



Marcello Di Bello

Lehman College CUNY

PHI 171 - Fall 2014

*God as the BNGCBC
and
God as the First Cause*

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 experiments

- **A POSTERIORI PROOF:** It establishes the existence of God **given our sensory experience**

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

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*.

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.

Three Objections to Anselm's Ontological Argument

1. Is God Thinkable or Conceivable?

“The Faithful say that God knows absolutely everything, and that there are no limits to what he can do. [However,] if God knows everything, then nobody could construct a box so that God doesn't know what it contains, whereas if there were no limits to what God can do, then he could construct a box so that nobody knows what it contains.”

Bill Wallace – From the 'Discussion Forum' on Richard Dawkins' website.

This observation suggests that the concept of God is hard for us humans to conceive, grasp and understand. If so, Anselm's argument which presupposes an understanding of the concept of God is in trouble.

2. Gaunilo's Objection

Consider the Perfect Island (=an island than which no greater / better island can be conceived).

Following Anselm's reasoning, it follows that a *non-existent* Perfect Island would be less perfect than an *existent* Perfect Island.

So, the Perfect Island must exist. (*Absurd!*)

Since this admittedly absurd piece of reasoning mirrors Anselm's proof of God's existence, Anselm's proof must be absurd, as well.

How Did Anselm Respond to Gaunilo?

Anselm's proof only applies to the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, not to any being.

3. Kant's Objection

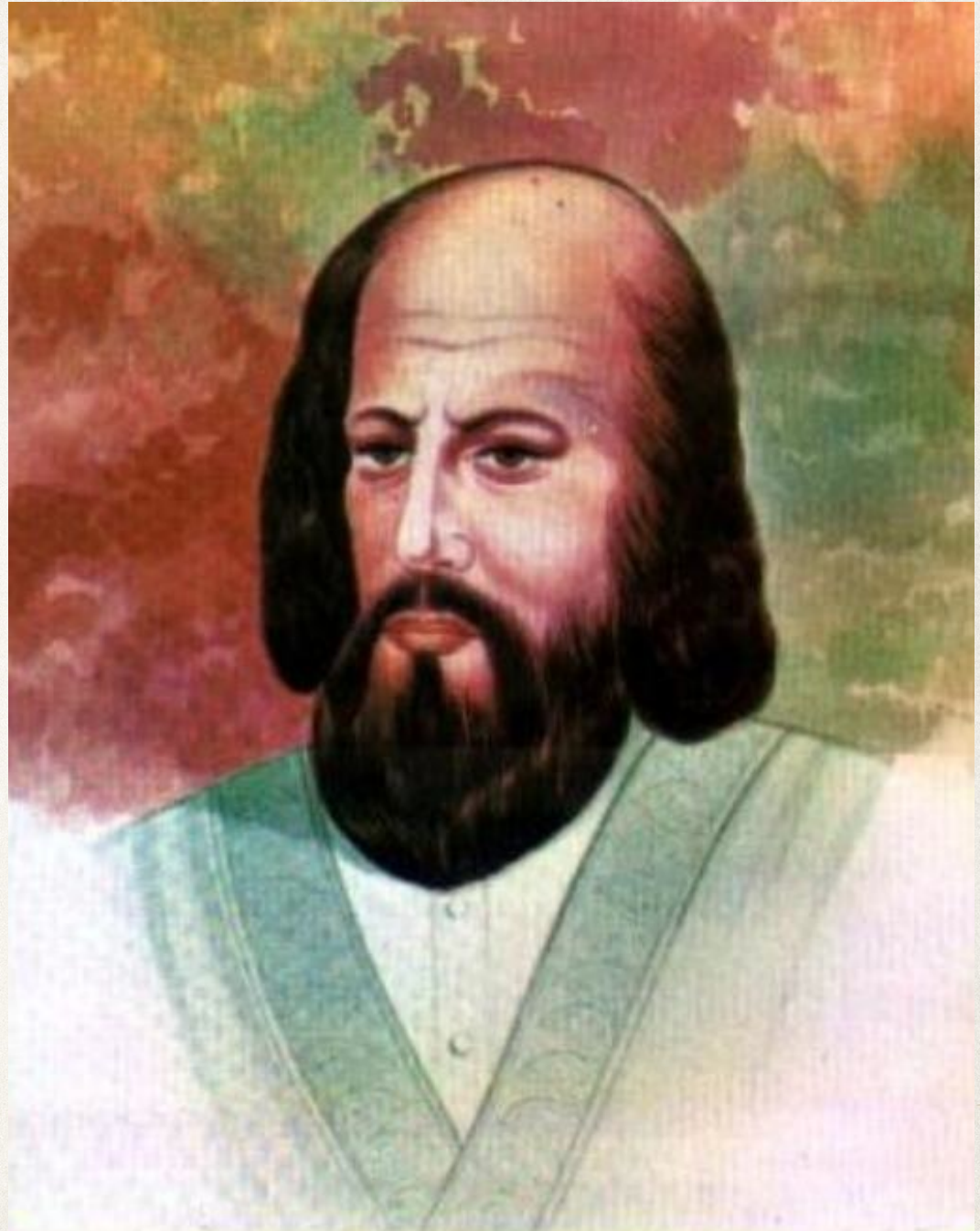
Existence is not a predicate, such as red, tall, short, etc.

*A hundred existent coins do not contain a coin more than a hundred mere possible coins. As the latter signify the **concept in the mind**, and the former the **real object** ..., should the former contain more than the latter, my concept would, in the latter case, express the whole object, and would not therefore be an adequate concept . . . **the conceived hundred coins are not themselves increased through acquiring existence outside my concept.***

And Now the Cosmological Argument

Al-Gazhali

(1022—1111)



Al-Gazhali's Argument

1. Everything that has a beginning of its existence must have a cause of its existence.
2. **The universe has a beginning of its existence.**
3. So, the universe must have a cause of its existence.
4. If the universe has a cause of its existence, its cause must be God.
5. So, God must exist.

St. Thomas of Aquinas (1225—1274)

“To those who have faith no explanation is necessary. To those without faith, no explanation is possible.”



The Cosmological Argument

1. Some things are undergoing change in the world.
2. Anything that is undergoing change must have a cause of its change.
3. Such a cause, if it is itself undergoing change, must have a cause for its change as well.
4. But this cannot go on forever, otherwise there would be no first cause and no change at all.
5. So, there must be a first cause of change, where the first cause is not itself caused by something else.
6. That first cause we call God.

Is Thomas' Argument A PRIORI or A POSTERIORI?

A posteriori. The proof begins with an empirical observation, namely that some things are undergoing change in this world.

Key Ideas in the Argument

Everything that
undergoes change
must have a cause

There cannot be an
infinite regress of
causes, otherwise
change itself would
be impossible

But Why Cannot There Be an
Infinite Regress of Causes?
