Axtell's discussion is dense and detailed. He, however, seems to avoid making controversial claims or glosses over them when he does. For example, he writes that counter-inductive thinking shows that religious belief often is not safe and hence not knowledge. Such claims are clearly of interest to many philosophers of religion and theologians and deserve more attention.

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Jeff Speaks, *The Greatest Possible Being*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2018, 192 pp.

In *The Greatest Possible Being* Jeff Speaks argues that Perfect Being Theology (PBT) fails in the jobs it purports to do, guiding us to attributes ascribable to God, allowing us to distinguish between the "dispensable" and the mandatory attributes, and helping us formulate a plausible semantic theory of "God". He offers a number of clever and carefully worked out arguments, and, having shown the failure of PBT, concludes with some suggestions for thinking more productively about God. Speaks works with the assumptions, intuitions, and definitions of much contemporary analytic philosophy of religion. Call his version of PBT, C (for contemporary) PBT. I assume that he properly char-

acterizes CPBT and leave it to its practitioners (CPBTians) to make the case if their work has been misrepresented. Speaks invokes St. Anselm of Canterbury as an early proponent of PBT and quotes Anselm (and Augustine and Aquinas) now and again. But their method is different from CPBT. Call Anselm's version T (for traditional) PBT. I offer a rough outline of some of Speaks' arguments, noting points where any PBTian might hold that he has moved too quickly. Then I note how TPBT differs from CPBT and avoids Speaks' main arguments against CPBT.

CPBT, as Speaks understands it, sets aside God's existence and reasons for believing in God. The project is to decide what properties God has, based on a modal claim: God is the greatest actual being, the greatest possible being, or the greatest conceivable being. There should be a "greatness condition", that is "a condition on properties which is such that a property's satisfying that condition, together with the relevant modal principle, entails that God has that property"(p. 11). The condition should satisfy "Entailment"; if a property F satisfies the condition it is a property of God. And "Informativeness": "it should be possible (without reliance on prior substantive claims about God) to see that some interesting candidates to be divine attributes satisfy the condition" (p. 12). Speaks uses the schema (with many subsequent variations) for comparing beings having, and not having, property F in possible worlds w and w*;

(i) $\Diamond\exists xFx$ & (ii) $\forall x\forall y((Fx_{w} \,\&\, \neg Fy_{w^*}) \rightarrow x_{w} > y_{w^*})$

In Chapter 2, that God is the greatest *actual* being is easily dismissed, since one can posit some limited being as the greatest actual being whose attributes do not satisfy the greatness condition. Speaks moves to the greatest possible being (GPB) and introduces the problem of "trumping"; for any standard attribute applicable to God — omnipotence, let's say — we can imagine *x* is omnipotent and *y* is not, yet *y* is greater than *x* because *y* has other attributes that outweigh *x*'s on the greatness scale. Suppose *x* is merely omnipotent, lacking in knowledge and goodness, while *y* "lacks a few trivial powers" but is omniscient and perfectly good. Wouldn't *y* be greater than *x*? The trumping problem applies for any proposed attribute.

Restricting *x* and *y* does not succeed, even restricting them to God in *w* and God in *w**. One problem is that PBTians standardly argue that God is *necessarily* GPB. For any F, God is necessarily F, or necessarily not F. But the

restricted greatness condition begins *possibly* (God is F), which, given that necessarily God is GPB, entails God is F and so is trivial (p. 32). Suppose we consider conjunctive attributes, for example "Triple-O", the conjunction of [P] for every state of affairs *s* which it is possible for anything to bring about, *x* can bring about *s*; [K] for every true proposition *p*, *x* knows that *p*; and [G]: in every situation, *x* does the morally best thing which *x* can do. The trumping problem arises again. Might not a being that is [*necessarily* G] & [P] & "knows everything but a few insignificant proposition" be greater than Triple-O? To solve this iteration of the trumping problem, the tempting move to *necessarily* Triple-O reintroduces the problem of triviality (p. 42). After pointing out that further attempts to save the conjunctive strategy fail, Speaks moves (Chapter 3) to "God is the greatest *conceivable* being".

What should "conceivable" mean here? It must be different from "possible", and it must avoid "trouble-makers." A trouble-maker satisfies three conditions, "(i) God would be better if *F* than if not *F*. (ii) It is conceivable that God is *F*. (iii) It is not possible that God is *F*" (p. 54). Speaks focuses on a negative understanding of conceivable: *p* is negatively conceivable if it is unable to be ruled out. Why not a positive approach? Speaks often treats "conceivable" and "imaginable" as synonyms. He asks, "What would it mean, for instance, to positively conceive of God's being omnipotent, or perfectly good? Certainly we can't imagine these claims being true in any straightforward sense" (p. 56). And that constitutes the argument for the negative approach. PBTians, both traditional and contemporary, may think Speaks moves too fast here. We cannot *imagine* omnipotence, if that means make a picture in our minds of all that it is to be omnipotent, but there is a vast literature on how the limited human being can talk and think about God. Might not a "conceiving" less robust than imagining nonetheless allow for positively conceptualizing divine attributes? For example, Speaks uses "omnipotent" in the trumping argument, suggesting that he and his reader share intuitions about "an omnipotent being" on some positive understanding.

On the negative approach the question is what property cannot be ruled out based on either logical consistency or on some broader epistemic notion. The various proposals lead to trouble-makers or devolve into proposals about possibility. For example, suppose "*p* is conceivable iff Say that *F* is being able to make the radii of a circle unequal. Speaks discerns a trouble-maker: God would be better if He could do it. It is conceivable that God can do it, and it is

not possible that God can do it. Denying this conjunction involves appealing to what God can *possibly* be or do (pp. 56–58). Speaks tries other definitions of negative conceivability, but none is successful.

Chapter 4 moves to Impure Perfect Being Theology; GPB has every property meeting a certain description, labelled a G-property. In comparing the greatness of two beings we might focus on "absolute greatness"; greatness simpliciter in terms of, for example, possession of intrinsic goods. But the trumping problem arises again (p. 85). Alternatively we can compare greatness between members of a kind. But it is difficult to assign God to the appropriate kind, and whatever likely kind we choose, the trumping problem is inescapable.

Chapter 5 addresses "hidden attributes". There seem to be conflicts among standard divine properties: If God is free, then couldn't he have failed to create, but if creation is good, must he not create? If God makes libertarian free creatures, how can he foreknow their free choices? If omnipotence is the ability to actualize any possible state of affairs, doesn't that conflict with perfect goodness? And granted that there seem to be conflicts, God may have attributes of which we have no suspicion which conflict with the attributes the PBTian tries to derive, properly producing PBT skepticism.

Given the apparent conflicts, couldn't PBT at least help distinguish the mandatory from the dispensable attributes (Chapter 6)? For example, one atheist argument goes, God is said to be omnipotent, which means He is able to actualize all possible states of affairs, but He is also said to be perfectly good, which means He cannot bring about some evil state of affairs. QED, no God. The PBT defense "weakens" one of the conflicting attributes, by showing that it was impossible for God to have and hence dispensable, permitting a reconciliation. But, argues Speaks, since the "weakened" property was taken to be one the GPB ought to have, this move could just as well demonstrate that there can be no GPB (p. 123).

Any PBTian might take issue with the way Speaks couches this argument. If A, B, and C are arguing about some divine property — say freedom — and A insists that freedom is the ability to choose between good and evil, while B understands freedom to entail open options, but not necessarily with moral significance, and C understands freedom as the ability to exercise one's will in total independence of anything outside of oneself, it would be dogmatic of A to insist that B and C have dispensed with divine freedom and in effect denied the existence of GPB. Rather, A, B, and C — all defending GPB's free-

dom — might go on to explain why their own understandings capture what is so great about freedom. This is a standard PBT move.

Chapter 7 deals with the effort of "perfect being semantics" to fix the meaning of "God". Is it a proper name? A descriptive term? Not being a philosopher of language, I will not attempt to outline or assess the arguments here. It seems odd that one would assume that a term used for so long, world-wide, in so many disparate contexts could in fact have "a" meaning. Those engaged in PBT often explain how they intend to use the word "God", but that is not the same thing as setting out "the" meaning of the term. But perhaps I missed the point, here.

Having shown that CPBT fails, Speaks in Chapter 8, offers positive suggestions for thinking about God. He notes that both Anselm and Aquinas start by proving the existence of God, before they derive the divine attributes, but he finds this unpromising since many CPBTians are skeptical of the power of the arguments for God's existence. Instead we must simply allow substantial assumptions as foundational and proceed from there. "For instance, one might take as one's foundational attribute the property of being capable of offering human beings genuine salvation; or the property of being a suitable object of faith; or the property of being deserving of worship" (p. 156). Speaks *very* briefly describes ways in which starting from these attributes could guide the process of determining the divine attributes, distinguishing the mandatory from the dispensable ones, etc.

Speaks grants that making these attributes foundational would limit participants in the discussion. More puzzling is the claim that starting with these attributes is likely to be more fruitful than past efforts at PBT. The history of Christendom shows that salvation, faith, and worship-worthiness are concepts open to wildly differing interpretations. And it seems unlikely that one of these starting points will facilitate discussion between the theist and the non-theist, as Speaks hopes (p. 158). Many a non-theist does not believe he needs salvation, and mocks faith and worship.

Let me suggest a more plausible foundational claim, which allows TPBT to avoid Speaks' arguments. It is derived from Anselm's (and Aquinas's) method where both (as Speaks noted) begin with proofs for God. Even those who do not find the proofs watertight might agree that they point to an absolute and independent source of all. This is clearer in Anselm's *Monologion*, than in the *Proslogion*, but even in the latter work, having demonstrated the existence of that than which a greater cannot be conceived, the first attrib-

utes Anselm ascribes to God are existing necessarily and independently of anything else, being the creator ex nihilo of everything not God, and being the source and standard for all goods. (I read the *Proslogion* argument differently from Speaks, but this is not the place to discuss that vexed issue.). This starting point has broad consequences. For one thing it means that simplicity is among the first attributes ascribed to God, since complexity entails being caused and being "decomposable" if only in intellectu. Although, *quoad nos,* it is appropriate to speak as if God has a variety of different properties, we should understand that they are all one in God. Speaks quickly dismisses the simplicity issue (pp. 17–18). but if one embraces simplicity as a basic divine attribute, Speaks' way of setting up the schema for the greatness condition is a non-starter. It asks us to compare x possessing some property — say omnipotence — with y not possessing that property. But if one is used to understanding that God's simple act involves His perfect power, which He exercises by knowing, and which is itself the standard for good, then the comparative strategy of the greatness condition cannot be applicable to "properties" of God, since a being lacking one of the "properties" would lack them all.

Further, starting where Anselm and Aquinas start entails a very different understanding of the typical attributes than many CPBTians assume. Take omnipotence. In the contemporary literature it is often taken for granted that, in addition to God and what He makes, there are, existing independently of God (perhaps as platonic abstracta), possible worlds, states of affairs, propositions, properties, moral truths, etc. On TPBT the most fundamental understanding of divine power is that *nothing* with any sort of ontological status at all exists independently of God. A being dealing with external abstracta is less powerful. (Anselm makes the provocative claim that the possible and necessary are grounded in the will of God which is immutable, eternal, and could not be other than it is. Aquinas grounds possibilia in the nature of God.) And since being is *good*, God's creative power is the source and standard for all goods. Moral truths are the rules by which the created agent can reflect God. The point is that the way Speaks has set out many of his examples, including the examples to motivate the trumping problem, fail on TPBT. No being is TPBT omnipotent without being omniscient and perfectly good, and so for all attributes we can plausibly assign to God. Certainly starting where TPBT starts leaves tensions that are open to debate, and allows that plenty of what there is to God may be "hidden" from limited creatures. But it seems a far more inclusive and

productive starting place than the specific and revealed divine attributes that Speaks suggests. But note that the claim that TPBT offers a richer and more fruitful approach than CPBT rather supports than undermines Speaks' case against CPBT. Speaks is right to say that contemporary analytic philosophers of religion would do well to examine their assumptions, especially if they hope to engage with "that than which no greater can be conceived."

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Bertini, Daniele and Migliorini, Damiano (eds.), *Relations: Ontology and Philosophy of Religion*. Mimesis International, 2018, 300 pp.

The book is a collection of selected and invited papers joined by a common interest that is the concept of *relation,* as the title clearly shows. It is the result of the reworking of the contents of a conference held in November 2016 at the University of Verona, dealing with ontology, one of the main fields which studies relations, and the philosophy of religion. The book is divided into four parts which in turn could be divided into two: the first half dedicated to ontology and the second to the philosophy of religion, mirroring the book's subtitle. Its introduction, written by the editors, aims at highlighting the context from which the book has originated and its consequent structure. Editors named the four parts: History of philosophy, Ontology, Philosophy of religion, and History of religious doctrines — names that probably express their contents and intents better than the official titles they were given. The book seems to have two reading paths. Although Part one and Part four may appear extremely distant, an in depth reading of the book shows that they are skillfully interwoven. Indeed, the structure is the following. Part one deals with the history of philosophy (of relations) with a look both at the origins of the debate identified in English idealism (see chapter 1 by Guido Bonino), and in the Russell-Bradley's dispute, which is a recurring theme in the text. The latter is more widely recalled by Michele Paolini Paoletti in chapter 6, but it is an indispensable landmark of the entire book. Chapter 3, by Sofia Vescovelli, begins dealing with some theological features that will be helpful later on in the text and it moves on to examine process metaphysics, which