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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

HOW FAITH SEEKS UNDERSTANDING  
IN ANSELM'S PROSLOGION

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

STEVEN WERLIN

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

JANUARY 1995

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To Brother Sixtus Robert,

sine quo non

"Quaestio tua oratio tua sit..."

William of St. Thierry

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CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

The guiding question for the following inquiry is how thought enables a thinker to understand. The end of the inquiry is the exploration of this question. The means employed is the interpretation of a book: The Proslogion, by Anselm of Canterbury. In his Proslogion, Anselm attempts to think his way to an understanding of God. I will argue that his desire to understand God leads Anselm to shift his conception of thinking. At the beginning of the book, he tries to use thinking about God to express what God is by the analysis of what he believes God to be, but he finally turns to think in other ways. First he turns to what he calls "coniectatio," and then he turns to prayer.

This inquiry will raise important questions regarding thinking, understanding, and the relationship between the two. Anselm describes how he understands "thinking" (cogitare) early in his small book, and he exemplifies that description all the way through the work that follows. The description he gives is, however, a general one, and as his work progresses it exemplifies that general description in very different ways. Though his treatment of "understanding" (intelligere) is less explicit, we can deduce clearly enough how he understands this word as well. Anselm aims at under-

standing, and he takes thinking as his means.

I take the interpretation of his thinking as my means not just in order to understand Anselm, but to better understand the relationship between thinking and understanding. When Anselm concludes his work by turning his thinking towards God directly, he suggests to us the orientation required by a thinking that is to lead towards understanding--at least towards an understanding of God.

Let us begin by considering the nature of the book. In the preface to the Proslogion, Anselm describes his task in a number of ways: in terms of distinctions between it and the Monologion, in terms of the hope he has for the one "argumentum" it contains, and in terms of the persona in which it is written. He characterizes the work most strikingly, though, with the titles he gave it. It is telling enough that he eventually named it the Proslogion. This means, he reports, an "alloquium," which is to say a speech to another or an address.<sup>1</sup> He calls it an address because the book is a speech, or prayer, directed to God. Anselm prays to God in the first chapter, in the last, and in many places in between. I will argue that the work's composition as a prayer is essential to it.

But Anselm did not originally call his work the

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<sup>1</sup> Anselm, Opera Omnia, ed. Franciscus Schmitt, (Edinburg: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946) 1:94. "Alloquium" comes from "ad-loquor," "to speak to."



"Proslogion." He also reports that the title he originally gave the book was "Fides Quaerens Intellectum" or "Faith Seeking Understanding."<sup>2</sup> In order to chart the shifts in the character of Anselm's thought I will attempt to establish what this first title meant. To ask about the character of Anselm's thinking is to ask how faith seeks understanding in the Proslogion.

I can make one preliminary claim that is not controversial: that the search has something to do with discursive reasoning, or analytical thought--at least in part with what has come to be called "the ontological argument for the existence of God." Anselm himself labels the insight he set out to find an "argumentum,"<sup>3</sup> and whether or not this word is synonymous with our word "argument," much of the first part of the Proslogion is in fact an argument of sorts: it is an analysis of one way of stating what Anselm believes God to be. We must ask, however, how the argument functions as a part of his whole search. Is Anselm's search the search for this argument? Is the search the analysis of the argument? Is the argument merely one stage in the search? Is it a tool that leads the seeker to seek in some other way? I will argue that it is, first and foremost, just such a tool.

It is important to recognize at the start, however, that it is not at all obvious that thinking is a suitable means

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

of seeking to understand God. Augustine, who was a great authority for Anselm, points to the problem in his work On the Trinity. Anselm makes it clear, in the preface to the Monologion, that just this work was decisive for him. There, Anselm defends himself against anyone who would attack his own work as novel by arguing that he writes nothing in the Monologion that is not in Augustine's work:

If it should seem to anyone that I have put forth anything in this little work that either is too novel or that differs from the truth, I ask that he not immediately shout that I introduce novelty or assert falsity, but that he first study diligently the books by...Augustine On the Trinity, and that he then decide about my little work according to them.<sup>4</sup>

For Anselm to point to On the Trinity in the preface to this earlier work does not assure that he thinks of it as decisive for the Proslogion as well. For now, however, it is enough to notice the problem that Augustine faces in that work, and to realize that Augustine's problem must have been on Anselm's mind.

In the last of the fifteen books of On the Trinity, Augustine describes at some length how human thinking fails. I want to consider that account, but before doing so it is worth noting that in Book 8 of the same work Augustine raises the possibility of using speech to understand God in

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 8: "...si cui videbitur, quod in eodem opusculo aliquid protulerim, quod aut nimis novum sit aut a veritate dissentiat: rogo, ne statim me aut praesumptorem novitatum aut falsitatis assertorem exclamet, sed prius libros praefati doctoris Augustini De trinitate diligenter perspiciat, deinde secundum eos opusculum meum diiudicet."

a manner that is not discursive.

He has spent the first seven books interpreting passages of scripture. By taking what he finds in scripture concerning the Trinity as authoritative, he can draw conclusions about the Trinity that are certain to be true. He does not, however, think that such accumulated knowledge itself brings him or his reader to understand the Trinity, and so he devotes the remaining eight books of the work to various attempts to understand what the first seven books enable him know.

In the eighth book, he makes his first such attempt. Augustine describes how thinking disturbs understanding. He exhorts one not to think, but to remain in a flash of light that shines when one hears "truth":

Behold, see if you can: God is truth. For this has been written: "Since God is light." [See] not as your eyes see, but as the heart sees when it hears: "He is truth." Do not ask what truth is; for at once mists of corporeal images and clouds of phantasms will present themselves and disturb the fair weather that was clear for you at the first flash, when I said "truth." Behold, remain if you can in that first flash by which you are dazzled as though by a shock.<sup>5</sup>

He goes on to deny that one can remain in that flash:

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<sup>5</sup> Augustine, Obras de San Agustín en Edición Bilingüe, vol. 5, Tratado sobre la Santísima Trinidad, trans. and ed. Luis Arias, (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1956), 502: "...ecce vide, si potes: Deus veritas est. Hoc enim scriptum est: Quoniam Deus lux est: non quomodo isti oculi vident, sed quomodo videt cor, cum audis: Veritas est. Noli quaerere quid sit veritas; statim enim se opponent caligines imaginum corporalium et nubila phantasmatum, et perterbabunt serenitatem, quae primo ictu diluxit tibi, cum dicerem: "Veritas". Ecce in ipso primo ictu quo velut coruscatione perstringeris, cum dicitur: "Veritas", mane si potes..."

"But you cannot; you will slip back into those habitual and earthly [ways]."<sup>6</sup> He does nothing at that point to explain why one will "slip back." He merely points to "the bird-lime of desire" and "the errors of [our] wanderings." One of the earthly ways he refers to is the habit of articulating and thinking through questions, and he goes on in Book 15 to explain why just such thinking interferes with the attempt to understand.

There, Augustine writes of two sorts of human speech: a silent word spoken within, and the words--spoken, either in silence or out loud, in the languages that people share--with which one attempts to say this word. Augustine does not think that these spoken words ever perfectly articulate the word within. Since that inner word is the one with which one knows whatever one knows, the spoken words do not articulate knowledge. His account emerges as his discussion of the human image of the Trinity draws to a close.

Since one aspect of the Trinity he would like to under-

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.: "sed non potes: relaberis in ista solita atque terrena."

Two major translators read the first clause "sed [si] non potes":

The editor of the Spanish bilingual edition, F. Luis Arias, translates, "Permanece, si pedes, en la clearheaded inicial de este rápido fulgor de la verdad; pero, si esto no te es posible..."

Stephen McKenna offers, "Remain in it, if you can, but if you cannot..." (St. Augustine, The Trinity, trans. Stephen McKenna, Washington D.C.: Catholic Univ. Press, 1963), 247.)

I do not know why they both thought that Augustine intended us to supply "si." The paragraph makes good sense without doing so.

stand is the Word that it speaks, he must see how human speech, the speech of the image of that Trinity, is that Word's image. He begins his account by noting two facts about the manner in which thought is spoken of in the New Testament: that thinking is described as inner speech<sup>7</sup> and that this speech is sometimes heard, but sometimes seen, by Jesus. He concludes that there must be some inner speech that "does not belong to any of those languages that are called the languages of peoples."<sup>8</sup> This word is the thought formed from knowledge, and to speak it is to speak the truth:

For it is necessary that, whenever we speak truly--that is, [when] we say what we know--[then], from the very knowledge that we hold with our memory, a word is born that is entirely of the same kind as the knowledge from which it is born. Indeed, the thought formed from that thing which we know is a word that we say in the heart.<sup>9</sup>

To the extent that the inner word is the same as the knowledge from which it is born, it mirrors the equality between the Word and the Father, its source. Augustine goes on to explain that human speech is an incarnation of the human word and is similar in this sense to the Word that be-

<sup>7</sup> We will see that the description of thinking as inner speech is decisive for Anselm, too.

<sup>8</sup> Augustine, 866: "hoc enim quod ad nullam pertinet linguam, earum scilicet quae linguae appellantur gentium."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 868: "Necesse est enim cum verum loquimur, id est, quod scimus loquimur, ex ipsa scientia quam memoria tenemus, nascatur verbum quod eiusmodi sit omnino, cuiusmodi est illa scientia de qua nascitur. Formata quippe cogitatio ab ea re quam scimus, verbum est quod in corde dicimus."

comes flesh:

For just as our word becomes a [spoken] utterance, [which is], in a certain way, of the body, by assuming that [utterance] in which it may be made evident to the senses of men, just so the Word of God was made flesh by assuming that [utterance] in which it itself might be made evident to the senses of men.<sup>10</sup>

But though this word is, in some ways, a fitting image of God, it is also quite different from that Word, and just this difference is important, because the difficulty that thinking in words presents for Anselm lies in the difference between the way we speak our word and the incarnation of the Word. Unfortunately, Augustine's account says little of this difference. Instead, he addresses the differences between the human inner word and the Word. A passage in Book 11 of the Confessions, however, sheds some light. It points towards the temporal character of speech.

Time is important even in the account in The Trinity, though it is related there to the formation of the human inner word: the last difference Augustine identifies between that inner word and the Word is that the former comes to be and passes away in time:

And then indeed our word will not be false, because we shall neither lie nor be deceived. Perhaps too our thoughts will not revolve, passing back and forth from some things to others, but we shall see all our knowledge in a single gaze. Nevertheless, even when it is thus, even if it is thus, [and] the creature [i.e. our thought] that can be formed is so [completely] formed

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 868: "Ita enim verbum nostrum vox quodam modo corporis fit, assumendo eam in qua manifestetur sensibus hominum; sicut Verbum Dei caro factum est, assumendo eam in qua et ipsum manifestaretur sensibus hominum."

that nothing that it ought to attain is missing from its form, nevertheless [even then] it will not be made equal to that simplicity where nothing that is formable has been formed or reformed, but [there is only] form; neither unformed nor formed, there the substance is eternal and immutable.<sup>11</sup>

That is what he says in On the Trinity. The passage we will consider from The Confessions is useful because it shows that at least one aspect of the temporality at issue in language is temporality in the most straight-forward sense: words take time to say. Insofar as the insight one strives to express with words is not extended in time, the words and the insight are incommensurable.

In the Confessions, Augustine compares the words with which God is reported in Genesis to have created the world with the words with which God is said, in the Gospel, to have recognized his son as his son. He asks, "How did You speak? Was it in the way that the utterance was made that said from the cloud: 'This is my beloved son?'"<sup>12</sup> He replies that the voice from the cloud was spoken in time, and he

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 890: "Et tunc quidem verbum nostrum non erit falsum, quia neque mentiemur, neque fallemur: fortassis etiam volubiles non erunt nostrae cogitationes ab aliis in alia euntes atque redeuntes, sed omnem scientiam nostram uno simul conspectu videbimus: tamen cum et hoc fuerit, si et hoc fuerit, formata erit creatura quae formabilis fuit, ut nihil iam desit eius formae, ad quam pervenire deberet; sed tamen coaequanda non erit illi simplicitati, ubi non formabile aliquid formatum vel reformatum est, sed forma; neque informis, neque formata, ipsa ibi aeterna est immutabilisque substantia."

<sup>12</sup> Augustine, Confessiones, ed. M Skutella, (Leipzig: Teubner, 1934), 269: "Sed quomodo dixisti? numquid illo modo, quo facta est vox de nube dicens: Hic est filius meus dilectus?"

goes on to explain, "The syllables sounded and went by, the second after the first, the third after the second and from there, in order, until the last one [sounded] after the others and [there was] silence after the last one."<sup>13</sup> He also emphasizes that the temporally arranged sounding of such words shows that they belong to the motion of a creature, which is temporal.<sup>14</sup>

Now, though this account does not exactly correspond to the one from On the Trinity, a straight-forward picture of the latter begins to emerge as long as the two are parallel: the difference between human speech and the Word of God may be that a difference exists between human speech and the word within, the word from which it is born. The words we use when we try to speak our inner word take time to say. They do not precisely reproduce the word within, a word that is formed, Augustine says, "by a single gaze at once" (uno simul conspectu).<sup>15</sup> One might, he says, occasionally "see all our knowledge in a single gaze,"<sup>16</sup> but the movement by which one tries to put that single gaze into words shatters

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.: "Sonuereunt syllabae atque transierunt, secunda post primum, tertia post secundam atque inde ex ordine, donec ultima post ceteras silentiumque post ultimam."

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.: "Unde claret atque eminent, quod creaturae motus expressit eam serviens aeternae voluntati tuae ipse temporalis."

<sup>15</sup> The Trinity, 890.

<sup>16</sup> The Trinity, 890.



its unity by scattering it through time.<sup>17</sup>

The desire to achieve a simple, instantaneous understanding by means of thinking is just the difficulty Anselm faces in the Proslogion. He suggests this right from the start when he declares, in the book's preface, his desire to find a single argument. But it is much more explicit in the manner in which he summarizes, in Chapter 18, the result of that argument. He writes, "My narrow understanding cannot see [God's qualities] in one simultaneous gaze in order to delight in them all simultaneously."<sup>18</sup>

We must insist, however, that in the face of what might look, at that point, like failure, Anselm does not give up on thinking. When he concludes that analytic thinking, or reasoning, cannot bring him to the understanding he desires, he does not turn away from thinking, but shifts towards other manners of thought. I will chart this shift. I will argue that Anselm's discovery that thinking cannot enable him to say what God is only leads him to command himself to ask how good God must be, and then to ask for the understanding that he lacks. Anselm's thinking, his inner speech, shifts from analysis, or reasoning, to what he calls coniectatio, and then to prayerful address. These shifts are

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<sup>17</sup> A vivid picture of this "scattering" of the understanding by thought is presented long after Anselm's time in the anonymous work, The Cloud of Unknowing.

<sup>18</sup> Anselm, 114: "non potest angustus intellectus meus tot uno simul intuitu videre, ut omnibus simul delectetur." I will have to return to this line.

faith's search for understanding, and their result determines the Proslogion's ultimate character as a prayer.

The difficulties that Anselm faces as he strives to understand God can thus be described in general terms. If understanding is an insight that comes all at once, and thinking is characteristically discursive, what connection can there be between the two? How can an activity that progresses through time lead to another that happens suddenly, or all at once? How can speech bring about vision?

My interpretation of one work by one man can hardly offer decisive answers to these questions. But by charting where one man's struggle with such questions leads him, I can hope at least to understand one way to face these questions.

Anselm's book finishes as a prayer, but it starts out as a prayer as well. The progress Anselm makes brings him back, in a sense, to the point from which he begins. This is not to say that he has made no progress at all. He prays at the end of his book with a far richer understanding of just where he stands. It is, perhaps, this richer understanding that permits him to pray at the end of the book with confidence that he does not show at its start. In the very last chapter he writes:

Lord, through Your Son You command, or rather You counsel [us] to seek, and You promise that we shall receive so that our joy might be complete. I seek, Lord, what You counsel [us] through our admirable counsellor; may I receive what You promise through Your truth, so that my

joy might be complete.<sup>19</sup>

Thus even if Anselm's progress is both from prayer as a beginning and to prayer as an end, his progress is progress nonetheless. Such progress is not unique to him, not even among philosophers. I myself think of Aristotle. He argues, in the Metaphysics, that philosophy begins in wonder, and, in the Ethics, that it ends in contemplation. It is interesting to note that his word for wonder, "θαυμάζειν" (thaumázein), and his word for contemplation, "θεωρεῖν" (theoría), are probably cognates, both related to a word, "θεῖν" (théa), that means spectacle or sight. Contemplation is not the same as simple wonder, but both wonder and contemplation are rooted in vision. For Aristotle too, at least in a sense, the work of thinking takes us to the place from which it starts.

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<sup>19</sup> Anselm, 121: "Domine, per Filium tuum iubes, immo consulis petere et promittis accipere, ut gaudium nostrum plenum sit. Peto, Domine, quod consulis per admirabilem consiliarium nostrum; accipiam, quod promittis per veritatem tuam, ut gaudium meum plenum sit."

## CHAPTER 2

### THE ANALYSIS OF ANSELM'S ARGUMENT

Anselm's Proslogion is a prayer. It is, however, an unusual one. Much of the book is devoted to reasoning: specifically, to the analysis of a statement with which Anselm expresses what he believes God to be. This is odd: when one thinks about prayer, one does not think first of analysis. When one thinks about analysis, one does not think first of prayer.

The apparent topic of the book's first set of reasonings is more surprising still. In its second and third chapters, Anselm appears to aim at establishing the existence of the God he addresses. I will eventually argue this is not the case. Nevertheless, that this is how the analyses in Chapters 2 and 3 appear cannot be denied. The tradition that interprets the passages as such an argument is too long and too rich. Any interpretation of the book must begin by facing it.

I shall ultimately argue neither for nor against the authors within this tradition. Most of them are less concerned with the extent to which such an argument is indeed an interpretation of Anselm's work than they are with the

rigor of one or more versions of the argument, and I am less concerned with the rigor of any particular argument than with the role that an argument plays within a prayer. This is not at all to say that the validity of his arguments was of no importance to Anselm, or even that it is of no importance to me. It is only to say that the main issue for me is the place of argument within Anselm's effort to understand God. Let there be no mistake: to understand God was Anselm's explicit goal. Because I aim to understand the place of Anselm's argument, I will eventually insist on leaving his argument in its place. Rather than freeing it from its context in order to investigate the full force of the range of arguments that Anselm's strategy suggests, I will interpret that strategy as Anselm himself states it.

I shall nevertheless first consider that part of the book that appears to be an argument for the existence of God, and I shall consider it as just such an argument. In this chapter, I shall investigate two types of current analysis of Anselm's argument. I shall argue that the versions of the argument that have been discussed by the contemporary analytic philosophers I discuss are inconclusive because they depend on a premise that some are willing to deny: that God is even possible. Those within the analytic tradition who would support some version of Anselm's argument, whether they do so with an appeal to ordinary language or they do so with an appeal to a private belief, must

appeal to something outside of the argument itself. This fact does not distinguish their versions of the argument from any other argument. Arguments have assumptions. It does, however, invite us look carefully at just what Anselm assumes, or start with. I will take their need to look outside of the argument as my invitation to look back to Anselm himself in order to show what he himself appeals to.

The reasons for beginning by attempting to determine whether Anselm in fact proves that God exists are of several kinds: there is the weight of the tradition I have already referred to, one that has used various ways of construing Anselm's analyses to determine whether there can be an ontological argument for the existence of God; there is direct evidence, within the book's second and third chapters, that suggests that he himself thought he had discovered a proof that God exists; and there is other evidence, dependant upon studies either of the entire Proslogion or of more of Anselm's work, that points in the same direction.

The tradition that uses the Proslogion as the source of arguments for the existence of God began in Anselm's lifetime, and continues to this day. Anselm's older contemporary, Gaunilo of Marmoutier, wrote a reply to the Proslogion so interesting to Anselm that he asked those who had already copied the book to attach both Gaunilo's reply and his own

reply to Gaunilo to their copies.<sup>1</sup> Even today, standard editions of the book include the two replies. Since Gaunilo, the tradition has included European philosophy's most important authors: Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, and Hegel. Nor has interest in the argument been limited to the philosophers: the tale of Anselmo in Don Quixote suggests a harsh rejection of the attempt to prove that God exists.

The debate continues in this century. Even if Richard Swinburne finds that ontological arguments "are unpersuasive for well-known reasons" and believes that "everyone who reflects on them ought to find the same,"<sup>2</sup> Anselm's argument remains a matter for dispute. Richard Findlay, Norman Malcolm, Charles Hartshorne, and Alvin Plantinga, among others, have written on the argument.

The existence of this tradition, however, is not by itself reason enough to interpret the book as an argument

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<sup>1</sup> The Life of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, by Eadmer, ed. and trans. R.W. Southern, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 31: "[The Proslogion] came into the hands of someone who found fault with one of the arguments in it, judging it to be unsound. In an attempt to refute it he wrote a treatise against it and attached this to the end of Anselm's work. A friend sent this to Anselm who read it with pleasure, expressed his thanks to the critic and wrote his reply to the criticism. He had this reply attached to the treatise which had been sent to him, and returned it to the friend from whom it had come, desiring him and others who might deign to have his little book to write out at the end of it the criticism of his argument and his own reply to the criticism."

<sup>2</sup> Richard Swinburne, "God's Necessary Being," Archivio Di Filosofia 1-3 (1990): 538.

for the existence of God. In fact, that there is such a tradition might come as a surprise to someone reading the book for the first time. Anselm devotes very little of the Proslogion to analyses that seem to concern God's existence, and although he argues for other claims in much of the rest of the book, there are large sections that are not analyses at all. He himself calls the book a "proslogion" or an "alloquy." This is to say a speech-towards, or an address, not a proof, or a discourse.

Nevertheless, Anselm does seem to announce directly that his task is to prove that God exists, and this in two ways. In the preface to the work he writes that he sought an argument that would suffice, among other things, "to affirm that God truly is."<sup>3</sup> I shall have more to say about what this phrase in fact means, but both standard translations of the book into English, and many other translations as well, reflect what the phrase is generally taken to mean: that Anselm seeks an argument that proves the existence of God. M.J. Charlesworth renders the phrase "to prove that God really exists."<sup>4</sup> S.N. Deane offers "to demonstrate that God truly exists."<sup>5</sup>

If that phrase is not enough, we need only turn to the

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<sup>3</sup> Anselm, 93: "ad astruendum quia Deus vere est."

<sup>4</sup> St. Anselm's Proslogion, trans. M.J. Charlesworth, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1979), 103.

<sup>5</sup> St. Anselm: Basic Writings, trans. S.N. Deane, (La Salle: Open Court, 1962), 1.



end of the second chapter. There, Anselm seems to state clearly enough that he has indeed proven that God exists. He writes that "there exists, therefore, beyond doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought, both in the understanding and in fact."<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the weight of a great tradition and the direct evidence of Anselm's words, there is a third class of reasons for supposing that Anselm sought to prove that God exists. Scholars of Anselm's work have based the claim that this was Anselm's task on studies both of the Proslogion as a whole and of the two replies. I shall consider three such arguments: one by Franciscus Schmitt and two by Kurt Flasch.

Schmitt, surely the most learned Anselm scholar of our century, edited the standard critical Latin edition of Anselm's works and translated a number of the works into German. He, more than anyone, has been attentive both to the words Anselm uses and to the style he employs in using them. Schmitt bases his interpretation of the Proslogion on a careful look at Anselm's rhetoric. What he discovers is that the style Anselm uses in the passages in which he argues is different from the style of the rest of the work. Schmitt also points out that both Anselm and his biographer-student, Eadmer, report that the argument was a sudden discovery. He concludes from these two facts that Anselm most likely dis-

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<sup>6</sup> Anselm, 102: "Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re."

covered some core argument first and only afterwards composed an address around it.<sup>7</sup>

Why did Anselm set his argument into an address? Schmitt answers that Anselm probably chose that form so that the Proslogion's style would contrast with that of its companion work, the Monologion, which is a monologue, or discourse.<sup>8</sup> In any case, Schmitt concludes that the Proslogion is essentially, like the other work, an attempt to establish that certain truths of faith accord with reason.<sup>9</sup> He thinks that its style is simply its wonderful style, and has nothing to do with the heart of the work:

The dressing up [of the work] in a prayer is merely the second element [of the work], which gives it its wonderful, almost unique character, but does not at all aim to remove from the kernel of the work its speculative character

The other arguments I shall consider are quite differ-

<sup>7</sup> Anselm von Canterbury: Proslogion, ed. and with a German trans. F. Schmitt, (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: frommann-holzboog, 1984), 32: "Was Anselm auf Wachstafeln schrieb, war der spekulative Kern. Diesen in das Kleid eines Gebetes zu fassen, war eine weitere glückliche Eingebung."

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: "Die Idee der 'Anrede' entsprang sicherlich dem Bedürfnis, dem Monologion gegenüber eine Abwechslung in der Form zu bringen."

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 51: "Zweck und Absicht des Büchleins sind, die Glaubenswahrheit der Existenz und des Wesens Gottes als vernunftgemäß darzutun. Und zwar gegenüber dem Atheisten [sic], dem Leugner eben dieser Glaubenswahrheit. Wie in der Apologetik ist der Gegenstand der Spekulation die Glaubenslehre, die Methode des Beweisens aber rein philosophisch."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 32: "Die Einkleidung in ein Gebet ist erst das zweite Element, das ihr den wundervollen, fast einmaligen Charakter gibt, das aber nie und nimmer den Kern des Werkes ihres spekulativen Charakters entkleiden will."

ent. They are made by a prominent German medievalist, Kurt Flasch, though he himself points out that his main argument had already been made by Schmitt. He considers the character of two debates that Anselm engages in: one with the fool, who is the imagined interlocutor of the early part of the Proslogion, and one with Gaunilo of Marmoutier, who wrote a reply to Anselm on behalf of that fool.

With respect to the first, Flasch claims that the fool is what we now call an "atheist." Flasch admits that Anselm does not use the word "atheist," but he insists that it is our word for precisely the opponent that Anselm has in mind:

Of course Anselm does not use the word "atheism," which first came into use around 1600. But he describes with clarity the position that he sought, by means of his argument, to reveal to be absurd: the denial of the existence of a being "beyond which a more perfect cannot be thought."<sup>11</sup>

Flasch claims that the fool is just a name Anselm gives to one who would later be called an atheist,<sup>12</sup> and that Anselm's goal is to show the atheist's position to be untenable.

But Flasch's understanding of Anselm's fool is not his main reason for thinking that the arguments in the early

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<sup>11</sup> Kann Gottes Nicht-Sein gedacht werden?, trans. Burkhard Mojsisch and intro. Kurt Flasch, (Mainz: Dieterich, 1989), 7: "Freilich gebrauchte er nicht das Wort 'Atheismus,' das erst gegen 1600 in Umlauf kam. Aber er bezeichnete klar die Position, die er argumentierend als widersprüchlich erweisen wollte: die Bestreitung der Existenz eines Wesens, 'über das hinaus Vollkommeneres nicht gedacht werden kann.'"

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 9.

chapters are attempts to prove the existence of God. More decisive for him is the character of Anselm's exchange with Gaunilo.<sup>13</sup> Flasch points out, first, that Gaunilo seems to aim only to show that Anselm has not proven the existence of God and, then, that Anselm responds not by claiming that Gaunilo has misunderstood him, but by addressing Gaunilo's case point by point.<sup>14</sup> Flasch implies that if Anselm had intended anything but a proof of the existence of God, he could have avoided Gaunilo's attack entirely by insisting that Gaunilo had missed the point. Anselm did not do so. He must, Flasch concludes, have intended a proof that God exists. The book's composition as a prayer is, according to Flasch, a "stylization" (Stilisierung). He writes, "If one reads the Proslogion in the context of the discussion between Anselm and Gaunilo, the religious stylization present in the text reveals itself as just that: a stylization."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The exchange between Anselm and Gaunilo is, in Flasch's view, so decisive that the edition of the Proslogion that he introduces contains only the second and third chapters and this exchange. He and Mojsisch do not even include the rest of the work.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 21: "Niemals aber antwortet Anselm, Gaunilo habe ihn mißverstanden; er, Anselm, habe gar nicht beweisen, sondern über den Glauben meditieren oder zu einer vertieften Gotteserfahrung hinführen wollen."

We will examine the positions that Flasch here rejects later. For now, it is enough to suggest that he is most likely thinking of Karl Barth in the first case and Anselm Stolz in the second.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 12: "Die religiöse Stilisierung, die im Text des Proslogion vorliegt, erweist sich, liest man sie im Kontext der Gaunilo-Anselm-Diskussion, als--Stilisierung eben."

I will eventually reject the grounds for trying to understand the Proslogion as an attempt to prove the existence of God. They are, however, reason enough for beginning to consider the book that way, and it is not hard to know where to start. Anselm discusses God's existence most explicitly in two chapters, the second and the third. Let us now turn to the argument or arguments that he makes.

In the second chapter, Anselm identifies God as "that than which a greater cannot be thought,"<sup>16</sup> and argues that such a one must at least be in the understanding, because the words, when spoken, are understood. He then asks whether that than which a greater cannot be thought could be solely in the understanding, and he answers that it could not. He reasons that a being is greater if it is in fact (in re) than if it is only in the understanding. Since that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought to be in fact, he deduces that if it were to be in the understanding alone, then a being greater than it--one thought to be in fact--would be thinkable. Therefore, that than which a greater cannot be thought must be in fact, and God must necessarily be.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Anselm, 101: "Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit."

<sup>17</sup> What Anselm literally concludes is that "something than which a greater cannot be thought exists, beyond doubt, both in the understanding and in fact." Anselm, 102: "Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et intellectu et in re."

So ends Chapter 2, but as if that were not enough, Anselm goes on to argue in Chapter 3 that the non-being of God is not only impossible, but unthinkable. He argues that something can be thought to be that is so great that it does not admit of being thought not to be. This, he claims, would be greater than something that can be thought not to be. Thus, that than which a greater cannot be thought must be such that it cannot even be thought not to be.

These analyses may seem simple, but they have been the source of centuries of debate. In order to enter that debate, I shall consider it as it stands now, by looking at two authors who have, in very different ways, defended versions of the argument recently.<sup>18</sup> They are Norman Malcolm and Alvin Plantinga.

Malcolm's position is that Anselm sets out, in the second and third chapters of the Proslogion, two distinguishable "pieces of reasoning" for the conclusion that God exists, and that one and only one of the "pieces" is a rigorous argument.<sup>19</sup> He claims that by means of the first argument, the one in Chapter 2, Anselm aims to show that God

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<sup>18</sup> For an outstanding analysis of the whole history of defenses and rejections of versions of Anselm's argument see: Charles Hartshorne, Anselm's Discovery, (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1965), Part Two: A Critical Survey of Responses to Anselm's Proof.

<sup>19</sup> Norman Malcolm, "Anselm's Ontological Arguments," The Philosophical Review 69 (1960), reprinted in Alvin Plantinga, ed., The Ontological Argument, (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1965), 136. Page numbers refer to those in Plantinga's book.

exists by showing that "something a greater than which cannot be conceived" exists. He believes that Anselm aims in Chapter 3 to show that God exists by showing that such a being necessarily exists.

I shall consider Malcolm's versions of each of these arguments in its turn. His version of the first can be put as follows:

0. God is something a greater than which cannot be conceived.
1. Something a greater than which cannot be conceived exists in the understanding.
2. What exists in the understanding can be conceived to exist in reality.
3. To exist in reality as well as in the understanding is greater than to exist solely in the understanding.
4. Something a greater than which cannot be conceived must exist in reality.
5. God must exist in reality.<sup>20</sup>

I should also consider the arguments for the steps in this proof. Malcolm takes 0. as a "definition" of "God." As Anselm's evidence for 1., Malcolm claims that:

Even the fool of the Psalm who says that there is no God, when he hears this very thing that Anselm says, namely, "something a greater than which cannot be conceived," understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding though he does not understand that it exists.<sup>21</sup>

Malcolm goes on to explain this by saying that, for Anselm, to be understood and to be in the understanding are the same thing, that Anselm "uses intelligitur and in intellectu est

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 137-8.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

as interchangeable locutions."<sup>22</sup> To say that a being is in the understanding, then, is to say that words that express what that being is are understood.

Malcolm does not argue for 2, though he does suggest an explanation: "Of course many things may exist in the understanding that do not exist in reality; for example, elves."<sup>23</sup>

He considers 3. at some length, and points out that Anselm deduces 4. from the steps that precede it. He finally rejects 3., and we should consider why. He claims that a doctrine that existence is a perfection underlies Anselm's position, and he rejects this doctrine. He offers the following expression of the doctrine: "An equivalent way of putting this interesting proposition, in more current terminology, is: something is greater if it is both conceived of and exists than if it is merely conceived of."<sup>24</sup> Malcolm first finds this doctrine "remarkably queer,"<sup>25</sup> and eventually finds it "false."<sup>26</sup> He explains the former claim with an example, "A king might desire that his next chancellor should have knowledge, wit, and resolution; but it is ludicrous to add that the king's desire is to have a chancellor

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 140.



who exists."<sup>27</sup>

Malcolm concludes that existence, far from being a perfection, is not a quality, or predicate, at all, and he claims that his own position is nothing but a restatement of a point made by Kant.<sup>28</sup> He finally admits, however, that he himself has no argument beyond what Kant has already offered. "It would be desirable," he writes, "to have a rigorous refutation of the doctrine but I have not been able to provide one. I am compelled to leave the matter at the more or less intuitive level of Kant's refutation."<sup>29</sup>

But even if modesty leads Malcolm to refer to Kant, we should notice that his position is no mere appeal to authority. We can sense this if we pause to consider the strange language Malcolm uses in rejecting the claim that existence is a perfection. He writes, as I mentioned, that he finds it "remarkably queer, " and he proceeds to show with examples how queer it is. When Malcolm points out how strange it would be for a king to desire a chancellor who exists, he is pointing out that we simply do not speak that way. He is not denying that a king presented with that odd choice would prefer an existent chancellor. He is saying that to treat

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>28</sup> For Kant's argument, see: The Critique of Pure Reason, Second Division, Chapter 3, Section 4: The Impossibility of an Ontological Proof of the Existence of God. We will consider some aspects of Kant's position later.

<sup>29</sup> Malcolm, 140.

existence as a desirable quality, or possible perfection, violates our ordinary use of language. When he points to Kant, he is not deferring to him as to an authority. He is merely saying that his own argument by examples leaves the matter more or less where Kant's example of 100 thalers does.

With this admission, Malcolm turns to the second "piece of reasoning," but we should not follow him before considering ourselves where his position leaves the first version of the argument. Let us go straight to the position Kant takes. His "intuitive" refutation has not persuaded everyone. Alvin Plantinga, for example, rejects Kant's position. He writes that "it is very doubtful that Kant specified a sense of 'is a predicate' such that, in that sense, it is clear both that existence is not a predicate and that Anselm's argument requires that it be one."<sup>30</sup>

We should sketch Plantinga's claim. He first describes what it means for concepts to be equivalent, discussing two possible concepts of the Taj Mahal. He labels them C1 and C3. He defines C1 as the whole concept of the Taj Mahal. By this he means the concept that is entirely adequate to its object. In his words, the "whole concept" is "the concept whose content includes all (and only) the properties the

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<sup>30</sup> Alvin Plantinga, God and Other Minds, (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967), 27.

object in question has."<sup>31</sup> C3 is "the whole concept of the Taj Mahal diminished with respect to existence."<sup>32</sup> As odd as Plantinga's use of the word "diminished" might be, what he means is clear enough. In order for the whole concept of the Taj Mahal to be adequate to its object, the Taj Mahal itself, it must include the existence of the building as an attribute of the building. To say that the concept has been "diminished" with respect to an attribute is only to say that the attribute in question is not predicated of the concept.

Plantinga then claims that for Kant to argue that 100 real thalers are no more than 100 imagined ones amounts to a claim that C1 and C3 are "equivalent concepts,"<sup>33</sup> but he does not judge whether Kant's claim about thalers is correct. Instead, he insists that it is not relevant. It is possible, he says, to argue that God must be even without assuming--as Malcolm claims Anselm's first argument does--that existence is a predicate. As Plantinga puts it:

Anselm maintains that the concept the being than which none greater can be conceived is necessarily exemplified; that this is so is in no way inconsistent with the suggestion that the whole concept of a thing diminished with respect to existence is equivalent to the undiminished whole concept of that thing. Anselm argues that the proposition God exists is necessarily true; but neither this claim nor his argument for it entails or presupposes that existence is a predicate in the sense

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 36.

just explained.<sup>34</sup>

He claims, in other words, that Anselm could insist that God must be even without thinking that to do so adds to his concept of God. Plantinga explains his claim by arguing that it is one thing to claim that God exists, quite another to claim that God necessarily exists. He thinks that Anselm's argument can and does suppose that necessary existence is a predicate without supposing that mere existence is one. Let me note: we shall see that this is precisely the tack taken by Malcolm in his "second piece of reasoning."

Plantinga reports, however, that Kant takes a different view. Kant does not think "God exists" could be necessarily true. He writes:

If, in an identical proposition, I reject the predicate while retaining the subject, contradiction results; and I therefore say that the former belongs necessarily to the latter. But if we reject subject and predicate alike, there is no contradiction; for nothing is then left that can be contradicted.<sup>35</sup>

Kant seems to claim that, even if there is an argument that we cannot posit "God" without positing "exists", we might still be able to deny "God," because it is only once we have posited "God" that "exists" becomes necessary. When we deny "God," nothing remains to which "exists" necessarily belongs.

Anselm's argument, however, explicitly calls into ques-

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 36

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, tr. Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 502.

tion whether his interlocutor can deny "God." The first point he makes about the fool is that when the fool hears "that than which none greater can be thought," he understands what he hears. Anselm infers from this that such a being is in the understanding--even in the fool's understanding--even if the fool does not understand such a being to be. Anselm thus concludes, and does not merely assert, that God is in the understanding. What he takes to be an established fact--that even the fool understands--becomes his evidence that God is in the fool's understanding at least. He then uses this conclusion to show that God must be. If we could simply deny "God," as Kant asserts we can, there might indeed be nothing for the denial of the existence of God to contradict. But neither Anselm nor his fool can do so. In the face of Anselm's evidence to the contrary, Kant must show the possibility of such a denial, and this he does not do.

For all this, it is enough to note right now that the fact that Plantinga argues against Kant at some length establishes at the very least that Kant's position does not appeal to everyone as it appeals to Malcolm. Even if Malcolm's Kantian refutation is correct, it has not persuaded all. Even so, if we assume that Malcolm's Kantian rejection of Anselm's first argument is inadequate we still need not accept the first argument. As I already suggested, there are issues concerning the possibility of God's existence

that the argument leaves unanswered. I shall address these as I consider what Malcolm takes to be Anselm's second argument.

Let us turn to it now. His way of construing what he calls Anselm's "second ontological argument"<sup>36</sup> can be summarized as follows:

0. God is a being than which a greater cannot be conceived.
1. A being whose non-existence is logically impossible can be conceived.
2. Such a being is greater than a being whose non-existence is logically possible.
3. God's non-existence must be logically impossible.

I shall again consider each step. Though Malcolm gave no explanation of 0. in the first version of the argument, he does so here by affirming that it is in line with one use of the word "God." He writes:

There certainly is a use of the word "God," and I think far the more common use, in accordance with which the statements "God is the greatest of all beings," "God is the most perfect being," "God is the supreme being," are logically necessary truths, in the same sense that the statement "A square has four sides" is a logically necessary truth.<sup>37</sup>

For Malcolm, Anselm's "definition" is equivalent to these statements, which are "logically necessary truths," in as much as this is what is most often meant by "God."

Malcolm has the most to say about 2. He explains in some detail how he understands Anselm's use of "greater." He understands Anselm's claim here to be different from the

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<sup>36</sup> Plantinga, The Ontological Argument, 141.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

claim Anselm makes in the first argument. There, Malcolm had interpreted Anselm's use of "greater" to be a reflection of the claim that existence is a perfection. Here, Malcolm argues that Anselm's claim is that necessary existence is a perfection.

Malcolm rejected the claim about existence by appealing to an example illustrating how we usually speak. He accepts the claim about necessary existence in much the same way. To this end he discusses what he calls "the notion of dependence,"<sup>38</sup> arguing that, "If we reflect on the common meaning of the word 'God',... we realize that it is incompatible with this meaning that God's existence should depend on anything."<sup>39</sup> He goes on to explain that our conception of God as an unlimited being includes more than just unlimited power. It also includes unlimited existence. God's being cannot depend on anything, and nothing can prevent God from being. According to Malcolm, this is what Anselm's definition of God means:

God is usually conceived of as an unlimited being. He is conceived of as a being who could not be limited, that is, as an absolutely unlimited being. This is no less than to conceive of Him as something a greater than which cannot be conceived. If God is conceived to be an absolutely unlimited being He must be conceived to be unlimited in regard to His existence as well as His operation. In this conception it will not make sense to say that He depends on anything for coming into or continuing in existence. Nor, as Spinoza observed, will it make any sense to say that something could prevent

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

Him from existing.<sup>40</sup>

Malcolm thus excludes two possibilities: nothing could prevent God from coming to be, and nothing could remove God from being.

Malcolm suggests, however, that there is one more possibility: God might just happen not to be. Even if no reason can be given for God's not being, even if that non-being cannot be thought, God might not exist. It might appear, after all, that the existence of God and our power to think that existence are distinct issues. So too for God's non-existence and our inability to think it. Perhaps God does not exist even though that non-existence cannot be thought.

Malcolm anticipates this objection, and he rejects it. He argues that God could "just happen" not to exist only if God's non-existence were possible and that, if it were possible that God should just happen not to exist, then, even if God did exist, God's non-existence would be thinkable--at least in the sense that we could ask meaningful questions about it. This is to say that the possibility that God might not exist entails that God's non-existence is thinkable. Malcolm explains that:

from the supposition that it could happen that God did not exist it would follow that, if He existed, He would have mere duration and not eternity. It would make sense to ask, "How long has he existed?," "Will He exist next week?," "He was in existence yesterday but how about today?," and so on. It seems absurd to make God the

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 143-4.



subject of such questions.<sup>41</sup>

Malcolm insists that our ordinary conception of God, a conception captured in Anselm's turn of phrase, is of a God not merely of unlimited duration, but of God eternal and necessarily eternal. Questions about God's supposed duration do not suggest merely falsely that there could be a limit to that duration. They do so meaninglessly. The suggestion that God just happens to exist eternally is, he thinks, likewise meaningless.

To Malcolm, all this means that no contingent existence can be ascribed to God, that the existence of God is either necessary or impossible, and he cites the following passage from Anselm's response to Gaunilo to show that Anselm agrees:

If indeed [that than which a greater cannot be thought] can even be thought, it is necessary that it be. For no one denying or doubting that there is something than which a greater could not be thought denies or doubts that, if there were [such a thing], it would not be possible that it not be, either in deed or in the understanding. Therefore, if it can even be thought, it is impossible for that than which a greater cannot be thought not to be.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>42</sup> Anselm, 131: "Si utique vel cogitari potest, necesse est illud esse. Nullus enim negans aut dubitans esse aliquid quo maius cogitari non possit, negat vet dubitat quia, si esset, nec actu nec intellectu posset non esse. Aliter namque non esset quo maius cogitari non posset. Sed quidquid cogitari potest et non esse: si esset posset vel actu vel intellectu non esse. Quare si vel cogitari potest, non potest non esse "quo maius cogitari nequit".

Malcolm himself cites Deane's translation (St. Anselm: Basic Writings, 154-5): "If it [the thing a greater than which cannot be conceived] can be conceived at all it must exist.

Malcolm concludes that the only possible basis for rejecting the existence of God would be to argue that a being than which none greater can be conceived is impossible.<sup>43</sup>

He discusses the question of God's possibility, but his main point is not an argument that God is, or must be, possible. Instead, he argues that it would be wrong to ask for such an argument. It would be, in his terms, to demand a proof that the concept of a being than which none greater can be conceived does not contradict itself, and he holds that such a demand would be unreasonable. He explains:

With respect to any particular reasoning that is offered for holding that the concept of seeing a material thing, for example, is self-contradictory, one may try to show the invalidity of the reasoning and thus free the concept from the charge of being self-contradictory on that ground. But I do not understand what it would mean to demonstrate in general, and not in respect to any particular reasoning, that the concept is not self-contradictory. So it is with the concept of God. I should think there is no more of a presumption that it is self-contradictory than is the concept of seeing a material thing.<sup>44</sup>

Malcolm speaks here of a "presumption." In the face of the fact that many of us do speak of God with a sense that

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For no one who denies or doubts the existence of a being a greater than which in inconceivable, denies or doubts that if it did exist its non-existence, either in reality or in the understanding, would be impossible. For otherwise it would not be a being a greater than which cannot be conceived. But as to whatever can be conceived but does not exist: if it were to exist its non-existence either in reality or in the understanding would be possible. Therefore, if a being a greater than which cannot be conceived, can even be conceived, it must exist."

<sup>43</sup> Malcolm, 145.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 157.

we are speaking of something real, we are right to assume that God is possible. There is, he thinks, no particular reason to assume that God cannot be rather than that God can be. Those of us who speak of God can rightly be asked to refute any particular argument that purports to show that God is impossible. We cannot be expected, however, to do any more than that.

Nevertheless, insofar as Malcolm's ordinary language version of the ontological argument for the existence of God can show, by itself, only that if God is possible, then God must be, it cannot show us that God is without showing us that God can be. If Malcolm is right to say that there are no general arguments for the possibility of a thing--or, as he would say, the non-contradictory character of a concept--then there can, on his account, be no general argument that God can be, and so is. We may feel a presumption one way or the other, but a presumption is not a proof. To say this is in no way to conclude that Malcolm's version of the argument is invalid. Or even that it is weak. It is only to affirm that the argument, even as he construes it, is limited.

Plantinga concludes as much in a rather different way. He does not believe that there are conclusive general arguments for the existence or non-existence of God, but he makes no general appeal to the way people speak. Instead, he concludes that the belief that God exists can be "properly

basic" for the individuals who hold it.<sup>45</sup> This is to say that there are circumstances under which it is reasonable for a given individual to hold that God exists, even if such circumstances are at play only for that individual. He writes, "There are therefore many conditions and circumstances that call forth belief in God: guilt, gratitude, danger, a sense of God's presence, a sense that he speaks, perception of various parts of the universe."<sup>46</sup> Such circumstances might lead to certain beliefs--he points, for example, to a belief that one is guilty before God and a belief that God is to be thanked. Though he must immediately admit that it is these beliefs that are "properly basic," and not the belief that God exists, he also adds that "each self-evidently entails that God exists."<sup>47</sup>

But this whole claim arises out of a conclusion that general arguments for and against existence are inconclusive. To say that whether it is reasonable for someone to believe in God depends on circumstances such as Plantinga points to is to say that the argument between men such as Malcolm and Findlay, who argues that God is impossible,<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Alvin Plantinga, "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?", Nous, March 1981, 41-53.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>48</sup> J.N. Findlay, Language, Truth and Value, (New York: The Humanities Press, 1963), reprinted in Plantinga, The Ontological Argument.

may be no argument at all. If Malcolm has some reason, perhaps an experience, that leads him to think that God is it is perfectly reasonable for him to believe it. In the absence of such evidence, Findlay is just as reasonable to think otherwise. But neither has any basis from which to refute the other's position. The two of them have little to discuss at all.

Plantinga's account stands thus, in one sense, in sharp contrast with Malcolm's. The latter attempts to enable us to discuss God's possibility by investigating the way we ordinarily speak about God. Someone who would deny that God is possible must accept the burden of undermining the presumption, grounded in the way we ordinarily speak, that God might be. For Plantinga, such a discussion would be beside the point. The basis on which the question of God's existence must be decided is a private one. I reflect upon my own experience. I ask myself whether any experience I have entails a properly basic belief that God exists.

Thus, if my account can serve as a representative sample of the current attempts to defend the rigor of what is taken to be Anselm's argument for the existence of God, I must conclude that those attempts fall short of establishing that God exists because they cannot show that God is possible. This does not mean that they are invalid, or even that they are weak, but that they are limited. Malcolm and Plantinga each go outside of the argument to justify their different

manners of concluding that God indeed exists. Malcolm turns to the ordinary use of the word "God." Plantinga appeals to private experience. By itself, the investigation of the ontological argument may thus be a complex and interesting road, but if it is to show that God exists, it also seems to be a dead end. My question, then, must be whether this dead end is Anselm's road as well.

### CHAPTER 3

#### ANSELM'S ARGUMENT FROM EXPERIENCE

In the first chapter I argued that modern analytic versions of Anselm's argument are not compelling proofs that God exists. Both of the versions we considered require an appeal to experience in order to ground the assumption, otherwise open to question, that God is possible. In considering the versions of Malcolm and Plantinga, I paid little attention to any question of fidelity to what Anselm himself actually says. I did not ask whether the Proslogion includes an ontological argument for God's existence. Instead I focussed on the analyses of current versions of what has come to be called the ontological argument. We must decide whether my conclusions concerning those modern arguments are valid for Anselm's position as well. I will argue that insofar as analytic versions of the argument lead to an appeal to experience, they are similar to the argument Anselm himself makes. The difference, however, lies in the character of the claim that Anselm's own argument strives to make. It is not a claim about God's existence, but a claim about God's being. The analytic debate about the ontological argument for the existence of God comes to a dead end at the

question of God's possibility, but Anselm's own argument is another road entirely.

Some recent commentators have already rejected the common assumption that Anselm offers an ontological argument for the existence of God. We will have reason to consider one such rejection, by Jean-Luc Marion, at some length in Chapter 5. Thomas Losoncy, however, has also argued that Anselm presents no such argument. He argues that it is Gaunilo who formulates the ontological argument and that Anselm explicitly rejects that formulation in his response to Gaunilo.<sup>1</sup> Gregory Schufreider allows that Anselm's argument is ontological, but insists that it is less about the fact of God's existence than about the manner of God's existence.<sup>2</sup>

One striking point is that although the current analytic debate, and indeed much of the debate since Leibniz and even Scotus, leads to the question of God's possibility, this question is entirely absent from Anselm's book. This fact has not struck all readers, and perhaps for good reason. Analytic writers like Malcolm and Plantinga see the issue of God's possibility in Anselm's various claims about conceivability. Plantinga, for example, writes that:

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas A. Losoncy, "Saint Anselm's Rejection of the 'Ontological Argument'--A Review of the Occasion and Circumstances," The American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, 64 (1990): 373-85.

<sup>2</sup> Gregory Schufreider, Confessions of a Rational Mystic, (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue Univ. Press, 1994).



when Anselm defines "God" as "the being than which none greater can be conceived," I think we can represent his intent by replacing that phrase with "the being than which it is not (logically) possible that there be a greater" or "the greatest possible being."<sup>3</sup>

And in a later book, he writes that when Anselm says, "that a certain state of affairs is conceivable he means to say (or so, at any rate, I shall take him) that it is a logically possible state of affairs."<sup>4</sup> It is only fair to add that Plantinga notes that he is less interested in representing Anselm's argument faithfully than in working out arguments that Anselm's "words suggest."<sup>5</sup> Even if expressions like "state of affairs" and "conceivable" are foreign to Anselm's work, it would be enough for Plantinga if they express an argument worth talking about. Plantinga cares about the logic of a certain collection of claims, not about the meaning of Anselm's words.

It is important for us to note that when Plantinga writes of logical possibility, what he has in mind is the absence of contradiction. In The Nature of Necessity, he explains what he means by a "possible state of affairs" by mentioning counter-examples:

So, for example, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's being more than seven feet tall is a state of affairs, as is Spiro Agnew's being President of Yale University. Although each of these is a state of affairs, the former but not

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<sup>3</sup> Plantinga, God and Other Minds, 65.

<sup>4</sup> Plantinga, The Nature of Necessity, (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), 199.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 199.

the latter obtains, or is actual. And although the latter is not actual, it is a possible state of affairs; in this regard it differs from David's having travelled faster than the speed of light and Paul's having squared the circle. The former of these last two items is causally or naturally impossible; the latter is impossible in that broadly logical sense.<sup>6</sup>

Plantinga's example of something logically impossible is the squaring of a circle, the self-contradictory effort to find a square equal in area to a given circle. A logically possible state of affairs is, presumably, one that entails no such contradiction. Let us remember that we already saw that Malcolm thinks of possibility in the same way. In order to suggest that there can be no general proof that something is possible, he writes that although he might be able to refute any particular claim that a given concept is self-contradictory, he does not "understand what it would mean to demonstrate in general ...that the concept is not self-contradictory."<sup>7</sup>

Anselm could not, however, mean what Plantinga takes him to mean. The issue for him is not whether a concept of God contradicts itself. He does not speak of whether a state of affairs is conceivable, much less whether one is logically possible. Anselm speaks of God as a being, not as a state of affairs, than which nothing greater can be thought. And this is not the same as saying that God is the greatest logically possible being. When Anselm says that God is a

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm, 157.

being than which nothing greater can be thought, he is speaking both of the greatness of God and our power to think. The evidence for this emerges in Chapter 15 of the Proslogion. There, Anselm argues that God is not only that than which a greater cannot be thought, or conceived, but that God is "something greater than could be thought."<sup>8</sup>

According to Plantinga's understanding, Anselm would here be arguing that God is so great as not to be logically possible.

Now, in the first place, it is hard to imagine what it would mean to say that logical impossibility should be a feature of God's greatness. It might not be strange to say that God's greatness is miraculous, but is "miraculous" even a near synonym for "logically impossible?" In addition, Anselm immediately goes on to argue that such a being can be thought to be. Is it likely that he means it is logically possible that there be a being that is logically impossible?

Let us, then, attempt to interpret Anselm's own argument. I will claim that it leads farther than the modern debate about the ontological argument can. We can begin by asking why the possibility of God's existence would not come into question for Anselm. It might be tempting to think that ignoring the question reflects a lack of rigor in Anselm's thinking, but this is not the case. We can start to under-

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<sup>8</sup> Anselm, 112: "quiddam maius quam cogitari possit." There will be a lot to say about this chapter.

stand why Anselm would not have considered whether God is possible by taking Anselm's original title for the work seriously.

He reports that he first called the book "Faith Seeking Understanding,"<sup>9</sup> as if the title itself should emphasize that the book is a search of and within faith for understanding--and not the search of a disinterested inquirer. Anselm underscores this fact about the book at the end of Chapter 1, where he insists that he does not seek to understand in order to believe, but rather believes in order to understand, and he explains by adding, "For this too I believe: that unless I believe, I shall not understand."<sup>10</sup>

In fact, much of the first chapter reflects its author's sense that the undertaking that is to follow depends upon his relationship with God. He exhorts the little man who he is to "be free for a little while for God and rest for a little while in Him."<sup>11</sup> This is to say that he must attend, for the moment, to God alone. He exhorts his own heart to beseech God: "Speak now, all my heart, say now to God, 'I

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 94: "...nec tamen eadem sine aliquo titulo, quo aliquem, in cuius manus venirent, quodam modo ad se legendum invitarent, dimittenda putabam: unicuique suum dedi titulum, ut prius Exemplum meditandi de ratione fidei, et sequens Fides quaerens intellectum diceretur." The work that he refers to as "the former" is the Monologion.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 100: "Nam et hoc credo: quia nisi credidero, non intelligam."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 97: "Vaca aliquantulum Deo, et requiesce aliquantulum in eo."

seek Your face; Your face, Lord, I am searching for.'"<sup>12</sup>

This suggests that it is not enough to attend to God. Anselm must speak to God and ask for help. Anselm then addresses God directly, "Then come You now, Lord my God, teach my heart, where and how it might seek You, where and how it might find You."<sup>13</sup> Each of these moments--and there are others in the first chapter--reflects the role that Anselm's faith, his relationship with God, plays from the very start of the book. What is important to remember here is that for Anselm to begin by confessing his belief in God is not merely to report his acceptance of a body of statements about God, among which is the claim that God exists. Anselm's starting point is not the words of a dogma, but the experience of a presence, God's presence.

The beginning of the book reflects this fact in many ways, but the reflection does have one characteristic form: throughout much of the beginning Anselm speaks directly to God. God is not merely the subject of a discourse, but the object of an address. After directing a few words to his own soul, Anselm spends most of the first chapter asking God for help and explaining to God why he needs it. The second chapter, where the argument concerning God's being first

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.: "Dic nunc, totum cor meum, dic nunc Deo: Quaero vultum tuum, vultum tuum, Domine, requiro."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 98: "Eia nunc ergo tu, Domine Deus meus, doce cor meum, ubi et quomodo te quaerat, ubi et quomodo te inveniatur."

emerges, opens with yet more words addressed to God. Before his analysis begins, Anselm briefly summarizes his plea for help, "Therefore, Lord, who grants understanding to faith, grant to me, as much as You know that it will profit, that I understand that You are just as we believe and that You are what we believe."<sup>14</sup>

The first thing to note is that Anselm considers his request to be a consequence of the profession that precedes it. The chapter's first word, "ergo" (therefore), marks it as such. He has just written that he will not understand without first believing. Because he believes that understanding can only follow faith, and that God is one who grants the former to the latter, he must begin his search for understanding by asking for it.

He directs this request to God. It is directed speech. The chapter's second word is in the vocative case, the form of direct address. The sentence's main verb, "grant" (da), is a second person imperative. It may be tempting to assume that Anselm must address God merely because he believes he must ask for understanding. As such it would reflect Anselm's need, but not necessarily any sense, on Anselm's part, of the presence of one who might meet that need.

The assumption, however, would be false. The intimate tone of the first chapter argues against this. In addition,

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<sup>14</sup> Anselm, 101: "Ergo Domine, qui das fidei intellectum, da mihi, ut quantum scis expedire, intelligam, quia es sicut credimus, et hoc es quod credimus."

we should recognize that Anselm could ask for help without addressing God directly. One way to see this is to compare the beginning of the Proslogion with another work that both aims at understanding the existence of God and also begins in prayer: De primo principio, by John Duns Scotus.

Scotus begins, "May the First Principle of things grant me to believe, to understand and to reveal what may please his majesty and may lift up our minds to contemplate him."<sup>15</sup> Scotus makes this request of what he calls "the first principle of things." He asks that the principle "allow" (concedat) him "to believe, know, and present what might please its majesty." He follows by asking that something be revealed that will lift up "our minds" to contemplation. This is just what Anselm at least claims to aim at as he writes the Proslogion. He describes the persona in which the Proslogion is written as that of "one trying to lift up his mind towards contemplating God."<sup>16</sup>

But if the similarity between Anselm's beginning and that of Scotus is great, so is the difference. The third person, jussive subjunctive that Scotus uses makes it clear

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<sup>15</sup> John Duns Scotus, A Treatise on God as First Principle, trans. and ed. by Allan B. Wolter (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1966), 3: "Primum rerum Principium mihi ea credere, sapere, ac proferre concedat, quae ipsius placeant maiestati et ad eius contemplationem elevent mentes nostras."

<sup>16</sup> Anselm, 94: "...sub persona conantis erigere mentem suam ad contemplandum Deum..."

that he does not address anyone in particular. He speaks of, and not to, the one on whom his request depends. Whereas Anselm speaks to the God from whom he hopes for assistance, Scotus speaks only of the first principle and of our minds.

Anselm, then, need not address God simply because his hope depends on God. He speaks to God because God is there for him to speak to--felt as present before an argument for God's existence is made--and he speaks to God because God's presence is fundamental to the analysis that follows his first words. In order to understand his analysis, one must understand the role God's presence plays in it.

In the sentence that follows Anselm's request for help, the sentence with which Anselm's analysis of God's being begins, he only confirms that the analysis requires the presence of God at the very start. Like the words that precede them, the words with which Anselm articulates what has been called his "definition" of God are also addressed to God. Anselm writes, "And indeed we believe You to be something than which nothing greater could be thought."<sup>17</sup> Here again, we see Anselm's reliance on God reflected in two ways: on one hand, he affirms that the analysis is about what he--or, as he says, what we--believe; on the other hand, it is a belief expressed to God, who is there.

Anselm concludes his first analysis of the being of God

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 101: "Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit."



midway through Chapter Three, "Therefore, so truly is there something than which a greater cannot be thought that it could not even be thought not to be."<sup>18</sup> He adds: "And this is You, Lord our God." And he goes on to explain the conclusion he has reached in a manner that shows the same two aspects. He addresses it to God, whom he has spoken of, and he explains it in terms of what he believes about God:

Therefore, You are so truly, Lord my God, that You could not even be thought not to be. And rightly. For if any mind could think something better than You, the creature would ascend above the creator and would pronounce judgment on the creator; which is very absurd.<sup>19</sup>

Anselm re-affirms, by use of the second person, the connection between his analysis and the presence of God, and he explains his conclusion in terms of a belief about God that is not expressed--though it might be implied--by the statement to and about God that begins the analysis: Anselm refers to God as the creator. If it were Anselm's intention to prove the existence of God by reason alone, without reference to the beliefs about God that he starts with, this explanation would make no sense whatsoever. By referring to God, at this point, as the creator, Anselm goes beyond any set of premises that the ontological argument would start with, and he does so gratuitously, since the argument has

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 103: "Sic ergo vere est aliquid quo maius cogitari non potest, ut nec cogitari possit non esse."

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.: Sic ergo vere es, Domine, Deus meus, ut nec cogitari possis non esse. Et merito. Si enim aliqua mens posset cogitare aliquid melius te, ascenderet creatura super creatorem et iudicaret de creatore; quod valde est absurdum.

presumably been made before the return to the second person singular that begins this passage.

The character of the first chapter, of the beginning of the second, and of the middle of the third suggests an explanation for the fact the Anselm does not discuss the question of God's possibility: he need not do so because he experiences the presence of the God whom he seeks to understand. Such an experience is just the sort of circumstance that Plantinga has in mind when he speaks of circumstances that entail a properly basic belief, and in this respect it may appear to be similar to his approach. The two appeals to experience are, however, quite different. Plantinga appeals, as a final step, to the possibility that an experience can justify a belief as properly basic in order to preserve the claim that the ontological argument can be valid. Anselm, however, does not appeal to experience at the end of his argument. For him, experience is where the argument begins. There is no moment, at the conclusion of the argument, at which Anselm must admit that it depends upon a decisive appeal to experience, because his experience of God moves the argument right from the start.

We should, however, at least consider the possibility that I am making too much of the words in which Anselm imbeds his argument. After all, Schmitt gives us serious reasons to think that the composition of the Proslogion as a prayer is window dressing that was added after the heart of

the work was conceived. It is important to face his position.

Schmitt shows that there are clear differences between the passages in which Anselm argues and those in which he does not. It is, however, important to notice that this hardly bears at all on the way of understanding the Proslogion that I would suggest. Schmitt's point seems aimed at refuting the attempt to deny that the Proslogion is an argument at all. This is not my position. Even if I grant Schmitt that the argumentative sections of the Proslogion are the core that Anselm only later clothed as prayer, I can still insist that Anselm's analysis depends on the fact that he feels God to be present to him.

But it is also possible to say more about Schmitt's position. Schmitt concludes that Anselm aims only at the speculative task of reducing the reasoning in the Monologion to a single argument, and that the composition of the work as an address is mere style. Even so, he must somehow explain the style of the work. He might claim that the book's composition is incidental to it, but the book is at least composed as an address. Fully aware of this, Schmitt asks why Anselm might have chosen this particular form, and answers that the Monologion was composed as a discourse and that, in order to vary his style, Anselm set the Proslogion as an address. But Schmitt does not ask why Anselm might have wanted to vary his style: he only asks--and this only

rhetorically--whether any other variation in style would have been more likely.<sup>20</sup> Nor does he explain why the style Anselm settled on was that of an address to God, though Anselm wrote dialogues and letters as well. For some reason, Anselm chose to compose the Proslogion as an address to God. One ought to try to understand this fact. To say that this was out of a desire for what we might today call a "change of pace" is to refuse to take what might be a decisive question seriously at all.

To see that the presence of God, which is affirmed by the composition of the work as a prayer, bears strongly on the nature of the analysis is to make a beginning. The possibility that God exists is established for Anselm by the fact that he experiences God. This is not to say that Anselm deduces that God is possible from his experience, but that, because of his experience, the question of God's possibility is not a question for him. Anselm's analysis is, then, an argument from experience. To explore this claim requires considering the two notions on which the analysis depends. We must ask what the verbs "to think" (cogitare) and "to understand" (intelligere) express.

When Anselm writes of something than which none greater can be thought, what does "thought" (cogitari) mean? The only gesture Anselm makes towards defining the word is by

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<sup>20</sup> See Schmitt's introduction to his Latin-German edition of the Proslogion, 32, cited above, note 8.

way of a metaphor. This he does in the fourth chapter, immediately after he has argued in the third that God cannot be thought not to be. Referring back to a psalm that he has already quoted, Anselm asks, "How then did [the fool] say in his heart what he could not think, or how could he not think what he said in his heart, when to say in the heart and to think are the same?"<sup>21</sup> He explains that something can be thought in two ways, "For a thing is thought in one sense, when the word signifying it is thought [and], in another, when that itself, which the thing is, is understood."<sup>22</sup> Anselm points to the second meaning as the important one, emphasizing that "No one indeed, understanding what God is, can think that God is not, although he might say these words in his heart."<sup>23</sup> It is this meaning, then, that must guide the attempt to understand what he means by "that than which none greater can be thought." Such a being is one than which none greater can be spoken of in our hearts with understand-

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 103: "Verum quomodo dixit in corde quod cogitare non potuit; aut quomodo cogitare non potuit quod dixit in corde, cum idem sit dicere in corde et cogitare?"

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 103: "Aliter enim cogitatur res, cum vox significans cogitatur, aliter cum id ipsum quod res est intelligitur."

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 103-4: "Nullus quippe intelligens id quod Deus est, potest cogitare quia Deus non est, licet haec verba dicat in corde..."

ing.<sup>24</sup>

But this explanation forces one to ask what Anselm means by "understanding" (intellectus) and "understand" (intelligere). It is more difficult to talk about these words. Let me say at least provisionally that the understanding is a kind of vision or is somehow like vision. To do so is to respond, once again, to a metaphor Anselm uses. For though he speaks of his desire to understand God, he also speaks, quoting another psalm, of a desire to see God's face: "I seek Your face; [it is] Your face, Lord, I am searching for."<sup>25</sup> The metaphor suggests that to understand something is to see it as what it is, that understanding is insight.

I will later point out that as noted an authority as Karl Barth takes the word in a very different sense, but for now let me confirm that this initial understanding of understanding corresponds to Anselm's own use by turning to his Chapter 18. There, he goes farther in the suggestion that the activity of understanding is a kind of vision. I cited the decisive passage in my introduction,<sup>26</sup> and I shall cite it later as well, but let me also do so here. After having enumerated qualities that are God, and having summarized

<sup>24</sup> My discussion of Augustine in the introduction can serve us here. Augustine describes the attempt to know as the struggle to speak one's inner word. This effort may be just what Anselm means by "saying in the heart."

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 97: "Quaero vultum tuum, vultum tuum, Domine, requiro."

<sup>26</sup> See above, p. 11.

them all by saying that God is "every true good," Anselm writes that the qualities "are many," and he adds, "my narrow understanding cannot see so many in one simultaneous insight in order to delight in all of them at once."<sup>27</sup> Anselm thus thinks of understanding as a power that sees--or fails to see--wholes at once.

When, therefore, Anselm identifies God as something than which nothing greater can be thought, he means that God is something than which nothing greater can be spoken of in one's heart in a manner that enables one to see it. And when he begins his argument by claiming that God is at least in the understanding, he must mean that when he tells the fool what God is, the fool sees, in some sense, what Anselm is talking about. The fool is not an atheist, if to be an atheist requires the denial that God is even possible. The fool cannot do so: Anselm's claim that the fool understands the words with which Anselm expresses what he believes God to be requires that the fool sees, or experiences, the "thing" (res) those words describe--perhaps very much as Anselm does.

If, then, Anselm's fool is--despite what Flasch would claim--no atheist, who is this fool? Several points are worth noticing. First, let us consider where Anselm finds the fool. It is in the thirteenth psalm. The psalmist begins

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 114: "Multa sunt haec, non potest angustus intellectus meus tot uno simul intuitu videre, ut omnibus simul delectetur."

by proclaiming the line that Anselm quotes:

The fool hath said in his heart: There is no God.  
They are corrupt, and are become abominable in their  
ways: there is none that doth good, no not one.

The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children  
of men, to see if there be any that understand and seek  
God.

They are all gone aside, they are become unprofit-  
able together: there is none that doeth good, no not  
one.<sup>28</sup>

These first three verses affirm the connection between  
the denial that God is and wrongdoing. The fool of whom the  
psalmist sings says in his heart that there is no God, and,  
as a result, is corrupt and has become abominable. At the  
same time, the psalmist also says what the fool is not. The  
fool is not one who "did understand, and seek God."

At this point it is worth remembering how Anselm de-  
scribes the persona he adopts for the Proslogion. It is  
written, he says, "under the persona of one trying to lift  
up his mind in order to contemplate God and seeking to  
understand what he believes."<sup>29</sup> As such, it seems written  
with the fool of the psalm in mind. The Proslogion persona  
strives precisely to direct his thoughts towards contemplat-

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<sup>28</sup> Psalms 13:1-3. This is the translation made from the  
Vulgate at Douay in 1609. The Vulgate itself reads:

Dixit insipiens in corde suo non est Deus  
corrupti sunt et abominabiles facti sunt in studiis suis:  
non est qui faciat bonum non est usque ad unum:  
Dominus de caelo prospexit super filios hominum  
ut videat si est intelligens aut: requirens Deum  
omnes declinaverunt simul inutiles facti sunt  
non est qui faciat bonum non est usque ad unum.

<sup>29</sup> Anselm, 93-4: "...sub persona conantis erigere mentem  
suam ad contemplandum Deum et quaerentis intelligere quod  
credit..."



ing God, and seeks in doing so to understand what he believes. This would be to understand God, an understanding denied, according to the psalmist, to the foolish children of men.

But to say that the Proslogion is directed against such a fool is not enough. When Anselm says that the persona he will assume is of one who seeks to lift the mind to the contemplation of God, he does not mean someone else's mind, but his own (mentem suam). In other words, Anselm's fool is a fool within, some part of the author that says in his heart that there is no God.

This is not to say that some part of Anselm doubts the existence of God. One way to see this is to consider a passage in another psalm, a passage echoed in the reference to the fool in Psalm 13. In the ninth psalm, the psalmist writes that:

The sinner has provoked the Lord: according to the  
throng of his anger he does not seek.  
God is not in his sight...<sup>30</sup>

Jerome's placing of "non est" in the emphatic first position

<sup>30</sup> This is my own translation of what appears in the Vulgate at Psalms 9:4-5. The Vulgate reads:

"exacerbavit Dominum peccator secundum multitudinem  
irae suae non quaeret  
non est Deus in conspectu eius."

I do not use the Douay because it loses the passage that the thirteenth Psalm echoes. Instead of translating "non est Deus" as "there is no God" it renders it as "God is not." In the Douay, the passage reads as follows:

"The sinner hath provoked the Lord, according to the  
multitude of his wrath he will not seek him:  
God is not before his eyes..."

in the Vulgate argues that God is entirely absent from the wicked man's sight. The wicked man fails to see God at all. God is not present to him.

But this is not the case with the fool--neither Anselm's fool nor the fool of the psalm. God is present in the fool's thoughts. The fool is a fool because he denies the existence of God even though God is present to him. Anselm uses this presence almost right away as his analysis proceeds: this much I have already argued. The wicked man of the ninth psalm, on the other hand, does not deny that God exists. He does not think of God at all.

Anselm's fool, the fool who dwells in Anselm, then, does not doubt, but willfully denies, that God exists. The end of the fourth chapter confirms this, where Anselm thanks God for an illumination in the light of which he could not fail to understand that God is even if he did not want to, or wished not to, believe it:

I thank You, good Lord, I thank You, because what I previously believed because You granted [it], I now so understand because You shed light [on it] that [even] if I were unwilling to believe that You are, I would not be able not to understand [that You are.]<sup>31</sup>

Here it is clear not only that the fool's denial that God is reflects what the fool wants to think, and not what the fool in fact believes, but also that, when Anselm considers the

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<sup>31</sup> Anselm, 104: "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."

possibility of a willful denial, he has himself in mind.

This contradicts Flasch directly. He claims that Anselm's fool is an atheist indeed. His argument depends on his understanding of the position that Anselm intends to use his analysis to undermine. According to Flasch, Anselm would refute the "denial of the existence of a being beyond which a more perfect cannot be thought."<sup>32</sup> This is surely true in a sense, but the denial in question is an odd one: it is not that of someone who believes his own words. Anselm's fool wants to deny the existence of a God whom he himself, in some sense, sees. Anselm's reference, in Chapter 3, to God as creator only makes this fact clearer and more dramatic. Anselm does not just assume, as Flasch argues, a shared vision of the being who is something than which a greater cannot be thought, he assumes that the vision includes a belief that this being is the Creator.

But Flasch has other evidence as well. He points especially to the character of Anselm's answer to Gaunilo's Reply on Behalf of the Fool. Gaunilo seems to take the first chapters of the Proslogion as an attempt to prove that God exists, and he argues that they fail. Flasch notices that Anselm responds to Gaunilo point by point, rather than by explaining that Gaunilo has mistaken his intent. But it is important to consider just how Anselm actually responds to

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<sup>32</sup> Flasch, 7: "die Bestreitung der Existenz eines Wesens, über das hinaus Vollkommeneres nicht gedacht werden kann." The emphasis is Flasch's.

Gaunilo. In the beginning of his answer, he reminds Gaunilo first of all where their discussion must begin. Against Gaunilo's claim that "that than which..." is neither understood nor thought, Anselm writes, "I use your faith and your conscience as my most solid argument."<sup>33</sup> If Anselm's book is in any sense an argument for God's existence, it is one that depends, at least in his own view, on the experience of faith.

This response by Anselm is important in two ways. First, it confirms the claim that his argument begins with a belief in God. Second, it speaks to the important role that belief plays: it is the belief that guarantees that the words with which Anselm points to God--"that than which..."--are in fact understood. The proof, of course, depends on both sides' agreeing that such a being is, at least, in the understanding, and this agreement flows from a matter of faith. If my understanding of "understanding" is correct, then this is what understanding the words "something than which none greater can be thought" requires.

Flasch knows perfectly well that this is Anselm's first answer to Gaunilo. He even points out that Anselm's purpose is merely to insist that Anselm and Gaunilo share the very

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<sup>33</sup> Anselm, 130: "Si `quo maius cogitari non potest' non intelligitur vel cogitatur nec est in intellectu vel cogitatione: profecto Deus aut non est quo maius cogitari non possit, aut non intelligitur vel cogitatur et in intellectu vel cogitatione. Quod falsum sit, fide et conscientia tua pro firmissimo utor argumento."

same understanding that Anselm shares with the fool:

When Anselm makes mention, in his answer, of Gaunilo's Christian belief, then [he does so], strictly speaking, only in the context [of his claim] that the content of his formula exists in the understanding of a believer (like Gaunilo) at least just as much as in the understanding of an unbeliever who enters into Anselm's discussion--even if, as in the case of an atheist, [it exists] without any positing of [the being's] existence [in fact].<sup>34</sup>

But if Anselm really thinks that the shared understanding in question could be independent of belief, then he would not need to appeal to Gaunilo's faith. He could merely remind Gaunilo that, when one hears the words "that than which a greater cannot be thought," one understands what one hears.

Gaunilo's response to Anselm was, in part, to deny it to be certain that he has such a being in his understanding any differently than he has "any false things and things that exist in themselves in no way at all."<sup>35</sup> And here is where Flasch's understanding of the debate seems most peculiar. He suggests that it is Anselm's intention to refute Gaunilo by pointing out that, because Gaunilo believes, God is in his understanding just as God is in the understanding of a

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<sup>34</sup> Flasch, 18: "Wenn Anselm in seiner Antwort (§1) an den christlichen Glauben Gaunilo's erinnert, dann strikt nur in dem Zusammenhang, daß der Inhalt seiner Beweisformel im Verstand eines Gläubigen (wie Gaunilo) zumindest ebenso existiert wie im Verstand eines in Anselms Diskussion eintretenden Ungläubigen; eventuell noch, wie bei dem Atheisten, ohne Existenzbehauptung."

<sup>35</sup> Gaunilo, Quid ad haec respondeat quidam pro insipiente, in Anselm, Opera Omnia, 125: "Nonne et quaecumque falsa ac nullo prorsus modo existentia in intellectu habere similiter dici possem, cum ea, dicente aliquo, quaecumque ille diceret, ego intelligerem?"

supposed atheist. But if this were so, the response would be no response at all. Anselm himself recognized, in his account of the fool's ability to think that there is no God, that the fool is able to think through words without any reference to the thing (res) the words refer to. Though his response to Gaunilo might work for one who has faith, it would not answer an atheist. Anselm's argument need not prevent someone who does not believe from denying that an understanding of God as that than which a greater cannot be thought is possible in just this way. The fool, if he is an atheist, can respond to Anselm that he can think through what Anselm says, but add that this does not mean that God is in his thought.

On the other hand, the appeal to Gaunilo's faith shows clearly something about the fool that is less explicit in the Proslogion itself: that the fool is, as I have already argued for other reasons, one who believes in God.<sup>36</sup> It would, as such, be Anselm's attempt to let Gaunilo and his other readers know all the more clearly where the argument begins: namely, with the experience of God, present to the

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<sup>36</sup> The first words of Anselm's response to Gaunilo only seem to deny this. He writes:

Quoniam non me reprehendit in his dictis ille insipiens, contra quem sum locutus in meo opusculo, sed quidam non insipiens et catholicus pro insipiens: sufficere mihi potest respondere catholico. (Anselm, 130)

But he hardly could have insisted, in a polite exchange, that he was still arguing with a fool. Though he can speak about a part of himself as foolish, it would not do to say the same about Gaunilo.

understanding when those words that express what, as Anselm says, "we believe" about God are spoken.

The end of the second chapter of the Proslogion confirms this claim. There, Anselm sums up the first argument concerning God's being with a two-fold conclusion: "There exists, therefore, beyond doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought both in the understanding and in fact."<sup>37</sup> This conclusion, which is one of very few occurrences in the book of the verb "to exist" (existere), affirms that there is a connection between the claim that God exists in fact and the claim that God exists in the understanding, and this latter depends, as Anselm's use of the word "understanding" suggests, on an experience of God.

Anselm's argument for the existence of God is, then, an argument from experience. He begins it from an understanding of the God that he strives to understand. But this claim is a strange one. It would appear that we have found an argument for the existence of God that depends on an experience of God as existent. If God is experienced as existing, why would one need to prove that God exists? This is the question that will set the inquiry of the next chapter into motion.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 102: "Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re."

## CHAPTER 4

### UNDERSTANDING WHAT WE BELIEVE

We should now try to understand what sense it makes for Anselm to argue for something he already believes. One could claim, on one hand, that the proof is directed by one who has had and understood an experience of God's presence to those who doubt God's existence. But this is not the case: the proof cannot be conclusive without appealing to experience, and it is in fact directed at those who have experienced the presence of God. The former conclusion emerged from the discussion of possibility, and the latter from the understanding of Anselm's fool.

One could claim, on the other hand, that precisely those who have experienced God's presence might need the reassurance that comes with proof. But here too there are difficulties. In the first place, Anselm declares that he does not attempt to understand in order to believe. He is most explicit on this point: that he believes in order to understand. The purpose of the proof is not, in other words, to confirm his faith. In the second place, Anselm does not infer that he is God's creature, but assumes it. He explains in the third chapter that it is impossible to think that God is not, and he does so by arguing that no mind could think



anything better than God because this would require that "the creature ascend above the creator."<sup>1</sup> Though Anselm goes on to argue that God is the being that all things need in order to be, this argument comes after he appeals to God's being the creator, a claim he takes as an evident fact.

Several authors in this century have indeed claimed, as I do, that Anselm's analysis in the Proslogion depends on his faith. The most important of these accounts was offered by Karl Barth. We can begin anew by considering it. He looks at only the second and third chapters of Anselm's book--the analyses that concern God's being. Generally speaking, Barth takes these analyses to be arguments for the existence of God, but arguments of a strange sort: they are, he thinks, part of a theological algebra, one in which certain points of faith are assumed in order that others might be proven. Barth writes:

This Existence of God which is accepted in faith is now to be recognized and proved on the presupposition of the Name of God likewise accepted in faith and is to be understood as necessary for thought.

And Barth goes on to affirm that an algebra is quite literally what he means:

Thus here the Name of God is the "a" taken from the Credo by means of which the Existence of God now repre-

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<sup>1</sup> Anselm, 103: "Si enim aliqua mens posset cogitare aliquid melius te, ascenderet creatura super creatorem et judicaret de creatore; quod valde est absurdum."

sented as X is to be transformed into a known quantity from one that is unknown (not disbelieved but as yet not realized)...<sup>2</sup>

According to Barth, Anselm begins his argument by assuming one of two "known quantities" as given in order to establish the logical connection between the two. What sense does Barth make of such a logic? His account depends on his understanding of Anselm's use of "understanding" and of Anselm's view of the relationship between understanding and faith.

Barth explains Anselm's understanding of understanding by considering the etymology of the word, "intellectus," that Anselm uses. To understand is to reckon or to gather inwardly:

In explaining Anselm's use of "intelligere" it is vitally important to remember the literal meaning of the word: intus legere. After all that has been said, there can be no question but that the fundamental meaning of intelligere is legere: to reflect upon what has already been said in the Credo.<sup>3</sup>

Why does faith seek this reflection? Barth does point out that understanding brings with it both proof and rejoicing, but it is important to see that, for Barth, this question is not well posed. Faith does not seek understanding as though this were a task over and above its primary task, which is to believe? Seeking to understand a Credo is part

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth, Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. Ian W. Robertson, (London: SCM Press, 1960; reprint, Mars, PA: Pickwick Publications, Pittsburg Reprint Series, 1985), 78 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 40.

of what faith is. Barth argues that the understanding that concerns Anselm is one "desired by faith," and explains:

What we are speaking of is a spontaneous desire of faith. Fundamentally, the quaerere intellectum is really immanent in fides. Therefore it is not a question of faith "requiring" the "proof" or the "joy." There is absolutely no question at all of a requirement of faith. Anselm wants "proof" and "joy" because he wants intelligere and he wants intelligere because he believes.<sup>4</sup>

In Barth's view, then, faith seeks understanding because it is faith. The understanding it seeks is a reflection on, or a gathering together of, articles of faith. It proceeds by the assumption of one article in order to explore the rational character of its relation to others. Barth argues that Anselm reflects upon the existence of God in the first few chapters of the Proslogion, and that, in the rest of the Proslogion, Anselm reflects upon the nature of God. In each case, Anselm sets what he would like to reflect upon as an unknown, to be explored by the assumption of something else. This something else is Anselm's phrase "that than which a greater cannot be thought," and Barth calls the phrase a "Name" of God. Anselm, he says, assumes this "Name," and, on the basis of its assumption, proves what he believes--neither as a means of affirming, or strengthening, his belief, nor of converting others to his belief, but as a means of reflecting upon, or understanding, that belief.

The first thing to notice about Barth's account is the

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 16-7.

sense in which it agrees with those previously considered. Barth, no less than the analytic writers, views the analyses of the second and third chapters as attempts to prove that God exists. He differs only in his account of what we might call the intent of that proof: rather than viewing it as a polemical attempt to affirm something on rational grounds alone, he views it as an attempt to reflect upon faith. Even for him, though, what is at issue is the existence of God. Let me say here, by way of anticipation, that there is reason to question even this--that is, whether the analyses of the two chapters concern the existence of God.

The second thing to notice is that, according to Barth, Anselm's analyses proceed from no more than the assumption of the "Name" of God. I have argued, however, that, if they are construed as polemical arguments, they depend on much more. Insofar as Anselm would prove that God exists, he must assume more than merely the "Name" of God. Not only must the statement, "God is something than which none greater can be conceived," be an unproven premise to the argument, but the possibility of such a being must also be granted from the start. Anselm can take God's possibility for granted because he starts from an experience that affirms that God exists. In other words, if Anselm were to "bracket" the existence of God, or treat it as an unknown X, his argument would be circular. His proof of God's existence would assume the existence of God.

There is yet a third matter to note about Barth's position, specifically about his understanding of Anselm's understanding. Barth defines it, by appeal to etymology, as an inward, or inner, reckoning (intus legere). "Legere" means, first of all, "to bring together, gather, collect." It can also mean "to read."<sup>5</sup> Barth's claim, then, is that, for Anselm, to understand is to collect discrete elements inwardly. This jibes well with Barth's claim that Anselm sets out to prove God's existence in order to see its connection to other elements of what he believes. But in explaining "understanding" in this way, Barth cites no passages from the Proslogion or from Anselm's other works. He pays almost no attention to Anselm's use of "thinking" (cogitare), and he ignores the textual evidence that can be brought to bear on the attempt to see through Anselm's use of "understanding."

I have already considered this evidence. I argued that understanding is, for Anselm, less a gathering-within than it is a vision. Such a vision may of course depend on a gathering-within that precedes it. One might have to collect disparate elements, gather them into a whole, in order to have some one thing for the understanding to see. But this only points back to the fact that Barth does not discuss Anselm's understanding of thought. Anselm describes thought,

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<sup>5</sup> C.T. Lewis, Intermediate Latin Dictionary, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), s.v. "lego."

as we have seen, by an appeal to a metaphor: thinking is saying in the heart. Such inward speech is what Barth means by understanding. A faithful account of the Proslogion must distinguish faith, thinking, and understanding, and show the connections among them. Barth uses the third of these in place of the second, and cannot reserve for the understanding its proper place.

It is, then, necessary to look more deeply if one is to understand the goal of Anselm's analysis. I will bring a range of considerations to bear. Taken together, these considerations will suggest that what have been taken so far as proofs, of whatever sort, of the existence of God make more sense as parts of an exploration of what, as Anselm says, "we" believe God to be. On such an understanding, the analysis appears to concern less the question of God's existence than the manner of God's being.

We can look for the purpose of the analysis by considering more exactly what Anselm claims he will prove. Anselm uses the same phrase in the various places where he appears to claim that he will show that God exists. For example, the second chapter of the Proslogion claims to show that "God truly is."<sup>6</sup> I have thus far assumed that "God truly is" is simply a synonym for "God exists." It is partly on this

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<sup>6</sup> Anselm, 101. The title of the chapter is: "Quod vere sit deus." See also the preface, where Anselm says that he seeks an argument to show, among other things, that God "truly is" (Deus vere est).

basis that I began by assuming that Anselm sets out to prove God's existence. The two standard translations of the Proslogion into English confirm this reading. M.J. Charlesworth renders Anselm's "Deus vere est," as "God truly exists."<sup>7</sup> S.N. Deane offers, "Truly there is a God."<sup>8</sup> Each treats the word "truly" (vere) as though they think it merely intensifies a claim that God exists, without bearing on the claim's meaning essentially.

A German theologian, Anselm Stolz, however, argues for another understanding of "vere est." He claims that the phrase is a technical term taken from Augustine. The distinction the phrase points to is not between existence and non-existence. It is, instead, between a certain form of being, true being, and any other form of being. Stolz writes that when Anselm attributes "vere esse" to God, he means that God possesses a wholly unique type of being. He explains that God is not subject to alteration like earthly things and that God did not pass from non-being to being. Stolz concludes that to say that God "truly is" means that "his being is not touched in any way by non-being, that the concept of being applies, in its ultimate and true sense, to

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<sup>7</sup> St. Anselm's Proslogion, trans. and intro. M. J. Charlesworth, (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 117.

<sup>8</sup> St. Anselm: Basic Writings, intro. Charles Hartshorne and trans. S. N. Deane, (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1962), 7.

him alone."<sup>9</sup>

The account of Stolz runs directly contrary to Barth's account of the same expression. Like the analytic writers, Barth takes Anselm's analysis to be an argument for the existence of God. He argues that the conclusion of Chapter 2 explains its chapter heading. The heading reads, "that truly God is," and the chapter concludes, "there exists, therefore, beyond doubt something than which a greater cannot be thought, both in the understanding and in fact."<sup>10</sup> Barth takes this to imply that to say that "God truly is" means that God exists, and exists not just in the understanding but in fact as well.<sup>11</sup>

There are, however, two indications that the aim of

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<sup>9</sup> Anselm Stolz, Anselm von Canterbury, (München: Verlag Kösel-Pustet, 1937), 17: "Gegen die erste läßt sich geltend machen, daß der Ausdruck 'vere esse' als Fachausdruck dem hl. Augustinus geläufig war. Er bedeutet bei ihm aber nicht 'wirklich dasein' im Gegensatz zu 'nicht-sein', der Ton liegt vielmehr auf dem vere, und wenn Gott das 'vere esse' zugeschrieben wird, ist damit gesagt, daß Gott eine ganz besondere Art von sein besitzt, d. h. er ist nicht wandelbar wie die irdische Dinge, er ist nicht aus dem Nichtsein zum Sein übergegangen, er ist nicht heute so und morgen anders, sondern er bleibt sich immer gleich und verwirklicht in sich absolute Seinsfülle. Er 'ist wirklich' (vere est), d. h. sein Sein ist in keiner Weise vom Nichtsein berührt, ihm allein kommt der Begriff des Seins im eigentlichen und wahren Sinn zu."

<sup>10</sup> Anselm, 102: "Existit ergo procul dubio aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et intellectu et in re."

<sup>11</sup> It is worth noting that Barth's account does not aim at excluding the point Stolz makes--that "true" being means the being unique to God--but to insist that, even if that point is granted, esse still means existere. See: Barth, 100.



Anselm's discussion of God's being is rather, just as Stolz says, to attribute to God a very special manner of being. One is the attention Anselm pays to just the qualities that Stolz identifies as belonging to "true being": both the latter part of the first half of the work (Chapter 13) and the middle part of the second half (Chapter 18-21) deal with the distinctions between how God and how created beings are with respect to time and space.

But perhaps the strongest indication that the discussion of God's being is an effort to attribute to God a particular manner of being is in the third chapter. Anselm sets out to show, in the second, that God truly is. And he turns in the third to argue that God is "so truly that He cannot even be thought not to be."<sup>12</sup> Analytical writers like Malcolm and others take this chapter as a distinct argument for the very same claim that they take Anselm to make in Chapter 2, and they do so even if they add that, as Malcolm puts it, "there are two different pieces of reasoning which [Anselm] did not distinguish from one another."<sup>13</sup> But Anselm does distinguish the two analyses by distinguishing the conclusions that they aim at. Each is, it is true, an argument that God "truly is." But while the one affirms that God indeed truly is; the other adds that God is so truly that "he cannot even be

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 102: "Quod utique sic vere est, ut nec cogitari poossit non esse."

<sup>13</sup> The Ontological Argument, 136.

thought not to be." This latter claim could, of course, refer only to the manner of God's being. After all, whether or not a thing can be thought as not being does not necessarily bear on whether that thing exists. In addition, Anselm's formulation requires that a thing could be more or less truly. It hardly makes sense to talk of the degree to which God is if all that is at stake is whether God is--that is, if what is at stake is God's existence considered only as a bare fact.

Anselm's argument in Chapter 3 argues directly against Barth's position that esse means existere, even if it is also central to Anselm's position to show that God's being--or, as Barth would say, existence--is unique. It makes sense to see Anselm's claim, that God is so truly, as an emphatic affirmation of what Stolz understands him to say--that God's being is untouched by non-being and this so much that God cannot even be thought not to be--that God cannot even be touched by non-being in our thought. But it makes no sense to understand the point of Chapter 3 to be to show that God exists, which was purportedly shown already in Chapter 2, and even more so.

Barth himself recognizes this problem. He begins his account of Chapter 3 by claiming that it concerns a different sense of "true being" than Chapter 2. He affirms that, in the second chapter, "true being" means, as he has already claimed, "being in the understanding and in thought." But he

concedes that it means, as the third chapter concludes, that God is such as cannot be thought not to be.<sup>14</sup>

Anselm, however, makes no such distinction. He presents the two chapters as though they were two analyses pointing to claims that differ in degree but not in kind--namely, that God truly is and that God is so truly that God cannot be thought not to be. In the first case, Anselm shows that God's being is such that God's being both in the understanding and in fact follows from our understanding of what we believe God to be: Anselm cannot understand what he believes without understanding that God is. In the second case, Anselm shows that God's being is such that God cannot even be thought not to be. If Barth were right, it would have made sense for Anselm to have distinguished the two senses of "being" by using two different words. And it cannot be argued that Anselm had no such words, for Barth himself points out that Anselm uses "existere" at the end of Chapter 2.

Both indications suggest that when Anselm writes of God's being, what he is interested in is not to show that God is, but to understand in what manner--that is, how very truly--God is. Anselm argues that God, and God alone, truly is. Gregory Schufreider's recent book confirms this claim. This may not appear to be so right away, because Schufreider generally speaks of God's existence rather than of God's

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<sup>14</sup> See Barth, 132.

being. He nonetheless insists that it is not the fact that God exists but the unique manner in which God exists that is at issue for Anselm, and does so by showing how the question is rooted in arguments Anselm makes in the Monologion.<sup>15</sup>

It is important to keep in mind, however, that this does not say much about what it means to say that God truly is. All that is certain at this point is that it means that there is no sense in which God is not. The non-being of God has no place in the understanding, no place in fact, and no place in thought. All I have claimed thus far is that Anselm's two analyses are not so much proofs that God exists--polemical or otherwise--but rather explorations of the character of God's being.

In order now to see more of what it means to say that God truly is we need to ask why Anselm argues that God truly is. It is necessary to ask what role such an argument could have in the Proslogion. We can begin by focussing on two aspects of Anselm's work: on the fact that the analyses concerning God's being are just two of several analyses that Anselm undertakes and on Anselm's use of the verb "to understand". I will argue that the analyses begin to make sense when seen in the context of a larger effort to see all of his beliefs concerning what he calls "divine substance" (divina substantia) and to see them as a whole.

That the whole range of analyses in the Proslogion

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<sup>15</sup> Schufreider, 113-177.

concerns more that just the existence of God can not be denied--even by those who take the two first analyses as arguments for the existence of God, and even if they understand each of the others as aimed at proving some other particular claim. No matter how fiercely anyone insists that the first two chapters aim only to show that God exists, he or she must still admit that the Proslogion includes, in addition to these, other analyses directed at rather different claims. Through the first half of the book, Anselm sets out a series of analyses that address various beliefs that he holds. After the chapters concerning God's being, he turns to other aspects of what he believes. He argues that God is "whatever it is better to be than not to be," that God is the creator who, as the only one of all things that exists "through itself" (existens per seipsum), made all other things from nothing. And he goes on to treat of God's sensitivity, incorporeality, omnipotence, mercy, impassiveness, justice, and of God's relationship to all these qualities. It is important to consider how these various analyses work together. Their breadth reflects Anselm's most general statement of what the Proslogion is about. In the first paragraph of the preface, he writes:

I began to seek with myself, whether perhaps one argument could be found that would need none other than itself alone to test itself and alone would suffice to affirm that God truly is and is the highest good, needing none other, which all things require in order to be and to be well and whatever we believe concerning divine

substance.<sup>16</sup>

Anselm thus sets himself one task: to affirm (astruendum) a series of beliefs about God, only one of which is that God truly is. It is not clear, however, what he means by "to affirm." This word is a key to understanding what Anselm hopes his argument will enable him to do. I have already pointed out reasons for thinking that the word could not, in the context in which Anselm uses it, mean "to prove." But to say what the word does not mean is not to explain what it does mean. It is not to look at the word directly at all.

It is important to determine first whether the word even admits of any other interpretation. The standard translations suggest that it does not. Deane has "to demonstrate"<sup>17</sup> and Charlesworth has "to prove."<sup>18</sup> Even Schufreider uses "to demonstrate."<sup>19</sup> I will consider the word at some length because it is at the core of the lines I have just cited, which are the only explanation Anselm gives in the Proslogion of the analyses the book includes. To figure out

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<sup>16</sup> Anselm, 93: "...coepi mecum quaerere, si forte posset inveniri unum argumentum, quod nullo alio ad se probandum quam se solo indigeret, et solum ad astruendum quia Deus vere est, et quia est summum bonum nullo alio indigens, et quo omnia indigent ut sint et ut bene sint, et quaecumque de divina credimus substantia, sufficeret."

<sup>17</sup> Deane, 1.

<sup>18</sup> Charlesworth, 103.

<sup>19</sup> Schufreider, 313.

what the word means, I will look first at the word in general and then at Anselm's use of it.

"Astruendum" is the gerund of "astruere." Anselm uses forms of the verb rarely, only five times in all his works.<sup>20</sup> The word is built by adding the preposition "ad-" to the verb, "struo," whose primary meaning is "to set," "to arrange," or "to construct." This word survives in our word "structure." In classical Latin, "astruo" meant "to build," "to heap or pile on," "to add," or "to provide." The Oxford Latin Dictionary mentions no uses that could be described as cognitive.<sup>21</sup> In classical Latin, "astruo" did not mean anything like "to demonstrate" or "to prove."

That dictionary's immediate predecessor, the one by Lewis and Short, confirms this conclusion. At the same time, it recognizes that cognitive uses of the verb exist nonetheless. At the end of the entry for the word, the compilers note that the "signification affirmare...is found in no Latin author."<sup>22</sup> They add that what appears to be an instance of that usage in Pliny is probably a bad reading. The even older dictionary by Forcellini also refers specifically to the questionable passage in Pliny. Forcellini too points

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<sup>20</sup> A Concordance of the Works of St. Anselm, ed. G.R. Evans, (Millwood, NY: Kraus International Publications, 1984), s.v. "astru-."

<sup>21</sup> Oxford Latin Dictionary, 1st comb. ed. (1982), s.v. "astruo."

<sup>22</sup> Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, A Latin Dictionary, (1975) s.v. "astruo."

out that others read the passage differently.<sup>23</sup>

But whether or not the classical word was given a cognitive sense accidentally, through a bad reading of Pliny, or by deliberate use of a metaphor, medieval authors did use it that way. By referring to the misreading of Pliny, the classical dictionaries suggest that the word came to be a synonym for "affirmare," which means "to support," "to confirm," or "to assert." One sense of the word that a French dictionary of the Latin used by Christian authors lists is "to prove," and it refers specifically to the construction of an argument. At the same time, it also suggests "to guarantee" and "to affirm."<sup>24</sup> My task is to try to determine just what Anselm means.

Augustine uses the word in an interesting passage in his Confessions. In Book 4, Chapter 15, he writes, "and I defined and distinguished as fair, what is so, absolutely of itself; and fit, which becomes graceful when applied to some other thing: and confirmed (astruebam) my argument by corporeal examples."<sup>25</sup> Here, just as Watts suggests with his translation, Augustine does not seem to mean that he demon-

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<sup>23</sup> Egidio Forcellini, Totius Latinitatis Lexicon, 1st German ed. (1833), s.v. "astruo."

<sup>24</sup> Dictionnaire Latin-Français des auteurs chrétiens, (1954), s.v. "adstruere."

<sup>25</sup> Augustine, Confessions, ed. W. H. D. Rouse and trans. William Watts, (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), 190-1: "et pulchrum, quod per se ipsum, aptum autem, quod ad aliquid adcommodatum deceret, definiebam et distinguebam et exemplis corporeis adstruebam."



strates or proves his definitions with examples. "Adstruebam" means "I added on to" or, perhaps better, "I supported." Augustine has definitions. He builds them up, or adds to them, by adding examples that confirm them. Augustine is very far from using the word the way that we use "to prove." He does not refer to any argument.

But let me turn to Anselm. A survey of the four instances other than the one in the Proslogion in which Anselm uses the word suggests that he himself means something like "to add together," "to build up," or "to affirm." Though the word could mean "to prove," that is not necessarily what it means. The word occurs, in various forms, twice in de Grammatico and twice in Cur Deus Homo.

De Grammatico is a dialogue between a teacher and a student. In it, the word occurs close to the beginning and very near the end. In the first instance, the teacher is explaining an argument that he makes by process of elimination. There are two alternatives, and one of them must be true. He says: "whatever is able to build up (ad astruendam) one part, destroys the other, and whatever weakens one, strengthens the other."<sup>26</sup> Here, Anselm shows that he thinks of "astruere" as a synonym for "roborare," which means "to strengthen" or "make strong." This makes perfect sense if the word means "to prove," but also if it means "to build

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<sup>26</sup> Anselm, 146: "quidquid valet ad astruendam unam partem, destruit alteram, et quidquid unam debilitat, alteram roborat."

up" or "affirm."

Towards the end of the book, the teacher warns the student against stubborn adherence to the conclusions that they have come to together, "I do not want you so to cling to these things that we have said that you hold on to them stubbornly although someone be able to destroy them with stronger arguments and build up (astruere) different things."<sup>27</sup> Here too, Anselm uses the word to express the possibility that someone might come along and, having used arguments to destroy what he himself and his student hold, goes on to build up, or construct, by whatever means, an account different from the one he has developed with his student. The construction of such an account might include proof, but it might not.

Cur Deus Homo is also a dialogue. At one point, Anselm asks his young friend Boso, "How should he be answered who asserts (astruit) that what is necessary is impossible because he does not know how it could be?"<sup>28</sup> At another point, later in the book, Anselm is discussing the necessity according to which one can say that "the heavens revolve by necessity because they revolve." He explains that this is

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 168: "nolo te sic iis quae diximus inhaerere, ut ea pertinaciter teneas, si quis valioribus argumentis haec destruere et diversa astruere."

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., v.II, 95: "Quid respondendum est illi qui idcirco astruit esse impossibile quod necesse est esse, quia noscit quomodo sit?"

the necessity that "seems to destroy any alternative and to affirm (astruere) that all things are by necessity."<sup>29</sup>

In the latter of these two cases, "astruere" seems to mean something like "affirm" or "confirm," and if arguments can carry the force of necessity, then this instance may bear on what it means for an argument to be sought that will "affirm" what we believe. But in the former case, the word is used somewhat differently. The word could mean "to affirm" or "strengthen," but only in the sense that one could be strengthened in a belief by one's own failure to imagine any alternative to it. Here, the word seems to mean more nearly "to assert."

In general, then, "astruere" may have the sense of building up claims, of affirmation, or of assertion. This can involve an appeal to an argument, as the second example from de Grammatico suggests, but this example does not explain the relationship between the argument, on the one hand, and the claim the argument concerns, on the other. And just this question is crucial. The other example from that book and the second example from Cur Deus Homo are even more ambiguous; in neither case is it clear whether arguments or proof have a role in affirming or showing at all. Finally, the first example from Cur Deus Homo seems quite different. There, the affirmation that the word points to is that of

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 125: "videtur utrumlibet destruere et omnia esse ex necessitate astruere."

someone who lacks an argument, someone who asserts because he or she cannot conceive of an alternative. Even in the one instance, then, that seems most clearly to involve an argument, the second example from de Grammatico, the only role that is certainly given to argument is the one opposed to affirmation. Anselm speaks of the possibility that someone could come along and destroy the things that he and his student have said with stronger arguments than those they have used. He or she would then be able to build up a different account. But it is not certain whether Anselm means that this person would build with arguments, or use arguments only to destroy positions that prevent the affirmation of whatever he or she wants to affirm.

These four occurrences of the word thus suggest that though the word might mean "to prove," it is not certain that it does. The instance in which Anselm most explicitly connects affirmation to argument, however, is the one in the Proslogion. Thus the only way to determine just in what sense his "single argument" is supposed to build up what Anselm intends it to build is to observe the role of the argument within the work.

Let me briefly review where my interpretation now stands. I began with Anselm's own description of the role of his argument. I did this by considering one crucial word of that description, the verb "astruere." I showed that the word can mean "to prove," but, also by looking at Anselm's

various uses of the word that this is not certainly how he understands it. Anselm's use covers a range of meanings: "to affirm," "to build up," and "to assert." To consider such evidence, however, does no more than open the way to the central question: namely, what does the word mean when Anselm uses it in the Proslogion?

Nothing less than a reading of the work as a whole can tell, and it is worth noting that at least three standard translations are quite different from the English ones we already saw. Schmitt writes that Anselm sought an argument "that would alone suffice to support that God exists in truth."<sup>30</sup> According to Stolz, Anselm sought to find an argument sufficient "in order to show that God in truth has being."<sup>31</sup> Stolz's word, "dartun," is ambiguous. It can mean "demonstrate," but it can also mean merely "show" or "present." According to Alexandre Koyré, Anselm writes that he sought an argument that would suffice "pour démontrer."<sup>32</sup> The French word, like Stolz's German word, is ambiguous. It could mean "to prove," but it could also mean "to point out."

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<sup>30</sup> Anselm, Proslogion, 2d ed., text and trans. Franciscus Schmitt, (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1984), 69: "...das allein hinreichte, um zu stützen, daß Gott in Wahrheit existiert..."

<sup>31</sup> Stolz, 47: "um darzutun, daß Gott im Wahrheit Sein hat..."

<sup>32</sup> Sainte Anselm, Sur L'Existence de Dieu, ed. and trans. Alexandre Koyré, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1992), 3.

We can begin to consider the word as it occurs in the Proslogion by noticing that it has not one, but rather a series of direct objects. Anselm seeks one argument sufficient to show, "that God truly is and is the highest good, needing none other, which all things require in order to be and to be well and whatever we believe concerning divine substance."<sup>33</sup> The verb thus has three objects: the first, that God truly is; the second, that God is the highest good, needing none other, which all things need both to be and to be well; and the third, whatever we believe concerning divine substance. This third, however, does not so much point to any belief in particular, as it indicates that there is more at stake than two claims about divine substance: it makes it clear that Anselm hopes that his one argument will address all that he believes concerning divine substance, that it will address what he believes as a whole.

For now, let us consider just the first two objects. One way to see what Anselm means here is to ask why he seeks one argument to show, to affirm, or to build up these beliefs. Anselm himself invites special attention to this question by reporting that it was the fact that the Monologion was "woven together by the interconnection of many arguments"<sup>34</sup> that moved him to write the Proslogion in the first place.

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<sup>33</sup> see note 8, p.52.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 93: "...multorum concatenatione contextum argumentorum..."

Why, then, does he seek one argument?

A return to Anselm's description of the persona in which the book is written suggests a possible answer. Anselm says that he writes:

in the person of one trying to lift up his mind to the contemplation of God and seeking to understand what he believes.<sup>35</sup>

It is the second aspect of the task he describes that is interesting here: Anselm writes as one seeking to understand what he believes. To do so he must learn to see all that he believes and see it all as one. This is because his beliefs are many--that God truly is, that God is the highest good, etc.--and because, for Anselm, "to understand" is to see a whole at once. He confesses in Chapter 18 that the qualities that God is "are many," and he adds, "My narrow understanding cannot see so many with one simultaneous insight, in order that it might simultaneously be delighted by all."<sup>36</sup> Perhaps, then, Anselm seeks to affirm all his beliefs about God with one argument because he seeks to understand whatever he believes about God and because to do so is to see those beliefs as a single whole.

The question is, then, how each of the arguments he makes--or, more precisely, each of the analyses of his one

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 93-4: "sub persona conantis erigere mentem suam ad contemplandum Deum et quaerentis intelligere quod credit."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 114: "Multa sunt haec, non potest angustus intellectus meus tot uno simul intuitu videre, ut omnibus simul delectetur."

argument--contributes to an effort to understand, or see, God as a whole. I have already argued that the main force of the arguments concerning the being of God is to set God apart, to show that God's being is unique. I will now argue that the next arguments in the book fit the same pattern. For though they concern a wide range of divine qualities, they all aim to identify God as "the highest good, needing none other, that all things need both to be and to be well."

After Anselm has affirmed that God truly is, he seems to turn rather to the third thing he proposes to affirm rather than directly to the second. The chapters that follow the discussion of God's being deal with a range of beliefs that Anselm holds about God, and his most emphatic identification of God as the highest good will wait until the second half of the Proslogion. It appears that Anselm turns first to affirming "whatever we believe about divine substance." But this appearance deceives. The various analyses in Chapters 6 through 11 only aim to explain how God can be whatever it is better to be than not to be, and Chapters 12 and 13 link this with the claim that God is the source of all good. These analyses, then, indeed affirm that God is "the highest good, needing none other, which all things need in order to be and be well."

Let us go through these chapters in some detail. The discussion of attributes begins in Chapter 5. There Anselm makes two arguments: that God is the creator and that God is



whatever it is better to be than not to be. The first serves, as the arguments concerning God's being do, to distinguish God from all else that is. The second opens the fuller analysis of divine attributes that follows.

Chapter 4 had been a slight departure from the progress of the argument. After having argued, in Chapter 3, that God cannot even be thought not to be, Anselm explains in the fourth chapter the one sense in which one could think, or say in one's heart, that God is not. He explains that, in one sense, "to think" means to think the word (vox) that signifies a thing. Here, "to think" means nothing more than to pronounce to oneself. In this limited sense of the word, anything can be thought to be or not to be: one need only say the words. Anselm points out that to think, in this sense, that God is not requires only that one say the words, "either without any [meaning] or with some foreign meaning."<sup>37</sup>

Anselm then starts Chapter 5 with a question: "What, then, are You, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought?"<sup>38</sup> He answers first with an argument. He argues for a precise version of a claim that he has already made: that God is the creator. Earlier, he had appealed to what must have been for him a fact--that God is the creator--in the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 104: "...aut sine ulla aut cum aliqua extranea significatione..."

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 104: "Quid igitur es, Domine Deus, quo nil maius valet cogitari?"

course of his identification of God as the being that cannot be thought not to be. That was in Chapter 3, where he pointed out that if God were not the being that is so truly that it cannot be thought not to be, then "the creature would ascend above the creator."<sup>39</sup> Here, he deduces that God is the creator with the same argument he used in order to show that God truly is.<sup>40</sup> He writes:

But what are You unless [You are] that which is the highest of all things, which alone [of all things] exists through itself, and made all others from nothing? For whatever is not this is less than could be thought. But this cannot be thought concerning You.<sup>41</sup>

Anselm emphasizes God's unique character in two ways: by saying that God is the only thing that exists through itself and by saying that God made all other things from nothing. Anything less would be less than can be thought.

But Anselm goes on: if God is the highest of all, which created all, then God must be whatever it is better to be than not to be. For with respect to any given good, Anselm can ask whether it could be absent from God. He can conclude that it could not by appealing to the same argument that he has just used: that God would then be less than can be

<sup>39</sup> See note 63.

<sup>40</sup> The fact that he appeals to the purported fact before he makes the argument only underscores that there can be no question of Anselm's wanting to prove, in a polemical sense, that God is the creator.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 104: "Sed quid es, nisi id quod summum omnium solum existens per seipsum, omnia alia fecit de nihilo? Quidquid enim hoc non est, minus est quam cogitari possit. Sed hoc de te cogitari non potest."

thought. In fact, he asks, "What good is then absent from the highest good, through which every good is?"<sup>42</sup> He answers with a list of the goods that God is, a list that introduces the analyses of particular goods that will follow, and he completes the list by concluding that God is "whatever it is better to be than not to be."<sup>43</sup>

This is the second indication that the series of analyses that flow out of Anselm's one argument are parts of Anselm's effort to see all that he believes about divine substance and see it all in one gaze. The first was that Anselm aims at a whole: the third object of astruendum is "whatever we believe." The second is that Anselm summarizes his list of divine attributes by saying that God is "whatever it is better to be than not to be." But it is worth also looking more closely at the arguments that Anselm makes about particular attributes in order to see whether these arguments also point towards a whole.

The analysis of particular goods takes the form of a series of reflections on pairs of qualities that seem mutually exclusive, or contradictory. Anselm asks how God could be sensitive though not a body (Chapter 6), omnipotent though unable to do many things (Chapter 7), and merciful though impassive (Chapter 8). It will be necessary to return

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 104: "Quod ergo bonum deest summo bono, per quod est omne bonum."

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 104: "quidquid melius est esse quam non esse."

to the third of these later, but for now I will only point out that in each case Anselm resolves the difficulty by explaining that it depends on human misunderstanding. God can be said to be sensible, but only in the sense that God knows, in a divine way, what a creature that sees or hears knows by hearing or sight. Though omnipotent, God can be said to be unable to do many things, because sometimes we say "unable" when we should, more properly, say "able": God is, for example, unable to do evil, but this "inability" is really a power--a power to avoid doing evil. God can be said to be merciful, even though impassive, because God's presence is a consolation to one in pain, even if God does not feel pain. In each case, qualities like sensible, incapable, and merciful have special meanings when they refer to God.

Anselm then spends three chapters reflecting upon apparent contradictions between God's justice and God's mercy, or goodness. The problem for Anselm is to understand how it is fitting for God both to punish those who are evil and to forgive them. Generally speaking, he finds each alternative easy enough to explain by itself by pointing to the appropriate sense of justice:

How, then, is it just that You punish those who are evil and just that You pardon those who are evil? Do You justly, in one sense, punish those who are evil and justly, in another sense, pardon them? For when You punish those who are evil, it is just because it agrees with their merits; when, however, You pardon them, it is just not because it befits their merits, but because it

befits Your goodness.<sup>44</sup>

From all this he concludes that justice simply means what God wishes: "For that alone which You wish is just, and what You do not wish is not just." But he cannot explain why any particular case should have one result rather than another. He continues:

Thus Your mercy is born of Your justice, because it is just that You be so good that You are good in pardoning. And this is perhaps why the highest justice can wish good things for those who are evil. But if it is somehow possible to grasp why You can wish to save those who are evil, surely no reason can comprehend why, of similar evil [people], You save some rather than others through highest goodness and condemn some rather than others through highest justice.<sup>45</sup>

The result of this analysis, then, is Anselm's admission that he cannot understand the individual instances of God's justice. Even if he can explain how any given instance of God's judgment exemplifies justice, he cannot explain why it should exemplify justice in one way rather than in another.

At the end he returns to the claim that the four analy-

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 108-9: "Quomodo ergo et iustum est ut malos punias, et iustum ut malis parcas?"

"An alio modo iuste punis malos, et alio modo iuste parcis malis? Cum enim punis malos, iustum est, quia illorum meritis convenit; cum vero parcis malis, iustum est, non quia illorum meritis, sed quia bonitati tuae condecens est."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 109: "Nam id solum iustum est quod vis, et non iustum quod non vis."

"Sic ergo nascitur iustitia tua misericordia tua, quia iustum est te sic esse bonum, ut et parcendo sis bonus. Et hoc est forsitan, cur summe iustus potest velle bona malis. Sed si utcumque capi potest, cur malos potest velle salvare: illud certe nulla ratione comprehendi potest, cur de similibus malis hos magis salves quam illos per summam bonitatem, et illos magis damnes quam istos per summam iustitiam."

ses began with, that God is whatever it is better to be than not to be. He summarizes, "Thus therefore truly You are sensible, omnipotent, merciful and impassive, in some sense living, knowing, good, blessed, eternal and whatever it is better to be than not to be."<sup>46</sup> The first words here show that this is a summary, and, so, that all the analyses since Anselm first made the claim that God is whatever it is better to be than not to be are only efforts to explain the claim. This claim needs explanation, because one could think that some good qualities would conflict with others. Anselm faces what appear to be particular instances of conflict, and works each apparent conflict out.

The chapter that follows, the twelfth, connects this claim--that God is whatever it is better to be than not to be--with the earlier claim that God is the highest good, needing none other, and thus with the claims about God's being. This might not be immediately obvious. It is the shortest chapter in the Proslogion, and in it Anselm draws a single conclusion: God does not have attributes, but is attributes:

But surely whatever You are, You are through nothing other than Yourself. You are, thus, the very life by which You live, and the knowledge by which You know, and the very goodness by which You are good to good and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 110: "Sic ergo vere es sensibilis, omnipotens, misericors et impassibilis, quemadmodum vivens, sapiens, bonus, beatus, aeternus, et quidquid melius est esse quam non esse."

evil; and thus [also] concerning similar cases.<sup>47</sup>

To see the connection between this argument and the claim that God is the highest good, one need only recall the form of the latter in Chapter 5. There, Anselm said that God is "the highest of all things," and specified that by adding "the one who, alone [of all things] existing through itself, made all things from nothing." It is the middle of this claim that is interesting now--namely, that God, alone of all things, exists per se--because to make this claim is to say that God is the being through which God is. Put in this form the claim is exactly parallel to the claims that God is the life by which God lives, the knowledge by which God knows, and the goodness by which God is good. Even if Anselm uses the preposition "per" with the accusative in one case (existens per se), and uses a relative pronoun in the ablative in the others (for example: ipsa vita qua vivis), it is clear enough that this difference is merely verbal. After all, Anselm he introduces the series of ablatives as explanations of a point he makes with the other construction: "whatever You are, You are through nothing other than Yourself" (non per aliud quam per teipsum).

What Anselm says about goodness is of special interest. What does it mean to say that God is the goodness by which

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 110: "Sed certe quidquid es, non per aliud quam per teipsum. Tu es igitur ipsa vita qua vivis, et sapientia qua sapis, et bonitas ipsa qua bonis et malis bonus es; et ita de similibus."

God is good except to say that God is the one good that is good through itself--that God is, simply, the good itself? It is a small step to the belief that Anselm says, in the preface, he wants to affirm: that God is the highest good, needing none other. To see the rigor of the step one need only notice that, if one were to respond to Anselm by arguing that to say that God is the goodness through which God is good is not quite to identify God as the highest good, he can answer with the argument he knows so well: if God is less than the highest good, then, if a highest good can be thought to be, God is not that than which none greater can be thought.

Now, one might still argue that Anselm has fallen short of affirming what he sought to affirm, since he has not yet argued that God is the good that all other goods need. But it should be remembered that even as early as Chapter 5, when Anselm argues that God is the only being that exists per se, he adds that God must also, as the only being who exists per se, have created all other things from nothing. He writes, "Whatever is not this is less than could be thought."<sup>48</sup> When Anselm goes on in Chapter 12 to say to God, "You are the very goodness by which You are good to good and evil," that God is, and does not merely possess, each of God's qualities, this only specifies the general claim that

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 104: "Quidquid enim hoc non est, minus est quam cogitari possit."



God made all things from nothing. What is at least implicit in the series of claims in Chapter 12 is that, as the very life, for example, by which God lives, God is also the life by which all others live. And so for each of the qualities Anselm mentions: God is the knowledge by which God and all others know and the goodness by which God and all others are good.

There are also two hints later in the book that this is what Anselm means. In the first place, the very next chapter, the thirteenth, concerns the relationship between God and other eternal spirits. Anselm brings this question up because the existence of unlimited and eternal spirits might appear to argue that God is not the source of being, life, and goodness for all things. One might think that if a soul, for example, is eternal then it cannot have a limit to its being, and, so, cannot have been created by God. One might think that anything eternal must, somehow, be its own source. But Anselm insists that such spirits are eternal only compared with bodies. They are, as "created spirits, limited compared to" God.<sup>49</sup>

In the second place, Anselm laments in Chapter 17 that he is unable to perceive the aspect of God's beauty proper to any of his five senses. I will come back to this, but let me note already that he concludes by explaining, "You have

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 110: "An creatus ad te collatus est circumscriptus, ad corpus vero incircumscriptus?"

these [beauties] in You in Your ineffable way, [You] who gave them to the things created by You [so that they might have them] in their sensible way."<sup>50</sup> What is decisive here is that, for Anselm, God's being certain qualities is intimately connected with God's giving these qualities to creatures. That God is the goodness by which God is good thus implies, especially in the context of the claim that God is the only being that exists per se, that God is also the goodness by which creatures are good.

But to see this is to complete the claim that, after having affirmed that God truly is, Anselm goes on in the next chapters to affirm that God is "the highest good, needing none other, that all things need both to be and to be well." It shows, in other words, more of what Anselm intends to build up, or affirm, even if it does not show what this building up or affirming is.

Let us now, however, come back to the attempt to answer this question. The word "astruere" has, as we've seen, a range of meanings. It could mean, though not in this case, to prove with an argument. It could mean, though again not in this case, to support with appeals to empirical examples. It could also mean, though not in this case, to refer to passages in the Bible or the church fathers. It is still not clear what Anselm means by the word. I have shown, however,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 113: "Habes enim haec, Domine Deus, in tuo ineffabili modo, qui ea dedisti rebus a te creatis suo sensibili modo."

that he uses his one argument to do something--whether to affirm, to build up, or to prove--with or to a series of claims, and also that whatever it is that he does, he does in the person of one trying to understand what he believes. I have also shown that "to understand" means to see a whole at once. Perhaps his desire for a single argument is nothing but the natural consequence of what understanding means to him. Perhaps he seeks his one argument in order to see his various beliefs about God in their connectedness, as a single whole--that is to understand them.

Even this supposition, though, fails to specify completely what Anselm means by "astruere." It does, however, suggest two alternatives. On the one hand, the verb could have a nearly literal sense: it could mean "build up" in the sense that Anselm uses his one argument to build various beliefs into a single whole much in the way a mason builds up one house out of many bricks. Each belief is one brick, and every time Anselm shows that his one argument affirms it he adds that belief to the whole that he can see at a glance.

But this simple account has at least three problems. First, it runs slightly against the other occurrences of the verb: in each case in which astruere involves an argument, the argument seems to add to a belief rather than to connect several beliefs. Second, it leaves the relationship between the argument that builds and the beliefs that are its bricks

undetermined: does the argument prove the belief, does it illuminate it, or is something else at work? Third, it suggests that there is some complex structure, built by the analysis of the argument, that one is supposed to be able to see at one gaze.

On the other hand, we could use my characterization of the analyses that concern the being of God in order to understand the word "astruere." Those analyses make the most sense understood as explorations, beginning with a sense of God's presence, that show how Anselm's one argument, as an expression of that sense, displays that God is in the very manner in which Anselm believes God to be. This is not to say that Anselm sets out to "prove" that God is in just that manner if this would be to suggest that Anselm sets out to establish his belief as true--as though it were a controversial claim. Anselm aims rather to show how a belief that he already has is connected to his one argument, how his one argument affirms, or agrees with, this belief.

If this account characterizes the relationship, in each case, between the argument and the various beliefs that Anselm holds even without the argument, then the role of Anselm's argument is to express the experience of God's presence in a manner that allows him to see everything he holds about divine substance in one gaze, not by building those beliefs into one structure, but by seeing how one way of expressing God's presence, one short argument, touches

them all.

The decisive moments of the first part of the Proslogion are thus the affirmations that I have pointed to. In each case, Anselm shows how he can see, in his experience of God's presence, some belief that he holds about divine substance. He does so by showing how the belief is affirmed by the argument that expresses God's presence. This is to say: Anselm begins with an experience of God's presence; he expresses the "object" of that experience when he says that God is "that than which a greater cannot be thought"; by analyzing this "one argument" he shows how his particular beliefs about God each are affirmed by it. He does not establish that these beliefs are true. He does not weave his beliefs together, or assemble them into a whole. He shows that one way of expressing what he experiences when he experiences the presence of God affirms whatever he believes about God. By doing so he seeks to see all that he believes concerning God at once, and this is what it means to seek to understand.

But this account still leaves serious problems. It only explains one half of the Proslogion. I will argue that it could not serve as an account of the book as a whole. In fact, what Anselm goes on to say seems to undermine this account: he will discover that he has not found God, that his argument has not enabled him to understand, because what God is cannot be expressed in an argument, cannot be thought

at all. I will now have to turn to these difficulties.

## CHAPTER 5

### Reasoning, Celebration, and Prayer

My effort to understand the role that Anselm's argument plays within the Proslogion has thus far been a process of elimination. I began by assuming that the second and third chapters are Anselm's polemical attempt to establish that God exists. Two sorts of considerations weighed against this assumption.

On one hand, Anselm's argument fails if understood in this way. An analysis of the case made for the ontological argument by Malcolm and Plantinga suggests that it depends on a controversial assumption that God is possible. Malcolm and Plantinga show that the argument can prove that if God is possible, then God must be, and each describes reasons for a presumption that God is possible. Neither man, however, understands himself to have established anything beyond a presumption, and Plantinga claims no more than that some people could have reason to assume that God can be. For these authors, this may be enough. They aim to show no more that the belief in God is not irrational, and therefore need only point out, as Malcolm does, that to expect a general

proof that God is possible is to expect too much.<sup>1</sup> But even if we were to assume that Anselm's intent is polemical, it would be hard to believe that the intent of his polemics was to show that his faith is not irrational. If his intent was polemical at all, it would make more sense to assume that he sought to prove that God exists.

On the other hand, there is evidence in Anselm's text that this was not his aim. His designs were different from those of the various thinkers who have tried to turn his argument into a proof. I noted first that Anselm begins his argument by affirming God's presence; next, that his interlocutor is not so much an atheist as a foolish and willful aspect of himself; and then, that his argument treats not of the fact of God's existence but of the manner of God's being.

My second account still assumed, despite this third point, that Anselm's argument is an attempt to prove the existence of God, but it also took seriously the fact that Anselm begins his argument from an experience of God's presence. It took the argument to be an argument from experience for the existence of God, and thus solved the main challenge to the rigor of the ontological argument. If, after all, the argument begins with an experience that God is present, it is no longer controversial to assume that God is possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Malcolm, 157.



This account, however, raised another problem. It forced us to ask what the function of such an argument could be. This is to ask what an argument for God's existence that is from experience could mean. A more careful look at the words that Anselm uses, together with a consideration of the range of analyses of which the ones concerning God's existence are just a part, pointed towards an answer: Anselm's argument is his attempt to understand all that he believes about divine substance--about the unique manner of its being and about all the qualities that it is. He uses his argument in an attempt to see all his beliefs as a whole, and to see them at a glance. As Anselm says, in words he finds in the Bible, his argument is an attempt to see God's face.

This conclusion is not original. It is closely related to the interpretation of the book suggested by Anselm Stolz. I have already discussed one part of his position--his understanding of "vere esse"--but I should also describe his view of the whole. Stolz concludes that the book is Anselm's search for a mystical experience of God. Anselm would like, he writes, "to be led, through the reflection on God and his qualities, to the mystical experience of God."<sup>2</sup> My interpretation so far has suggested that Stolz may be right. It is important to recognize, however, that such a conclusion does

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<sup>2</sup> Stolz, 18: "Außerdem will Anselm, wie vor allem aus Kap. 17 ersichtlich ist, durch das Nachsinnen über Gott und seine Eigenschaften zur mystischen Gotteserfahrung geführt werden."

not, by itself, take us very far. Stolz's interpretation is based on his conviction that Anselm belongs in a particular religious tradition, rooted in the writings of Augustine and Gregory the Great.<sup>3</sup> There is nothing wrong with such an approach, and nothing false about the conclusions it leads to, but it does not answer the question as to the role Anselm's argument and his analyses of that argument play within his search--even if it does tell us what that search is a search for.

Thus, though I insist that Anselm's work begins from an experience of God, and agree that Anselm also seeks an experience of God, I must still determine how his argument serves that end. When I concluded that Anselm's argument might be a means of searching for a vision of God, I immediately suggested that this account would have problems of its own. On one hand, it is hard to believe that Anselm expects his argument to bring him to a vision of God. On the other, the account at best explains only the first half of the book. In the middle of the book, Anselm shows that he does not believe that his argument has given him or can give him what he seeks. Let us now consider how Anselm faces the limits of the analytical thinking, the reasoning, he employs through Chapter 13.

At the beginning of Chapter 14, Anselm asks himself a striking question:

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

But have you, my soul, found what you were seeking? You were seeking God, and you found Him to be a certain highest of all, than which nothing better can be thought, and this to be life itself, light, wisdom, goodness, eternal blessedness and blessed eternity, and this to be everywhere and always. If you have not found your God, how is He what you have found and what you have understood Him to be with such certain truth and such true certainty?

If, however, you have found [God], why is it that you do not feel what you have found?<sup>4</sup>

And he then turns the question towards God, "Why does my soul not feel You, Lord God, if it has found You?"<sup>5</sup>

Anselm has discovered himself to be in a quandary. He is confident that his analyses thus far are correct--he says that they are true and certain--but he does not feel their object. He is certain that he has understood various things about God, certain that he has found God, but he realizes that he does not feel the God he has found. This is particularly strange because we found that Anselm begins from a sense--we might say a feeling--of God's presence. In light of his beginning, how does Anselm arrive at a moment at which he questions whether he has found God?

Let us consider first how Anselm arrives at this dilem-

<sup>4</sup> Anselm, 111: "An invenisti, anima mea, quod quaerebas? Quaerebas Deum, et invenisti eum esse quiddam summum omnium, quo nihil melius cogitari potest; et hoc esse ipsam vitam, lucem, sapientiam, bonitatem, aeternam beatitudinem et beatam aeternitatem; et hoc esse ubique et semper. Nam si non invenisti Deum tuum: quomodo est ille hoc quod invenisti, et quod illum tam certa veritate et vera certitudine intellixisti?"

Si vero invenisti: quid est, quod non sentis quod invenisti?"

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.: "Cur non te sentit, Domine Deus, anima mea, si invenit te?"

ma, and then where the dilemma leaves him. We will then be in a position to see the direction that the dilemma gives the remainder of his book and what this direction implies for the attempt to understand the role of his argument in the work as a whole. First, however, I will argue that the dilemma arises for Anselm because the conclusions he comes to in his discussion of God's qualities force him to ask himself whether he has found God. I will then argue that, in response to this self-questioning, Anselm's argument takes on a critical force. It becomes, in part, an argument about the limit of his reasoning. Finally, I will show how this realization leads Anselm to employ thinking in other ways.

First, then, let me describe how Anselm arrives at his dilemma. The question he asks his soul--whether it has found what it was searching for--may seem sudden, but it has been prepared by the discussion of divine attributes that precedes it. Through the analyses in Chapters 6, 7, and 8, a recognition emerges that God does not appear to Anselm as God is in se. In Chapter 6, Anselm explains how God could be sensible though incorporeal, and in Chapter 7, how God could be omnipotent though incapable of many things. In each case, Anselm's explanation hinges on the recognition that words must be used with special care when they describe God. He argues that God can be said to be sensible, because although God does not perceive through the five senses, to sense is

"nothing but to come to know,"<sup>6</sup> and what we know by means of the senses God knows by the means that are God's. He argues that God can be said to be unable to do many things, because what we mean by God's inability is an inability to do wrong, which is, more precisely, not a limit but a strength.

Anselm takes this line of discovery a step farther in Chapter 8. It is not merely that words have special meanings when one tries to talk about God. One's sense of God, the sense one can strive to express in words, is distinct from what God is. The distinction becomes an issue as Anselm tries to explain how it is that God could be merciful and impassive. He insists that since God is impassive, God could not be merciful, "For if You are impassive, You feel no compassion; if You feel no compassion, then Your heart is not wretched out of compassion for the wretched--which is what it means to be merciful."<sup>7</sup> But although God cannot be merciful, one can feel mercy from God. Anselm explains, "You are indeed [merciful] according to our sense, and not according to Yours. For when You look upon us who are wretched, we feel the effect of mercy, but You do not feel the

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 105: "Sed si sentire non nisi cognoscere aut non nisi ad cognoscendum est."

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 106: "Nam si es impassibilis, non compateris; si non compateris, non est tibi miserum cor ex compassione miseri, quod est esse misericordem."

Our word "merciful" loses the force of the argument carried by Anselm's Latin. Anselm's point is that God cannot not feel our suffering, and so that God's heart cannot be wretched (*miserum cor*). But "merciful" (*misericors*) means "wretched heart."

affect."<sup>8</sup> In other words, one's sense of God's presence can serve as consolation even if God does not suffer in se. God is impassive, but seems compassionate. Anselm thus acknowledges a distinction between what God is and how God seems.

It is, then, in a context set by this distinction that Anselm goes on to ask himself whether he has found God. For though his analyses have led him to draw a range of conclusions concerning God, he cannot, in light of this distinction, assume that his conclusions touch upon anything more than how God seems to be. Anselm must ask whether he has come to see, or understand, God, and he begins Chapter 14 with just this question.

As he proceeds to answer the question, he shows no lack of confidence that the analyses he has gone through thus far are correct. We already saw that he describes what he has found as having been found by "certain truth and true certainty." Anselm will reject nothing he has said in the book's first thirteen chapters. With such confidence he can argue that he must have seen God in some sense:

If [my soul] has not found You, whom did it find to be light and truth? For how could it have understood this except by seeing light and truth? Or could it have understood anything at all about You except through Your light and Your truth? If, therefore, it sees light and truth, it sees You. If it does not see You, it sees

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.: "Es quippe secundum nostrum sensum, et non es secundum tuum. Etenim cum tu respicis nos miseros, nos sentimus misericordis effectum, tu non sentis affectum."

neither light nor truth.<sup>9</sup>

Because Anselm believes that God is light and truth, and because he believes that he could only have seen this by seeing light and truth, Anselm concludes that he either must have seen God or not have seen light and truth at all. One might expect him to conclude the latter in the face of his feeling that he has not found God, but instead he finds a middle way. He concludes that his soul has seen something of God, even if it has not seen God as God is, "Or is truth and light what it has seen, and nonetheless it has not seen You, because it has seen You in a sense, but has not seen You just as You are?"<sup>10</sup> In other words, even if Anselm must admit that he can only see God as God seems, he need not conclude, in any simple way, that he has not seen God. For Anselm, to see God as God seems is indeed to see God, but to see God only in a sense.

The chapter continues with Anselm's insistence that his inability to see God must be ascribed both to God's greatness and to his own limitation, and ends with a series of exclamations expressing wonder at God's greatness. Anselm

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 111: "An non invenit, quem invenit esse lucem et veritatem? Quomodo namque intellixit hoc, nisi videndo lucem et veritatem? Aut potuit omnino aliquid intelligere de te, nisi per lucem tuam et veritatem tuam? Si ergo vidit lucem et veritatem, vidit te. Si non vidit te, non vidit lucem nec veritatem."

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.: "An et veritas et lux est quod vidit, et tamen nondum te vidit, quia vidit te aliquatenus, sed non vidit te sicuti es?"

phrases the exclamations as questions about the extent of that greatness, questions that he can answer in one short sentence: God's greatness is "surely more than can be understood by a creature."<sup>11</sup>

This conclusion leads to the most curious chapter in the whole work. In Chapter 15, Anselm shows that God cannot be thought. To do so he uses the same reasoning he has used over and over already:

Therefore, Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are something greater than could be thought. For since something of this kind can be thought to be, if You are not this very thing, something can be thought [that is] greater than You-- which cannot happen.<sup>12</sup>

Few of those who analyze Anselm's argument as an attempt to prove the existence of God take note of this chapter. I pointed to an example of someone who does not when I discussed how Plantinga understands Anselm's claim that something can be thought. Plantinga, we saw, understands it to refer to a state of affairs and to mean that the state of affairs is logically possible. Anselm's Chapter 15 shows

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 112: "Quanta namque est lux illa, de qua micat omne verum, quod rationali menti lucet! Quam ampla est illa veritas, in qua est omne quod verum est et extra quam non nisi nihil et falsum est! Quam immensa est, quae uno intuitu videt, quaecumque facta sunt, et a quo et per quem et quomodo de nihilo facta sunt! Quid puritatis, quid simplicitatis, quid certitudinis et splendoris ibi est! Certè plus quam a creatura valeat intelligi."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.: "Ergo, Domine, non solum es quo maius cogitari nequit, sed es quiddam maius quam cogitari possit. Quoniam namque valet cogitari esse aliquid huiusmodi: si tu non es hoc ipsum, potest cogitari maius te; quod fieri nequit."



that this could not be the case. If it were, one would be forced to understand the argument here as a claim that God is so great as to be logically impossible. Aside from the particular difficulty this interpretation would present for the attempt to understand Anselm's claim that "a being of this kind can be thought to be," such an interpretation seems most unlikely. How likely is it, after all, that Anselm understood himself to have shown in Chapter 15 that God is impossible?

Charlesworth takes slightly more account of the passage. In his commentary on the chapter, he points out that it is important, and summarizes Anselm's claim, "Here, in this important discussion, St. Anselm reminds us that, even if we understand God to be 'that than which nothing greater can be thought,' we do not thereby have a positive or determinate knowledge of God."<sup>13</sup> What Charlesworth does not explain is why the chapter is important: he makes no effort to consider its role in the work as a whole. His commitment to the claim that the early chapters are an attempt to prove God's existence closes him to the rest of the book. He devotes less than a page of commentary to the last eleven chapters, and concludes his few remarks on Chapter 15 by suggesting that Anselm might just as well have left the question in the hands of later, better theoretically equipped minds, "To deal adequately with this whole question St. Anselm would of

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<sup>13</sup> Charlesworth, 81.

course need a theory of analogical predication, such as Aquinas was to develop later."<sup>14</sup>

At least one interpreter, however, has taken careful stock of the passage, and I shall take my direction, if not my conclusion, from him. Jean-Luc Marion discusses this part of Anselm's analysis in the course of showing that Anselm's argument for the existence of God is not ontological.<sup>15</sup> Marion emphasizes the sense in which Chapter 15 demonstrates the inadequacy of the attempt to conceptualize, or think, God. His surprising conclusion makes Anselm out to be something of a proto-Kantian:

If, according to Kant, the word "transcendental" means...never a relation of thought with things, but only with our power [or faculty] of thinking, then we must conclude paradoxically that the argument of Anselm aims at a transcendent but inaccessible item only through the transcendental test of our cogitatio.<sup>16</sup>

Marion adds that such prominent critics of the argument as Kant and Thomas Aquinas miss the point because they fail to see its critical character. He writes of Kant that "it is not the least paradoxical that Kant was the first to miss the point and to criticize Anselm as if he had not been critical--in Kant's very sense--as Kant himself was supposed

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> See also: Adriaan Peperzak, "Anselm's Proslogion and its Hegelian Interpretation," trans. Steven Werlin, The St. John's Review, 42, no. 1 (1993): 59-77.

<sup>16</sup> Jean-Luc Marion, "Is the Ontological Argument Ontological?" Journal of the History of Philosophy 30, no.2 (April 1992): 209.

to be."<sup>17</sup> And even though he writes that Kant was the first to make the mistake, he nonetheless goes on to judge Thomas along similar lines:

The whole burden of the Thomistic refutation rests upon the fact that God is not obviously known by us, ... so that we are deprived of any concept of him; therefore Thomas strongly confirms our interpretation of Anselm's argument.<sup>18</sup>

Marion notes in summary that it is, for Anselm, precisely the impossibility of forming a concept of God that proves that God exists:

Therefore Anselm's argument infers God's existence from the very impossibility of producing any concept of God or His essence, according to a critical and transcendental examination of the limits of our power of thinking.<sup>19</sup>

I disagree with Marion on several levels: I do not think that Anselm's argument is exclusively or even primarily critical, nor that it is an argument for the existence of God. But Marion's point should be well taken, even if it does not take us very far. First of all, it is well worth wondering what a detailed reconstruction of the argument, so conceived, would look like. One way of understanding it would be more Cartesian than Kantian: it might be that Anselm begins with an experience of the presence of God and then deduces that God must exist in fact, and not merely in his own thought, by showing that God could not exist in his

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 213.

own thought. The argument would thus foreshadow the one Descartes makes on the basis of the presence of the idea of the infinite in the finite mind.<sup>20</sup>

But though Marion's point should be well taken, it cannot and should not be taken too far, even if the argument's critical aspect plays an important role in the work as a whole. Anselm does insist in Chapter 15 that God cannot be thought, but this does not mean, as Marion suggests, that he thinks of the impossibility of thinking God as a proof that God exists. In the first place, Anselm draws no such conclusion from Chapter 15. In fact, there is no talk that could be interpreted as though it concerned the existence of God after the first few chapters of the book. In the second place, none of the talk of God's being in the Proslogion, even the analyses of Chapters 2 and 3, is aimed by Anselm at proving that God exists. In the third place, Marion's exclusive emphasis on the critical aspect of the argument in Chapter 15 comes at a price: he does not attend to Anselm's parallel insistence that he also has come to see God.

If, then, Chapter 15 is not, as Marion suggests, the final proof that God exists, I must ask what it is. The first thing to consider is its relation to what precedes it, in Chapter 14 and before, if for no other reason than because this will provide the final evidence for my early

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<sup>20</sup> See: Meditations on the First Philosophy.

claim that "astruere" does not mean "to prove."

The first word of Chapter 15, "therefore" (ergo), marks it as a conclusion that follows on the last words of Chapter 14. Though one should not exaggerate this--"ergo" does not here mean what it would mean in Euclid or Copi--it does suggest that the analysis it introduces follows upon the claim that precedes it. That claim summarizes the discovery Anselm made, in Chapter 14, that though he has found God in a sense, he must also admit that he has not found God. God, he concludes, must "surely be more than could be understood by a creature."<sup>21</sup>

The analysis Anselm undertakes in Chapter 15 does not so much prove a new conclusion as affirm this discovery. The force of what he writes at the end of Chapter 14 is clear enough: God is too great to understand. But it is possible to say more about the understanding that connects this conclusion to the conclusion that God cannot be thought and the analysis by which he comes to this conclusion. We saw already that Anselm writes in Chapter 4 that something can be thought in either of two ways, either verbally or according to an understanding of the thing (res) to be thought.<sup>22</sup> Anselm thus implies that any thinking that is not merely

<sup>21</sup> Anselm, 112: "Certe plus quam a creatura valeat intelligi."

<sup>22</sup> Anselm, 103: "Aliter enim cogitatur res, cum vox eam significans cogitatur, aliter cum id ipsum quod res est intelligitur."

verbal relies on some understanding. That God cannot be understood thus entails that God cannot be thought, and the analysis of Chapter 15 confirms or explores this conclusion.

Thus, it is even more clear here than elsewhere that "to affirm" (astruere) does not have a polemical sense. It does not mean "to demonstrate" or "to prove." The claim that God cannot be thought is a conclusion that follows directly upon another Anselm has just come to: that God cannot be understood. He does not draw that conclusion by means of an analysis of his argument. The argument does not even appear in Chapter 14. The conclusion arises out of Anselm's reflection on the feeling he has that his argument has not enabled him to see God as he would like to. This feeling has arisen in him in the course of his reflections on his argument. Just as the work as a whole begins with Anselm's experience that God is present to him, this second part of the work begins with the experience that he has not come to understand God, has not seen God just as God is, has not seen God's face.

But it is important not to over-simplify. Anselm's position in Chapter 14 does suggest, in general, that whatever we fail to understand we shall also be unable to think. He has not, however, claimed that he is unable to understand God at all. He labels Chapter 14, "In What Way and Why God

is Seen and Not Seen By Those Seeking Him."<sup>23</sup> To the extent to which God is seen, God can be thought, and just this thinking has been Anselm's task through the first half of the Proslogion. He will never in the course of the latter part of the work repudiate the progress he has made.

At the same time, an important moment in that progress is the discovery of the difference between the way God seems to us and the way God is. Anselm realizes that he has not yet seen God as God is, and he shows that his one argument can affirm even this realization. We shall see that this realization becomes the driving force for the additional progress Anselm goes on to make.

To say, however, that Anselm's argument affirms what he believes is not to say that the reasoning in Chapter 15 simply confirms something Anselm already knows, as though Anselm were to make knowledge that is less firm firmer by appealing to the argument. Anselm's lament in Chapter 14 shows that reflection on his experience has already entirely convinced him that the analyses of his argument have not brought him to see God's face. He has found God, but only in the limited sense that he there suggests. This knowledge that his discovery is limited need not be made more firm.

What the analysis of Chapter 15 does show is that Anselm can use his one argument to show everything he believes

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<sup>23</sup> Anselm, 111: "Quomodo et cur videtur et non videtur Deus a quaerentibus eum."

about divine substance--including his belief that divine substance is beyond whatever he believes. Here, belief is expressed in a sort of thinking. Anselm has expressed what he believes in a series of statements he can think, or say in his heart, about God. Anselm has used his argument in an attempt to see God, in one glance, as what God is, by showing how his one argument combines all his various beliefs. But Chapter 14 expresses his feeling that he must fail to do so, and Chapter 15 shows that his one argument affirms even this belief. Anselm's one argument entails a criticism that turns it back on itself.

One can confirm that much of the force of Anselm's argument in Chapter 15 is critical by considering the chapters that immediately follow it. Though those chapters also show that his argument is not merely critical, Anselm dwells on his failure to see God. He does so even as he also explains what he means in Chapter 14 when he says that he sees God to some extent (aliquatenus).

After he has considered the sense in which his argument fails, Anselm continues. Though he discovers that analyzing his argument enables him to see that his ability to see God by means of his argument is limited, he does not conclude his Proslogion. In Chapter 18, he returns to his search for God. The recognition of that limit leads to a shift in the nature of Anselm's thinking through the last chapters of the Proslogion. His thinking shifts twice, in fact. We shall see



that his transformed thinking takes him farther than the analysis of his argument than his reasoning can. To emphasize, as Marion does, that what Anselm discovers by the analysis of his argument is that God cannot be thought may be to say something true, but it does not say enough. It is necessary to chart the course on which the discovery of his argument's limit leads Anselm, not only in order to understand the work as a whole, but to understand the real force of the beginning of the work as well. If our guiding question is how Anselm attempts to use thinking in order to understand, then we must consider how his discovery of the limit of that thinking which is characterized by analysis of his one argument leads him to think of thinking in different ways. After discovering the limit of reasoning, Anselm turns to thinking that he calls "coniectatio"<sup>24</sup> and then to thinking that is prayer.

Before considering those shifts, let me review what I have argued about the character of the first manner of Anselm's thought. I have referred several times to the analysis of his one argument, but it is important to understand what this means.

Anselm begins the Proslogion with a sense of God's presence. He attempts to express what he experiences in a statement: "something than which nothing greater could be

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<sup>24</sup> See the title of Chapter 24, "Coniectatio, quale et quantum sit hoc bonum."

thought" (aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit). The wording of the statement varies through the book. Sometimes Anselm says "that" (id) instead of "something" (aliquid), sometimes he says "better" (melius) instead of "greater" (maius), and he has several ways of saying either that nothing greater can be thought or that something greater cannot be thought. All his formulations suggest the one argument he uses throughout the first half of the book: if God's being is not true, for example, then God is not that than which none greater can be thought. Anselm takes up various beliefs about God, and analyzes his one argument in order to show how it affirms them each. Here, "analyze" means that he works out what his argument implies, works out how it implies each of the beliefs he holds about God. He does so in order to show that each belief is, in a sense, present in his argument and thus to show that to understand the words of his argument is to see them all at a glance, and thus to see God.

Eventually he discovers, by reflecting on what his argument has revealed to him, that the effort does not bring him to see God, and he affirms even this discovery by appeal to the very same argument. He explains that the qualities his argument affirms in God are many, so that he cannot see them "in a single simultaneous gaze" (uno simul intuitu), even though the same one argument also affirms that they are indivisibly one in God. Anselm's failure is a failure to

express all that God is. Anselm's one argument may remain the same throughout the analyses that use it, but those analyses take time. One follows another. The argument itself also takes time. Word follows word. Words cannot express what God is because God's utter simplicity sets God apart. Anselm emphasizes: "You are unity itself, not divisible by any understanding."<sup>25</sup>

Having failed to say what God is, Anselm attempts to ask how good God must be. Anselm calls this "coniectatio," and that is how he labels Chapter 24. In it, Anselm exhorts himself, one more time, to think, "Awaken now, my soul, and lift up your whole understanding, and think, as much as you can, what sort and how great is that good."<sup>26</sup> This he writes immediately after declaring, at the end of Chapter 23, just what good he has in mind, "But one thing is necessary. But this is that one necessary thing, in which is every good, or, rather, which is every [good] and the one [good] and the whole [good] and the only good."<sup>27</sup> The one necessary thing, the one good he has in mind, is, of course, God. His coniectatio, then, is an attempt to think God by asking what

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<sup>25</sup> Anselm, 114: "tu es ipsa unitas, nullo intellectu divisibilis."

<sup>26</sup> Anselm, 117: "Excita nunc, anima mea, et erige totum intellectum tuum, et cogita, quantum potes, quale et quantum sit illud bonum."

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.: "Porro unum est necessarium. Porro hoc est illud unum necessarium, in quo est omne bonum, immo quod est omne et unum et totum et solum bonum."

sort of good and how great a good God is.

It is tempting to translate his word, "coniectatio" with our word "conjecture." Standard translations of the Proslogion do just this. But that word is deceiving because it generally means something like "guess." In addition, though "conjecture" might strike us as a close cognate of Anselm's word, there is another Latin word closer to "conjecture" than Anselm's word: "coniectura." This word does mean a conjecture or a guess.

I have chosen to translate Anselm's word as "celebration." This has advantages and disadvantages, and I should present them right now. We use our verb, "to celebrate," in two ways: intransitively and transitively. Each way expresses an aspect of Anselm's coniectatio. As an intransitive verb, "to celebrate" means to rejoice. As such, the word well captures the tone of this part of the Proslogion. Chapters 24 and 25 are filled with the words that mean delight and delightful (delectation and delectibile), pleasure and pleasant (iucunditas and iucundus), and enjoy (fruor). Anselm is here rejoicing or celebrating.

As a transitive verb, "to celebrate" emphasizes that in my rejoicing I am turning my attention to something in particular that is the object of my rejoicing. When, for example, I celebrate Passover, I joyfully turn my attention to God's gift of freedom from Pharaoh for the children of Israel. When I celebrate a friend's birthday, I joyfully

turn my attention to that friend. In this respect as well, "celebration" captures an aspect of Anselm's coniectatio. In fact, Anselm's coniectatio is just this: his attempt to turn his attention joyfully toward God.

The translation I have chosen, however, does present problems. First, it is not a usual translation for Anselm's word. Standard translations use "conjecture." Second, the translation is jarring: I will insist that Anselm's celebration is a form of thinking, and in doing so I surely strain English usage--perhaps too far. Finally, it has no historical or etymological connection to Anselm's word--none, at least, that I know of. But I am willing to accept these difficulties. The question at issue for me is just how to characterize thinking, and so for me to use a word that draws attention to itself may be, in the end, an advantage.

I will consider Anselm's celebration from two sides: how Anselm prepares it in the chapters leading up to it, and its character as a form of thinking. Anselm prepares it in a series of chapters that aim at identifying God as the one good. This identification takes its departure from a summary that Anselm gives in Chapter 18 as a response to the discovery that he has not found God, "What are You, Lord, what are You? What does my heart understand You to be? Surely You are life, You are wisdom, You are truth, You are goodness, You

are beauty, You are eternity, and You are every true good."<sup>28</sup> Anselm goes on to point out a difficulty that this summary presents. He writes, as we have already seen, "These are many. My narrow understanding cannot see so many at once in one gaze in order to delight in all at once."<sup>29</sup>

Anselm faces the difficulty in the very same chapter by showing that God must be one in the strongest sense, referring to his one argument one last time to argue that neither God nor God's eternity has any parts:

For whatever has been connected of parts is not entirely one, but is in a certain sense more and different from itself, and can be dissolved either by an action or by the understanding. These things are foreign to You, than whom nothing better can be thought.<sup>30</sup>

Anselm concludes that to say that God is one, to say that God is indivisible whether considered spatially or temporally, is to say that all of God is wholly present at every place and at every time; "Since, therefore, neither You nor Your eternity, which You are, have parts, there is no part of You or Your eternity anywhere or ever, but all of You is

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 114: "Quid es, Domine, quid es, quid te intelligit cor meum? Certe vita es, sapientia es, veritas es, bonitas es, beatitudo es, aeternitas es, et omne verum bonum es."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.: "Multa sunt haec, non potest angustus intellectus meus tot uno simul videre, ut omnibus simul delectetur."

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.: "Nam quidquid partibus est iunctum, non est omnino unum, sed quodam modo plura et diversum a seipso, et vel actu vel intellectu dissolvi potest; quae aliena sunt a te, quo nihil melius cogitari potest."

everywhere and all of Your eternity is always."<sup>31</sup>

The question of God's unity thus turns Anselm's thinking to the question of God's relation to space and to time. In Chapter 19, he argues that God is neither in space nor in time, but rather that space and time are in God, and in Chapter 20 he argues that God is before and beyond all other things, whether those things are transitory or eternal. From all this he concludes, in Chapter 22, that God is not only one, but is also unique:

Therefore, Lord, You alone are what You are, and You are who You are. For what is one thing as a whole and another in parts, and in which there is something mutable, is not entirely what it is. And what begins from not being and can be thought not to be, and [what] returns to not being unless it subsists through another, and what has a "having been" that it is not now and a "will be" that it not yet is: this is not strictly and absolutely. You, however, are what You are, because, whatever You are at any time or in any way, this You are wholly and always.<sup>32</sup>

He then reviews his progress so far, and closes by echoing his preface to say what he would like to show: God

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 115: "Quoniam ergo nec tu habes partes nec tua aeternitas, quae tu es: nusquam et numquam est pars tua aut aeternitas tuae, sed ubique totus es, et aeternitas tua tota semper."

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 116: "Tu solus ergo, Domine, es quod es, et tu es qui es. Nam quod aliud est in toto et aliud in partibus, et in quo aliquid est mutabile, non omnino est quod est. Et quod incipit a non esse et potest cogitari non esse et, nisi per aliud subsistat, redit in non esse; et quod habet fuisse quod iam non est, et futurum esse quod nondum est; id non est proprie et absolute. Tu vero es quos es; quia quidquid aliquando aut aliquo modo es, hoc totus et semper es."

is, he writes, the one who "strictly and simply is,"<sup>33</sup> who is all of the various qualities he has already discussed, and is nevertheless nothing but "the one and highest good." He confesses to God, "You [are the one], entirely sufficient to Yourself, needing nothing, whom all things need in order to be and to be well."<sup>34</sup> At the end of Chapter 23, after he has identified this unique God as God the trinity, Anselm summarizes the line he has been pursuing by identifying God, as we have seen, as, "the one necessary thing, in which is every good, or, rather, which is every [good] and the one [good] and the whole [good] and the only good."<sup>35</sup>

Anselm is now ready to begin his celebration. He does so in Chapter 24, with an exhortation to his soul to consider the one necessary good that he has just identified, "Awaken now, my soul, and lift up your whole understanding, and think, as much as you can, what sort and how great is that

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<sup>33</sup> It is worth mentioning that this is the final and decisive evidence that Stolz is right in his interpretation of "vere esse." Here Anselm says explicitly that God is the only one that truly is.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 116-7: "Et tu es qui proprie et simpliciter es; quia nec habes fuisse aut futurum esse, sed tantum praesens esse, nec potes cogitari aliquando non esse. Et vita es et lux et sapientia et beatitudo et aeternitas et multa huiusmodi bona, et tamen non es nisi unum et summum bonum; tu, tibi omnino sufficiens, nullo indigens, quo omnia indigent ut sint, et ut bene sint."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 117: "Porro unum est necessarium. Porro hoc est illud unum necessarium, in quo est omne bonum, immo quod est omne et unum et totum et solum bonum."



good."<sup>36</sup> Though he here tells his soul to think, the activity he intends is different from the thinking he has shown us so far. Here, he asks his soul to consider a series of questions. He does not attempt to answer any of them. Each question presents one way to celebrate God's goodness. Whereas he sought, in the first half of the book, to express the object of his thinking by analysis of his argument, he does not attempt to do so here. Insofar as he does attempt to express the object of the thinking that celebrates, its expression is in the identification of God as the good he will wonder at. This identification is the preparation for his celebration, not the celebration itself.

We should compare just what the respective objects of reasoning and celebration are. We have already seen that Anselm's reasoning aims at a vision of God by showing how his argument implies all his various beliefs about God. One implication of the claim that Anselm's reasoning is critical, that it leads him to discover its limit, is that its objects are Anselm's beliefs, namely: that God truly is, that God is merciful, that God is just, that God is the life by which God lives, etc. Anselm discovers that his reasoning does not concern God as God is, but rather God as he believes God to be--that is, how God seems to him.

His celebration is different. All of the particular

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.: "Excita nunc, anima mea, et erige totum intellectum tuum, et cogita, quantum potes, quale et quantum sit illud bonum."

questions that he asks as part of his celebration aim at one object: "the one necessary thing...which is every good."

These questions have a general form, which the reasoning he uses to exhort his soul to consider them suggests. He continues:

If individual goods are delightful, think attentively how delightful that good must be, which contains the delight of all goods--and not such [delight] as we experience in created things, but as different from it as the creator differs from the creature.<sup>37</sup>

With each of the questions that follows Anselm specifies one aspect of the delight to be found in created things, and with each he asks his soul how good that particular delight must be in the God who created it. Anselm spends the next chapter, Chapter 25, going through a list of delights that one might love and explaining how each one will be found most of all in God.

What is important to note in all this is that Anselm's manner of thinking has shifted. His thinking does remain just what he defined thinking to be early in the book: it is still a "saying in the heart." Anselm's thinking still unfolds in speech. It is still his struggle to say what he feels. This is true of his celebration no less than it is of the analysis of his argument. But the grammar of his speech, the grammar of his thinking, has undergone a dramatic

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 117-8: "Si enim singula bona delectabilia sunt, cogita intente quam delectabile sit illud bonum, quod continet iucunditatem omnium bonorum; et non qualem in rebus creatis sumus experti, sed tanto differentem, quanto differt creator a creatura."

change. Anselm no longer uses the indicative. Here, Anselm thinks an imperative that commands an interrogative. He commands himself to ask. Rather than trying to express what God is, he commands himself to ponder how good God must be.

This shift is a promising solution to the problem he encountered when he discovered that his argument fails to enable him to see God as God is. For us to see this, however, it is necessary to go back for a moment to the very beginning of the book. In its preface, Anselm writes that he wrote the Proslogion, "in the persona of someone trying to lift up his mind towards contemplating God and of one seeking to understand what he believes."<sup>38</sup> The analysis of the one argument fails to lift Anselm's mind to the contemplation of God and to enable him to understand what he believes because it brings him to discover that such thinking must fall short.

That discovery is the discovery that he has been thinking only about what he believes. This fact about his thinking is, however, both a fact about Anselm and fact about God because, for Anselm, to think truths is to think the Truth. Anselm, however, emphasizes the sense in which the discovery of the distance between what God is and how God seems to him is a discovery about himself. In Chapter 14, when he concludes at first that he has found no more than the individu-

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 93-4: "sub persona conantis erigere mentem suam ad contemplandum deum et quaerentis intelligere quod credit, subditum scripsi opusculum."

al truths he has considered, he then corrects himself, "[My soul] strains so that it might see more, and it sees nothing beyond what it has seen except darkness; rather, it does not see darkness, which is not in You, but it sees that it cannot see more because of its darkness."<sup>39</sup> Anselm's soul sees that beyond the various truths it has been able to see in its argument, it sees only its own darkness.

His celebration, however, takes him farther. It does not require that he express what God is, but only that he turn his attention away from himself and towards God. Each of the questions he commands himself to ask begins in him, but points away from where it starts. The first can serve as an example. Anselm asks, "If created life is good, how good is the life that creates?"<sup>40</sup> He is to think how good his own life is in order to wonder how good God's life must be. All the other questions that serve his celebration take the same form.

But here too Anselm finally admits his own failure. Anselm's celebration, the attempt to see or understand what God is by asking himself how good God must be, does not go far enough. He confesses in the first part of Chapter 26 that nothing that he has said or considered has allowed him

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 111: "Intendit se ut plus videat, et nihil videt ultra hoc quod vidit, nisi tenebras; immo non videt tenebras, quae nullae sunt in te, sed videt se non plus posse videre propter tenebras suas."

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 118: "Si enim bona est vita creata, quam bona est vita creatrix?"

to see what he would like to see. He writes, "I have not yet spoken of or thought how greatly Your blessed ones will rejoice."<sup>41</sup> And here even his celebration ends.

Not even this, however, is the end of the Proslogion. The Proslogion ends the way that it began. The character of Anselm's thinking shifts a second and last time. At the realization that even his celebration falls short, Anselm turns to prayer. He writes, "God, I ask that I may know You, that I may love You, so I may rejoice about You." But here, because he has discovered how limited he is, he adds that even if he cannot succeed completely here, in this life, he still wishes to make progress until his joy is complete in another.<sup>42</sup>

Just as it is possible to describe the first shift in Anselm's thinking as a shift in the grammar of his thinking, so too this second one. Whereas his celebration was an imperative that commanded him to ask, his prayer is simply interrogative. Anselm asks God for the understanding that he seeks.

And here again, the shift is promising. To see this one need only consider what leads Anselm to judge that his celebration has failed. His sense that the analysis of his

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 121: "Nondum ergo dixi aut cogitavi Domine, quantum gaudebunt illi beati tui."

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 121: "Oro, Deus, cognoscam te, amem te, ut gaudeam de te. Et si non possum in hac vita ad plenum, vel proficiam in dies, usque dum veniat illud ad plenum."

argument falls short arises out of an experience--the feeling he has that he has not found God. His sense, however, that his celebration has failed arises when he faces a text from scripture that tells him that it could not have succeeded. He writes, "But surely that joy, in which Your chosen ones shall rejoice, neither the eye has seen, nor has the ear heard, nor has it arisen in the heart of a man."<sup>43</sup> Anselm cites First Corinthians 2:9. It tells him that whatever he might command himself to ask, he will not, as a man, experience the full joy of seeing God, the good, whom he asks about.

It should come as no surprise that the evidence he turns to is authority. Anselm has, after all, explicitly gone beyond what his own reasoning can teach him, and his experience cannot be expected, by itself, to show him its own limit. He cannot experience that his experience falls short. To do so would require that he experience something beyond his experience. We should also note, however, that, faced with the limit of his ability to celebrate God, he no more repudiates his celebration than he did his reasoning.

When Anselm prays for further help, he does not, to be sure, overcome this limit, but he looks forward with hope to the possibility that he will overcome it someday. He looks forward with hope to the possibility that God will grant him

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 121: "Sed gaudium illud certe, quo gaudebunt electi tui, nec oculus vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit."

more than he can achieve himself. As Anselm prays in Chapter 26, he is hopeful, even confident. He expresses this confidence near the very end of the work:

Lord, through Your son You command, or rather You counsel [us] to seek and You promise [that we will] receive so that our joy will be complete. I seek, Lord, what You counsel... May I receive what You promise...so that my joy will be complete.<sup>44</sup>

In this final passage, Anselm makes two things clear: first, that the whole work is a search that aims at an experience of God that it cannot, by the means Anselm has, ever bring about; and second, that as the one who undertakes that search Anselm feels that he is doing what he can to deserve the experience.

But the passage also suggests why the Proslogion must be a prayer. Anselm has used two means to try to look at God: he tries to express what God is and to celebrate how great God's goodness must be. The first means can point to its own shortcoming. The second raises questions, but offers no answers. Prayer goes farther in two senses. On one hand, once Anselm discovers that he has no means that can bring him to understand God as he desires to, all he can do is ask for more help, and this help is just what he prays for. On the other hand, the only means that Anselm has of saying exactly what he believes God to be is direct address. When

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.: "Domine, per filium tuum iubes, immo consulis petere et promittis accipere, ut gaudium nostrum plenum sit. Peto, Domine, quod consulis per admirabilem consiliarium nostrum; accipiam, quod promittis per veritatem tuam, ut gaudium meum plenum sit."

Anselm says "you," he need not wonder whom he is speaking to. He speaks as one who has turned to, or lifted himself up towards, God. When Anselm says "you," he is directing himself to God as precisely as he can.

He can direct himself to God as a "you," because God has been with him from the start. This I have argued in several places. When, in the beginning, he says what he believes God to be, his words have meaning because God is already with him. That is why the fool is a fool and not an atheist. When he discovers that his argument is critical, he discovers that his first attempt to lift his mind to the contemplation of God has turned his attention to an aspect of himself--namely, what he believes about God, or what God seems to be. He makes this discovery by reflecting upon the difference between the God he has found in his reasoning and the God whose presence he feels.

His celebration is his struggle to turn his attention from himself to God. It is a second attempt to lift his mind to the contemplation of God, but he is convinced that it does not bring him to see how good God must be. It does, however, point him once more towards God, and this fact is reflected in his closing prayer. This prayer attempts neither to say what God is nor to ask how good God must be. It identifies God as a "you," a companion vividly present to him, one who can be addressed.

In the final analysis, then, the Proslogion is a prayer



that asks for an experience, or an understanding, of God. It is worth noting that, as such, it closely parallels the general outline of Anselm's other prayers. Sister Benedicta Ward, who describes that outline, includes the Proslogion in her translation of Anselm's prayers. She writes of the prayers generally that they, "are meant to be said in solitude, and the aim is to stir the mind out of its inertia to know itself thoroughly and so come to contrition and the love of God."<sup>45</sup> She adds, with reference specifically to the Proslogion, that it is "set in the form of a prayer and follows the Anselmian pattern of withdrawal, self-knowledge, and compunction."<sup>46</sup>

This is easy enough to confirm. The Proslogion begins with an exhortation that aims at stirring the mind (Chapter 1). The analysis of the argument leads Anselm to self-knowledge, the discovery of the limit of his argument, which leads Anselm to contrition. He writes in Chapter 18:

I was trying to rise up to the light of God, and I fell back into my darkness. Or, rather, I did not fall back into it, but I perceived myself to be enveloped in it. I fell before my mother conceived me. Surely I was conceived in it, and was born wrapped up by it. Surely we all once fell in him in whom we all sinned.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion, trans. and with an intro. by Sister Benedicta Ward, (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 51.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>47</sup> Anselm, 114: "Conabar assurgere ad lucem Dei, et recidi in tenebras meas. Immo non modo cecidi in eas, sed sentio me involutum in eis. Ante cecidi, quam conciperet me mater mea. Certe in illis conceptus sum, et cum earum obvolutione natus

Finally, this failure leads him to wonder how good God must be.

But though Sister Benedicta sees this form, she herself makes little of it. For though she notices that the argument is "a statement about what is beyond our thought,"<sup>48</sup> she has nothing to say about how Anselm's analyses are connected to his conviction that God is beyond his thought. I have argued that this is first and foremost a conviction that rises out of the experience that nothing he is able to see of God by means of his argument shows him what he wants to see.

If, however, I am to explain the work in this way, there is one more matter to discuss: this is not how Anselm describes what moves him to seek. In the preface to the work, he writes that since the Monologion, which he had already written, was "woven together by the interconnection of many arguments,"<sup>49</sup> he began to search with himself to discover whether there might be "one argument." I have already discussed what he says he wants that single argument to accomplish. From the perspective of all I have said, however, one might be tempted to conclude that he does not find his argument, or that he finds an argument that fails, that all he really finds is his own need for further help from God. But

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sum. Olim certe in illo cecidimus, in quo omnes peccavimus."

<sup>48</sup> Ward, 80.

<sup>49</sup> Anselm, 93: "...considerans illud esse multorum concatenatione contextum argumentorum..."

if this is what Anselm thinks of his one argument, why does he not say so clearly? Why does he leave the Proslogion, the record of a search that seems to fail? It would be easy to argue that he cannot claim to follow the advice that God gives him--that is, the advice to seek--unless he makes some effort, but should one not expect him to discard the argument completely if all he discovers is that it must fail?

I myself do not think the question is a fair one, and this for two reasons. In the first place, the discovery that the analysis of his one argument cannot bring him to the vision of God that he seeks is hardly a failure of the argument. It is, after all, just this discovery that moves Anselm to think in other ways. To say that the argument fails is not quite right; it would be better to say that it falls short. It enables Anselm to progress, but not to complete the task he aims at.

To explain the second reason I must discuss one aspect of the work that I have not considered thus far. I must consider Anselm's brothers, the monks for whom he writes the work. Those monks asked Anselm to write a justification of the tenets of their faith that depended on reason alone. The book that resulted was the Monologion. Anselm must have been unhappy with the book. Something about that book moved him to look farther, and there are stories that have come down to us through his student, Eadmer, about the fervor with which he sought for the insight he felt he needed. Anselm

himself describes that fervor in the Proslogion's preface. The insight he found became the argument that drives the first part of the Proslogion, and Anselm spends, I have argued, the middle part of the book overcoming it. Anselm might then have discarded the insight, but he is writing for those who desire reasons, who want analytical thought. If he had rejected the desire for such thinking outright, they might simply have turned elsewhere. The virtue of the Proslogion is that it begins where the brothers it was written for start: with the desire to understand by means of the analytical thinking, the reasoning, that strives to express what something is.

In fact, whether Anselm could ever discard his argument, even if it finally shows him its own limit, is at the very least an open question. If discursive reason is part of what characterizes us as what we are, then the need for an argument that points us beyond that part of us may never disappear. The existence of 900 years of interpretations that attend only to Anselm's argument may be the strongest evidence that many of us do look for arguments--much as Anselm's brothers did. In this sense, Anselm can confess with confidence that he is looking for God, because he has shown that his means of seeking has taken him as far as he can go.

If, however, the Proslogion ends in prayer, it is a prayer that is in part determined by the thinking that has

preceded it. Anselm's argument is not superfluous to his search for understanding. It is the rigorous pursuit of a thinking that begins in prayer that turns Anselm to celebration. Celebration, in turn, turns him back to prayer.

I set out to study Anselm's book in order to consider how thinking can bring us to understanding. What I have discovered is how Anselm's thinking orients him toward what he desires to see. His thinking is his "saying in the heart," his attempt to express what he feels about God. We have seen that this begins as the attempt to articulate what God is. When Anselm realizes that such thinking turns him less to what God is than to what God seems to be, it also turns him to wonder at the good that God must be. Anselm celebrates that goodness, and that celebration constitutes a second attempt to express what he feels about God. When Anselm concludes that even this celebration fails to bring him to see, or understand, God, he turns to address God directly. Here, in a sense, he does express what God is: God is one who is present to him. He can speak to God and ask God for further help.

Just how much of what is true of Anselm's thinking about God is also true of thinking generally may remain an open question. But this study has suggested that it is not enough to say what things seem to us to be. If we are to understand anything, we must struggle to turn our attention directly towards the things themselves. This does not mean that we

will succeed in seeing what we strive to see. In fact, if Anselm's case is an example, it suggests that we shall not. Anselm's example also suggests, however, that we make progress as we strive.

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## VITA

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The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

November 30, 1994  
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