

Chapter 2

Is the Ontological Argument Ontological?

THE ARGUMENT ACCORDING TO ANSELM AND ITS METAPHYSICAL INTERPRETATION ACCORDING TO KANT

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1

FOR A LONG TIME the so-called ontological argument was not called ontological at all.¹ Saint Anselm and even Descartes both introduce it as “meum argumentum”—my argument.² Leibniz speaks only of

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² Anselm, *Proslogion*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, vols. 1–3 of Anselm of Canterbury, *Opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgh and Rome: Thomas Nelson, 1938–1961), vol. 1, 95, lg. 6. When I quote Anselm in translation, I often use Anselm of Canterbury, *Works*, vol. 1, edited and translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (To-

an “argumentum dudum inter Scolasticos celebre et a Cartesio renovatum”—a most celebrated argument among Scholastics, now renewed by Descartes.³ Kant, who, we should add, sometimes calls it “Cartesian,”⁴ was probably the first one to describe it as an “ontological proof.”⁵ Therefore we cannot avoid asking a very obvious question: Why did the ‘ontological argument’ attain so late the explicit qualification of ‘ontological’? At the very least, this latency period reveals, although it does not explain why, that the ‘ontological argument’ could perfectly well have continued *without* becoming ontological, for it managed to be born and then reborn without this qualification. But could Anselm (and even Descartes) have developed the ‘ontological argument’ without using the very concept of ontology? From a historical point of view, this question is all the weightier since the term ‘ontology’ first appears six hundred years

ronto and New York: Edwin Mellen, 1974). I give first the page and lines of the Latin text, then the standard English translation. See also “. . . vulgaribus argumentis . . .,” *Monologion*, Prologue, *ibid.*, 7, 9; and “. . . connexionem hujus meae argumentis . . .,” *Quod ad haec respondent editor ipsius libelli [= Responsio]*, 3.133.9. Descartes, *Oeuvres*, ed. Adam-Tannery, rev. P. Costabel and B. Rochot (Paris: J. Vrin, 1966–), 7.115.22; see 65, 20. On this point, I agree with the statement of Alexandre Koyré, to whom the argument of Anselm no longer seems “une preuve ontologique au sens exact du terme” (*L’idée de Dieu dans la philosophie de Saint Anselme* [1923; reprint, Paris: J. Vrin, 1984], 193).

³ *Meditationes de cognitione, veritate, et ideis*, in *Die philosophischen Schriften*, ed. C. J. Gerhardt (Hildesheim: Olms, 1978), 4.425

⁴ “. . . argumento Cartesiano . . .,” in *Principiorum primorum cognitionis metaphysicae nova dilucidatio*, II. 7. Akademie-Ausgabe I, 395; or “. . . cartesianischer (Beweisgrund) . . .,” in *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*, III, 5, Akademie-Ausgabe II, 162; and also “. . . dem so berühmten ontologischen cartesianischen Beweis . . .,” in *Critique of Pure Reason*, A602/B630.

⁵ *Der einzig mögliche Beweisgrund zu einer Demonstration des Daseins Gottes*, III, 4, Akademie-Ausgabe II, 161, and *Critique of Pure Reason*, A592/B620. Henceforth the formula “ontological argument” is established. Hegel uses it to define both Descartes (“Das ist also die Einheit des Denkens und Seins und der ontologische Beweis vom Dasein Gottes”; *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 20 of *Werke von 1832–35*, eds. E. Moldenhauer and K. Markus Michel [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971], 138) and even Anselm (“. . . den sogenannten ontologischen Beweis vom Dasein Gottes”; *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, eds. P. Garniron and W. Jaeschke, vol. 6g of *Vorlesungen. Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* [Hamburg: Meiner, 1983–], 33–34). Schelling sometimes places side by side, on the same page, the old formula (“. . . cartesianischen Beweis . . .”) and the new one (“. . . durch die Ausstellung des ontologischen Beweises ist Cartesius für die ganze Folge der neueren Philosophie bestimmend geworden”; *Zur Geschichte der neueren Philosophie*, vol. 10 of *Sammthche Werke* [Stuttgart and Hamburg: Cotta, 1856–1869], 14).

after Anselm—when, in the days of Descartes, Goclenius, Clauberg, and others progressively imposed it.⁶ Thus, the original argument raised by Anselm was perfectly acceptable for a very long time as a demonstration without any help from ontology: that is a plain fact in the history of concepts.

Thus, the obvious question arises: Does Anselm's argument appear, without any reservation or exception, in the realm of the question of being, that is, is it within the limits of the history of metaphysics (understood according to the precise acceptation suggested by Heidegger)? Or, on the contrary, was the original argument capable of succeeding without any appeal to 'ontology' as it is defined by metaphysics—that is, outside the horizon of being? In philosophy, questions of rights matter more than facts; it is therefore clear that no purely historical result will provide an answer sufficient to our question. To outline something like an answer, one would have to analyze what Kant meant when he first called the argument an "ontological" one. Let us proceed in three steps: (a) determine the characteristics of such an 'ontological' argument according to Kant; (b) check if and how some thinkers in the history of metaphysics prepare or fulfill these characteristics; and (c) decide whether Anselm's argument (and perhaps, to some extent, Descartes's) agrees or disagrees with these characteristics and, as a consequence, with any 'ontological argument' in the proper Kantian sense.

2

When Kant discovered and imposed the syntagm 'ontological argument,' he gave it an accurate definition: this ontological argument infers "gänzlich a priori aus blossen Begriffen auf das Dasein einer höchsten Ursache"—the existence of a Supreme Cause absolutely a

⁶ On that point, see the studies of P. Petersen, *Geschichte der aristotelischen Philosophie im protestantischen Deutschland* (1921; reprint, Stuttgart: Friedrich Fromann, 1962); M. Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulmetaphysik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Siebeck], 1939); E. Vollrath, "Die Gliederung der Metaphysik in eine *Metaphysica generalis* und eine *Metaphysica specialis*," *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 16, no. 2 (1962); my own essay, *Sur le prisme métaphysique de Descartes* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1986), chap. 1; and Jean.-François Courtine, *Suarez et le système de la métaphysique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990).

priori from mere concepts—that is, establishes the “Dasein eines höchsten Wesens aus Begriffen”—the existence of a Supreme Essence (Being) from concepts.⁷

Therefore, the argument deserves to be called ‘ontological’ when it reaches the existence of a Supreme or Privileged Being by means of pure concepts. However, a difficulty appears: if the ontological argument deserves its qualification only because it leads, through mere concepts, to existence, then all the other proofs of God’s existence in rational theology would deserve this qualification of ‘ontological’ as well. Don’t they reach the conclusion of an existence, too? In fact, Kant meant something entirely different: the argument becomes ‘ontological’ because it leads to the existence of a Supreme and Privileged Being by relying not merely on concepts, but also on the concept of the essence of this Being, that is, the “Begriff eines höchsten Wesens,” or the “Begriff des allerrealsten Wesens.”⁸ ‘Ontological’ does not indicate the simple attainment of Being as existence, but rather the quite extraordinary fact that this Being attains existence solely by means of its pure essence. The ontological argument becomes really ‘ontological’ only insofar as it proves existence (as other proofs do) under two exceptional conditions (quite apart from all other proofs): (a) by starting from a pure concept; and (b) by starting from the pure concept of an essence. In identifying these two conditions of the genuine ‘ontological argument,’ Kant merely explicated some decisions already made by his predecessors. Let us recall them briefly.

That a proof of God’s existence becomes an ‘ontological proof’ only by relying on a concept of God was already clearly assumed by Descartes (though he avoided the word ‘ontological’). The a priori demonstration of God’s existence in *Meditatio V* derives in fact from a ‘cogitatio de Deo’; this ‘thought’ claims the status of a true idea (“ejus ideam tanquam ex mentis meae thesauro depromere”—the idea of Him I bring out, as it were, from the treasury of my mind); that is, it claims to be at the same level of intelligibility as any other idea—for instance, a mathematical idea (“non minus apud me invenio quam ideam cujusvis figurae aut numeri”—I find [this idea of Him] no less in me than the idea of some figure or number). The

⁷ *Critique of Pure Reason*, A590/B616, A602/B630.

⁸ *Ibid.*, A601/B629, A596/B264.

idea of God thus belongs to the class of innate ideas, of which it presents a very peculiar but not an irregular case: with the idea of God, we are still dealing with one of the “*ideae verae mihi ingenitae, quarum prima et praecipua est idea Dei*”—the true and innate ideas in me, of which the first and principal is that of God.⁹ The common epistemic claims weigh so much upon this idea of God that Descartes finally admits—in spite of his insistence on preserving God’s incomprehensibility—a “*Dei conceptus*,” that is, a “*divinae naturae conceptus*” or a “*conceptus entis summe perfecti*”—a concept [understanding] of God, of the divine nature, of the most perfect Being.¹⁰ So a decisive step is taken: from now on, the ‘ontological’ argument relies on the (first) presupposition that a concept—whatsoever it may be—can match the divine essence, or that a concept can reach God within the limits of an essence—whatsoever it may be. All subsequent discussions, whether they deal with the determination of this essence (Spinoza, Malebranche, Leibniz) or with the transition from the concept of an essence to its existence beyond the concept (Gassendi, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Schelling, etc.), will henceforth admit and use a certain concept of God—in short, will agree that it may be possible and correct to identify God with a concept.

We are now able to proceed to the second characteristic of the ‘ontological’ argument and ask for a definition of this essence of God, which is supposed to make it accessible by a concept. The philosophers did not answer this second question as swiftly as they did the first. They needed to go through several stages.

(i) Descartes restricts himself to a definition of God as the Supreme or Supremely Perfect Being: “*cogitare Deum (hoc est ens summe perfectum)*”—to think God (that is the most perfect being), “*ens primum*”—first Being, or “*summum ens, sive perfectum*”—highest and perfect Being.¹¹ But this conceptual determination of the essence of God did not obviously open an unbridged gap between essence and existence; the word “perfection” emphasizes the gap even more than it succeeds in filling it: God does not yet exist by an immediate effect either of His concept or of His essence, but

⁹ *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, in *Oeuvres*, vol. 7, 67, 21–23; 65, 22–23; 68, 8–10.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 167, 1; 151,6; 166, 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66, 12–13 (= 67, 9–10 or 54, 13–14).

only through the mediation of a third operator—the “supreme perfection,” which includes, among many others, the perfection of existing. In order to reach the existence directly by means of pure essence, that is, to think of God as “*id cuius essentia involvit existentiam*,” that whose essence includes existence (as Spinoza says without any proof at all¹²), metaphysics has to go one step further.

(ii) Malebranche takes this step by repeating the Cartesian argument not merely from the concept of “*Dieu ou l’être infiniment parfait*”—God or the Infinitely Perfect Being—but also through the absolute identity, in the concept of God, of the essence and being as such. So “*l’idée de Dieu, ou de l’être en général, sans restriction, de l’être infini*”—the idea of God, or of being in general, of being without any restriction, of infinite being¹³—is squarely opposed to the idea of such and such finite being, in the sense that only in God could the essence be one with the whole being, so that God could reach nothing but Himself as He achieves His existence. The ‘ontological’ argument means, for Malebranche, only that God uses all the manifold meanings of being according to Aristotle: the argument proceeds from being as essence (possibility) to being as existence (substance, act) through being as concept (categories and truth). It would be advisable indeed to dwell, at this point, upon the fundamental ambiguity of Malebranche’s understanding of the very term ‘being,’ since the opposition between “*l’être en général*”—being in general—and “*tel être*”—such a being (or “*tels êtres*”—such beings)—may lead to two opposed interpretations: on the one hand, to the ontic difference between being as Absolute Being—*ὄντως ὄν*—and finite, lapsing, derivative beings; on the other hand, to a quasi-ontological difference between all beings and Being itself, universal and abstract. Malebranche never confronts directly the essential and obvious ambiguity of his concept of ‘being’; but, insofar as the incapacity of thinking out the ontological difference as such seems to be the main feature of metaphysics—as Heidegger says—this very failure makes Malebranche a very distinguished metaphysician indeed. In any case, for our purposes this failure does not matter that much; the decisive point remains that, in stating that “*l’être*

¹² *Ethica*, I. Def. I (= § 11, Dem. 1).

¹³ *Recherche de la vérité*, IV, 11, §§ 1 and 2, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. André Robinet, vol. 2 by Geneviève Rodis-Lewis (Paris: J Vrin, 1972), 93, 95.

sans restriction, en un mot l'Être, c'est l'idée de Dieu"—the being without restriction, in a word the Being, is the idea of God¹⁴—Malebranche abolishes any further mediation between God's essence and God's existence to the point that he reestablishes, at least tentatively, the Thomistic identity of the divine essence with Being as such, that is, *in actu*. God exists by the immediate consequence of His essence, which amounts solely to Being. In this formulation, the Cartesian argument appears to deserve, for the first time, the title (if not yet the word) 'ontological.'

(iii) Leibniz, however, is to be credited with the perfection of the so-called ontological argument: he identifies the divine essence not only with the concept of being in general, but also definitively with the concept of the Necessary Being: "l'Existence de l'Être nécessaire, dans lequel l'Essence renferme l'Existence, ou dans lequel il suffit d'être possible pour être actuel"—the existence of the Necessary Being, in whom essence encloses existence, or for whom to be possible is enough to be actual.¹⁵ Indeed, the formulation by Malebranche (and that by Descartes) does not make clear *why*, in the core of the manifold meanings of being, essence could amount to existence. Leibniz makes this transition by establishing the equivalence, at least in the one concept of God, of possibility and necessity, beyond effectivity itself as mere (extra)position: "Si l'Être nécessaire est possible, il existe. Car l'Être nécessaire et l'Être par son Essence ne sont qu'une même chose"—if the Necessary Being is possible, He exists. For the Necessary Being and Being by His essence are one and the same thing.¹⁶ To become perfectly 'ontological,' the argument had to make sure that the concept of divine essence fully coincides with Necessary Being—God is as the Necessary Being, with the minimal condition that He be possible. This formulation brings the former merely 'Cartesian' argument to its full ontological dignity. Even though they intend to criticize it, Kant and Schelling still refer to its Leibnizian expression: God is by His mere concept of necessary existence, provided that this concept be possible. However, we must notice that Descartes himself has at least once anticipated such an

¹⁴ *Entretiens sur la métaphysique et la religion*, II, §4, vol. 12 of *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. André Robinet (Paris: J. Vrin, 1965), 53.

¹⁵ *Monadologie* §14, ed. André Robinet (Paris: J. Vrin, 1954; repr. 1986), 95.

¹⁶ *Méditationes de cognitione, veritate, et ideis*, *Die philosophischen Schriften*, vol. 4, 406.

outcome; in his pedagogical exposition of the a priori proof, he reformulates the argument previously developed from the point of view of perfection within the horizon of possibility and necessity: “nempe continetur existentia possibilis sive contingens in conceptu rei limitatae, sed necessaria et perfecta in conceptu entis summe perfecti”—possible or contingent existence is contained in the concept of a limited thing, whereas necessary and perfect existence is contained in the concept of a supremely perfect being.¹⁷ This means that, to some extent, Descartes has already reached the ontological status of the argument, even though he lacked the word. When Schelling argues against Descartes that the latter’s demonstration confuses the concept of a necessary Being with the concept of a Being existing by necessity—“dass Gott nicht bloss das notwendige Seiende, sondern notwendig das notwendige Seiende ist; dies ist aber ein bedeutender Unterschied” (God is not only the necessary Being, but necessarily the necessary Being; this is an important distinction)¹⁸—he admits at least that there is evidence that Descartes was fully aware that the core of the argument lies in the connection of necessity and possibility; this means that Descartes was already developing a genuine ontological argument—without the right name.

3

We are now at the point where it is possible to formulate our second question: If the argument proposed by Anselm deserves to be called ‘ontological,’ it has to fulfill the two requirements set by its later metaphysical interpretation, namely, (a) to reach existence through a concept of God’s essence; and (b) to interpret this essence as Being as such, universal and without restriction. Does Anselm’s argument fulfill both those requirements?

Let us start with the first one: Does the original argument rely on any concept of the divine essence? A totally negative answer is imperative, for several matching motives.

¹⁷ *Meditationes de prima philosophia*, 166, 16–18.

¹⁸ *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, I, 8, vol. 13 of *Sämtliche Werke*, 159. On this point, see X. Tilliette, “Argument ontologique et ontothéologie. Notes conjointes. Schelling et l’argument ontologique,” *Archives de Philosophie* 26, no. 1 (1963); reprinted in *L’absolu et la philosophie: Essais sur Schelling* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987), chap. 9.

We notice first that the starting point of the argument is explicitly a matter of faith, not of conceptual obviousness: the two mottos “fides quaerens intellectum” and “exemplum de ratione fidei”—‘faith seeking insight,’ and ‘an example of the rationality of faith’—inaugurate, respectively, the *Proslogion* and the *Monologion*; in both cases, the point is only to rationalize what faith has already given us to think about. Faith here does not simply provide reason with a mere neutral *datum*, which it could later appropriate from faith as its own property; rather, faith leads reason and rationality all along the speculative way: “Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo: quia ‘nisi credidero, non intelligam’”—For I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For I believe even this: that I shall not understand unless I believe (*Proslogion* I/100, 18–19/93).¹⁹ Intelligence proceeds from faith, because rationality consists mainly in recognizing in faith the permanent and radical condition of the possibility of thinking; in that sense, intelligence needs not merely faith, but explicitly specified faith—belief in exactly this: that reason has to believe in order to achieve understanding. As Hegel admits later, Anselm recognizes faith as the first condition of speculation, but, contrary to Hegel, he also admits faith as the last horizon of understanding. (By the way, no concept—no matter which—ever plays the central and original role in speculation.)

The final point of the argument also escapes from the concept, because its ultimate goal is to reach the God who lives in a “lux inaccessibilis” (an inaccessible light; 1 Tim. 6.16). The fact that God dwells in this unreachable light defines not only the starting point of the argument (as it does in *Proslogion* I/98, *passim*), but also its final result (*Proslogion* XVI/112, 18ff.): knowledge never abolishes faith or

¹⁹ The motto “fides quaerens intellectum” comes from Isaiah 7.9 (according to the Septuagint). “Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis,” through Augustine: “Intelligere vis? Crede. Deus enim per prophetam dixit: ‘Nisi credideritis, non intelligetis.’ . . . Si non intellexisti, inquam, crede. In intellectus enim merces est difei, ergo noli quaerere intelligere ut credas, sed crede ut intelligas” (*In Johannis Evangelium*, XIX, 6, Corpus Christianorum 36, p. 287; see also XLV, 7; XV, 24; XXVII 7; LXIX, 2; *ibid.*, pp. 273, 391, and 500–501). Augustine chooses the version of the Septuagint, but reconciles it with the translation from the Hebrew: “Nisi credideritis, non permanebis” (*De doctrina christiana*, 2.12, 17; PL 34, col. 43. See F. Thonnard, “Caractères augustiniens de la méthode philosophique de Saint Anselme,” in *Spicilegium Beccense* I [Paris: J. Vrin, 1959]).

God's inaccessibility; it makes the mind recognize this inaccessibility as a definitive feature of God. Anselm's argument proves quite unable either to exhibit any concept of God or to hope for one. What is more, this argument never implies any such concept,²⁰ because it relies precisely on the impossibility of any adequate concept of God whatsoever. The root of the argument is not reliance on the concept, but reliance on a nonconcept, acknowledged as such.

This nonconceptual starting point is obviously expressed by the keynote formula of the *Proslogion*: "id quo majus cogitari nequit," or "aliquid quo nihil majus cogitari possit"—something such that anything greater than it cannot be thought. One must stress this point: God, if there is such a being, can be thought of only as something that we *cannot* conceive. As a concept, God admits only His very transcendence of any conceivable concept at all. As long as anything can be conceived within fixed limits, this item does not reach God in any way. Inversely, thought opens itself to the question of God only insofar as it reaches the utmost limits of its own field. The only evidence that thought might really deal with the question of God and His supposed essence consists in this: it can transcend all conceivable concepts, and, more, it can experience the limits of its conceiving power. God can be met by thought only insofar as, first, thought experiences the maximum of the conceivable—something like an "id quo majus cogitari *potest*" (something such that anything greater *can* be thought—though Anselm never uses this formula)—and, then, in a further step, it faces up to what this same finite thought *cannot* surpass, conquer, or rule—something like an "id quo major cogitari *nequit*." As long as our thought can still think in concepts, no God appears; God appears only as soon as thought cannot go further; God begins exactly where and when the concept stops

²⁰ Nor a divine name, as Etienne Gilson emphasized against Karl Barth (*Fides quaerens intellectum: Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes* [Munich: Kaiser, 1931]): "Or il n'est pas besoin d'être grand exégète pour savoir que jamais l'Écriture n'a donné à Dieu nom semblable; les théologiens du Moyen Age les ont colligés et commentés, à la suite de Denys, dans leurs *De divinis nominibus*, ils n'y ont jamais trouvé celui-là" ("Sens et nature de l'argument de Saint Anselme," *Archives d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 9 [1934]: 26ff., reprinted in *Études médiévales* [Paris: J. Vrin, 1983], 74ff.). We fully agree with Gilson's thesis, against the recent reinforcement of Barth's position by M. Corbin ("Cela dont plus grand ne puisse être pensé," *Anselm Studies* 1, 1983; and the "Introduction" to the *Proslogion* in his *L'oeuvre de Anselme de Cantorbéry* [Paris: Cerf, 1986], 1.210, 214, 216, 220–21).

short. The fascination raised straightaway by the *nonontological* argument of Anselm—notwithstanding any question about its validity—comes clearly from this genuinely critical aspect. In fact, the syntagm “*id quo majus cogitari nequit*” claims neither to define God by a concept, even in a negative way, nor to give access to any transcendental item or being. It only indicates the limits felt by all possible efforts toward any conception of God, that is, all efforts to think beyond the limits of our power of thinking. This syntagm deals more with our finitude than with the conception of God. More precisely, it deals with the impossibility of any conception of God, as it reveals the essential finitude of our thoughts, whatever progress they may indefinitely achieve.

If, according to Kant, the word ‘transcendental’ means “*niemals eine Beziehung unserer Erkenntnis auf Dinge, sondern nur aufs Erkenntnisvermögen*”—never a relation of thought with things, but only with our power [or faculty] of thinking²¹—then we must conclude paradoxically that Anselm’s argument aims at a *transcendent* but inaccessible item only through the *transcendental* test of our *cogitatio*. Any critical evaluation of this argument that would begin by ignoring its obvious critical status in order to disqualify it in an easier way—as it happens in most cases—would prove immediately self-defeating; and, in fact, the majority of these refutations do refute their own attempts, though by no means Anselm’s proof. The dogmatic bias appears in most discussions on the side of the opponent (who does not understand the critical argument), not on the side of Anselm. And it is not in the least paradoxical that Kant was the first to miss the point and to criticize Anselm as if he had not been as ‘critical’—in Kant’s very sense—as Kant himself was supposed to be. This can also be confirmed by referring to the other

²¹ *Prolegomena*, §13, Akademie-Ausgabe, 293, “third remark.” This comparison was suggested by P. Naulin: “Le paradoxe du *Proslogion* est de développer une argumentation proprement dogmatique dans une perspective qui, par sa référence à la conscience de soi, est déjà critique” (“Réflexions sur la portée de la preuve ontologique chez Anselme de Cantorbéry,” *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 74–1 [1969], 19). See also C.-E. Viola: “C’est à tort qu’on identifie souvent l’argument d’Anselme avec la preuve cartésienne ou leibnizienne, qui part de l’idée de Dieu conçu comme *ens perfectissimum*, l’idée du plus parfait. . . . En effet, chez Anselme, il ne s’agit pas de l’analyse d’un *concept* comme chez la plupart des partisans de l’argument ontologique,” but rather “d’une analyse de notre manière de comprendre Dieu que celle d’un simple concept” (“Journées internationales anselmiennes,” *Archives de Philosophie* 35 [1972]: 153).

famous opponent of Anselm's argument, Thomas Aquinas. The whole burden of the Thomistic refutation rests upon the fact that God is not obviously known by us ("per se notum quoad nos"), so that we are deprived of any concept of Him; therefore Thomas first strongly confirms our interpretation of Anselm's argument, as relying on the impossibility of conceiving God, but then, second, interprets this lack of any concept of God as a failure of Anselm's, although it is precisely the core of Anselm's argument. Thus, Thomas gives the utmost evidence that he did not understand at all the powerful paradox of his opponent. Third, he confesses plainly (but unwillingly) that he himself endeavors to construct his own *viae* (ways) upon noncritical, dogmatic, and quasi-empirical concepts of the essence of God, and he obviously does so by assuming Aristotelian starting points. The real issue between Anselm and Thomas Aquinas does not consist, as traditional critics insist too exclusively, in the use of a priori versus a posteriori concepts of God's essence, but primarily in whether to use any concept at all. Far from precluding the demonstration of the existence of God (as Thomas implicitly suggests), the impossibility of any concept of God's essence proves to be, for Anselm, the core of all proof supposed to remain critical and transcendental (in Kant's sense). Far in advance of his critics, Anselm frees himself from the presuppositions of the metaphysical conception.²²

The solidity of this nonconcept of God is further confirmed by the three steps of the demonstration based upon it. Let us repeat them.

²² This transcendental interpretation of the *cogitatio* is precisely laid out in the reply to Gaunilo: "Sed et si verum esset non posse cogitari vel intelligi illud quo majus cogitari, non tamen falsum esset 'quo majus cogitari nequit' cogitari posse et intelligi. Sicut enim nihil prohibet dici 'ineffabile,' licet illud dici non possit quod 'ineffabile' dicitur; et quemadmodum cogitari possit 'non cogitabile,' quamvis illud cogitari non possit cui convenit 'non cogitabile' dici: ita cum dicitur 'quo nihil majus cogitari' valet, procul dubio quod auditur cogitari vel intelligi potest, etiam si res illa cogitari non valeat aut intelligi, qua majus cogitari nequit" (*Responsio*, IX/138, 4–11). In his first academic essay (still unpublished), F. Alquié perfectly put the stress on this critical and transcendental character of thought as applied to God: "Saint Anselme ne veut pas définir Dieu dans la pensée, mais hors de la pensée. . . . Dieu est défini non dans la pensée, mais par rapport à elle. Il est défini comme extérieur à la pensée, ou du moins comme constituant pour elle une limite infranchissable," as "un obstacle à la pensée, quelque chose que la pensée sentira comme une limite, à laquelle elle se heurtera, qui l'empêchera d'aller plus loin" (*L'argument ontologique chez Saint Anselme: Les critiques de Gaunilon et Saint Thomas d'Aquin*, Diplôme d'Études supérieures directed by Étienne Gilson, and defended before E. Gilson, P. Fauconnet, and L. Brunschvicg, in May 1929, pp. 17, 18

(i) It is impossible to deny the critical nonconcept of the “*id quo majus cogitari nequit*.” For whoever refuses it on the pretext of not being able to understand its meaning (i.e., cannot conceive it “in intellectu”) contradicts self: to reject this point, one must first understand it (“*audit hoc ipsum quod dico*”); so whoever understands the nonconcept enough to refute it must admit to this much understanding. According to the very definition of the nonconcept, the maximum of the thinkable must not be completely conceived; moreover, it must not be conceived in the strictest sense of a concept. To object on the basis of this impossibility of conceiving it is not to dismiss it, but to acknowledge it as it must be. The deeper misunderstanding of the “*id quo majus cogitari nequit*” consists in objecting to it on the basis of common rules of meaning, to which it has to be an exception.²³

²³ *Responsio VIII* to Gaunilo claims to need only a “conjecture” (*conijcere*) in order to argue, not a concept; see 137, 14, 18, and 27). Étienne Gilson underlined this point: “Saint Anselme a simplement dit que la vue des choses suffisait à permettre de ‘conjecturer’ le ‘quo majus cogitari nequit,’ et qu’à partir de cette notion, même conjecturale, la preuve pouvait se développer complètement” (*Études médiévales*, p. 9 or p. 56). Alexandre Koyré, too, has admitted that the proof “part d’un concept indirect et n’exprimant pas l’essence de Dieu,” and remains a “démonstration indirecte” (*L’idée de Dieu dans la philosophie de Saint Anselme*, 201, 202). See J. Paliard, “Prière et dialectique: Méditation sur le Prosligion de Saint Anselme,” *Dieu vivant* 6 (1946); H. Bouillard, “Le preuve de Dieu dans le *Prosligion* et son interprétation par K. Barth,” in *Spicilegium Beccense*, I, 196; Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Herrlichkeit*. II. *Fächer der Style* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962); M. Kohlenberger, *Similitudo und Ratio: Überlegungen zur Methode bei Anselm von Canterbury* (Bonn: Grundman and Bouvier, 1972); and I. U. Dalferth, who says: “weder ein Gottesbegriff noch ein Name Gottes, sondern eine Regel, eine Anweisung, wie man *denken* muss, wenn man Gott denken Will,” in “Fides quaerens intellectum: Theologie als Kunst der Argumentation in Anselms *Prosligion*,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 81 (1984): 78ff. It is, on the contrary, a bias of J. Vuillemin’s study, yet a very clever one, to presuppose that Anselm intended to use a genuine concept of God (*Le Dieu d’Anselme et les apparences de la raison* [Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1971], 54). We also rely here on the demonstrations of Henri de Lubac, in “Sur le chapitre XIV du *Prosligion*,” *Spicilegium Beccense* I, 300, and in “‘Seigneur, je cherche ton visage’: Sur le chapitre XIVe du *Prosligion* de Saint Anselme,” *Archives de Philosophie* 39, no. 2 (1976). With this thesis, Anselm follows a tradition that includes, among many others, Gregory of Nyssa (*Vita Moysis*, §163, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 44, 377A = ed. Jean Daniélou, Sources Chrétiennes 1 bis [Paris: Cerf, 1987], 210); Dionysius (*Mystical Theology* II, *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 3, 1025A); Augustine (*Sermo CXVII*, 3, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 38, col. 663, and *De Trinitate* XV, 2, 2); Nicholas of Cusa (*De Visione Dei*, XVI, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften* III, ed. L. Gabriel [Vienna: Herder, 1967], 166), and even Descartes (*Meditationes de prima philosophia*, 368, 2–4).

(ii) A second step (God cannot be only in understanding, but must be “in re”—that is, in the order of things) follows from the first (the nonconcept of God is “in intellectu”): “Et certe id quo majus cogitari nequit, non potest esse in solo intellectu”—surely, that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding (*Proslogion* II/101, 15ff./94). But this plain conclusion of the logic of the maximum has to be corrected in the case of God, where a nonconcept is at issue. The maximum of what can be thought about requires not only that, in a transcendental way, the *cogitatio* (thought) can reach the limits of its thinking power, but also that it recognize the transcendence of the *majus*. The *cogitatio* has to admit its inability to think (*cogitare nequit*) some item that transcends the transcendental limits.

(iii) This implies a third step in the argument: to recognize that such a transcendent item as God stretches far beyond the field of understanding. How, then, to name this item beyond understanding (*intellectus*), if not under the title of the *res*, if not by conceding its existence outside the understanding—“esse et in re”?

Indeed, an objection may immediately be raised: Why should that which is no longer completely and plainly in the understanding (transcendental) notwithstanding be in reality (transcendent)? Why should the unthinkable be thought at the second degree as though it were a real entity? Should not the conclusion be, on the contrary, that the item which no longer is according to the lowest degree of being (i.e., being in understanding) has that much less reason to be according to the highest degree of being (i.e., being in reality)? Although this objection looks obvious, it collapses as soon as it is raised. For, at least in Anselm’s intention, there is no question here of interpreting the “id quo majus cogitari nequit” as a minimum; it must be interpreted rather as a maximum; and this claim to a maximum turns the hierarchy of the degrees of being back against the previous objection, by distinguishing three different levels. First, there is being in the understanding only and not in reality (e.g., the painter who has in understanding a pattern of that which does not yet exist outside, on his or her canvas). Then, there is the being of that which is in understanding and also in reality (“in intellectu et in re”). And, finally, the last moment is when something is in reality, without being in understanding (“in re et non in intellectu”). This last degree of the hierarchy of being often escapes attention, because

most *Proslogion* readers do not press the analysis further than Chapter 4—but Anselm does. In Chapter 15, the theme of the highest possible thought attains its final determination: “Ergo, Domine, non solum es quo majus cogitari nequit, sed es quiddam majus quam cogitari possit”—O Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are also something greater than can be thought (112, 1–15/104). That is: if God is to be thought only insofar as our thought reaches its transcendental limits, God remains beyond the power of thought, that is, is transcendent to it, surpasses it, and, in sum, is not in our understanding. To think about God does not mean only to admit that He exists, but to admit precisely that He remains beyond and outside our understanding. Therefore, God exists *in re* in a very special way—not because He is in understanding, but despite the fact that He is not. Further, He is in reality *because* He is not in understanding. And this is the last and highest degree of being.

Another confirmation for this paradox can be taken from the casual statement that God “utique sic vere est, ut nec cogitari possit non esse.” This text does not mean that God so truly is that He could not not be. That translation might suggest that our finite power of thinking is or could be capable of thinking about the infinite; and this makes no sense to Anselm and contradicts his transcendental (critical) method. In fact, the quotation requires and imposes a completely different reading: it is not a question of understanding in a direct and dogmatic way that God exists, as if our thought could surpass its own limits; it is a question of “our not being able to think that God is not.” According to the transcendental method, our thought admits its limits and, so to speak, rebounds from them to think in the second degree that it cannot deny that the transcendent item that escapes any concept *in intellectu* must be *in re*. Therefore, Anselm’s argument infers God’s existence from the very impossibility of producing any concept of God or His essence, according to a critical and transcendental examination of the limits of our power of thinking. God is known as existent inasmuch as He remains unknown through the concept of His essence. Anselm’s argument not only does not satisfy the first characteristic of its metaphysical interpretation as an ‘ontological argument,’ but actually contradicts this interpretation in advance. Thus, the first rupture between Anselm’s argument and its metaphysical interpretation appears.

4

It remains to be seen if Anselm's argument also breaks with the second characteristic of its metaphysical interpretation as an 'ontological argument.' The question can be stated thus: Is God's supposed essence to be identified with "essence par excellence"? In brief, does the "id quo majus cogitari nequit" admit to being interpreted (even negatively or in a remote way) in terms of essence, that is, in terms of the question of being or οὐσία?

We noticed a first rupture: the formula "id quo majus cogitari nequit" contradicts the legitimacy of any concept of God. We must now record a new rupture, accomplished through a second formula, "[id] quo nihil melius cogitari potest" (*Proslogion* XIV/111, 9/102–3). This formula, defining something such that nothing better than it can be thought, differs from the first by substituting *melius* for *majus*, that is, the principle of the best for that of the greatest possible quantity. What we have reckoned as a logic of the (undetermined) maximum now takes shape as a logic of a maximum of good, therefore of a sovereign good. But before interpreting it, we have to establish the textual evidence for it. In the *Proslogion*, the first occurrence of this substitution occurs as early as Chapter 3, which, to justify the *majus*, warns: "Si enim aliqua mens posset cogitare aliquid melius te, ascenderet creatura super creatorem, et judicaret de creatore; quod valde est absurdum"—For, if any mind could conceive something better than you, the creature would rise above the Creator and would sit in judgment over the Creator: an utterly preposterous consequence (103, 4–6/94–95). Therefore, *melius* does not contradict *majus*, but rather justifies it by specifying it. The confirmation is to be found in Chapter 5, which states as a rule that God is "quidquid melius est esse quam non esse"—whatever it is better to be than not to be.²⁴ The principle of the *majus* first becomes

²⁴ *Proslogion*, V.104, 9. See "Si ergo vere es . . . quidquid melius est esse quam non esses" (XI, 110, 1–3); and also "Quis enim verbi gratia vel hoc cogitare non potest, etiam si non credat in re esse quod cogitat, scilicet si bonum est aliquid quod initium et finem habet, multo melius esse bonum, quod licet incipiat non tamen desinit; et sicut istud illo melius est, ita isto esse melius illud quod nec finem habet nec initium" (*Responsio*, VIII, 137, 18–22); or "Credimus namque de divina substantia quidquid absolute cogitari potest melius esse quam non esse. Verbi gratia: melius est esse aeternum quam non aeternum, bonum quam non bonum, imo bonitatem ipsam quam non ipsam bonitatem" (*Responsio*, X, 139, 3–6). Hence, we

operative when it is ruled by the principle of the *melius*: to be greater means to be better; the greatest has to be understood as having a qualitative, not a quantitative, meaning. In order to decide if a determination suits God or not, it is enough to test whether it adds a good to (or subtracts one from) the sovereign good. “Quaerebas Deum, et invenisti eum esse quiddam summum omnium, quo nihil melius cogitari potest”—You were seeking God, and you have found that He is something such that nothing better can be thought (*Proslogion* XIV/111, 8ff./102–93).²⁵ The claim to a maximum of the *cogitatio* would have remained ineffective and empty without this interpretation.²⁶ This means that above and beyond the concept of any essence, the good defined as ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (beyond being) in Plato’s sense (*Republic* 509b) gives the criterion for the “id quo majus cogitari nequit.” The good appears as the dominant feature of any radical definition of God, because it exceeds the essence by the same leap by which it gets rid of the concept. The good can be

have to be cautious if we speak of a “mouvement de la pensée vers un *optimum* et *maximum* posé comme l’Absolu” (P. Vignaux, “Structure et sens du *Monologion*,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 31 [1947]:211), or an *Ens perfectissimum*, as Alexandre Koyré did (*L’idée de Dieu dans la philosophie de Saint Anselme*, 41, 43–44, 46–47); for neither *summe perfectum* nor *perfectissimum* ever appear in Anselm’s works, according to G. R. Evans, *A Concordance to the Works of St. Anselm* (Millwood, N.Y.: Kraus, 1984), vol. 3, 1032, and to *Index generalis personarum et rerum*, vol. 6 of *Opera omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt, 275.

²⁵ *Proslogion* XIV, 111, 8–9 The same reduction is to be found in other texts: “Deum vero summum bonum esse nullus negat, quia quiddam aliquo minus est, nullatenus Deus est, et quiddam summum bonum non est, minus est aliquo, quia minus est summo bono” (*Epistula de incarnatione verbi*, VIII, *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, pp. 22, 24–26); and: “Nempe sicut a summo bono non est nisi bonum, et omne bonum est a summo bono: ita a summa essentia non est nisi essentia, et omnis essentia est a summa essentia. Unde quoniam summum bonum est summa essentia, consequens est ut omne bonum sit essentia, et omnis essentia bonum” (*De casu diaboli*, I, *Opera omnia*, vol. 1, 234, 29–235, 3). Here *minus/majus* explicitly refer to *summum*, and the *summum* itself to the *bonum*.

²⁶ How far the “id quo majus cogitari nequit” taken alone may be deceiving becomes clear with Gaunilo’s confusion between the right formula and the mere “majus omnibus” (*Responsio*, V, 134, 24f.). On the contrary, the principle “Deo nihil majus aut melius” (*Cur Deus homo*, I, 13, *Opera omnia*, vol. 2, 71, 13 = “nec major nec justior cogitari possit [misericordia Dei],” II, 20, 131, 29) may be applied to each particular attribute of God; e.g., to justice: “te sic esse justum, ut justior nequeas cogitari” (*Proslogion*, XI, 109, 11); or to mercy: “Benigne, plus es clemens quam possim cogitare” (*Oratio*, XIV, *Opera omnia*, vol. 3, p. 56, 29–30); and: “Nam, cum Deus . . . sit benignus, ut nihil benignius cogitari queat” (*Cur Deus homo*, I, 12, 70, 7).

thought only as it is given—without any measure or concept. God, as a maximum, can be aimed at, but only as a sovereign good.

These two ruptures can be linked together by the relation between the two syntagms that characterize their respective operations. The first rupture (between the original argument and any concept of God) admits a transcendental limit, comes up against it, and marks it as a comparative of simple superiority: *nihil majus cogitari potest, quod majus cogitari nequit*. Indeed, we need only a comparison when our thought faces only one item, its limit. But the second rupture (from *majus* to *melius*) reaches a transcendental ideal, which transcends the transcendental limit of our power of knowing. Therefore, it cannot be expressed by a mere comparative, but requires an absolute superlative, a *summum bonum*. The *summum bonum* indicates more than a limit; it means the crossing of the limit. As a consequence, the indeterminate and unidentified comparative has to be—if I may say so—colored by the light shed from the absolute *summum*, which is now identified as a *bonum*. Thus: “O immensa bonitas, quae sic omne intellectum excedis!”—O goodness without limits, which surpasses every understanding! (*Proslogion* IX/107, 26–27). Absolute transcendence leads to goodness, as the superlative of the *summum bonum*; the transcendental limit leads back to thought, as a mere comparative of οὐσία.

This second rupture, which is even more fundamental than the first and justifies it retrospectively, structures the whole of Anselm’s undertaking. Beginning with it, the entire *Proslogion* sets only one goal for its argument: to demonstrate that God is “summum bonum nullo alio indigens, et quo omnia indigent ut sint et bene sint”—the highest good that needs nothing and that everything needs in order to be and to be good (*Prooemium*, 93, 6–9). If the first syntagm “id quo majus cogitari nequit” plays the leading role in Chapters 1–3, it is supplanted by the second, because it is in the end “cogitare aliquid melius te”—to think something better than You (*Proslogion* III/103, 5)—which proves impossible, and leads to the recognition of God’s existence as and through a maximum: “summum omnium solus existens”—the one existing maximum of all; according to the principle that “deus sit quidquid melius est esse quam non esse”—God is whatever it is better to be than not to be (104, 9 = 104, 16). Moreover, both the deduction of the divine attributes (Chapter 12), and the theoretization of the definitive incomprehensibility of God’s es-

sence, which follows immediately (Chapters 13–23), obey the principle of the *melius*,²⁷ leading to the *summum bonum*.²⁸ Therefore, the conclusion leads quite logically from the motto of the maximum to the motto of the best: “cogita quantum potes, quale et quantum sit illud bonum”—think over, as far as you can, which good this is and how good it is (*Prosligion* XXIV/117, 25–26). To reach the limit of our power to understand (according to the maximum) amounts to aiming at the best by loving it (“tantum amabunt, quantum cognoscent”). Love goes further than understanding, because love can desire that which remains unknown, while knowledge cannot reach that which remains unknown or unknowable: “Desidera simplex bonum, quod est omne bonum”—Let us long for the simple good, which is the entire good.²⁹ If it is a matter of knowing God as the *melius*, that is, as the sovereign good, our thought must not and cannot rely on the (impossible) concept of an inaccessible essence, but must use its own desire, with no other help than its infinite power to love.

By substituting at the end the *melius* for the *majus*, the good for the οὐσία, Anselm extracts—in advance of Kant and for the second time—his argument from any metaphysical, that is, ontological, interpretation. Therefore, it is all the more surprising that the best interpreters have never (at least to my knowledge) pointed out this radical decision. Still more puzzling, the sources that scholars have sometimes tried to assign to the motto “id quo majus cogitari nequit”³⁰ confirm, on the contrary, that Anselm had recourse to the

²⁷ See chap. VI, 104, 20; chap. IX, 107, 10 and 108, 12; chap. XIV, 119, 9 (“summum omnium, quo melius cogitari nequit”); chap. XVIII, 114, 21. The principle appears one more time as such in chap. XI, 110, 2. All occurrences of *melius* are given in Evans, *Concordance to the Works of St. Anselm*, vol. 2, 852ff.; of *majus*, 2.819ff.

²⁸ *Summe bonus*: chap IX, 107, 20 and chap X, 109, 5. *Summum bonum* in chap. XXII, 117, 1 and XXIII, 117, 5 (expressed as “omne et totum et solum bonum”).

²⁹ See chap. XXIV, 117, 25–26; chap. XXVI, 121, 9–10; and chap. XXV, 118, 17.

³⁰ Strangely, F. S. Schmitt (*Index generalis*, 102n) cites, for the *majus*, *Monologion*, LXXX, 86, 19–21, which does not mention it and *Monologion*, XV, 29, 17–211, which uses only *melius* and *melior*, exactly as Augustine and Boethius do! The one text, among those quoted by Schmitt, that used the *majus* comes from a non-Christian, Seneca: “Quid est Deus? Mens universi, quod vides totum et quod non vides totum. Si demum magnitudo sua redditur, qua nihil majus excogitari potest, si solus est omnia, opus suum et intra et extra tenet” (*Naturales Quaestiones*, I, *Praefatio*). When a non-believer uses *melius*, it still qualifies the world: “nihil omnium rerum melius est mundo, nihil praestabilis, nihil pulchrioris” (Cicero, *De*

melius only with the authority of Augustine himself; Boethius, too, might have provided some examples to Anselm.³¹ Thus, the second thesis of our nonontological interpretation of Anselm's argument lacks neither speculative articulation nor support in the patristic tradition. It is neither a matter of detail in the formulation nor of originality devoid of consequences. It is a question of the possibility of going back to a strict identification of the argument, far removed from its later metaphysical interpretation. God's existence *is* demonstrated, but without any claim to having a concept of His essence or to submitting this supposed "essence" to the jurisdiction of the οὐσία, that is, of the *Seinsfrage*. If God is to be known, it can only be within the horizon of the good.

5

We have now come far enough to answer the third question: At least one form of the so-called ontological argument—the first one, given

natura deorum, II, 7, 18). On the use of *melius*, see A. Daniels, "Quellenbeiträge und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Gottesbeweise im dreizehnten Jahrhundert, mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Arguments im *Prologion* des heiligen Anselm," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters* 8, nos. 1–2 (Munster, 1909) d J. Châtillon, "De Guillaume d'Auxerre à Saint Thomas d'Aquin: L'argument de Saint Anselme chez les premiers scolastiques du XIIIème siècle," in *Spicilegium Beccense* 1). See also N. Malcolm, *The Ontological Argument: From Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1965), 142.

³¹E.g., Augustine: "Sic enim nitebar invenire caetera, ut jam melius inveneram melius esse incorruptibile quam corruptibile, et ideo te, quidquid esses, esse incorruptibilem confitebar. Neque enim ulla anima unquam potuit poteritve cogitare aliquid quod sit te melius, qui summum et optimum es. Cum autem verissime atque certissime incorruptibile corruptibile praeponatur, sicut ego jam praeonebam, poteram jam cogitatione aliquid attingere, quod esset melius Deo meo, nisi tu esses incorruptibilis" (*Confessiones*, VII, 4, 6, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 32, col. 735 = CSEL XXXII, p. 145 = *Oeuvres de Saint Augustine* [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1962], 588, quoted by Schmitt, *Prologion* I). "Nam cum ille unus cogitatur deorum Deus, ab his qui alios et suspicantur et vocant et colunt deos sive in coelo et terra, ita cogitatur, ut aliquid quo nihil melius sit atque sublimius illa cogitatio conetur attingere" (*De doctrina christiana*, I, 7, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 34, col. 22 [quoted by Schmitt, *Index generalis*, I, and by Vuillemin, *Le Dieu d'Anselme et les apparences de la raison*, 93]). "Summum bonum omnino et quo esse aut cogitari melius nihil possit, aut intelligendus, aut credendus Deus est, si blasphemiam carere cogitamus" (*De moribus Manichaeorum*, II, 11, 25, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 32, col. 1355). See *De duabus animabus contra Manichaeos*, VIII, 10, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 42, col. 101; and *De natura boni contra Manichaeos*, I, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 42, col. 551. Boe-

by Anselm—does not fulfill the two distinctive requirements of the metaphysical interpretation of the argument. Therefore, Anselm's argument does not belong to ontology, that is, is not an 'ontological argument' at all.

As surprising as this conclusion may seem, it is backed by numerous and strong reasons.

(i) The independence of Anselm's argument from the question of being and ontology in general does not sentence it to irrationality and 'mysticism.' It means only that God's most characteristic features escape the grasp of finite concepts, that God's transcendence has to be termed a transcendence of the good and not a mere maximum of entities. God transcends by the preeminence of the sovereign good: in other words, only the good deserves the qualification of infinite, as if Anselm were convinced (in advance of Kant and Heidegger) that being as such is always finite. The two theoretical decisions on which the argument relies prove to be one: God escapes any concept (or theoretical reason) insofar as He remains open to love (or practical reason). "Id enim summum est, quod sic supereminet aliis, ut nec par habeat, nec praestantius. Sed quod est summe bonum, est etiam summe magnum"—This is the highest good, which transcends everything else such that it has neither equal nor more excellent. But that which is the highest good is therefore also the greatest (*Monologion* I/15, 9–11).

(ii) By attributing transcendence to the good, and depriving being of it, Anselm stands on firm ground: two major authorities support his attempt. First, Plato, who has placed the good far above entities (οὐκ οὐσίας ὄντος τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἐπεκείνα τῆς οὐσίας the good being not a being, but beyond being), has also acknowledged the hyperbolic transcendence of good ("Ἀπολλων, ἔφη, δαμμονίας ὑπερβολῆς—miraculously transcendent; *Republic* 509b/c). This doctrine gives to Anselm's position not only a strong legitimacy, but, more, an indisputable right to be termed a pure philosophical doctrine. Second, in a quite different tradition, Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians (3.10) gives another standard meaning for understanding the transcendence of the divine good according to

thus appears as the probable link between Augustine and Anselm: "Deum rerum omnium principem bonum esse communis humanorum conceptio probat animorum. Nam cum nihil Deo melius excogitari quaet, id quo melius est bonum esse quis dubitet?" (*Philosophiae Consolatio*, III, 10).

Anselm: γνῶναι τε τὴν ὑπερσάλλουσαν γνῶσες ἀγάπην τοῦ Χριστοῦ—to know the hyperbolic charity of Christ, which surpasses any knowledge. We remark that the translation of this text in the Vulgate—“scire etiam *supereminentem* scientiae charitatem Christi”—fits exactly Anselm’s own words: “summum est, quod sic *supereminet*.” But, on the other hand, we must concede that Anselm’s use of the *summum bonum* refers neither to Christ nor to *caritas* as such, at least in the *Proslogion*. As a result, the question remains to be answered whether or not Anselm intended to teach as a theologian. Therefore, the question whether Anselm stands closer to Plato or to Paul remains open, too. But the very fact that we waver between those two authorities demonstrates that Anselm’s nonontological argument remains within the field of rational and intelligible discussion.

(iii) In fact, the greatest difficulty of our claim that there is a nonontological interpretation of Anselm’s argument and a very obvious discrepancy between his argument and its later metaphysical interpretation lies in the possibility (or the impossibility) of arguing beyond or outside the field of metaphysics. Does it make sense to admit conclusive and rational arguments without admitting the primacy of being, that is, of metaphysics and, as a consequence, of logic? How far does logic depend on metaphysics? How could a nonmetaphysical argument be valid?

We would suggest that at least one author was convinced that some arguments are not involved in metaphysics—Anselm himself.