THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND THE DEVIL

By Yujin Nagasawa

The 'parody objection' to the ontological argument for the existence of God advances parallel arguments apparently proving the existence of various absurd entities. I discuss recent versions of the parody objection concerning the existence of 'AntiGod' and the devil, as introduced by Peter Millican and Timothy Chambers. I argue that the parody objection always fails, because any parody is either (i) not structurally parallel to the ontological argument, or (ii) not dialectically parallel to the ontological argument. Moreover, once a parody argument is modified in such a way that it avoids (i) and (ii), it is, ironically, no longer a parody – it is the ontological argument itself.

I. INTRODUCTION

The so-called 'parody objection' is a familiar response to the ontological argument for the existence of God. It purports to undermine the argument by claiming that if the ontological argument were successful, it would be possible to construct parallel parodies of the argument which prove with equal success the existence (or non-existence) of various absurd entities, such as the greatest possible island and the devil.

The parody objection is certainly one of the oldest, if not *the* oldest, responses to the ontological argument. It was introduced by Gaunilo in the eleventh century soon after Anselm introduced the ontological argument.[1] Its longevity notwithstanding, however, it seems to me that the strengths and weaknesses of the parody objection are often misunderstood.

Here I discuss critically some of the most recent and most sophisticated versions of the parody objection. In particular, I focus on Peter Millican's and Timothy Chambers' versions of the objection, which are concerned with the existence of 'AntiGod' and the devil. Through discussion of these versions, I defend the following hypothesis: the parody objection always fails because any parody of the ontological argument is either (i) not structurally

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[1] See Anselm, *Proslogion* and *A Reply to the Foregoing by the Author of the Book in Question*; Gaunilo, *A Reply to the Foregoing by a Certain Writer on Behalf of the Fool*, all in M.J. Charlesworth (ed.), *St Anselm's Proslogion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), pp. 102–55, 168–91, 156–67.

parallel to the ontological argument (typically because its scope is too narrow), or (ii) not dialectically parallel to the ontological argument (typically because it makes extraneous assumptions to which proponents of the ontological argument are not committed). I argue, moreover, that once a parody argument is modified in such a way as to avoid (i) and (ii), it is, ironically, no longer a parody: it is the ontological argument itself. Of course one can hardly undermine the ontological argument by advancing the ontological argument itself.

This paper has the following structure: in §II, I introduce Millican's formulation of the ontological argument, and discuss Gaunilo's parody objection to it. In §III, I explain why the parody objection is more powerful than other existing objections to the ontological argument. In §§IV–V, I introduce Millican's recent defence of the parody objection, and argue that it fails to undermine the ontological argument. I also discuss parody arguments which address the existence of the devil, derived from the failure of Millican's argument. In §VI, I introduce Chambers' elaborate attempt to utilize a parody argument against the existence of the devil. In §VII, I argue that Chambers' parody objection faces several difficulties. In §VIII, I defend the above-mentioned hypothesis concerning the limitations of the parody objection.

II. THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT AND THE ISLAND ARGUMENT

There is a consensus among Anselm scholars that Anselm's presentation of the ontological argument in the relevant texts, namely, chs 2–5 and 15 of his *Proslogion* and the response to Gaunilo, are ambiguous. There have been many interpretations of the texts, and many forms of the argument have been derived from them. Some contend that Anselm provides in the texts four distinct versions of the ontological argument;[2] some contend that he provides three,[3] some contend that he provides two;[4] some contend that

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[2] See G. Nakhnikian, 'St Anselm's Four Ontological Arguments', in W.H. Capitan (ed.), *Art, Mind, and Religion* (Pittsburgh UP, 1967), pp. 29–36; F. Sontag, 'The Meaning of "Argument" in Anselm's Ontological Proof', *Journal of Philosophy*, 64 (1967), pp. 459–86.

[3] Brian Leftow maintains that in addition to the two versions of the ontological argument explained below, Anselm introduces a third version in his response to Gaunilo: see his 'Anselm's Neglected Argument', *Philosophy*, 77 (2002), pp. 331–47.

[4] Charles Hartshorne and Norman Malcolm maintain that Anselm provides two versions of the ontological argument, one non-modal and the other modal, in chs 2 and 3 of *Proslogion* respectively. See C. Hartshorne, 'The Necessarily Existent', in his *Man's Vision of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), pp. 299–341, repr. in part in A. Plantinga (ed.), *The Ontological Argument from St Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers* (New York: Anchor, 1965), pp. 123–35, 'The

he provides only one;[5] yet others contend that he makes no attempt to provide an argument for the existence of God at all.[6] It is indeed an interesting and important question exactly what sort of argument(s) Anselm tries to defend. Nevertheless, in what follows, I set aside debate on the textual interpretations and focus on the standard non-modal ontological argument which is, whether or not Anselm really endorsed it, widely attributed to ch. 2 of *Proslogion*. Here, then, I call any parody of the ontological argument an instance of the 'parody argument', and I call any attempt to undermine the ontological argument by advancing a parody argument an instance of the 'parody objection'.

Peter Millican utilizes what he calls the 'theory of natures' in formulating the ontological argument and his parody objection to it.[7] I introduce this theory here because it is crucial for understanding Millican's interpretation of the ontological argument. The theory of natures enables 'reference to be made to an "entity" (such as God) without presupposing either its existence or its non-existence' (Millican, p. 449). He uses the term 'nature' to denote an existence-independent entity, and speaks of a nature as 'instantiated' if such an entity exists in reality.

According to Millican's theory of natures, the nature of, for example, Lassie the television dog can be expressed as follows:

<Lassie>: <dog, catches villains, rescues victims, star of film and television>

The first set of angle brackets encloses the name of a nature and the second set encloses at least one of the most significant properties of that nature. In this format, the natures of some British heroes can be expressed as follows:

<Alfred>: <King of England, defeated the Danes, translated Boethius>
<Arthur>: <saintly and heroic king, kept a court of knights, sought the Holy Grail>

Logic of the Ontological Argument', *Journal of Philosophy*, 58 (1960), pp. 471–3, and *Anselm's Discovery: a Re-Examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence* (La Salle: Open Court, 1965); N. Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', *Philosophical Review*, 69 (1960), pp. 41–62.

[5] Richard R. La Croix argues that *pace* Malcolm, the version of the ontological argument in ch. 3 of *Proslogion* is not distinct from the one in ch. 2. See R.R. La Croix, 'Malcolm's *Proslogion* III Argument', in his *What is God?: the Selected Essays of Richard R. La Croix* (Buffalo: Prometheus, 1993), pp. 17–25.

[6] Karl Barth argues that Anselm does not, in *Proslogion*, attempt to provide a deductive argument for the existence of God; rather, he provides an expression of faith, which *presupposes* the existence of God. See K. Barth, *Anselm: Fide Quaerens Intellectum*, tr. I.W. Robertson (Richmond: John Knox, 1960). This interpretation is highly implausible because in the preface to *Proslogion* (p. 103) Anselm states explicitly that his goal is 'to find one single argument that for its proof required no other save itself, and that by itself would suffice to prove that God really exists, that he is the supreme good needing no other and it is he whom all things have need of for their being and well-being, and also to prove whatever we believe about the Divine Being'.

[7] P. Millican, 'The One Fatal Flaw in Anselm's Argument', *Mind*, 113 (2004), pp. 437–76.

Millican maintains that Anselm subscribes implicitly to this theory of natures, which enables him to rank natures on the basis of their greatness. According to Millican's interpretation (p. 451), Anselm thinks that 'among the various criteria for greatness (power, wisdom, goodness, etc.) real existence [or instantiation] "trumps" all others, so that any nature which has a real archetype, however lowly its characteristic properties may be, will on that account alone be greater than any nature, however impressively characterized, which does not'. This means that according to Millican's interpretation, Anselm endorses the following principle:

PSE. *Principle of the superiority of existence*: any nature which is instantiated is greater than any nature which is not instantiated (or any nature which is conceived only in the mind).

It is slightly odd that Millican allows natures to have existence, or instantiation, as a property, given that he stipulates (p. 446) that natures are 'existence-independent entities'. If natures can be regarded as being existence-independent whether they are instantiated or uninstantiated, then, for instance, ideas and concepts are also existence-independent. It is then unclear why Millican needs to introduce the new terminology here. For the sake of simplicity, however, I set this concern aside. Elsewhere I have also questioned in detail the legitimacy of Millican's attribution of (PSE) to Anselm,[8] but in this paper I accept it for the sake of argument.

It is controversial whether or not King Arthur really existed, that is, whether or not <Arthur> was instantiated. If <Arthur> *was* instantiated, then it is the greatest among the three natures, for its existence immediately defeats <Lassie> and its other great-making properties defeat <Alfred>. On the other hand, if <Arthur> was not instantiated, then it is not as great as <Alfred>; it is only greater than <Lassie>.

Using the concept of natures, Millican (pp. 457–8) formulates the ontological argument as follows:

Millican's formulation of the ontological argument

1m. The phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' is clearly understood by the Fool, and apparently makes sense
2m. Hence we can take the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought' as successfully denoting some specific nature
3m. A nature which is instantiated in reality is greater than one which is not
4m. So if a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought were not instantiated in reality, then it would be possible to think of a nature

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[8] See Y. Nagasawa, 'Millican on the Ontological Argument', *Mind*, 116 (2007), pp. 1027–40.

that is greater (for example, any nature that is in fact instantiated in reality)

5m. But this would be a contradiction, since it is obviously impossible to think of a nature that is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought

6m. Therefore a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought must indeed be instantiated in reality.

Premise (3m) is equivalent to (PSE). Premise (4m) says that if a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought were not instantiated in reality, then given (3m) or (PSE), it would be possible to think of a nature, for example, <*Alfred*>, which is greater than a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought. This is, of course, as (5m) says, contradictory. The argument concludes that a-nature-than-which-no-greater-nature-can-be-thought is therefore instantiated in reality; that is, God exists.

As I mentioned above, the parody objection was introduced for the first time by Anselm's contemporary Gaunilo. Gaunilo formulates the objection by producing a parody argument which purports to prove the existence of the greatest possible island:

> You cannot any more doubt that this island that is more excellent than all other lands truly exists somewhere in reality than you can doubt that it is in your mind; and since it is more excellent to exist not only in the mind alone but also in reality, therefore it must needs be that it exists. For if it did not exist, any other land existing in reality would be more excellent than it, and so this island, already conceived by you to be more excellent than others, will not be more excellent. If, I say, someone wishes thus to persuade me that this island really exists beyond all doubt, I should either think that he was joking, or I should find it hard to decide which of us I ought to judge the bigger fool – I, if I agreed with him, or he, if he thought that he had proved the existence of this island with any certainty, unless he had first convinced me that its very excellence exists in my mind precisely as a thing existing truly and indubitably and not just as something unreal or doubtfully real.[9]

Using Millican's formulation of the ontological argument as a basis, Gaunilo's island argument can be presented as follows:

The Island Argument

1i. The phrase 'a-nature-of-an-island-than-which-no-greater-nature-of-an-island-can-be-thought' is clearly understood by the Fool, and apparently makes sense

2i. Hence we can take the phrase 'a-nature-of-an-island-than-which-no-greater-nature-of-an-island-can-be-thought' as successfully denoting some specific nature

[9] Gaunilo, *A Reply to the Foregoing by a Certain Writer on Behalf of the Fool*, p. 165.

3i. A nature of an island which is instantiated in reality is greater than one which is not

4i. So if a-nature-of-an-island-than-which-no-greater-nature-of-an-island-can-be-thought were not instantiated in reality, then it would be possible to think of a nature of an island that is greater (for example, any nature of an island that is in fact instantiated in reality)

5i. But this would be a contradiction, since it is obviously impossible to think of a nature of an island that is greater than a-nature-of-an-island-than-which-no-greater-nature-of-an-island-can-be-thought

6i. Therefore a-nature-of-an-island-than-which-no-greater-nature-of-an-island-can-be-thought must indeed be instantiated in reality.

The island argument seems structurally parallel to the ontological argument. It only adds the phrase 'of-an-island' to all occurrences of the phrase 'nature' in the ontological argument. Assuming that the island argument has the same logical structure as that of the ontological argument, Gaunilo advances his parody objection as follows. If the ontological argument were successful in proving the existence of God, then the island argument would be equally successful in proving the existence of the greatest possible island. However, we all know that there is no such thing as the greatest possible island in reality. Therefore, by *modus tollens*, the ontological argument is not successful.

III. THE VIRTUES OF THE PARODY OBJECTION

The parody objection is often regarded as only a second-class supplementary objection to the ontological argument, or a mere curious consequence which one can derive from it. In fact Millican himself treats the parody objection as a supplement to another, more substantial, objection to the ontological argument. Few critics regard it as something that could constitute a serious objection to the ontological argument. Yet the parody objection has a number of virtues which other objections lack.

First, unlike other objections, the parody objection does not dispute any controversial metaphysical assumptions which the ontological argument makes (for the same point, see Millican, pp. 460–3). This is evident by comparing the parody objection with Kant's objection, which is arguably the most widely accepted response to the ontological argument.[10] According to Kant, the ontological argument is unsuccessful because it is based on the false assumption that existence is a predicate. Kant says that while existence

[10] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1929), pp. 500–7.

could behave grammatically like a predicate, it is not a real predicate. Such sentences as '*x* exists' and '*x* is existent' are not comparable to '*x* is tall' or '*x* is smart', where the predicates denote properties of *x*. Although many critics believe that this is a knock-down objection to the ontological argument, defending it is far from easy. For in order to defend it, one has to prove not only that the ontological argument presupposes that existence is a predicate, which itself is controversial, but also that existence is indeed not a predicate, which is even more controversial, independently of the debate on the ontological argument.[11]

Thus in order to refute the ontological argument by relying on the Kantian objection, one needs first to solve the very difficult problem regarding the nature of existence. The parody objection, on the other hand, does not involve this sort of complication. In order to advance this objection, one need not dispute any contentious metaphysical assumptions which the ontological argument makes. The parody objection accepts, at least for the sake of argument, all the premises of the ontological argument and all its assumptions. The parody then constructs a parallel argument which reveals an apparent absurdity entailed by the ontological argument. In this sense, the parody argument is as metaphysically sympathetic as possible with the ontological argument, until the last stage tries to reveal its absurdity.

Another virtue of the parody objection is that it is applicable to multiple versions of the ontological argument. Kant introduced his own objection to *Descartes'* version of the ontological argument because it seems obvious that Descartes is assuming that existence is a predicate when he states 'existence is a perfection'.[12] It is, however, far from obvious that the same objection applies equally to other versions of the ontological argument. For example, as can be seen in the above formulation, Anselm's version of the ontological argument does not seem to be committed to the claim that existence is a predicate. Contrary to Kant's objection, the parody objection appears to be applicable to all versions of the ontological argument, because it can be constructed by merely rephrasing relevant terms in any version of the ontological argument. As I mentioned above, Gaunilo uses the objection to undermine Anselm's version of the ontological argument; Gassendi, Descartes' contemporary, uses it to undermine Descartes' version of the argument (by offering a parody argument for the existence of a 'perfect

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[11] For more on the controversy over existence as a predicate see, for example, C. McGinn, *Logical Properties* (Oxford UP, 2000); B. Miller, *The Fullness of Being: a New Paradigm for Existence* (Notre Dame UP, 2002), and 'Existence', in E.N. Zalta (ed), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2002/entries/existence; G.E. Moore, 'Is Existence a Predicate?', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol. 15 (1936), pp. 154–88.

[12] R. Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, in J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch (eds), *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. II (Cambridge UP, 1984), pp. 3–62.

Pegasus');[13] and Graham Oppy uses it to undermine even Gödel's modal version of the argument.[14]

Of course, the parody objection is not almighty. One drawback of the objection is that even if it is successful, it does not pinpoint exactly what is wrong with the ontological argument. If the objection is successful it shows only that there is *something* wrong *somewhere* in the argument.[15] However, while it would be interesting to know exactly where the flaw lies in the ontological argument, the parody objection alone is, in principle, sufficient to refute it.

In the next two sections I discuss Peter Millican's parody objection, which introduces an argument for the existence of a being he calls 'AntiGod'.

IV. MILLICAN'S PARODY OBJECTION

Millican says that there must be something wrong with Anselm's reasoning because we can construct from the ontological argument a parallel parody argument which yields the absurd conclusion that AntiGod exists.

According to Millican, AntiGod is a being that has almost all the properties that God has. The only difference is that instead of being morally perfect, AntiGod is 'most effectively evil'. Millican writes (p. 461) 'The result, after appropriate substitutions, will be an argument [the 'AntiGod argument'] beginning something like this':

The AntiGod Argument

1a. The phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-more-effectively-evil-nature-can-be-thought' is clearly understood by the Fool, and apparently makes sense
2a. Hence we can take the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-more-effectively-evil-nature-can-be-thought' as successfully denoting some specific nature.

Given that it has the same structure as that of the ontological argument, the above argument appears to prove the existence of AntiGod just as certainly as the ontological argument proves the existence of God. Unfortunately, the conclusion of the argument, i.e., that AntiGod exists, is unacceptable,

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[13] See A. Plantinga (ed.), *The Ontological Argument: from Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers* (New York: Anchor, 1965), p. 47. Caterus, another contemporary of Descartes, also tries to undermine the ontological argument, by providing a parallel argument for the existence of an 'existing lion': Plantinga (ed.), *The Ontological Argument*, p. 39.

[14] G. Oppy, 'Gödelian Ontological Argument', *Analysis*, 56 (1996), pp. 226–30.

[15] See Millican, 'The One Fatal Flaw in Anselm's Argument', p. 463.

particularly to theists. Millican concludes, therefore, that the ontological argument, which is parallel to the parody argument, is fallacious.

In what follows, I argue that Millican's parody objection is untenable because the AntiGod argument is not parallel to the ontological argument.

V. RESPONSE TO MILLICAN'S PARODY OBJECTION

As I explained above, Millican presents amendments to the first two premises of Anselm's ontological argument, (1m) and (2m). In order to render the AntiGod argument formally valid and also parallel to the ontological argument, however, he needs to modify all the other premises as well. He needs, as he does in (1m) and (2m), to replace the term 'greater' in all the premises with 'more-effectively-evil'. Thus (3m) should be modified as follows:

3a.   A nature which is instantiated in reality is *more effectively evil* than one which is not.

However, and here is the first difficulty with the parody argument, (3a) is, unlike (3m), subject to obvious counter-examples, like, for instance, the following nature:

<*Morally Perfect Being*>:   <morally perfect>.

Suppose <*Morally Perfect Being*> is instantiated. According to (3a), <*Morally Perfect Being*> is more effectively evil than any nature that is not instantiated. This is surely wrong; an existent *morally perfect* being cannot be more effectively evil than a non-existent being.

In order to resolve this difficulty, Millican needs to amend (3a) as follows:

3a′. An *evil* nature which is instantiated in reality is *more effectively evil* than one which is not.

This modification renders the parody argument not structurally parallel to Anselm's ontological argument, but I set this point aside in favour of Millican. Similarly, he needs to amend (4m) and (5m) as follows:

4a.   So if a-nature-than-which-no-*more-effectively-evil*-nature-can-be-thought were not instantiated in reality, then it would be possible to think of a nature that is *more effectively evil* (for example, any evil nature that is in fact instantiated in reality)

5a.   But this would be a contradiction, since it is obviously impossible to think of a nature that is *more effectively evil* than a-nature-than-which-no-*more-effectively-evil*-nature-can-be-thought.

From these premises can be derived the following conclusion:

6a. Therefore a-nature-than-which-no-*more-effectively-evil*-nature-can-be-thought must indeed be instantiated in reality.

This parody argument is formally valid. However, Millican cannot use it in order to reject the ontological argument because there is no reason for proponents of the argument to accept (3a′). Even if they were to accept the entirety of the theory of natures which Millican attributes to Anselm, they would not be obliged to accept such a claim about effective evilness as (3a′). The theory of natures is concerned with greatness and has nothing to do with effective evilness.

Millican's objection faces a further difficulty. The above parody argument is not only structurally not parallel, but also *dialectically* not parallel, to Anselm's original argument: it is explicitly question-begging in a way in which the original argument is not. Necessarily, if a nature is effectively evil, then that nature is instantiated. Or, more generally, if a nature is effective with respect to something, then, necessarily, that nature is instantiated. There is no such thing as an effective but uninstantiated nature. This is because the phrase 'effective' is used here to mean effective *in reality*. Millican formulates the parody argument in terms of *effective* evilness, rather than evilness *simpliciter*, precisely because otherwise the argument fails to yield the conclusion that AntiGod exists. However, this means that the parody argument begs the question. Some claim that Anselm's ontological argument is also question-begging, but it is, at least, not question-begging in the way in which the AntiGod argument is.

Fortunately, however, it is possible to construct another parody argument which satisfies the following conditions: (a) it shares the spirit of the AntiGod argument; (b) it is structurally parallel to Anselm's ontological argument; (c) it is no more question-begging than Anselm's ontological argument.

This new parody argument, which I shall call the 'devil argument',[16] can be formulated as follows:

The Devil Argument

1d. The phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought' is clearly understood by the Fool, and apparently makes sense
2d. Hence we can take the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought' as successfully denoting some specific nature
3d. A nature which is instantiated in reality is *worse* than one which is not

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[16] I use the term 'devil' for the sake of convenience. I am aware that what I call the devil does not necessarily match the traditional conception of the devil.

4d. So if a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought were not instantiated in reality, then it would be possible to think of a nature that is *worse* (for example, any nature that is in fact instantiated in reality)

5d. But this would be a contradiction, since it is obviously impossible to think of a nature that is *worse* than a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought.

These premises entail the following conclusion:

6d. Therefore a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought must indeed be instantiated in reality.

The devil argument is clearly structurally parallel to Anselm's original argument: it merely replaces the phrase 'greater' in the original argument with 'worse'. The thrust of this argument is that a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought, or the nature of the devil, must be instantiated because, if it were not, then it would be possible to think of a nature that is worse than the nature in question (for example, the nature of an actual evil dictator) that is instantiated in reality.

However, while this argument *is* structurally parallel to Anselm's ontological argument, Millican cannot use it for the purpose of attacking Anselm. This is because premise (3d) is inconsistent with (3m), or equivalently with (PSE), which is a crucial premise of the ontological argument. (PSE) entails that given that the devil is the *worst* possible being, it cannot have any great-making properties, including existence.

One might reject the claim that (3m) and (3d) are inconsistent by insisting that every instantiated nature has some value, while no uninstantiated nature has any value at all. Therefore it is vacuously true that anything that is of some value is greater *and* worse than anything of no value. Therefore every instantiated nature is greater and worse than any uninstantiated nature.[17]

But this claim entails a contradiction. Suppose X is an instantiated nature and Y is an uninstantiated nature. If the above-mentioned claim is correct, the following two propositions are true:

1. X is greater than Y (because any instantiated nature is greater than any uninstantiated nature)

2. X is worse than Y (because any instantiated nature is worse than any uninstantiated nature).

But (2) entails

3. Y is greater than X.

[17] I am indebted to Joseph Jedwab on this point.

Given the transitivity of greatness, from (1) and (3) can be derived

4. X is greater than X.

(4) is obviously self-contradictory. (Whether or not greatness is always trans-itive is, of course, a matter of dispute. However, it is only minimally controversial that greatness *simpliciter*, which concerns me here, is transitive.) Hence Millican cannot say legitimately that if the ontological argument were successful, then the devil argument would be successful, and *vice versa*.

What happens, then, if (3d) is replaced by (3m)? This produces the following, which I shall call the 'no-devil argument':

The No-Devil Argument

1n. The phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought' is clearly understood by the Fool, and apparently makes sense

2n. Hence the phrase 'a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought' can be taken as successfully denoting some specific nature

3n. A nature which is instantiated in reality is greater than one which is not

4n. So if a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought *were* instanti-ated in reality, then it would be possible to think of a nature that is *worse* (for example, any nature that is *not* instantiated in reality)

5n. But this would be a contradiction, since it is obviously impossible to think of a nature that is *worse* than a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought.

These premises entail the following conclusion:

6n. Therefore a-nature-than-which-no-*worse*-nature-can-be-thought must *not* indeed be instantiated in reality.[18]

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[18] The devil and no-devil arguments are not particularly new. The devil argument was introduced by Albert A. Cock in 1917–18, and rediscovered in the 1950s. As far as I know, the no-devil argument was formulated for the first time by C.K. Grant in 1957. See A.A. Cock, 'The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 18 (1917–18), pp. 363–84; C.K. Grant, 'The Ontological Disproof of the Devil', *Analysis*, 17 (1957), pp. 71–2. For discussions of these arguments see P.E. Devine, 'The Perfect Island, the Devil, and Existent Unicorns', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 12 (1975), pp. 255–60; W. Gombocz, 'St Anselm's Disproof of the Devil's Existence in the *Proslogion*: a Counter Argument against Haight and Richman', *Ratio*, 15 (1973), pp. 334–7; P. Grim, 'Plantinga's God and Other Monstrosities', *Religious Studies*, 15 (1979), pp. 91–7; D. Haight and M. Haight, 'An Ontological Proof of the Devil', *The Monist*, 54 (1970), pp. 218–20; P. Millican, 'The Devil's Advocate', *Cogito*, 3 (1989), pp. 193–207; G. Oppy, *Ontological Argument and Belief in God* (Cambridge UP, 1995), and *Arguing About Gods* (Cambridge UP, 2006); W.L. Power, 'Ontological Arguments for Satan and Other Evil Beings', *Dialogue*, 31 (1992), pp. 667–76; R.J. Richman, 'The Ontological Proof of the Devil', *Philosophical Studies*, 9 (1958), pp. 63–4, 'The Devil and Dr Waldman', *Philosophical Studies*, 11 (1960), pp. 78–80, and 'A Serious Look at the Ontological Argument', *Ratio*, 18 (1976), pp. 85–9; T. Waldman, 'A Comment upon the Ontological Proof of the Devil', *Philosophical Studies*, 10 (1959), pp. 49–50.

The conclusion of the no-devil argument is much more innocuous than that of the devil argument, because it is uncontentious that we can derive *a priori* the *non*-existence of many beings (e.g., square circle, married bachelor, etc.). The conclusion seems also theologically unproblematic; many theists would be happy to accept the conclusion that there is no such being as the devil. Evidently Anselm himself seems to think that a being than which no worse can be thought does not exist.[19] Another reason why the no-devil argument is not very significant is that it is not structurally parallel to the ontological argument. The third premise is identical with its counterpart in the ontological argument, but all other premises are not identical with theirs; rather, they are mirror images of their counterparts. That is, while the third premise is, just as are the premises of the ontological argument, formulated in terms of the term 'greater', other premises are formulated in terms of the term 'worse'.

Therefore not even the best possible revision of the AntiGod argument succeeds in undermining the ontological argument.

VI. CHAMBERS' PARODY OBJECTION

I have shown that no argument from among the set consisting of the AntiGod argument, the devil argument and the no-devil argument is forceful enough to constitute a successful objection to the ontological argument. Nevertheless, Timothy Chambers maintains that the no-devil argument, in particular, might not be as innocuous as it seems at first sight.[20] In this and the following sections I discuss Chambers' new, elaborate application of the no-devil argument.

Unlike Millican, Chambers (pp. 100–2) formulates the ontological argument without relying on the theory of natures:

Chambers' Formulation of the Ontological Argument

1c. There is, in the understanding at least, something than which nothing greater can be thought
2c. If it is even in the understanding alone, it can be thought to be in reality also
3c. This would be greater
4c. There exists, therefore, both in the understanding and in reality, something than which a greater cannot be thought.

[19] See G. Oppy, *Ontological Argument and Belief in God*, p. 183.
[20] T. Chambers, 'On Behalf of the Devil: a Parody of Anselm Revisited', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 100 (2000), pp. 93–113.

I assume, for the sake of argument, that this is an accurate formulation of the ontological argument. Chambers then (p. 110) introduces the 'no-devil corollary':

The No-Devil Corollary

1n´. There is, in the understanding at least, something than which nothing lesser (worse) can be thought
2n´. If it exists in the understanding and in reality, it can be thought to exist in the understanding alone
3n´. This would be still less (worse)
4n´. There does not exist in reality, therefore, something than which a lesser (worse) cannot be thought.

The no-devil corollary is essentially identical with the no-devil argument which I discussed in the previous section. The no-devil corollary derives, as does the no-devil argument, the non-existence of the devil by paralleling Anselm's reasoning. Moreover, the no-devil corollary appears to be just as innocuous as the no-devil argument. The fact that the non-existence of some being is shown *a priori* is unsurprising, and the claim that the devil does not exist in reality does not seem theologically problematic. Chambers claims, however, that the apparent innocuousness of the no-devil corollary is only superficial. According to him, it could lead to a new, more effective parody objection to the ontological argument.

   In order to establish the new parody objection Chambers (p. 111) introduces another parody argument, which is comparable with the no-devil corollary presented above. He calls it the 'extreme no-devil corollary':

The Extreme No-Devil Corollary

1e. Suppose there is, in the understanding at least, something than which nothing lesser (worse) can be thought
2e. If it exists in the understanding, then it is possible for it not to exist in the understanding
3e. This would be still less (worse)
4e. There does not exist in the understanding, therefore, something than which a lesser (worse) cannot be thought.

The extreme no-devil corollary derives the conclusion that the devil does not exist even in the understanding, apparently by endorsing the following principle: any being that does not exist in the understanding is lesser (worse) than any being that exists in the understanding. This is analogous to (PSE), the principle of the superiority of existence, introduced in §II above.

By using the no-devil and the extreme no-devil corollaries, Chambers (pp. 110–12) runs his parody objection to the ontological argument as follows:

Chambers' Parody Objection to the Ontological Argument

1p. If Anselm's argument is sound, then so is the no-devil corollary
2p. We understand the expression 'something than which nothing lesser (worse) can be thought', if we understand the expression 'something than which nothing greater can be thought'
3p. The extreme no-devil corollary is sound if the no-devil corollary is
4p. If the extreme no-devil argument is sound, then its conclusion is true, i.e., the conclusion that there does not exist in the understanding something than which a lesser (worse) cannot be thought
5p. If we understand the description 'That than which a lesser (worse) cannot be thought', then the subject of that description exists in the understanding
6p. Therefore if Anselm's argument is sound, then we do *not* understand the description 'That than which a greater cannot be thought'
7p. Anselm's argument is sound only if we understand the description 'That than which a greater cannot be thought'
8p. Therefore Anselm's argument is not sound.

Chambers' parody objection purports to show the following. If the ontological argument were successful, then the no-devil corollary would also be successful. If the no-devil corollary were successful, then the extreme no-devil corollary would also be successful. However, the extreme no-devil corollary implies a claim which demolishes the ontological argument: one cannot even understand the description of God as 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'. Therefore the ontological argument is unsuccessful.

VII. OBJECTION TO CHAMBERS

While Chambers' parody objection to the ontological argument is certainly interesting, it seems to face several difficulties.

First, it is far from obvious that (1p) is true (i.e., if Anselm's argument is sound, then so is the no-devil corollary), because it is far from obvious that (2p) is true (i.e., we understand the expression 'something than which nothing lesser (worse) can be thought', if we understand the expression 'something than which nothing greater can be thought'). Proponents of the ontological argument can maintain that even though they are committed to the claim that there is in the understanding a being than which no greater can be thought, they are not committed to the claim that there is in the

understanding a being than which no *lesser* (worse) can be conceived. Here is an illustrative example: even if one is committed to the claim that there is in the understanding a negative integer than which no greater can be thought, that is, −1, one is not committed to the claim that there is in the understanding a negative integer than which no lesser can be thought; for there is no such number. (It should be emphasized here that this is only an analogy. I do not intend to convey the idea that the notion of greatness in the ontological argument is comparable to the greatness of numbers.)

   Secondly, the third premise of Chambers' parody objection, i.e., that the extreme no-devil corollary is sound if the no-devil corollary is, is clearly false. For the no-devil corollary and the extreme no-devil corollary are incompatible. The no-devil corollary shows, if it is successful, that a being than which no lesser (worse) can be thought exists in the understanding but not in reality. Meanwhile, the extreme no-devil corollary shows, if it is successful, that a being than which no lesser (worse) can be thought exists neither in the understanding nor in reality. From these two arguments, we can derive the claim that a being than which no lesser (worse) can be thought both *exists and does not exist* simultaneously in the understanding, which is, of course, logically impossible. So, contrary to what Chambers says, it is false that the extreme no-devil corollary is sound if the no-devil corollary is. (As Oppy correctly points out (*Arguing About Gods*, p. 81), the conclusion of the extreme no-devil corollary is the *negation* of the first premise of the no-devil corollary.) So clearly Chambers cannot consistently hold these two arguments at the same time.

   Thirdly, Chambers' parody objection seems to be based on an incorrect assumption about transitivity in the case of parody arguments. The point of the parody objection in general is to refute the ontological argument by showing that there is a parallel argument which reveals the absurdity of the ontological argument. Yet what Chambers shows is not that there is a parallel argument which reveals the absurdity of the ontological argument, but rather that there is *a parallel to the parallel argument*, which reveals the absurdity. This strategy works if the following transitivity relation holds: if arguments A_1 and A_2 are parallel and arguments A_2 and A_3 are parallel, then arguments A_1 and A_3 are parallel. This relation does not, however, seem to hold, particularly not among the set of arguments consisting of the ontological argument, the no-devil corollary and the extreme no-devil corollary. We cannot obtain the extreme no-devil corollary simply by substituting relevant phrases in the ontological argument.[21]

[21] As Oppy remarks, moreover (*Arguing About Gods*, p. 81), the extreme no-devil corollary is not exactly parallel even to the no-devil corollary. While the no-devil corollary is a categorical derivation, the extreme no-devil corollary is a *reductio ad absurdum*.

Chambers' parody argument is certainly one of the most elaborate applications of the devil argument. However, it fails to refute the ontological argument.

VIII. A HYPOTHESIS CONCERNING THE PARODY OBJECTION

I have shown that while the parody objection is more powerful than many other existing objections in various respects, even the most sophisticated versions of it, such as Millican's and Chambers', do not succeed in defeating the ontological argument. In this section, by comparing the island argument on the one hand with the no-devil argument and the devil corollary on the other, I explain why the parody objection always fails.

As I remarked in §II, Gaunilo's parody objection employs the island argument, which purports to show that the greatest possible island exists. Proponents of the ontological argument commonly reject Gaunilo's objection on two grounds.

First, the island argument is not strictly parallel to the ontological argument because its scope is narrower. That is, while the ontological argument is concerned with the set of all possible beings, the island argument is concerned with a significantly smaller subset of it, namely, the set of all possible *islands*.

Secondly, the island argument is based on an assumption about intrinsic maxima to which proponents of the ontological argument are not committed. The ontological argument is based on the assumption that there are intrinsic maxima for properties traditionally attributed to God. So, for example, it assumes that there is a maximum amount of knowledge that any being, in particular, a being than which no greater can be thought, can have. Similarly, the island argument is based on the assumption that there are intrinsic maxima for properties that an island can have. So, for example, it assumes that there is a maximum amount of beautiful palm trees or pleasant beaches that any island, in particular, an island than which no greater can be thought, can have. However, proponents of the ontological argument, who are committed to the assumption that there are intrinsic maxima for God's properties, such as knowledge, are not committed to the assumption that there are intrinsic maxima for an island's properties. Moreover, there is an obvious reason to reject this assumption about an island's properties: for any island i it is always possible to make i greater by adding, for example, one more beautiful palm tree or one more pleasant beach.[22]

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[22] A. Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1974), p. 91.

Resorting to the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary can be regarded as an attempt to overcome the two difficulties which the island argument faces. In response to the first difficulty, the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary retain the same scope as the ontological argument. The scope of the no-devil argument and that of the no-devil corollary are no less or no more narrow than that of the ontological argument: it covers all possible beings. In response to the second difficulty, the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary assume nothing more about intrinsic maxima than does the ontological argument. This is because, unlike the island argument, they are not concerned with the upper limit of any property.

Unfortunately, however, the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary face a difficulty of their own. They make a different kind of assumption to which proponents of the ontological argument are not committed. They assume that there are intrinsic *minima* for properties that a being than which no lesser or worse can be thought can have; in particular, a being than which no lesser or worse can be thought lacks the property of being existent in reality. (It might appear slightly inappropriate to treat non-existence as an intrinsic minimum, because unlike the number of beautiful trees or the size of knowledge, existence is not continuous. However, we can construe existence as a binary property of being either existent or non-existent, and thus existence is the intrinsic maximum while non-existence is the intrinsic minimum.) Therefore while the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary might be structurally and dialectically the most similar to the ontological argument among instances of the parody argument, they still do not parallel the ontological argument exactly. Yet if they do not parallel it exactly, they cannot constitute a successful parody objection to the ontological argument.

One might claim at this point that a parody argument does not have to parallel the ontological argument exactly, because, after all, it is just a parody. The purpose of the parody objection is, one might say, to show that there is something wrong with the ontological argument by presenting an absurd parody argument, which is comparable with, but not necessarily strictly parallel to, the ontological argument.

If this claim is correct, however, the parody objection is too weak. In §III I contended that while the parody objection does not pinpoint exactly what is wrong with the ontological argument, it is in principle sufficient to refute the ontological argument. However, if the above interpretation is correct, the parody objection is far from sufficient. Its being true merely that the ontological argument and a parody argument are *similar* and that the parody argument is absurd does not entail that the ontological argument is also absurd.

One might advance another interpretation of the parody objection, as follows: the purpose of the parody objection is not to show that proponents of the ontological argument are committed to an absurd parody argument. The purpose is to show rather that between the ontological argument and a parody argument there is no reason to choose one rather than the other, because one is a mirror image of the other.[23]

This interpretation cannot be applied to the version of the parody argument which uses the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary, because the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary are not mirror images of the ontological argument. As I have shown, we cannot obtain them merely by replacing the term 'greater' in the ontological argument with the term 'lesser' or 'worse'. Moreover, it is incorrect to say that we cannot choose one rather than the other in a choice between the ontological argument on the one hand and the non-devil argument and the no-devil corollary on the other. As I noted earlier, proponents of the ontological argument are usually willing to accept, if necessary, the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary because their conclusions are both philosophically and theologically innocuous.

Suppose, then, we apply the interpretation in question to the version of the parody argument which incorporates the devil argument. Unlike the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary, the devil argument *is* a mirror image of the ontological argument; one can obtain the devil argument merely by replacing the term 'greater' in the ontological argument with the term 'worse'. It is, however, incorrect to say that one cannot choose between the ontological argument and the devil argument. For example, the third premise of the ontological argument is

3m. A nature which is instantiated in reality is greater than one which is not.

The counterpart of this premise in the devil argument is

3d. A nature which is instantiated in reality is *worse* than one which is not.

In order for the interpretation in question to be successful, proponents of the ontological argument need to find (3d) as plausible as they find (3m). However, they could easily deny this by saying that (3d) lacks the intuitive appeal which (3m) has. One might say that (3d) is false because <*Morally Perfect Being*>, even if it is instantiated, cannot be worse than a nature that is not instantiated. Thus even though the devil argument is a mirror image of the ontological argument, it is not the case that one cannot choose between the ontological argument and the devil argument. Therefore the

[23] I am indebted to Joseph Jedwab on this point.

interpretation of the parody argument in question does not weaken the position of the ontological argument.

An effective parody argument would derive an absurd conclusion, while being structurally and dialectically parallel to the ontological argument. Starting with the island argument, proponents of the parody argument have improved their case to the extent that they have developed the no-devil argument and the no-devil corollary. However, as I have argued, these approaches still do not succeed in constructing a successful refutation of the ontological argument.

These observations suggest the following hypothesis. The parody objection always fails because any parody argument is such that either (i) it is not structurally parallel to the ontological argument (typically because its scope is too narrow), or (ii) it is not dialectically parallel to the ontological argument (typically because it makes extra assumptions to which proponents of the ontological argument are not committed).

To circumvent (i) and (ii), proponents of the parody objection need to revise either the no-devil argument or the no-devil corollary, by eliminating the assumptions which proponents of the ontological argument do not endorse, while keeping the structure parallel to that of the ontological argument. However, ironically, once an instance of the parody argument is modified in this way, it is no longer a parody: it is the ontological argument itself. Of course one cannot undermine the ontological argument by advancing the ontological argument itself.

The parody objection is, in many respects, better than other existing objections, but it nevertheless fails to refute the ontological argument.[24]

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