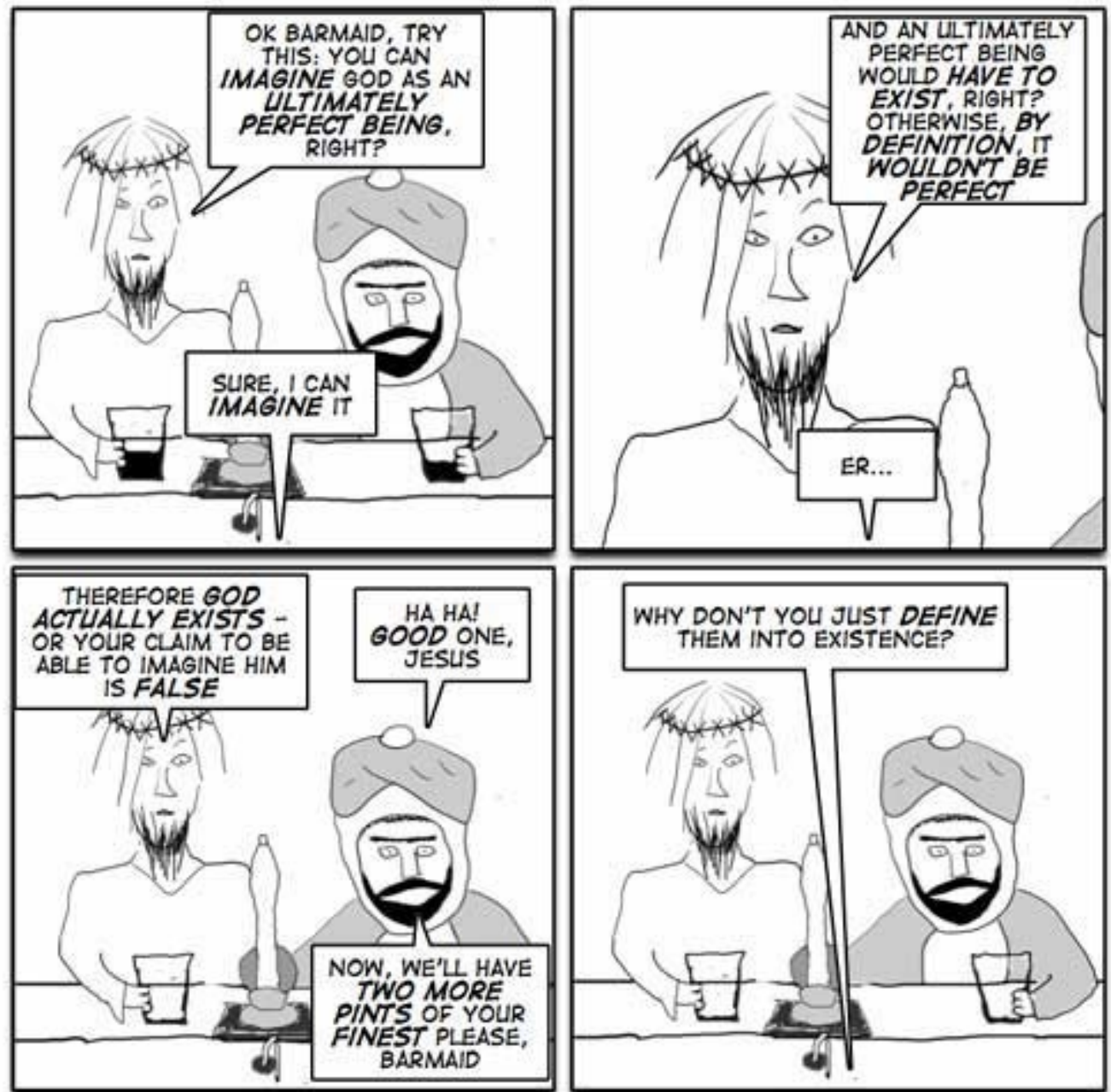


God as the Being than Which No Greater Can Be Thought/ Conceived

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Course Requirements

- ❖ Three writing assignments: each 20% of the grade
 1. Argument analysis (**done!**)
 2. Paper outline (**1-2 pages — due Nov 17**)
 3. Final paper (**5-7 pages — due Dec 15**)
- ❖ Dialogue participation: 20% of the grade (**see schedule**)
- ❖ Final exam: 20% of the grade (**during exam period**)

God, Suffering and Faith

Can we prove
that God exists?

If God exists,
why is there
suffering in the
world?

Can we do
away with
faith?



Bruegel the Elder, *Tower of Babel*

Two Types of Proofs of God's Existence

- **A PRIORI PROOF:** It establishes the existence of God **given the concept of God alone**

An a priori statement is one whose truth or falsity depends on thought alone and does not depend on sensory experience, data collection or observation

- **A POSTERIORI PROOF:** It establishes the existence of God **given our sensory experience, data collection or observation**

An a posteriori statement is one whose truth or falsity depends on sensory experience, data collection or observation

Examples of A Priori Statements

A priori TRUE

- Triangles have three sides
- $4+4=8$
- Bachelors are unmarried

A priori FALSE

- Triangles have four sides
- $4+4=5$
- Bachelors are married

Examples of A Posteriori Statements

A posteriori TRUE

- Water flows downhill
- There are more than five billion people on earth today
- Standing under the rain with no umbrella makes you wet

A posteriori FALSE

- Water flows uphill
- There are less than five billion people on earth today
- Standing under the rain with no umbrella makes you dry

Anselm's Ontological Argument

“Lord . . . we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

. . . The fool has said in his heart, there is no God (Psalms xiv. 1). But when this very fool hears of God, i.e. a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, he understands what he hears.

Even the fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be conceived, at least, exists in the mind.

But that than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist in the mind alone. (For, suppose it exists in the mind alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which would be something greater.)

So, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in the mind alone, it would be something than which something greater can be conceived.

But this is impossible, so that there exists—in reality—something than which nothing greater can be conceived.”

Reconstructing Anselm's Argument

Define God as the being than which no greater can be conceived (=BNGCBC).

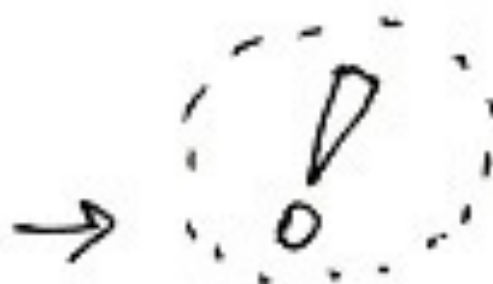
1. By definition, nothing greater than God can be conceived
2. Suppose God (=BNGCBC) does not exist.
 - A. If God does not exist, something greater than it can be conceived.
 - B. So, something greater than God (=BNGCBC) can be conceived.
3. But nothing greater than God can be conceived because, by definition, God is BNGCBC. So, we cannot suppose that God does not exist.

NOTA BENE:

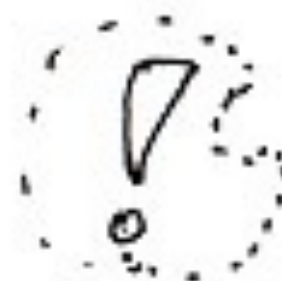
Step 2 assumes that an **existent being** is *greater than* (more perfect than) a **non-existent being**. That is, if you conceive of *God-as-non-existent*, you can conceive of something greater than it, namely you can conceive of *God-as-existent*.



Think of the greatest
concept ever



Now imagine that
it doesn't exist

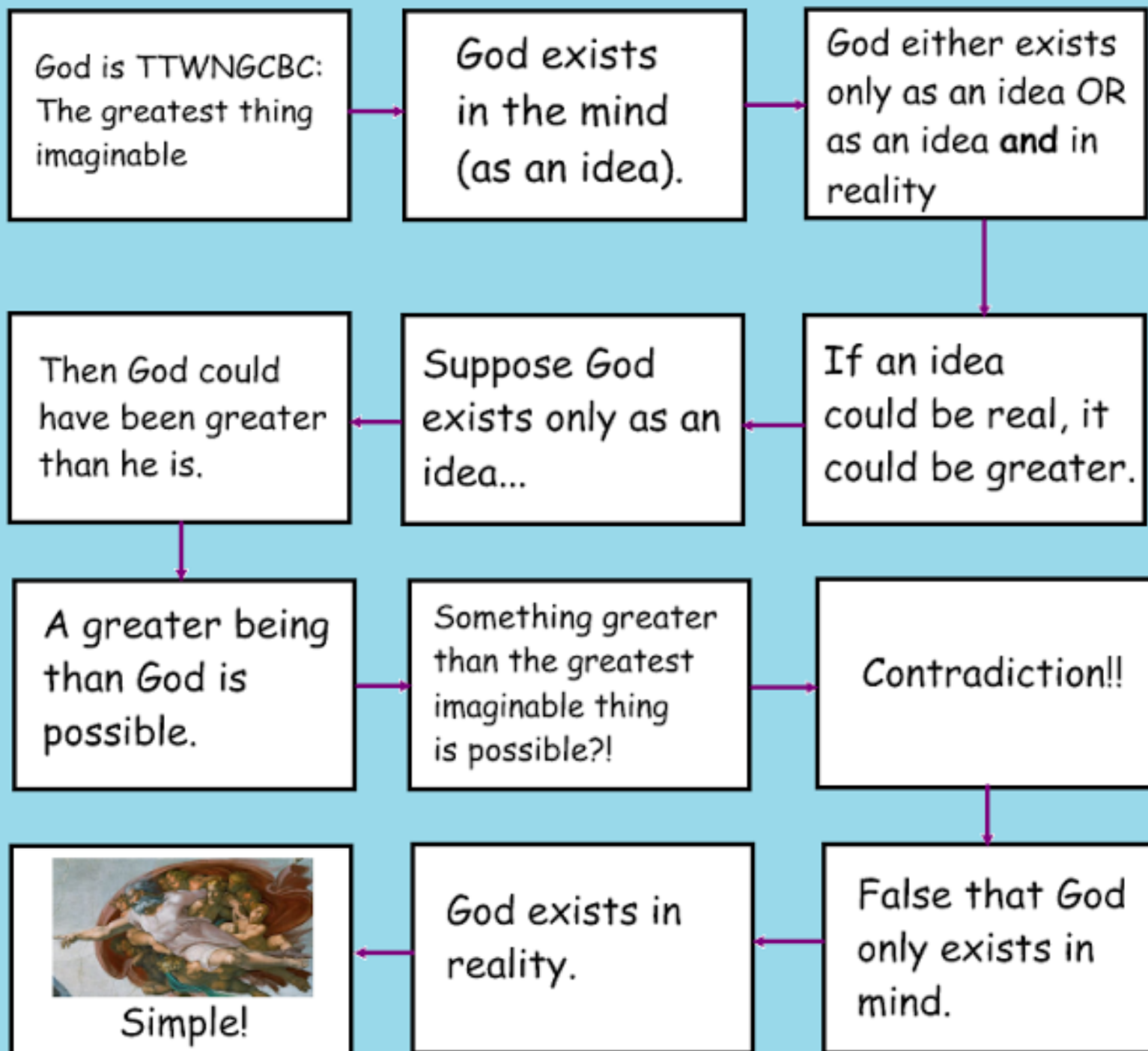


Not so great
now, is it?



So if what you're thinking of is
really so great, it must exist!

Anselm's Ontological Argument Made Simple



The Abstract Form of Anselm's Argument

1. By definition, nothing greater than God can be conceived.

2. Suppose God does not exist.

A. If God does not exist, something greater than it can be conceived.

B. So, something greater than God can be conceived.

3. But, by definition, nothing greater than God can be conceived, so we cannot suppose God does not exist.

1. By definition, X is true

2. Suppose Y is true

A. If Y is true, then X is false

B. So, X is false

3. But X cannot be false, because by definition, X is true. So, Y must be false.

Anselm on How We Can Make Sense of a Being Than Which No Greater Can Be Conceived

“...by raising our thoughts from lesser goods to greater goods, we are quite capable of forming an idea of that than which a greater cannot be thought ...

Who, for example, is unable to think . . . that if something that has a beginning and end is good, then something that has a beginning but never ceases to exist is much better?

And ... something that has neither beginning nor end is better still?

...So there is in fact a way to form an idea of that than which a greater cannot be thought.”

Anselm's Challenge for the Atheist

A. *Either* the atheist understands the word 'God' (namely, the being than which nothing greater can be conceived)

B. *Or* the atheist does not understand the word 'God'

If (A), the atheist has to admit God exists by Anselm's proof.

If (B), the atheist cannot meaningfully deny God's existence.

So, **either** God exists **or** denying its existence is meaningless.

Is Anselm's Proof A PRIORI or A POSTERIORI?

A priori. It contains no appeal to our sensory experience, data collection or observation of the world.