

# God and Universal Value Commensurability

Yujin Nagasawa

Department of Philosophy, University of Birmingham, UK

Y.Nagasawa@bham.ac.uk

A first draft. Please do not quote.

## 1. Introduction

In the eleventh century Anselm introduced a concept of God that is now widely accepted among Judaeo-Christian-Islamic theists: that than which no greater can be thought.<sup>1</sup> Anselm presented primarily two applications of this concept: (i) We can construct the ontological argument for the existence of God from this concept; (ii) we can derive from this concept the proposition that God has such individual attributes as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. Over the last nine hundred years philosophers have concentrated on these applications of the Anselmian concept of God. As to (i), they have tried to examine the cogency of the ontological argument. Some have attempted, in particular, to construct objections to the argument and some have tried to defend or improve on it. As to (ii), philosophers have tried to analyse the concepts of omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. Some have tried, in particular, to provide proper formulations of these attributes and some have tried to show the incoherence of and inconsistency between these attributes. Ironically, however, philosophers have rarely examined in detail the Anselmian concept of God itself. In exactly what sense is God that than which no greater can be thought?

The most intuitive response to this question is to say that God is that than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in the ‘great chain of being’, a

---

<sup>1</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, in M.J. Charlesworth (ed), *St. Anselm's Proslogion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 102-155.

universal linear ranking of all possible beings. I call the model of the Anselmian concept of God that is based on this view the ‘Linear Model’. It is widely agreed among contemporary philosophers, however, that the Linear Model is not tenable because, according to them, the idea of the great chain of being is untenable. They think that it does not make sense to assume that there can be a single objective scale of value that can rank *all* possible beings. In this paper, therefore, I explore alternatives to the Linear Model by systematically analysing the divine attributes. I argue that what I call the ‘Extended Radial model’ is a successful alternative that characterises correctly the Anselmian concept of God, even though the model faces a powerful objection. I argue further that the Linear Model should be taken seriously as a backup option for Anselmian theists because (i) it is not vulnerable to the objection that the Extended Radial model faces and (ii) contrary to what many philosophers think, there is no knock-down objection to the model.

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

## **2. The Linear Model**

Before starting our discussion we review several assumptions. First, I assume in the following that ‘that than which no greater can be thought’ is equivalent to ‘the being than which no greater can be thought’. Anselm uses the phrase ‘that than which no greater can be thought’ in his *Proslogion*, but the term ‘*the* being than which no greater can be thought’ is more convenient because it excludes polytheism, which Anselmian theists reject. Second, I assume that the claim that God is the being than which no greater can be thought entails that He is the being than which no greater is possible or that He is the greatest possible being. This is indeed what Anselm has in mind. Finally, I use the terms in the following pairs interchangeably: (i) property/attribute; (ii) greater/superior; (iii) worse/inferior. This is not very elegant but it is unavoidable because the relevant literature mixes up the terms in each pair.

The property of being the being than which no greater can be thought is obviously a relational property. In order for God to retain this property He needs to have a certain relationship between Himself and all other possible beings. What sort of relationship could that be? The most straightforward model, the Linear Model, says that God occupies the top link in the ‘great chain of being’. The great chain of being is a ranking of all beings, both actual and possible, established in accordance with a single objective scale of value.<sup>2</sup> The ranking tells us whether  $x$  is as great as  $y$ , greater than  $y$ , or less great than  $y$ . (It is not necessary to have ‘as great as’ relations among distinct beings in order to construct the great chain of being. However, this relation is necessary at least to preserve identity relations such as  $x$  is as great as  $x$ .) According to this model, God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in the great chain of being while all other possible beings fall elsewhere on the chain. The Linear Model is, using Thomas V. Morris’s terminology, committed to ‘universal value commensurability’<sup>3</sup>:

*Universal value commensurability:* Every possible being is value commensurable. According to universal value commensurability, we can compare the greatness of any two beings and locate them on the great chain of being. If it is possible that the great chain of being exists, it is easy to show that God is the being than which no greater can be

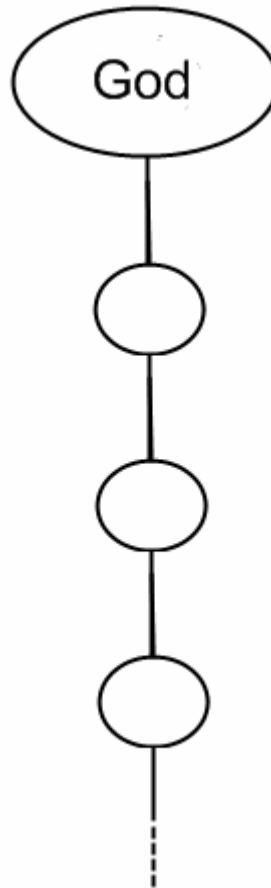
---

<sup>2</sup> This is a philosophical formulation of the great chain of being. A typical medieval formulation of the great chain of being includes only actual beings, not non-existent beings. So, starting with God, it contains such beings as angels, humans, animals and non-sentient beings. An interesting question concerning the great chain of being is whether or not it includes types of beings or tokens of beings. For example, should the great chain include tokens such as John F. Kennedy and Lassie or should it only include types such as human being and dog? For the history of the great chain of being see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas V. Morris, ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm’, *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 1 (1984), pp. 177-187, repr. in *Anselmian Explorations* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), pp. 10-25, pp. 15-16 (page references to reprinting).

thought. We need only to look at the chain and confirm that God occupies the top link. The fact that God occupies the top link guarantees that, whichever being one picks, God is greater than that being (unless we pick God Himself). The Linear Model can be formulated as follows:

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



**Figure 1**

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

of perfection'.<sup>4</sup> Morris, to take another example, claims that universal value commensurability is 'a position which is clearly false'.<sup>5</sup> He rejects the possibility of the great chain by saying, 'It just makes no sense to ask which is of greater intrinsic value, an aardvark or an escalator'.<sup>6</sup> In other words, they reject the Linear Model because it is based on universal value commensurability.

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

### **3. The Radial model**

Consider, for the sake of simplicity, that there are only three possible beings: an aardvark, an escalator and God. How can God be the greatest possible being among them with the assumption that an aardvark and an escalator are not value commensurable? Under this circumstance God can be the greatest possible being only if God is value commensurable with an aardvark and an escalator individually and independently. That is, while an aardvark is value commensurable with God and an escalator is value commensurable with God, these relations are independent of one another. This example seems to suggest that once universal value commensurability is given up the following has to be true in order for God to be the being than which no greater can be thought:

*Divine value commensurability:* Every possible being is value commensurable with God.

---

<sup>4</sup> C.D. Broad, 'Arguments for the Existence of God', *Journal of Theological Studies*, Vol. 40 (1939), pp.16-30; pp. 156-67, repr. in his *Religion, Philosophy and Psychological Research: Selected Essays* (London: Routledge, 1953), pp. 175-201 (page references to reprinting), at p. 177.

<sup>5</sup> Morris, 'The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm', p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Morris, 'The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm', p. 17.

In fact this is what Morris seems to endorse even though he does not explicate it in detail.<sup>7</sup> The idea is that while such beings as an aardvark and an escalator might not be value commensurable with one another, each of them is value commensurable with God. Moreover, God is greater than any other possible beings, including an aardvark and an escalator. Since God is greater than all other possible beings, we can maintain that He is the being than which no greater can be thought. Universal value commensurability entails divine value commensurability but not *vice versa*.

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

*Universal non-divine value incommensurability:* No non-divine possible being is value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being.<sup>8</sup>

By non-divine possible beings I mean all possible beings except God. If universal non-divine value incommensurability is correct, then, for example, an aardvark is incommensurable with any other non-divine possible being, such as an escalator, a human being or a sheep, even though it is value commensurable with God and itself. This means that for each possible being there is one ‘local chain of being’ consisting entirely of that being and God. For example, there is a chain that contains only God and an aardvark and there is another chain that contains only God and an escalator. However, there is no chain that contains more than one non-divine possible being. Let us call this model entailed by the conjunction of divine value commensurability and universal non-divine value incommensurability the ‘Radial model’.

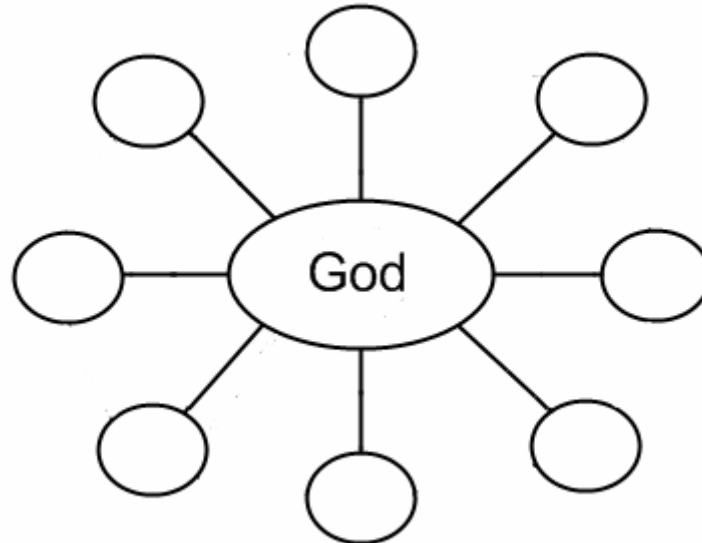
*The Radial model:* God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of being greater than each of all non-divine possible beings, although no

---

<sup>7</sup> Morris, ‘The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Anselm’, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Even if universal non-divine value incommensurability is true, any non-divine possible being is commensurable with one non-divine possible being, namely the non-divine possible being itself. That is why the phrase ‘any other’ is crucial in the formulation of universal non-divine value incommensurability.

non-divine possible being is value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being (Figure 2).



**Figure 2**

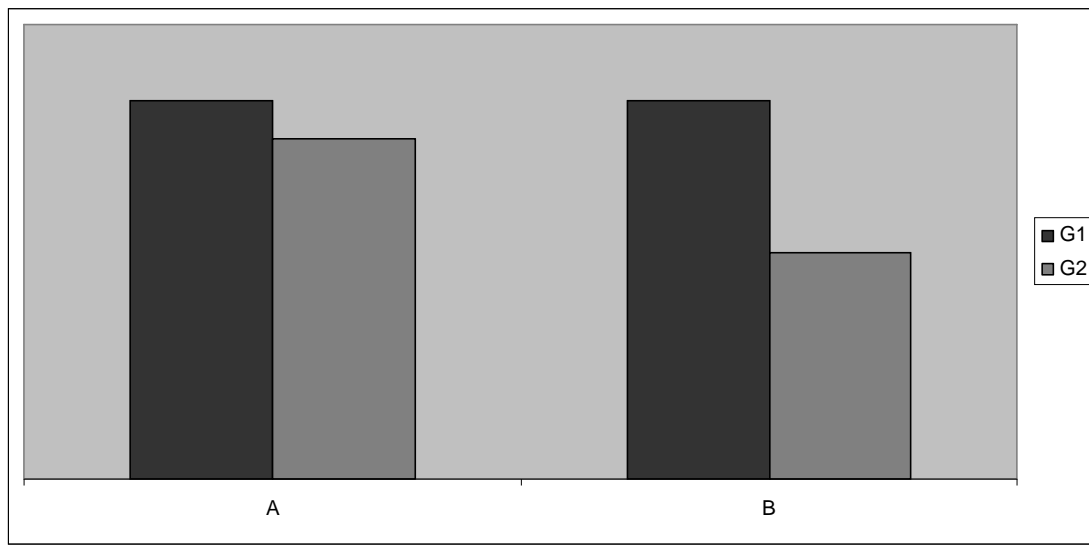
The Radial model is, however, implausible because universal non-divine value incommensurability is implausible. In order to see this, and in order to advance the discussion, we need to introduce and discuss in detail several key terms.

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

For example, being powerful is, according to most philosophers, a great-making property because the property of being powerful makes a person who possesses it greater than otherwise.

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

For example: Suppose that being  $A$  has only two great-making properties  $G1$  and  $G2$  and another being  $B$  also has only the same great-making properties  $G1$  and  $G2$ . Regardless of the intensity of each of the great-making properties that these beings have,  $A$  and  $B$  are extensively equal (Figure 3).



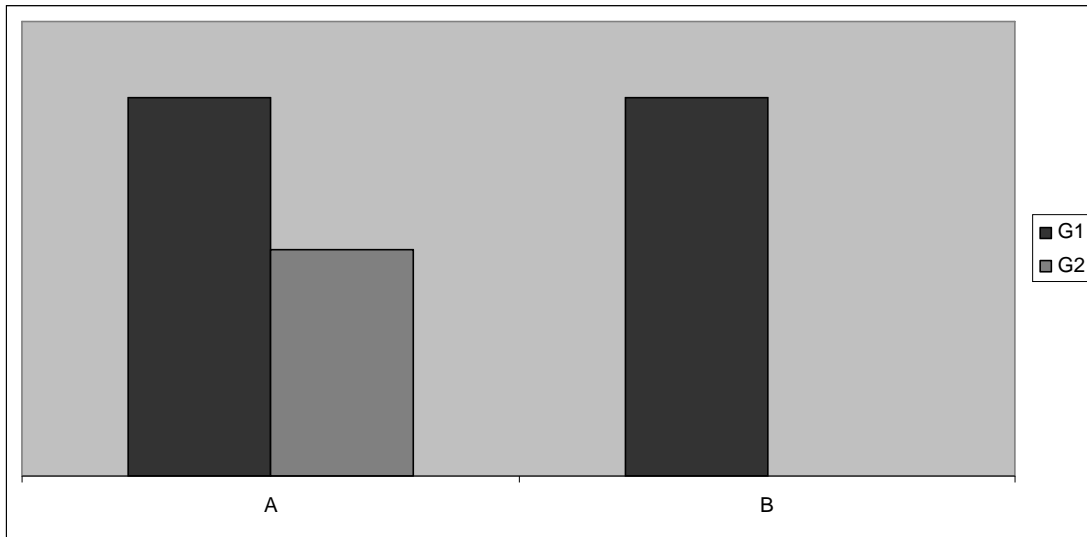
**Figure 3**

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

*Extensive superiority*: *x* is extensively superior to *y* if and only if both of the following are true: (i) *x* has all the great-making properties that *y* has; (ii) *x* has some great-making properties that *y* does not have.<sup>9</sup>

For example: Suppose that *A* has only two great-making properties *G1* and *G2* while *B* has only one great-making property *G1*. Regardless of the intensity of each of the great-making properties these beings have, *A* is extensively superior to *B* (Figure 4).

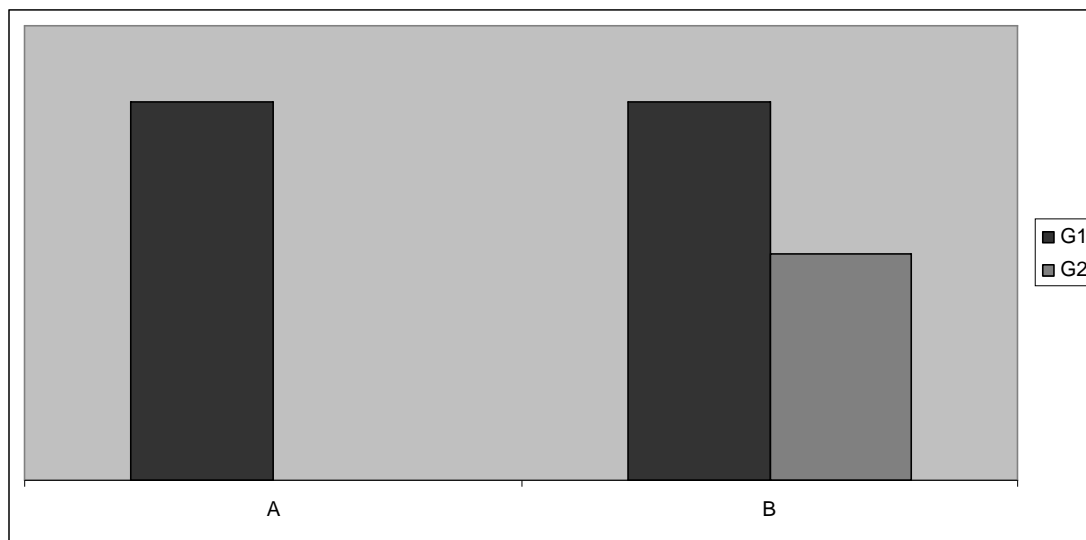
<sup>9</sup> I borrow the terms ‘extensive superiority’ and ‘intensive superiority’ from Broad (1939), p. 177.



**Figure 4**

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

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

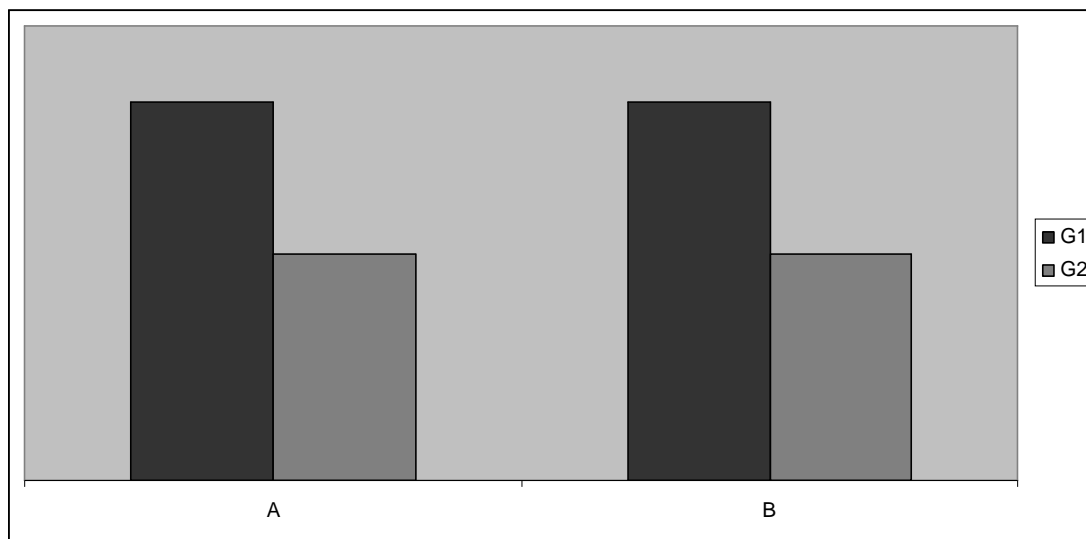


**Figure 5**

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

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

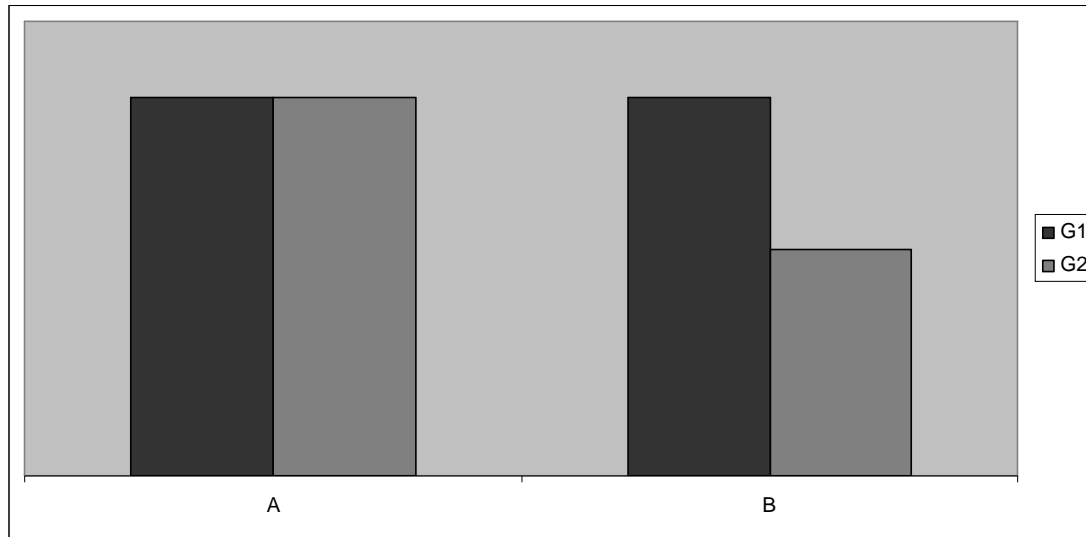
For example: Suppose that  $A$  has only two great-making properties  $G1$  and  $G2$  and  $B$  has also only two great-making properties  $G1$  and  $G2$ . Moreover,  $A$  and  $B$  have these two great-making properties to the exact same degree of intensity. In this case  $A$  and  $B$  are intensively (and also extensively) equal (Figure 6).



**Figure 6**

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

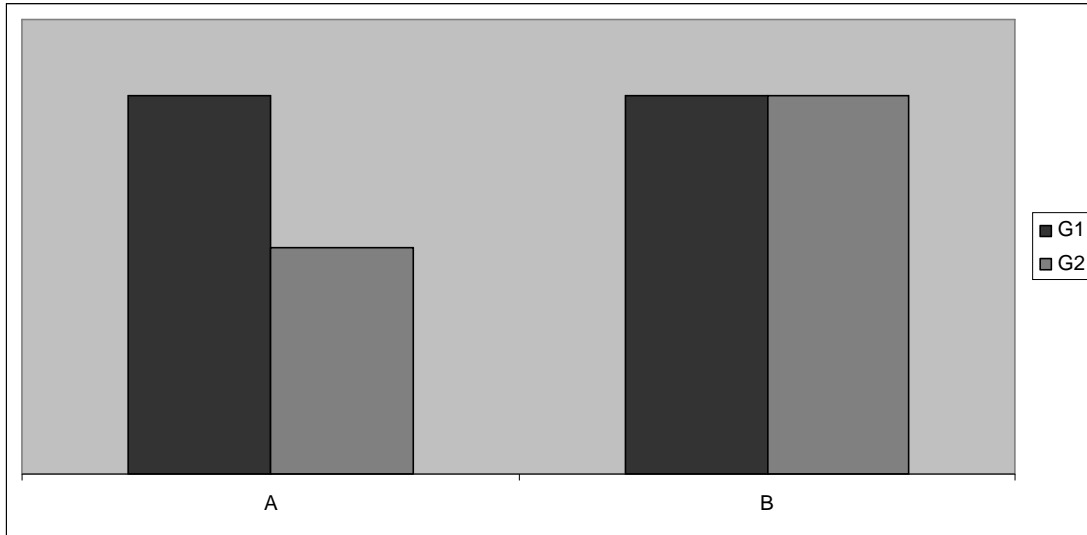
For example: Suppose that *A* has only two great-making properties *G1* and *G2* and *B* also has only two great-making properties *G1* and *G2*. However, while *G1* is present in both *A* and *B* to the exact same degree of intensity, *G2* is present in *A* to a higher degree of intensity than in *B*. In this case *A* is intensively superior to *B* (even though they are extensively equal; Figure 7).



**Figure 7**

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

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



**Figure 8**

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

- (1)  $x$  is intensively equal and extensively equal to  $y$ .
- (2)  $x$  is intensively equal and extensively superior to  $y$ .
- (3)  $x$  is intensively equal and extensively inferior to  $y$ .
- (4)  $x$  is intensively superior and extensively equal to  $y$ .
- (5)  $x$  is intensively superior and extensively superior to  $y$ .
- (6)  $x$  is intensively superior and extensively inferior to  $y$ .
  
- (7)  $x$  is intensively inferior and extensively equal to  $y$ .
- (8)  $x$  is intensively inferior and extensively superior to  $y$ .
- (9)  $x$  is intensively inferior and extensively inferior to  $y$ .
- (10)  $x$  is neither extensively superior, equal nor inferior to  $y$ .
- (11)  $x$  is extensively superior to  $y$  and the great-making properties that  $x$  and  $y$  share are present in  $x$  to the same degree of intensity as in  $y$  (in this case  $x$  is neither intensively superior to, equal to, nor inferior to  $y$ .)
- (12) Other cases than (11) in which  $x$  is neither intensively superior to, equal to, nor inferior to  $y$ .

In case (1)  $x$  and  $y$  are *genuinely equal*, which means that the greatnesses of  $x$  and  $y$  are equal in every way. Case (2) is impossible to obtain because if  $x$  is intensively equal, then

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

Let us go back to the Radial model, according to which God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of being greater than each of all non-divine possible beings, even though non-divine possible beings are not value commensurable among themselves. The Radial model is based on universal non-divine value incommensurability, according to which no non-divine possible being is value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being. The above discussion shows clearly why universal non-divine value incommensurability, and consequently also the Radial model, fail. As we have seen, there are cases, such as cases (1), (4), (5), (7), (9), and (11) in which two non-divine possible beings are clearly value commensurable.

#### **4. The Extended Radial Model**

In the previous section we considered the Radial model as an alternative to the infamous Linear Model. The Radial model is, again, based on divine value commensurability—i.e., every possible being is value commensurable with God—and universal non-divine value incommensurability—i.e., no non-divine possible being is value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being. As we have seen, the Radial model fails because universal non-divine value incommensurability is false. However, fortunately, it is possible to construct a model which is (i) free from universal value commensurability, (ii) free from universal non-divine value incommensurability, and (iii) consistent with divine

value commensurability. In addition to divine value commensurability this alternative model relies on the following thesis:

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

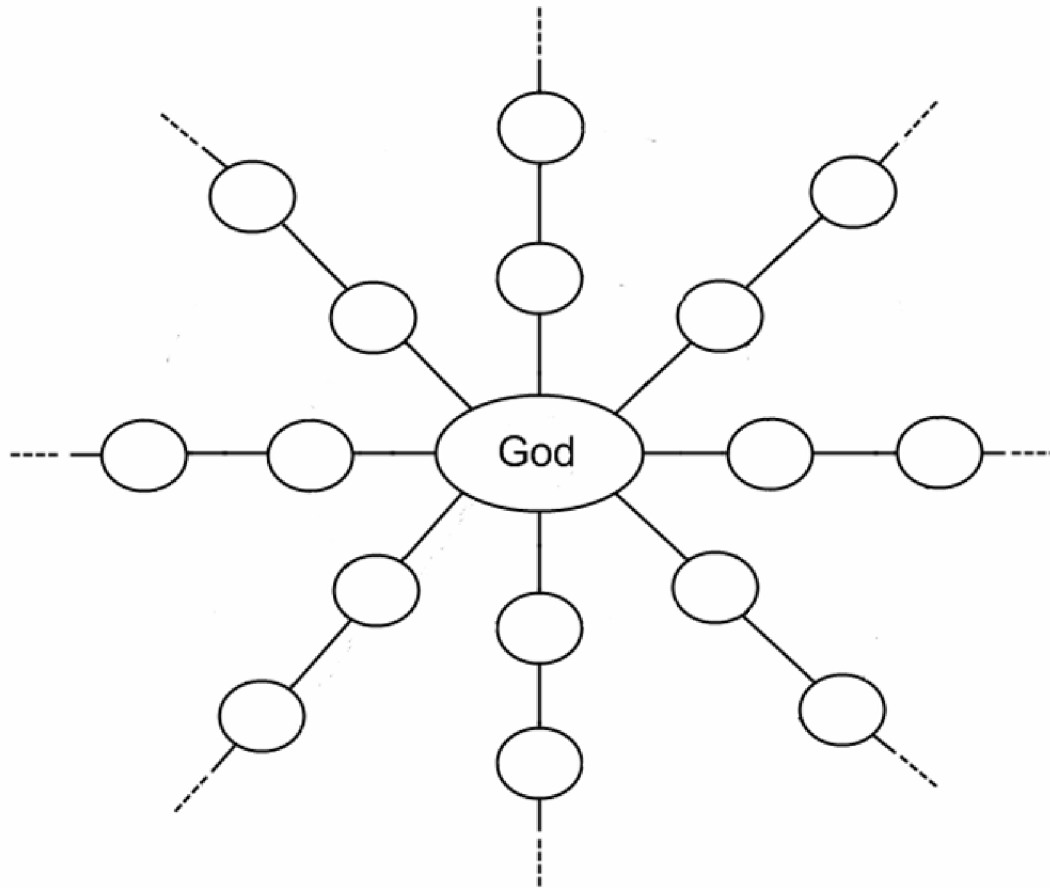
Partial non-divine value commensurability lies between universal value commensurability and universal non-divine incommensurability. Partial non-divine value commensurability says that even if universal value commensurability is false some non-divine possible beings remain value commensurable among themselves.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

An interesting question concerning partial non-divine value commensurability is whether there is a non-divine possible being such that it is not value commensurable with any other non-divine possible being. The answer seems to be negative because it seems reasonable to think that for any being there is at least one being that jointly satisfies either (1), (4), (5), (9) or (11). This means that, contrary to what the Radial model implies, there is no local chain of being that contains God and only one non-divine possible being. Thus any local chain of being will always include God and multiple non-divine possible beings. This observation suggests that the following is true:

*Universal partial non-divine value commensurability:* Every non-divine possible being is value commensurable with some non-divine possible beings.

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

*The Extended Radial model:* God is the being than which no greater can be thought by virtue of occupying the top link in all local chains of being, each of which contains multiple beings (Figure 9).



**Figure 9**

It is interesting to remark that while we have attempted to avoid the Linear Model, which is based on the infamous doctrine of universal value commensurability and the great chain of being, we ended up with something that is not too dissimilar to it. Instead of having one great-chain of being with God occupying the top link, the Extended Radial model allows for many local chains of being, some of which are infinitely long, with God at the top.

### **5. The Comprehensive View**

We have seen so far that once we give up the Linear Model, which relies on universal value commensurability and the great chain of being, the Extended Radial model allows for the Anselmian notion of God as the being than which no greater can be thought. The Extended Radial model is, however, still incomplete because it does not tell us exactly

how God manages to occupy the top link in all local chains. In particular, it does not tell us what sort of relationship should be maintained in this model between God and other possible beings. In this and the following sections I address this issue.

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

(4)  $x$  is intensively superior and extensively equal to  $y$ .

(5)  $x$  is intensively superior and extensively superior to  $y$ .

(11)  $x$  is extensively superior to  $y$  and the great-making properties that  $x$  and  $y$  share are present in  $x$  to the same degree of intensity as in  $y$ .

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

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

The view is named as such because in order to satisfy either (i) or (ii) God has to, first of all, be either extensively equal to or extensively superior to all possible beings. This means that God has to have all possible great-making properties that at least one being has, that is, all possible great-making properties *simpliciter*. George N. Schlesinger seems to agree with this view when he says, ‘for any property  $P$  whether the putative [Anselmian] being does or does not possess  $P$ : if having  $P$  contributes to the excellence of a thing that does have  $P$ , then an absolutely perfect being has  $P$ ; otherwise the being does not have  $P$ ’.<sup>10</sup> With this view in hand, the Revised Radial Model can be advanced as follows: God has all great-making properties that other possible beings have and, moreover, He is either intensively or extensively superior to each one of every possible

---

<sup>10</sup> George N. Schlesinger, *New Perspectives on Old-Time Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 16.

being. That is why He occupies the top link in all local chains of being, which is equivalent to saying that He is the being than which no greater can be conceived.

## 6. Objections to the Comprehensive View

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

### *(i) The extensity objection*

Again, the Comprehensive View requires that God possess all possible great-making properties. However, the extensity objection points out that there are many great-making properties that God cannot have. As I mentioned earlier, property  $p$  is a great-making property if it contributes to the greatness of its possessor. So, for example, having a healthy heart is a great-making property because it contributes to the greatness of a person who possesses it. A person would be greater with a healthy heart than otherwise. To take another example, being a fast runner is a great-making property because, again, it contributes to the greatness of a person who possesses it. A person would be greater as a fast runner than otherwise. However, God surely does not have these great-making properties. The Comprehensive View is, therefore, wrong in saying that God has all possible great-making properties. This is the extensity objection.

In response to this objection one might claim that God does not have to have these great-making properties because only *key* great-making properties are crucial in determining the greatness of a being and God has all of them. The term ‘key’ is vague but it is plausible to assume that key great-making attributes include attributes that are traditionally ascribed to God, such as knowledge, power and benevolence, to maximum intensity. The main difficulty with such a response is that the use of the term ‘key attributes’ seems not only vague but also *arbitrary*; it is not clear why only certain great-making properties matter and others do not. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that the response in question is correct. That is, God is the being than which no greater can be conceived because, with respect to key great-making attributes such as knowledge, power

and benevolence, He is greater than any other possible being. This is, however, essentially equivalent to saying that with respect to non-key attributes God is not necessarily greater than other possible being. If we attempt to determine one's greatness in terms of individual great-making properties while ignoring some great-making properties arbitrarily we beg the question against the extensity objection.

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

*Relative great-making property:* Property  $p$  is a relative great-making property if its acquisition improves the greatness of some beings but worsens the greatness of some other being.

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

This distinction allows us to focus non-arbitrarily on some specific attributes that God should have. Consider, again, the property of having a healthy heart. This is only a relative great-making property because while its possession improves the greatness of some people it worsens the greatness of God by undermining some of His other great-making properties. For example, it is likely to undermine God's omnipotence and incorporeality. Consider, on the other hand, for example, the property of being omnibenevolent. Assuming that omnibenevolence is a coherent notion, this is an absolute great-making property because its possession improves the greatness of many beings, such as people and other creatures, and does not worsen the greatness of any other being, including God Himself.

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

(ii) *The intensity objection*

The second objection to the Comprehensive View is the intensity objection, which is potentially more troublesome than the extensity objection. The intensity objection says that the Comprehensive View cannot be sustained because there are arguments that try to show that God cannot have even such absolute great-making properties as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. There are largely three types of such arguments.

Arguments of the first type purport to show that at least one of the divine attributes is internally incoherent. The paradox of the stone is a classic example of this kind.<sup>11</sup> It runs as follows. Either God can create a stone that He cannot lift or He cannot create a stone that He cannot lift. If He can create a stone that He cannot lift, then He is not omnipotent. If He cannot create a stone that He cannot lift, then, again, He is not omnipotent. Hence, the concept of omnipotence is internally incoherent; no one, not even God, can be omnipotent.

To take another example, Patrick Grim purports to prove the incoherence of omniscience by showing that there is no set of all truths.<sup>12</sup> Suppose, for the sake of

---

<sup>11</sup> For discussions of the paradox of the stone, see Harry Frankfurt, 'The Logic of Omnipotence', *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 73 (1964), pp. 262-263; George I. Mavrodes, 'Some Puzzles Concerning Omnipotence', *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 72 (1963), pp. 221-223; C. Wade Savage, 'The Paradox of the Stone', *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 76 (1967), pp. 74-79; Jordan Howard Sobel, *Logic and Theism: Arguments for and against Beliefs in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Grim, 'There Is No Set of All Truths', *Analysis*, Vol. 44 (1984), pp. 206-208; Patrick Grim, 'On Sets and Scenarios: A Reply to Menzel', *Analysis*, Vol. 46 (1986), pp. 186-191; Patrick Grim, 'On Omniscience and a 'Set of All Truths': A Reply to Bringsjord', *Analysis*, Vol. 50 (1990), pp. 271-276; Patrick Grim, *The Incomplete Universe: Totality, Knowledge and Truth* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991); Patrick Grim, 'The Being That Knew Too Much', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 47 (2000), pp. 141-154; Patrick Grim, 'Impossibility Arguments', in Michael Martin (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 199-214. For discussions of Grim's argument see John E. Abbruzzese, 'The Coherence of Omniscience: A Defence', *International Journal for*

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

$$s_i \in P(T)$$

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

If an argument of the first type is successful, then at least one member of the attribute set comprising omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence is internally incoherent. The intensity objection says here that the Comprehensive View is false because arguments of the first type show that God cannot achieve such absolute great-making properties as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence. This claim is, however, untenable. Suppose, for example, that the paradox of the stone is indeed successful and the concept of omnipotence is internally incoherent. In this case God cannot have the property of being omnipotent. However, this is not necessarily bad news for the Comprehensive View because what the paradox shows is merely that being omnipotent is not an absolute great-making property and that instead something slightly weaker than omnipotence is an absolute great-making property. Anselmian theists can maintain that since omnipotence is an incoherent notion God only needs to be slightly weaker than omnipotent. In order to undermine the Comprehensive View here one has to show that

---

*Philosophy of Religion*, Vol. 41 (1997), pp. 25-34; J. C. Beall, 'A Neglected Response to the Grim Result', *Analysis* Vol. 60 (2000), pp. 38-41; Richard Cartwright, 'Speaking of Everything', *Noûs*, Vol. 28 (1994), pp. 1-20; Gary Mar, 'Why 'Cantorian' Arguments against the Existence of God Do Not Work', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 33 (1993), pp. 429-442; Alvin Plantinga and Patrick Grim, 'Truth, Omniscience, and Cantorian Arguments: An Exchange', *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 71 (1993), pp. 267-306; Keith Simmons, 'On an Argument against Omniscience', the American Philosophical Association Central Division (1990).

God cannot achieve even the property of being slightly weaker than omnipotent. However, one cannot derive such a conclusion from the paradox of the stone itself. The same point applies to all other arguments of the first type. In sum, the intensity objection cannot be advanced with arguments of the first type. (Some Anselmian theists might claim that if God cannot achieve one or more of the omni-attributes, then He does not exist. That is, even if the property of being slightly weaker than omnipotence is an absolute great-making property, if God cannot be omnipotent, then Anselmian theism fails. I do not find any merit in such a claim. If the concept of omnipotence is internally incoherent, that is, if no possible being can be omnipotent even in principle, it is unreasonable to demand that God be omnipotent.) There are, however, two more types of arguments against the divine attributes that seem to support the intensity objection more forcefully.

Arguments of the second type say that some of the divine attributes are mutually inconsistent. Probably the most well-known argument of this type is the so-called argument from God's inability to sin, which purports to show that omnipotence and omnibenevolence are mutually inconsistent. Suppose that God is omnibenevolent. He should then be unable to perform morally wrong or sinful actions, such as killing hundreds of innocent children. Still, if God is omnipotent, He must be able to perform such an action; after all even we can do so in principle. Therefore, God cannot be omnipotent and omnibenevolent at the same time.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> For discussions of this argument, see T. J. Mawson, 'Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection are Compatible: A Reply to Morrision', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 38 (2002), pp. 215-223; Wes Morrision, 'Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are they Compatible?', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 37 (2001a), pp. 143-160; Wes Morrision, 'Omnipotence and the Anselmian God', *Philo*, Vol. 4 (2001b), pp. 7-20; Wes Morrision, 'Are Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection Compatible?: Reply to Mawson', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 39 (2003), pp. 441-449; Pike, 'Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin'.

There is also an argument which purports to show that omniscience and omnipotence are mutually inconsistent.<sup>14</sup> If God is omniscient, then He must understand fully what fear and frustration are. However, given a modest form of concept empiricism, an omnipotent God cannot understand fear and frustration fully because He, who is omnipotent, cannot experience what it is like to suffer fear and frustration.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> David Blumenfeld, 'On the Compossibility of the Divine Attributes', *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 34 (1978), pp. 91-103.

<sup>15</sup> For defences of similar arguments, see Selmer Bringsjord, 'Grim on Logic and Omniscience', *Analysis*, Vol. 49 (1989), pp. 186-189; Michael Martin, 'A Disproof of the God of the Common Man', *Question*, Vol. 7 (1974), pp. 115-124, repr. in Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier (eds), *The Impossibility of God* (Amherst New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp. 232-241 (page references to reprinting); Michael Martin, 'Conflicts Between the Divine Attributes' in his *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), repr. in Michael Martin and Ricki Monnier (eds), *The Impossibility of God* (Amherst New York: Prometheus Books, 2003), pp. 242-257 (page references to reprinting); Michael Martin, 'Omniscience and Incoherency' in Ghita Holmstrom-Hintikka (ed), *Medieval Philosophy and Modern Times* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), pp. 17-34; John Lachs, 'Omniscience', *Dialogue*, Vol. 1 (1963a), pp. 400-402; John Lachs, 'Professor Prior on Omniscience', *Philosophy*, Vol. 37 (1963b), pp. 361-364. For discussions of these arguments, see Torin Alter, 'On Two Alleged Conflicts Between Divine Attributes', *Faith and Philosophy*, Vol. 19 (2002), pp. 47-57; Michael Beaty and Charles Taliaferro, 'God and Concept Empiricism', *Southwest Philosophy Review*, Vol. 6 (1990), pp. 97-105; Yujin Nagasawa, 'Divine Omniscience and Experience: A Reply to Alter', *Ars Disputandi*, Vol. 3 (2003) (<http://www.arsdisputandi.org/publish/articles/000098/index.html>); Yujin Nagasawa, *God and Phenomenal Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); A. N. Prior, 'Rejoinder to Professor Lachs on Omniscience', *Philosophy*, Vol. 37 (1963), pp. 365-366.

Arguments of the third type purport to show that the set of the divine attributes is mutually inconsistent with a certain contingent fact. The most prominent example of such an argument, which also happens to be *the* most prominent argument against the existence of God, is the argument from evil.<sup>16</sup> It seems obvious that, as a matter of contingent fact, there is evil in the actual world. However, if God has such attributes as omniscience, omnipotence and omnibenevolence there should be no evil. If God is omniscient, then He must know that there is evil in the actual world; if God is omnipotent, then He must be able to eliminate evil from the actual world; and if He is omnibenevolent, He must be willing to eliminate evil from the actual world.

To take another example, the ‘argument from the best possible world’ tries to show that the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent God is inconsistent with the existence of the actual world. If God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent, then He would create the best possible world. It seems obvious, however, that the actual world is far from the best possible world. Therefore, the argument concludes, God cannot be omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent simultaneously.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> According to Daniel Hill, more than 3600 articles and books have been written on the problem of evil since 1960 alone. See Daniel Hill, ‘What’s New in Philosophy of Religion?’ *Philosophy Now*, Vol. 21 (1998), pp. 30-33, at p. 32. For critical assessments of the argument from evil see, for example, Marilyn McCord Adams and Robert Merrihew Adams (eds), *The Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and Against the Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); Michael L. Peterson (ed), *The Problem of Evil: Selected Readings* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992); Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> For discussions of this argument see, for example, Robert Merrihew Adams, ‘Must God Create the Best?’, *Philosophical Review* Vol. 81 (1972), pp. 317-332; Klaas J. Kraay, ‘Creation, World-Actualization, and God’s Choice Among Possible Worlds’, *Philosophy Compass* Vol. 3 (2008), pp. 854-872.

Unlike arguments of the first type, arguments of the second and third types do seem to support the intensity objection to the Comprehensive view. Suppose, for example, that the argument from God's inability to sin is correct in saying that omnipotence and omnibenevolence are indeed mutually inconsistent. In this case, Anselmian theists have to compromise either God's omnipotence or omnibenevolence in order to maintain the concept of God as the being than which no greater can be conceived. Let us assume that omnipotence should be compromised.<sup>18</sup> In this case while God is omnibenevolent He is not really omnipotent; His power extends only as far as it is consistent with omnibenevolence. If so, however, the Comprehensive View might be wrong, because being as powerful as possible consistently with omnibenevolence might not be an absolute great-making property. If there could be a non-omnibenevolent being that is omnipotent or nearly omnipotent, the property of being as powerful as possible consistently with omnibenevolence diminishes, rather than enhances, the greatness of the being in question. Yet, by definition, no absolute great-making property diminishes the greatness of any being. The Comprehensive View, therefore, seems to fail. God does not have all absolute great-making properties.

The intensity objection is certainly more forceful than the extensity objection but defending it is not so easy. First, in order for the intensity objection to succeed at least one of the arguments of the second or third types has to be sound. There are, however, many existing objections to each of the arguments. Second, once proponents of the Comprehensive View compromise one of the divine attributes, the onus of the proof is on opponents of the Comprehensive View to show that the attribute with the compromised intensity is not an absolute great-making property. For example, once proponents of the Comprehensive View admit that God is not omnipotent but accept that He is only as

---

<sup>18</sup> John Bishop makes this move in response to the problem of evil and Wes Morriston does in response to the argument from God's inability to sin. See: John Bishop, 'Evil and the Concept of God', *Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 22 (1993), pp. 1-15; Wes Morriston, 'Omnipotence and Necessary Moral Perfection: Are they Compatible?', *Religious Studies*, Vol. 37 (2001a); Wes Morriston, 'Omnipotence and the Anselmian God', *Philo*, Vol. 4 (2001b), pp. 7-20.

powerful as possible consistently with omnibenevolence, opponents have to show, in order to advance the intensity objection, that the property of being as powerful as possible consistently with omnibenevolence is not an absolute great-making property. This is not an easy task, especially, but not only, if an argument of the first type succeeds in showing that the concept of omnipotence is internally incoherent. In sum: While the intensity objection is a potential threat to the Comprehensive View, whether or not it ultimately succeeds remains controversial.

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

I believe that the Extended Radial model with the supplement of the Comprehensive View allows us to characterise correctly the Anselmian concept of God as the being than which no greater can be thought. However, as I have claimed in this section, the intensity objection against the Comprehensive View remains controversial. In what follows, therefore, I reconsider the Linear Model, which relies on the great chain of being, as a backup option for Anselmian theists. I argue that despite its infamous reputation the Linear Model should be taken seriously because it undercuts the intensity objection and, also, it is free from any knock-down objection.

## **7. The Linear Model**

## **8. Objections to the Linear Model**

## **9. Conclusion**