Saint Anselm And His Proofs For The Existence Of God

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SAINT ANSELM AND HIS PROOFS
FOR THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

by

Jacob C. Klessens

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submitted to the Department of Philosophy
of Carroll College in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Degree of
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# Table of Contents

Foreword by the Author .................................................. iv

Chapter I

Some Observations on the Philosopher, the Saint, and the Century ................. 1
A. The Historical Situation and Saint Anselm
   1. Education
   2. Monastic Contributions
   3. The Influence of the Crusades
   4. Faith and Reason
   5. Investiture
   6. Realism vs. Nominalism
   7. Dialectics
B. Anselm, the Benedictine

Chapter II

The Non-Ideological Arguments ..................... 9
A. Need of a Standard
   1. Platonic Foundation
   2. Augustinian Foundation
   3. Saint Anselm's Argument
   4. Saint Thomas' Concurrence
B. Gradation in Beings
   1. Saint Anselm's Argument
   2. Saint Thomas' Argument from Perfection
C. Design
   1. Saint Anselm's Argument
   2. Saint Thomas' Argument

Chapter III

The Ideological Argument ......................... 20
A. Foundations for the Argument
B. Anselm's Argument
C. Reduction and Explanation of the Argument
   1. John K. Ryan
   2. Glenn's Syllogism
   3. Etienne Gilson
"Credo ut intelligam." This was the motto of Saint Anselm of Canterbury. In respect to Anselm himself, it may be added "Intelligo ut amem," for truly, to know Saint Anselm is to love him. A humble, studious monk, his life and his works are manifestations of one who carried his love for Christ and for His Church into every phase of his busy life.

Living in an age which historians have erroneously labeled the "Dark Ages," Anselm, along with many other great sons of the Church, is a complete refutation of this charge. Intelligent historians are in accord with the Church which realizes the important part which Anselm played in the continuum of religious, philosophical, and political thought.

To most historians of philosophy, the name, Saint Anselm, means merely the ontological argument. Perhaps no other great philosopher was so neglected in his own day; certainly few are more neglected in modern times. While it is true that he is remembered by most students for his unique ideological argument for the existence of God, it must be understood that this was only one of his four arguments. Long before he began to write his Proslogium, he had formulated three non-ideological arguments in the Monologium; one based on the
need of a standard, one from gradation in being, and one which was based on design, or order. In addition to these works, he wrote many treatises on theological and philosophical matters, among the most famous of which are *Cur Deus Homo* and *Meditationes*. To believe that Anselm's contribution to philosophy was limited to the ontological argument is the same as believing that Saint Thomas wrote one argument for God's existence, and nothing more.

Since this work is necessarily limited to the proofs for the existence of God according to Saint Anselm, it is not the author's intention to treat all of his philosophy; rather, it is intended that Anselm's proofs, both ideological and non-ideological, be clearly set forth and explained. This necessitates an understanding of his basic philosophy, as well as an insight into Anselm, the philosopher, and his times. It was with these facts in mind that Chapter One was written. Further, since no philosophy is without its effects, it has also been necessary to follow Anselm's works, so far as is possible, to comparatively recent times.

It is to be hoped that the reader of this work will realize the importance of Anselm in a study of philosophy. By studying Anselm's works, an insight may be gained into the life of a man who bore his faith zealously into every one of his diverse activities, in a time and in a capacity in which this was very difficult. This having been done, the reader will gain, as the author has, a new love and respect for the runaway boy from Aosta who grew up to be the Archbishop of Canterbury, and what is greater, a Saint and Doctor of the Church.
Chapter I

Some Observations on the Philosopher,
the Saint, and the Century

By 950, western Europe had seen some five and one-half centuries of incessant turmoil, brought about by invasions, migrations and settlement of barbarian peoples. This period of dislocation and resettlement, broken only by a brief interlude under the three great Carolingians saw the feudalistic and manorial systems of government evolve into an intricate maze of lord-vassal relationships.\(^{(1)}\) With stability finally effected, a superior type of civilization was now possible. It remained to be seen whether feudalism or manorialism were capable of supplying the peace, order, security and wealth necessary for this new civilization. It must be stated at once that without the ubiquitous and pervasive influence of the Church to restrain the quick impulses always threatening, without its inspiration to men to express themselves in art and writing, without its scholars and teachers (who provided the only education to be had), it is difficult to see how a life of any refinement and complexity could have been furnished.

The charge has often been levelled that the era ending with the zenith of feudalism and manorialism was an age of darkness. Conditions of the times, it must be remembered, were not conducive to intellectual or cultural achievements of great magnitude. The Church, however, can point with pride to her valiant sons and daughters, who, far from living in darkness, kept alive the flame of learning in the far-flung monasteries. In answer to her attackers, she calls upon her great popes and her unknown monks, all of whom were responsible for advances in studies and art and introduction of new methods in agriculture and the trades. Far from being passive to the difficulties of the times, she not only kept the spark of learning alive, but fanned it into the flame that a later period would increase to enlighten the whole world. Without the educated and trained clergy of this period upon whom kings and rulers relied heavily, it is a matter of conjecture as to what would have emerged from the middle ages.

The monastic reforms of the 11th and 12th centuries bolstered the contributions of the Church's scholars, and introduced innovations in organization which had great subsequent importance. New groups of cloistered anchorites were formed in Italy and France. Bruno of Cologne (1030-1101) founded the Carthusians, who lived a strict life which included little but religious services, mystic contemplation and manuscript copying. In addition, the Augustinian canons, or canons regular, adopted a rule derived from some writings of Saint Augustine. The Cistercian Order, founded by Robert in 1098, received its impetus from Saint Bernard, who not only effected the propagation of the order, but also increased its contribution to civilization in
the fields of art, studies, and agriculture. These new orders accepted the torch of responsibility from the original Benedictine Order. It was by the hands of these Benedictine monks and lay brothers largely, that the stage was set for the great age of Scholasticism.

In order that the period into which Saint Anselm stepped may be understood, a word is necessary concerning the effect of the prelude to the Crusades. The first stirrings of a revival of commerce and industry were being felt, and with this, the arts and sciences began to develop. The intellectual horizon widened, and translations from the manuscripts of the great Greek philosophers afforded ample material for the minds of the neophyte Scholastics. While these factors had little effect on Saint Anselm's philosophy, it had a great deal to do with the reception of it by his contemporaries and those who immediately followed him.

It is ironical that Saint Anselm should appear in an age fraught with many weighty problems of great importance. Anselm was humble, a lover of the solitude of the monastery, an ardent scholar; and yet, he was ejected from his tranquil studies into a high position which demanded the solution of problems which had implications which would have radically changed the course of political and religious history, had they been left unsolved. In the Investiture struggle, in the battle between Nominalism and Realism, and in the aged matter of Faith vs. Reason, he acted boldly and wisely, keeping always before him, the principles of the Faith which he so ardently loved.

The problem of the relation of religion to philosophy had divided the Church from the beginning, into two parties. For many, faith in
Christ together with a blameless life constituted the essence of Christianity. At the beginning of the second century, the opposition to philosophy and science was prevented from becoming dominant through the efforts of the catechetical school at Alexandria.

The dialecticians, at their extremes, taught that worldly knowledge was independent, and that reason was the only criterion even in matters of faith. In opposition to them, a good many condemned all profane learning as useless and dangerous, declaring that faith is the first light of the intellect. Referring to the dangerous proceedings of the dialecticians and the errors of Abelard and Gilbert de la Porre, they claimed that philosophy undermined the faith. Even the pagan Epicurus had called knowledge for its own sake vanity. In a later day, Saint Bonaventure and Saint Thomas would support that view for more compelling motives, saying that all knowledge must be directed to the divine.

The telling decision in this conflict was given by Anselm of Canterbury. Filled with the Augustinian spirit, to which he was ever faithful, he reiterated Augustine's program: "Credo ut intelligam, fides quarens intellectum." Against the rationalists, he said that "pure reason has no place where divine things are considered, and faith alone can give the experience that opens the vision for the divine." Far from being a defender of assent by faith alone, he proposed that the teachings of faith have a "ratio," and this "ratio" can be comprehended by the intellect. In opposition to the fideists,

(2) Cf. Anselm, quoted in Welch, Anselm and His Work, New York, Scribners and Sons, 1901, p.89.
he requires a rational study directed toward the attainment of an insight into the teachings of the faith, but this study must remain always under the guidance of the authority of the Church, and it must be founded on practical faith and moral living. Thus, Anselm fights both for and against reason—for it inasmuch as reason can be used by the ethically unbiased man for an insight into the teachings of faith; against it inasmuch as it claims a role that does not belong to it.

The Church itself took philosophy to itself, offered it as something covetable to its highest geniuses and saints, and was rewarded by finding that it left unmarred their genius and sanctity, even adding what was best in their mind and soul, a certain childlike simplicity.

So far as the Investiture struggle is concerned, it is not pertinent to the subject matter of this work. Suffice it to say that, as always, a great Catholic appeared in this time of great importance, as Anselm became the Archbishop of Canterbury. Had Anselm been allowed to remain in the monastery and, unthwarted by the heavy burden of worldly responsibilities, perhaps philosophical history would have advanced much more rapidly.

Perhaps more important to our subject was the struggle between the realists and the nominalists. On the one hand, the Realists, at their extreme, claimed that universals as such exist outside the mind; there are objective realities which, independently of our minds, possess universality (universal "ante rem"). On the other hand, the Nominalists claimed that general terms or ideas were a mere intellectual convenience, reality entering only into individual things.
The eleventh century revival of logic raised this question, which went back to Plato's theory of ideas. Plato had conceived of reality as consisting in a hierarchy of general ideas, chief of which was the idea of the good. There was no reality in a particular thing except as it partook of the nature of its general idea. The question now raised was whether these general terms or ideas had real existence of their own, or whether, as Aristotle thought, they were a mere intellectual convenience, reality only entering into individual things.

This struggle was of great importance; the nominalists threatened the existence of a body of truth derived from divine revelation; the realist threatened to swallow up the individual in an abstraction. The extreme form of either realism or nominalism leads to a "reductio ad absurdum."

Medieval scholars were the quickest to see the theological implications of realism and nominalism. The controversy in the eleventh century quickly led to a dispute on the doctrine of the Trinity between Roscelin, a thoroughgoing nominalist, and Anselm, who charged him with believing in three Gods, and proved that strict nominalism leads only to heresy. Partly from his native Platonism, partly from his battle with Roscelin, Anselm's realism took what may be considered a somewhat extreme form. It was soon to find the golden mean of moderate Realism accepted by later philosophers. Anselm's position was an important stage in the process.

(1) Ibid., p.100ff.
Anselm was a firm believer in dialectics to explain the tenets of Christian faith. It should be emphasised that the dialecticians, in setting up reason against authority, did not claim that in case of conflict, it was possible to substitute their syllogism for the articles of faith and the revelation of God in Scripture. Their fundamental idea was that there can be no genuine conflict between revealed truth and rational truth; truth is one. But they did believe that it was possible to make revealed truth intelligible not only to those willing to accept it on faith, but also to unbelievers. It is to be stated also, that they realized the impossibility of exhausting the full meaning of revelation. As Anselm put it, "No Christian ought in any way to dispute the truth of what the Catholic Church believes in its heart and confesses with its mouth. But always holding the same faith unquestioningly, he ought himself as far as he is able, to seek the reason for it. If he can understand it, let him thank God. If he cannot, let him not raise his head in opposition, but bow in reverence." (1)

From this brief summary of the problems of the times into which Anselm was born, his philosophical doctrines will be better understood. Anselm, who was born in 1033 in the mountainous Burgundian town of Aosta, became a monk in the Benedictine Abbey of Bec at the age of 27. (2) Three years later, he became the Prior, succeeding his former teacher, Lanfranc. It was at this time, before he shouldered the

(2) Cf. Welch, op. cit., Ch.3.
responsibilities of the Archbishopric of Canterbury, that our Saint wrote some of his most important philosophical and theological works, notably, the Monologium and the Proslogium. It is with the subject matter of these two treatises, that this work is concerned.
Chapter II

The Non Ideological Arguments

Anselm's great work, the Monologium, contains his meditations on finite being, thus arriving at three proofs for the existence of God. True to his model Augustine, with whom he claimed never to disagree, he at first entitled the work Fides Quaerens Intellectus. This work was a meditation in which our saint attempts, putting aside all scriptural authority, to prove the being of God in the light of pure reason, and then to define his nature and attributes, and His relation to the world and to men.

Anselm begins his Monologium with a proof of God's being as implicit in ordinary experience. All things which are must have a cause. What a man desires at any particular moment is some good, something that has intrinsic value, or only supposed advantage. But all three particular goods must have a common origin in some original good. So it is with everything that rouses men's reverence. Whatever quickens such reverence proves the existence of some original sublime.

Saint Anselm begins his theological arguments in the first section of his Monologium, by stating that there is something that is the best, and greatest, and the highest of all things.
This concept is not original with Saint Anselm. Plato, 1300 years before had written that the Divinity is the Absolute Good, that is the Idea of Goodness. This Divinity, to Plato, was supremely perfect, ordering and governing everything for the best. Any good in the world is merely a faint recollection of this Good.

Anselm proves, in this argument, that the existence of diverse goods necessarily demands the existence of the Absolute Good, which is God. This is the argument which is commonly known as his argument from the need of a standard. Anselm begins his argument thus:

"Reason alone, in great part, is able to convince that one highest nature exists, sufficient to itself, and from whose omnipotent goodness all other things are, and many other things which we believe about God. Now the mode of investigating the highest nature is here very apt." (1)

Anselm's next lines show very definitely the great attachment to the thought of Saint Augustine. Saint Augustine says:

"...Thence entered I the recesses of my memory, those manifold and spacious chambers, wonderfully furnished with innumerable stores; and I considered, and stood aghast; being able to discern none of these things without Thee, and finding none of them to be Thee." (2)

Augustine, in his argument from the immutability and permanence of the object of our intellectual knowledge states that nothing is true or good in this world of change and imperfection except in so far as it participates in the absolute truth and goodness of Him Who never changes. Augustine teaches the immutability, eternity, and omnipotence of God, Who is all knowing, and absolutely devoid of

(1) Cf. S. Anselmi, Opera Omnia (Monologium), Patrologia Latina, Minge, 1863. The present writer has translated into English each direct quote given from Minge.

potentiality or composition. Now let us turn back to Saint Anselm as he says:

We seek only that which we think good; and we discern by reason that many things are good. Now it is most certain that whatever things are called something in such a way that they are called greater or lessor or equal, one to another, they are said to be through something, not in one way or another way, but it is known the same way in diverse things which come together in that one. Therefore, it is necessary that all things are good through something which is one and the same in diverse goods. Therefore, there is one through which the entire body of things are good, and in which diverse goods come together. Now who would doubt that that very thing through which the whole is good, is a great good, and is good "per se"? Therefore, all other goods are through something; and that alone is through itself. But that which is good through another is less than that which is good through itself. And for this reason, that which is through itself good is in a great degree good, and the greatest of all things that are: for what is of a higher degree good, is in a higher degree great. There is, therefore, one something in a higher degree great, and a higher degree good, that is the greatest of all things which are.

Just so there is one other in the greatest way good, because all goods are through one something which is good through itself; thus there exists one something in the greatest way great; because whatever are great, are great through one something which is great through itself. I know the great, not by space, for that is a body, but by wisdom, which is better and more worthy.(1)

Saint Anselm next proves that there is one and only one God, and that He is this greatest good:

All which is, is either through something or nothing. It is not through nothing, therefore, it is through something. Now that through which all things are, is either one or many: if many, these many are each through themselves; and so there is one reason or strength by which the many have these things, in order that they might be through themselves. Therefore, there is one something through which they are whatever they are; and that alone is through itself. For nothing, neither that to which they are referred, nor those relations, are equal. But

(1) Anselmi, op. cit.
what is through another is less than that which is through itself. Therefore there is one something which alone is in the greatest way and the highest way of all, and the highest good and the highest great exists; as through which it is, whatever good or great or otherwise, is. (1)

This argument from the need of a standard seems to be closely allied to the argument which he later proposes, i.e., the argument from gradation in beings. The basis of the foregoing argument is the existence of certain qualities in man and nature, moral and intellectual excellencies. Anselm argues that, in order for them to be intelligently accounted for, they presuppose, as the ground for their existence, the same qualities in a perfect and transcendent manner, in a Being who is seen, on further investigation, to be one without whom nothing could be, and who Himself depends upon nothing. It is an argument from ideas, in the sense in which Plato spoke of them, as grounds accounting to reason, for all that is a matter of experience.

The argument can be reduced to this form:

Things are called good in a variety of ways and degrees; this would be impossible if there were not some absolute standard, some good in itself, in which all relative goods participate. Similarly, with such adjectives as great; they involve a certain greatness. The very existence of things is impossible without some one Being by Whom they are. This Absolute Being, this Goodness, this Greatness, is God. (2)

This proof manifests Anselm's realism in a striking degree. It coincides to some extent with the earlier theories of Augustine, as contained above, although it is carried out with a singular boldness and fullness.

(1) Anselmi, op. cit.
(2) Ibid.
Saint Thomas bears out Anselm's argument in the beginning of his fourth argument. He starts with certain perfections observed among the beings of nature, i.e., truth, goodness, nobility, and the like. They are not self-sufficient, they imply something prior, whence they are derived, and on which they depend. From this, Saint Thomas proceeds, by the principle of causality, to that adequate, self-sufficient cause. The conclusion is that only absolute perfection, Supreme Being, subsisting in itself, can account for the limited and relative perfections found in nature. (1)

The works of Saint Anselm are not cast in the same clear-cut manner which we find in St. Thomas' works. Thus, in Chapter IV. of the Monologium, we find Saint Anselm proposing the argument which is usually termed the argument from the gradation in beings; it was this line of reasoning from this argument that Saint Thomas took most of his fourth argument, that of the grades of perfection. While Anselm's first proof, from the need of a standard, and his second argument from gradation in being, seem to be closely related, this argument has its own merits which must be treated separately. Saint Anselm states his argument briefly, in these words:

Not all natures are equal in dignity; but some are better than others. Therefore, there is one which supercedes in eminence, that does not have anything superior to itself. Otherwise, the multitude of natures would have no end, which is absurd; now the highest nature, whether one or many, are equal. If many, they are not equal unless through something else which is of its own essence; for if they are equal through another, they are less than that; and therefore, not the greatest or the highest of the others. Therefore, there is one certain nature or essence

which is the highest of all which are; which is great and
good through itself; which through itself is that which is
itself, and through which is whatever is good or great or
otherwise. (1)

This argument also portrays a certain relation to Anselm's realism,
and can be rightly traced to the Platonic theory of ideas. Indeed,
although Saint Thomas' proof from degrees of perfection is taken from
this argument, many Thomists feel that both Anselm's and Saint Thomas'
argument are idealistic. To the mind which sees matter as more real
than ideas, this proof has little appeal; on the other hand, to the
mind which recognizes the reality of good and evil, of kindness and
cruelty, of joy and sorrow, this argument is the strongest of all.

This argument is based on the fact that truths are true in dif­
ferent degrees. This is everywhere apparent. A contingent truth,
for example, in the physical order has not so full a degree of truth
as a necessary physical law; this, in turn is a truth of a lower
order than a metaphysical principle such as the principle of causality.
Even metaphysical truths differ in degree—the principle of identity
possesses truth on a higher level than others—finally, there is
the Truth which of itself is, and must be, and without which there
would neither be being or truth.

Saint Thomas more fully explains the basis for the validity of
this truth, namely, that if one and the same perfection is found in
several different beings, it is impossible that each should of itself
possess it, and therefore the several beings must have received this
perfection from some one cause. Furthermore, a being which possesses

(1) Anselmi, op. cit., Chap. 4.
in limitation a perfection which is not of its essence limited, possesses it from an intrinsic cause which is the highest degree of that perfection.

Concerning the impossibility of several different beings possessing, of itself, one and the same perfection, he says:

It is necessary, if some one thing is found in several beings, that it be caused in them by some one cause. For it cannot be that the common thing belongs to each by reason of itself, since each one, inasmuch as it is itself, is different from the others and diversity of causes produces diverse effects. (1)

That such a being possessing, in limitation, that perfection which is unlimited, must possess it from an extrinsic cause which is the highest degree of that perfection, is proved in this manner:

What belongs to something by reason of its own nature, and not from some other cause, cannot be in it in a lessened or deficient degree. For if something essential be taken away from or added to a nature, the latter will at once be another nature. .......If on the contrary, while the nature or "quiddity" of a thing remains intact, something is found diminished, it is at once evident that this latter does not depend upon that nature simply, but upon something else by whose removal it is diminished. Therefore, what belongs to something in a lesser degree than to some other things, does not belong to it by virtue of its own nature alone, but from some other cause. Consequently, that to which the predication of a certain genus is proper in the maximum degree will be the cause of everything in that genus. (2)

The argument is thus valid, and the only ultimate cause of truth or goodness in limited being is Absolute Truth or Absolute Good, for any Truth short of this is less than the subject in which it is, and is therefore limited by it, and then the subject is not true of itself, but by virtue of something else. This cannot be the ultimate cause of

(1) Cf. De Potentia, III, 3.
truth. The same line of argument applies to the case of good, wisdom, nobility, and so on in, all the perfection of being.

In Chapters IX - XIII of the Monologium, Saint Anselm offers his third and final non-ideological argument. In the opinion of the author, this proof is the weakest of his three proofs, being less clear and containing several lines of argument. It would seem that Saint Thomas included this argument in his fifth argument, that of design, primarily. Anselm does not bring out the basis of intrinsic finality which characterizes Thomas' proof. Anselm's argument is based on the fact that ideas (in this case, the plan of the universe) must exist in a mind, by whose providence the universe was made and is governed. This being we call God.

Anselm begins:

Nothing rationally becomes from something unless the form of the thing precedes in that something. Therefore, there was in that highest reason of nature something, either 'qualia' (what kind) or 'quomodo' (how) all things were going to be made, before they were made. Therefore, before they were, they were not nothing; they are not from nothing, since they are, with regard to the plan of the one making.(1)

Anselm explains that when something is reasonably made, something of the thing to be made, such as an example, or more aptly, the form, or likeness or the plan, precedes it in the mind of the one making it. Wherefore, when those things were made, nothing was, before they were made, in regard to the thing made, because they were not what they now are; nor was there anything from which they became. Nevertheless, there was something in regard to the plan of the one making through which and according to which they were made.

(1) Anselmi, op. cit., Chap. IX.
Anselm continues:

The form of the thing in the divine mind is the pronouncing of that in some reason itself; as the artist of a work that is to be made speaks within himself. Now we can say one thing in a threefold manner: (1) Sensibly, by using sensible signs, (2) Insensibly, by thinking within ourselves, these signs insensibly, and (3) neither sensibly nor insensibly, and not by saying the sign, but (by saying) the thing itself, in the mind.(1)

Anselm explains this by using the example of an artist who is going to make a work of art, asking, "Does he not say that within himself by a conception of the mind?" Again, his realism is a great aid for his argument. He further elucidates the matter, emphasising again, his realism by saying:

In these three types of discourse, each come together; the words of the third discourse are natural, and accordingly, the same among all. Where they are, no other word is necessary for knowing the thing; where they cannot be, every other word is of no avail for demonstrating the thing. The natural words are the more true, because they are more similar to the thing. Whence, the natural word is by much the most proper and principle word of the thing. Therefore, this was the saying by which the highest essence called all things before they were, in order that they might be made through that.(2)

The dissimilitude of the highest artist and the workman is (1) in this, the fact that the highest artist did not compose the form in anything else, (2) in this, the fact that the highest artist completed no matter from which he perfected the preconceived work, (3) in this, the fact that the substantial works of a producer are nothing unless they are through that; now what things were made by the artist are not completely made unless they are something, which are not through him.

The highest substance makes all things through itself. However, he makes all things through the natural and innermost discourse. Therefore, this natural discourse is the highest substance itself.

(1) Ibid.
(2) Ibid., Chap. X.
As all things which are, are something through one, which along is through itself, so also all things move through one something, which along moves through itself. Therefore, as nothing is made except through a producer essence, so also nothing moves except through the same powerful preserver.(1)

Perhaps in none of the proofs does Anselm's realistic position stand out so clearly. His argument could be reduced to a form that things created could not be what they are, could not act as they do, except through a preconceived plan. Now an idea is an accidental being, existing only in an intelligence, and this is God. Anselm's proof brings out quite clearly his belief in the existence of ideas independent of our mind, a certitude which characterized all of his philosophical works. His premisses are absolutely solid, being built on the fact that nothing comes from nothing, and whatever acts in the way that it does, demands a plan, or an idea through which and by which it acts in the way that it does. It seems, however, that the proofs leading to this latter statement are to be presupposed, either from his previous works or from those of earlier philosophers. The proof assumes all the activities regarding intelligence. It is for this reason that the proof might seem to be of less value than his other proofs.

Saint Thomas' proof which seems to be most closely allied to this proof is the fifth proof, that of design. It is much more forceful and complete. He shows that things which lack knowledge act always, or almost always, in the same way, to reach their end. Hence, they much achieve their end, not fortuitously, but designedly. Since

(1) Ibid., Chap. XI.
even things lacking knowledge act for an end, they are directed by some being endowed with intelligence. This Being is God. (1)

Chapter III

The Ideological Argument

In his first theological treatise, as we have seen, Anselm set forth the arguments showing the existence of God by reason alone. But he himself was not satisfied, for he felt that he had used too many arguments. In his own words:

At the solicitous entreaties of certain brethren, a brief work (the Monologium) as an example of meditation on the grounds of faith, in the person of one who investigates, in a course of silent reasoning with himself, matters of which he is ignorant; considering that this book was knit together by the linking of many arguments, I began to ask myself whether there might be found a single argument which would require no other argument for its proof than itself alone; and alone would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists, and that there is a supreme good requiring nothing else, which all other things require for their existence and well-being, and whatever we believe regarding the Divine Being.(1)

The result of Anselm's desire to find one single argument for the proof of the existence of God has been known to this day as Anselm's famous "Ontological Argument." This is actually a misnomer, for it is frequently confounded with Ontological order from which it differs greatly.

For this reason it is more accurately called the Ideological Argument. There are many who, whenever they hear the name, St. Anselm, think of him only as the author of the "Ontological" argument. This fact is due, probably, to the unique character of this intriguing argument. Starting from the notion that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought, he argues that what exists in reality is greater than that which is only in the mind. Since God is that than which nothing greater can be thought, He exits in reality.

The basis for the ideological argument can be found in classical Greek realism—the general prejudice that for a name there must be something named, but especially the conviction that the name of the highest and the best cannot hang objectless. The argument rests upon the realistic metaphysics of Plato.

Whether or not the existence of God can be proved from our idea of Him is not a settled matter in our own day. Those Christian philosophers who follow the traditions of Saint Anselm always tend to regard the ideological proof as the best, even sometimes, as the only one possible. They either base everything on the ontological value of rational evidence, and maintain that a real existence necessarily corresponds to the necessary affirmation of an existence; or they construct an ontology based on the objective content of the concepts, and then prove the existence of God inductively as the sole conceivable cause of the idea of God in us.

The source of all the ideological arguments, whether it be the most famous, Anselm's, or the later arguments supported or propounded by Scotus, Descartes(1), Leibniz(2), or Malebranche(3), have as a

(1) 1596-1650.
(2) 1646-1716.
(3) 1638-1715.
common source, the Platonic idea that the material beings of the universe are but the shadows of intelligible beings, that is, ideas, which in Plato’s mind have an existence of their own in a spiritual world apart from the human intellect, and which are therefore, the standard and criterion of our knowledge. Such a conception, modified by the teachings of Christianity, exercised great influence upon the arguments used on behalf of the existence of God by Saint Augustine, Saint Anselm, and very many others, even down to our own day.

Saint Augustine's argument is based upon the eternity, necessity, universality, and immutability of our ideas in general, and upon the eternity, necessity, immutability, and universality of the logical and moral ideas in particular. The argument assumes that there can be no adequate explanation of the absoluteness of the ideal and moral orders unless we accept the ideas in the Divine Mind as its foundation. Here we have an adaptation of Plato’s idea to Christian teaching. It is a beautiful and appropriate conception, but for the conclusive demonstration of the objective divine existence, the argument has no value whatsoever.

To sum up, briefly, it may be said that the ideological arguments have this common basis: in an open or veiled manner, they deduce the existence of God from the idea of God in particular, or from the idea of the absolute, the infinite, or the perfect, in general.

Saint Anselm begins his argument thus:

And indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there such a nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? (Psalms XIV, 1) But at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak—a being than which nothing greater can be conceived—understands what he hears,
and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist. (1)

While a later section of this work will contain the criticisms of the argument, it may be profitable to point out at this time, that Saint Thomas Aquinas detected a fallacy in the very first line of the argument. This fallacy is not one of logic, but an objective error, in which Anselm claims that the name "God," is synonymous with "that than which nothing greater can be conceived," to everyone. This matter will be further treated in a subsequent part of this work.

Anselm continues:

Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. (2)

Before the argument is completed, it will prove useful to investigate Plato's theories of Ideas influencing Anselm's writings. In Plato's Theory of Ideas, the name Idea denotes primarily something objective. It is essentially universal. Nothing is clearer than that Plato understood by the Idea, something existing apart from the phenomena, which make up the world of sense. The idea transcends the world of concrete existence; it abides in the heavenly sphere. According to Aristotle, the Platonic world of Ideas is a world by itself, a prototype of the world which we see. (3)

With this thought in mind, we follow our saint's argument, as he explains:

(1) Ibid., p.779.
(2) Ibid.
And assuredly that than which nothing greater can be conceived cannot exist in the understanding alone. For suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

Therefore, if that than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.(1)

This is the heart of the argument, and it was in the foregoing passage that Saint Thomas found the loophole in the reasoning, i.e., that the argument made an illegal transition from the world of ideas to the world of reality. Anselm, however, was not content to leave the argument in this stage. Working on the premises set forth above, he attempts to clinch the argument thus:

And it exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a Being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being, Thou art, O Lord, Our God!(2)

Along the same thoughts, and in the same manner, Anselm, in his own mind having conclusively proved his argument, continues to show that God necessarily exists:

And indeed, whatever else there is, except Thee alone, can be conceived not to exist. To Thee alone, therefore, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings, and hence, in a higher degree than all others. For whatever

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(1) Ibid., p.780.  
(2) Smith, op. cit., p.780.
else does not exist so truly, and hence, in a lesser degree, it belongs to it to exist. Why then, has the fool said in his heart, there is no God, since it is so evident to a rational mind, that thou dost exist in the highest degree of all?(1)

Thus, our saint, after many attempts, gave to the world one single argument, for the existence of God, which would require no other for its support. Fallacious or not, it has given much food for thought for subsequent philosophers. Rejected by many, on the one hand, it was accepted by other great thinkers as the best, indeed, the only argument, on the other hand.

The argument will be made more clear by reducing the argument from the somewhat lengthy form of Saint Anselm, before we follow it through the course of philosophical history, to note its criticisms and defenses. The argument can be reduced to this:

Under the name of God, everyone understands that greater than which nothing can be thought. Since anything, being the greatest and lacking existence is less than the greatest having also existence, the former is not really the greater. The greatest therefore, has to exist.(2)

In The Basic Principles and Problems of Philosophy, John K. Ryan restates the argument in this fashion:

Everyone, even the fool who says in his heart, 'There is no God,' has an idea of God. This is the idea of the greatest of all possible beings, of a being so great that none greater can be thought of. The Theist says that such a being exists both in his thought and in reality as well. The Atheist says that this being does not exist in fact, but only in the mind. Such a statement, rejoins Saint Anselm, is a contradiction in terms. The atheist says that God, the greatest being that he can possibly think of does not really exist. Yet he must be thought of as really existent or else he will not be thought of as the greatest of all possible beings. If I am to think of such a being,

(1) Smith, op. cit. p.780.
(2) Welch, op. cit., p.79
I must think of him as really existent. I do think of the greatest of all possible beings. Therefore I must, to be self-consistent, think of God as existing in the order of reality as well as of thought. (1)

Glenn, in reducing the argument to the syllogistic form, gives us a somewhat oversimplified and superficial form of the argument.

The syllogism falls into this form:

God is the most perfect being we can think of;
But the most perfect being we can think of must be thought of as existing;
Therefore, God must be thought of as existing. (2)

Leaving the technical mechanism of the proof in the Proslogium, it is reduced to this, by Gilson:

That there exists a being whose intrinsic necessity is such as to be reflected in the very idea we form of Him. God exists so necessarily in Himself that even in our thought, He cannot not exist. (3)

Assailants of this argument should remember that all minds are not cast in one mould, and that some can feel the force of arguments not felt by others. To declare this argument as an absurd fallacy would be the same as attaching the title of moron to such great minds as Duns Scotus, Saint Bonaventure, Saint Anselm himself; to this list may be added Descartes, Leibniz, and Hegel, in the more recent times.

Saint Bonaventure, for example, saw very well that the necessity of God's being "quoad se" is the sole conceivable sufficient reason of the necessity of his existence "quoad nos." Saint Bonaventure defends the argument in this way:

Let him who would contemplate the unity of the Divine Essence, first fix his eyes on being itself, and there he will see that being itself is in itself so absolutely self-evident that it cannot be thought of as not being; ("et videat ipsum esse adeo in se certissimum, quod non potest cogitari non esse").

The whole Bonaventuran metaphysic of illumination lies behind this text, in readiness to explain our certitude of His existence by an irradiation of the divine being in our thought.

Duns Scotus has often been named as an adherent to the ideological argument, although his argument certainly is not the same as the one which Saint Anselm completed. Duns Scotus' argument is not developed, but his proposal would read like this: The proper object of our intellect is being. How can we doubt of its infinity and existence, which the intellect affirms of being with such fullness of light? Duns Scotus does not claim that the existence of God is a self-evident truth "per se notum," and he defends Anselm from his assailants by claiming that Anselm himself never thought so, since he demonstrates it. This matter will be further treated in the criticism of the arguments.

Perhaps no mind was more intrigued nor convinced by the ideological argument than that of Rene Descartes. Descartes formulated two proofs for the existence of God—one "a posteriori," and another "a priori." The first does not concern us here, but his "a priori" argument has been called a mere rephrasing of Anselm's argument, and as such, must be included in the development of Anselm's argument.

Descartes claimed that the only thing that he was sure of was that he was a doubting thing, that is, a thinking substance; a doubter realizes that he does not know as perfectly as he would like to know. He must therefore, have at least a confused idea of perfection. (1) Herein is Descartes' jumping-off point for his argument. He becomes aware of an idea of a perfect being in which all conceivable perfections are to be found. Such is God, whom we conceive as a Supreme being, eternal, infinite, immutable, all-knowing, all-powerful, and Creator of all things outside of Himself.

Now, if everything has a cause, Descartes continues, there must be a cause for our idea of Him, which contains at least as much perfection within itself as there is to be found in the effect. It must therefore be a perfect being, endowed with all the perfections that are found in our idea of its nature. Such a being must be that which we call God. (2)

The very idea of perfection, which is identical with our idea of God, is therefore in our minds as an objective reality, for whose existence no other conceivable cause can possibly be found but that of an actually existing God.

Descartes completes his argument by saying that everyone would agree that if there is a God, He must of necessity be a perfect and infinite substance, and that, together with the principle of causality, is the only thing required for our demonstration of His existence.

(2) Ibid., p.178.
Hence, Descartes said, "I doubt; hence, God is," in the same way that he said, "I doubt, hence, I am."

Descartes was attacked for his statement that existence is a perfection. His argument does not consider our idea of the infinite as negative, that is, being in general to which is added the negation of any limit, but as a positive thing. Mental abstraction can explain the idea of the infinite without any appeal to the existence and action of God. Thus, his argument, resolved to this form, is easily shattered: We have an idea of the infinite; it must exist because we cannot explain the idea of it unless God puts it there in our mind.

Leibniz defended vigorously, the arguments of Anselm and Descartes, but his claim was that they were not completed. According to him, the Scholastics were wrong in their attacks upon Anselm's argument as being fallacious; it merely needed completion. He acknowledges that neither Anselm nor Descartes offers any reason for their assumption that the idea of the greatest and absolutely perfect being is possible, and not self-contradictory. On the other hand, he insists that this possibility may safely be assumed so long as no one else proves the contrary. His argument would read something like this:

God is at least possible, for in the concept of Him, no repugnance is discovered. But if He is possible, He must exist, because the concept of Him implies existence.(1)

While there were many philosophers of lesser stature who accepted or formulated an ideological argument for God’s existence, it is not

the purpose of this work to investigate all of them. Certainly by treating Saint Bonaventure, Duns Scotus, Descartes and Leibniz, we have followed the argument of Anselm through its most important stages. While the forms of the argument may differ in some ways, it is an indisputable fact that they were basically the same as, and inspired by, the argument as presented by Saint Anselm.
The validity of Anselm's argument was attacked almost immediately by a monk named Gaunilo. He wrote a criticism, entitled *Pro Insipiente* to which Anselm replied. The criticisms and replies to the criticism were carried on in a gentlemanly, but a rather humorous way. Anselm, in his argument, implied that anyone who could not accept his argument was "a fool." Gaunilo sprang to the defense of "the fools" with what appears to be a light sarcasm. Anselm, still holding to his original argument, received the criticisms of his work gratefully, and answered them graciously.

Gaunilo, an ingenious thinker, answered Anselm's argument by stating that it only proved the existence of an infinite being in the world of ideas, not in the world of realities; that it proved the ideal possibility of such a being, but not its real existence.

Gaunilo begins with an example:

Suppose I should hear something said of a man absolutely unknown to me, of whose very existence I was unaware. Through that special, or general, knowledge, by which I know what man is, or what men are, I could conceive of him also, according to the reality itself which man is. And yet, it would be
possible if the person who told me of him deceived me, that
the man himself, of whom I conceived, did not exist; since
that reality according to which I conceived of him, though
a no less disputable fact, was not that man, but any man.(1)

A conception of man, according to the fact that it is real and
familiar, was possible for Gaunilo. But, he continues, of God, or a
being greater than all others, no conception is possible, except ac­
cording to the word itself, and a word "can hardly or never" be con­
ceived according to the word alone; when so conceived, it is the
signification of the word that is heard. It is not conceived by one
who knows what is generally signified by the word. It is conceived
as by a man who does not know the object, and he conceives it only in
accordance with the movement of his mind produced by the hearing of
the word, the mind attempting to imagine for itself the signification
of the word that is heard. And it would be surprising if in reality
of fact, it could ever attain to this.

Gaunilo's example of the "lost island" which possesses riches
surpassing all that of countries inhabited by man, was used to attack
the ideological argument. If such an island is described, the descrip-
tion could be understood. But the fact that the understanding is in
the mind, that the idea is admitted, does not thereby posit actual
existence in reality, regardless of whether it, in ideal existence,
surpassed all other islands. Before its real existence could be
actually proved, it must be thought of as really and undoubtedly
existing, and not only in the way in which something false or uncertain
is thought.

(1) Cf. Pro Insipiente, Gaunilo, Inter Opp. S. Anslemi, c-2, Minge,
1863.
Anselm's opponent argues further(1), that it is impossible to know the attributes of a being that is greater than all, unless first the existence of such a nature is proved. Thus, he, as Saint Thomas later does, denies that we can have a universal idea of God—that is, that all men understand by the word "God" that being greater than which nothing can be thought.

Anselm had claimed that the non-existence of this being is inconceivable. Gaunilo points out that its non-existence, or the possibility of its non-existence, is unintelligible, and not inconceivable, since unreal objects are unintelligible. Yet their existence is conceivable in the same way that the non-existence of God is conceived.

God is necessary, if he exists. This statement is the only conclusion that Gaunilo could reach from Anselm's ideological argument. The "if" remains, and so, the argument, to him, is useless for proving God's existence.

In his Apologeticus, Anselm answers Gaunilo's criticisms, by attempting to show that it was misunderstood by Gaunilo, and that the examples used by him were not applicable to the argument. Regarding the "lost island" argument, he says:

If anyone can find anything whatsoever, either really existing, or only represented in the mind, with the one exception of the greatest being conceivable, such that he can reasonably apply to it the form of this, my argument, I promise to find for him the "lost island" with such success that it shall never be lost again.

Now an infinite being cannot be otherwise than self-existing.

Thus, our saint, in this matter, is perfectly right. If Gaunilo

(1) Ibid., c-4.
(2) Liber Apologeticus, inter Opp. St. Anselmi, c-3, Minge, 1863.
granted that we have a true idea of an infinite being, he could not deny that existence is implied in that idea without contradicting himself, for a being which is not self-existing is necessarily limited. It cannot possess anything not received from its cause, which cannot give it self-existence. Gaunilo, in using a finite being for his example overlooked the fact that such a finite being, since it is contingent, can be denied existence. But if it can be admitted that one has a true idea of an infinite being, the actual existence of such a being must be allowed, since an idea of an infinite being without self-existence involves an internal contradiction.

Gaunilo's argument of the "lost island," then, is successfully shattered by Saint Anselm. This does not mean that the argument therefore stands as valid. In order for the demonstration to be valid, it must first prove with absolute certainty, that we have an idea of an infinite being. Thus, in the ideological argument of Anselm, the supposition underlying the premises that the idea of an infinite being is not self-contradictory, is assumed without sufficient warrant. It must be admitted that the idea of an infinite being is, in fact, not self-contradictory. However, it must be denied that this can be ascertained with certainty in any way but the "a posteriori" method. The preliminary admission of a true idea of an infinite being is attacked by the Agnostics, and the argument as left by Anselm, is unable to stand up to these attacks. For this reason also, the majority of the Scholastics rejected the argument. It remained for Saint Thomas to develop this criticism, and to point out clearly the illegal jump from the realm of ideas to the realm of reality. It
must be understood that Gaunilo himself stated this latter criticism, by pointing out that no matter how wide a thought is made, it still remains no more than thought, and that objective reality cannot be conferred upon it thereby. Its existence is certain, but only its existence as thought. It is permissible to pass from thought to thought, from existence to existence, but not from thought to existence. However, Gaunilo's criticism was not developed further.

Thus, the ideological argument for the existence of God has no validity, unless the unproved premises are accepted. Unless the idea of an infinite being is proved not self-contradictory (and this can be done only by the "a posteriori" method) by a consideration of contingent things; unless by inference from this basis, infinite being; that is, the One First Cause, is proved, the Agnostic can successfully shatter the demonstration.

Boedder states the Agnostic proposal in this way:

 Possibly there may be many self-existing beings. In that case, the idea of an infinite being is self-contradictory. For none of the many self-existing beings would be the source of the perfections of other beings; and consequently, none of them could be really infinite; because a being which does not unite in itself all thinkable perfections, must be finite.

 Of the many self-existent things which I suppose there may be, none can be infinite. Now no contingent being can be infinite. But all being is either self-existent or contingent. The conclusion is that an infinite being is absolutely impossible, and consequently, we can have no real idea of such a being. (1)

With Leibniz, the adherents to the ontological argument can only assert again that the possibility of an infinite being may be assumed until it is proved definitely that there is no infinite being.

(1) Boedder, op. cit.
Certainly this is no basis for certainty. Thus, if the premises are accepted, the ontological argument is a very strong argument; in no way is it an objectively evident proof.

No philosopher has put his finger so clearly upon the flaws of the ideological argument as did Saint Thomas Aquinas. He begins his criticism in Article I, question 1 of his Summa Theologica. The second objection states the ontological argument in essence, and then he gives his own opinion on the question. To the proposition that an understanding of the word "God" means an understanding that He actually exists, he answers:

A thing can be self-evident in either of two ways; on the one hand, self-evident in itself, though not to us; on the other, self-evident in itself and to us. A proposition is self-evident because the predicate is included in the essence of the subject, as "Man is an animal," for animal is contained in the essence of man. If, therefore, the essence of the predicate and subject be known to all, the proposition will be self-evident to all......if, however, there are some to whom the essence of the predicate and subject is unknown, the proposition will be self-evident in itself, but not to those who do not know the meaning of the predicate and subject of the proposition...

Therefore, I say that the proposition "God exists," of itself is self-evident, for the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence. Now because we do not know the essence of God, the proposition is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated by things that are more known to us, though less known in their nature--namely, by effects.(1)

Saint Thomas proves that in this life, God cannot be seen in His essence.(2) He explains that man, in this life, knows only what has a form in matter, or what can be known by such a form. Thus the

(1) Cf. Aquinas, Summa Theologica, Pt. 1, Al, ql.
(2) Aquinas, op. cit., Pt. 1, Q12, Al.
essence of God cannot be known, since the knowledge of God by means of any created similitude is not a vision of His essence.

Saint Thomas answers the ideological argument in his reply to Objection #2:

Perhaps not everyone who hears this word "God" understands it to signify something than which nothing greater can be thought....yet granted that everyone understands that by this word "God" is signified something than which nothing greater can be thought, nevertheless, it does not therefore follow that he understands that what the word signifies exists actually, but only that it exists mentally. Nor can it be argued that it actually exists, unless it be admitted that there actually exists something than which nothing greater can be thought; and this is precisely what is not admitted by those who hold that God does not exist.(1)

Saint Thomas thus agrees that the conception of the greatest conceivable being must include the notion of necessary existence, but from this, it could not be concluded that such a being really exists; you can conclude merely that if it exists, it exists necessarily, and not contingently. In short, the conception of the greatest conceivable being must include the notion of necessary existence, but from this notion, it cannot be concluded that such a being really exists.

Immanuel Kant's criticism is much like that of Saint Thomas', although not so clear. Kant distinguishes between a judgment asserting existence of a being and the judgment of attributing a predicate to a subject. He points out that the advocates of the ideological argument pass from a judgment attributing a predicate to a subject (The most perfect being must exist) to a judgment asserting existence (God is). To affirm a predicate of a subject is to assert that the subject must be conceived as having that predicate, but it does not assert the real

(1) Aquinas, op. cit., Pt.1, Q2, A1.
existence of the subject or the predicate. The judgment "ens realissimum is necessary being" designates necessity as a proper predicate of the subject "ens realissimum," but it still does not prove whether this subject with this predicate exists only in the mind or in reality.(1)

Kant's criticism resolves itself to this basic statement: It is self-contradictory to say that Supreme Being is not necessary being; it is not self-contradictory to say that there is no Supreme Being. Thus the ideological argument is invalid.

From the criticisms presented it is possible to sum up the errors of the ideological argument in the following points:

1) A truth is self-evident in two ways—both in itself and to us, or in itself, but not to us. The proposition "God exists" is evident in itself, but not to us, because we do not see the essence of God, and therefore, we do not see that he is His own being.

2) Not everyone understands by the term God the being than which nothing greater can be conceived.

3) The existence of such a being cannot be concluded from the premises of the argument, unless first it is proved that there actually exists a being greater than which nothing can be conceived.

A lengthy criticism of Anselm's non-ideological argument is not only unnecessary, but actually impossible. To deny the validity of these arguments is to deny the arguments of Saint Thomas and other great philosophers. Only those who deny the validity of all knowledge can fail to be convinced of the validity of these arguments.

It is true that Saint Anselm does not portray his arguments in the same straightforward manner which is characteristic of Saint Thomas. The charge is also made that Anselm's proofs are not developed to the degree that those of Saint Thomas reach. Notwithstanding, they are built on sound philosophical bases, and contain no fallacious reasoning, and thus, stand against the attacks of those who attack all Scholastic proofs, even as those of Saint Thomas have withstood these attacks.
Chapter V

Appreciation of the Arguments

The defense of the ideological argument by Saint Bonaventure (1) and Duns Scotus(2) have already been noted in this work. The subsequent arguments formulated by Descartes and Leibniz have also been stated. To these followers can be added such names of Spinoza(3) and Hegel(4). Nor is it to be assumed that these were the only great philosophers who have accepted the ideological argument. The limitations of this work necessitate our treating only the most important supporters of this argument. Since Anselm first formulated the argument, it has been a constant subject of controversy; this controversy is not settled in our own day.

The argument is undisputedly of Christian origin. The fact that no semblence of such an argument is found in Greek philosophy, is due no doubt to the fact that Greek thinkers did not identify God and being. A possible exception to this statement is Plato, but this

(1) 1221-1274.
(2) 1226(?)-1308.
(3) 1632-1677.
(4) 1770-1831.
identification was by no means clearly stated. Plato's doctrine of the good, in the only rational interpretation, can mean only God Himself. Plato's Idea is active, and is described as the only true cause. There is a contact with the Idea and the phenomena; thus the concrete good partakes of the absolute good. This participation is explained as an imitation. The phenomena, or ectypes, are copies of the Idea-in-itself, or prototype.(1)

When a Christian thinker like Saint Anselm asks whether God exists, he asks if Being exists, and to deny God is to deny that Being exists. The inconceivability of the non-existence of God could have no meaning at all, except in a philosophy wherein God is identified with being, and where, consequently, it becomes contradictory to suppose that we think of Him and think of Him as non-existent.(2)

Perhaps Malebranche developed this point more completely. Malebranche analyzed the general, abstract and confused idea of being, and shows that it is the sign of presence of Being Itself to our thought. Thus, his philosophy was basically, that if God is possible (if we think of God), He is real (He must necessarily be).

To show the affirmation of the necessary existence is implied in the idea of God would show that God is necessary if he exists. If on the contrary, the sufficient reason of a being, capable of conceiving the idea of being should be sought, and if there is read into it, the inclusion of essence in existence, the question must remain an open one. It will always be legitimate to attempt to construct a

(1) Turner, op. cit., p.104.
(2) Gilson, op. cit., Chap. 11.
metaphysics on the basis of the presence in our minds of the idea of God, provided that an "a priori" deduction is not attempted, with its starting point in God, but an induction "a posteriori" with its starting point in the content of our conception of God.

Since the early Scholastics made no definite distinction between philosophy and theology, Anselm's attitude is certainly understandable. Man is one, and philosophy must come from this unity of the Christian man; therefore, there can be nothing but a Christian philosophy. Anselm manifested this very clearly. He did not seek to know in order to believe, but to believe in order to know. For Saint Anselm, faith is so intricately intertwined with the soul of man that it is identified with his reason in many respects. It is from this viewpoint that the ontological proof for the existence of God must be judged.

There is in Anselm nothing of the latent skepticism about the validity of human thought which is found in so much of the philosophy and theology of a later day. Faith was the gift of God, but intelligence was no less the sign of His indwelling presence. The two could not finally conflict.

It is held that this lies at the foundation of the ideological argument. When the argument is stated in syllogistic form, it is a simple matter to point out how the conclusion is subsumed in the premises. But the finite has no reality apart from the infinite. The relative and contingent imply the absolute and the necessary. Unless we really deny the existence of the finite human mind, we must accept the existence of an infinite mind.

Realism in its Platonic version was the leading philosophy of the Christian middle ages, until Saint Thomas Aquinas officially adopted
the Aristotelian view that forms have a being only in things, ("in rebus"). Thus, also, Anselm was a true realist, who held that Universals exist before things ("ante rem"). Abstract or general terms, or universals were held to have an equal, and sometimes, a superior reality to actual physical particulars. Realism applied to ontology means that no derogation of the reality of universals is valid, the realm of essences or possible universals being as real as, if not more real than, the realm of existence, or actuality. Any attack on Anselm’s proof must take into consideration the fact that his age was another age in the long search for truth—another mile covered in the long road of philosophical speculation.

The argument is distinctive in every way. Being deductive, it starts with the idea of God and then moves on to His existence. It is held by many that the ontological argument is not, strictly speaking "a priori," but rather, that it is an argument deriving its conclusion about one thing from its connection with another which is not really distinct from it, but is such that it cannot be thought of without this thought of the other.

Advocates of the argument further state that in the case of the greatest of all possible beings, our thought is unable to remain as mere possibility. Reason tells us that this being cannot be merely possible; it must be completely real. The arguments offered against the argument, which use examples of finite things have no force against it. Anselm’s argument is not conceived with finite things, but solely with the one absolutely unique being, the most perfect of all beings, the greatest of all possible beings. Only in such a being do we find essence and existence to be one, so that knowing what he is, we know
also that he is.

Proponents of the argument further argue that, although we cannot have an exhaustive idea of God's nature, we can and do have an idea of an absolutely perfect being. It is from this idea that the ontological argument argues, i.e., from the idea of that nature to its real existence.

Finally, the ideological argument does not deny the validity of the "a posteriori" arguments. The ontological arguments arrive at the same conclusion as the "a posteriori" methods, but in a different method, and independently of them.

Nothing was more clear to Anselm than the validity of the "a posteriori" arguments. Anselm was dissatisfied with his three inductive proofs because he felt that there were too many dependent lines of argument. He proposed the ideological argument as a single, independent, and simple argument.

To appreciate Anselm's non-ideological arguments is to appreciate those proofs put forth by Saint Thomas. No philosophy is completely severed from philosophies which have preceded it. Indeed, the very problems of philosophy are usually explanations or refutations of foregoing philosophic endeavors.

Anselm's argument from the need of a standard is more profound than it may appear at first. Likewise, the argument from gradation of beings cannot be appreciated at first glance. To appreciate these two arguments, it must be realized that varying degrees of goodness, truth and beauty are found. For example, man can be good in a certain regard, and cease to be good in that regard. Although his goodness is real, it is not complete. Hence, He is not essentially good, because then he would be completely, perfectly, and permanently good. So also
with other perfections in finite things.

These perfections, then, must be communicated. They must be wrought by an external agent. They must possess their perfections of themselves, by reason of their nature, because retrogression into infinity is impossible, as Saint Thomas clearly proved. This agent is found to be essentially perfect—absolutely good, completely true, utterly beautiful, entirely one. This being is God.

The argument proposed by Anselm, from design in the world, proposes that order indicates a plan, an idea, which must exist in the intelligence of the designer. Now order is the adaptation of means to an end. The relation of a means to an end can only be perceived in its fullness by an intelligent being. It involves intelligence because the end is a real cause. The end that the means are adapted to is the final cause. The very nature of a final cause, towards which means are adapted is such that it depends upon and manifests the existence of a mind at work. It is the highest and most important of all causes, but yet does not come into objective existence until the very end. Being real, and not yet existing in the objective order, it must have existed in the subjective order, that is, in the order of the mind.

Anselm's Proslogium and Monologium mark the first real effort in western theology to reach a more certain foundation than Augustine offered. The work of Anselm helped to bring the idea of God's immanence into clearer place in the Church's theology.

While Saint Thomas rejected the ontological argument, nevertheless, the theological works of Anselm exerted much influence on him. Perhaps there is more than geography in the fact that Schiavi, where Anselm countered Islam and Judiasm, with his immortal Cur Deus Homo, is neighbor
to Rocca Secca, where Aquinas was born. Indeed, the question, "Why is God Man?" which Anselm put and answered while in exile at Schiavi, is neighbor to the question, "What is God?" which Aquinas used to ask his Benedictine teachers at Monte Casino. The young Neapolitan thinker is by all the laws of intellectual heredity, the legitimate offspring of the Lombard thinker. Aquinas is Anselm born again, and born greater than before.

Certainly there can be no question about the genius of Saint Anselm in formulating these arguments for the existence of God. They represent a great surge ahead in philosophical speculation; indeed, Anselm's work has frequently been called, and rightly so, the acorn from which the "oak tree of Scholasticism" began. Perhaps it would be more accurate to refer to Anselm's works, not as an acorn, but as a strong sapling which he nourished and entrusted to his followers.
Chapter VI

Conclusion

Even were one so steeped in modernity and scientism as to deny all creative originality to Christian thought, one would have to make some reservations in favor of Saint Anselm's argument from the idea of God. No intelligent person denies that it is a unique argument, unparallelled in all history, nor that it is an extremely profound exposition. Those who feel that the argument is useless, and lightly dismissed, fail to appreciate the depths of thought to which it plunges. Those who appreciate the value of the argument are either convinced that it is the best argument or they realize that it has tremendous value—a value which can be appreciated only by exploring the innumerable caverns of philosophical thought. Of those who reject the argument and at the same time certainly appreciate it, Saint Thomas stands foremost. Yet the controversy which has raged since Anselm, one of the greatest of medieval thinkers, first introduced this argument, is testimony to its depth, power, and attraction. There are great thinkers on both sides. As Joseph Richaby writes,

But the argument is like an eel: now you think you have it in a conclusive form, and it slips away; now you
think you have killed it, and lo it lives again. The eel has wiggled for centuries, and will go on wiggling, for all the handling of Descartes and Leibniz, Kant, and you and me. But I have always felt it a sad thing, this disagreement of Saint Thomas with Saint Anselm. (1)

The argument is completely independent of finite things. No matter what part of the exposition one were to dwell on, he would be regarding the Divine Essence. Thus, the magnificence of Saint Anselm is even further demonstrated, in this, the fact that the argument is an extremely profound meditation on the Divine Being. Our saint soars completely above the finite, in his meditation, and dwells completely on God, with the resulting conclusion of the impossibility of His non-existence.

Saint Anselm and Saint Bonaventure are representatives of the view that the concept of God belongs to the equipment and inventory of our intellectual souls. By reflecting on itself, our mind continually discovers the striving for eternal wisdom, for the highest good, and for lasting peace in a supreme unchangeable being. This is the expression of the Supreme Divine Being which becomes ever present to our intellect.

Saint Anselm cast his argument into the syllogistic form so loved of the schoolmen. This form was incompetent to express the thoughts of this thinker. Indeed, is there a language which can portray his meditations adequately? It is certainly a matter of great conjecture as to whether anyone truly understands the argument in the way that Saint Anselm understood it. Language breaks down, and thus, the clarity and certainty of the argument in the mind of Saint Anselm is lost to those of us who are incapable of ascending the degree of

(1) Cf. Richaby, J., quoted in Ryan, op. cit.
thought which Anselm reached. It has been questioned by some whether our saint may have left the philosophical realm and gone into the realm of mystical theology. Truly, Anselm was a man of great genius, but more—he was a profoundly religious man.

His active work as a pastor and stalwart champion of the Church makes Anselm one of the chief figures in religious history. As a writer and a thinker, he may claim yet higher rank, and his influence on the course of philosophy and theology was even deeper and more enduring. If he stands on the one hand with great leaders like Gregory VII, Innocent III, and Thomas a Becket, on the other hand, he may claim a place beside Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

Anselm's works did not receive the respect and attention, in the Middle Ages, justly their due. Perhaps this was due to the fact that they are generally tracts or dialogues on detached questions, and not elaborate treatises like the great works of Aquinas. Yet, they have a certain freshness and vigor which seems to make up for want of system.

Clement XI, in 1720, declared him a Doctor of the Church, and in the office read on his feast day, April 21, it is said that his works are a pattern for all theologians. Pius X, on April 21, 1909, wrote an encyclical in his praise.

This is the man who formulated and proposed the famous "ontological" argument. Although authority takes last place in philosophy, can there be any doubt in anyone's mind about the genius of such a man? Is it possible to lightly dismiss any of his great works? Truly, a man of such intellectual and religious stature commands the respect and attention of every intelligent creature.
Anselm may, in justice, be considered the first scholastic(1) philosopher and theologian. In Anselm is found that relation of reason to revealed truth, and the beginning of elaborating a rational system of faith, which form the special characteristic of scholastic thought. His works were of great value to the scholastics who immediately followed him.

It is a matter of conjecture what philosophical heights he would have soared had he been able to devote his time to philosophical studies in the quiet of the monastery. He was called from the monastic life which was his delight, and hurled into the turmoils of public and ecclesiastical affairs. Misunderstood, exiled, he never sought an easy escape from strife, but bowed his head and submitted to suffer for the principles to which he held.

Whether men agree or disagree with the teachings of Anselm, they cannot fail to honor the spirit in which he did his work. They must end by loving the clean-souled, high-minded monk, who while seeking only to serve his own generation according to the word of God, has contributed to all subsequent generations, the heritage of a great mind, seeking truth—seeking God.

How great things he commanded our fathers, that they should make the same known to their children: that another generation might know them.(Ps. 77)

(1) The author here uses the word "scholastic" in the strict sense of the term. Prescinding from chronology, the question has been asked whether Augustine was the last of the Fathers or the First Scholastic.
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   2. Proslogium, S. Anselmi.
   3. Pro Insipiente, Gaunilo.
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