

PHIL 2220 HANDOUT – Lecture 01 (January 21st)

Chapter 2 of *Proslogion* by St. Anselm of Canterbury Anselm's famous 'ontological argument' for the existence of God

THAT GOD TRULY EXISTS

Therefore, Lord, you who grant understanding to faith, grant that, insofar as you know it is useful for me, I may understand that you exist as we believe you exist, and that you are what we believe you to be. Now we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be thought. So can it be that no such nature exists, since "The fool has said in his heart, 'There is no God'"? But when this same fool hears me say "something than which nothing greater can be thought," he surely understands what he hears; and what he understands exists in his understanding, even if he does not understand that it exists [in reality]. For it is one thing for an object to exist in the understanding and quite another to understand that the object exists [in reality]. When a painter, for example, thinks out in advance what he is going to paint, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand that it exists, since he has not yet painted it. But once he has painted it, he both has it in his understanding and understands that it exists because he has now painted it. So even the fool must admit that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood exists in the understanding.

And surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot exist only in the understanding. For if it exists only in the understanding, it can be thought to exist in reality as well, which is greater. So if that than which a greater cannot be thought exists only in the understanding, then the very thing than which a greater cannot be thought is something than which a greater can be thought. But that is clearly impossible. Therefore, there is no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.

QUOD VERE SIT DEUS

Ergo Domine, qui das fidei **intellectum**, da mihi, ut, quantum scis expedire, **intelligam**, quia es sicut credimus, et hoc es quod credimus. Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit. An ergo non est aliqua talis natura, quia "dixit insipiens in corde suo: non est Deus"? Sed certe ipse idem insipiens, cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: "aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest," **intelligit** quod audit; et quod **intelligit**, in **intellectu** eius est, etiam si non **intelligat** illud esse. Aliud enim est rem esse in **intellectu**, alium **intelligere** rem esse. Nam cum pictor praecogitat quae facturus est, habet quidem in **intellectu**, sed nondum **intelligit** esse quod nondum fecit. Cum vero iam pinxit, et habet in **intellectu** et **intelligit** esse quod iam fecit. Convincitur ergo etiam insipiens esse vel in **intellectu** aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest, quia hoc, cum audit, **intelligit**, et quidquid **intelligitur**, in **intellectu** est.

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

Question 2 of *Summa theologiae* by St. Thomas Aquinas Aquinas's famous 'Five Ways' arguments for the existence of God

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.