Now we can use all this to diagram Anselm's argument:

P_1

C

P_2
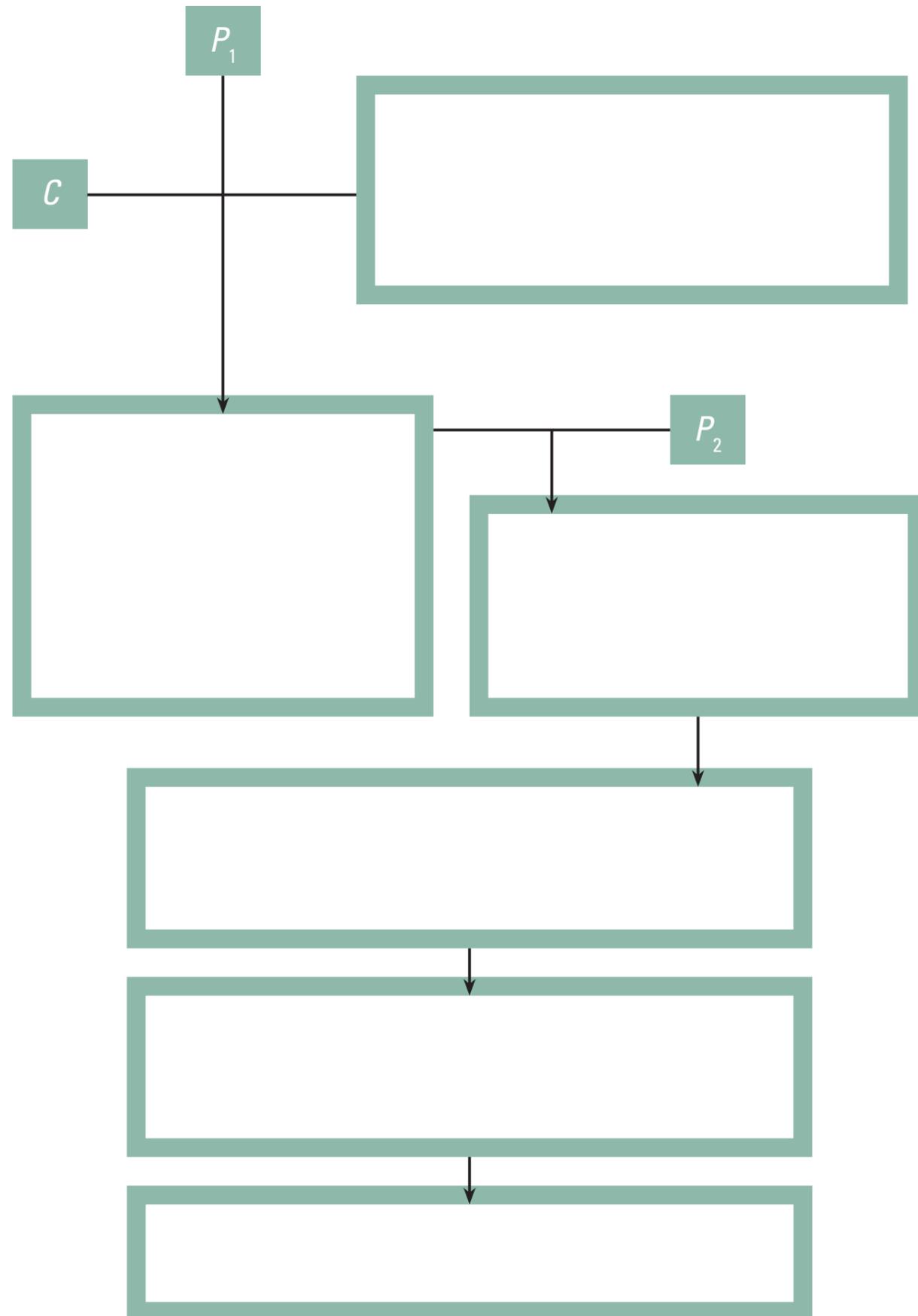
Introduction to Philosophy

The Ontological Proof of God's Existence

Proofs of God's existence are generally classified as either *a posteriori* or *a priori*. This distinction refers to two different sorts of justification to which an argument might appeal to when defending the conclusion that God exists. The distinction is as follows:

1. An *a posteriori* justification is . . .

2. An *a priori* justification is . . .

In the *Proslogion*, the Christian philosopher and theologian Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109 CE) attempts to provide an *a priori* justification for the claim that God exists.

> O Lord, you who give understanding to faith, so far as you know it to be beneficial, give me to understand that you are just as we believe, and that you are what we believe. . . .
>
> You so truly are that you cannot be thought not to be. And rightly so. . . .
>
> You alone, of all things exist in the truest and greatest way, for nothing else so truly exists and therefore everything else has less being.
>
> Why, then, did the fool say in his heart: "God is not," since it is so obvious to the rational mind that you exist supremely above all things? Why, because he is stupid and foolish.
>
>   - Anselm, *Proslogion*

Anselm argues that once you properly understand what "God" means and what "existence" means, you must then conclude that the proposition "God exists" is true. Arguments like this for justifying God's existence are typically called "ontological proofs".

To help us better understand Anselm's argument, the contemporary philosophy WIlliam Rowe suggests to begin by considering the difference between the actual world and merely possible worlds.

      The Real World:

      Possible Worlds:

We can use this idea of possible worlds to generate the following categories:
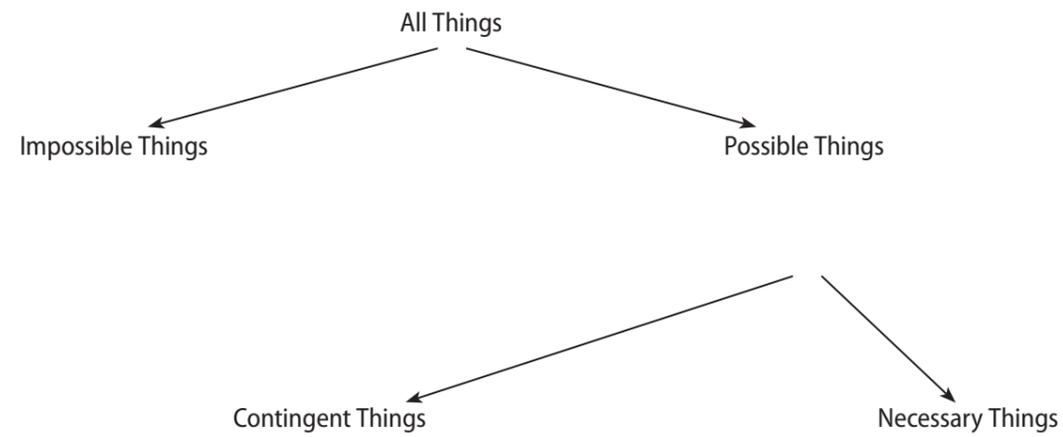
In his proof, Anselm's strategy is to make an argument for God's existence using **reductio ad absurdum**. This is an argument form that . . .

In particular, Anselm grants "the fool's" claim (C) that God does not exist. But then he argues that C contradicts two premises, P_1 and P_2, that even the fool cannot deny:

      P_1 (The God-Idea):

      P_2 (The Nature of Existence):