

## ANSELM'S ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

### Anselm of Canterbury

#### Chapter 2: *That God truly exists.*

And so, Lord, do you, who do give understanding to faith, give me, so far as you know it to be profitable, to understand that you are as we believe; and that you are that which we believe. And indeed, we believe that you are a being than which nothing greater can be thought. Or is there no such nature, since the fool has said in his heart, there is no God? (Psalms 14:1). But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak—a being than which nothing greater can be thought—understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his intellect; although he does not understand it to exist. For, it is one thing for an object to be in the intellect, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter preconceives of what he will afterwards execute, he has it in his intellect, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet made it. But when the painting is finished, he both has it in his intellect, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it. Hence, even the fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in the intellect. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the intellect.

And certainly that than which nothing greater can be thought cannot exist in the intellect alone. For, if it exists in the intellect alone, then it can be thought to exist in reality; which is greater. Therefore, if that than which nothing greater can be thought exists in the intellect alone, then that than which nothing greater can be thought is that than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists something than which nothing greater can be conceived, both in the intellect and in reality.

#### Chapter 3: *That God cannot be thought not to exist*

And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be thought not to exist. For, it is possible to think of something which cannot be thought not to exist; and this is greater than something which can be thought not to exist. Hence, if that than which nothing greater can be thought can be thought not to exist, then it is not that than which nothing greater can be thought. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be thought, that it cannot even be thought not to exist.

And this being you are, O Lord, our God. So truly, therefore, do you exist, O Lord, my God, that you cannot be thought not to exist; and rightly so. For, if a mind could think of a being better than you, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd. And, indeed, whatever else there is, except you alone, can be thought not to exist. To you alone, therefore, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings, and hence in a higher degree than all others. For, whatever else exists does not exist so truly, and hence existing belongs to it in a lesser degree. Why, then, has the fool said in his

heart, there is no God (Psalms xiv. 1), since it is so evident, to a rational mind, that you do exist in the highest degree of all? Why, except that he is stupid and a fool?

#### Chapter 4: *How the fool said in his heart that which cannot be thought*

But how has the fool said in his heart what he could not think; or how is it that he could not think what he said in his heart? since it is the same to say in the heart, and to think.

But, if in fact, or rather since in fact he both thought, because he said in his heart; and did not say in his heart, because he could not think; then there is more than one way in which a thing is said in the heart or thought. For in one sense a thing is thought when the word signifying it is thought; and in another sense when the very thing itself is understood. In the former sense, then, God can be thought not to exist; but in the latter, not at all. For no one who understands what God is can think that God does not exist; although he says these words in his heart, either without any signification or with some extraneous signification. For, God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. And whoever fully understands this, assuredly understands that this being so truly exists, that not even in thought can it not exist. Therefore, he who understands that God exists in such a way, cannot think that he does not exist.

I thank you, gracious Lord, I thank you; because what I formerly believed by your bounty, I now so understand by your illumination, that if I were unwilling to believe that you do exist, I should not be able not to understand this to be true.

---

## “ON BEHALF OF THE FOOL”

### Gaunilo of Marmoutiers

To one who doubts or denies that there exists something of such a nature ‘that nothing greater can be thought’, it is said [by Anselm] that its existence is proved first because whoever denies it has it in his thought, since when he hears it said he understands what is said; and then because what he understands necessarily exists not only in the intellect but also in reality. Thus its existence is proved, because it is a greater thing to exist also in reality than to exist only in the intellect, and if it exists only in the intellect, then what exists also in reality will be greater, and thus that which is ‘greater than everything else’ will be less than something and not ‘greater than everything else’, which is self-contradictory. Thus what is ‘greater than everything else’, already proved to exist in the intellect, exists not only in the intellect, but also in reality, or it could not be ‘greater than everything else’. —He could perhaps reply:

“This is said to exist in my intellect only in the sense that I understand what is said. But then could it not be said that in my intellect are all sorts of

false things with no existence in themselves, since when someone speaks of them I understand what is said? Unless perhaps it is a given fact that this cannot be possessed in thought as these false or doubtful things can, and so I am not said to *think* of what I hear, or have it in my *thought*, but to *understand* it and have it in my *intellect*, since I can think of it only by understanding it, i.e. comprehending in true knowledge [*scientia*] that it really exists. But first, if this is true, then there will be no difference between having it in the intellect and then understanding that it really exists, as in the case of the painting, which is first in the painter's mind and afterwards in the finished product. Moreover, it is virtually impossible to believe that this, once spoken of and heard of, could not be thought not to exist, just as God *can* be thought not to exist. For if that is so, then why go against someone who doubts or denies that something of such a nature exists, as this whole dispute has assumed? Finally, that this is something which cannot be so much as *thought of* without intellectually perceiving with certainty that it undoubtedly exists, this must be proved to me by some knockdown argument. But not by this, that this is in my intellect because I understand what I hear; which so far as I can tell could be said equally well of various other things that are uncertain or even false, by anybody whose words I understand, and all the more so if I should be deceived, as often happens, into believing him—what you speak of I do not yet believe.

“And so that example of the painter having the picture he is going to make already in his intellect is not a good match for this argument. For that picture, before it is made, is in the artistic craft of the painter, and any such thing in the artistic craft of some craftsman is nothing other than a certain part of his intelligence; for as Saint Augustine says, ‘when a worker is going to make a strongbox as a finished product, he first has it in his artistic craft. The strongbox made as a finished product is not something living, the strongbox in his artistic craft is something living, because the soul of the craftsman lives, in which all such things are, before they are brought forth.’ For why are these alive in the living soul of the craftsman if not because they are nothing other than the knowledge or intelligence of the soul itself? But apart from what is known to belong to the nature of the mind itself, when upon hearing or thinking of something the intellect perceives it as true, no doubt the truth itself is one thing, and the intellect grasping it another. Thus even if it is true that there is something ‘greater than which cannot be thought’, this is neither heard nor understood in such a way as the not yet made picture in the painter's intellect.

“To this we add what was mentioned beforehand, namely that this ‘greater than everything else that can be thought’, which is said to be nothing other than God himself, I can neither think about upon hearing it nor have in my intellect in terms of something whose species or genus I know, no more than I can with God himself, who for this very reason I can think of not to exist. For I neither know this reality itself nor can I guess at it from anything similar, since you yourself assert it to be such that nothing else can be similar to it. For if a man I do not know at all, whose very existence I do not know, has something said about him, it is due to that notion of species or genus by

which I know what a man is or what men are, and in terms of the very reality this man is that I can think of him. And yet it could turn out that, as the one who spoke of him is lying, this man I thought of does not exist; but nonetheless I thought of him in terms of a true reality, not what *this* man is, but what *any man whatsoever* is. And therefore not even as I have this false thing in thought or the intellect can I have that, when I hear it said ‘God’ or ‘something greater than everything else’, for that I can think of in terms of some true reality I know, but this only in terms of a word, in terms of which it is seldom if ever possible to think of something true. For when we think in this way, we think not so much about *the word itself*, which is certainly something true, i.e. the sound of letters or syllables, but about *what the word we hear signifies*; and yet not as one who knows what the word usually signifies, namely by thinking of something true in reality or only in thought, but as one who does not know it and thinks only in terms of the changes effected in his soul by hearing the word and endeavors to represent its signification in himself. What a marvel, if anyone ever [in this way] managed the truth of the matter. It is a given fact, therefore, that in no other way than this can I have in my intellect ‘something greater than which nothing greater can be thought’. So much for what is said of this supreme nature existing in my intellect!

“But that this necessarily exists in reality is proven to me thus, because if it did not exist in reality, then everything that exists in reality would be greater than it and it would not be ‘greater than everything’, which of course has been proven to exist in the intellect, to this I reply: If we say something exists in the intellect which cannot even be thought of in terms of any true reality whatsoever, then I won't deny that it exists in mine. But since from this there is no way to obtain its existing in reality, I still do not concede this to him, until it is proven to me by a knockdown argument. For whoever says it exists, because otherwise ‘greater than everything’ will not be ‘greater than everything’, is not attending well to what he says. For I do not say, I even doubt or deny, that this is ‘greater’ than every true reality, no more than I concede that it exists—if we call it ‘existence’—apart from the mind endeavoring to represent something entirely unknown to itself in terms of some word that has been heard. How, then, is it proven to me that this ‘greater’ subsists as a matter of fact because it is a given fact that it is greater than everything there is, when I still deny or doubt it as given that this ‘greater’ exists in intellect or indeed in thought even as many doubtful and uncertain things do? I must first be certain that this ‘greater’ exists in any true reality whatsoever, and it is only then that, from its being greater than everything, it will without ambiguity also subsist in itself.

“For example, they say there is in the ocean somewhere an island which, due to the difficulty or rather impossibility of finding what does not actually exist, which some call ‘The Lost Island’. And they say that this island has all manner of riches and delights, even more than the Isles of the Blest, and having no owner or inhabitant it is superior in the abundance of its riches to everywhere inhabited by men. If someone should tell me that this is so, I will find it easy to understand what he says, since there is nothing difficult about

it. But then he adds, as if it were a logical consequence, *You cannot doubt that this island more excellent than all other lands exists somewhere in reality, since you do not doubt that it is in your intellect; and since it is more excellent to exist not only in the intellect but in reality as well, it must necessarily exist, because if it didn't, anywhere else existing in reality would be more excellent than it, and thus that island now understood by you as more excellent will not be such.* If, I say, he tries to convince me by these words that I should no longer doubt that the island exists in reality, I will either think he is joking or I will not know who is the bigger fool, me if I believe him or him if he thinks he has proved its existence with any measure of certainty without first showing me at least that its excellence exists in my intellect as something of true and indubitable reality and in no way as something false or uncertain.”

For the time being, this is how the fool responds to objections. And when one goes on to assert that this ‘greater’ cannot fail to exist even in thought, and this again proven from its otherwise not being ‘greater than everything’, he can reply with the very same response and say: “When did I ever say that anything like this ‘greater than everything’ exists as a true reality, so that from this it should be proved to me that it exists so much that one cannot think of it as not existing? For this one should first prove by an argument of the highest certainty that there is any superior nature whatsoever, i.e. greater and better than everything, so that from this one could go on to prove everything else that what is greatest and best of all cannot lack.

When, however, it is said that this highest reality cannot be thought not to exist, perhaps it is better to say that it not existing or even it being able not to exist cannot be understood. For strictly speaking nothing false can be understood; though it can of course be thought, in the same way that the fool thinks of God not existing. And I know myself to exist with utmost certainty, and yet nevertheless I know that it is possible for me not to exist. The truly highest being, namely God, I undoubtedly understand to exist and to be unable not to exist. But to think of myself as not existing, while also knowing with utmost certainty that I exist, I do not know to be possible. But if it is possible, then why not for whatever else I know with certainty? And if it is *not* possible, then this is nothing special about God alone.

## AQUINAS ON THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

Thomas Aquinas

### Question 2. The existence of God

1. Is the proposition “God exists” self-evident?
2. Is it demonstrable?
3. Does God exist?

### Article 1. Whether the existence of God is self-evident?

**Objection 1.** It seems that the existence of God is self-evident. Now those things are said to be self-evident to us the knowledge of which is naturally implanted in us, as we can see in regard to first principles. But as Damascene says (*De Fide Orth.* i, 1,3), “the knowledge of God is naturally implanted in all.” Therefore the existence of God is self-evident.

**Objection 2.** Further, those things are said to be self-evident which are known as soon as the terms are known, which the Philosopher (1 Poster. iii) says is true of the first principles of demonstration. Thus, when the nature of a whole and of a part is known, it is at once recognized that every whole is greater than its part. But as soon as the signification of the word “God” is understood, it is at once seen that God exists. For by this word is signified that thing than which nothing greater can be conceived. But that which exists actually and mentally is greater than that which exists only mentally. Therefore, since as soon as the word “God” is understood it exists mentally, it also follows that it exists actually. Therefore the proposition “God exists” is self-evident.

**Objection 3.** Further, the existence of truth is self-evident. For whoever denies the existence of truth grants that truth does not exist: and, if truth does not exist, then the proposition “Truth does not exist” is true: and if there is anything true, there must be truth. But God is truth itself: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Therefore “God exists” is self-evident.

**On the contrary,** No one can mentally admit the opposite of what is self-evident; as the Philosopher (Metaph. iv, lect. vi) states concerning the first principles of demonstration. But the opposite of the proposition “God is” can be mentally admitted: “The fool said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalms 52:1). Therefore, that God exists is not self-evident.

**I answer that,** A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways: on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us; on the other, self-evident in itself, and to us. A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as “Man is an animal,” for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all; as is clear with regard to the first principles of demonstration, the terms of which are common things that no one is ignorant of, such as being and non-being, whole and part, and the like. If, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition will be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition. Therefore, it happens, as Boethius says (*Hebdom.*, “Whether all that is, is good”), “that there are some mental concepts self-evident only to the learned, e.g. incorporeal substances are not in space.” Therefore I say that this proposition, “God exists,” is self-evident in itself, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence, as will be shown later (ST I.3–4). Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are better known to us, though less known in their nature—namely, by effects.

**Reply to Objection 1.** To know that God exists in a general and confused way is implanted in us by nature, inasmuch as God is man's beatitude. For man naturally desires happiness, and what is naturally desired by man must be naturally known to him. This, however, is not to know absolutely that God exists; just as to know that someone is approaching is not the same as to know that Peter is approaching, even though it is Peter who is approaching; for many there are who imagine that man's perfect good which is happiness, consists in riches, and others in pleasures, and others in something else.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Perhaps not everyone who hears this word "God" understands it to signify something than which nothing greater can be thought, seeing that some have believed God to be a body. Yet, even if it is granted that everyone understands that the word "God" signifies something than which nothing greater can be thought, nevertheless, it does not therefore follow that he understands that what the word signifies exists in reality, but only that it exists in the apprehension of the intellect. Nor can it be argued that it exists in reality, unless it be accepted that there really exists something than which nothing greater can be thought; and this precisely is not accepted by those who contend that God does not exist.

**Reply to Objection 3.** The existence of truth in general is self-evident but the existence of a primal truth is not self-evident to us.

## **Article 2. Whether it can be demonstrated that God exists?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated. For it is an article of faith that God exists. But what is of faith cannot be demonstrated, because a demonstration produces scientific knowledge; whereas faith is of the unseen (Hebrews 11:1). Therefore it cannot be demonstrated that God exists.

**Objection 2.** Further, the essence is the middle term of demonstration. But we cannot know in what God's essence consists, but solely in what it does not consist; as Damascene says (*De Fide Orth.* i, 4). Therefore we cannot demonstrate that God exists.

**Objection 3.** Further, if the existence of God were demonstrated, this could only be from His effects. But His effects are not proportionate to Him, since He is infinite and His effects are finite; and between the finite and infinite there is no proportion. Therefore, since a cause cannot be demonstrated by an effect not proportionate to it, it seems that the existence of God cannot be demonstrated.

**On the contrary,** The Apostle says: "The invisible things of Him are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Romans 1:20). But this would not be unless the existence of God could be demonstrated through the things that are made; for the first thing we must know of anything is whether it exists.

**I answer that,** Demonstration can be made in two ways: One is through the cause, and is called *propter quid* and this is to argue from what is prior absolutely. The other is through the effect, and is called a demonstration *quia*; this is to argue from what is prior only in relation to us. When an effect is better known to us than its cause, then from the effect we proceed to the knowledge of the cause. And from every effect the existence of its proper cause can be demonstrated (so long as its effects are better known to us), because since every effect depends upon its cause, if the effect exists, the cause must pre-exist. Hence the existence of God, in so far as it is not self-evident to us, can be demonstrated from those of His effects which are known to us.

**Reply to Objection 1.** The existence of God and other like truths about God, which can be known by natural reason, are not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles; for faith presupposes natural knowledge, even as grace presupposes nature, and perfection supposes something that can be perfected. Nevertheless, there is nothing to prevent a man, who cannot grasp a proof, accepting, as a matter of faith, something which in itself is capable of being scientifically known and demonstrated.

**Reply to Objection 2.** When the existence of a cause is demonstrated from an effect, this effect takes the place of the definition of the cause in proof of the cause's existence. This is especially the case in regard to God, because, in order to prove the existence of anything, it is necessary to accept as a middle term the meaning of the word, and not its essence, for the question of its essence follows on the question of its existence. Now the names given to God are derived from His effects; consequently, in demonstrating the existence of God from His effects, we may take for the middle term the meaning of the word "God".

**Reply to Objection 3.** From effects not proportionate to the cause no perfect knowledge of that cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects; though from them we cannot perfectly know God as He is in His essence.

## **Article 3. Whether God exists?**

**Objection 1.** It seems that God does not exist; because if one of two contraries be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed. But the word "God" means that He is infinite goodness. If, therefore, God existed, there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world. Therefore God does not exist.

**Objection 2.** Further, it is unnecessary to suppose that what can be accounted for by a few principles has been produced by many. But it seems that everything we see in the world can be accounted for by other principles, supposing God did not exist. For all natural things can be reduced to one principle, viz. nature; and all voluntary things can be reduced to one principle, viz. human reason, or will. Therefore there is no need to posit God's existence.

**On the contrary,** It is said in the person of God: “I am Who am.” (Exodus 3:14)

**I answer that,** The existence of God can be proved in five ways.

The first and more manifest way is the argument from change. It is certain, and evident to our senses, that in the world some things are undergoing change. Now whatever is undergoing change is being changed by something else, for nothing can be undergoing change except inasmuch it is in potentiality to that towards which it is changing; whereas a thing brings about change inasmuch as it is in act. For change is nothing else than the reduction of something from potentiality to actuality. But nothing can be reduced from potentiality to actuality, except by something in a state of actuality. Thus that which is actually hot, as fire, makes wood, which is potentially hot, to be actually hot, and thereby moves and changes it. Now it is not possible that the same thing should be at the same time in actuality and in potentiality in the same respect, but only in different respects. For what is actually hot cannot at the same time be potentially hot; on the contrary, it is at the same time potentially cold. It is therefore impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both bringing about change and undergoing change, i.e. that it should be changing itself. Therefore, whatever is undergoing change must be being changed by something else. If that by which it is changed is itself undergoing change, then this also must necessarily be being changed by another, and that by yet another. But this cannot go on to infinity, because then there would be no first source of change, and, consequently, no other source of change; seeing that subsequent sources of change bring about change only inasmuch as they are changed by the first mover; as the staff moves only because it is put in motion by the hand. Therefore it is necessary to arrive at a first source of change, not changed by anything else; and this everyone understands to be God.

The second way is from the nature of the efficient cause. In the world of sense we find there is an order of efficient causes. There is no case known (neither is it, indeed, possible) in which a thing is the efficient cause of itself; for then it would be prior to itself, which is impossible. Now in efficient causes it is not possible to go on to infinity, because in all efficient causes following in order, the first is the cause of the intermediate cause, and the intermediate is the cause of the ultimate cause, whether there be many intermediate causes, or only one. Now to take away the cause is to take away the effect. Therefore, if there be no first cause among efficient causes, there will be no ultimate, nor any intermediate cause. But if in efficient causes it were possible to go on to infinity, there would be no first efficient cause, neither would there be an ultimate effect, nor any intermediate efficient causes; all of which is plainly false. Therefore it is necessary to acknowledge a first efficient cause, to which everyone gives the name of God.

The third way is taken from possibility and necessity, and runs thus. We find in nature things that are possible to be and not to be, since they are found to be generated [*come into existence*], and to corrupt [*go out of existence*], and consequently, they are possible to be and not to be. But it is impossible for these things always to exist, for that which is possible not to be at

some time is not. Therefore, if everything is possible not to be, then at one time there could have been nothing in existence. Now if this were true, even now there would be nothing in existence, because that which does not exist only begins to exist due to something already existing. Therefore, if at one time nothing was in existence, it would have been impossible for anything to have begun to exist; and thus even now nothing would be in existence—which is absurd. Therefore, not all beings are merely possible, but there must exist something whose existence is necessary. But every necessary thing either has its necessity caused by another, or not. Now it is impossible to go on to infinity in necessary things which have their necessity caused by another, as has been already proved in regard to efficient causes. Therefore we cannot help but posit the existence of some being having of itself its own necessity, and not receiving it from another, but rather causing in others their necessity. This all men speak of as God.

The fourth way is taken from the gradation to be found in things. Among beings there are some more and some less good, true, noble and the like. But “more” and “less” are predicated of different things, according as they resemble in their different ways something which is the maximum, as a thing is said to be hotter according as it more nearly resembles that which is hottest; so that there is something which is truest, something best, something noblest and, consequently, something which is uttermost being; for those things that are greatest in truth are greatest in being, as it is written in *Metaph.* ii. Now the maximum in any genus is the cause of all in that genus; as fire, which is the maximum heat, is the cause of all hot things. Therefore there must also be something which is to all beings the cause of their being, goodness, and every other perfection; and this we call God.

The fifth way is drawn from the governance of things. We see that unintelligent things, such as natural bodies, operate for the sake of an end, and this is evident from their operating always (or nearly always) in the same way, for the sake of what is best. Hence it is plain that they achieve their end not by chance, but by design. Now no unintelligent thing can tend towards an end unless it be directed by some being endowed with wisdom and understanding; as the arrow is shot to its target by the archer. Therefore there is some intelligent being by whom all natural things are directed to their end; and this being we call God.

**Reply to Objection 1.** As Augustine says (*Enchiridion* xi): “Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil.” This belongs to the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist, and out of it produce good.

**Reply to Objection 2.** Since nature operates for a determinate end under the direction of a superior agent, whatever is done by nature must necessarily be traced back to God, as to its first cause. Likewise, whatever is done voluntarily must also be traced back to some higher cause other than human reason or will, since these are changeable and fallible; for all things that are changeable and fallible must be traced back to a first principle that is unchanging and per se necessary, as was just shown.