

THE LOGIC OF THE *ARGUMENTUM ANSELMII*

Between 1075 and 1080, Brother Anselm, the prior of the Benedictine monastery at Bec (Normandy, France) produced two texts, *Monologion* and *Proslogion*, that launched the distinctive theology of the Middle Ages in the West. The Church made him the Archbishop of Canterbury (1093) and eventually recognised him as a saint.¹ In 1720, he was named a Doctor of the Church, and on that occasion, his writings were commended as “a pattern for all theologians”². In the assessment of the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, “few pages of our theology have not been illustrated by the labours of Anselm.”³

Working under the motto “*Fides quaerens intellectum*” (“Faith seeking understanding [of God]”), Anselm had set out to answer the question “What is a living faith, as distinct from a dead or merely conventional faith?” A dead faith is, at best, little or no more than a habitual routine, wrapped in unexamined ideas. It is not what the founders of monastic orders expected of those who wished to become monks and to live a life entirely devoted to God. Monks needed to understand what it was to which they were devoting their lives. What could be the significance of their devotion, if they did not understand God? A large part of a prior's task was to see to it that those who were to be admitted to the monastic community were truly committed to serve God in all they did, said and thought. For a monk, thinking about God was not supposed to be a *divertissement*, a hobby or an intellectual pastime of merely “academic” interest. Certainly for Anselm, it was a vital matter.

At the request of his fellow monks at Bec, Anselm had resolved to write down his thoughts about God in the manner of a philosopher, relying only on his reasoning powers and foregoing the authority of the Bible, the few writings of or about the early

¹ The official date of his canonisation is uncertain. It may be as early as 1163, when Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, requested Anselm's canonisation, or as late as 1494.

² *Catholic Encyclopaedia* (at www.NewAdvent.org), s.v. Saint Anselm.

³ *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, *ibid.*

Church Fathers⁴ or ancient philosophers that were available in a Latin version in the library of the monastery, and the canons and traditional beliefs of the Catholic Church. His task was to explain God in terms any ordinary person would be able to understand. After all, most people seeking to join a religious order were simple folk. Illiteracy was common at the time, also among monks, but being illiterate is not the same as being without intelligence.

A part of Anselm's argument was later — at least more than half a millennium later — dubbed “an ontological argument for the existence of God”. In this text, I am primarily concerned with that part of Anselm's argument. However, it should be understood that Anselm was not particularly interested in proving the existence of God. In the eleventh century, all thinking men who lived in the world known to Anselm believed in God, not only Christians but also Jews and Muslims, the only other civilized people of which a Christian, living at the edge of the known world, would know enough to take their opinions into consideration. Besides, the pagan religions of the great civilizations of the past (Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome, Egypt, Persia) and the Far East also emphasized belief in God, a supreme deity, a god or king of gods or, at least, a chief or *primus inter pares* among all other gods. Certainly as far as civilized existence was concerned, belief in God

⁴ E.g. Tertullian (ca 155 – ca 220) and Saint Augustine (354-430) wrote in Latin. The Greek-writing authors had an indirect influence, because in the seventh and the eighth century many popes and clergy in Rome were from the Eastern Mediterranean (Byzantium, Syria, Palestine), and because the monastic movements in the West were inspired by Eastern examples (see e.g. the *Commemorium*, ca 434, of Vincent of Lérins; also the influence of Maximus the Confessor, ca 580-662, and Pope Gregory the Great, ca 540-604, a monk who had been made the Pope's emissary to the Emperor in Constantinople). Maximus held the view that by being created in the image of God, man was “deified”, i.e. given the ability to become “like God”. As a result, the medieval Church and the monasteries represented a far more optimistic view of the human condition than can be found in the writings of Augustine, who had become obsessed with his own, particularly nasty doctrine of “original sin”. Yet, Augustine remained the most authoritative theologian, largely because his writings were both impressive and easily available. In the sixteenth century, the Protestant Reformation, which held Augustine for the last authentic representative of “true Christianity”, turned its ire not only against the Church but also against the monastic orders.

was universal. Primitive polytheism was no longer an intellectually respectable option. Consequently, trying to prove the existence of God would have been like trying to force one's way through a door that was already wide open. However, there was a need to clarify the meaning and significance of the belief in God. Obviously, Christianity, Judaism and Islam were different faiths, different religions, despite the fact that they were God-centred or theistic religions.

A religion is a more or less complex system of beliefs about what holds the world, maybe even the cosmos together.⁵ Although one might think of a private, personal religion, the term is usually reserved for a system of beliefs shared in common among many, to whom it provides a single framework of basic axioms and postulates about what keeps the world or the cosmos in order and must be heeded to prevent disorder and conflict. Not all religions are theistic, let alone monotheistic. The prevalent religion of today's self-styled "intellectual classes" is non-theistic or even atheistic. It is often called scientism⁶ or a "belief in science", ultimately in the science of so-called elementary particles or forces, invisible and difficult to detect even with expensive and sophisticated instruments. Because such science requires a long initiation and rigorous training in a number of specialized disciplines, scientism has all the marks of an extremely esoteric and gnostic⁷ religion, including a strict separation between the few fully initiated and the many believers, who are expected to believe and do what the high priests of science tell them, usually via legions of propagandists (teachers, journalists), adept at presenting simple, vulgar, popularized versions of "The Science". However, scientism differs from science in that it is not satisfied with accounting for observable phenomena but makes the claim that accounting for such phenomena also provides answers to all questions about what is right and what is wrong, what is to be done and what is not to be done or to be undone. The basic idea is that science translates into

⁵ 'Religion', from the Latin 'religio', which derives from the verb 'religare', "to bind or hold together".

⁶ F.A. Hayek, *The Counterrevolution of Science* (1952)

⁷ A gnostic (from the Greek 'gnōstikos') is "one who knows", an initiate to what for most people is inaccessible knowledge, hence one who possesses "secret knowledge" or "knowledge of secret things".

a technology: it determines the “best” (most efficacious, most efficient) means for achieving a preferred end or goal. Scientism adds that science also determines the ends or goals that are to be achieved. The latter question is to be decided by recording (observing and aggregating) the preferences or desires of the people who actually, effectively believe in science, the enablers or financiers of the required technology, investors (who invest their own present or future savings) or political authorities (who invest the present or future earnings or even the present and future labour of their underlings). Thus, scientism marries belief in science to the reductionist maxim “The desirable is nothing more and nothing less than what is desired by the people who have the means, i.e. the power, to get what they desire”. The fruit of that marriage is the technocratic idea⁸: Order in the world requires a unified structure of commanding power in which the powerful set the goals and scientific experts determine the most efficient means and methods for achieving those goals, especially means and methods for coercing, cajoling or bribing the rest of the world's population into aiding and abetting the agenda of the technocracy, and for silencing or otherwise eliminating opponents of its agenda. Scientism is a religion of force and power. It seeks to master the forces of Nature and to put them in the service of a technocratic power structure. It eschews the appeal to reason and understanding on the assumption that “science” is sufficient to prove the validity and soundness of the technocratic agenda, even if the science is incomprehensible to most people.

Theistic religions, in contrast, refuse the reduction of the desirable to the desired, unless it means reduction of the desirable to what God desires. One type of theistic religion (exemplified for instance by Islam, Judaism and various forms of Protestant Christianity) holds that God is the all-powerful governor of the world or the cosmos, as it were a supreme technocrat, and that things are desirable merely because God desires them. These are

⁸ Patrick Wood, *Technocracy Rising: The Trojan Horse Of Global Transformation* (2014); *Technocracy: The Hard Road to World Order* (2018); *Trilaterals Over Washington* (Volumes I & II, 2017). Wood is a disciple and collaborator of Anthony Sutton (1925-2002), who was a pioneer in studying the emergence of a global technocratic elite in the twentieth century.

typically “religions of the book” — “the book” being a record of direct revelations from God to one or more authors, who in writing down and telling others what God revealed to them become his spokespersons (“prophets”). Another type (exemplified by Catholic Christianity, of which Anselm of Bec was a prominent representative) argues that God desires only what is in itself desirable, or even that God is what is desirable in itself and therefore cannot even be thought to desire what is not desirable. God is not considered a governor, requiring blind obedience to his commands. He is considered the shining example of what is right, a beacon of light and a source of joy in the saddening darkness of the world. If political terms are at all applicable to God then ‘ruler’ and ‘judge’ are far more appropriate than ‘commander’ or ‘governor’, let alone ‘technocrat’. Not the Roman emperors, with their power of life and death over every one of their subjects, but the medieval Germanic tribal kings were his earthly representatives. In the Western Middle Ages, kings had little to no commanding power. They were supposed to be, and act as, trustworthy prophets (“rulers”) and guardians (“judges”) of the venerable traditions of their people — but in other respects, a king or pope was nothing more than a *primus inter pares*, a first among equals. The same was true of the popes and other bishops, the prophets and guardians of the principles of “living in Christ”. The Christian world was not thought of as a society (an organization) held together by commands and regulations, enforced by its governors or board of directors. It was a community, held together by conscience (“shared knowledge”) of common principles to which every member of the community can appeal. Its religion was one of reason and conscientious understanding, not of force and power.

Anselm was undoubtedly aware of the fact that there were controversies concerning the meaning and significance of their faith among Jews and among Muslims, just as there were among Christians. Indeed, Anselm had barely reached adulthood when the Great Schism of 1054 occurred, the formal parting of the ways of the Patriarchs of Constantinople and Rome.⁹ Clearly, the differ-

⁹ The doctrinal cause of the Schism was the “filioque”-question. Byzantium held on to the traditional view that the Holy Spirit “proceeds from the Father (God)”, albeit “through the Son (Jesus Christ)”. Until 1014, the Roman popes

did the same. However, from the late eighth-century onward, the Roman Pontiffs had been under the protection of the Franks, whose king, Charlemagne, Pope Leo III crowned in 800 as the Emperor of Western Christendom (“New Rome”). Charlemagne returned the favour. For the purpose of fostering a common culture among the diverse tribes under his rule, he established institutions of Christian learning throughout the West. This was a fateful policy. On the one hand, it made Latin, the language of Rome, the common language of the Church throughout the empire. On the other hand, it created a chasm between the intellectuals, who spoke or at least read Latin, and the common folk, including most of the lower clergy and even many bishops (who were almost to a man members of local noble families). Of course, Latin never became the common language of the peoples of the realm. As a result, the local clergy was everywhere forced continually to translate and explain the meaning of liturgical phrases and readings from the Bible into the local vernacular. This led, almost inevitably, to a variety of interpretations and consequently to the spread of subjectivist, relativistic attitude of nominalism: Words are just that, words; they may mean one thing here, another thing there, and maybe nothing elsewhere.

Charlemagne's court theologians, notably Alcuin, insisted on declaring that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* (“filioque”), presumably to counter the risk of caesaropapism, the inherent vice of the Byzantine system. Caesaropapism implied that the Byzantine Emperor in Constantinople, was the Vicar of God and, as such, not only the administrative head but also the doctrinal head of the Church. The Patriarchs of the Church were only vicars of the Son, Jesus Christ, as beholden to the Emperor as the Christ was beholden to his Heavenly Father. The dire implications of caesaropapism became obvious early in the eight century, when Emperor Leo III ordered a campaign of iconoclasm (to remove all images of God and the Christ from public life, including the churches and the monasteries). Because this policy broke with longstanding tradition, it was controversial in the East. In the West, it was totally unacceptable: the holy images were vital ingredients of the process of evangelizing illiterate tribesmen, pagans and recent converts who were accustomed to venerating and sacrificing to visual representations of their gods. Corruption and scandal at the Byzantine court further drove Rome and Constantinople apart. In 863, the Pope and the Patriarch mutually excommunicated one another. Although that crisis was of short duration, it emboldened the Frankish theologians to press forward on the filioque-question. The fast collapse of Charlemagne's empire after his death, had convinced them that the Church and the Pope were the true defenders of Christianity in the West. Emperors and their Courts could not be trusted. The authority of the Vicar of the Son in bringing the good tidings of the Gospel was no less authentic than the authority of the Vicar of the Father. Ergo, it was wrong to deny that the Holy Spirit proceeded also from the Son. It was foolish to put all one's eggs in one

ences among men had far-reaching effects in the world, but one might well wonder whether they reflected the existence of different gods or merely different ideas about God. Western (Roman) and Eastern (Byzantine) Catholics, apparently also Jews and Muslims, and presumably, all thinking pagans prayed to the highest of all beings. All of them thought of God as that greater than which is unthinkable. Presumably, then they prayed to the same god, unless there were several highest beings — a logical possibility, just as there may be ten different but equally high highest buildings. However, Anselm's question was, “Is it possible, i.e. thinkable, that there is more than one thing greater than which is unthinkable?” To this question, his answer was an unequivocal “No”.

For Anselm, the main problem was therefore to distinguish between right and wrong thinking about God, to find arguments that would convince all thinking men, regardless of their religious denomination or historical or geographical place in the world, of what conscientious, disciplined reasoning would lead any intelligent persons to accept as undeniable truths about something that was greater than which nothing else was thinkable — in short, about God or Supreme Being. Anselm undertook his first attempts to find such arguments in his teaching at Bec, which prompted the other monks there to insist that he put his thoughts in writing. The result, later called *Monologion*, established him as the first truly philosophical theologian of Western Christendom. However, it did not satisfy him at all. Indeed, it left him in a deep personal crisis.

Monologion started from premises that Anselm could reasonably assume no sane person would deny, but then the arguments became ever more complex, even convoluted, to the point where one might wonder whether Anselm was perhaps talking only to himself — hence the title “*Monologion*” (“A monologue” or “Soliloquy”). What was the point of his seeking to understand God, when explicating his understanding tried his readers' patience, even defied their powers of understanding? “I agreed with your starting

basket. True, the Pope was powerless without the support secular rulers. However, that did not make him a subordinate. It meant that steps should be taken to ensure that the secular magnates were powerless without the support of the Church. The power of the sword and the spiritual power should not be in the same hands.

points, Brother Anselm, but then you lost me along the way.” How many of his brethren at Bec must have made such a remark to Anselm after reading his text! Yet, they were thoroughly familiar with his, their prior's, way of thinking. What would outsiders make of his arguments? Even though he had not intended the text to circulate outside the monastery, Anselm soon learned that it aroused interest in the wider world, among readers with whom he had little or no chance of clarifying and, if need be, correcting his statements in a direct, face-to-face confrontation. If the arguments in *Monologion* were not clearly conclusive then they might sow confusion instead of understanding and so do more harm than good.

MONOLOGION

The basic tenet of Anselm's faith was that **God is supreme goodness**.¹⁰ Anselm believed that goodness is a real, not an imagined, quality or virtue; that it is a thing in itself, not merely a word that names a concept or a mental construct, and certainly not a word that no one who is somewhat fluent in a natural language understands, unless the speaker or writer provides an explication of what he means whenever he uses it. We know that, as an accomplished grammarian (logician)¹¹, Anselm always paid close attention to the difference between words and what they supposedly mean, and between a truth-claim and the truth of a claim. Thus, we can be certain that he was aware of the fact that people who agree on the correctness of “God is supreme goodness” might still wish to argue that the word ‘goodness’ means different things to different persons, and that the goodness of which people speak is something that is only in their personal understanding (“in intellectu”) and not something that is in reality (“in re”).

There is no doubt that he had hoped to put to rest such objections to his views on God. However, he soon discovered that what had seemed clear to him, was apparently not clear to others. It

¹⁰ Text in boldface identifies basic presuppositions of Anselm's way of thinking, most of which were so evident to him that he did not think it necessary to explain or justify them. They are his appeals to the conscience of his audience, the knowledge or insights they share with him and each other.

¹¹ Anselm, *De Grammatico*, ca 1062

was, therefore not really clear, because **what is really clear must be clear to every intelligent being**. At the very least, it must be such that it should be possible to make it clear to any even moderately intelligent person by means of intelligible arguments that require no initiation or instruction in a particular cult, school, or discipline. It should be clear to all conscientiously intelligent persons, not a bunch of specialists, who claim knowledge that is inaccessible to ordinary people and are called ‘specialists’ primarily because that is how they call themselves and each other. Ordinary people know they do not, maybe cannot, understand the truth-claims such specialists make. They are therefore easily intimidated and dissuaded from criticising, let alone refuting them, even when they suspect that the claims are mostly bluff, mere pretexts for requesting more money or privileges.

The starting point of the Monologion had been the observation that all intelligent persons speak about some things being good and some things being better than other things. Most of the time, they mean no more than that some things are useful, and that some are more useful than other things, for one or other purpose. For example, a horse may be good, i.e. useful, for a messenger because it is swift and another horse may be useful, i.e. good, for a farmer or a knight because it is strong, but swiftness and strength are not good in themselves. A swift and strong robber may be a better robber than a slow or weak one, but a robber's swiftness or strength does not make robbing people a good thing. Everyone readily understands “A good robber is worse than a bad one” — one who is good at robbing people is likely to do more harm than one who is bad at it.

So, the question arises, whether there are qualities that by themselves make all things that have them good or at least better than they would otherwise be. If there were no such qualities then ‘good’ and ‘useful’ would be synonyms and there would be no need for words such as ‘good’ and ‘goodness’. But, obviously, ‘useful’ and ‘good’ are not synonyms and therefore “useful but not good” and “good but not useful” are not contradictory assessments. That is obvious, because ‘good’ is used in contrast to not only ‘useless’ but also ‘wrong’ and ‘evil’. What is right or correct is good (in the proper sense of the word). What is wrong or incorrect is bad, even

if someone finds it useful. A fortiori, evil, which is wilful or intentional wrongness, is bad. Undoubtedly, wrong, even evil things are often useful for one or other purpose, but that does not make them good things. Good things are often useless for one or other purpose, but that does not make them bad things.

Apparently, then, the capacity for distinguishing between the proper sense of ‘good’ (which is opposed to “bad, because wrong or evil”) and the proper sense of ‘useful’ (which is opposed to “bad, because useless”) is, if not deeply ingrained in human nature then certainly one of its most notable, most significant characteristics. Without it, humans would be incapable of understanding the distinction between being human and being humane. Humanness, the quality of being an animal of the human kind, does not guarantee humaneness (“humanity”). Indeed, only with respect to a human being is it relevant to ask whether it is humane or inhumane. Only evil, inhumane people would find it useful to deprive language of the possibility of distinguishing between uselessness and wrongness, between usefulness and right- or goodness, and consequently, between a human animal and a humane person.

If the goodness of a thing is not its usefulness then it must be something else. There is no reason to call that something else by any other name than ‘Goodness’. As Anselm put it¹², the goodness “through which all good things are good” is itself a great good. In other words, goodness is itself good, but it stands out from all other good things, which are good through it, because “it alone is good through itself”. Evidently, “no good which is good through something other than itself is equal in goodness to or greater in goodness than goodness itself, which is good through itself.” Goodness itself is pure goodness. It is therefore supremely good.

To that conclusion, Anselm added, “Now what is supremely good is also supremely great”. [Greatness in] **goodness is a sufficient condition of greatness** [in being] — but it is not a necessary condition, because a thing maybe thought great without being thought good. The better a thing is, the greater in being it is. That is the main theme of *Monologion*: “Therefore, there is one thing which is supremely good and supremely great: the highest of all beings” (i.e. the highest of all things that have being, a fortiori the

¹² *Monologion*, chapter 1, *in fine*

highest of all things, because a thing that has being is certainly greater than one that lacks being). However, he immediately went on to qualify this notion of greatness: “I do not mean great in size, as a material object may be great; I mean great in the sense that the greater a thing is, the better or more excellent it is — as is the case with wisdom.” As it related to God, this was a notable departure from the characterization of God that the Roman nobleman Seneca Minor had provided in his *Quaestiones Naturales* (ca. 65 AD): God is a magnitude greater than which is unthinkable.¹³ For Anselm, God is indeed a thing greater than which cannot be thought, but he is not a magnitude. Having or being a magnitude may be a mark of divine greatness within the context of a religion of force and power, but it is not a mark of greatness within the context of a religion of reason and understanding, which primarily, maybe even exclusively, recognizes goodness as the mark of divine greatness.¹⁴ However, Anselm merely mentioned this qualification of Seneca's God-formula. He did not bother to explain or justify it. It was evident to him and to his audience. In any case, there is no doubt that when he characterized God as “that, greater than which cannot be thought”, he meant that God is something greater and better than which nothing can be thought. However, he did not thereby exclude that God might be great in other respects than goodness, e.g. great in wisdom, justice, truthfulness, even in being. As we shall see, for Anselm, having being is a quality which some but not all things have.

In emphasizing goodness, Anselm was probably merely deferring to common habits of speech. What he really meant was rightness, *rectitudo*, and specifically — although this became clear only in *Proslogion* — rectitude of the kind that is a source of joy, because doing, thinking about or contemplating things in the right, correct way reveals the beauty of God's creation. In the Biblical story of the six days of creation, God's repeated assessments, “This is good”, end up sounding like “This will do” or “This is good

¹³ Seneca Minor, *Quaestiones Naturales*, I,13: “magnitudo... qua nihil maius excogitari potest”, <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/sen/sen.qn1.shtml>.

¹⁴ See below, page 59; also the first part of the title of *Proslogion* 5, “Quod deus sit quiquid melius esse quam non esse...” (That God is whatever it is better to be than not to be...).

enough". They may instil a mentality of "Oh well, if it's good enough for God then it's good enough for me", which is not a mentality Anselm would have thought satisfactory, certainly for monks. It does not inspire one to aspire to understand and appreciate the beauty of creation. That aspiration is, for Anselm, what sets humans apart from other "created things". Through his faith, he sought to experience the joy of being alive to the beatific things that make everything beautiful, i.e. blessed, blissful. Of course, experiencing joy is so much more than merely having pleasant sensations, just as beauty is so much more than looking or sounding nice. As it is said, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever"¹⁵ — and to a Christian, 'forever' means "from here to eternity". When the utilitarians, the paradigmatic Enlightenment thinkers, reduced the meaning of 'good' to "useful", tying every action to an expectation of pleasure or pain¹⁶, then beauty and joy as well as ugliness and sadness disappeared from men's moral compass. They made the world safe for the dispensers of stimulants and painkillers, incentives and disincentives — in a word, for the manipulators of men and women.

In the third chapter of *Monologion*, Anselm applied the same reasoning to the concept of being that he had applied to the concept of goodness. "Whatever has being has being through something or through nothing. But... it cannot even be conceived that there is anything which has being through nothing." Whatever has being has being through something else or through itself.

¹⁵ John Keats, *Endymion* (1818), Book I, 1; even more vivid, C.S. Lewis's autobiographical *Surprised by Joy* (1955)

¹⁶ Later utilitarians replaced 'pleasure' with 'utility' and 'pain' with 'disutility' to get rid of the obvious fact that pleasure and pain, even expectations of pleasure and pain do not explain everything people do. Eventually, utilitarianism became merely a formal language or manner of speech that replaced 'A does X' with 'A expects more utility from doing X than from doing anything else'. As a result, utilitarianism ceased to be a falsifiable empirical theory of human (even animal) behaviour (which it was originally intended to be) and turned into a set of unfalsifiable, empirically empty tautologies. On this view, nothing anyone does can ever falsify the statement that he or she is merely maximizing his or her utility (because, unlike pleasure or pain, utility and disutility are unobservable apart from the behaviour they supposedly explain).

Moreover, no thing that has its being from something else can be thought greater in being than that thing through which it has being. Because it is evident that there are beings, there must be at least one thing that has being through itself. Such a thing is pure being. As such, it is supreme being, supremely great in being. Just as nothing can be thought better than goodness itself, just so nothing can be thought to have more being than being itself. It follows immediately that if one believes that God is something that is supreme in being and supreme in goodness then one should also believe that the goodness of a thing need not diminish its being and that its being need not diminish its goodness. Being and goodness are non-rivalrous qualities. If one believed otherwise; if one believed that being and goodness are unavoidably always in conflict, then one would not be able, logically, to believe that there is something that is supreme in being and in goodness. If one believes of something that its being detracts from its goodness, or its goodness from its being, then one cannot believe that thing to be God.

What does thinking of God as supreme goodness and supreme being mean? How can anything be goodness itself and being itself? Obviously, one must think God goodness itself and being itself. In relation to God, the words 'being' and 'goodness' must be perfect synonyms. They denote the same thing, even though in their common human use, with respect to things other than God, they connote different things. This is inevitable, because such things appear always in a particular context, which never stays the same for long and is hardly ever exactly the same for all men. If they are at all understood then they are understood in terms of the context in which they appear. They are "defined", if you will, by their contexts as these appear in different perspectives. In contrast, God can only be thought the same, regardless of context or perspective. That is what makes God unique. It is a fundamental error to think of God as if he were just one of those things that are defined by the contexts in which they appear. Much of the argument of Monologion is devoted specifically to this point, to proving the absolute uniqueness of God.

Moreover, the same can and must be said of other qualities than goodness, because "obviously the supreme nature is in a supreme

manner whatever good thing it is”.¹⁷ Therefore, “the supreme nature is supreme being, supreme life, supreme reason, supreme refuge, supreme justice, supreme wisdom, supreme truth, supreme goodness, supreme greatness, supreme beauty, supreme immortality, supreme incorruptibility, supreme immutability, supreme beatitude, supreme eternity, supreme power, supreme oneness.” By logical necessity, this means that the supreme nature cannot be thought non-being, death, madness, injustice... unless, of course, logic or reason does not apply in contemplating and meditating about “supreme nature”. But, the basic premise of Anselm's undertaking was that **logic and reason matter**, that no one can be good or great at thinking, if his thinking lacks in logic or reason, whether he is thinking about supreme nature or anything else. Logic and reason give thinking whatever beauty it has.

How can one thing — call it by whatever name or designation that pleases you, ‘supreme nature’, ‘supreme being’, ‘Jehovah’, ‘Allah’, ‘Jove’, ‘Lord’, ‘God’ — be many things and yet not be everything? Calling God ‘supreme being’ indicates that one considers him at least as great in being as other things, but it gives no clue as to what those other things are. If God is supreme being then, surely, God has being. Still, the inference holds only if there are things that have being. What is the meaning of saying that something has being?

Evidently, things that have being are “things that are”, but does it follow that all things that are “have being”? Not according to Anselm. But, how would he be able to convince his audience, on the one hand, that there is a thing which is pure being, and on the other hand, that there are things that have no or almost no being? Certainly, there are things that have no being. For example, rectangular circles have no being, they are nothing. Do dreams or hallucinations have some degree of being? They can be experienced — but, if it be granted that this proves that a dream or a hallucination has some degree of being then what about the things which appear in dreams or hallucinations? They are in a dream or a hallucination, but most people most of the time do not accept that they are anywhere else, just as they do not accept that Mickey Mouse is not only in stories or memories of stories but also in

¹⁷ *Monologion*, chapter 16

other places. Most people understand that Mickey Mouse is not a real being and does not really have being, even though they understand that he is (exists, appears, emerges¹⁸) in certain stories or fables or memories thereof. Mickey Mouse is a mentionable thing and stories about him may make sense, but because we know the stories are fictional, we understand that Mickey Mouse is at most a fictional, not a real being. Words alone do not convey being on something that has none. Obviously, this alone sufficiently explains Anselm's decision not to rely on stories, even authentic Biblical stories, about God. Believing stories true does not make them true.

Rectangular circles can be mentioned, but they cannot be thought, let alone understood. The things which appear in dreams or hallucinations can be mentioned, but can they be understood? Assuredly, dreaming and having a hallucination can be thought of as forms of mental activity, hence of thinking in a loose sense of the word, but they are forms of thinking that do not involve understanding. **Genuine or real thinking implies understanding what one thinks.** Although the things which appear in dreams or hallucinations may be said to be “in the mind” and therefore thinkable (in a loose sense of the word), most of them are not genuinely or really thinkable. They cannot be said to be “in the understanding”, because they no longer make sense as soon as we stop dreaming or hallucinating them and discover that they leave no trace anywhere else but in our usually fast-fading memory of the details of the dream or hallucination. **For a thing to have being, it must be genuinely thinkable and therefore understandable.** It must be intelligible. For God to have being — a fortiori, to be being — he must be thinkable and understandable, unlike rectangular circles, Mickey Mouse, or things that exist only in fantasies, dreams or hallucinations. Consequently, for God to be supreme being, he must be supremely thinkable and understandable. What does that mean, if it means anything?

That God is supremely thinkable and understandable is precisely what Anselm had set out to demonstrate in his teaching and in writing *Monologion*. Yet he soon began to doubt that he had succeeded in doing so. As impressive as *Monologion* was, it left much to be desired. Even if it was not wrong on any important

¹⁸ See below, page 34

point, it was perhaps incomplete. In any case, it was not a satisfactory explication of what he had in mind. The realization that he had failed to provide a satisfactory explication of the central tenet of his faith was no mean thing for Anselm. It undermined his faith in his own fitness as a teacher of monks. His pupils and fellow monks should know the truth on the authority of reason, not on his, Anselm's, institutional authority (as their prior), or his personal authority (as a competent, inspiring, widely esteemed teacher and prolific author of collections of Prayers and Meditations). Surely, reason, as opposed to unreason, is a good thing; consequently, reasonableness is a virtuous quality. And, if reasonableness is a quality then, surely, nothing can be thought more reasonable than reasonableness itself.¹⁹ But, what if reasonableness turned out just another subjective, relative concept; if, conceivably, everybody could proclaim his own standard of right reason and there was no way of determining which of those purported standards was better than any other, or at least as good as any other thinkable standard of right reason? What, if there were no objective standards of *rectitudo* at all — if it was all just a matter of opinion? Then, the search for rectitude would be in vain, and teaching about God would be a matter of honing one's rhetorical skills in propagandizing a particular point of view, not a matter of seeking and propagating the truth.

Such teaching would be anathema to Anselm, for he always insisted “Do not believe me on my word, but critically consider the merits of the arguments for or against my position — after all, I am only a human being, prone to overlook and to be in error about many important things”.²⁰ In short, “It's about God, not about me.” Dissatisfaction with the arguments of Monologion led Anselm even to question his faith in God, the be-all and end-all of his life as a monk.²¹ For, if everything he thought God to be, goodness itself, wisdom itself, truth itself and so on, including reason itself, was subjective or relative then God too would be

¹⁹ See below, page 55

²⁰ Cf. “Nullius in verba”, the motto of the Royal Society of London for improving natural knowledge (established in the early 1660s), literally means “By no one's words”, i.e. no matter who is proposing that something is true, his “words alone are never sufficient proof”.

²¹ *Eadmer's Vita Anselmi* (ed. R. W. Southern, 1962)

something subjective and relative. He would be whatever one thought him to be. He would be one thing to one person, another thing to another, and maybe nothing to a third.

Anselm did not want to be a leader. He was not looking for followers. He was always looking for better guidance than it was in his power to offer. For him, humility too was a virtue. For a monk, it was an aspect of true greatness. It was, moreover, one of the few virtues that most people can hope to master to a significant degree. After all, awareness of one's own relative insignificance in the grand scheme of things was not that difficult to come by in the harsh conditions of life in the eleventh century. Another, albeit much more demanding, virtue was meekness: the ability to endure misfortune, even injury or injustice, and to deal with it with resolve but without resentment and without making a spectacle of one's misery. It required fortitude, the mental strength that enables one to stand up to pain and adversity. Of this strength, Anselm had enough.

Nevertheless, the suspicion that his teaching was a manifestation of mere pretence or arrogance must have hurt him deeply. However, the agony of being on the verge of losing his confidence in his fitness as a teacher, even his fitness as a faithful Christian, did not deter him. He continued to look for a way out of his conundrum with undiminished humility and meekness. After a period of pained reflection, Anselm wrote *Proslogion* (ca 1078), which apparently removed the cause of his self-doubt, yet left the basic ideas expounded in *Monologion* intact.

PROSLOGION

Proslogion was not another convoluted monologue. Instead, it was a direct address, a plea to God himself to enlighten his understanding: "Therefore, O Lord, you who give understanding to faith, grant me to understand — to the degree you know to be advantageous — that you are as we believe, and that you are that which we believe. Now we believe you to be something at least as great in being as anything that can be thought."²² Whatever else people may believe about God, this is what they certainly believe.

²² *Proslogion*, chapter 2

That emendation of Seneca's God-formula was the most notable innovation of Proslogion. It provided an explication of the notion of God that was logically more fruitful than the merely suggestive references to Supreme Being or Supreme Nature that abound in Monologion. Surely, reflecting on the idea of a building higher than which nothing can be built is more enlightening for an engineer or architect than travelling around the world in search of the highest building.

The joyful tone of Proslogion is set in its famous second chapter (which contains Anselm's alleged proof of the existence of God) and is confirmed in the triumphant concluding sentences of chapter 4: "I give thanks, good Lord, I give thanks to you, since what at first I believed through your gift I now so thoroughly understand through your enlightenment, that even if I did not want to believe that you have being, I should be unable not to understand that you do have being."²³ Clearly, as far as Anselm was concerned, Proslogion 2 is only a part of the argument. Indeed, it does not conclude with a statement about God. Its conclusion is that something greater than which is unthinkable really exists. Now, there may be many such things, and it would have been anathema for Anselm to have to admit that each of those things is separate from God, let alone a separate God.

Chapter three eliminates things that, although they are unmistakably real, nevertheless can be thought not to be,²⁴ for these are less great in being than things which cannot be thought not to be real. Thus, at the end of that chapter, we are given to understand that what is greater than which nothing is unthinkable is not only real but necessarily real — it is a logically necessary being. Finally, chapter four makes the point that uttering (and therefore thinking, in a loose sense of the word) the expression 'that than which a greater cannot be thought has no being' is one thing, but understanding it is another. We are given to understand that the references to thinking in the preceding parts of the

²³ "Gratias tibi, bone Domine, gratias tibi, quia quod prius credidi te donante, iam sic intelligo te illuminante, ut, si te esse nolim credere, non possim non intelligere."

²⁴ E.g. the moon is certainly real, but it is not unthinkable that there would be no moon or that there would be several moons.

argument must be restricted to genuine thinking, i.e. thinking with understanding. Thus, the grand conclusion of the argument in chapters 2-4 is that anyone who is capable of thinking with understanding will have to acknowledge the undeniable reality of something that is greater than which cannot be thought. However, this is not yet a proof of the statement that Anselm presumably wanted to prove, viz. that only God is that greater than which is genuinely unthinkable. So, a further explication of the expression 'greater than which is unthinkable' is necessary.

In chapter five, Anselm boldly asserts that God — by implication, that greater than which is genuinely unthinkable — is every thing it is better to be than not to be. This is a further explication of the word 'greater' (Latin 'maius'). 'Maius' can indeed be translated as "greater", but it can also be translated as "grandier" (more admirable, venerable, respectable). Certainly, saying that what exists both in the intellect and in reality is greater than what exists in the intellect alone is not the same as saying that it is grandier — and it is by no means certain that Anselm intended to posit that everything that exists both in the intellect and in reality is grandier than it would be if it existed in the intellect alone. Executing a criminal plan is a greater thing than merely thinking of executing it, but is it a grandier, more admirable thing? "God is that grandier [i.e. greater and better] than which is unthinkable" is arguably what Anselm meant to say. After all, he had stated already in Monologion that goodness makes a thing great — which makes sense if we interpret 'great' as "grand", but not if we interpret it as "big" or "colossal".

Thomas Aquinas

The problem with most discussions of Anselm's text in Proslogion 2 is that they hardly pay attention to what Anselm meant to say and instead treat Proslogion 2 as if it were independent of what he had written in Monologion and independent of what he went on to say in the remaining chapters of Proslogion. Admittedly, taken out of context, Proslogion 2 does not present us with a really impressive argument, but surely, Anselm did not mean it to be taken out of context.

For many people Proslogion 2 is *prima facie* fallacious: "It does not prove the existence of God; it merely proves that the sentence

‘God exist’ is intelligible, not that the proposition that God exists is true.” Many, indeed, think so on the authority of Saint Thomas Aquinas. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (written between 1259 and 1264, nearly two centuries after Anselm's *Proslogion*), Thomas paraphrased the argument from “something greater than which cannot be thought” to God's existence as follows:

For by the name ‘God’, we understand “something greater than which cannot be thought”. This notion is formed in the intellect by one who hears and understands the name God. As a result, God must exist already at least in the intellect. But he cannot exist solely in the intellect, since that which exists both in the intellect and in reality is greater than that which exists in the intellect alone. Now, *as the very definition of the name points out*, nothing can be greater than God. Consequently, the proposition that God exists is self-evident, as being evident from the very meaning of the name ‘God’.²⁵ [Emphasis added]

This certainly an apt summary of *Proslogion* 2, taken out of context. Thomas also gave the standard refutation²⁶, which he repeated almost word for word in his magisterial *Summa Theologiae*:

[G]ranted that everyone understands that by this word ‘God’ is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought, nevertheless, it follows, not that everyone understands that what the word signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally. Nor can it be argued that it actually exists, unless it be admitted that there actually exists something than which nothing greater can be thought; and

²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Book I, chapter 10, §2. Translation taken from Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*, Translated, with an Introduction and Notes, by Anton C. Pegis (Hannover House, Garden City, New York, 1955, p.79). This *summa* is not really “against the pagans”. It was a handbook for friars of the Dominican Order (of which Thomas was the most prominent member), who were expected to go out into the world to try to convert pagans and people suspected of heresy, and to strengthen the faith of lukewarm Christians.

²⁶ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 11, §3 (page 82 in Pegis's translation).

this precisely is not admitted by those who hold that God does not exist.²⁷

The argument being criticised is presented as one that seeks to prove the “actual existence” of God by means of the concept of something than which nothing greater can be thought. However, that is not sufficient to make the case that the argument was Anselm's argument. Clearly, if in honouring and canonizing Anselm the Church was able to bypass Thomas's critique then she must have judged that Anselm's argument was not an essential part of his theology — but this would contradict Anselm's own assessment. Alternatively, she must have judged that Thomas's critique pertained to an argument that was not the famous *argumentum Anselmi* of the Proslogion — which merely contradicts the now nearly ubiquitous textbook treatment of Thomas's remark.

The crucial point is, of course, whether Thomas's “actual existence” is the same as Anselm's “undeniable reality”. Arguably, it is not. Anselm was well aware of the fact that different things exist in different ways (see below, page 34). Consequently, the criteria that are appropriate for judging whether one thing exists may not be suitable for judging the existence of another thing. Indeed, it would be highly surprising, if something greater than which cannot be thought met the same criteria of existence as, say, a brick or a tree.

It is worth noting that Thomas did not attribute the argument he criticised to Anselm, either in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* or in the *Summa Theologiae*. In both texts, he mentioned the argument he criticised and refuted as an example of “the opinion of those who say that the existence of God, being self-evident, cannot be demonstrated.” Obviously, what is truly self-evident must be treated as a first or primary principle that cannot be demonstrated by an appeal to or deduction from even more fundamental principles. However, as a philosopher, Anselm did rely on a more fundamental principle than “God exists”, viz. “What must logically be thought real is real”. This was Anselm's “philosophical faith”, as it was of the majority of the ancient philosophers, most notably

²⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q.2, art.1, Reply to obj. 2

Parmenides and Plato.²⁸ As is evidenced by his writing the second chapter of *Proslogion*, Anselm did not assume that the proposition “God exists” is self-evident and needs no demonstration. It would have been Saint Thomas Aquinas' mistake, if he had included Anselm among “those who say that the existence of God, being self-evident, cannot be demonstrated.”

Obviously, whichever set of things we consider, if it is not an empty set then there is always at least one element in it that is at least as great as any other of its elements, regardless of the respect in which we consider them great. In that sense, it is true a priori that in every set, there is at least one element we can call ‘god’. This is true also for the set of all thinkable things and for the set of all real things. However, there is no reason a priori that a thinkable thing must be a real thing, yet Anselm's argument sought to prove that a god-element of the set of thinkable things is also a god-element in the set of real things. That conclusion is not self-evident, because the set of thinkable things is presumably much larger than the set of real things. It is possible therefore that a god-element in the first set is not even a member of the second set. Contrary to what Saint Thomas's critical remarks suggest, Anselm did not try to prove his conclusion, “God truly exists” (i.e. “God really has being”) with a definitional sleight-of-hand. Instead, he relied on his understanding of the properties a thing must have, if the thought “The thing is real and at least at least as great as any thinkable thing” is true. It is not as if he had suddenly realized that he could have spared himself a lot of headaches, if instead of writing *Monologion*, he had simply consulted a dictionary or its eleventh-century equivalent, a *vocabularium*. In short, he did not argue from the name of God. He argued from the nature of God, the nature of reality and the nature of thinking-with-understanding.

²⁸ In the eleventh century very few of Plato's and Aristotle's work were known at all, and even fewer were available in Latin. Anselm has a reputation of being a Platonist, but that is because of certain characteristics of his manner of thinking, not because he was a follower of Plato or one or other explicitly Platonist or neo-Platonist author.

Other people dismiss Anselm's argument on the authority of Immanuel Kant, the great Prussian philosopher of modern (i.e. post-medieval) times. Kant wrote:

Being is obviously not a real predicate; that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the concept of a thing... Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgement... If, now, we take the subject (God) with all its predicates... and say *God is* or *There is a God*, we attach no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject... By whatever and however many predicates we may think a thing... we do not make the least addition to the thing when we further declare that this thing is... When therefore I think of a being²⁹ as the supreme reality, without any defect, the question still remains whether it exists or not.³⁰

What is the question referred to in the last sentence in this quote, if it is not the question which Anselm answered in *Proslogion* 2? However, Kant apparently supposed it possible to think of something as the supreme reality and, at the same time, to think of it as not existing in reality. Surely, Anselm would have objected, Kant must be thinking of thinking without understanding what one thinks. Admittedly, if one understands God to be the supreme reality then one can consider, for the sake of making an argument, the counterfactual hypothesis that he is not a real being — but one cannot simultaneously understand the hypothesis to be true. Also, if one understands God not to exist in reality then one can consider, again for the sake of making an argument, the counterfactual hypothesis that his being is the supreme reality — but one cannot simultaneously understand him to be a real, a fortiori a supremely real, being.

Clearly, Kant wishes to distinguish between existence and being. There is nothing wrong with that. However, it is certainly misleading to insinuate that, because the word 'is' is mostly used as a

²⁹ Note that Kant mentions *a* being. Anselm, writing in Latin (which knows no particles, 'a', 'the'), did not think of God as *a* being but as unqualified *being itself* (or pure being, the fullness of being, ultimate reality).

³⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (N. Kemp Smith's translation), A598, B628.

copula in pronouncing a judgment, it is never used predicatively, and that therefore 'X is' is never the expression of a proposition but is instead always a mystifying way of uttering 'X': "If we take the subject (God) with all its predicates... and say *God is* or *There is a God*, we attach no new predicate to the concept of God, but only posit the subject." What does this mean? If we do not attach a new predicate to the concept of God when we say "God is" or "There is a God" then we do not remove any predicate from the concept of God when we say "God is not" or "There is no God". If saying "God is" merely posits the concept — whatever that may mean — what does saying "God is not" do? Does it too merely posit the concept? And, if that is what it does, does this mean that if one person says "God is" and another "No, he isn't", they are really saying (or doing) the same thing? Does it mean that one does not posit a concept — but how does one not posit a concept, if not by not thinking or mentioning it at all? How can one understand and execute the command "Do not think of a blue bear" without thinking and understanding the concept of a blue bear? Or does Kant's dictum mean that there is no concept of God that can be posited? But this would be news to most atheists, who, however reluctantly, admit that they understand the concept of something greater than which is unthinkable — that is to say, that such a thing exists for them, if only in their minds ("in intellectu") — but nevertheless refuse to accept that the thing really exists ("in re"), as something no intelligent person can deny.

Despite Kant's assertion to the contrary, one who says "X is" is saying something about X, viz. that it is (exists) in some manner, to some degree, under some conditions, in some place, perhaps only in some person's imagination or in a story or some other artistic creation, or that it satisfies the criteria of existence in use in some circles. "X is" means that X is (exists) in some [unspecified] context. A modern logician might say, "X exists in one or other [unspecified] possible world". The unqualified saying "X is" is false, only if X, the thing in question, does not exist at all, because it cannot be thought and understood. If X cannot even be thought and understood then it does not exist at all. Think, again, of a rectangular circle. However, one might still say that such a circle exists, but only as a name, word or verbal expression — i.e. only as a mentionable thing. Historians may quibble about the question

whether King Arthur is a historical figure (“He is”, “No, he is not”). In contrast, students of English literature know for sure that King Arthur is the protagonist in a number of tales or legends, and they might quibble about the answer to a question such as “What sort of man was this legendary king?” They are not being irrational, because the legends and literary sources tell us more about King Arthur than the historical evidence tells historians about, say, my ancestor in the paternal line at the time when Julius Caesar was murdered. Yet, that ancestor of mine certainly existed, not only according to biologists but also to every intelligent person who ever met me or is somehow aware of my “existence in reality”. In *Monologion*, Anselm had written: “Nothing comes from nothing; every thing that has being has its being either from something else or from itself.”

THE ARGUMENTUM ANSELMII

The argument in *Proslogion* 2 was important to Anselm, because he had become aware of the fact that it seemed logically possible to accept what he had said about Supreme Being *and* to doubt that there is (exists) such a thing. This was important, because — as we mentioned already — Anselm's teaching and his writing *Monologion* had been undertaken with the explicit commitment to rely only on arguments that any reasonably intelligent person would be able to understand. It was therefore out of the question for Anselm to rely on any “argument from authority”. No one actually questioned the existence of God, but it was thinkable that someone might do so. If it was thinkable in the sense of being logically thinkable, i.e. thinkable without involving a logical contradiction, then the arguments in *Monologion* would not have been about God but about what Anselm thought God was — not about Supreme Being but about what the words ‘Supreme being’ meant to Anselm and perhaps a few others. Anselm had done his best to try to keep his thinking about God logically consistent, free of contradictions, but if the God he had been thinking about did not exist apart from his thinking then Anselm's opinion would stand against many other logically possible opinions. Still, he would be betraying his own commitment, if he claimed any personal authority in the matter, any other authority than that of common

reason expressed in readily intelligible arguments. It was therefore important that he should succeed in arguing not only that his interpretation of the divine quality, “being greater and better than which is unthinkable”, was logically coherent, but also that it was truer to its subject than other interpretations. The latter undertaking makes sense only if one accepts, if only for the sake of the argument, that it is logically thinkable that the thing greater than which is unthinkable, is really different from what the interpretation under scrutiny says it is. The undertaking does not make sense if one thinks of that thing as one would think of the hero or protagonist of a fictional story. What can we say truly about Hamlet, if we do not accept Shakespeare as the definitive authority on that fictional Prince of Denmark? What can we say truly about Sherlock Holmes, if we do not accept Conan Doyle as the definitive authority on that fictional detective? Surely, the creator of a fictional thing has the power to define just what that thing is. But Anselm was not seeking to make a name for himself as the creator of a much grander fiction than a psychologically troubled prince or a brilliant drug addict.

So, before we follow Saint Thomas or Kant and cry “Fallacy!” let us take a closer look at *Proslogion* 2. Obviously, we should try to assess just what Anselm intended it to prove, and whether he succeeded in proving it. Such an assessment is required because it would be irrelevant to criticize Anselm for not successfully proving what he had no intention of proving. There are many ways in which his statement “*Deus existit*” (God exists) can be interpreted, and we can be sure that Anselm would have rejected most of them as false. It behoves us to identify his interpretation, even if it means bracketing our own deep-rooted prejudices about what does and what does not exist, about what can and what cannot exist.

Here is the text of the second chapter:

Quod vere sit Deus

Ergo Domine, qui das fidei intellectum, da mihi, ut, quantum scis expedire, intelligam, quia es sicut credimus, et hoc es quod credimus. Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit. An ergo non est aliqua talis natura, quia “dixit

insipiens in corde suo: non est Deus"³¹? Sed certe ipse idem insipiens, cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: 'aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest', intelligit quod audit; et quod intelligit, in intellectu eius est, etiam si non intelligat illud esse. Aliud enim est rem esse in intellectu, alium intelligere rem esse. [...]³² Convincitur ergo etiam insipiens esse vel in intellectu aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest, quia hoc, cum audit, intelligit, et quidquid intelligitur, in intellectu est.

Et certe id quo maius cogitari nequit, non potest esse in solo intellectu. Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re; quod maius est. Si ergo id quo maius cogitari non potest, est in solo intellectu: id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest, est quo maius cogitari potest. Sed certe hoc esse non potest. Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re.

And here is a slightly edited version of a widely used translation³³:

God truly [i.e., really] exists

Therefore, O Lord, You who give understanding to faith, grant me to understand — to the degree You know to be advantageous — that You are, as we believe, and that You are what we believe. Indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or is there, then, no such nature [as You], for the Fool has said in his heart that God does not exist? But surely when this very same Fool hears my words 'something than which nothing greater can be thought' then he understands what he hears. And what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand [i.e., judge] it to exist. For that a thing is in the understanding is distinct from understanding that [this] thing exists. [...]³⁴ So even the Fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be thought is at least in his understanding; for when he hears of this

³¹ [Book of Psalms, 13,1; 52,1]

³² Omitted: "Nam cum pictor praecogitat quae facturus est, habet quidem in intellectu, sed nondum intelligit esse quod nondum fecit. Cum vero iam pinxit, et habet in intellectu et intelligit esse quod iam fecit."

³³ *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury* (2000, tr. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson).

³⁴ Omitted: "For example, when a painter envisions what he is about to paint: he indeed has in his understanding that which he has not yet made, but he does not yet understand that it exists. But after he has painted [it]: he has in his understanding that which he has made, and he understands that it exists."

[being], he understands [what he hears], and whatever is understood is in the understanding.

But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding. For if it were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality — something which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought were only in the understanding, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would be that than which a greater can be thought! But surely this [conclusion] is impossible. Hence, without doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.³⁵

The general form of the argument, rendered as a conditional proposition, is “If *not-P* implies *P* then it follows that *P*” or “(*Not-P* implies *P*) implies *P*”. In modern formal notation: “[$(\sim P \rightarrow P) \rightarrow P$]”, which is a formal tautology, a truth of formal logic, regardless of what *P* stands for. Of course, as it relates to Anselm's argument, *P* stands for “There is at least one real thing greater than which nothing can be thought”. The conclusion of the argument, *P*, is established by a *reductio ad absurdum* of $\sim P$, for if $\sim P$ implies *P* then it implies ($\sim P$ and *P*), which is a logical contradiction. However, even if we admit the formal validity of Anselm's argument, we still need to assess critically the truth of the premise “*not-P* implies *P*” (i.e. $\sim P \rightarrow P$), before we accept the truth of its conclusion, *P*.

“GOD EXISTS. REALLY?”

Anselm gave Proslogion 2 the title “Quod vere sit Deus”. Hopkins and Richardson (and most other translators) render it as “God truly exists”, although the literal translation should be “God truly is” — that is to say, “God truly, really has being” (unlike a rectangular circle or something that appears only in a dream or a hallucination). Arguably, Anselm meant the title of Proslogion 2 to convey the same thing that he said in the last sentence of the chapter: “Existit procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et

³⁵ Note that Hopkins-Richardson translate not only Anselm's ‘existit’ in the last sentence but also all instances where he uses a form of the Latin ‘esse’ (to be) in another way than as a copula with forms of the English ‘to exist’.

in re". If that is the case then he expected his readers to take the 'vere' (truly) in the title to mean the same as 'procul dubio'; 'Deus' (God) the same as 'aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet'; and 'sit' (is) the same as 'existit et in intellectu et in re'. However, a reader might object that the argument is about an unspecified something ("aliquid") greater than which cannot be thought and concludes with the statement that this something exists. If that objection is correct then the argument logically justifies a general proposition: "All things greater than which no other thing is thinkable exist." It is certainly possible to understand this as saying that all gods exist, but that understanding does not seem to fit the title of the chapter, which is about the one and only God. To jump back from the conclusion of Proslogion 2 to its title, one needs a further argument that would establish that there is and can be only one thing that is greater than which cannot be thought. There is no such argument in the text of Proslogion 2, even if we take the explications given in chapters 3 and 4 into account. Does this observation vitiate Anselm's argument, or does it merely draw attention to the pitfalls of reading an argument "out of context"?

Most people who discuss Anselm's argument in the second chapter of Proslogion appear to assume it is intended to be a fully formalized stand-alone proof of "God exists" — a proof that is supposed to turn into a formal tautology, if one re-writes it as a hypothetical proposition (just as re-writing " $A, B; \text{therefore } B$ " as "If A and B then B " yields a formal tautology, regardless of what the letters 'A' and 'B' stand for). The assumption plays a large part in the most common criticisms of Anselm's argument, viz. that its conclusion does not follow from its premises — "If A and B then C " is not a formal tautology — or that the conclusion only follows because it is a premise of the argument. In other words, the criticism is that the argument is inconclusive — it does not logically establish the existence of God — or it is that the argument succeeds only because it assumes as given what it is supposed to prove.

However, Anselm did not intend Proslogion 2 to be read and understood as if it had nothing to do with what he had already discussed, a few years earlier, in his Monologion. The Monologion was about God's being — about what God is, i.e. about what God can and must be thought to be. It was not about God's existence,

which was not a disputed matter. Furthermore, there was no need for him or for his audience to repeat what he had written in the Monologion. Let us not forget that serious writing is a laborious process. It was never more laborious than it was in a relatively poor monastery in eleventh-century Normandy, where it meant carving letters into clay tablets, unless one wanted to produce an important document for use outside the monastery or a copy of a sacred text. A prior was not supposed to waste expensive materials (such as paper or vellum, and ink) for communicating with his fellow monks and pupils, who lived in the same house.

To understand Anselm's argument aright, one needs to have some background knowledge. At the very least, one should be wary of the suggestion that the second chapter is about the existence of God, no matter how one interprets the words 'God' and 'exists', or any of the words ('great', 'thing', 'thought') he used in making his argument.

'God'

Let's consider 'God' first. Anselm's argument is certainly not about a vigorous elderly man with an impressive white beard who dwells on a high mountain top or somewhere on a cloud in the sky and listens to the name 'God'. It is not about an eye encapsulated inside a triangle or about a mythical or legendary figure (a Ra, Jehovah, Zeus or Jupiter) that is a major *dramatis persona* in popular tales and stories. It is certainly not intended to prove every Biblical statement about God correct or factually true, e.g. the statement that God turned a woman into a pillar of salt.³⁶ It is, instead, about something about which little or nothing is presupposed other than that all intelligent persons who discuss it and argue about it formally agree that it has a certain quality, viz. the quality of being greater than which nothing can be thought. That, formally considered, is the divine quality (see below, page 57). As far as Anselm was concerned, when intelligent people discuss God then they discuss something (some *thing*) that has that quality to the greatest thinkable extent and is for that reason often called Supreme Being.

³⁶ *Genesis* 19:26

However, such formal agreements “in the abstract” may not, and often do not, survive when people start to explicate their meaning. For example, there is general agreement among intelligent persons on the idea that man is a rational animal, i.e. an “animal *rationis capax*”, a reason-able animal being. Still, one person's answer to the question “What do you mean by ‘man’, ‘animal’, ‘reason’, ‘having a capacity or ability’ and ‘being?’” may not be another's. Further disagreements appear when one asks “Which criteria do you use to determine whether something is a man or an animal, or whether something has a particular capacity, in particular the capacity to reason?” And that is not the end of it. Even among those who agree on the answers to each of those questions, disagreements may arise when one asks, “Does this particular thing meet or satisfy your criteria?” or “If, as you say, *this* particular thing satisfies your criteria, why does *that* other particular thing not satisfy them?” Arguably, all intelligent persons who agree that man is an animal *rationis capax*, a reason-able animal, also agree that men are disagree-able, that the ability to reason implies the ability to disagree — and they agree that, when disagreements arise then the reasonable thing to do is to look for ways to resolve or mitigate them through diligent, conscientious argumentation. Furthermore, all intelligent beings agree that it is unreasonable to blame anything other than a reason-able being for being unreasonable. It is unreasonable to blame anything (e.g. a rock, an oak, a worm) that is not *rationis capax* for not properly manifesting a capacity it does not have, but it is not unreasonable to chastise a person for his unreasonableness.

In discussions, it is important to understand that agreement on a principle (such as “Man is a reason-able animal”) does not guarantee agreement on any explication or application of the principle. However, such disagreements do not nullify the agreement on the principle. Nor do they nullify the principle that one ought to try to resolve or mitigate disagreements through argumentation, which involves proposing, defending and challenging arguments by appealing to the opposing party's conscience and understanding (as opposed to appealing to her vanity or greed, her fears or hopes).

Anselm was interested only in stating and analyzing the generally agreed-on proposition that God is something greater than which is

unthinkable. He was not interested in the various uses to which people (e.g. Christians, Jews, Muslims) might wish to put it. It is therefore reasonable to interpret his ‘cannot be thought’ or ‘is unthinkable’ as short for ‘is logically (absolutely, objectively) unthinkable or unintelligible’ and therefore the equivalent of ‘cannot be intelligible to (i.e. thought and understood by) any intelligent being’.

It is possible, of course, that some things are not objectively but only subjectively unthinkable. Some people profess their inability to understand that there are, even can be, certain things (e.g. mermaids, winged horses, things that move faster than light). Note, however, that this does not mean that they claim that no intelligent being is, or can be, able to understand that there are, might have been or might be such things. Some physicists believe that no physically observable or detectable thing can move faster than light, but they certainly would not claim that the proposition “Some things move faster than light” is self-contradictory, and that its truth is therefore unthinkable. No evolutionary biologists would claim that circumstances in which mermaids or winged horses might have evolved and survived are unthinkable, even if they are convinced that no such circumstances ever did or ever will prevail on planet Earth.

A thing is only subjectively thinkable, if some people plausibly claim that they can think it, although it is not objectively thinkable. We may refer to such a thing as ‘an imaginary thing’. E.g., the square root of -1 is an imaginary thing. On the one hand, it must be an objectively unthinkable number, because for any real number ϱ that would be the square root of -1 , it must be true (by the definition of ‘square root’) that $\varrho^2 = \varrho \cdot \varrho = -1$. However, there is no such real number, because the result of multiplying any positive or negative real number by itself is a positive number and, therefore, different from -1 . On the other hand, no contradiction follows from assuming that, in addition to real numbers, there is at least one imaginary number — mathematicians call it ‘ i ’ — that is the square root of -1 , so that $i^2 = -1$. In that sense, the square root of the real number -1 is at least subjectively thinkable, although one cannot equate it, even approximately, with any real number. It is an imaginary number, but only in a metaphorical sense of the word ‘imaginary’, because one cannot make a concrete image of it. It is therefore unlike π which is a real number that appears when we

consider either the surface ($S=\pi\cdot r^2$) or the circumference ($C=2\cdot\pi\cdot r$) of a circle, where r stands for the radius of the circle, the distance between the centre of a circle and any point on its circumference. For example, if the radius of a circle is 1 metre then the surface of that circle is π square metres — $S=\pi\cdot 1^2 = \pi\cdot 1 = \pi$. So, although we cannot see the number π itself, we can see magnitudes (surfaces) the size of which is exactly π square metres. Similarly, if the radius of a circle is 1 metre then half the length of its circumference is π metres — $C=2\cdot\pi\cdot 1=2\cdot\pi$, hence $C/2=\pi$. Although we cannot see the number π itself, we can see magnitudes (lines) the size of which is exactly π metres.³⁷ In other words, we have concrete images of the number π .

Things that are objectively and subjectively unthinkable are nothings. E.g., a rectangular circle is a nothing, because it is neither objectively nor subjectively thinkable. Moreover, the assumption that, in addition to rectangles and circles, there is at least one rectangular circle renders the whole of Euclidean geometry into a mess of contradictions. A rectangular circle is certainly a mentionable thing, but it is not even subjectively thinkable — no intelligent being can plausibly claim the ability to think or imagine it without changing the meaning of the words ‘rectangular’ and ‘circle’. Obviously, Anselm believed that God is not a nothing. However, he was willing to consider, if only for the sake of the argument, that God is only a subjective thing, an “imaginary being” that we can add to the set of thinkable things without generating a contradiction in our thinking about real things — just as modern mathematicians add i (the square root of -1) to the set of thinkable numbers without generating a contradiction in their thinking about real numbers.

Finally, modern intellectuals are likely to interpret ‘thing’ as meaning “object”, a thing that can be located in space and time or in a constructed series of objects (as one can locate the number four in the series of non-negative numbers that one can construct

³⁷ Mathematicians call π an irrational number, because it is not exactly equal to any ratio of integer numbers (such as $22/7$). In decimal notation, π is 3.14... (where ‘...’ stands for an indefinitely long series of non-repeating sequences of digits). In other words, the exact value of π cannot be spelled out in decimal notation. Yet, it is a real number, the measure of an imaginably real thing

by assuming that 0 is a non-negative number and that if n is a non-negative number then so is its immediate successor, s_n — so, $ssss0$ is the fourth successor of 0, i.e. the number four (the name of which we usually write as ‘4’). Of course, Anselm did not think of God as an object in space or time³⁸ or the occupant of a position in a constructed series. When he referred to God as something (some thing) he used the word ‘thing’ in its commonsensical meaning in the natural language in which he communicated with his audience. Even today, people (including self-styled intellectuals) use the word, most of the time, to refer to something that can be thought (even in the weakest sense of ‘thought’, i.e. mentioned, spoken of). Human speech is not, was not ever and will never be exclusively about objects (in a restricted, “technical” or “specialist” sense of the word). It is therefore a poor logician who thinks that logical thinking is thinking about objects, or that one cannot think logically about any thing without first “objectifying”³⁹ it.

As for ‘great’ and ‘greater’, Anselm stipulated that he did not mean to use these words in the sense “great / greater in size” but only in the sense “great / greater in quality”. I shall return to this distinction later (below, page 55 sqq.).

‘Existence’

Apart from the danger of making unwarranted assumptions about the meaning of the words ‘God’, ‘great’, ‘thing’ and ‘thinkable’, readers of *Proslogion* 2 should also be aware of the danger of interpreting ‘existence’ in ways that Anselm did not intend.

Looking up the verb ‘*exsistere*’ (also written ‘*existere*’) in my Latin-to-Dutch dictionary⁴⁰ and translating the entry into English, I find this:

exsisto (also existo), -stiti (-titi)

1) to rise, to emerge (from or above something from which or above which one previously did not distinguish oneself); to appear, to stand

³⁸ *Monologion* 17-24; *Proslogion* 19-21

³⁹ Sometimes the term ‘reification’ is used in stead of ‘objectification’. This is unfortunate because the Latin word ‘res’ (from which ‘reification’ derives) means “thing”, not just “object”.

⁴⁰ Fred. Muller, E.H. Renkema, *Beknopt Latijns-Nederlands Woordenboek*, 8^e druk (bewerkt door K. van der Heyde (1958)

up, to raise oneself.

2) metaph.: *to emerge or reveal oneself, to act (as something, in a certain capacity), to make an appearance, to come into being, to become* (as perfectum also: *to be available, to occur, to be*)⁴¹

3) *to follow (logically) from something.*

Apparently, the Latin ‘existere’ refers to an action or activity of something in relation to other things (above which it rises, to which it appears, from which it follows). It should be noted that, except with respect to the third, logical meaning, all translations refer to things that admit of degrees, of a qualification such as “more or less” or “somewhat” or “after a fashion”. In contrast, one thing does not follow (logically) more or less, or somewhat, from another thing; it follows or it does not follow, and all things that follow logically, follow equally. This is definitely not the case for the other meanings of ‘existere’. Not all things that appear, appear equally, everywhere, at all times, even to every person to whom they appear. Not all things that reveal or manifest themselves do so equally — unless they appear or reveal or manifest themselves in genuine, logical thinking. What becomes apparent to one person in one set of circumstances may not become apparent to another or even to the same person in other circumstances. Surely, a thing may become apparent to a healthy person but not, say, to one who is blind, deaf, numb, unable to move, or suffering from loss of smell or taste. A thing may become apparent to an alert, highly intelligent person but not to a lazy person, one who is unconscious or asleep or distracted by some other thing, or one who never mastered the art of disciplined thinking. These considerations suggest that the proper explication of ‘Deus existit’ is “God's being follows logically [from the argument]” rather than, say, “God's being reveals itself to those who have good eyes or ears, know how to use a telescope, microscope or sound amplifier, or are good at math”.

Note also that the dictionary does not mention “to exist” as a common translation. The English ‘to exist’ translates into Dutch as ‘bestaan’, into German as ‘bestehen’, the literal meaning of which is ‘to stand on or in’ and may be close enough to ‘to rise above’ or ‘to

⁴¹ Perfectum: what *has* emerged, appeared or acted, is now present, available, current; what *has* come into being now is (has being), whereas it was not (had no being) before it came into being.

emerge from'. Of course, in the literal sense, 'God bestaat/besteht' or 'God exists' is, for Anselm (and indeed for most people who believe in God) either false or nonsensical, unless one interprets it as "stands on or in himself". Whatever God is or does, he does not stand (in a literal sense of that word) on or in anything else. One may say that he stands on or in himself, but then one uses 'stands' in a metaphorical sense. For a believer, it is certainly inconceivable that God would need to stand on or be contained in anything other than himself.

In *Proslogion*, Anselm uses forms of the verb 'existere' only three times: once in the already quoted last sentence of chapter 2, and again in the title and the text of chapter 5 ("Deus [...] solus existens per se [...]"), which Hopkins and Richardson translate as "God [...] alone existing through himself [...]"). In both cases, we are looking at sentences that state a fundamental truth: "God exists" and "God exists through himself". In contrast, in *Monologion*, forms of 'existere' occur approximately 50 times, but not always in sentences that express a fundamental truth about that which cannot be understood not to be.

If one thinks it appropriate to translate 'Deus existit' as "God exists" then one should bear in mind that, for Anselm, God's existence is unlike the existence of any other thing, i.e. any thing that is not God or an inseparable part, aspect or attribute of God. Such other things do not exist (i.e. appear to human beings) objectively, absolutely or unconditionally. If they exist at all then they exist under certain conditions, in some degree, after a fashion, for one person but possibly not for another.

When people say about a thing that it exists then they mean that it satisfies certain criteria for being apparent or manifest. However, it would be presumptuous of them to claim that only their criteria are valid, relevant in all discussions in which people argue about their views on what exists. How mathematicians establish the existence of a solution to a mathematical problem is not how particle physicists establish the existence of a particular elementary particle (or even a particular kind of elementary particle), virologists the existence of a particular virus (or kind of virus) or a medical doctor the existence of an illness (or kind of illness) in a patient. How mathematicians, particle physicists, virologists or physicians establish the existence of something is not how historians establish

the existence of a certain event or whether the event was, or was not, the intended result of an action undertaken by a particular historical figure. It is certainly not how an art lover establishes the existence of an artistic quality in a painting, sculpture, musical or literary composition.

Of course, mathematicians, physicists, biologists, historians and art critics will not find God (or anything that is not separable from God) among the things that meet their various criteria of existence, but that tells us nothing about the existence of God. It tells us lot, however, about the powers of the human mind to discipline itself in various ways, to focus on, and to develop methods and techniques and devise criteria for studying, one or other aspect of certain things to the exclusion of all other aspects and all other things. It also tells us a lot about the folly of assuming that the narrower (“more specialized”) our focus is, the better we can know and understand all things in all their aspects and relations to other things.

Pure mathematics is great, and so is pure physics, but what exists within the realm of pure mathematics need not exist within the realm of pure physics, or vice versa. The meaning of ‘existence’ is the same for mathematicians and physicists, but the criteria which mathematicians use for identifying what exists differ from those that physicists use. In that sense, mathematical existence is not physical existence. Moreover, anybody who is somewhat familiar with the history of mathematics knows that not all mathematicians agree on the same criteria of mathematical existence. The same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, for physics, biology, historiography, indeed, for every scientific discipline and every disciplined intellectual enquiry, including philosophy, theology and the study of artistry. Whenever we turn to such subjects, we find different “schools” as well as mavericks, who are not members of any established or generally recognized school, yet are acknowledged to be “interesting” interlocutors in the debates and discussions that make the distinction between a school and a congregation of featherless parrots.

Criteria and standards

While it is true that to discipline the mind, we need to establish criteria, it is also true that we need to think about those criteria, to

discuss and evaluate them, to justify them in the light of standards of rightness or excellence. An employer establishes the criteria that inform his employees about the things to watch out for in determining what they may or may not do while going about their assigned tasks, but the fact that he does this does not ensure that they are the right criteria. He may have attended a business or a trade school and learned there about good and bad criteria, but what such schools teach is also not above criticism in the light of standards of correctness or excellence. A set of criteria may be intended as an implementation of a standard, but it is not the standard itself. It establishes a way to distinguish, in a particular context, between what is and what is not “good enough”; but they are not the “that better than which cannot be thought”, which alone can be the standard of excellence for that particular context.

A suitably programmed robot may be perfect for applying specified criteria but is helpless when it comes to judging according to standards. It is helpless because no matter how suitably programmed it might be, it cannot think in the way human persons can think. For example, it cannot question its own thinking, think of identifying and remedying its own shortcomings or finding arguments for and against a particular proposition or point of view, or invent a new vocabulary and reprogram itself to learn to use it critically in judging just where it allows for making relevant distinctions that could not be expressed unequivocally within the old language, and just where it merely entices to make distinctions without a difference. A robot cannot question things, although it is easy to program it to consult a database of prepared “questions” and to link these to a list of prepared answers or subroutines for calculating an answer to a particular “question”. It is like a functionary or bureaucrat, who needs criteria to function within his bureau, to please his boss, to keep his job. A robot, no matter how suitably programmed, is unlike a judge, who needs standards to arrive at a just verdict. Someone whose main objective is to please her boss by doing what the boss tells her to do and how to do it, does not need much judgement. She cannot justifiably, and therefore should not, be called a judge, whether or not her boss orders his other underlings to call her ‘Judge’ and to address her as “Your Honour”.

A true judge has no boss and answers to no boss but is aware of and answers to objective, absolute standards. In a scene in the 1970 film *Tora! Tora! Tora*, a naval officer asks his commander for a direct command. When he gets the reply “Use your own judgment”, he answers that it is the clearest command he ever received, even though it makes him fully responsible for his actions and deprives him of every opportunity to shift the blame to his commander and to exonerate himself with a perhaps truthful but nevertheless cowardly “I’m just following orders” or “I’m just doing my job”. The commander does not tell the officer, “Do what you want”, but declares that he trusts the officer's ability to judge by the right standards and, at the same time, declares that he himself will not prejudge the appropriate criteria for using the troops and weapons at the officer's disposal in dealing with the unpredictable, chaotic situations of the battlefield. The officer trusts that, unless he knowingly, intentionally, wilfully neglects or discards standards of right judgment, his commander (but perhaps no one else) will forgive him. The officer's task, then, is to be a man, not an artfully programmed robot; to judge by the appropriate standards of rightness or excellence, so as not to disappoint his commander and not to betray the latter's trust.

Similarly — here I return to Anselm's outlook on man and his world and their relation to God — human persons should not disappoint God or betray his trust in their ability to live and work according to the right standards. They should be thankful to him for giving them “the clearest command they will ever receive” and for trusting their ability to judge things by the right standards, but they should not even think of shifting the blame for their judgments, thoughts, words or actions to God. They may betray his trust, but when they do then it does not mean or prove that his trust in their ability to judge rightly (their human intelligence or understanding) was misplaced. Think of God as an educator. To live and work rightly is what an educator, a true teacher of men, should teach his pupils. He is not merely an instructor, a programmer of men, who tells his pupils what to do in particular circumstances and how to do it then and there, if they want to get good marks from him or good pay from employers who like his instructions and are therefore likely to hire his certified pupils. A teacher may certify that his pupils have ability, but he cannot certify

that they will actually use it, much less that they will use it properly. Orthodox Christians, such as Anselm, know that a greater educator than God is unthinkable. Moreover, they believe that God considered the creation of Man a good thing, but they do not believe that God believed that all human beings will always think or act according to every standard of rightness. However, they do believe that God (if no one else) will forgive their shortcomings (“their sins”), provided they do not wilfully refuse to obey “the clearest of all commands” and do not wilfully refuse to repent for their refusal to obey it. It is no wonder that many consider Anselm the first libertarian theologian and philosopher in the West: “Man is free to do what he ought to do” — but saying that is not the same as saying “Man is free, if and only if he takes orders from another”.

Orthodox Christians judge the existence of a human person by considering the criteria mentioned in the Book of Genesis, viz. possession of the knowledge (at least conscious awareness) of the existence of good and evil, and understanding of the meaning and significance of the distinction between what ought to be done (to the greatest extent that one is capable of) and what ought not to be done or (if at all possible) ought to be undone. However, although the Bible abounds with examples of good and evil things, it does not spell out the criteria that would enable a robot to be a human person, much less a good human person. As history shows, turning humans into robots is easier than turning expensive machinery into things that understand the command “Use your own judgment” as meaning something other than “Jump to and execute the next line in whichever program is currently loaded in your random-access memory (and if you have trouble with that, paralyze or kill the program or crash your operating system and wait for someone or something else to reboot you)”.

As noted earlier, there was no actual need for Anselm to “prove” to anyone that God exists, and there is no indication that he was challenged to prove God's existence. However, he had been worried about the possibility that although there is a god in everybody's understanding, there is no god that is in everybody's understanding — after all, from “Every human being has a heart” it does not follow that there is a heart that is the heart of every human being. To address that possibility, he turned to the Book of

Psalms, where there is a mere mention of “the fool who says in his heart, ‘God is not’”⁴², even though, being a fool but not a dumb person, he will admit that he knows enough about the things under discussion (gods) to make an intelligible claim. The fool does not say, “I don’t know what you are talking about, but I tell you that it — whatever it is you are talking about — does not exist”. Rather, he says, “I know what you are talking about and I tell you that there is no such thing”. Anselm accordingly interpreted the fool’s saying as “In reality, there is not something greater than which cannot be thought” or “Things greater than which cannot be thought do not really exist”. The purpose of the argument in *Proslogion* 2 is to refute the fool’s claim, to demonstrate that the fool’s proposition, so interpreted, is, from a logical point of view, a contradiction, i.e. a proposition that cannot be thought true and is, therefore, by logical necessity, false. And, if that is the case, then the proposition, “There is something greater than which cannot be thought” (i.e. the logical negation of the fool’s proposition) is, again by logical necessity, true. It is true, unless it can be shown that ‘that greater than which cannot be thought’ is a logically incoherent, contradictory expression, similar to, say, ‘the first even negative number that is greater than 0’. Anselm felt no need to prove the logical coherence of ‘that greater than which cannot be thought’, because no one, not even the fool, claimed that the expression made no sense. I guess it is safe to say that no one ever tried to argue that, as Anselm used it — i.e. as meaning “something greater in goodness than which is unthinkable” — the expression is formally incoherent. Anselm’s critics never ventured beyond the claim that he simply assumed, but did not prove, that the expression is logically coherent. However, we know that Anselm explicitly ruled out an understanding or interpretation that would have made the expression incoherent (see below, page 59).

RE-READING THE ARGUMENT

So, let us reread *Proslogion* 2 bearing in mind the preceding caveats. For ease of reading, I substitute ‘socon’ for ‘something greater in being good than which is unthinkable’. Obviously, in

⁴² Psalm 14:1, “Dixit insipiens in corde suo: Non est Deus.”

engaging the fool in an argument, Anselm was prepared to concede, for the sake of the argument, that socons might be no more than subjectively thinkable, imaginary things (in a metaphorical sense of the word ‘imaginary’). The purpose of his argument was, of course, to show that socons have to be thought real things.

- 1· Either there is or there is not a socon.
- 2· The fool says in his heart that there is no socon.⁴³

[What he means is either “There is in reality no socon — no real socon”, or it means “I do not understand what a socon is — there is no such thing in my understanding”.

However, if he does not understand what a socon is then his saying that there is no socon makes no sense as a contribution to a discussion about socons. It would be tantamount to his saying “I don't even know what I am talking about, so do not take seriously anything I say about it”. If he meant to say “I do not understand what you mean by the word ‘socon’, but whatever it is, I assure you that there is no such thing” then he would have to make good on this claim by showing that nothing can possibly answer to the meaning of ‘socon’, because it is like the meaning of ‘rectangular circle’. However, he said “There is no socon” only “in his heart”, with no apparent intention to argue that socons are unthinkable things.]

3· Therefore, [if his saying, “There is no socon”, is to be taken as a contribution to an argumentative discussion then we should take it to mean that] he understands the word ‘socon’.⁴⁴ In other words, we should understand him to admit that at least one socon is in his understanding. Note, however, that he does not say that he understands it to be anywhere else.]

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4· Nevertheless [given that the fool understands what it is for something to be a socon] he can think that socons are also outside his understanding [e.g., in someone else's understanding, unless he thinks that, apart from him,

⁴³ Dixit insipiens in corde suo: non est Deus

⁴⁴ Convincitur ergo etiam insipiens esse vel in intellectu aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest, quia hoc, cum audit, intelligit, et quidquid intelligitur, in intellectu est.

nobody is capable of understanding what he understands. However, if that is what he thinks then he denies the existence of any company or community of intelligent beings (persons) with whom he would be able to have an intelligent conversation or discussion. Or, if he does not deny the existence of such a community then he certainly excludes himself from it — as if he were saying “Don't bother: you and I cannot both be intelligent beings (in the same sense of the word ‘intelligent’)”. But then, we should understand him to say it only to himself, because he cannot simultaneously say what he means to say and believe that the persons to whom he says it understand what he means. He would be more than just a fool: an arrogant fool, or a nutcase.]

5. Moreover [given that he must admit that it is logically possible to discuss socons with at least one other person] he should also admit that it is logically possible for him to discuss socons with any other intelligent person. [In other words, he should admit that it is logically possible for him to think that the meaning or reference of ‘socon’ that is in his understanding is also in the understanding of all beings that have some capacity for thinking and understanding. At the very least, he should admit that it is logically possible that every other intelligent being can be made to understand what a socon is by presenting him with the right explications and arguments.

Now, let us not forget Anselm's “philosophical faith”: On the one hand, that which is in the understanding of all intelligent beings is understandable, in an absolute, objective sense of the word. And, *things which all intelligent beings understand* (or can be made to understand, if they are given the proper arguments) *are real* (“are in reality”), even though they may not be more real than other things, a fortiori, not more real than nothing else can be thought. Trees are real because everybody understands what trees are, or can be made to understand what trees are, e.g. by being shown one or more examples, photographs or descriptions (by reliable witnesses) of trees. Still, “There are no trees” is not an

unthinkable proposition. After all, there are many treeless places, and it is certainly possible to think that everywhere trees have become extinct. On the other hand: *Things which no intelligent beings understand* (a fortiori, can be made to understand) *are unreal* — they are at most subjective things, possibly nothings.]

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6. Thus, given that the fool understands what it is for something to be a socon “in his [or any other intelligent being’s] understanding” then he can think it to be a socon also in reality⁴⁶ [i.e. in every intelligent being’s understanding.]

7. Undoubtedly, however, it is greater for a thing to be “in reality” [i.e. in every intelligent being’s understanding] than for it to be only in the understanding of *some* person or persons.⁴⁷ [The greater the number of people who can understand a thing, the more real or greater-in-reality it is. Obviously, this should not be taken to mean that a thing is the more real, the more people *believe* they understand it. “I believe that I understand what you’re saying” may be true, when “I understand what you’re saying” is not.]

Note that, here, ‘greater’ means “greater in being”. It does not mean “greater in being good”, which is the meaning of ‘greater’ in the explication of ‘socon’. But, remember that, for Anselm, “greatness in goodness” is a sufficient condition of “greatness in being”.]

8. Therefore, if a socon were *only* in the understanding of some persons, then it would be something than which a greater *can* be thought.⁴⁸

9. But no such thing is logically thinkable⁴⁹ [as it would have to be thought a socon and not a socon].

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10. Therefore [given that the fool properly understands the word ‘socon’] he would contradict himself, if he continued to maintain that a socon is — a fortiori, can be — only in the understanding of *some* intelligent beings. [This holds, in particular, for a socon that is in his understanding.]

⁴⁵ My explicatory interpolation — FvD

⁴⁶ Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re

⁴⁷ Quod maius est.

⁴⁸ Si ergo id quo maius cogitari non potest, est in solo intellectu: id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest, est quo maius cogitari potest.

⁴⁹ Sed certe hoc esse non potest.

11. It follows [that the fool, being an intelligent person, should admit] that it is unthinkable that a socon is only in his understanding, or only in the understanding of some persons.

12. [Because this conclusion holds for anyone who would be foolish enough to suggest that socons are not real, it follows that] no intelligent being can logically deny that at least one socon is real.

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13. Ergo, [every being that is intelligent enough to understand elementary laws of logic ought to admit that] at least one socon is in [his] understanding and in reality.⁵⁰

Philosophical realism

The italicized sentences in our explicatory re-reading (“Things which all intelligent beings understand, are real” and “Things which no intelligent beings understand, are unreal”) play a crucial role, but no obvious equivalents were mentioned in Anselm’s text of *Proslogion* 2. However, they should not be dismissed. As a realist philosopher or philosophical realist, Anselm certainly accepted that things are real only to the extent that they can be understood by intelligent beings, who can think and understand what they think: “Veritas est rectitudo sola mente perceptibilis” — i.e. **truth is a quality of rightness only the mind can perceive**; it is a quality the presence or absence of which only the intelligent can note. Similarly, the reality of a thing is a quality of that thing that only the intelligent mind can perceive. Indeed, the basic presupposition of Western philosophy, from the early days of Heraclitus and Parmenides onward, is that intelligent people can communicate and explicate their thoughts to one another and so arrive, by a process of diligent argumentation (by asking and conscientiously replying to pertinent questions), at a common understanding of things — an understanding that Heraclitus called ‘the logos of things’ and that Parmenides maintained could only be achieved by following what he called ‘the way of truth’ in its proper direction, i.e. toward the discovery of truths rather than falsehoods. Philosophers are truth seekers, not satisfied with unmasking the falsity of certain opinions.

⁵⁰ Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re.

Of course, neither Heraclitus nor Parmenides assumed that intelligent people always take the trouble to explicate and communicate their thoughts as best they can. Indeed, Heraclitus was notorious for his incessant laments about the intellectual sloppiness and laziness of the overwhelming majority of human persons: “The many are bad and the good are few”.

The Logos holds always but [most] humans always prove unable to understand it... They fail to notice what they do when awake, just as they forget what they do while asleep. For this reason it is necessary to follow what is common. But although the Logos is common, most people live as if they had their own private understanding.

Or, as Bertrand Russell put it, “We all have a tendency to think that the world must conform to our prejudices. The opposite view involves some effort of thought, and most people would die sooner than think — in fact they do.”⁵¹

Admittedly, the realist presupposition has been challenged at various times by anti- and pseudo-philosophers (e.g. sophists, nominalists and subjectivists). However, with few exceptions, such people nevertheless presuppose that they can communicate and explicate their thoughts to one another and so arrive at a common understanding of things — even though they ostensibly mean their communications and explications to establish that the common understanding of things is that there is and can be no common understanding. They seem to want to establish the conclusion “The logos of things is that there is no logos of things” or “The only objective truth is that there is no objective truth”. Consequently, we should understand them as saying that there is no truth to any of the arguments they advance as reasons for accepting their conclusion, just as there is no truth to any arguments anybody else might produce as reasons for rejecting it. In other words, there is no way of truth; there is only the way of opinion, where rhetoric

⁵¹ Bertrand Russell, *The ABC of Relativity* (1925), p.166: in later editions, from the late 1950s onward, the part “most people would die sooner than think — in fact they do” was dropped. By then Russell had completed his transition “from Descartes to Hume”, i.e. from thinking with understanding to merely “associating ideas”—in other words, from being a philosopher to being a “public intellectual”.

trumps logic and the clamour of the applause seekers drowns out the voice of reason every inch of the way.

To produce arguments for denying the realist presupposition, “Reality is what every intelligent being can understand”, one should identify 1) something the reality of which one intends to argue with intelligible arguments, and 2) some being that one intends to argue is intelligent yet absolutely — not just for the moment or because of an, in principle, remediable lack of specialized knowledge — unable to understand the arguments for calling the thing in question ‘a real thing’. Arguably, this cannot be done, because to show that an intelligent person is absolutely unable to understand an argument, one needs to show that the argument itself is unintelligible — which is logically incompatible with the claim that it is an intelligible argument. Surely, every intelligent person knows that saying “Reality is what people believe is real” is saying something that is eminently false, for every intelligent person knows that it is one thing to say “What X believes to be real appears to him as if it were real” and another thing to say “What X believes to be real is real, i.e. appears to every intelligent being as real”. The same goes for “Reality is a socially constructed thing”, which merely hides the element of subjective belief under a layer of fanciful academic jargon. It may be true that one can make many people believe what is false, but any intelligent person understands that the statement is about people and their beliefs, not about reality. Reality itself (as opposed to what people believe it to be) cannot even be thought false. Realist philosophy is common sense philosophy. It appeals to people's conscience, the knowledge they share with others, to arrive at a common understanding of things, at the logos of things.

The reality vs. the existence of God

Note that the argument, as it was paraphrased above, is not about God's existence but is about his reality. That is not a distinction without a difference. On the one hand, we take it for granted that many things exist without us knowing that they exist, just as we take it for granted that many events happen without us knowing that they happen — just don't ask for an example! They exist but we do not notice them, maybe because they are too far away in space or time, too small or too big, or too fast for us to be able to

notice them. On the other hand, we cannot make sense of the notion of real things that we do not or cannot understand. Unintelligible things or events, we call unreal or surreal, even when they happen right before our eyes. Magicians in show business know this well: “See this: it exists. All of you saw it with your very own eyes — but, unlike me, you cannot make heads or tails of it, can you?” And their audience knows it too: “Amazing, this can't be real! How could the magician possibly achieve that effect? It defies my understanding.” If the people in the audience did not know of the distinction between existence and reality they would consider the showman a true magician and, awed by his supernatural powers, would fall on their knees before him or kill him.

The English ‘real’ derives from the Latin word ‘res’. The meaning of ‘res’ is not only “a physical or material thing, a tangible object”, it is also and primarily “something that can be brought up in a discussion, e.g. in a court case or a public assembly, or in a conversation. ‘Res’ derives from the verb ‘rei’ (reor, ratus), which means specifically “to reckon, calculate” and generally “to think, suppose, imagine, deem, judge” — all of which are activities of the intellect, not of the body or even the free-wheeling, dreaming, hallucinating mind.

Even after centuries of dogmatic empiricism, speakers of Dutch or German can easily distinguish between “realiteit” or “Realität” and “werkelijkheid” or “Wirklichkeit”, between things which affect the understanding (the intellect) and things that merely affect the body. The words ‘werkelijkheid’ and ‘Wirklichkeit’ derive from the verbs ‘werken’ and ‘wirken’, which mean “to work, to have a physical effect on physical things”. Neither English or French nor Latin provides an easy terminological way of making that distinction. The English ‘Reality’ and the French ‘réalité’ are used to translate both ‘realiteit’ and ‘werkelijkheid’, ‘Realität’ and ‘Wirklichkeit’. Empiricist prejudices, then, easily lead to the mistaken, ultimately incoherent view that reality is the sum total of physical things (“objects”) and the physical things (changes, movements) that happen to them — the view that only “working” things exist. On that mistaken view, God's existence can be demonstrated only by finding traces of his physical activity in the material universe. Obviously, however, Anselm's argument is not about physical traces or about God as the physical cause of changes

in material things. It is about the intellectual faculties and what they reveal to those who have them and pay attention to them. Without those faculties nothing is intelligible, no matter how relentlessly frenetic the workings of material things. Without them, there is nothing to anybody — or rather, everything is nothing. Materialists know this. They do not even attempt to explain how a science of material things would be possible inside a universe where there is no intelligent being, only the frenetic working of material things. They simply assume that they can observe, describe and come to understand such a universe, as it were, from the outside, without interacting with (i.e. changing) anything inside it. Because there is no place or time outside the universe, they present a timeless view from nowhere on changing things. They name this view ‘theoretical, i.e. contemplative, physics’. It was a plausible assumption when scientific physics was basically astronomy: one could reasonably assume 1) that observing the heavenly bodies had no effect on them, and 2) that they had no effect on man's intellectual faculties. Observation was thought a non-invasive action of the observers on the things (stars, planets, comets) which they observe. However, that contemplative view renders experimental physics unintelligible, because scientific experiments (as distinct from mere thought experiments) require interaction with and, in particular, acting on (i.e. changing) material things with understanding (intelligence) — they are inevitably invasive. In short, experimental physics is intelligible only on the supposition that the intelligent experimenter is inside the universe. What experiments reveal is not “pure matter in motion” but the effects of intelligent action on matter. Still, experimental science continued to assume that the matter on which the experimenter works does not have any effect on his intellectual faculties, his powers of thinking with understanding.

Read as an argument for the reality of God, Proslogion 2 invokes the intelligibility and the undeniability of these three propositions: 1) If that greater than which nothing can be thought *is* thought then it *must* be thought greater than which nothing can be thought (because it cannot be thought otherwise); 2) What *must* be thought to be (or have) a particular property undeniably *is* (has) that property, because 3) what is undeniable is real. Anselm was

particularly concerned with the first of those propositions, because the other two are fundamental principles of logical thinking (i.e. thinking with understanding), even though they are not formal tautologies in the sense of the modern so-called formal logic of symbols — or rather, a formal logic of reproducible physical marks, which are all that remain of symbols when one does not take into account the things which they symbolize. Admittedly, formalism holds significant intellectual attraction, never more so than in the present age, besotted as it is with the thinking without understanding of computers (which are supposed to improve, or at least to speed up, the thinking without understanding of far too expensive human drones, manual and clerical workers). However, devising and working with formal systems, investigating their properties and relations (such as their usefulness as abstract models of other complex things, their total or partial equivalence, and their formal consistency, completeness and decidability) are intellectual activities.

For Anselm, logic has to do with ideas, not with mere symbols, let alone physical marks. However, because the idea of something greater than which is unthinkable is understood by all intelligent persons, it is not simply an idea (“a thought”). Rather, it is an *Idea*, or to be more precise, an Anselmic Idea, similar to but not quite the same as a Platonic Idea. The idea of a thing can be in the understanding, and by implication in the mind, of a person, even if it is an idea of a thing (a tangible object, a body) that cannot itself be in a person's understanding or mind. Of course, the fact that two persons have an idea of something (say, the Empire State building in New York) does not guarantee that each of them has exactly the same idea of it, even when each of them understands that both of them have an idea of the same thing. An ordinary object can be experienced or sensed simultaneously but differently by different persons without thereby ceasing to be the very same object it is and these different experiences cause those different persons to have different ideas of the object. In contrast, *Ideas* are things that can be in the understanding — as ordinary ideas can be — but they are peculiar in this respect: The very same Idea can be in the understanding of different persons. Thus, your Idea of something is the same Idea as mine. It is the same, not by happenstance but because the thing of which it is the Idea can be

understood in one way only. It is, then, impossible to distinguish between the thing and its Idea (if there is a corresponding Idea). Or, as one might also put it: The thing and the Idea are really the same thing. Moreover, being the same in every intelligent person's mind (because it is the same in every person's understanding), an Idea is a real thing. These insights are shared by all realist philosophers or philosophical realists. Of course, because Ideas as such can only be identified in speech, there is a real risk that the words used to speak about them are confusing and give rise to misunderstandings. However, once the misunderstandings and the confusions are cleared up, the reality of the Idea (and therefore of the thing of which it is the Idea) is understood by all intelligent persons.

Neither Plato nor Anselm ever fully explicated an unambiguous theory of Ideas. However, compared to Plato, Anselm made or presupposed a much clearer distinction between, on the one hand, things that, if understood by one person, must be understood in the same way by all persons, and on the other hand, things that can be understood in various but similar ways (and so give rise to more or less similar ideas in the minds of various persons, even when those persons understand that their various ideas are ideas of the same thing). We have to keep this characteristic of Anselm's thinking in mind, if we want to appreciate the significance of Monologion and Proslogion, taken together as a single intellectual enterprise.

Why this re-reading is nevertheless unsatisfactory

One problem with our re-reading of Anselm's argument is obvious. Anselm would not be satisfied with its conclusion, which merely states that every intelligent being is logically bound to believe that the socon that is in his understanding is real. However, that is no more than a necessary condition for the truth of the intended conclusion of Anselm's own argument, viz. that God is in reality (in every intelligent being's understanding, not only in his and the fool's understanding). "Everybody can [be made to] understand that some god is real" is still a far cry from "There is a god, whose reality everybody can [be made to] understand".

If we change the reference of 'socon' to "something that has the head and torso of a woman but the tail of a fish (instead of legs)",

i.e. to something that is commonly called 'a mermaid', then we understand immediately that the argument does not lead to the conclusion that, without a doubt, there is at least one mermaid that exists not only as something in some people's minds but also in reality, in all thinking people's minds. Given this interpretation of 'socon', the "if not- P then P " part of the argument fails. "If no mermaid exists in reality then at least one mermaid exists in reality" get us nowhere. Defining the word 'socon' as a synonym of 'mermaid', we have no way of moving from "This mermaid exists for me (in my mind)" to "The very same mermaid exists, or can (with the help of sound reasoning and intelligible arguments) be made to exist in every intelligent person's mind, and therefore, in reality". Yes, intelligent people can discuss mermaids, but only "in the abstract". What they cannot do is discuss any particular mermaid on the assumption that "the mermaid I have in mind is the same one you have in mind". We might say that the species is real, but the specimens are not, or that, while the *Idea* "mermaid" is real, there is no reality to anyone's idea of any particular mermaid.

For Anselm, 'God' was not just a common name for things that are greater than which nothing greater is thinkable; it was a proper name for that one and only thing that is greater than which nothing else can be thought. In other words, God is not *a* socon, he is *the* socon. As we might say (and should say, if we want to understand Anselm's argument), God is the quality of being socon itself. He is the quality of being greater-in-goodness-than-which-cannot-be-thought itself. Clearly, our re-reading does not capture all the relevant elements of Anselm's argument, or if it does, then his argument is indeed inconclusive.

There is, however, no need to judge Anselm's argument inconclusive. He wrote in Latin, which does not use particles such as 'a' or 'the'. To our ears 'God is a being' may sound better than 'God is being' or 'God is being itself', but surely, we cannot fault Anselm for not making our linguistic preferences his own or for not sharing our prejudices. We cannot do justice to his argument, if we interpret it as an argument about one or other being, or good thing, when he intended it as an argument about being itself, or about goodness itself.

So, how do we move logically from “Every intelligent being understands the socon that is in his understanding to be real” to Anselm's “One and only one thing is greater than which nothing else can be thought”? How do we move from an idea to an *Idea*? The answer is really simple. Anselm was not beholden to an understanding of logic that aprioristically makes a categorical distinction between, on the one hand, things (“objects”⁵²) about which one can say something and, on the other hand, things (“properties”, “relations”) that can be said about, or predicated of, such objects. He was not beholden to the view that only objects can be the logical “subjects” of a Subject-Predicate proposition, so that properties and relations can never be the “subjects” of such a proposition, although they can be predicated of objects. On that view, the logical standard form of a Subject-Predicate proposition is

Predicate(*object*)⁵³

and its standard grammatical or sentential form is

“Subject *is* Predicator”

where ‘Subject’ is a name or identifying description of an object, and ‘Predicator’ a name or identifying description of a predicate). Thus, the grammatically correct sentence ‘John is sick’ corresponds to the logical or propositional form Sick(*john*). The proposition “John is sick” should accordingly be taken as stating that the object

⁵² See above, page 33

⁵³ The form ‘Predicate(*subject*)’ is formally like the standard form of a mathematical function, **Function**(*number*), and is therefore called a logical or a truth function — it takes the value 1 if, and only if “Predicate(*subject*)” is a true proposition; it takes the value 0 if and only if it is false; or (in the rather exceptional case where it makes sense to speak of the probability of the truth of a proposition) it takes the value p if and only if the proposition has a probability p of being true (and, of course, $0 \leq p \leq 1$). Thus, if proposition P has truth value νP then the truth value of its negation $\sim P$ equals $(1 - \nu P)$; the truth value of (P and Q) equals νP or νQ , whichever is smaller; and the truth value of (P or Q) equals νP or νQ , whichever is larger. Finally, the truth value of (P implies Q) equals $(1 - \nu P)$ or νQ , whichever is larger. An alternative truth-functional meaning of ‘implication’ results if we stipulate that the truth value of an implication is calculated as follows: $\nu(P \text{ implies } Q) = 0$ if and only if $\nu P > \nu Q$, otherwise it is 1.

called 'John' is an instance of the property called 'being sick' (or 'having an illness'), it being assumed that in the context in which the sentence 'John is sick' is uttered, the name 'John' unambiguously identifies a particular object.

Although it is now quite common, this view has some odd consequences. For example, if someone says that pure goodness is better than corrupted goodness then he should be understood as saying something like "For all pairs of objects x and y , if x is purely good and y is good but corrupted then x is better than y ". This may sound fine, but it is not. For, if there are or happen to be no purely good objects then the original proposition is undeniable, merely because there are no purely good objects. Consequently, the contrary proposition "Pure goodness is worse than corrupted goodness" would also be undeniable, and for the same reason — because there are or happen to be no objects that are purely good.⁵⁴ The operating principle is "Ex falso sequitur quodlibet" — i.e. "From a false premise any conclusion whatsoever can be drawn".

Anselm certainly accepted the principle, but he would not have interpreted the proposition "Pure goodness is better than corrupted goodness" in the suggested way, i.e. as being solely about objects. Arguably, he would have agreed that there are no purely good *objects*, but he certainly would not have accepted that any proposition about pure goodness is therefore trivially true, or that pure goodness is a contradictory notion, i.e. an objectively unthinkable thing. Also, he would not have said of an object (e.g. *this* tree) that it (the tree itself) is in a person's understanding, even though the name 'this tree' fails to name anything, unless one understands

⁵⁴ To prove that the proposition "All purely good objects have property P" is false, while supposing it logically indistinguishable from "For every object x , if x is purely good then x has property P", one would have to find a purely good object and then demonstrate that it does not have property P — but this cannot be done, if there are no purely good objects to be found anywhere. No matter what 'P' stands for, the proposition is unfalsifiable and undeniable (and therefore undeniably true — the claim that it is true cannot be refuted). "All purely good objects are despicably bad" is, then, just as undeniable as "All purely good objects are at least as good as any object can be thought to be". Surely, this is a misrepresentation of the intention of a person who proposes that all purely good objects have property P. And surely, it is not the proper task of a logician to misrepresent the speakers or authors whose statements he purports to analyze and evaluate logically.

that it refers to a tree. Neither would he have said that an event that happens to objects (e.g. Napoleon Bonaparte's troops firing their cannons at royalist insurgents in front of the church of Saint-Roch, in the Rue Saint-Honoré, Paris on the 5th of October, 1795) happens in a person's understanding, although the description of the event fails to name anything, unless one understands that it refers to a military unit, its commander, its weapons, people who revolt against a political regime, a church building, a street in a city, and a particular day in a particular calendar). The understanding of the event is “in the understanding” (in the mind) but the event itself is not. Many kinds of things are “in the understanding”, but objects and the events that happen to them are not, even though we have images or hypothetical stories (“theories”) of them in our minds and maybe even in our understanding. Moreover and evidently, it is no truth of logic that intelligent people can speak or think logically only about objects and events. They also speak about other things, e.g. about potencies and potentialities, dispositions and tendencies, problems and solutions, about magnitudes, measurements, quantities and qualities, even about divine things.

The problem with our re-reading of Anselm's argument stems from the fact that it suggests that the argument is about objects of a special kind — about socons or gods. But, if gods were objects (in the commonsense meaning of the term) then they would not be in anyone's understanding. And, even if they were objects about which no one can speak without thinking them real then the conclusion of the argument still would not logically imply that the god of which different people speak is really the one and only God that Anselm was thinking of. To close the gap between the subjective idea of a god and the objective Idea of God, we need to move beyond Proslogion 2.

QUALITIES

When we consider things in respect of their having one or other quality, we can rank them according to the degree to which they have, exemplify or exhibit, the quality in question. Considering a closed set of accessible objects, we may be able to determine which of them have the quality to at least as high a degree as any other thing in the set. However, we may also consider a set of thinkable

things and ask which of these have the quality to at least as high a degree as any other thinkable thing. As a rule, we know which thing has quality Q to at least as high a degree as any other thinkable thing, viz. Q itself. Q itself is at least as great in being Q as any other thing can be thought to be Q. For, evidently, Q itself is pure Q; it has quality Q and no other quality or property or relation that diminishes, detracts from, contaminates or corrupts its having or being Q.

Let us stipulate

gQ is a *genuine quality* (a quality in the proper sense of the word), if and only if it satisfies the condition that gQ itself is not less gQ than any other thinkable thing.

Thus, if we take redness to be a genuine quality then we imply that redness itself or pure redness is at least as red as any other thinkable thing. And, surely, redness is (exists as) a thinkable thing. It may not be — indeed is not — an object that we can locate in space or time (or in a constructible series) and inspect as we can inspect a brick or a tomato (or an integer number), but we can mention it, think it, consider it and think about it without entangling ourselves in a web of contradictions. It is certainly not like a rectangular circle or a negative number greater than 0, either of which is a mentionable but not an intelligible (thinkable and understandable) thing. From a logical point of view, it is trivially true that all things are mentionable, but it is not necessarily true of every mentionable thing that it is intelligible. Incidentally, mentionability and intelligibility appear to be genuine qualities.

The colour in which objects appear to us depends on many factors, so an object which appears red to you may not appear red to me, and what appears red to one person in one set of circumstances may not appear to him red (or as red) in other circumstances. People may use different objects (tomatoes, strawberries, drops of blood, a picture of the setting sun) to illustrate or exemplify what they mean when they say that something is red, but they would never call such objects ‘redness itself’. To repeat: Redness itself is not an object at all — it is an Idea. Indeed, the thing that I think of as being redness itself is, and can only be, the same thing that every other person thinks of as being redness itself. There are no two ways about it — it is simply

impossible to distinguish between the redness itself that is in my mind and the redness itself that is in your mind. In this respect, redness itself is like a number. Some persons may use the symbol '4' to specify what they mean when they think of the fourth positive integer, while others may use 'IV', 'iiii', 'ssss0', four fingers or the sides of a rectangular table, but what they are thinking of is the same number. What they believe about that number may be true ("It is an even number") or it may be false ("It is a prime number"), but the truth or falsity of their beliefs about it depends solely on whether their beliefs correspond with the truth about that number — it does not depend at all on the symbols they use to represent the number or on the images that a mention of it conjures up in their minds.

Divine qualities

Redness may make a tomato great, but it does not make everything that is red greater or better than it would be, if it were not red or less red. Certainly, one can think of some red things that are greater or better than some non-red things, and vice versa. And, most certainly, no even moderately intelligent person, would want to insist on knowing the colour of God or the colour of any of the qualities that make God something greater than which cannot be thought. Nor would any such person jump to the conclusion that, because God must be thought colourless, his colourlessness is one of the qualities that make him great. The same is true for every other genuine quality that does not make all things greater or better than they would be, if they did not have that quality or had it only in a lesser degree. While we can think that redness is a genuine quality, and that redness itself is a standard of purity for red things, we do not and cannot think it a divine quality. "The redder, the better" is not true for all things. It is not true for all coloured objects, even for all red objects — and it is not true for colours (which are thinkable things but not objects). Redness itself is a standard of purity, but because it is not a standard of excellence, neither Anselm nor the readers of *Monologion* thought it necessary to bring it up in a discussion about God. If redness were a divine quality then surely yellowness, blueness, blackness and colourlessness would be divine qualities too. But, evidently, we cannot think and understand anything that is, at the same time and in the same

respects, redness itself, yellowness itself, blueness itself, blackness itself and colourlessness itself. Such a thing is at most mentionable, but it is not thinkable, because to the degree or extent that something is yellow, it is not red and, therefore, removed from being redness itself.

Let us stipulate:

dQ is a *divine quality*, if and only if it is a genuine quality that makes everything that has it better or greater in goodness than it would be if it had that quality only to a lesser degree than it already does — a fortiori, better than it would be if it lacked that quality altogether.

Typically, for a genuine quality gQ (e.g. redness), there is at least one contrary quality (e.g. yellowness, greenness) that is logically incompatible with it, so that, if a thing somehow acquires more of a contrary quality then, *ceteris paribus*, it is left with less of gQ than it had before, yet does not, as a result of this change, become greater or less great, or better or worse than it was before. In contrast, for a divine quality dQ (e.g. intelligence, wisdom), there is at least one contrary quality (e.g. stupidity, foolishness) that is logically incompatible with it, so that, if a thing somehow acquires more of the contrary quality then, *ceteris paribus*, it is left with less of dQ than it had before and, as a result of this change, becomes worse than it was before.

Now, let us once again reconsider Anselm's argument in Proslogion 2. There seems to be no *prima facie* relevant reason for not thinking of what he called 'greatness' (i.e. 'greatness-in-goodness') as a genuine quality. Indeed, he thought of it not simply as a quality but as a divine quality — and not simply as *a* divine quality but as *the* divine quality. For him, greatness itself or pure greatness is the quality of being great to at least as high a degree as any other thinkable thing. It is that thing which is greater-in-goodness than which cannot be thought. It may not be — indeed, is not — an object that we can locate in space or time and inspect as we can inspect a great monument or a great painting, but we can think it, consider it and think about it. It stands to "great" as redness itself stands to "red". It is the standard of purity of greatness, just as redness itself is the standard of purity of redness. However, we should not push the analogy too far. Indeed, unlike

redness itself, greatness itself is not only a standard of purity but also a standard of excellence. Asking “In what respect is redness itself at least as red as any other thinkable thing?” is pointless, because the answer can only be “In respect of redness, of course”. In contrast, it is not pointless to ask “In what respect is greatness itself at least as great as any other thinkable thing?” People who agree that greatness is the divine quality are likely to start disagreeing as soon as someone raises the question, “Great in what respect?”

Did Anselm suppose God to be something that is greater-in-all-respects than which nothing else can be thought? Certainly not: the monks at the monastery as well as the readers of *Monologion*, knew that, as he intended to use the word ‘great’, its meaning was definitely not “great in all respects”. They knew, for instance, that for Anselm, ‘great’ should not be taken to refer to one or other measurable magnitude, such as size, length, weight, density, speed, wealth or force. Admittedly, he offered no explanation for the exclusion of magnitudes in his texts, presumably because he did not think it necessary to provide one. We may therefore assume that it was obvious to Anselm and his audience that “having magnitude” does not qualify as a genuine, let alone divine quality. And indeed, as a matter of logic, it is unthinkable that a magnitude, any magnitude, is greater than which no magnitude can be thought. The distinctive characteristic of a magnitude is that it is measurable, at least in principle but maybe not in practice. All it takes is that we define a suitable “standard unit of measurement” (e.g. 1 metre, 1 kilogram, 1 minute)⁵⁵ and one or more methods for determining the quantity — i.e. the number — of units or fractions of units it takes to match the size of the corresponding magnitude of whatever we wish to measure. Using such units, we can express magnitudes as numbers and treat them as mathematical things, e.g.

⁵⁵ We can say such things as “the magnitude of a thing’s reality is measured by the number of intelligences that understand the thing” (see Proposition 7 in our first re-reading of Anselm’s argument, page 44; also in the second re-reading, page 66) or “the magnitude of a thing’s popularity is measured by the number of people who like it”, but it would be odd to consider any intelligence that understands the thing or any human being who likes it a standard unit of measurement. We do not think of the measurability of thing as measured by the number of people who measure it.

in calculations, while taking care that we do not mix up the magnitudes under consideration — e.g. do not add metres to minutes, or confuse distance covered per minute with weight lost per minute. However, any intelligent being understands that there is not, and cannot be, a number greater than which no other number is thinkable. If you thought that there is such a number — say, that N is a number greater than which is unthinkable — then your mistake would immediately become obvious, when it is pointed out to you that if N is thinkable then so is $N+1$, which is greater than N .⁵⁶ It follows that no magnitude can be thought so great that no greater magnitude is thinkable. For example, for any length or distance, L metres, that one can think of, one can immediately think of a greater length: $L+1$ metres. ‘Pure length’ does not mean “standard unit of length”, and it does not mean that lengthiness itself is the standard of purity or the standard of excellence for lengthy things. Lengthiness is not a genuine quality. A fortiori, it does not qualify as a divine quality. This goes for all magnitudes, not just length. Consequently, whatever you are thinking of, to the extent that you think of it as having one or more purely quantitative or measurable aspects, as being in one or other way a magnitude, then you know that it is not a pure quality and certainly not a divine thing, at least in respect of its quantitative aspects or magnitudes.

Even if one thinks of quantities and magnitudes as qualities, they cannot be thought qualities of the same kind as those for which no numerical unit and, consequently, no standard unit of measurement can be defined. And, surely, there are such non-measurable qualities. Take, for example, the quality of being a dog: No dog is the standard unit for measuring how much of a dog another dog is. Nevertheless, we can think of doghood itself as the standard of

⁵⁶ For the same reason, no number that is smaller than any other number is thinkable: all negative numbers are smaller than 0, and if N is a negative number then $N-1$ is smaller than N — so, whichever negative number N is, it is not the smallest. One might think that, as far as magnitudes are concerned, 0 is the smallest thinkable measure. However, saying that a thing is 0 metres (or nanometres) long is saying that it has no length; it is not the same as saying that its length is smaller than which no length can be thought. Mathematically, 0 is a number, but it is not the measure of a magnitude — it stands for the absence of that magnitude.

purity for all dogs. We do not have, and would be foolish to suppose that there is, a standard unit of, for example, truth, justice, intelligence, logic, conscientiousness, beauty, kindness, humility or meekness. People may convince themselves that there are measurable “proxies” or “indexes” of such things — that IQ tests measure intelligence, for example, but an IQ test merely reports the fraction of correct answers to a number of puzzles the correct solution of which is known to the maker of the test. However, puzzle solving is but a tiny fraction of intelligently dealing with problems. Most problems are not puzzles. They do not have one or more solutions, let alone known solutions. Learning to live with a problem is often far more intelligent than wasting an enormous amount of time or energy in vain attempts to solve it — although, admittedly, many academics, posing as “experts”, make good money out of pretending that problems are puzzles.

Of course, Anselm's brethren at Bec and readers of *Monologion* also knew that he did not believe and did not want his fellows to believe that God is at least as great in stupidity, wickedness or deviousness as any other thinkable thing. They knew this without presupposing that stupidity is a magnitude, i.e. that it is possible to define a standard unit of stupidity that one can use to measure the size or amount of stupidity of stupid things. Instead, they knew that, as Anselm used the word, ‘great’ referred to what he called ‘excellences’, i.e. moral and intellectual qualities such as wisdom, intelligence, reasonableness, justice, mercifulness or other divine qualities, all of which, when detected in human persons, Christians generally consider commendable or virtuous. Arguably, moreover, all people, not just Christians, agree that, if God is (has being) at all then God is great in respect of at least those things. However, some, including some Christians, may believe or want to believe that God's greatness extends to other qualities, even to quantities or magnitudes, which Anselm had explicitly excluded.

Of course, as a monk and a teacher of monks, Anselm was not (and did not expect monks or would-be monks to be) interested in everything people believe about God. He wanted to know the truth about God, as far as it could be known by all intelligent beings. Specifically, he was not interested in the “Roman virtues”, e.g. in physical swiftness, strength, ability to handle heavy weapons or

other qualities that fit under the general heading “virility”.⁵⁷ Such Roman virtues certainly have relative value, being useful for one or other purpose of some people. For example, they are evidently useful to a farmer, labourer or soldier, also to a robber or a pirate. However, while having them may make one a great robber or a great pirate, they do not make robbery or piracy great-in-goodness. Much less do they make robbery a divine thing. Surely, medieval Christians did not believe that God was a robber or pirate greater than which is unthinkable, although they might believe that if God were a robber then he would be the greatest robber imaginable.

One might argue, as many modern Western nincompoops are wont to do, that medieval Christians were not intelligent beings, but their arguments invariably boil down to a claim that it is irrational (“unscientific”) to believe in the God medieval Christians believed in, and consequently, that Jews and Muslims or other people who believe God to be such that nothing can be thought greater in qualities such as wisdom, intelligence or justice are as irrational as medieval Christians. In short, they believe that if there are divine qualities then these certainly do not include the “excellences” of which Anselm spoke and wrote. Some of those who share that belief assume that only Roman virtues can be excellent or great. Roman virtue, virility, can be thought a quality, but it resolves, upon closer consideration, into a heterogeneous collection of things, many of which are magnitudes, not genuine

⁵⁷ The English ‘virtue’ (like ‘virtuose’) derives from the Latin ‘virtus’ and ultimately from ‘vir’, man, male human being). For the Romans, ‘virtus’ primarily meant manliness, manhood, i. e. the sum of all the corporeal or mental excellences of human males (potential citizens or *cives*, i.e. brothers-in-arms, legionnaires, soldiers): strength, vigour, bravery, courage. In Christian times, ‘virtus’ came to stand for the aptness, capacity, worth, excellence, etc. of human beings generally (*homines*, from ‘homo’, human being) rather than males (*vires*). In fact, “female” excellences took precedence over the Roman military virtues — witness the exalted role of Mary, the mother of the Christ Jesus, in the Catholic faith, as well as the references to Jesus as the Prince of Peace and to God as the God of Mercy and Love. The corruption (political weaponization) of the Roman virtues and the Christian Idea of virtue in and after the Protestant Reformation eventually led, on the one hand to a Big Brother, on the other hand to a Big Nanny conception of the state as an organization of physical and psychological violence (coercive police force, mind-numbing propaganda, “psy-ops”).

qualities. Others — we may call them ‘atheists’ or ‘nihilists’ — believe that there are no divine qualities at all, that nothing is truly or really great or excellent in any immeasurable respect. Of course, Anselm had disposed of self-declared would-be nihilists in Proslogion 2 with his argument against “the fool”. He had offered them a choice: Either exclude yourself from the company or community of intelligent beings and keep mumbling to yourself, or admit that there is something greater than which nothing else is thinkable. How could anyone who denies that there are standards of excellence be included in the company or community of intelligent beings? How would any intelligent being be able to argue seriously with a nihilist, one who does not accept that there are standards of excellence or rightness? How would a person appeal to the conscience of someone who “knows in his heart” that there is no such thing as conscience (“shared knowledge”) and maybe even takes pride in unscrupulous? In his argument with the only atheist of which he knew, the fool mentioned in the Book of Psalms, Anselm had to suppose, without evidence, that his opponent was an intelligent being, capable of understanding his own words and willing to listen to reason. Without that supposition, there would not have been an argument.

Greater in goodness; greater in reality

For Anselm, ‘great’ meant the same as ‘good’, at least in the context of Monologion and in most of Proslogion. And, it meant “good” as distinct from “useful for one or other purpose”. This he had made clear already in the first chapter of Monologion (see above, page 8). A thing is supremely great, because it is supremely good — goodness is a sufficient condition of greatness, but there are many other senses of ‘great’ for which goodness is not even a necessary condition. One might think that there was no reason for Anselm to use the word ‘great’ in Monologion, except perhaps to establish a link to the venerable formula, “God is that greater than which is unthinkable”. However, he found a proper use for it in Proslogion 2, in the part which in my re-reading comes out as “It is greater for a thing to be in reality [i.e. in every intelligent being's understanding] than for it to be only in the understanding of some

person or persons”⁵⁸. The statement “The more real a thing is, the greater it is” is plausible as it stands, given the ordinary meaning of the words in which it is expressed in the common natural language. It would be no longer plausible, if we substituted ‘better’ for ‘greater’: “The more real a thing is, the better it is”. Arguably, it is greater, even for an evil thing, to be real than to be only in some people's minds — but a real evil thing is not better than an imagined or purely hypothetical evil. People who love a good crime or war story do not necessarily love real crimes or real wars.

Thus, in attempting to understand Anselm's argument, we should bear in mind that, although goodness is a sufficient condition of greatness, it is not a necessary condition. Things can be great without being good. Anselm's interest was exclusively in things that are great because they are good — things that are great in goodness.

For Anselm, a thing is the greater-in-reality, the more people can think and understand it. That is the very opposite of “modern” conceptions of the reality of things. From my own experience as a teacher (1974-2012), I can say that a great number of students apparently believe that the fewer people understand a thing, the more real it is. Usually, they refer to things such as elementary particles, which they consider more real than any other things, even though they rarely claim to understand what elementary particles are or how we can know what they are. In their minds, the fact that only a small band of “specialists” understands such things is a strong, possibly decisive argument for their belief. Of course, pushed to its logical extreme, their belief implies that nothing can be thought greater-in-reality than what no intelligent person can understand. At that point, the logical becomes the illogical, the real the unreal, commonsense or conscience becomes nonsense, and you are what you think you are, even if — especially if — no one else thinks the same and you are not quite sure of it either. As one of my colleagues put it “Welcome to the twentieth century.”

⁵⁸ Proposition 7 of my re-reading of Anselm's argument: see above, page 44

RE-READING THE ARGUMENT ONE MORE TIME

The argument of *Proslogion* 2 is about the right answer to the question, whether there is something greater in goodness than which nothing else can be thought, and about the right answer to the question, what one can logically think of such a thing. To Anselm and most of his contemporaries, indeed most people, the formally correct answer to the first of those questions is straightforward: Goodness itself is at least as great in goodness as any other thinkable thing. Therefore, if things are great to the extent that they are good then, if one calls ‘God’ that better than which is unthinkable, one says that God is greatness-in-goodness itself, i.e. goodness itself. Similarly, if things are great to the extent that they are wise then God is Wisdom itself. And the same reasoning holds for every other Christian virtue or excellence one can think of, e.g. truthfulness, justice, intelligence, reasonableness, conscientiousness, loving care or kindness. Obviously, God cannot be thought to be all those things, unless one thinks of each of them as logically compatible with every other taken singly and with all the others taken together. Not one of those qualities can be thought to diminish the greatness conferred by any of the others. They are not “in rivalry” with goodness — otherwise, the thing which is supposed to have those qualities or virtues would itself be unthinkable as “that greater (better, more excellent in goodness) than which cannot be thought”. Moreover, each of those divine qualities is a genuine quality. As such, each of them is in itself thinkable in one way only. Like redness itself, each divine quality itself is the same for all intelligent persons (who understand their own thinking). A divine quality is not one thing in one person's mind and another thing in another's.

That was indeed the main point of *Monologion*. For Anselm, God is each of those things (i.e. divine qualities) wholly and independent of time and place. Admittedly, supreme power (one of the virtuous, meritorious or excellent things that he mentioned in *Monologion*⁵⁹, seems to be a magnitude rather than a genuine quality, but in *Proslogion* 7 (“How God is omnipotent, although there are many things which he cannot do”), Anselm addressed the

⁵⁹ See above, the text at footnote 17

problem and solved it by interpreting omnipotence (supreme power) as supremely incorruptible moral integrity (an ethical quality, not a magnitude). One cannot think that God would succumb to any force or temptation to do or be anything that might diminish his greatness in any good, excellent quality. That is to say: One cannot do so without abandoning the Idea of God as that greater-in-goodness than which is unthinkable.

Let us re-read the argument of Proslogion 2 again, this time taking account of the fact that ‘something greater than which cannot be thought’ refers to the quality of being-better-than-which-is-unthinkable itself. For ease of reading, let us call that quality ‘divinity’. Surely, Anselm would not have refused to say that God is divinity itself. And, of course, divinity itself is thinkable only as a unique thing, unlike the socons of our earlier reading, which were things of a kind.

Substituting ‘divinity’ for ‘something greater than which cannot be thought’, we read this:

1. Divinity either is or it is not.
2. The fool says in his heart that divinity is not.
3. Therefore, he understands the word ‘divinity’. [Divinity is in his understanding. Moreover, understanding that ‘divinity’ is not a common name of a particular kind of object, he understands that it is the proper name of a particular, individual thing.]
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 - 4. [Given that the fool understands what it is for something to be divinity] he can think it [i.e. that very same thing] to be also outside his understanding, in other people's understanding.
 - 5. [Given that he has to admit that it is logically possible that divinity is also in the understanding of at least one other person, he should admit that] it is logically possible for divinity to be real [i.e. in every person's understanding].
 - }
6. Thus [given that the fool understands what it is for something to be divinity “in his (or any other intelligent being's) understanding”] he can think divinity to be “in reality”.

7. It is greater for a thing to be “in reality” [i.e. in the understanding of every intelligent being] than for it to be only in the understanding of *some* person or persons.

8. If divinity were only in the understanding of some persons, then it would be something than which a greater *can* be thought.

9. But no such thing is logically thinkable.

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10. Therefore, given that the fool properly understands divinity, he contradicts himself, if he continues to maintain that it is — a fortiori, can be — only in the understanding of *some* intelligent beings.

11. It follows that it is unthinkable that the divine quality is only in his understanding, or only in the understanding of some persons.

12. Hence, no intelligent being, no matter how foolish it may be, can logically deny that divinity is real.

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13. Ergo, divinity is in the understanding and in reality.

If ‘to exist’ means “to be in reality” and ‘God’ means “divinity itself” then we have here incontrovertible proof that God exists — that God's existence is undeniable by any intelligent person. And, we have proof that God is indeed, as Anselm had argued in *Monologion*, all the divine qualities rolled into one (so to speak).

The argument of *Proslogion* 2 fulfils Anselm's request, “Lord, You who give understanding to faith, grant me to understand — to the degree You know to be advantageous — that You exist, as we believe, and that You are what we believe.” What remains to be done is to identify the things that qualify as genuine qualities, and which of these qualify as divine qualities — that is to say, as qualities that, because they are implied in the quality of being good, make everything and, in particular, every human being that has them better than it would be without them and do not make it less good in any other respect. The range of divine qualities, of things which it is unqualifiedly better to be or have than not to be or have, is arguably much wider than stock examples such as truthfulness, justice and mercifulness suggest. Personhood and community can hardly be excluded if conscientiousness (the quality of being “religious”, i.e. meticulous, scrupulous, honest, critically aware of one's own shortcomings, desirous to avoid mistakes and errors,

open to well-argued criticism) is a divine quality. Parenthood and educational ability, humanity and joyfulness cannot be excluded, if life is a divine quality. As Anselm put it, “God is everything it is better to be than not to be.

