be-thought, etc. But this means that one can also prove that there is at least one existing unicorn, elf, etc. The ontological proof is wrong, then, because it proves too much. It does not prove only the existence of God, but also the existence of many other things to which the theist would not like to be committed. Gaunilo seems to be right and the ontological proof must be rejected.

II

It may be claimed, however, that Gaunilo's type of criticism can be successfully applied only to Anselm's first formulation of the ontological proof, and not to others; later versions of the proof are immune to the weakness from which Anselm's first formulation suffers. I shall therefore now inspect two other versions of the ontological proof and show that, like Anselm's first one, they too prove not only the existence of God but also that of other entities.

Karl Barth was the first to show that after the famous proof of *Proslogion* II (discussed in the previous section) Anselm presents another version in *Proslogion* III. (Barth, however, does not think that any of these proofs are supposed to be rational means for proving the existence of God to the atheist and, hence, is not interested in assessing their rationality at all. See Barth [1960], pp. 132-61.) This version has been taken to be immune to Gaunilo's type of criticism (Adams [1971] 34-40). It runs as follows (based on Charlesworth [1965] 119):

(5) The notion of that which cannot be thought not to exist can be understood in the mind.

(6) That which cannot be thought not to exist is more perfect than that which can be thought not to exist.

(7) That-than-which-nothing-more-perfect-can-be-thought, then, cannot be thought not to exist. QED.

That-than-which-nothing-more-perfect-can-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist since if it *could* be thought not to exist there would be (by [6]) something more perfect than it, namely that which *cannot* be thought not to exist. But if it is that-than-which-*nothing-more-perfect*-can-be-thought, it must be the more perfect of the two possibilities, namely that which *cannot* be thought not to exist.

But again this very method of proof can also be used to prove the existence of the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought. Assumptions (5) and (6) need not be altered at all. Only (7) has to be replaced by:

(7') The-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought, then, cannot be thought not to exist. QED.

Just as before, the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist since if it *could*

be thought not to exist there would be (by [6]) a unicorn more perfect than it, namely the unicorn which *cannot* be thought not to exist. But if it *is* the-unicorn-than-which-*no-more-perfect-unicorn-*can-be-thought, it must be the more perfect of the two possibilities, namely the unicorn which *cannot* be thought not to exist.

This version of the ontological proof, then, must also be rejected since it proves too much. It too can be used to prove not only that that-than-which-nothing-more-perfect-can-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist, but also that the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought cannot be thought not to exist. In both cases, if they *could* be thought not to exist, they would not be that-than-which-*nothing-more-perfect-*can-be-thought or the-unicorn-than-which-*no-more-perfect-unicorn-*can-be-thought, since there could respectively be something, or a unicorn, more perfect than they, namely a thing, or unicorn, that *could not* be thought not to exist. Suppositions (5) and (6) apply equally to them both.

Similarly, it may be claimed that Descartes' version of the proof is immune to the weakness from which the two previous versions suffer. Descartes' version of the ontological proof runs as follows (based on Descartes' Fifth Meditation [1984] Vol. II, 45-49 (= pp. 65-71 in Vol. VII of the Adam and Tannery Edition):

(8) The idea of God, or a supremely-perfect-being, can be thought in the mind (or can exist in the mind).

(9) God, or a supremely-perfect-being, has all perfections.

(10) (Objective) existence is a perfection.

(11) God, or the supremely-perfect-being, has the characteristic of objective existence (or: God, or the supremely-perfect-being, objectively exists). QED.

But again this very method of proof can also be used to prove the existence of the most perfect unicorn:

(8') The idea of the-most-perfect-unicorn can be thought in the mind (or can exist in the mind).

(9') The-most-perfect-unicorn has all the perfections it, as the-most-perfect-unicorn, can have.

(10) (Objective) existence is a perfection.

(11') The-most-perfect-unicorn has the characteristic of objective existence (or: the-most-perfect-unicorn objectively exists). QED.

Just as before, the-most-perfect-unicorn must exist not only in the mind but also objectively since if it did not, it would not be the-*most*-perfect-unicorn; there could be another unicorn, more perfect than it, namely the unicorn which exists both in the mind *and* objectively. Thus, Gaunilo seems to be right as regards these versions of the ontological proof as well. They too can be used to prove not only the existence of God, but also that of many other entities.

<center>III</center>

So far I have discussed three versions of the ontological proof and have shown that they can all be used to prove the existence of other entities besides God. Of course, there have also been other versions of the ontological proof in the history of philosophy. (For a history of the ontological proof see Henrich [1960] and Hartt [1940].) But they do not differ much, either in essence or in phrasing, from the three I have discussed, and I shall not trouble the reader by showing how each and every one of them can be used to prove also the existence of many different entities. Instead, I shall now consider some objections that can be raised against the legitimacy of using the ontological proof, in its different versions, to prove the existence of non-Divine entities. I shall concentrate mostly on objections to the way the three versions of the ontological proof discussed above were used to prove the existence of non-Divine entities, but these objections could be easily extrapolated to other versions which were not specifically discussed.

Criticism (i): It is difficult to conceive what exactly would be the nature of the-most-perfect-unicorn (or the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought) or of the most-perfect-island (or the-island-than-which-no-more-perfect-island-can-be-thought). (To make the reading easier, I shall refer henceforth in this section only to the Cartesian formula of the-most-perfect-x, but what I say is true also of the two Anselmian ones.) Would the-most-perfect-unicorn have a long, or short, or sharp, or blunt horn? Will it have fur? What size would it be (it must have *some* size). Similarly, what would be the size of the perfect island? What kind of vegetation would grow on it? Since these concepts are so unclear, it may be claimed, the whole type of proof suggested here should be dropped.

Reply: Defenders of the ontological proof must show not only that the proof of the existence of the-most-perfect-unicorn or the most-perfect-island is open to criticisms, but that the proof of the existence of the-most-perfect-being is not open to the same criticisms. However, they do not seem to have done this. Although the notions of the-most-perfect-unicorn and the-most-perfect-island are unclear, they do not seem any more unclear than the notion of the-most-perfect-being.

Defenders of the ontological proof may answer that the notion of the-most-perfect-being is easier to understand than those of the-most-perfect-unicorn or the-most-perfect-island since the former is more general and abstract. But these characteristics can make the notion of the-most-perfect-being also more nebulous and vague. We know more or less what the characteristics of the-most-perfect-unicorn and the-most-perfect-island would be. The most-perfect-unicorn would probably look like a white horse with a long thin horn on its forehead, would exist (or, according to Anselm's second version of the proof, would exist necessarily), and would probably also be very big, beautiful, intelligent, good, strong, and fast. Likewise, the-most-perfect-island would exist (or, according to Anselm's second version of the proof, would exist necessarily), and would be big, beautiful, peaceful, with an excellent climate, a lot of nourishing vegetation, non-dangerous wildlife, and friendly inhabitants. But what would be the characteristics of the-most-perfect-being?

It may be answered that since God, or the-most-perfect-being, must be perfect in all ways, He must have all perfections. Thus, He would be omnibenevolent, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, etc. However, it is not clear that these characteristics are clearer than those of the-most-perfect-unicorn or the-most-perfect-island. Moreover, whereas the characteristics of the latter notions do not involve us in paradoxes, the characteristics of the former one do. If God is omnibenevolent, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, etc., why is there evil and injustice in the world? Can God create a stone He cannot lift? If God knows everything how can there be freedom of will? If there is no freedom of will how can there be justice? If God is present everywhere is he also present in my evil deed? If God has *all* perfections, he must have contradictory ones (e.g., be at the same time the largest and the smallest). How is that possible?

The logic of perfection is in general difficult to understand. But there is no reason to think that perfection in general is easier to understand than perfection of a certain kind.

Of course, it may still be claimed by defenders of the ontological proof that the notion of the-most-perfect-being, or God, is clearer than that of the-most-perfect-unicorn or the-most-perfect-island, since we are more used to the former notion. However, the disagreement does not concern psychological ease, which may be influenced by acquaintance, but conceptual clarity. Although we may be more used to the notion of God than to the notions of the most-perfect-unicorn or the-most-perfect-island, the former may be as confused as the latter, or even more confused.

Criticism (ii): Anselm's second argument can be phrased as discussing necessary existence (which would be another formulation of the 'cannot be thought not to exist'). But whereas the descriptions of 'existing island' (or 'the-existing-island-than-which-no-more-perfect-island-can-be-thought') and 'existing unicorn' (or 'the-existing-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought') are consistent and do make sense, those of the 'necessarily existing island' (or 'the-necessarily-existing-island-than-which-no-more-perfect-island-can-be-thought') and the 'necessarily existing unicorn' (or 'the-existing-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-unicorn-can-be-thought') do not. It is difficult to conceive how and why islands and unicorns will have necessary existence. (Adams [1971] 39-40)

Reply: This objection is no more than a variation on objection (i) above and, hence, the answer will also be a variation of the answer to objection (i). It is true that it is somewhat difficult to understand what would be the necessary existence of a perfect unicorn or a perfect island. It would probably mean that the perfect unicorn or the perfect island not only exists, but cannot not exist. But I do not see why the description of 'the necessarily existing being' or 'the necessarily existing perfect being' (i.e. a being in general which not only exist, but cannot not exist) is more consistent or makes more sense than that of 'the necessarily existing island' (or 'the island which cannot not exist') or of 'the necessarily existing unicorn' (or 'the unicorn which cannot not exist').

Criticism (iii): The-most-perfect-island (or the-island-than-which-no-more-perfect-island-can-be-thought) and the-most-per-

fect-unicorn (or the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect--unicorn-can-be-thought) are impossible notions, since islands and unicorns are by definition limited things, whereas perfection is unlimited. (St. Bonaventure, *De Mysterio Trinitatis* Q. I, a 1, s.o. 6 [*Opera Omnia* {Quaracchi, 1882-1902} Vol. V, p. 50].)

Reply: The-island-than-which-no-more-perfect-*island*-can-be-thought or the-most-perfect-*island,* and the-unicorn-than-which-no-more-perfect-*unicorn*-can-be-thought or the-most-perfect-*unicorn,* are not taken in the proof to be perfect in all respects. They are taken only to be the most perfect of their *kind.* Their kind, of course, has limitations; but within that kind they are the most perfect. In other words, nothing of that kind is more perfect than they are. Thus, the fact that they are limited in some ways—as are all beings of their kind—does not contradict their perfection within that kind.

Criticism (iv): Descartes' ontological proof can be presented differently than was done above, so that it cannot be used to prove the existence of the-most-perfect-island and the-most-perfect-unicorn. It can be presented as simply relying on the fact that God is that Being which has existence as part of His essence, just as a triangle is that geometrical form that has three vertices as part of its essence. But the-most-perfect-island or the-most-perfect-unicorn do not have existence as part of their essence (God is the only being which has existence as part of His essence). Hence, this version of the ontological proof cannot be used to prove also the existence of the-most-perfect-island or the-most-perfect-unicorn.

Reply: The analysis of the nature of the-most-perfect-unicorn and the-most-perfect-island shows that these entities, too, contain existence as part of their essence. As shown above, once it is accepted that existence is a predicate and a perfection, any perfect, or most-perfect, thing of its kind will have existence as part of its essence, since without existence it would not be the most perfect thing of its kind. Hence, the-most-perfect-island and the-most-perfect-unicorn have existence as part of their essence just as a triangle has three points as part of its essence, and even this presentation of Descartes' ontological proof can be used also to prove their existence.

Criticism (v): It is wrong to think that the natures of the-most-perfect-unicorn and the-most-perfect-island include existence, since the natures of normal, imperfect unicorns and islands do not

include existence. Seeing these entities as perfect involves seeing all
their characteristics as perfect, but not adding new ones. Therefore,
the-most-perfect-unicorn and the-most-perfect-island would be
perfectly beautiful, pleasant, etc. unicorns and islands, but would
not exist. On the other hand, since God's nature is to have *all*
perfections and characteristics, He will necessarily also have the
characteristic of existence.

Reply: The objection is based on the principle that 'seeing
entities as perfect involves seeing all their characteristics as perfect,
but not adding new ones'. However, I know of no argument that
justifies this principle. Until such an argument is presented, there is
no reason for accepting it. Moreover, it seems that this principle is
not observed even in the ontological proof of the existence of God.
The difference between a non-perfect-being (or the-non-most-
perfect-being) and the-most-perfect-being is not only in the degree
of perfection of the characteristics of the-most-perfect-being, but
also in the fact that the-most-perfect-being has *all* characteristics. In
other words, both Anselm and Descartes admit that non-perfect
beings do not necessarily have the characteristic (or predicate) of
existence. But this means that seeing beings as perfect involves not
only seeing their previous characteristics as perfect, but also *adding*
a new characteristic—that of being.

Thus, the perfect unicorn, the perfect island and the perfect
being-in-general—i.e. God—all exist not because of the natures of
unicorns, islands and imperfect beings-in-general, but because of
the nature of perfection. Since perfection involves existence, or, put
differently, since inexistence is an imperfection, the perfect unicorn,
perfect island and perfect being-in-general must exist. Otherwise,
they would be an imperfect unicorn, an imperfect island and an
imperfect being-in-general.

But it may still be claimed that since the members of the class
of unicorns or islands do not normally have existence as one of their
characteristics, there is no reason to believe that the most perfect of
them will have existence as one of its characteristics either.

Reply: It is true that in the notion of the perfect unicorn or the
perfect island existence is not deduced from the nature of the
unicorn or the island, but from the nature of perfection. But it is not
clear how this is an argument against the proof of the existence of
the perfect unicorn or island. Moreover, the same is true, again, for

the proof for the existence of God. The members of the class of
things in general do not normally have existence as one of their
qualities. The reason for believing that the most perfect of them,
the-most-perfect-being, does have existence as one of His qualities,
is not deduced from the fact that it is a being, but from the fact that
it is perfect. As regards all these notions, then, only once it is
accepted that existence is a kind of *perfection* do the concepts of the-
most-perfect-unicorn-which-does-not-exist, the-most-perfect-is-
land-which-does-not-exist, and the-most-perfect-being-which-does-
not-exist, become impossible, contradictory concepts.

Criticism (vi): The ontological proof of the existence of God
has been formalized several times and shown to be valid. (E.g. by
Adams [1971], Plantinga [1974] Ch. 10, and Hartshorne [1962]
Ch. 2) It may be objected that a formalization of the ontological
proofs for the existence of the perfect unicorn or perfect island will
show, on the contrary, that they are not valid.

Reply: I shall not present here a formalization of the ontological
proof of the existence of the perfect unicorn or perfect island.
However, inspection of the formalizations of the ontological proof
of the existence of God does not suggest that they are essentially
unique to God's existence. On the contrary, it seems that with a few,
inessential changes they can also yield successful, valid formaliza-
tions of the ontological proofs for the existence of the perfect
unicorn or island.

Criticism (vii): If the existence of the perfect unicorn or perfect
island is deduced from the concepts of such objects, there could have
not been a time when they did not exist. But according to Christian
theology they are created things, i.e. there was a time when they did
not exist. Thus, their existence cannot be proved from the concepts
of these objects. This objection is even stronger when the existence
of God is proven according to *Proslogion* III, which is supposed to
endow the perfect unicorn or the perfect island with *necessary*
existence. If they have necessary existence, they could not not-exist
at any point. But this contradicts their nature as created beings.

Reply: As mentioned above, the question whether the onto-
logical proof can prove the existence of the perfect unicorn or island
is understood here as part of a larger, rational debate between a theist
and an atheist, in which the theist tries to prove to the atheist on the
basis of reason only and without appealing to any theological

presuppositions that God exists. Thus, as far as the atheist is concerned, the hypothesis that the entities called 'the perfect island' and 'the perfect unicorn' always existed is as plausible or implausible as the hypothesis that the entity called 'God' always existed. Moreover, the premise that God created the world cannot be assumed when the existence of God Himself is the issue.

Criticism (viii): According to the metaphysical presuppositions of some systems (e.g. Spinoza's, Hegel's), the ontological proof cannot be applied to perfect unicorns or perfect islands. In Spinoza's system, for example, there is only one entity which causes itself—namely God—and only it has existence as part of its essence (*Ethics* I def. 1 and cor. to prop. 14). Thus, Spinoza's system admits the ontological proof of the existence of God but excludes the ontological proof of the existence of the perfect unicorn and the perfect island. The claim that the ontological proof can also be used to prove the existence of the perfect unicorn or island does not apply in Spinoza's system.

Reply: Defenders of the proof cannot use Spinoza's, Hegel's, or any other philosopher's metaphysical presuppositions in order to prove the existence of God without arguing for them. Until this is done successfully, the ontological proofs of the existence of the perfect island and the perfect unicorn are not excluded.

IV

None of the objections discussed up to this point have successfully refuted Gaunilo's type of criticism. The next two objections, however, may suggest that the very example of a perfect entity he used—viz. the perfect island—was not a good one. Thus, Gaunilo's actual, historical criticism may be refuted. However, his *type* of criticism is not refuted; with a slight amendment of the example he uses, his criticism of the ontological proof still holds.

Criticism (ix): Islands and unicorns are tangible things. Hence, it should be possible to land on the perfect island or stroke the perfect unicorn one day. Since this has never happened, the plausibility of the existence of these entities is diminished. On the other hand, since God is in principle intangible, the fact that He has never been seen or touched is no proof against His existence. Hence, the argument for the existence of God is stronger than the argument for

the existence of the perfect unicorn or island. (Perhaps this is what Anselm meant when he answered Gaunilo's point by asking him to show him the perfect island if he can; see Charlesworth [1965] 175.)

Reply: Even if the criticism is accepted here, the claim that the ontological proof proves too much does not have to be dropped; it only has to be slightly altered. Attackers of the proof may no longer claim that the ontological proof can also be used to prove the existence of *all* perfect beings, but only to prove the existence of all *intangible* perfect beings. Thus, it cannot be used to prove the existence of the perfect island or the perfect unicorn, but it can be used to prove the existence of entities such as the perfect spirits of Wu-Shu-Lu (whatever that may be) who guard the house, the perfect spirits of stones and trees, all of Plato's ideas, etc. The ontological proof still proves too much.

Criticism (x): Not the existence of all (even intangible) things can be proven by the ontological proof, but only good ones. An evil spirit would be more perfect not when it exists, but when it does not exist, just as, for example, a perfect murderer (which, of course, is a tangible thing) will not be an existing murderer but a non-existing one.

Reply: This is a correct criticism which further limits the entities whose existence can be proven by using the ontological proof. Not only should these entities be intangible, they should also be good. Thus, the ontological proof cannot be used to prove the existence of all perfect spirits of Wu-Shu-Lu, but only all perfect good spirits of Wu-Shu-Lu, only perfect good spirits of stones and trees, etc. But even with this limitation, there is still an infinite number of entities the existence of which the ontological proof can be used to prove. (Think of the perfect good spirits of Wu-Shu-Mu, the perfect good spirits of Wu-Shu-Nu, etc.) The ontological proof still proves too much.

Strictly speaking, then, Gaunilo's argument indeed fails. But it fails only technically. Essentially, it succeeds. With some amendments, it shows that even if the ontological proof cannot be used to prove the existence (or necessary existence) of everything whatsoever, it can be used to prove the existence of a vast number of things, to which defenders of the proof would not like to be committed. Thus, although Gaunilo's point has been frequently treated lightly, he was actually right. The ontological proof is wrong because it proves too much.

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