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IN THE COMPLETE TREATISES  
OF ST. ANSELM

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## CHAPTER IV

### ANSELM'S DEBATE WITH GAUNILLO\*

Gaunilo, monk of Marmoutier, is known almost exclusively for his attempted refutation of Anselm's ontological argument around 1079. Indeed, both his counter-example about the alleged island which is more excellent than all others and Anselm's rebuttal thereof have nowadays become standard items for courses in medieval philosophy. Over the past decade or so, which has witnessed a revival of interest in the ontological argument, Gaunilo has been either lauded for his brilliancy or disparaged for his mediocrity. Thus, R. W. Southern judges that, "in words which are as trenchant as, and in some details strikingly similar to, those of Kant," Gaunilo pointed out the main difficulty in accepting Anselm's argument.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the most Charles Hartshorne can say on Gaunilo's behalf is that he is "a clever, but essentially commonplace mind."<sup>2</sup> Those who praise Gaunilo tend to do so because he "wisely" discerned the illegitimacy of inferring a factual statement from an *a priori* description. Those who speak derogatorily of his achievement tend to side with Anselm's two criticisms: (1) that he misunderstood the phrase "*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest*"—replacing it by "*maius omnibus*"—and (2) that his definition of "understanding" is inconsistent with his having maintained that what is unreal can be understood.<sup>3</sup> Now, if Gaunilo did commit himself to two blatantly inconsistent statements within a few lines of each other, as the second criticism maintains, then to call him a *clever* mind would itself be an overstatement.

In this chapter, I want to clear up several misinterpretations both within and about the debate between Anselm and Gaunilo. At the same time, I want to articulate the reformulations of the ontological argument as they occur in *Reply to Gaunilo* 1. I shall not take up the issue of whether or not any of these reformulations

present a sound argument for the existence of God, though in my judgment none of them do. Nor shall I worry about the respective degrees of brilliancy attributable to our two opponents, though on the present interpretation Gaunilo will fare better than Hartshorne supposes but not as well as Southern fancies.

1. 1. *Problem of interpreting Gaunilo.* The Anselm-Gaunilo controversy has usually been approached with the preconception that Anselm's interpretation of Gaunilo's text is reliable. Anselm may or may not have successfully rebutted all of Gaunilo's objections, it is assumed, but he certainly was not mistaken about the nature of these objections. Now, it is strange that commentators find no apparent difficulty in allowing that Gaunilo misunderstood Anselm's argument while disallowing the reverse—i.e., disallowing that this “great mind [viz., Anselm] beside whom Gaunilo was not an intellectual giant”<sup>4</sup> should have misread *On Behalf of the Fool*. Thus, in a recent article<sup>5</sup> F. S. Schmitt deals section by section with Anselm's *Reply to Gaunilo*. But he deals with Gaunilo's text itself only through the eyes of Anselm's *Reply*, which he assumes to be exegetically definitive. Yet, when we look closely at Gaunilo's text and then at Anselm's interpretation of it, we will find that Anselm's charge of inconsistency is based upon a misreading.

1.2. *Gaunilo's misinterpretation of Anselm.* However, before taking up the issue of whether or not Anselm fully understood the logical structure of Gaunilo's work, let us admit outright that Gaunilo did not fully comprehend that of Anselm's. Most flagrantly of all, he failed to appreciate how uniquely the expression “*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest*” fits into the structure of the argument in *Proslogion* 2. Thus, in Section I of *On Behalf of the Fool* he sees no harm in slipping from the expression “*aliqua ... natura, qua nihil maius cogitari possit*” (S I, 125:3-4) to the shorter phrase “*maius omnibus*” (S I, 125:9). Now, as the beginning and end of Section 4 reveal, Gaunilo is using “*maius omnibus*” (“that which is greater than all others”) as an abbreviation of “*illud maius omnibus quae cogitari possunt*” (“that which is greater than all others that can be thought”).<sup>6</sup> But Anselm reads “*maius omnibus*” as a shorthand for “*maius omnibus quae sunt*”: “that which is greater than all other existing beings.”<sup>7</sup> He therefore reproaches Gaunilo for distorting his

description of God. To be sure, Gaunilo *does* once use the expression “*maior natura omnium quae sunt*” in Section 7 (S I, 129:8-9). But there he is not confusing it with Anselm's formula. He is merely objecting to Anselm's inference from the *a priori* description of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought (or, in Gaunilo's formulation, the being which is greater than all others (that can be thought) to the conclusion that God is *actually* the greatest of all beings. Only if *Proslogion 2* had presented—as Gaunilo deems it not to have done—a sound argument for the conclusion that God exists, and therefore is actually the greatest being, would Anselm have had a legitimate basis for contending in *Proslogion 3* that God exists so really that He is not able to be thought not to exist. In contesting the soundness of Anselm's proof, Gaunilo calls for a new argument to demonstrate the real existence of something which is greater than all others (that can be thought) and which, thus, is greater than all other existing natures (i.e., beings).

If Gaunilo's “*maius omnibus*” is really a shorthand for “*illud maius omnibus quae cogitari possunt*”—as I think it is—then he does not distort Anselm's formula by abridging it. Gaunilo's failure is rather a failure to comprehend how, within Anselm's *reductio ad impossibile* argument, the contradiction is arrived at. He does not understand the function of the contradiction nor the exact statement of the contradiction. Indeed, had he discerned exactly where the contradiction resided and what role it played within the structure of the Anselmian proof, he would not have used the abbreviation “*maius omnibus*” lest it should diminish the appearance of contradiction! Gaunilo's misapprehension is obvious when we compare Anselm's *Proslogion 2* premise (“If N<sup>8</sup> were only in the understanding, N could be thought to exist also in reality—which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]”<sup>9</sup>) with Gaunilo's recapitulation: “Now, if this thing existed solely in the understanding, then whatever existed also in reality would be greater than it.”<sup>10</sup> Obviously, the recapitulation does not capture Anselm's point. For Anselm is *not* arguing that if N existed merely in the understanding, then a really existing stone, say, would be greater than N. Rather he is reasoning that if N existed merely in the understanding, then N could be thought to exist in reality; and since for N to exist both in the understanding and in reality would be greater than for N to

exist merely in the understanding, N could be thought to be greater than it is.

The next step of Gaunilo's recapitulation continues the misapprehension: "Thus," he writes, "that which is greater than all others would be less than some other and would not be greater than all others—surely a contradiction." Yet, in *Proslogion* 2 Anselm's next move had generated a contradiction *without comparing* N with any other actual or conceivable being: "Thus, if N existed only in the understanding, then N would be not-N."

Gaunilo's failure to grasp the *reductio* technique was not the *result* but the *cause* of his simplifying the longer expression to "*maius omnibus*." For, given this failure, nothing except prolixity would be gained by his having written: "Thus, that which is greater than all others *that can be thought* would be less than some other and would not be greater than all others *that can be thought*—surely a contradiction." For he had already missed the point in formulating his previous premise, where the misconception would also not have been corrected by his having written: "Now, if this thing *than which nothing greater can be thought* existed solely in the understanding, then whatever existed also in reality would be greater than it." Though Gaunilo does not include the italicized words, he intends for the reader to supply them. Consequently, he *does* regard Anselm's formula even though he does not see exactly how the formula functions in Anselm's argument.

1.3. *Anselm's additional misreading of Gaunilo*. So Gaunilo's abbreviation "*maius omnibus*" is not, as such, unfair to Anselm, though it is misleading. Indeed, it misled Anselm; and Anselm in turn has misled almost everyone else. Unfortunately, this is not the only respect in which Anselm has misinterpreted Gaunilo; for if he had not misread another passage, he would never have charged Gaunilo with a flagrant self-contradiction.

In particular, Anselm misconstrues Gaunilo's definition of "*intelligere*" as it occurs in *On Behalf of the Fool* 2. This misunderstanding can happen only because Anselm does not detect the rationale of Gaunilo's objections, just as Gaunilo did not discern the logic of Anselm's argument. In Section 2 Gaunilo is pointing out that *Proslogion* 2 presupposes the following principle: x is in A's understanding<sup>11</sup> whenever A understands the words of someone

who purports to be talking about *x*. But surely, to paraphrase Gaunilo, I sometimes understand people who speak falsely and people who speak about unreal things. So if the criterion for something's being in my understanding is simply that I understand someone's words, then I can have in my understanding that to which no real object corresponds. So *N* too—whose description I understand when I hear it—might be in my understanding in just this way. Or are you, Anselm, going to tell me that *N* cannot be in my understanding in this way but must be there in the way that something is there when I understand someone who is speaking about real objects? Are you prepared to say that I can think this being only by way of understanding (i.e., only by way of apprehending with certainty) that it really exists?<sup>12</sup>

Gaunilo goes on to maintain that if this is Anselm's view, then three problems arise for it:

1. "There would no longer be a difference here between first having this thing in the understanding and subsequently understanding [judging] this thing to exist—as happens in the case of a painting, which first is in the artist's mind and then later is an actual product."
2. "Secondly, it could scarcely be plausible that when this thing is spoken of or heard of it could not be thought not to exist, in the way even God can [be thought] not to exist."
3. "The claim 'This being is such that as soon as it is thought of it must be indubitably understood to exist in reality' would have to be proved to me by an indubitable argument"<sup>13</sup>—not by the argument that you, Anselm, have used.

This third consequence, as Gaunilo sees it, requires Anselm to give an additional and independent argument to show that *N* must be *understood to exist* and cannot be understood in the way that some falsehoods are understood.

Now, Anselm fails to follow Gaunilo's reasoning; and thus in *Reply to Gaunilo* 6 he construes Gaunilo's phrase "*non [posse] hoc aliter cogitare, nisi intelligendo id est scientia comprehendendo re ipsa illud existere*" as if Gaunilo were defining "*intelligere*" as "*scientia comprehendere re ipsa illud existere*." Yet, what Gaunilo did was to construe "*intelligere*" as "*scientia comprehendere*"; he thus identified *intelligere re ipsa illud existere* with *scientia comprehendere re ipsa illud existere*. Gaunilo's meaning would stand out better with the use of parentheses: *non [posse] hoc aliter cogitare, nisi intelligendo (id est scientia com-*

*prehendendo) re ipsa illud existere.* In other words, Anselm supposes that Gaunilo is defining “understanding *x*” as “apprehending with certainty *that x really exists*”—whereas all he is doing is defining “understanding” as “apprehending with certainty.” This confusion on Anselm’s part leads him to say that Gaunilo’s position is inconsistent, inasmuch as the definition is incompatible with stating, as Gaunilo did a few lines earlier, that sometimes (discourse about) unreal things can be *understood*. Furthermore, Anselm fails to realize that Gaunilo at this stage is not *advocating* the definition but is simply hypothesizing about a move Anselm might want to make, and about the consequences thereof.

But how do we know that Anselm’s reading is wrong? Surely, it may be contended, *he* better than *we* could make sense of Gaunilo’s Latin; *he* better than *we* knew how to read the pericope beginning with “*Nisi forte*” (S I, 125:17). Nonetheless, that Anselm is mistaken is clear. In the first place, we may disqualify the *a priori* principle that Anselm must rightly have interpreted the passage simply because he understood the Latin of his day better than we do; for the correct interpretation of Gaunilo does not depend merely upon familiarity with ecclesiastical Latin of the eleventh century. It depends as well upon detecting the structure of an argument. And at this detection perhaps we today excel Anselm (as, for that matter, someone today might also surpass him in the knowledge of eleventh-century ecclesiastical Latin). Secondly, if there is any *a priori* principle involved, it is the *a priori* improbability that Gaunilo contradicted himself within the scope of a few lines. Any such apparent contradiction should lead us to question whether we are correctly interpreting his words. For such an apparent contradiction casts a *prima facie* doubt upon the interpretation and (in our case) the translation. All other things being equal, we are obliged to choose the interpretation which makes sense out of the passage, since we recognize from the remainder of the treatise that Gaunilo was too clever to write so incoherently as Anselm’s interpretation requires.

A further subtlety now arises. Given Anselm’s construal of the definition of “*intelligere*” in *On Behalf of the Fool* 2, what does he take to be the relationship between this definition and Gaunilo’s point in Section 7 to the effect that “properly speaking, unrealities cannot be understood”? At first it might be supposed

that Anselm regarded this statement as just the obverse side of the inconsistency which he attributed to Section 2. For although, on his reading, the definition in Section 2 is *consistent* with the statement in Section 7, that statement itself is *inconsistent* with the assertion in Section 2 that sometimes unreal things *can* be understood. Nonetheless, since Anselm never mentions this additional inconsistency, we must be cautious about inferring that he believed there was one.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, had he held this view, it would have been easy for him to point out that in Section 7 Gaunilo need not have made an issue of our not being able to understand *God* not to exist; for nothing at all (let alone *God*) would be able to be understood not to exist, since the expression “understood not to exist” would be self-contradictory (given Anselm’s construal of Gaunilo’s definition of “understand”).

Accordingly, it begins to appear more likely that Anselm realized something which present-day commentators seem to have overlooked, viz., that Gaunilo’s point of view changes in the middle of Section 7,<sup>15</sup> where he begins speaking for himself, the believing monk, and stops speaking on behalf of the Fool, as he had been doing up to then. In Section 7 he writes: “I understand indubitably that that being which is supreme, viz., God, exists and cannot fail to exist.” Obviously he is not speaking for the Fool. Rather, he is remarking: the Fool thinks a proposition which you and I, Anselm, regard as a falsehood, viz., that God does not exist; consequently, the Fool cannot *understand* this falsehood because, strictly speaking, only truths can be understood. So Gaunilo at this stage is identifying with Anselm’s point of view and recommending a precision which he feels Anselm had neglected. Because of this shift in viewpoint Gaunilo’s statement in Section 7 is not viciously inconsistent with the passage in Section 2 (i.e., there is no *self*-contradiction). Anselm probably realized this and thus did not accuse Gaunilo of a double inconsistency. Moreover, at the beginning of his *Reply* Anselm refers to the writer of *On Behalf of the Fool* as a believing Christian even though he admits to not knowing who the author is. (Anselm did not so much as know Gaunilo’s name.)<sup>16</sup> Thus, that Gaunilo was a believer Anselm could only have learned from Sections 7 and 8. Of course, someone might protest that Section 8 by itself is sufficient to reveal that Gaunilo was a Christian, and that therefore Anselm still might have overlooked the switch in view-

point in Section 7. But such a protest would be gratuitous given the fact that Anselm does not charge Gaunilo with an inconsistency between Sections 2 and 7.

2. *Systematization of Anselm's text.* For all the fault that Anselm finds with Gaunilo, he nonetheless regards him as raising criticisms which others might also be prone to espouse. Therefore, he requests that Gaunilo's attack, together with his own rebuttal, be appended to future transcriptions of the *Proslogion*.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, his *Reply* parcels Gaunilo's criticisms into two groups: those which are regarded as having merit and those which are not.<sup>18</sup> This judgment about the merit, or force, of Gaunilo's objections determines the order of Anselm's *Reply* and is the reason for his not dealing with the objections in the order they were presented. Moreover, any attempt to rearrange the order of the *Reply*<sup>19</sup> will eclipse Anselm's weighting of both Gaunilo's objections and his own defenses. For instance, one reason for the brevity of the response (in Anselm's Section 8) about the artist and the painting is Anselm's appraisal of the relative meritlessness of Gaunilo's criticism. This evaluation is readily evident from the fact that Anselm places it after Section 4; but this placing is lost sight of when the text of the *Reply* is broken up in order to map it over against *On Behalf of the Fool*.

One justification proffered for this truncation is that the *Reply* is but "a series of notes which Anselm put together without much attention to overall unity or development."<sup>20</sup> But this claim is especially weak for a number of reasons. First, it goes counter to Anselm's assertion that he did impose some order on this work, dealing with issues of two kinds—the more and the less weighty, as we said. Secondly, we know from Anselm's other works that he was not accustomed to let his imperfect writings be transcribed. He complains, for instance, about monks who had prematurely copied and set into circulation earlier drafts of *De Incarnatione* and the *Cur Deus Homo*.<sup>21</sup> Since his practice was to release a work only after he was satisfied with it, and since he requested that the *Reply* be copied together with the *Proslogion* and *On Behalf of the Fool*, we may conclude that it was neither something he threw together from notes nor simply a series of notes. Thirdly, he may have been careless about attending to Gaunilo's objections, but it does not follow that he was inatten-

tive to the structure he gave the *Reply*. If anything, his oversights of Gaunilo's points occurred because he was "too preoccupied" with unfolding more fully his own viewpoint. On the whole, it seems to me, his reasoning in the *Reply* does not move haphazardly. Fourthly, extreme care must be exercised in dividing up Anselm's sequences, if this dividing is going to be done. For example, it is possible without obvious distortion to separate the first half of *Reply* 3 from the second half,<sup>22</sup> which begins right after Anselm's ironic comment about finding the lost island and making Gaunilo a present of it. Yet, in doing so, some continuity is lost. For at the end of *Reply* 2 Anselm is supporting his inference in *Proslogion* 2 that N must exist in reality as well as in the understanding. He turns aside for a moment to consider Gaunilo's counter-argument with its suggestion that the reasoning of *Proslogion* 2 is faulty. Then, having dismissed the example by intimating that it is not analogous to the argument in *Proslogion* 2,<sup>23</sup> he goes on to show, as in *Proslogion* 3, that N exists so really that it cannot be thought not to exist. So although severing these passages may not be wrong, it is, to be sure, not obviously helpful.

Furthermore, what legitimate reason could there be for putting S I, 132:10-21 immediately before 132:3-9, as do J. Hick and A. McGill on p. 13 (*The Many-faced Argument*), thus reversing Anselm's order? This reversal would be acceptable only if thereby some clarity were gained—as it is not. Also, S I, 131: 6-11 is no more a reply to Gaunilo's 129:1-10 than to his 127:25 – 128:13. Worst of all, Hick and McGill fragment and restructure not only Anselm's *Reply*, which they deem but a series of notes; but they also do the same thing with Gaunilo's *On Behalf of the Fool*, even though they do not regard it as a collection of notes! Their procedure is utterly uncalled for; indeed, it even miscasts the entire debate with Anselm. For instance, they place next to last what Gaunilo placed first (viz., S I, 125:6-13). Thus, Gaunilo's initial misstatement and misapprehension of the logic of Anselm's argument—a misstatement which governs the rest of his short treatise—is lost sight of at the outset. This misstatement was so serious that it provoked Anselm's strong response at the beginning of his *Reply*. In fact, Anselm's three attempts in Section 1 (S I, 131:1-17) to reformulate the statement of his argument come in direct response to Gaunilo's misstate-

ment in his, Gaunilo's, Section 1. Yet, Hick and McGill do not even bring these two sections together, let alone put them at the beginning!

Then too, Hick and McGill take Section 2 of Gaunilo's work and divide it in such a way as to dissipate the strength of his reasoning. That is, we have noted previously how Gaunilo urges that three consequences would follow if Anselm were to conflate "understanding" with "understanding to exist" in the case of understanding N. Now, Hick and McGill simply *elide* the second consequence and move it elsewhere in order to mesh it conveniently with a section of Anselm's response<sup>24</sup> which, on their method, they have to do something with. This elision weakens the force of Gaunilo's reasoning and is editorially problematical. By their dubious method Hick and McGill betray that, like Anselm, they too have difficulty following Gaunilo's argument.

3. *Intelligere and intellectus.* It is necessary now to clarify Anselm's use of "*intelligere*" and "*intellectus*." According to McGill there is "little evidence that the word *intellectus* ever suggested to Anselm, as it does to us, an organ (such as the mind) or a faculty (such as the intellect). It was chiefly the noun form of the verb *intelligere* and signified the *act* of understanding."<sup>25</sup> Yet, it seems to me that in the present context Anselm has four different uses of "*intellectus*": to indicate (1) an act of understanding and (2) a capability, power, or faculty of the soul; and to indicate (3) intelligence and (4) a respect. The first two distinctions occur in *Reply to Gaunilo* 2 (S I, 132:19-20): "What is understood [*intelligitur*: act of understanding] is understood by the understanding [*in intellectu*: a capability of the soul] and is thereby in the understanding [*in intellectu*: a manner of speaking which generally but not necessarily indicates for Anselm the act of understanding]." Now, Anselm comments immediately beforehand: "What is thought is thought by thinking; and what is thought by thinking is thereby in our thinking." Is he here suggesting that *thought* is a faculty, and, if not, then why should his very next statement be construed as indicating that understanding is a faculty?, it might be asked. For Anselm, as for Augustine, man has a *rational* faculty which belongs to the soul. This rational faculty accounts for man's capacity to think rationally, to understand. So, in some contexts, whether Anselm

speaks of rationality (*rationalitas*) or understanding (*intellectus*) or thinking (*cogitatio*), he is regarding these as alternative designations for the same faculty of soul. Accordingly, in *Monologion* 23 he comments that “*intellectus* is there in the soul where *rationalitas* is”—although “there” and “where” are not being used as spatial locators (S I, 41:28-29).

A third meaning of “*intellectus*” occurs at S I, 132:12-13 (*Reply to Gaunilo* 2), where Anselm states that anyone who does not understand the description “N” has little or no *intellectus*—i.e., intelligence.<sup>26</sup> To borrow a terminology from *De Libertate* and *De Concordia*, such a person would have the instrument, or faculty, (*instrumentum*) of understanding but either would not be able to use (*uti*) this instrument adequately or else would have a defective instrument (as one might have defective vision). Anselm does not elaborate the point. Still, his view is clear: a fool might not have much intelligence (*intellectus*), but he must have the faculty of *intellectus*; otherwise he would not be a man and, therefore, not a fool (non-rational animals are not fools).

The fourth meaning of “*intellectus*” has caused the most difficulty—especially to English translators of Anselm’s Latin. In particular, the phrase “*in nullo intellectu*” has not made sense in English translations. For instance, at S I, 132:29-30 (*Reply to Gaunilo* 2) Anselm writes: “*Sed utique quo maius cogitari potest, in nullo intellectu est quo maius cogitari non possit.*” Charlesworth translates this as: “But surely ‘that-than-which-a-greater-can-be-thought’ is not for any mind [the same as] ‘that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought’.” McGill has: “But certainly that than which a greater *can* be conceived does not stand in relation to any understanding as ‘that than which a greater *cannot* be conceived.’” And Wolter puts: “But surely in no intellect . . .” which is comparable to Deane’s “in no understanding.”<sup>27</sup> Yet a careful look at S I, 136:28 – 137:3 makes clear that “*intellectus*” in the phrase “*in nullo intellectu*” is sometimes an alternative for “*nullatenus intelligitur*” and “*nullo modo intelligitur.*” So what Anselm means is best translated in S I, 132:29-30 as: “But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought is in no sense (or: in no respect) that than which a greater can be thought.” And the line of reasoning continues: “Does it not follow, therefore, that if that than which a greater cannot be thought is at all in the

understanding [i.e., is even partially understood], then it does not exist in the understanding alone?"

Since Anselm does not attempt to develop a vocabulary of technical Latin, we must be alert to his use of the one word "*intellectus*" in several different ways. In places, he can interchange "*intellectus*" with "*cogitatio*"<sup>28</sup> or "*scire*"<sup>29</sup> or "*sensus*,"<sup>30</sup> just as he interchanges "*oratio*" with "*propositio*" in *De Veritate* 2, and "*essentia*" with "*existentia*" in the *Philosophical Fragments*<sup>31</sup> or with "*natura*" in *Monologion* 4 (S I, 17:17-18)—though not supposing that these interchangeable terms have the same meanings in most contexts. Therefore, in translating Anselm's expressions we must avoid frozen renderings—i.e., avoid mechanically using the same English word to translate a given Latin word wherever it occurs. Thus, sometimes "*intelligere*" will come into English better as "to know," "to judge," "to comprehend," "to discern," or "to think" than as "to understand." In *Proslogion* 2 Anselm means by "*intelligere rem esse*" to judge that the object exists. And at S I, 131:8 the expression "*nec actu nec intellectu*" is best rendered as "neither actually nor conceivably."<sup>32</sup> Failure to recognize the "flexibility" of Anselm's terminology will lead to confused and confusing translations. And there will be danger not only of translating the same Latin word by the same English word where this should not be done,<sup>33</sup> but also of translating two different Latin words by two different English words, where only one word is required.<sup>34</sup>

4. *Thinking secundum rem and thinking secundum vocem.* In *Proslogion* 4 Anselm distinguishes between two different ways of thinking an object: "In one sense an object is thought when the word signifying it is thought, and in another when what the object is understood."<sup>35</sup>

Thus, in the first sense but not at all in the second, God can be thought not to exist. Indeed, no one who understands what God is can think that God does not exist, even though he says these words [viz., "God does not exist"] in his heart either meaninglessly or else bizarrely. For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Anyone who comprehends this [description], surely understands that this being [than which a greater cannot be thought] so exists that it cannot even conceivably not exist. Therefore, anyone who understands that God is such [a being] cannot think that He does not exist.

Now, Anselm never elucidates what, precisely, is involved in

thinking an object by merely thinking the word which signifies it. Even at the end of *Reply to Gaunilo* 4 all he does is refer again to the above passage in *Proslogion* 4, calling it sufficient.<sup>36</sup> Apparently, in *Proslogion* 4 he meant that one can either (1) conceive of God according to a correct description (e.g., the description “N” and the predicates licensed by “N”), or else one can (2) think the word “God” according to an incorrect signification or according to no signification (i.e., one thinks the word but does not know what the word signifies). In the latter case, i.e., case 2, one can think (and say) something inconsistent without realizing it to be inconsistent; for one has grasped a signification incorrectly or not at all.

For his part, Gaunilo is more explicit about thinking *secundum rem veram* and *secundum vocem*.<sup>37</sup>

Although I can think of a non-existent man by reference to a real thing known to me, I cannot at all think of this thing [which is greater than all others] except only with respect to the verbal expression. And with respect only to a verbal expression a real thing can scarcely, if at all, be thought of. For when one thinks with respect to a mere verbal expression, he thinks not so much the verbal expression itself (i.e., not so much the sound of the letters or the syllables), which assuredly is a real thing, as he does the signification of the expression that is heard. Yet, [the signification is] not [thought] in the manner of one who knows what is usually signified by the expression—i.e., one who thinks in accordance with the thing, whether it is real or exists in thought alone. Rather, [the signification is thought] in the manner of one who does not know what is usually signified by the verbal expression but who (1) thinks only according to the movement of the mind brought about by hearing this expression and who (2) has difficulty in representing to himself the signification of what he has heard. (But it would be surprising if he could ever [in this manner discern] what the thing is.) So, then, it is still evident that this is the only way this thing is in my understanding when I hear and understand someone who says that there is something greater than all others that can be thought.

So Gaunilo, speaking for the Fool, supposes that what God is cannot be thought. And Anselm takes the trouble in *Reply* 8 to show him how God's nature can be thought without taking the trouble in *Reply* 4 to clarify how God's non-existence can be thought.

Here we must notice two additional points. First, in *Reply* 8 Anselm's method of “analogically” conceiving God's nature is altogether different from the *via negativa* of John Scotus Erigena and Pseudo-Dionysius, who were willing to say only that God is

more than goodness and is the cause of goodness.<sup>38</sup> Secondly, what Anselm means by his statement that the *Proslogion* develops *unum argumentum*<sup>39</sup> is that it proceeds to unfold a *single line of reasoning*—not that there is only one major argument, or argument-form. Of course, for him the major argument for God's existence is that of *Proslogion 2*.<sup>40</sup> He regards *Proslogion 3* not as introducing a further such argument but rather as indicating (once *Proslogion 2* has established the fact of God's existence) how really and certainly God exists. Nevertheless, the arguments of Chapters 2 and 3, together with the deductions he makes about God's attributes beginning with Chapter 5, are all aspects of the one line of reasoning. In last analysis, "*unum argumentum*" indicates all that is derivable from the formula "N." "For the significance of this utterance ["N"] contains so much force that what is spoken of is, by the very fact that it is understood or thought, necessarily proved really to exist and to be whatever ought to be believed about the Divine Substance."<sup>41</sup> Accordingly, even the reformulations presented in *Reply 1* are variants of the single line of reasoning. Hence, the question of whether Anselm has one, two, three, four, or more different versions of the ontological argument in the *Proslogion* (and the *Reply*) is not settled by referring to the phrase "*unum argumentum*" and commenting that Anselm intended to be setting forth only one argument for God's existence. For even aside from the fact that a philosopher might *intend* to formulate only a single argument but in fact word his formulation in such way that there were really two (or more) distinct arguments, Anselm never claimed to have only *one* argument. He claimed only that the various arguments were derivable in accordance with a *single* unique description. Indeed, someone might even extend this single line of reasoning by observing that the description "N" entails the descriptions "*ens perfectissimum*," "*ens realissimum*," and "*ens necessarium*," and develop new ontological arguments à la Gottfried W. von Leibniz, Christian Wolff, and Immanuel Kant, whose formulations are different from Anselm's.<sup>42</sup>

5. *Three arguments from Reply 1*. Let us now look closely<sup>43</sup> at the three arguments in S I, 131:1-17.

5. 1. The first of these, S I, 131:1-5, is formulable as:

- (1) For any object x, if x can be thought to exist and yet x does not exist, then x can be thought to begin to exist. (premise)
- So: (2) If N can be thought to exist and yet N does not exist, then N can be thought to begin to exist. (instance of (1))
- But: (3) It is not the case that N can be thought to begin to exist.  
(a) What exists without beginning is greater than what exists through a beginning. (presupposition)
- Assume: (b) N can be thought to begin to exist.
- Then: (c) N can be thought to be greater than it is. (impossible)
- So: (d) It is not the case that N can be thought to begin to exist.
- So: (4) It is not the case that N can be thought to exist and yet does not exist. (2) (3)
- Thus: (5) If N can be thought to exist, it must be the case that N does exist. (4)

It is important to recognize that in the last step “*Si ergo cogitari potest esse, ex necessitate est*” is to be read as “Therefore, if it [N] can be thought to exist, it is necessary that it exist” instead of as “Therefore, if it [N] can be thought to exist, it exists necessarily.” That is, the necessity applies to the inference not to the quality of existence (cf. S I, 135:30-31); hence, Anselm might equally have expressed the consequent as “Then, it must follow that N exists.”<sup>44</sup> Now, this sentence, so construed and taken together with the one immediately preceding it, suggests that Anselm made use of the rule  $\sim (p \ \& \ \sim q) \equiv (p \supset q)$ , although he nowhere states this rule explicitly and although what he actually says warrants only  $\sim (p \ \& \ \sim q) \supset (p \supset q)$ .

5.2. The next section in the Schmitt text (S I, 131:6–11) must be viewed, I think, as containing two interlinking arguments, some of whose premises are suppressed. As the argument is presented it is not in good logical form. For it is not clear how the stated premises could warrant the conclusion that N is *not able not to exist*. Yet, Anselm has told the reader enough to allow him to supply the missing premises and to combine them with the stated premises so that jointly they do entail the desired conclusion. This can be accomplished in two parts.

- A. (1) If anything can be thought but does not exist, then if it were to exist, it would be able (either actually or conceivably) not to exist. (premise)
- So: (2) If N can be thought but N does not exist, then if N were to exist, N would be able (either actually or conceivably) not to exist. (instance of (1))

- But: (3) It is not the case that if N were to exist, N would be able (either actually or conceivably) not to exist.
- (a) (a) What is not able (either actually or conceivably) not to exist is greater than what is able (either actually or conceivably) not to exist. (presupposition)
- (b) If if N were to exist N were able (either actually or conceivably) not to exist, then N could be thought to be greater than it is.
- But: (c) It is not the case that N can be thought to be greater than it is.
- Thus: (d) It is not the case that if N were to exist N would be able (either actually or conceivably) not to exist.
- Thus: (4) It is not the case that N can be thought but N does not exist. (2) (3)
- So: (5) If N can be thought, N exists. (4)
- B. (1) If N can be thought, then N exists. (conclusion of A)
- (2) If N exists, then N is not able not to exist.
- (a) What is not able not to exist is greater than what is able not to exist. (presupposition)
- (b) If N exists but N is able not to exist, then N can be thought to be greater than it is.
- But: (c) It is not the case that N can be thought to be greater than it is.
- Thus: (d) It is not the case that N exists and N is able not to exist.
- Thus: (e) If N exists, N is not able not to exist.
- So: (3) If N can be thought, then N is not able not to exist. (1) (2)

For Gaunilo's sake as well as for ours Anselm ought to have formulated his argument more explicitly. Still, he formulated it fully enough to allow the reader to detect its structure and validity.

5.3. A third argument begins at S I, 131:12 (and it would have been helpful had Schmitt placed a new paragraph at this point in the Latin text):

- (1) If anything can be thought and does not exist, then if it were to exist it would not be N (because it would be able not to exist. Cf. Argument 2, steps A,1 and A,3.) (premise)
- Thus: (2) If N can be thought and N does not exist, then if it were to exist it would not be N. (instance of (1))
- Assume: (3) N can be thought and N does not exist.
- Then: (4) If N were to exist, N would not be N—an impossible hypothetical. (2) (3)
- Thus: (5) It is not the case that N can be thought and N does not exist. (3) (4)
- So: (6) If N can be thought, N exists. (5)

As just presented, these premises have a slightly different order from their order in the text;<sup>45</sup> yet this new order reveals the movement of the argument slightly better. What is stated above as the third premise is really Anselm's opening sentence, which says literally: "Let us suppose that it [N] does not exist if it can be even thought." Now, it would be *wrong* to construe the logical form of this proposition as  $p \supset \sim q$ . For the very next sentence (following the order of the text) states: "Whatever can be thought and yet does not exist would not, if it were to exist, be that than which a greater cannot be thought." Without doubt, Anselm regards the proposition expressed by the opening sentence as a substitution-instance of the proposition expressed by the second sentence. To make this clear to the reader, one is obliged to translate Anselm's meaning rather than his exact words. And the meaning of his opening sentence is  $p \ \& \ \sim q$ : "Let us suppose that N can be thought and yet does not exist."

6. *Cogitare and cogitare esse*. In looking back on Argument 1 and Argument 2, we notice a shift from "If N can be thought to exist" to "If N can be even thought."<sup>46</sup> What is the significance of this switch? Is Anselm making some important *epistemological* or *logical* point? I do not think so. Let it be acknowledged that he accepted a distinction between (1) thinking of something (i.e., conceiving or imagining it) and (2) thinking (i.e., believing, judging, understanding, or knowing) it to exist.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, if (à la *Proslogion* 2) one can understand something without understanding (judging) it to exist, then one can also *think* something without *thinking* it to exist—since understanding is a form of thinking, on Anselm's view as well as on ours. But here "thinking" is being used equivocally to mean that one can *conceive* something without *judging* it to exist. Yet, in the two arguments under discussion "thinking" is being used univocally to stand for "conceiving."

Anselm obviously regards "conceiving x" and "conceiving x to exist" as having different meanings. For were they synonymous the expression "conceiving x not to exist" would be, for every x, self-contradictory—a view foreign to Anselm. Yet, it seems that he did assume an extensional equivalence such that

x can be thought if and only if x can be thought to exist.

In *Proslogion* 2 this assumption allows him to infer “N can be thought to exist in reality” from “N is in the understanding.”<sup>48</sup>

Now, although there is a semantical difference between “conceiving x” and “conceiving x to exist,” still when Anselm switches from the one expression to the other in *Reply* 1, he is not leaning upon this semantical difference in order to make any epistemological or logical point. He is simply exhibiting two different arguments—each of which has a valid form irrespective of which expression is used. Moreover, the truth or falsity of the premises in which these phrases occur would remain unaffected by completely substituting the one expression for the other. So, then, in the process of exhibiting a second argument, Anselm indicates that, should we prefer, we can simplify “if N can be thought to exist” to “if N can be thought,” for even the premise thus simplified will suffice for the logic of his argument.

7. *Relation between Proslogion 2 and the Reply.* There is, of course, a relationship between the argument of *Proslogion* 2 and the three arguments of *Reply* 1. But we must be careful about specifying this relationship. In *Proslogion* 2 Anselm's proof runs:<sup>49</sup>

- (1) We properly conceive of God as N. (premise)
- (2) We understand what the words “N” describe. (premise)
- (3) Whatever is understood is in the understanding. (premise)
- Hence: (4) N exists in the understanding. (2) (3)
- (5) Either N exists in the understanding without existing in reality or else N exists both in the understanding and in reality. (premise)
- Assume: (6) N exists in the understanding without existing in reality.
  - (a) N can be thought to exist in reality.
  - (b) For N, existing in the understanding and in reality is greater than existing only in the understanding.
- Hence: (c) N can be thought to be greater than it is (and so N is that than which a greater *can* be thought). (impossible)
- So: (7) N exists both in the understanding and in reality. (4) (5) (6) (c)

In this formulation 1 is an *a priori* description, 2 is a fact, and 6, b is a presupposition. Now, both the main assumption in 6 and the steps 6,a & b are elicited from Anselm's statement:

- (S): For if it [N] were merely in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality—which is greater.

The most natural interpretation of this sentence is to construe

“which is greater” as indicating that N would be greater if it existed in reality as well as existing in the understanding. So what Anselm means by *S* can be restated:

(S'): If N were only in the understanding, N could be thought to exist also in reality, and for N to exist also in reality would be greater than for N to exist only in the understanding.

Accordingly, Anselm assumes that for N existence is a perfection. But does he assume that for conceivable objects other than N existence is also a perfection? We do not definitely know. Certainly in *On Behalf of the Fool* 1 Gaunilo attributes to Anselm this further assumption; and Anselm does not quarrel with the ascription. But this fact does not by itself prove (though it does warrant the presumption) that Gaunilo's construal was correct. For Anselm's argument to be valid no assumption stronger than *6,b* is required. Possibly, he might want to maintain that for something like an island existence is not a *perfection* (i.e., a great-making property), though it would be a *property (simpliciter)*. For instance, in *Monologion* 15 he states that *being composed of gold* is a property which is a perfection for a metal but not for a man (e.g., not for King Midas' daughter). So some properties may be perfections for some kinds of things but not for other kinds of things. Still, it is hard to see what basis Anselm could have for allowing that existence is a perfection in the case of N but disallowing it in the case of other conceivable objects. For unlike the property of *being composed of gold*, the “property” of *existing* never detracts from any perfection which an object has. If, therefore, it is a perfection for any object, it must be a perfection for every object. My own sense of the matter is that Anselm recognized this implication<sup>50</sup> and in fact did accept the generalized premise

(P): For any object x, if x exists in the understanding and in reality, then x is greater than if x exists only in the understanding.

I would imagine that he felt no more compunction about *P* than about the generalized premise:

(Q): Being unable to be thought not to exist is greater than being able to be thought not to exist.

At any rate, whether Anselm presupposed *P* or *6,b*, he has a valid (vs. a sound) argument in *Proslogion* 2.<sup>51</sup>

We are now in a position to notice the difference between *Proslogion 2* and *Reply 1*. The former presupposes that existing in reality is greater than existing only in the understanding and not existing in reality. The latter presupposes that existing without a beginning is greater than existing with a beginning (Argument 1), and that not being able not to exist is greater than being able not to exist (Arguments 2 & 3). These differences have often been noted before and would not be worth repeating here were it not for the recent attempt to deny them. Thus, La Croix supposes that in *Proslogion 2*, *S* must be unpacked as:<sup>52</sup>

- (a) If N exists only in the understanding, then N does not exist in reality.
- (b) If N does not exist in reality, then N can fail to exist in reality.
- (c) If N can fail to exist in reality, then N can be thought not to exist in reality.<sup>53</sup>
- (d) If N can be thought not to exist in reality and N can be thought to exist in reality, then N can be thought to be greater.
- (e) N can be thought to exist in reality.
- (f) It is false that N can be thought to be greater than it is.

Now, *b - f*, La Croix claims, constitute Anselm's single argument-form (p. 124). But it seems to me that if there is such a form, it is better expressed as

- (F): For any predicate x such that it is greater to be x than not to be x, if N were not x (e.g., existent, unable to be thought not to exist, omnipotent, etc.), then N would be not-N, for N could be thought to be greater than it is; but N cannot be thought to be greater than it is; therefore, N is x.<sup>54</sup>

This formula differs slightly from La Croix's. First, it recognizes explicitly that Anselm is committed to the presuppositions that

- (i): to exist (in reality) is, in itself, better than not to exist (in reality)
- and (ii): to be unable to be thought not to exist is, in itself, better than to be able to be thought not to exist

and recognizes that these enter into his reasoning. Secondly, the formula does not have to be unpacked by reference to *Reply 5*. Thirdly, it makes room for the presence of an independently valid argument in *Proslogion 2*. And finally, it allows that in *Reply 1* Anselm develops new argument-forms—i.e., forms which do more than simply explicate F.

In one respect, then, Malcolm and Hartshorne are right about *Proslogion 2* and its relation to the *Reply*. For they realize that *Proslogion 2* constitutes for Anselm an “independent” argument for the existence of N, or God, and that in *Reply 1* Anselm is opening up new arguments to prove the same conclusion (though he goes on in *Reply 2* to reiterate the proof contained in *Proslogion 2*).

8. *Conclusion.* In *Anselm's Discovery* Hartshorne speaks disparagingly of the “Gaunilo tradition,” or “Gaunilo legend”<sup>55</sup>—meaning the tradition of “mistaken” objections leveled by Gaunilo against Anselm. Hartshorne goes so far as to quote Koyré's verdict: “Gaunilo seems to have understood the corrections which Saint Anselm addressed to him; at least, he did not reply.”<sup>56</sup>

Perhaps Hartshorne and Koyré are wrong. Perhaps there was simply too much mutual confusion for the debate to continue profitably. Now that some of these confusions have been cleared up, we ourselves will be in a better position to evaluate Anselm's response and to decide whether any substantive objections remain for the Gaunilo-tradition, or whether this tradition must succumb to the soundness of at least one reformulation of the ontological proof.

## ABBREVIATIONS

### *Anselm's Works*

M	<i>Monologion</i> (A Soliloquy)
P	<i>Proslogion</i> (An Address)
DG	<i>De Grammatico</i>
DV	<i>De Veritate</i> (On Truth)
DL	<i>De Libertate Arbitrii</i> (Freedom of Choice)
DCD	<i>De Casu Diaboli</i> (The Fall of the Devil)
DIV	<i>Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi</i> (The Incarnation of the Word)
CDH	<i>Cur Deus Homo</i> (Why God Became a [God]-Man)
DCV	<i>De Conceptu Virginali et de Originali Peccato</i> (The Virgin Conception and Original Sin)
DP	<i>De Processione Spiritus Sancti</i> (The Procession of the Holy Spirit)
DC	<i>De Concordia Praescientiae et Praedestinationis et Gratiae Dei cum Libero Arbitrio</i> (The Harmony of the Foreknowledge, the Predestination, and the Grace of God with Free Choice)
PF	<i>Ein neues unvollendetes Werk des hl. Anselm von Canterbury</i> (Philosophical Fragments). Latin text ed. F. S. Schmitt and published in <i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie and Theologie des Mittelalters</i> , 33/3. (Münster: Aschendorff Press, 1936)

### *Other Works*

DT	Augustine's <i>De Trinitate</i> (On the Trinity) E.g., DT 7.4.7 indicates Book 7, Chapter 4, Section 7
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> (ed. J. P. Migne)
AA	<i>Analecta Anselmiana</i> (Frankfurt/M.: Minerva GmbH). Vol. I (1969); Vol. II (1970); Vol. III (1972); Vol. IV (1975); Vol. V (1976). Vols. I-III ed. F. S. Schmitt; Vols. IV-V ed. Helmut Kohlenberger. A continuing series.
S	<i>Sancti Anselmi Opera Omnia</i> . Ed. F. S. Schmitt. (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons). 6 Vols. (1946 – 1961). Vol. I first published in Seckau, 1938; Vol. II first published in Rome, 1940. All volumes reprinted by Friedrich Frommann Press (Stuttgart, 1968) with an introduction by Schmitt drawing together his articles on Anselm's text, and with corrigenda for the text.

## NOTES

### Chapter IV: Anselm's Debate with Gaunilo

\*I am grateful to Richard R. LaCroix, William E. Mann, Gareth B. Matthews, and C. Wade Savage for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter. Unfortunately, I cannot be certain that any one of them would agree completely with the present version.

1. *The Life of St Anselm by Eadmer*, ed., intro., and trans. R. W. Southern (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), 31 n.

2. Charles Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1965), 20. See also p. 151.

3. Hartshorne complains that Gaunilo, and others like him, neglected the principle of *Proslogion* 3 that *to exist without conceivable alternative of not existing is better than to exist with such alternative*. *Anselm's Discovery*, 88 (verbatim).

4. *Anselm's Discovery*, 18.

5. F. S. Schmitt, "Der ontologische Gottesbeweis und Anselm," in AA III, 81-94.

6. S I, 126:30; 127:23. Gaunilo employs the phrase "*aliquid omnibus maius*" (S I, 127:11-12) in the middle of this same section. Cf. the end of Section 3 (S I, 126:26-27).

Even those who would deny that Gaunilo intended "*maius omnibus*" as an abbreviation would still have to translate this phrase as "that which is greater than all *others*" and not as "that which is greater than all." To omit the word "others"—on the ground that the Latin term "*alii*" does not appear in the text—would have the consequence that that which is greater than *everything* would be greater than itself. And this is surely not an accurate expression of Gaunilo's point.

However, in Section 4 of *On Behalf of the Fool* "*illud maius omnibus quae cogitari possunt*" could admittedly be read as "that which is greater than all that can be thought." Now, the sentence "God is that which is greater than all that can be thought" entails that God cannot be conceived. Although in Section 4 Gaunilo does argue that God cannot be conceived, he does *not* do so by claiming that "God is *illud maius omnibus quae cogitari possunt*" entails that God is inconceivable—something he could hardly have failed to do on the above

reading. Moreover, he is using this Latin phrase to identify Anselm's position. And he knows that in *Proslogion* 2 (where Anselm says that God is something than which nothing greater can be thought) Anselm neither means nor implies that God cannot be thought. The intent of Gaunilo's Latin expression, therefore, is that God is greater than all *others* that can be thought. Accordingly, in Section 4 he challenges Anselm's belief that God *can* be conceived. Thus, he maintains that one reason God can be supposed not to exist is that He *cannot at all* be conceived *secundum rem*. Gaunilo's Section 4 is addressed to *Proslogion* 4 and not to *Proslogion* 15, where Anselm allows that God *can be thought* (i.e., can be apprehended) even though He is greater than can be thought (i.e., greater than can be comprehended).

Moreover at S I, 128:22 Gaunilo obviously means an "island which is more excellent than all *other* lands," though he writes only "*insulam illam terris omnibus praesantioiorem*." Where the context suffices to imply "*aliud*" Anselm himself sometimes does not bother to insert this word. E.g., cf. M 64 (S I, 75:7) with M 65 (S I, 76:3), and DCD 4 (S I, 241:31) with DCD 4 (S I, 242:1).

To be sure, there is a *prima facie* difference between (1) "God is that which is greater than all others that can be thought" and (2) "God is that than which nothing greater can be thought." For the former entails that God can be conceived, whereas the latter seems to entail neither that God can be conceived nor that He cannot be conceived. Nonetheless, Gaunilo's use of *I* is not a *distorted* substitute for Anselm's use of *2*, given Anselm's insistence on the conceivability of that than which no greater can be thought. At any rate, "*maius omnibus*," as Gaunilo uses it, does not stand for "*maius omnibus quae sunt*," as Anselm supposes it does.

7. *Reply to Gaunilo* 5 (S I, 135:8-10). N. B. In our own day Anselm's long formula has been abbreviated by Sylvia Crocker, who speaks of Anselm as "proving that the *quo maius* exists." See "The Ontological Significance of Anselm's *Proslogion*," *Modern Schoolman*, 50 (November 1972), p. 33. She employs this formula throughout her article; and, in doing so, she is motivated by the same desire for conciseness as was Gaunilo.

8. N = something than which no greater can be thought = that than which a greater cannot be thought = a necessary being.

9. See pp. 114-115 below for an interpretation of this premise.

10. Gaunilo's recapitulation occurs in *On Behalf of the Fool* 1: "To one who doubts whether there exists, or who denies that there exists, a nature than which nothing greater can be thought, the claim is made that the existence of this nature is proven from two considerations: first, from the fact that the very one who doubts or denies the existence of this nature already has this nature in his understanding when, upon hearing it spoken of, he understands what is said; and, secondly, from the fact that, necessarily, what he understands exists not only in his understanding but also in reality. This second consideration is [allegedly] established by the following reasoning:

To exist also in reality is greater than to exist solely in the understanding. Now, if this thing existed solely in the understanding, then whatever existed also in reality would be greater than it. Thus, that which is greater than all others would be less than some other and would not be greater than all others—surely a contradiction. Therefore, it is

necessary that that which is greater than all others (having already been shown to exist in the understanding) exist not only in the understanding but also in reality. For otherwise it could not be that which is greater than all others." (S I, 125:3-13)

11. "*In intellectu*" ("in the understanding") is as idiomatic for Anselm as "in mind" is for us. McGill worries that "in the understanding" sounds too spatial, and consequently he prefers the translation "in relation to the understanding." Yet, on p. 19 McGill reverts to "in the understanding of the painter." Surprisingly, he finds no analogous problem with "held in thought" and "in his imagination" (p. 17, p. 19). Why should "in the understanding" sound more spatial than "in the imagination"? McGill's distinction seems invidious; and his worry is unnecessary. See John Hick and Arthur McGill, eds., *The Many-faced Argument* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 4, n. 10.

12. *On Behalf of the Fool 2*: "Regarding the fact that this thing is said to exist in my understanding simply because I understand what is said, I ask: Could I not similarly be said to have in my understanding—because if someone were to speak of them I would understand whatever he said—all manner of unreal things that in no way actually exist? But suppose that this thing [than which nothing greater can be thought] were proven to be such that it is not able to exist in thought in the same way as any unreal and doubtfully real things do. And, accordingly, suppose that when I have heard of it I am not said to think it (or to have it in thought) but am said to understand it (and to have it in the understanding) since I could not think it except by understanding (i.e., by apprehending with certainty) that it really exists" (S I, 125:14 – 126:1).

13. Literally: "This being is such that as soon as it is thought of it can only be perceived with certain understanding of its own indubitable existence" (S I, 126:8-9).

14. N. B. *Reply to Gaunilo 4* addresses itself to *On Behalf of the Fool 7*; *Reply to Gaunilo 6* takes issue with *On Behalf of the Fool 2*.

15. This change begins at S I, 129:10 with the sentence "*Cum autem dicitur ...*"

16. In the *Proslogion* Preface Anselm explains why at first he did not append his name to his manuscript. "Modesty" of the same sort probably induced Gaunilo to publish his objections anonymously.

17. *The Life of St Anselm by Eadmer*, 31.

18. For this division see the opening sentences of *Reply 5*.

19. As do Hick and McGill.

20. Hick and McGill, 9. Cf. Barth's label "*eine Notizensammlung*" Karl Barth, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, ix, n. 1 (English ed., 14, n. 2).

21. DIV 1 and CDH preface. Note also the one preface for the three dialogues DV, DL, and DCD.

22. See Hick and McGill, 25, n. 13. N.B. It would be a mistake to infer from the fact that the section-divisions are *not* found in the early mss. that the *Reply* was originally an unordered series of notes loosely strung together. Although Hick and McGill come to the "series of notes" conclusion, they do *not* utilize this mistaken inference. See their p. 9.

23. Gaunilo can be interpreted as discussing a thing (viz., an island) than which no greater *island* can be thought—whereas Anselm discusses a

thing than which *nothing* greater can be thought. To effect a legitimate counter-argument, Gaunilo would have to talk about an island than which *nothing* greater can be thought. But no contradiction results from denying that such a thing exists—whereas a contradiction does result from denying that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists (given the presupposition that existence is a perfection).

In the argument (interpreted as being) about an island than which no *greater* island can be thought, Gaunilo seems to accept Anselm's construal of "greater" as "better." Thus, he mentions that the island "abounds with countless riches and delights of all sorts." He shows no sign either of restricting "greater" to *size* (e.g., an island 1,000 miles in circumference is greater than one 200 miles in circumference) nor of supposing that the island *with its delights* would be better (i.e., greater) in proportion to its size. For Gaunilo the claim "The bigger the island the better" would be as counter-intuitive as for us is the assertion "The bigger the flower the better." So no one is entitled to object to the logic of Gaunilo's counter-example on the ground that, like "the positive integer than which no greater positive integer can be conceived," the notion "the island than which no greater island can be conceived" is unintelligible.

24. See Hick and McGill, 15-16. There they present S I, 125:14 – 126:4 and 126:8-13. That is, they have elided 126:4-7 simply to suit themselves editorially.

25. Hick and McGill, 4, n. 10.

26. Not even McGill reads this passage as telling us that the Fool has no "act of understanding."

27. (1) M. J. Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), 175. (2) Hick and McGill, 21. (3) John Wippel and Allan Wolter, eds., *Medieval Philosophy: From St. Augustine to Nicholas of Cusa* (New York: Free Press, 1969), 166. (4) S. N. Deane, trans., *St. Anselm: Basic Writings* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1962, 2nd ed.), 158. N.B.: at S I, 132:14-15 "*in nullo intellectu*" seems best rendered as "not at all in the understanding" Cf. M 19 (S I, 34:19-21).

28. *Reply to Gaunilo 1* (S I, 130:12-18).

29. *Meditatio Redemptionis Humanae* (cf. S III, 88:110 with 88:114). Cf. Gaunilo, *On Behalf of the Fool 7* (cf. S I, 129:14-15 with 129:16).

30. *Reply to Gaunilo 7* (S I, 136:28 – 137:1).

31. Cf. 42:32-33 with 43:14-15. N. B. Gaunilo makes the same substitution in *On Behalf of the Fool 6* (S I, 128:30).

32. Note also S I, 131:10; 114:20-21. Cf. S I, 104:3-4.

33. E.g., translating "*essentia*" always as "essence."

34. E.g., translating "*existere*" as "to exist" and "*subsistere*" as "to subsist," thereby implying that Anselm was making a distinction between existing and subsisting.

35. "*Aliter enim cogitatur res cum vox eam significans cogitatur, aliter cum id ipsum quod res est intelligitur*" (S I, 103:18-19).

36. Cf. M 10: "For in ordinary usage we recognize that we can speak of a single object in three ways. For we may speak of it either (1) by perceptibly employing perceptible signs (i.e., signs which can be perceived by the bodily

senses) or (2) by imperceptibly thinking to ourselves these same signs, which are perceptible outside us, or (3) neither by perceptibly nor by imperceptibly using these signs but by inwardly and mentally speaking of the objects themselves by imagining them or by understanding their respective definitions, depending upon the type of object. For in one way I speak of a man when I signify him by the name 'man'. In another way [I speak of him] when I think this name silently. In a third way [I speak of a man] when my mind beholds him either by means of an image of his body or by means of his definition—by means of an image of his body, for instance, when [my mind] imagines his visible shape; but by means of his definition, for instance, when [my mind] conceives his universal being, viz., *rational, mortal animal*" (S I, 24:29 – 25:9).

Gaunilo may have had this passage in mind when he mentioned the possibility of conceiving of a non-existent man by conceiving of the generic concept *man* (*On Behalf of the Fool* 4).

37. These terms occur in Section 4 (e.g., S I, 127:12-13).

38. *De Divisione Naturae* (*Patrologia Latina* 122:459D, 463D, 464A).

39. See Anselm's preface to the *Proslogion*. In some contexts "*argumentum*" means "premise." Note Anselm's use of "*pro argumentis*" = "as premises" in S II, 177:16 (DP 1).

40. Note my Section 7. In P 2 Anselm *assumes* that God is identical with N since "N" entails the list of attributes traditionally ascribed to God. (This assumption is made more explicit in *Proslogion* 4.) Then he goes on in *Proslogion* 2 to prove, to his own satisfaction, that N exists. Chapters 5 and following *demonstrate* what was assumed—viz., that N is God—by exhibiting the list of attributes derivable from "N". Hence, the proof of *God's* existence in *Proslogion* 2 depends, in some final sense, upon the further proofs in Chapters 5 and following, as Richard La Croix rightly recognizes (*Proslogion II and III: A Third Interpretation of Anselm's Argument*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972).

41. *Reply*, 10 (S I, 138:30 – 139:3). La Croix is misled by Charlesworth's translation of "*prolatio*" as "proof," instead of as "utterance." See LaCroix, 38,

42. Kant, of course, in rejecting the soundness of the ontological argument, is dealing with the construals of Leibniz and Wolff.

43. [1.] "With confidence I assert that if N can be even thought to exist, it is necessary that it exist. For N can only be thought to exist without a beginning. Now, whatever can be thought to exist but does not exist can be thought to begin to exist. Thus, it is not the case that N can be thought to exist and yet does not exist. Therefore, if it can be thought to exist, it is necessary that it exist.

[2.] "Furthermore: if indeed it can be even thought, it is necessary that it exist. For even one who doubts or denies the existence of N admits that if this being were to exist it would neither actually nor conceivably be able not to exist. For otherwise [i.e., if it existed but were able not to exist] it would not be N. Now, as for whatever can be thought but does not exist: if it were to exist, it would either actually or conceivably be able not to exist. Therefore, if N can be even thought, N is not able not to exist.

[3] "But let us suppose that it can be thought and yet does not exist, Now, whatever can be thought and yet does not exist would not, if it were to exist, be N. Hence, if N [assumed for the sake of argument not to exist] were to exist, it

would not be N—an utterly absurd consequence. Therefore, it is false [to suppose] that N can be thought and yet does not exist.”

44. Anselm never mentions the possibility of a counter-argument in support of the Fool:

(1) Either N is able to begin to exist or N is not able to begin to exist  
(premise)

Assume: (2) N is able to begin to exist.

(a) What is able to begin to exist can be thought to begin to exist.

(premise)

(b) What exists without beginning is greater than what exists through a beginning. (presupposition)

So: (c) N can be thought to be greater than it is. (impossible)

Hence: (3) It is not the case that N is able to begin to exist. (2) (b)

Hence: (4) N is not able to begin to exist. (1) (3)

(5) If anything does not exist but it is able to exist, then it is able to begin to exist. (premise)

Hence: (6) If N does not exist but N is able to exist, then N is able to begin to exist. (instance of (5))

Thus: (7) It is not the case that N does not exist and N is able to exist. (4) (6)

Thus: (8) Either N exists or N is not able to exist. (7)

Assume: (9) N does not exist.

Then: (10) N is not able to exist. (8) (9)

So: (11) If N does not exist, N is not able to exist. (9) (10)

N.B. N can, nonetheless, be thought to exist (because whatever can be thought can be thought to exist); i.e., “N exists” is not self-contradictory.

N.B. “N does not exist and N is able to exist” is inconsistent.

45. The same is true of the text of Arguments 1 and 2 and my representations of them.

46. By truncating the sequence of these two arguments, Hick and McGill bury the noteworthiness of this shift, so that for them it is not an issue. They place the one argument at the top of p. 22 and the other at the bottom of p. 25. Anselm is allegedly responding to two *different* criticisms made by Gaunilo!

47. The ambiguity of “thinking” (conceiving vs. knowing) is partially indicated by Anselm in *Reply 4*.

48. See William Mann, “The Ontological Presuppositions of the Ontological Argument,” *Review of Metaphysics*, 26 (December 1972), 260-277.

49. “So even the Fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding; for when he hears of this being, he understands [what he hears], and whatever is understood is in the understanding. But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding. For if it were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality—which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought exist only in the understanding, then that than which a greater *cannot* be thought

would be that than which a greater *can* be thought! But surely this conclusion is impossible. Hence, without doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.

50. For a different view see D. M. Lochhead, "Is Existence a Predicate in Anselm's Argument," *Religious Studies*, 2 (October 1966), p. 124. Lochhead maintains that Anselm subscribed only to *6 b* and not to *P*.

In "Existence as a Perfection: A Reconsideration of the Ontological Argument," *Religious Studies*, 4 (October 1968), p. 97, L. T. Howe contends that "Whatever exists in the understanding and outside the understanding is more perfect than whatever exists in the understanding alone" is false. As a counter-example he mentions secrets. But this example is not really to the point since in *Proslogion 2* and *Reply 1* Anselm's universe of discourse is "substances." He is not dealing with dreams, illusions, or secrets—none of which can exist independently of the mind. I may, to be sure, wonder whether tonight I shall have such and such a recurrent dream. If I do have this dream, then (Anselm could say) the dream as it occurs is more perfect than the dream as merely surmised. But the dream would exist in the way that dreams do, viz., in the mind. Anselm recognizes that the notion of reality is context-dependent. The very fact that in *Proslogion 2* he contrasts *esse in re* with *esse in intellectu* shows that he has restricted his domain of reference to things which *can* exist extramentally. He further indicates the context of his discussion by taking as his example the case of an artist and his painting.

Not even Lochhead's comment that a real slum is worse than an imaginary one (p. 122 n.) overthrows *P*; for a real slum is a better slum than is an imaginary one.

The main motive for wanting to deny that Anselm subscribed to *P* is that, given *P*, he has no way to fault one interpretation of Gaunilo's perfect-island argument. For if 'the island than which no greater island can be conceived' did not exist in reality, it would be an island than which a greater island could be conceived, etc. Anselm failed to recognize the forcefulness of Gaunilo's reasoning. He failed not because he did not regard existence as a perfection for any being other than *N* (as Lochhead suggests) but because of the considerations alluded to in n. 23 above.

The closest Anselm comes, elsewhere, to comparing a thing *as thought* with that thing *as existing in reality* is *Monologion 36*: "For no one doubts that created substances exist in themselves much differently from the way they exist in our knowledge. In themselves they exist in virtue of their own being; but in our knowledge their likenesses exist, not their own being. It follows, then, that the more truly they exist anywhere by virtue of their own being than by virtue of their likenesses, the more truly they exist in themselves than in our knowledge." Also note *Reply 5* (S I, 135:14-16).

51. Moreover, the logical structure of this argument is not subject to La Croix's counter-interpretation, which entails the conclusion that *N* does not exist (p. 126).

52. La Croix, Chapter 3—especially 99-100; 106-107. La Croix interprets *S* by reference to the principle of *Reply 5* which states: "What does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist is able to be thought not to exist." This principle is implicit in *Reply 1*.

53. Anselm nowhere teaches, and indeed always denies, that N can be thought not to exist in the sense that something can be thought not to exist because it is able not to exist (à la *Reply 5*); for it is never the case that N is able not to exist. He does allow that we can *assume* (a Pickwickian sense of “think”) N not to exist—just as in a logical proof we might assume a premise which we do not realize to be self-contradictory. We can think this schema in the sense of premising it; but we cannot think it *consistently*. By comparison, Anselm regards “N does not exist” as self-contradictory and therefore as unable to be thought (consistently), though able to be assumed as a step in a proof.

54.  $(F) \equiv (F')$ :

(1) Let x be any predicate such that to be x is greater than not to be x.

(2) Either N is x or N is not x.

Assume: (3) N is not x.

(a) N can be thought to be x.

So: (b) N can be thought to be greater than it is (and so N is that than which a greater *can* be thought). (impossible)

So: (4) N is x.

55. E.g., pp. 133, 178, 236, 286, 298.

56. *Anselm's Discovery*, 13. Note also p. 98.