impressive. Pereboom forcefully argues that anyone who is even moderately moved by his arguments to doubt the existence of free will must take seriously the implications of such skepticism for our practices of blame and punishment, since such practices inflict serious harm on their targets, and "justification for harm must meet a high epistemic standard" (158). His insistent reminder that our debates about the nature and extent of human freedom in the metaphysics classroom have implications for everything from public policy to personal relationships—and that these implications must be faced squarely by free will theorists—is to be applauded.


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A. D. Smith takes a winding and uneven route to what I find an exciting and plausible conclusion: Whether or not Anselm intended it, there is a valid and persuasive argument for the existence of God to be found—or at least suggested—in Anselm's Replies, that is, in his responses to Gaunilo's criticisms of the Proslogion II argument. On the way to this conclusion, Smith argues that, contrary to the views of some, Anselm does not present a Modal Ontological Argument in Proslogion III, or indeed anywhere else. In order to make his case against any modal argument and in favor of the "other" argument of the title, Smith sets out what he takes to be Anselm's position on the nature of "conceivability" and "possibility." The book, then, is an attempt both to present Anselm's own thinking on some issues which are key to certain sorts of proofs for the existence of God, and to develop and defend an argument inspired by Anselm's Replies.

Smith's discussion of Anselm's understanding of conceivability and possibility is not as thorough as it might be, and it contains some unnecessary digressions. One such digression offers a brief overview of Anselm's position on the question of whether or not there is a best world, such that a perfectly good God "must" actualize it. The issue comes up in connection with Anselm's approach to counterfactuals, but the discussion, though several pages long, is not substantive enough to settle the question in terms of interpreting Anselm, does not contribute to the perennial philosophical debate, and does not seem to have much bearing on Anselm's approach to counterfactuals. One can make sense of counterfactuals whether or not one holds that ours is the only world a perfect God could actualize.

Regarding the rather "quick" interpretation of Anselm on conceivability and possibility, Smith does offer some historical perspective, but it is in the
form of briefly citing various late classical and medieval figures to develop his various theses. We know that Anselm took Augustine to be his major influence, and so the standard approach in interpreting Anselm is to look first at Augustine, but Smith does not consider how Augustine might have understood conceivability or possibility. (Perhaps Smith is not conversant with Augustine. He writes, without qualification, “God, of course, is not in any interesting sense like a number” (26). Augustine, famously, held that God is Numbers (and Wisdom).)

The other standard move in interpreting Anselm on some issue is to canvas everything he said on the subject. Anselm has a lot to say on how our thinking reflects reality (or how reality must reflect our thinking) and on what is possible and what is necessary. But his corpus is not large, so a thorough assessment would not be too difficult a task. Smith includes many important texts on conceivability and possibility, but sometimes cites only a short portion of a lengthy discussion, and sometimes does not mention a text that seems relevant. For example, the De Concordia, inspired by the freedom and foreknowledge dilemma, offers some interesting distinctions concerning what is necessary and what is possible, but Smith does not discuss it.

That Smith’s analysis is not thorough would be a serious problem if Smith’s book were intended to be the last word on interpreting Anselm’s own understanding of conceivability and possibility, but that is not the aim of the book. More importantly, Smith’s interpretations of Anselm on conceivability and possibility, while not thoroughly developed, may well be correct, even though they are sometimes surprising. For example, Smith rightly insists that for Anselm, “Reason intrinsically and essentially, grasps and tracks the truth [Smith’s italics]” (60). Then Smith attributes to Anselm the view that conceivability encompasses what reason demonstrates must be the case. If reason shows that some state of affairs is impossible, then, in some important sense, that state of affairs is “inconceivable.” This is not the way contemporary philosophers use the term, but Smith has texts to support this reading.

Even more surprising is the analysis of what is “possible.” Smith argues that in cases when Anselm discusses locutions that seem to ascribe to things certain inabilities—that some being, including God, does not have an ability (God “cannot” lie, for example)—or when he ascribes to nonexistent beings some ability or inability—the ascription must be parsed as involving a power or lack of power on the part of some other existent being. Prima facie this seems implausible, but, again, Smith has texts to defend the interpretation. A more thorough analysis might well support Smith’s reading.

Smith concludes that Anselm’s understanding of what is “possible” for any being is based on the metaphysical nature and ontological status of the being. And our “conceiving” what is the case for any being must reflect reason’s assessment of that nature and status. Thus, in that Anselm had a very different understanding of “conceivable” and “possible” than that
used in modern Modal Ontological Arguments, Smith is able to make the historical case against such arguments being made, or somehow embedded, in Anselm’s work. (For those of us who are less fluent in contemporary modal logic and its sub-dialects, more explanation of how contemporary philosophers distinguish logical and metaphysical possibility, and of what exactly is meant by the latter, might have been helpful.)

As Smith begins to close in on the “other” argument, the trajectory, at first, does not look very promising. Smith finds in Anselm’s *Replies* an argument of which the crucial premise is, “whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived to exist with a beginning” (131). Smith interprets Anselm to mean that whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived to exist with a *temporal* beginning. This seems a pretty implausible premise. Smith devotes pages to arguing that this is indeed Anselm’s claim. Then he notes that it is surprising that Anselm makes such a claim, in that he would have had access to counter examples and he, himself, contradicts the claim in places. Smith then devotes many more pages to arguing that the crucial premise is mistaken, and that what Anselm should have said is that “whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist can be conceived to be caused” (144).

In fact, the term Anselm uses, which Smith’s translation gives as “beginning,” is *initio*. That can mean a temporal beginning, but it can also mean an origin, which could be a source or a cause. Smith notes that Anselm also says that a conceivable, non-existent thing can be conceived to exist with an “end.” Again Smith assumes Anselm means a *temporal* end, but the term *finis* can also mean a border or limit or boundary, rather than a temporal ending. A charitable, but not unlikely, interpretation would have allowed Smith to cut to the chase and suppose that Anselm did indeed propose the claim that Smith holds that he ought to have made, and which supports a more persuasive version of the “other” argument. (As Smith notes, this “other” argument bears a close family resemblance to one which Duns Scotus makes. Could it be that Duns Scotus is the first to discover the “other” argument in Anselm?)

With some reworking of what Anselm has to say in the *Replies*, to cast it into the contemporary idiom, Smith sets out the “other” argument:

1) For any essential kind of thing, if there is not, but possibly could be, something of that kind, then it is possible for something of that kind to be caused.

2) There could possibly be something divine (i.e., of the essential kind *divine*).

3) It is not possible for anything divine to be caused.

Therefore, something divine exists (152).

*Prima facie* the first premise, which Smith labels “Anselm’s Principle,” is the one which is most likely to offend. Smith shows that it can be supported using an extremely weak version of the Principle of Sufficient Reason: “for
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any possibly instantiated essential kind, it is at least possible that there should be an instance of that kind that exists for a reason” (171). This seems a difficult claim to deny. Premise 3 is unassailable. The critic, then, should probably fall back on defending the claim that it is not, in fact, possible for there to be something divine. But this, too, is difficult to argue. Smith concludes by defending the “other” argument against a couple of Lost Island-style attacks—successfully, it seems to me.

In the 900 years since Anselm wrote his Proslogion, there has been a large and steady stream of ink spilt over analyzing the arguments in chapters 2 and 3 and in the Replies. Smith’s accomplishment is impressive on two counts. He has uncovered something new in those oft-read texts, and he has presented his discovery as a plausible argument for the existence of God—plausible, at least, to those of us sympathetic to an Anselmian approach and hence to arguments which operate entirely within the confines of what is “conceivable.”


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You are the sole remaining passenger on a spaceship that is programmed to self-destruct in one minute. You have before you a control panel with five buttons; each button represents a possible way in which you might be transported from the doomed ship to the friendly surface of a nearby planet. You need to choose which button to push; one, and only one, of them will bring you safely to the planet. The ship’s guidebook gives some hints, but unfortunately it lacks clear instructions concerning which is the correct button. Time is running out. So begins Silas N. Langley’s Death, Resurrection, and Transporter Beams.

The five buttons represent five different Christian views concerning the way in which we survive bodily death. They are roughly as follows:

Soul-flight: You are your soul, your body is just a shell. Your soul is transported to the planet; on arrival, you get a new body.

Particle Beam: You are your body, which is disassembled, teleported to your destination, and reassembled.

Data Stream: Your body is scanned and all your physical and mental characteristics are registered in a stream of data that is transmitted to the planet, where you are reconstructed and continue your life.