

## Reading 2

### **Anselm, *Proslogion*; Gaunilo, *Reply on Behalf of the Fool*; Anselm, *Reply to Gaunilo* <sup>1</sup>**

#### ***Preface***

Upon the insistent adjurations of certain brothers I wrote a short work as an example of meditating about the rational basis of faith in the role of someone who by arguing with himself investigates what he does not yet know. Afterwards, considering this work to be composed of a chain of many arguments, I began to ask myself whether perhaps a single argument could be found which would constitute an independent proof and would suffice by itself to demonstrate that (1) God truly [really] exists, that (2) He is the Supreme Good, needing no one else yet needed by all else in order to exist and to fare well, and that (3) He is whatever else we believe about the Divine Substance. I often and earnestly turned my attention to this goal. At times what I was in quest of seemed to me to be apprehensible; at other times it completely eluded my mental powers. At last, despairing, I wanted to give up my pursuit of an argument which I supposed could not be found. But when I wanted to shut out the very thought [of such an argument], lest by engaging my mind in vain, it would keep me from other projects in which I could make headway just then this argument began more and more to force itself insistently upon me, unwilling and resisting as I was. Then one day when I was tired as a result of vigorously resisting its entreaties, what I had despaired of finding appeared in my strifetorn mind in such way that I eagerly embraced the reasoning I had been anxiously warding off. Supposing, then, that to record what I had joyously discovered would please its readers, I wrote the following short work on this subject

<sup>1</sup> *Anselm of canterbury*, vol. 1. trans. J. Hopkins and H. Richardson, Edwin Mellen Press, Toronto, 1975, pp. 89-95, 115-120, 123-134.

(and on various others) in the role of someone endeavoring to elevate his mind toward contemplating God and seeking to understand what he believes. And although I deemed neither this present writing nor the former one as worthy to be called a treatise or to bear the name of an author, nevertheless I thought that they should not be circulated without titles which in some way would issue to anyone coming across them an invitation to read them.

Hence, I gave a title to each calling the first An Example of Meditating about the Rational Basis of Faith and calling the present work Faith Seeking Understanding. But after a number of people had already copied both works under these respective titles, I was urged by several readers to prefix my name to these writings urged especially by Hugh, the reverend archbishop of Lyons and apostolic legate in Gaul, who on the basis of his apostolic authority directed me to do this. To make the affixing of my name less inappropriate, I retitled the first writing Monologion, i.e., a soliloquy, and the present writing Proslogion, i.e., an address.

### ***Chapter One: Arousing the mind for contemplating God.***

Come now, insignificant man, leave behind for a time your preoccupations; seclude yourself for a while from your disquieting thoughts. Turn aside now from heavy cares and disregard your wearisome tasks. Attend for a while to God and rest for a time in Him. Enter the inner chamber of your mind; shut out all else except God and whatever is of aid to you in seeking Him; after closing the chamber door, think upon your God. Speak now, my whole heart; speak now to God: I seek Your countenance; Your countenance, O Lord, do I seek. So come now, Lord my God, teach my heart where and how to seek You, where and how to find You. If You are not here, Lord, where shall I seek You in Your absence? But if You are everywhere, why do I not behold You in Your presence? Surely You dwell in light inaccessible. Yet, where is this inaccessible light? Or how shall I approach unto a light inaccessible? Or who will lead me to and into this light so that in it I may behold You? Again, in what signs or appearances shall I seek You? Never have I seen You, O Lord my God; I am not acquainted with Your countenance. What shall this Your distant exile do? What shall he do, O most exalted

Lord? What shall Your servant do, anguished out of love for You and cast far away from Your presence? He pants to see You, but Your face is too far removed from him. He desires to approach You, but Your dwelling place is inaccessible. He desires to find You but does not know Your abode. He longs to seek for You but does not know Your countenance. O Lord, You are my God and my Lord; yet never have I seen You. You have created me and created me anew, and have bestowed upon me whatever goods I have; but not yet do I know You. Indeed, I was made for seeing You; but not yet have I done that for which I was made.

O the wretched fate of man when he lost that end for which he was made! O that hard and ominous fall! Alas, what he lost and what he found, what vanished and what remained! He lost the happiness for which he was created and found a wretchedness for which he was not created. The necessary condition for happiness vanished and the sufficient condition for wretchedness remained. Man then ate the bread of angels for which he now hungers; and now he eats the bread of sorrows, which then he did not know. Alas, the common mourning of all men, the universal lament of the sons of Adam! Adam burped with satiety; we sigh with hunger. He abounded; we go begging. He happily possessed and wretchedly deserted; we unhappily lack and wretchedly desire, while, alas, remaining empty. Why did he not, when easily able, keep for us that of which we have been so gravely deprived? Why did he shut us out from the light and enshroud us in darkness? Why did he take life away from us and inflict death? Wretched creatures that we are, expelled from that home, impelled to this one; cast down from that abode, sunken to this one! [We have been banished] from our homeland into exile, from the vision of God into our own blindness, from the delight of immortality into the bitterness and horror of death. O miserable transformation from such great good into such great evil! What a grievous loss, a heavy sorrow, an unmitigated plight!

But, alas, pitiable me, one of the miserable sons of Eve far removed from God what did I set out to do; what have I achieved? Where was I heading; where have I arrived? To what was I aspiring; for what do I sigh? I sought after good things and, behold, here is turmoil. I was reaching out for God, but tripped over myself. I was seeking rest in solitude, but I found tribulation and grief in my inmost self. I wanted to laugh with joy

of mind, but am constrained to cry out in lamentation of heart. I hoped for joy, but, lo, my sighs increase! O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord, will You forget us? How long will You turn away Your face from us? When will You look upon us and hear us? When will You enlighten our eyes and show us Your face? When will You restore Yourself to us? Look upon us, O Lord, hear us, enlighten us, reveal Yourself unto us. Restore Yourself unto us so that it may go well with us for whom it goes so badly without You. Have compassion upon the efforts and attempts which we direct toward You, without whom we can do nothing. As You summon us, so aid us. I beseech You, Lord, that I may not despair with sighing but may revive with hope. I implore You, Lord, to sweeten by Your consolation my heart made bitter by its own desolation. I adjure You, Lord, that having begun hungering to seek You, I may not finish without partaking of You. I set out famished; let me not return still unfed. I came as one who is poor to one who is rich, as one who is wretched to one who is merciful; let me not return empty and spurned. And if before I eat I sigh, grant that at the end of my sighing I may have food to eat. O Lord, bent over as I am I can only look downwards; straighten me so that I can look upwards. Having mounted above my head, my iniquities cover me over; and as a heavy burden they weigh me down. Deliver me from them, unburden me, so that the abyss of iniquities does not engulf me. Permit me, at least from afar or from the deep, to look upwards toward Your light. Teach me to seek You, and reveal Yourself to me as I seek; for unless You instruct me I cannot seek You, and unless You reveal Yourself I cannot find You. Let me seek You in desiring You; let me desire You in seeking You. Let me find You in loving You; let me love You in finding You.

O Lord, I acknowledge and give thanks that You created in me Your image so that I may remember, contemplate, and love You. But this image has been so effaced by the abrasion of transgressions, so hidden from sight by the dark billows of sin, that unless You renew and refashion it, it cannot do what it was created to do. Lord, I do not attempt to comprehend Your sublimity, because my intellect is not at all equal to such a task. But I yearn to understand some measure of Your truth, which my heart believes and loves. 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.

***Chapter Two: God truly, [or really], exists.***

Therefore, Lord, Giver of understanding to faith, grant me to understand to the degree You deem best that You exist, as we believe and that You are what we believe You to be. Indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater can be thought. Is there, then, no such nature as You, for the Fool has said in his heart that God does not exist? But surely when this very Fool hears the words "something than which nothing greater can be thought," he understands what he hears. And what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand [judge] it to exist. Indeed, for a thing to be in the understanding is different from understanding [judging] that thus thing exists. For when an artist envisions what he is about to paint, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand [judge] that there exists what he has not yet painted. But after he has painted it, he has it in his understanding and he understands [judges] that what he has painted exists. So even the Fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists at least in his understanding; for when he hears of this being, he understands [what he hears], and whatever is understood is in the understanding. But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding. For if it were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought existed only in the understanding, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would be that than which a greater can be thought! But surely this conclusion is impossible. Hence, without doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.

***Chapter Three: God cannot be thought not to exist.***

Assuredly, this being exists so truly [really] that it cannot even be thought not to exist. For there can be thought to exist something whose nonexistence is inconceivable; and this thing is greater than anything whose nonexistence is conceivable. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought could be thought not to exist, then that

than which a greater cannot be thought would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought a contradiction. Hence, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly [really] that it cannot even be thought not to exist.

And You are this being, O Lord our God. Therefore, Lord my God, You exist so truly [really] that You cannot even be thought not to exist. And this is rightly the case. For if any mind could conceive of something better than You, the creature would rise above the Creator and would sit in judgment over the Creator an utterly preposterous consequence. Indeed, except for You alone, whatever else exists can be conceived not to exist. Therefore, You alone exist most truly [really] of all and thus most greatly of all; for whatever else there is does not exist as truly [really] as You and thus does not exist as much as do You. Since, then, it is so readily clear to a rational mind that You exist most greatly of all, why did the Fool say in his heart that God does not exist? Why indeed except because he is foolish and simple!

#### ***Chapter Four: How the Fool said in his heart what cannot be thought.***

Yet, since to say something in one's heart is to think it, how did the Fool say in his heart what he was not able to think, or how was he unable to think what he did say in his heart? Now, if he really rather, since he really both thought [what he did] because he said it in his heart and did not say it in his heart because he was unable to think it, then there is not merely one sense in which something is said in one's heart, or is thought. For in one sense an object is thought when the word signifying it is thought, and in another when what the object is [i.e., its essence] is understood. Thus, in the first sense but not at all in the second, God can be thought not to exist. Indeed, no one who understands what God is can think that God does not exist, even though he says these words [viz. "God does not exist"] in his heart either meaninglessly or else bizzarely. For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Anyone who comprehends (i.e. properly understands) this, surely understands that God so exists that He cannot even conceivably not exist. Therefore, anyone who understands that this is the manner in which God exists cannot think that He does not exist.

I thank You, good Lord, I thank You that what at first I believed through Your giving, now by Your enlightening I so understand that even if I did not want to believe that You exist, I could not fail to understand [that You exist].

### ***Gaunilo's Reply***

#### ***What Someone, on Behalf of the Fool, Replies to These Arguments***

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

To exist also in reality is greater than to exist solely in the understanding. Now, if this thing existed solely in the understanding, then whatever existed also in reality would be greater than it. Thus, that which is greater than all others would be less than some other and would not be greater than all others surely a contradiction. Therefore, it is necessary that that which is greater than all others (having already been shown to exist in the understanding) exist not only in the understanding but also in reality. For otherwise it could not be that which is greater than all others.

When these claims are made, the doubter or denier [i.e.. the Fool] can perhaps make the replies which follow.

[2] Regarding the fact that this thing is said to exist in my understanding simply because I understand what is said, I ask: Could I not similarly be said to have in my understanding because if someone were to speak of them I would understand whatever he said all manner of unreal things that in no way actually exist? But suppose that this thing [than which nothing greater can be thought] were proven to be such that it is not

able to exist in thought in the same way as any unreal and doubtfully real things do. And, accordingly, suppose that when I have heard of it I am not said to think it (or to have it in thought) but am said to understand it (and to have it in the understanding) since I could not think it except by understanding (i.e., by apprehending with certainty) that it really exists. But if this were so, then (to begin with) there would no longer be a difference here between first having this thing in the understanding and subsequently understanding [judging] this thing to exist as happens in the case of a painting, which first is in the artist's mind and then later is an actual product. Secondly, it could scarcely be plausible that when this thing is spoken of or heard of it could not be thought not to exist in the way even God can [be thought] not to exist. For if this thing cannot [be thought not to exist], why was your entire argument enjoined against one who doubts or denies that there is any such nature as this? Lastly, the claim "This being is such that as soon as it is thought of it must be indubitably understood to exist in reality" would have to be proved to me by an indubitable argument. [It can] not [be proven to me] by the argument that this thing is already in my understanding when I understand what I have heard. For I still maintain that in my understanding there could likewise be whatever other dubiously real and even unreal things are spoken of by someone whose words I have understood. And it would be all the more true [that they are in my understanding] if I, who do not yet believe that this thing [exists], were mistakenly to believe that those things [exist], as often happens.

[3] Hence, the example about the painter's already having in his understanding a picture which he is going to paint would be irrelevant to your argument. For before the painting was made it existed in the painter's art (*arte*). And such a thing in the artist's art is nothing other than a part of the artist's understanding. For as St Augustine says:

When a craftsman is about to make a chest, he first has it in his art. The chest which is produced is not alive; but the chest which is in the art is alive because the soul of the craftsman is alive, and in it exist all these artefacts before they are produced.

For why are these artefacts alive in the living soul of the craftsman except because they are nothing other than his soul's knowledge and understanding? But except for things which are known to pertain to the very nature of the mind, whenever anything



that is heard of or thought of is understood to be real, then without doubt the real thing is different from the understanding by which it is apprehended. Therefore, even if it is true that there exists something than which a greater cannot be thought, nevertheless when it was heard of and understood it would not be like an as yet unproduced painting in the understanding of a painter.

[4] To this may be added a point previously alluded to: viz., that upon hearing of that which is greater than all others that can be thought (which is said to be able to be no other than God Himself), I cannot think of this thing (or have it in the understanding) by reference to any object known to me through species or genus just as in this way I also cannot think of God Himself (whom surely, for this reason, I can indeed think not to exist). For neither am I acquainted with God Himself nor am I able to infer [what God is like] by reference to some other similar being, since, as even you maintain, God is such that there cannot be anything else similar to Him. Now, suppose that I were to hear something being said about a man totally a stranger to me a man whom I was not even sure existed. Still, I would be able to think of him by means of the specific or generic notion by which I know what a man is (or what men are) i.e., by reference to the very thing a man is. However, it could happen that the one who told [me about this stranger] was lying and that the man whom I thought of does not exist. Nonetheless, I would still have conceived of him by reference to the reality which any man is, though not by reference to the reality which that man is. But when I hear someone speaking of God (or of something greater than all others), I cannot have Him in my thought and understanding in the way that I might have this unreal man in my thought and understanding. For although I can think of a nonexistent man by reference to a real thing known to me, I cannot at all think of God except only with respect to the word. And with respect only to a word a real thing can scarcely, if at all, be thought of. For when one thinks with respect to a mere word, he thinks not so much the word itself (i.e., not so much the sound of the letters or syllables), which assuredly is a real thing, as he does the signification of the word that is heard. Yet, [the signification is] not [thought] in the manner of one who knows what is usually meant by the word i.e., one who thinks in accordance with the thing, whether it is real or exists in thought alone. Rather, [the signification is thought] in the manner of one who does not know what is

usually signified by the word but who (1) thinks only according to the movement of the mind brought about by hearing this word and who (2) has difficulty in representing to himself the signification of what he has heard. (But it would be surprising if he could ever [in this manner discern] what the thing is.) So, then, it is still evident that this is the only way something is in my understanding when I hear and understand someone who says that there is something greater than all others that can be thought.

All of this is my reply to the claim that that supreme nature already exists in my understanding.

[5] Now, I am offered the following proof that, necessarily, [that supreme nature] exists in reality: Unless it existed in reality, whatever does exist in reality would be greater than it and, accordingly, that which was proved assuredly to exist already in the understanding would not be that which is greater than all others.

To this argument I reply: If that which cannot even be properly conceived must nonetheless be said to be in the understanding, then I do not deny that in this improper sense it is in my understanding. But since from this concession its existence in reality cannot at all be inferred, I still will not at all concede that it exists until this existence has been proven to me by an indubitable argument. Now, whoever says, "This being exists because otherwise that which is greater than all others would not be greater than all others" does not pay enough attention to whom he is speaking. For I do not yet admit indeed, I even doubt and deny that that which is greater [than all others] exists at all in reality. I do not concede to it any other existence than that existence (if it should be called existence) present when the mind tries to represent to itself a thing completely unknown, [trying to do so] in accordance with a word which it has merely heard. How, then, from the [alleged] fact that it is, patently, that which is greater than all others does one prove to me that that which is greater [than all others] exists in reality? For I still so doubt and deny it to exist that I claim that this greater [than all others] is not even in my thought and understanding even in the way that numerous doubtfully real and uncertainly real things are. Indeed, I must first be made certain that this greater [than all others] exists somewhere in reality; only then will I find / indubitable the claim that it exists (also) in reality because it is greater than all others.

[6] For example, people tell of an island existing somewhere in the ocean. Some call it Lost Island because of the difficulty or rather, the impossibility of finding what is only imaginary. They say that it abounds with inestimable plentitude of riches and delights of all sorts even much more so than is reported of the Isles of the Blessed. Having no owner or inhabitant [it is said] to excel completely because of the superabundant goods for the taking all other lands in which men dwell. Now, should someone tell me these tales I would easily understand what he said, for it is simple enough to comprehend. But suppose he were then to add, as if it followed logically: "You can no more doubt that this island which is more excellent than all other lands exists somewhere in reality than you can doubt that it is in your understanding. And since for it to exist in reality as well as in the understanding is more excellent [than for it to exist in the understanding alone], then, necessarily, it really exists. For if it did not exist, then any other really existing country would be more excellent than it, and thus this island, which has already been understood by you to be more excellent [than all other lands], would not be more excellent [than all others]." Now, if someone wanted in this way to prove to me that I must not any longer doubt the existence of this island, then either I would think he were jesting or else I would not know whom I ought to regard as the more foolish either myself, were I to grant his argument, or him, were he to suppose that he had proved to any extent the existence of this island. For he would first have to prove that this island's excellence is in my understanding only in the way that a thing which really and certainly exists is in my understanding and not at all in the way that a thing which is unreal or doubtfully real is in my understanding.

[7] So might the Fool answer preliminarily the arguments against his position. And when [his opponent] goes on to maintain that that which is greater [than all others] is such that it cannot even be thought not to exist (this step in turn being proved from no other consideration than that otherwise this being would not be greater than all others), the Fool can point to his previous reply and ask: "When indeed did I ever concede the real existence of such a being (viz., one which is greater than all others), so that from this concession I could be shown that it exists so greatly in reality that it cannot be thought not to exist? Therefore, first of all one must prove by an indubitable argument that there exists a nature which is higher (i.e., greater or better) than all existing things,

so that on the basis of this proof we can go on to deduce all the other characteristics which that which is greater and better than all others must not fail to have."

Now, as for saying that this Supreme Being cannot be thought not to exist. one might more appropriately say that it cannot be understood not to exist and cannot be understood even to be able not to exist. For properly speaking, unrealities cannot be understood, but they can surely be thought in the way that the Fool thought that God does not exist. Now, I know most certainly that I exist; yet I know no less certainly that I am able not to exist. Moreover, I understand indubitably that that being which is supreme, viz., God, exists and cannot fail to exist. Still, I do not know whether, during the time when I know most certainly that I exist, I can think that I do not exist. But if I can, why [can I] not [think not to exist] whatever else I know as certainly [as I know my own existence]? On the other hand, if I cannot [think that I do not exist], then this [property of not being able to be thought not to exist] will no longer be uniquely God's.

[8] The other parts of that treatise are argued so truthfully, brilliantly, impressively, and are, in fact, so fully useful and so fully fragrant with an inward perfume of devout and holy affection that they should not at all be despised simply because of those things at the beginning. (To be sure, those matters are rightly discerned, but they are argued less firmly [than the later parts].) Instead, the initial parts must be more cogently argued, so that all parts may be received with great respect and praise.

### ***Anselm's Response***

#### ***What the Author of That Treatise Replies to These Objections***

Since my arguments are not attacked by the Fool, against whom I directed my treatise, but by an intelligent and orthodox Christian (*catholicus*) on behalf of the Fool, it will suffice to reply to the orthodox Christian (*catholicus*).

[I] Now, you argue (whoever you are who claims that the Fool can make these objections) as follows:

Something than which a greater cannot be thought is in the understanding only as something which cannot even be properly conceived.

Moreover, from the fact that it (viz., what I am calling that than which a greater cannot be thought) exists in the understanding there does not follow that it exists also in reality any more than there follows that Lost Island most certainly exists, from the fact that when it is described in words the one who hears of it does not doubt that it exists in his understanding.

But I contend that if that than which a greater cannot be thought is not understood or thought and is not in the understanding or in thought, then surely either

- (1) God is not that than which a greater cannot be thought or else
- (2) He is not understood or thought and is not in the understanding or in thought.

But I point to your faith and conscience as the strongest indicator of how false these inferences are.

Therefore, that than which a greater cannot be thought is indeed understood and thought, and is in your understanding and in your thought.

Hence, either those premises are not true by which you try to prove the opposite, or else from them there does not follow what you suppose you infer logically.

From the fact that something than which a greater cannot be thought is understood there does not follow, you claim, that it is in the understanding. Or if it is in the understanding, there does not follow, you claim, that it exists in reality. But with confidence I assert that if it can be even thought to exist, it is necessary that it exist. For that than which a greater cannot be thought can only be thought to exist without a beginning. Now, whatever can be thought to exist but does not exist can be thought to begin to exist. Thus, it is not the case that that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought to exist and yet does not exist. Therefore, if it can be thought to exist, it is necessary that it exist.

Furthermore: if indeed it can be even thought, it is necessary that it exist. For even

one who doubts or denies the existence of something than which a greater cannot be thought admits that if this being were to exist it would neither actually nor conceivably (i.e. neither in actuality nor in the understanding) be able not to exist. For otherwise [i.e., if it existed but were able not to exist] it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought. Now, as for whatever can be thought but does not exist: if it were to exist, it would either actually or conceivably (i.e. either in actuality or in the understanding) be able not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought can be even thought, it is not able not to exist.

But let us suppose that it can be thought and yet does not exist. Now, whatever can be thought and yet does not exist would not, if it were to exist, be that than which a greater cannot be thought. Hence, if that than which a greater cannot be thought [assumed for the sake of the argument not to exist] were to exist, it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought an utterly absurd consequence. Therefore, it is false [to suppose] that something than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought and yet does not exist. Consequently, it is all the more [false to suppose] that it can be understood and can be in the understanding [and yet does not exist].

I will add a further point. Consider anything whatsoever which does not exist at some given place or at some given time. Without doubt, even if it does exist elsewhere or at another time, it can be thought never and nowhere to exist just as it does not exist at that given place or at that given time. For with regard to something which did not exist yesterday but does exist today: just as it is understood not to have existed yesterday, so it can be supposed never to exist. And with regard to something which is not in this place but is in that place: just as it is not in this place, so it can be thought nowhere to exist. Likewise, if some of a thing's parts do not exist where or when its other parts exist, then all of its parts and thus the thing as a whole can be thought never and nowhere to exist. For even were we to say that time exists always and that the world exists everywhere, nevertheless it is not the case that time exists always as a whole, or that the world exists everywhere as a whole. Now, just as some parts of time do not exist when others do, so the parts of time can be thought never to exist. And just as some parts of the world do not exist where other parts do, so the parts of the world can be supposed nowhere to exist. Now, even that which is a unified composite is able to be

divided in thought and is able not to exist. Therefore, with regard to whatever at some place or time does not exist as a whole: even if this thing does exist, it can be thought not to exist. But with regard to that than which a greater cannot be thought: if it exists, it cannot be thought not to exist. For otherwise, if it existed it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought an inconsistency. Therefore, it does not at all fail to exist as a whole at any time or place but exists as a whole always and everywhere.

Don't you think that that thing about which these statements are understood can to some extent be thought and understood, and to some extent can be in thought and in the understanding? For if it cannot [be thought or understood], then the above statements cannot be understood about it. But if you say that what is not fully understood is not understood and is not in the understanding, then you say as well that someone who cannot stand to gaze upon the most brilliant light of the sun does not see daylight, which is nothing other than the sun's light. Surely that than which a greater cannot be thought is understood and is in the understanding to the extent that the above statements are understood about it.

[II] And so in the argument with which you find fault I said that when the Fool hears of that than which a greater cannot be thought, he understands what he hears. Surely, if it is spoken of in a language one knows, then one who does not understand [what he hears] has little or no intelligence [i.e. understanding]. Next, I said that if it is understood, it is in the understanding. (Or would what [I claim] conclusively have proved to exist in reality not at all exist in the understanding?) Now, you will say that even if it is in the understanding, there does not follow therefrom that it is understood. Notice, [though], that from the fact of its being understood, there does follow that it is in the understanding. For just as what is thought is thought by thinking, and what is thought by thinking is thereby in our thinking, so what is understood is understood by the understanding, and what is understood by the understanding is thereby in the understanding. What is more obvious than this?

Next, I went on to maintain that if [that than which a greater cannot be thought] existed only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if it existed only in the

understanding, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would be that than which a greater can be thought. What, I ask, follows more logically? For if it existed only in the understanding, could it not be thought to exist also in reality? And if so, would not anyone who thought this [i.e., thought it to exist in reality] think something greater than it if it existed only in the understanding? Therefore, what follows more logically than this conclusion, viz.: if that than which a greater cannot be thought existed only in the understanding, it would be that than which a greater can be thought? But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought is in no sense that than which a greater can be thought. Does it not follow, therefore, that if that than which a greater cannot be thought is at all in the understanding, then it does not exist in the understanding alone? For if it existed only in the understanding it would be that than which a greater can be thought a contradiction.

[III] But you contend that my reasoning proceeds analogously to someone's claiming that an island in the ocean (an island which because of its abundance excels all other lands and which because of the difficulty or rather the impossibility of finding what is only imaginary is called Lost Island) cannot be doubted really to exist since one readily understands when it is described in words. With confidence I reply: if besides that than which a greater cannot be thought anyone finds for me anything else (whether existing in reality or only in thought) to which he can apply the logic of my argument, then I will find and will make him a present of that lost island no longer to be lost.

However, it now seems clear that that than which a greater cannot be thought is not able to be thought not to exist since it exists so assuredly and truly. For otherwise [i.e., if it could be thought not to exist], it would not at all exist. In fact, if someone says that he thinks that this thing does not exist, I reply that in thinking as he says, either he is or he is not thinking of something than which a greater cannot be thought. If he is not thinking of it, then he is not thinking that what he is not thinking of does not exist. And if he is thinking of it, then surely he is thinking of something which cannot even be thought not to exist. For if it could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end. But such a consequence is impossible. Therefore, whoever thinks of this thing thinks of something which cannot even be thought not to exist. Now, whoever thinks of [what cannot be thought not to exist] does not think that it does not



exist. Otherwise he would be thinking what cannot be thought. Therefore, it is not the case that that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist.

[IV] You suggest that to say "The Supreme Being cannot be understood not to exist and cannot be understood even to be able not to exist" might be better than to say "The Supreme Being cannot be thought not to exist." [I answer]: It was necessary to say "cannot be thought." For had I said that this thing "cannot be understood not to exist," then perhaps you who say that, strictly speaking, unrealities cannot be understood might have objected that nothing which exists can be understood not to exist. For it is false that what exists does not exist; and, thus, it would not be a unique characteristic of God not to be able to be understood not to exist. On the other hand, if any one of the things which most assuredly exist can be understood not to exist, then likewise other certainly existing things [e.g., God] can also be understood not to exist. But these objections do not hold with regard to thinking as careful reflection will show. For even if no existing things could be understood not to exist, still they could all be thought not to exist with the exception of that which exists supremely. Indeed, all and only things which have a beginning or an end or are composed of parts and whatever (as I have already said) at any place or time does not exist as a whole can be thought not to exist. But only that in which there is no conceivable beginning or end or combination of parts, and only that which exists as a whole everywhere and always, cannot be thought not to exist.

Be aware, then, that you can think that you do not exist even while knowing most certainly that you do exist. (I am surprised that you expressed uncertainty about this point.) For many things which we know to exist we think not to exist; and many things which we know not to exist we think to exist. [In so thinking] we do not judge rather we imagine that [these things] are as we think. Indeed, [both of the following statements are true:] (1) We can think that something does not exist even while knowing that it does exist; for we can think [imagine] the one state while at the same time knowing the other. And (2) we cannot think that something does not exist while knowing that it does exist; for we cannot think it to exist and at the same time think it not to exist. Hence, if someone distinguishes in this manner these two senses of this expression ["to think"], he will discern (i.e. understand) that (2\*) a thing cannot be

thought not to exist while known to exist and also that (1\*) anything (except that than which a greater cannot be thought) can be thought not to exist while known to exist. So, then, [in one sense] it is a unique characteristic of God not to be able to be thought not to exist; and [in another sense] many other things, while existing, are also not able to be thought not to exist. But about the way in which God is said to be thought not to exist, I deem that enough has been stated in the treatise itself [i.e., in the Proslogion].

[V] It is easy for someone even of moderate intelligence to detect [what is wrong with] the other types of objections which you raise against me on behalf of the Fool; and so I thought I ought to forego showing their misconception. But because I hear that they do seem to various readers to count somewhat against my position, I will examine them briefly.

For one thing, you say repeatedly that I argue as follows: "That which is greater than all others is in the understanding. And if it is in the understanding, it exists also in reality; for otherwise [i.e., if it did not exist in reality], that which is greater than all others would not be that which is greater than all others." But nowhere in any of my statements can such a line of reasoning be found. For the expression "that which is greater than all others" and the expression "that than which a greater cannot be thought" are not equally effective in proving that what is spoken of exists in reality. For if someone claims that that than which a greater cannot be thought (1) is not something really existent or (2) able not to exist or (3) is able to be thought not to exist, he can easily be refuted. For what does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist is able to be thought not to exist. But regarding whatever can be thought not to exist: if it does exist, it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought. And if it does not exist, then (assuredly) if it were to exist, it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought. But regarding that than which a greater cannot be thought: we cannot say that if it exists it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought, or that if it were to exist it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought. Therefore, it is evident that [that than which a greater cannot be thought] neither (1) fails to exist nor (2) is able not to exist nor (3) is able to be thought not to exist. For otherwise [i.e., were it able not to exist or able to be thought not to exist], if it exists it is not what it is described as being; and if it were to exist it would not be [what it is described as being].

But this consequence seems more difficult to be able to be deduced in the case of what is said to be greater than all others.

Or it is not obvious that what can be thought not to exist is not greater than all other existing things, as it is obvious that it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought. And it is not certain that if there is something greater than all others it is identical with that than which a greater cannot be thought (or that if it were to exist it would likewise be identical with [that than which greater cannot be thought]), as this inference is certain about what is called that than which a greater cannot be thought. For if someone should say that there exists something which is greater than all other existing things and yet that this thing can be thought not to exist and that something else even if it does not exist can be thought to be greater than this thing? Could the inference "Therefore, it is not greater than all other existing things" obviously be drawn in that case just as the inference "Therefore, it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought" can very obviously be drawn in my argument? The first inference does not follow immediately from appeal to the notion of what is greater than all others; but the second does follow immediately from appeal to the notion of that than which a greater cannot be thought. Therefore, if the argument which speaks of what is greater than all others proceeds less directly than the argument which speaks of that than which a greater cannot be thought, you unjustly criticize me for having said something I did not say; for [what I was interpreted as saying] differs so greatly from what I did say.

On the other hand, if with an additional premise it can [be proven that what is greater than all others exists], you ought not to have criticized me for having said something which can be proven. Now, the possibility of this proof is easily apprehended by one who recognizes that that than which a greater cannot be thought is able to be this [i.e., to be greater than all others]. For that than which a greater cannot be thought can only be understood to be that which alone is greater than all others. Therefore, just as that than which a greater cannot be thought is understood and is in the understanding and hence is affirmed to exist in reality, so what is said to be greater than all others is inferred to be understood and to be in the understanding and hence, necessarily, to exist in reality. Do you see, then, the respect in which you did rightly compare me with that fool who wanted to assert the existence of Lost Island from the

mere fact that its description was understood?

[VI] Now, you also object that all kinds of unreal and doubtfully real things can likewise be understood and can be in the understanding in the same way as the thing I was speaking of. Now, I am surprised that here you have argued against me. For I aimed at proving something [which I assumed to be] doubtfully real. And I was content at the outset to show in any manner whatsoever that this thing is understood and is in the understanding, so that thereafter I might go on to determine whether it exists only in the understanding, as unreal things do, or whether it also actually exists, as real things do. For if unreal and uncertainly real things are understood and are in the understanding in the sense that when they are spoken of the hearer understands what the speaker means, then nothing prevents what I have spoken of from being understood and being in the understanding.

But how are the following statements consistent? [On the one hand] you say that if someone spoke of unreal things you would understand whatever he said. And [on the other hand] with regard to that which is present in thought but not in the manner in which unreal things are, you say not that you think it or have it in thought (when you hear of it) but rather that you understand it and have it in the understanding. For [you say that] you can think this [real] thing only by understanding it i.e., only by apprehending with certainty that it really exists. How, I ask, are these two statements compatible viz., (1) that unreal objects can be understood and (2) that to understand is to apprehend with certainty that a thing exists? [This contradiction] is not my concern; you attend to it. Yet, if unreal things are in some sense understood, and if your definition is a definition of a special mode of understanding rather than of every mode of understanding, then I ought not to have been criticized for having said that that than which a greater cannot be thought is understood and is in the understanding, and [for having said this] even before it was certain that this being exists in reality.

[VII] Next, one can scarcely at all believe, you say, that when this thing is spoken of or heard of, it cannot be thought not to exist, as even God [you say] can be thought not to exist. Yet, let those who have even a minimal knowledge of debate and argumentation come to my defense. For is it reasonable for someone to deny what he understands [and

to do so] because it is said to be identical with that which he denies because he does not understand? Or if he ever denies something which to some extent he understands, and if that thing is identical with something which he does not at all understand, is not what is in question more easily proved about that which to some extent he understands than about that which he does not at all understand? Therefore, [on the one hand] it cannot even be plausible for someone to deny any knowledge of that than which a greater cannot be thought (which, when he hears of, he understands to some extent) because he denies any knowledge of God (in no respect thinking the meaning of the word "God"). On the other hand, if he denies any knowledge of God because he does not at all understand [the meaning of the word "God"], then is it not easier to prove what in some sense is understood than what is not at all understood? Therefore in order to prove that God exists I, not unreasonably, adduced against the Fool [the description] "that than which a greater cannot be thought." For he might not at all understand the word "God," but he would to some extent understand the description.

[VIII] Now, you go to so much trouble to prove that that than which a greater cannot be thought is not in the understanding analogously to the way in which an unproduced painting is in the understanding of an artist. Yet, there was no reason for you to do so. For I introduced the [example of a] preenvisioned painting not because I wanted to assert that the thing I was discussing is analogous to a painting but only so that I could show that something can be in the understanding without being understood [judged] to exist.

Moreover, you maintain that upon hearing of that than which a greater cannot be thought you cannot think it (or have it in the understanding) by reference to any object known to you through species or genus. For [you claim that] you are neither acquainted with this being nor able to conceive of it by reference to some other similar being. Yet, the facts of the matter are dearly otherwise. For to the extent that everything less good is good, to that extent it is like a greater good. Therefore, to any rational mind it is clear that by ascending from lesser goods to higher goods, we can indeed pass from conceiving of those goods than which a greater can be thought to conceiving of that Good than which nothing greater can be thought. Is there anyone, for example even if he does not believe in the real existence of what he conceives who is unable to think

that if there is something good which has a beginning and an end, then that good is much better which has no end though having a beginning. And just as this second good [which has a beginning but no end] is better than the first, so also that good which has neither a beginning nor an end is better than this second good. [This third good is better than the second] even if the third is always moving from the past through the present toward the future. Yet, that good which in no way needs or is compelled to be changed or moved is far better (whether or not it really exists) than this [third good, which does change]. Can this [unchanging good] not be conceived? Can anything greater than it be conceived? Is not this [i.e., conceiving of this unchanging good] the same as passing from those goods than which a greater can be thought to the conception of that Good than which a greater cannot be thought? Therefore, there is a way to conceive of that than which a greater cannot be thought. Thus, the Fool, who does not accept sacred authority [i.e., Scripture], can easily be refuted if he says that by reference to other things he cannot conceive of that than which a greater cannot be thought. But if an orthodox Christian (*catholicus*) should say this, let him remember that since the creation of the world the invisible things of God (including His eternal power and deity) are clearly seen and are understood by reference to created things.

[IX] Yet, even if it were true that [in one sense] that than which a greater cannot be thought could not be conceived or understood, nonetheless it would not be false that [in another sense] that than which a greater cannot be thought can be conceived and understood. Nothing prevents our saying [the word] "unsayable," even though what is called unsayable cannot be said. Moreover, we can think [the concept] inconceivable, even though what is rightly called inconceivable cannot be conceived. By the same token, when that than which nothing greater can be thought is spoken of, without doubt what is heard can be thought and understood, even if the thing than which a greater cannot be thought could not be thought or understood. For even anyone were so foolish as to say that something than which a greater cannot be thought does not exist, nevertheless he would not be so shameless as to say that he cannot think or understand what he is saying. Or if such an impudent person is found, not only is his word to be rejected but he himself is to be despised. Therefore, whoever denies the existence of that than which a greater cannot be thought surely thinks and understands

the denial he is making. And he cannot think or understand this denial without thinking or understanding its parts one of which is "that than which a greater cannot be thought." Therefore, whoever denies this [viz., that this being exists] thinks and Understands [the meaning of] "that than which a greater cannot be thought."

In like manner, obviously, "what is not able not to exist" can be thought and understood. Now, someone who thinks of this [viz., of what is not able not to exist] thinks of something greater than someone who thinks of what is able not to exist.

Therefore, while that than which a greater cannot be thought is conceived: if what is able not to exist is conceived, then that than which a greater cannot be thought is not conceived. Now, since the same thing cannot at the same time be both conceived and not conceived, someone who conceives of that than which a greater cannot be thought does not conceive of what is able not to exist but rather conceives of what is not able not to exist. Hence, it is necessarily the case that what he conceives of exists because whatever is able not to exist is not what he conceives of.

[X] I have now showed, I believe, that in my earlier treatise I proved not by inconclusive reasoning but by very compelling reasoning that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists in reality. And [I have showed] that this reasoning was not weakened by any strong counterreasoning. For the significance of this utterance ["that than which a greater cannot be thought"] contains so much force that what is spoken of is, by the very fact that it is understood or thought, necessarily proved really to exist and to be whatever ought to be believed about the Divine Substance. For we believe about the Divine Substance whatever can in every respect be thought to be better than its contradictory. For example, it is better to be eternal than not to be eternal, better to be good than not to be good or rather, to be goodness itself than not to be goodness itself. But that than which something greater cannot be thought cannot fail to be anything of this kind. Therefore, it is necessarily the case that that than which a greater cannot be thought is whatever ought to be believed about the Divine Being.

I thank you for your kindness both in criticizing and in praising my treatise. For since you praised so lavishly those things which seemed to you worthy of acceptance, it is quite evident that you criticized out of good will rather than out of malevolence the

things which seemed to you untenable.

