ANSELM'S ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT: ITS MEANING AND SIGNIFICANCE

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Much of the difficulty surrounding Anselm's ontological argument has been generated by ignoring its metaphysical framework. Examination of the Proslogion and Monologion shows it to be a platonic argument, thus disposing of the 'Lost Island' objection, among others. Contemporary modal interpretations are neither correct versions of, nor advances upon, the original: Hartshorne confuses modal status with truth-value. The Proslogion II argument is valid; it is the sense of Anselm's definition and conclusion which is at issue. Since the argument explicates why God, defined as that which is maximally real, must be real, questions of the logic of 'existence' are irrelevant; however, what 'x is real' means depends on what sort of entity x is, so that Anselm's conclusion remains uncertain until and unless it can be shown in what the non-fictionality of God might consist. Indeed, can God be anything but a fiction? If he can, then he must be real, for, I contend, 'God is eternal and self-sufficient' (which Anselm, as a platonist, claims for him) entails that 'God is real' is necessary. Whether it is necessarily true or necessarily false, then, depends on the coherence of otherwise of 'God', a coherence Anselm assumes. The assumption is disguised by his - and his commentators' - failure to distinguish between the bearer of the name 'God', and the supreme reality described as 'god'. We may thus ask, Can God be god? To discover what sort of entity God is, we must see what may be predicated of him: but neither

analogia entis, the language-game theory, nor analogia fidei solve the problem of how attributes may be predicated of a being who is god. The question of God's reality remains unresolved; but Anselm's argument at least shows how and why it is a conceptual question.

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Part of Ch.2 has appeared in The Philosophical Quarterly, 24 (1974) as '"Greatness" in Anselm's Ontological Argument'; part of Ch.3 in Ratio, 17 (1975) as 'Hartshorne's Modal Argument for the Existence of God'; and part of Ch.4 in Philosophical Studies (Eire), 23 (1975) in 'Aquinas on Anselm'.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The best English edition of Anselm's Proslogion and Reply, and Gaunilo's Reply, is St. Anselm's 'Proslogion' with 'A Reply on Behalf of the Fool' and 'The Author's Reply to Gaunilo', translated with an introduction and philosophical commentary by M.J. Charlesworth (Oxford University Press, 1965). All references to these texts are to this edition, and where I cite Charlesworth's commentary I refer simply to 'Charlesworth'. The only alteration I make to Charlesworth's translation is to omit the hyphens which he inserts into Anselm's formula.

All references to Anselm's Monologion and Cur Deus Homo are to St. Anselm: Basic Writings, translated by S.N. Deane (La Salle, Ill.; Open Court, 1962; 2nd edition).

The most important collection on the ontological argument is The Many-Faced Argument, edited by John Hick and Arthur C. McGill (London; Macmillan, 1968), and I refer to it simply as 'Hick and McGill'.

1. INTRODUCTION

Well then, Lord, You who give understanding to faith, grant me that I may understand, as much as You see fit, that You exist as we believe You to exist, and that You are what we believe You to be. Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or can it be that a thing of such a nature does not exist, since 'the Fool has said in his heart, there is no God' /Ps. xiii. I, lii.I/? But surely, when this same Fool hears what I am speaking about, namely, 'something than which nothing greater can be thought', he understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his mind, even if he does not understand that it actually exists. For it is one thing for an object to exist in the mind, and another thing to understand that an object actually exists. Thus, when a painter plans beforehand what he is going to execute, he has /the picture/ in his mind, but he does not yet think that it actually exists because he has not yet executed it. However, when he has actually painted it, then he both has it in his mind and understands that it exists because he has now made it. Even the Fool, then, is forced to agree that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists in the mind, since he understands this when he hears it, and whatever is understood is in the mind. And surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot exist in the mind alone. For if it exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater. If then that than which a greater cannot be thought exists in the mind alone, this same that than which a greater cannot be thought is that than which a greater can be thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the mind and in reality.

- Proslogion II.

Since 1078 these few lines have given rise to a greater volume of philosophical work than perhaps any other single argument. Despite attracting the criticism of some of the greatest western thinkers, the argument has survived - indeed it has enjoyed a remarkable resurgence of interest. Its history has been traced often enough, from its period of dormancy in the C12th. to its considerable popularity among the later scholastics, and its rejection by Aquinas; from Descartes' form of the argument, together with Spinoza's and Leibniz's versions, to Kant's apparently conclusive refutation; and from its importance in Hegelianism to its subsequent demise and recent revival, begun by Hartshorne and Malcolm.

The revival has centred very much on Anselm's argument, rather than on Descartes'. In part this seems to have been brought about by the desire to avoid Kant's objection that 'existence' is not a predicate. Whether or not Kant is right however (and I would argue that he is not) Anselm's argument is nevertheless different from, and superior to, Descartes'; it is presented in a clearly defined metaphysical framework, and moreover, does not rely on the concept of perfection. It is the latter, rather than anything Kant has to say, which seems to me the proper basis of dissatisfaction with Descartes' version. For if God, defined as absolutely perfect, is said to exist because existence is itself a

perfection, then the immediate question must surely be about this evaluation. Even if it is allowed that 'exists' may be a logical predicate, and that problems about the notion of degrees of perfection and the compatibility of perfections may be satisfactorily dealt with, there seems to be no good reason why it should be considered more perfect to exist than not to exist, as has been pointed out over and over again in discussions of the argument. The evaluation has often been assumed to be moral in nature; but surely it is not necessarily morally better to exist than not to exist. And if the evaluation is not moral, then what sort of evaluation is it? The point is that simply to say of something that it is perfect, even supremely perfect, is uninformative. We must ask in what respect, or respects, it is perfect, what 'perfect' means in this particular instance. And the only profitable way to understand 'perfect' in Descartes' argument seems to me to be in terms of reality: a thing is more real if it exists than if it does not exist. This, however, takes us straight back to Anselm's argument, which has the advantage over Descartes' of avoiding all the extra problems about 'perfection' and about the admissability or otherwise of using 'exists' as a logical predicate. Descartes' argument shares the difficulties of Anselm's, but introduces extra and unnecessary ones of its own - as it is, the difficulties engendered in working with the philosophical notions and kinds of issue involved

in Anselm's argument occupy much of the thesis.

Nevertheless, although the recent emphasis on Anselm is quite proper, much of it is seriously misguided and misinformed. Most of the concern has centred on assessing the validity or otherwise of the argument, but without attending first to its premisses. This has given rise to many needless problems, and the argument of Proslogion II has been mistakenly rejected in favour of other supposed arguments to be found in the Proslogion. Although Hartshorne and Malcolm have made an important contribution to work on the argument in focussing attention on the modal status of propositions about God's existence, they have nevertheless done Anselm a disservice by "relocating" the argument in Proslogion III and regarding Proslogion II as a poor first attempt. Others, in their eagerness to justify Anselm despite needless misgivings about the validity of the argument of Proslogion II have offered even stranger interpretations: La Croix insists that it is the entire Proslogion which really constitutes Anselm's argument;[1] Barth and other theologians propose a "purely theological" interpretation, arguing that there is strictly speaking no argument present

1. Richard R. La Croix, Proslogion II and III (Leiden; E.J. Brill, 1972).

at all, only an exposition of belief.[2] I shall argue that they are all wrong. Anselm certainly presents a philosophical argument; it is to be found in Proslogion II, as traditionally assumed; and, most importantly, it is valid.

The argument of Proslogion II is valid - but it does not prove that God exists, because its premisses are problematic. Indeed their very intelligibility, and thus the intelligibility of Anselm's conclusion, is at issue. This is the crucial problem about the argument. Much attention has usually been paid to logical difficulties about its form, but very little to arriving at a proper understanding of what Anselm actually means when he writes that God is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', and that it is 'greater' to exist 'in reality also' than 'solely in the mind'. And yet, as one or two writers have pointed out,[3] it does not take very much to discover what he means. It soon becomes clear that Anselm's

2. Karl Barth, Anselm:Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. Ian Robertson (London; SCM,1960). Cf. André Hayen, 'S. Anselme et S. Thomas: la vraie nature de la théologie et sa portée apostolique', in Spicilegium Beccense (Paris; J.Vrin, 1959), pp. 45-85 (the second part trans. Arthur C. McGill as 'The Role of the Fool in St. Anselm and the Necessarily Apostolic Character of True Christian Reflection', in Hick and McGill, pp. 162-182); and Anselm Stolz, 'Zur Theologie Anselms im Proslogion', Catholica, 2 (1933), pp. 1-24 (trans. McGill, op.cit., pp. 183-206).
3. e.g. Sylvia Fleming Crocker, 'The Ontological Significance of Anselm's Proslogion', The Modern Schoolman, 50 (1972), pp. 33-56: and Paul J.W. Miller, 'The Ontological Argument for God', The Personalist, 42 (1961), pp. 337-351.

thought is thoroughly platonic - and this, of course, has important consequences, not only for a proper interpretation of Anselm's argument, but for recognizing its peculiar importance for Christian thought. For in analyzing Anselm's premisses, their relation to the form of the argument, and their place in the Christian concept of God, as well as in platonic metaphysics, we may discover just what the basic problems are in asserting God's existence. Indeed, the fact that Anselm's argument is formally valid tells us a good deal about 'God' and itself indicates what is problematic about the concept. This is perhaps one of the things that is most important about the argument: it shows, both as against Barth, and as against the neo-Wittgensteinian trend in philosophy of religion, best represented by D.Z. Phillips, that philosophy and religion are by no means mutually exclusive. Religious belief, if it is to assert anything at all, must face up to traditional philosophical difficulties.

Anselm's argument, I maintain is thoroughly platonic, as indeed befits a Christian argument for the existence of God - for Christian doctrine concerning God is itself firmly rooted in the platonic tradition inherited from the early Hellenization of Christian thought. As such the argument is valid; but as such, it also fails to distinguish between the Christian God and the <u>ens realissimum</u> of platonism. It is this failure, together with the resultant failure to consider

the problems to which this gives rise in respect of the nature of the existence at stake (a failure which his commentators share with Anselm) which lies at the heart of the perennial fascination of the argument. For the fascination which the argument has held for philosophers is generated by the difficulty of trying to discover just what is wrong with it, and the unease often felt about a quick dismissal. This in turn is due at least in part to the confusion caused by the failure to realise that Anselm's definition of God is one which indentifies him as the supreme reality of a hierarchical ontology, and that this identification is to be understood in the context of platonic metaphysics. Supporters of the argument are right to be impatient of the sometimes dogmatic and shallow objections put forward by its opponents: surely the reality of the ens realissimum is undeniable. On the other hand, its opponents are right to be intensely suspicious of an argument which hangs something so momentous as the existence of God on a few lines of argument, apparently generating an existential conclusion from a mere idea. Those whose interest has centred on the supposed modal version have at least appreciated, with Leibniz, that the issues are issues of logical possibility, and that the matter is far more complex than either Bonaventure or Schopenhauer supposed. For we can be satisfied neither with the position that God is God, therefore he exists,[4] nor with the view that '"Were not the

4. Bonaventure, De Myst. Trin., I,1,29,t.v.,p.48; cited by Etienne Gilson, The Philosophy of Bonaventure, trans. Dom Illtyd Trethowan and F.J. Sheed (London; Sheed and Ward, 1940), p.128.

thought so cursedly acute/ One might be tempted to declare it silly"'.[5] Any serious objection to the argument must take the form of an objection to the metaphysics in which it is put forward. Therein lies the importance of Anselm's argument. Its fusion of religious doctrine with Greek metaphysics reflects just such a fusion within Christianity itself, a fusion which gives rise to the central difficulty about its doctrine of God - namely the very intelligibility of the concept. The fundamental objection to platonic metaphysics is that it conflates differences in degree and differences in kind; and it is just this objection which raises the most acute problems about God's existence. Investigation of the intelligibility of 'God' therefore, neglected by almost all the argument's proponents (at least in relation to the argument), will at the same time be an inquiry into the coherence or otherwise of the hierarchical ontology propounded in platonic metaphysics.

My interest in Anselm's ontological argument began with what it has to say about the nature of the question of God's existence, and the relation of that question to metaphysical problems. For the argument shows us that the question of God's existence is a metaphysical one: indeed, it is the metaphysical

5. Schiller, Wallenstein-Trilogie: Piccolomini, Act ii, Sc.7; quoted by Arthur Schopenhauer in The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, given in ed. Alvin Plantinga, The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan, 1968), p.67.

question. As the issues gradually became clear, however, I came increasingly to feel a loyalty to Anselm, a desire to set right the injustice which has so often been done to his argument, even by those, like Hartshorne, who set out to avoid doing just that. Furthermore, it became apparent that an account of the meaning of Anselm's text would, in fact, constitute the basis of a proper evaluation of the argument's significance. As we all know, the road to hell is paved with good intentions, especially where others have professed the very same ones. Nevertheless, it is my hope that I have done no violence to Anselm's argument; for although I doubt whether any interpretation would be absolutely faithful - indeed Anselm's thought is not completely consistent - I am convinced that all sorts of philosophical and theological positions not his own have been foisted onto Anselm. Not only is this unfortunate from the point of view of scholarship, but, more importantly, it is precisely this which stands in the way of finally coming to terms with the ontological argument, and understanding that it raises fundamental philosophical issues. The interpretation I propose is generous to Anselm in justifying much that may otherwise appear problematic in the Proslogion and Reply; and it is consistent with his broader philosophical orientation. That it should also lead to a fruitful understanding of the argument and its significance should cause no surprise, since such an interpretation must commit one to the

view that Anselm is not only a theologian of the first importance, but a highly gifted philosopher, the value of whose work in, among other things, setting out the implications of a hierarchical ontology is still largely unrecognized. No doubt he fails in his intention to convince the Fool, and no doubt he would be disconcerted to realise that the argument with which he tries to convince him serves in fact to point up the central difficulties about the intelligibility of the proposition whose truth he seeks to demonstrate. But this in no way belittles his philosophical achievement.

This brief outline of my interest in, and approach to, Anselm's argument will, I hope, make clear the intention governing the structure of what follows. Within the overall theme, the meaning and significance of Anselm's argument, I deal first with the metaphysical framework of Anselm's thought; then identify the argument and show that it is formally valid; discuss some of the problems raised by consideration of the meaning of its conclusion; and finally discuss the root problem about the question of God's existence to which such a procedure gives rise. Each chapter is therefore fairly self-contained, dealing - in a proper sequence - with the philosophical issues about God and God's existence which it is my belief that the argument uncovers and whose chief interest and value I consider to lie in this fact.

2. ANSELM'S CONCEPT OF GREATNESS

'Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought' (Pros.II): it is usually assumed that for 'greater' we can read 'better', or even more oddly, 'more perfect'. I contend that this is an unjustifiable assumption, based on an insufficiently careful reading of Anselm's text and lack of attention to the metaphysical framework within which the argument is mounted.

The word 'maius' occurs nine times in Ch.II of the Proslogion, and 'melius' not at all; in Ch.III 'maius' occurs five times, 'melius' once; in Ch.IV 'maius' occurs once, 'melius' not at all. The argument having been concluded, Anselm discusses, in the remaining chapters, what God is like. In Ch.V he asks, 'What then are You, Lord God, You than whom nothing greater can be thought?', and answers '...that supreme being, existing through Yourself alone, who made everything else from nothing' (p.121). From this, he begins to draw out God's nature:

> What goodness, then, could be wanting to the supreme good, through which every good exists? Thus You are just, truthful, happy and whatever it is better /'melius'/ to be than not to be - for it is better /'melius'/ to be just rather than unjust, and happy rather than unhappy.
>
> - ibid.

This chapter is important because it shows that, far from using 'maius' and 'melius' interchangeably, Anselm was generally careful to distinguish between them.

And it is 'maius' which he uses in Proslogion II - IV (with a single exception). God's being 'melius' follows from his being the supreme 'bonum'. His being the supreme good follows from the fact that every good exists through him, since he made everything else from nothing. And it is because he is the creator, the ground of all being, that he is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'. This distinction between God's ontological supremacy and his goodness is retained throughout the Proslogion.

In Ch.IX Anselm discusses God's moral goodness, his 'bonitas'; and no mention is made of his greatness. In Ch.XIII we read:

> All that which is enclosed in any way by place or time is less /'minus'/ than that which no law of place or time constrains. Since, then, nothing is greater /'maius'/ than You, no place or time confines You, but You exist everywhere and always.
> - p.133.

What sense would it make here to say that what is bound by place and time is less good than what is not? What would it mean to say that it is less perfect (if, indeed, it could mean anything at all)? In Ch.XV, when Anselm returns to the subject of God's greatness, and, incidentally, to the somewhat more philosophical tone of Chs.II - IV, as distinct from the more religious, or adorational tone of the rest of the Proslogion, he says that God is 'maius', not 'melius'. In Ch.XVIII, Anselm says he is life, wisdom, truth, goodness, blessedness, eternity, and every true good - but not that he is greatness. God's greatness is in a different

class from his virtues, and this is seen again in Ch.XXII. Ch.XXIII concludes:

> 'Moreover, one thing is necessary' /Luke, X, 42/. This is, moreover, that one thing necessary in which is every good, or rather, which is wholly and uniquely and completely and solely good.
> - p.147 (my underlining).

What, however, of the single occurence of 'melius' in Ch.III? The context in which it occurs is one where Anselm is saying that God 'cannot even be thought not to exist', which 'is as it should be, for if some intelligence could think of something better /"melius"/...the creature would be above its creator - and that is completely absurd' (p.119). In view of the mass of evidence from the rest of the Proslogion, I think it reasonable to conclude that Anselm allows the notion of judging to mislead him into writing 'melius' instead of 'maius'; this argument as to why God cannot be thought not to exist gains such force as it has, of course, from the notion of the supposed absurdity of creature judging creator, which notion in turn makes clearer sense if applied to the idea of the creature thinking of something morally better, as opposed to something greater, than God, something morally better which the creature could use as a yardstick whereby to judge God. Had Anselm been more careful here, this argument would not have been open to him until after Ch.V - not that he needs it anyway, since the point that God cannot be thought not to exist receives sufficient attention at the beginning

of Ch.III. What this does show is that 'greater' and 'better' are indeed closely linked together, but that Anselm overlooks that this was not going to be shown until Ch.V.

In his replies to Gaunilo's objections to the argument, Anselm talks of something's being better, rather than greater, only once. It could be argued that in the passage where he presses an analogy between the mind's ability to mount 'from the less good to the more good', and our being able to 'conjecture a great deal about that than which a greater cannot be thought' (Reply VIII, p.187), Anselm fails to observe the distinction between greatness and goodness. However, since this is the sole example of such a use of 'melius' in the entire Reply, as against an otherwise consistent use of 'maius', and since it is not absolutely clear that the distinction is in fact blurred here, I do not think it seriously damaging to my argument. Moreover, Anselm's reply to the 'Lost Island' counter-example confirms it, as we shall see.

There is, then, sufficient textual evidence that Anselm does not mean by 'greater', 'better', or 'more perfect'. It is as well he does not. For, although one may reasonably say that God is something than which none better can be thought, it seems clear that a general principle to the effect that whatever exists is better than anything which does not exist would be exceedingly difficult to substantiate. As

Charlesworth points out[1] it is not at all clear that, for example, an actual evil is better than an imagined one; or that my future house will be better if it exists than if it does not, as Malcolm says.[2] Certainly, Hitler was not better than King Arthur. And if it is objected to this line of thought that only one who exists can, properly speaking, be good anyway - a temptation to be avoided - then one cannot compare existent with non-existent beings in terms of goodness. Hitler could not be better or worse than King Arthur, since the latter, being non-existent, could have no moral qualities at all attaching to him. And if Anselm had intended to propound the particular thesis that an existing God is better than one who does not exist, then why did he write 'maius' instead of 'melius'? What sense would there be in Ch.V of the Proslogion? And what if, for example, some of the gods of the Hindu pantheon actually existed? Would they be better than the Christian, or Jewish, or Moslem God, even if he were a figment of the imagination?

Turning to consider 'more perfect', the difficulties multiply. First, there is that of taking existence itself to be a perfection, as did Descartes. Apart from the implication of this that existence is a property, it is by no means clear that existence need be the chief among perfections, or that it need be a perfection at all. Why could it not in some instances

1. Charlesworth, p.64.
2. 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', in Hick and McGill, p.303.

be outweighed by perfections possessed by non-existent entities? To say that existence is a perfection is not to say that it is a perfection in the absence of which no other perfections are possible; and to argue the latter would be plainly ridiculous. A superbly-crafted character in a novel might well be considered perfect, a certain living person imperfect in many respects: a completed building might well be imperfect as compared with its appearance on the architect's drawing-board. To avoid these problems, Anselm's thesis, that to exist in reality is greater than to exist in the mind alone, would have to be understood as applying uniquely to God. But this would not help, for it is no clearer that an existing God must be more perfect than a non-existent one, than that he must be better than a non-existent one. Anyway, the two Gods being compared would have to be alike in all other respects, save that one existed and the other did not (in view of what is said above). This is in fact the thesis that some commentators have attributed to Anselm. But in what sense is 'more perfect' being used here? If it means simply 'better', that is, 'morally better', then that, as we have seen, solves nothing. If not, then what does it mean? 'More perfect' may perhaps be taken to mean'morally better', or'more beautiful', or'better fitted for a specific purpose', or possibly one or two other things; but it is not, unlike 'yellow' or Moore's 'good', simple and indefinable. If a thing is perfect, then it is

perfect in some particular respect or respects. Indeed, Anselm discusses the various respects in which God is perfect in Chs.V-XXV of the Proslogion - after having established, to his own satisfaction at least, his existence. And of course, it cannot be existence, or manner, or degree, of existence with respect to which God is said to be perfect in the proof of his existence, since that really would be to beg the question. There is, then, no good reason why something 'than which nothing more perfect can be thought' should have to exist in order that that description should fit it, since, once 'more perfect' has been given a definite sense - if indeed it can be given a definite sense - it becomes clear that existence need not be a feature of whatever it is that is said to be 'more perfect'; the phrase could, of course, be given some such sense as 'existing to a higher degree', but in this context such a move is clearly illicit.

Having ruled out 'better' and 'more perfect' as glosses on 'greater', it remains to establish what Anselm actually does mean by 'maius'. Let us take note of a somewhat odd expression in Ch.III of the Proslogion: Anselm says that God '<u>so truly exists</u>' that he cannot be thought not to exist. This phrase is repeated three times, and Anselm goes on:

> You alone, then, of all things <u>most truly exist</u> and therefore of all things possess existence <u>to the highest degree</u>; for anything else does not exist <u>as truly</u>, and so possesses existence <u>to a lower degree</u>...You of all things exist <u>to the highest degree</u>.
>
> - p.119 (my underlining).

Let us allow Anselm the notion of something's possessing existence, treating it as an (unfortunate) equivalent of something's existing, as Anselm actually does in the penultimate sentence of the chapter. What did Anselm mean by all this? It seems to me that the only way one can begin to make sense of it is to place it firmly within a context of platonic metaphysics. That Anselm uses these phrases, is, I suggest, clear evidence that he was conducting his argument within just such a framework, one which admits of the notion of degrees of existence.

Anselm drew much of his theology from Augustine, and whether his description of God as 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' derives from Augustine or Seneca, both of whom used it, his philosophical and theological framework is that of Augustine, with whose work he was thoroughly familiar, and whom he regarded as his mentor.[3] Augustine was himself influenced to a great extent by neo-platonism, especially by Plotinus, even if not by Plato himself. In his excellent article '"Vere esse" im Proslogion des hl. Anselm',[4] Stolz traces the notion of God's existing so truly that he cannot be thought not to exist through the works of Augustine, and makes it quite clear that Anselm was working with one and the same notion. 'Vere esse,' Stolz writes, 'thus describes for Augustine the absolute, unchanging, divine being...';[5] and 'over against this divine,

3. Monologion, Preface, p.36.
4. Scholastik, 9 (1934), pp.400-409.
5. ibid., p.403, my translation. For detailed citation of Augustine see Stolz's article.

unchanging being stands the subdued being of creatures, subject to change, which contains something of not-being in itself, and which is therefore not "vere"... In this conception of St. Augustine's, the influence of neo-platonic philosophy is revealed very clearly',[6] an influence to which Augustine himself admits; in fact, he thinks that Plato must have known the Old Testament.[7] And, as Stolz says, 'Anselm, in his conception of God's being, moves entirely within Augustinian thought: it is unchangeableness which makes God's being absolute being, subsisting reality, so that from the point of view of this determination of being, the thought of God's non-existence is absurd; so that God "most truly exists and possesses existence to the highest degree"'.[8]

Anselm's Monologion also makes extensive use of the notion of degrees of existence. In his acute analysis in Ch.VIII of the term 'nothing', where he rejects as 'always false' the idea that 'this very nothing.../is/... some existent being' (p.54), he suggests that 'nothing' and 'something' are not different in kind, but only in degree:

> For, indeed, from the very word that we use, saying that it /the creative Being/ created them or that they were created, we understand that when this Being created them, it created something, and that when they were created, they were created only as something. For so,

6. ibid., p.404.
7. City of God, VIII, 11; cited by Stolz, op.cit., p.404.
8. Stolz, op.cit., pp.406-7.

> beholding a man of very lowly fortunes exalted with many riches and honours by someone, we say, 'Lo, he has made that man out of nothing'; that is, the man who was before reputed as nothing is now, by virtue of that other's making, reckoned as something.
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> - p.55.

Non-existent beings '...were not nothing, so far as the creator's thought is concerned, through which, and according to which, they were created' (p.56) before they came into being. Whatever is 'in the thought', that is, lies along the same continuum as that real object to which it corresponds; the creator changes its state ('the beings that were created... were not what they are now') rather than bringing it into being out of 'absolutely nothing'. Now, whatever the virtues or problems of this as a doctrine of creatio ex nihilo, or as the apparent positing of some other class besides the class of what exists and the class of what does not exist, it affords further evidence that we may most fruitfully understand Anselm as propounding a theory involving the notion of degrees of existence. Indeed, he actually says that the creator is 'a certain Substance existing in the greatest degree of all existing beings' (p.53). In his discussion of the relation of the Word to created beings, Anselm says of the Word that its 'essence exists so supremely that in a certain sense it alone exists; while in these things which, in comparison with that Essence, are in some sort non-existent,

and yet were made something through, and according to, that Word, a kind of imitation of that supreme Essence is found' (Ch.XXXI, p.92). This surely cannot be anything but platonic language; and the Theory of Forms comes to mind again when Anselm writes:

> If we should conceive any substance that is alive, and sentient, and rational, to be deprived of its reason, then of its sentience, then of its life, and finally of the bare existence that remains, who would fail to understand that the substance that is thus destroyed, little by little, is gradually brought to smaller and smaller degrees of existence, and at last to non-existence? But the attributes which, taken each by itself, reduce an essence to less and less degrees of existence, if assumed in order, lead it to greater and greater degrees.
>
> - ibid.

It is abundantly clear that Anselm was employing platonic metaphysics in the Monologion; and there is no reason to suppose that he repudiated his platonism between finishing the Monologion and writing the Proslogion.

'Greater' is therefore to be understood in a platonic manner: not as 'better', or 'more perfect', but as 'ontologically greater', that is to say, 'more real'. Once this is established, it becomes possible to do justice to Anselm's argument; and all that has been written about the incomparability in terms of goodness or perfection of real and imaginary things must be dismissed as irrelevant.

The question, '...in what sense can we say that actual existents are greater absolutely than possible or conceptual existents?'[9] admits of a ready answer: actual existents are more real than possible or conceptual existents. And Malcolm's comment about the oddity of maintaining that my future house will be better if it exists than if it does not (p.15) may be seen not to touch Anselm.

Now, what is this platonic manner of understanding 'greater'? Plato has a hierarchical view of reality (where 'reality' covers all that there is, those things which are not ontologically independent of human thought, as well as those that are): some things are more real than others. But clearly 'real' cannot refer in this latter phrase to all there is. What then does it mean? If we draw on the Divided Line analogy in the Republic,[10] we may represent Plato's view of the ontological structure of things thus:

↑ Forms
| The material world
| Non-existents

It is this picture which Anselm takes over. And what makes the Forms more real than the material world, which is in turn more real than non-existents, is that, as Vlastos suggests,[11] it is the Forms which are of supreme cognitive reliability, and thus of

9. Charlesworth, p.64.
10. 509e.
11. 'Degrees of Reality in Plato', in ed. Renford Bambrough, New Essays on Plato and Aristotle (London; RKP, 1965), pp. 1-20.

supreme value. It is cognitive reliability and value which determine degree of reality for Plato. This is in turn the case because cognitive reliability is a sign of ontological independence; and the greater the ontological independence of an entity, the more fully can it be what it is, because the greater is the extent to which it is able to determine itself. For Plato, 'to be completely means to be a complete and perfect essence, to possess in a perfect manner the actuality of essence'.[12] Thus it is aseity which is the mark of what is most real. And that is precisely what Anselm too holds: 'that which exists through itself exists in the greatest degree of all things'.[13] The Forms exist a se; the empirical world is finite and dependent on the Forms (or, ultimately, on the Good, which is the supreme Form[14]); and non-existents are those things which are entirely dependent for their being real at all on finite, dependent beings. That is to say, they are fictions, appearing in poetry, people's fancy, etc. They are only insofar as they have been thought of or imagined.

The distinction between fictions and non-fictions is crucial for the thesis I am putting forward. When Anselm tries to show that the Fool is contradicting himself in denying that there is a God, his intention is clearly to show that God cannot be a fiction, for

12. Paul J.W. Miller, 'The Ontological Argument for God', The Personalist, 42 (1961), p.348.
13. Monologion, III, p.42. See also XXVIII, and Proslogion, XXII.
14. Republic, 508e-509.

it is just this which the Fool implies when he says 'There is no God'. Now this may seem somewhat obvious. However, in view of the volume of literature about the logic of 'existence' to which the ontological argument has given rise, the point cannot be over-emphasized. What one's view is of the concept of existence matters not at all for an assessment of Anselm's argument. One needs simply to remember that Anselm seeks to show, as against the unbeliever, that God is not a figment of the imagination, not something invented, in short, not a fiction; and that to do this he uses the platonic principle that non-fictions are more real than fictions. Of course the matter is more complicated than this, and discussion of just what we may understand by 'God is not a fiction', and under what conditions it may intelligibly, let alone truly, be asserted, will form a major portion of what I have to say about Anselm's argument. I hope also to show that it is decisive in determining how we eventually assess the platonic view of reality.

Before proceeding further, it is as well to allay any suspicion there might be that the platonic ontological scale has a fundamentally axiological basis, so that the distinction I have drawn between 'better' and 'more real' must collapse. The point is that the Good is good because it is ontologically independent: the Forms have supreme value because of their ontological supremacy, and not vice-versa. Whether this traditional inference of value from ontological status is valid is of course another

matter, but one which need not concern us here; what is important is that Anselm follows this tradition in arguing to God's goodness from his supreme reality. This is clearest in Ch.XII of the Proslogion:

> But clearly, whatever You are, You are not that through another but through Your very self. You are therefore the very life by which You live, the wisdom by which You are wise, the very goodness by which You are good to both good men and wicked, and the same holds for like attributes.
>
> - p.133.

And in Ch.III of the Monologion we read:

> But whatever exists through another is less than that, through which all things are, and which alone exists through itself. Therefore, that which exists through itself exists in the greatest degree of all things. There is, then, some one being which alone exists in the greatest and the highest degree of all. But that which is greatest of all, and through which exists whatever is good or great, and, in short, whatever has any existence - that must be supremely good, and supremely great, and the highest of all existing beings.
>
> - pp.42-3.[15]

It is clear, then, that Anselm regards God's greatness as logically prior to his goodness - which is why 'goodness' plays no significant part in Chs.II - IV of the Proslogion, being deduced from God's ontological supremacy in Ch.V, the first of a long list of attributes so deduced in Chs.V - XXV.

Now that it has been established what Anselm means by 'greater', Gaunilo's classic 'Lost Island'

15. Cf. Proslogion, XXII, XXIII, and Monologion, I, IV.

counterexample can be seen to be as irrelevant as Anselm takes it to be; and all similar objections to Anselm's argument can be dismissed along with it. Gaunilo's argument may be put as follows:[16]

(1) The idea of a Lost Island 'which is more excellent than all other lands' is intelligible.

(2) The Lost Island is therefore in the mind.

(3) 'Since it is more excellent to exist not only in the mind but also in reality', the Lost Island exists in reality;

(4) 'For if it did not exist, any other land existing in reality would be more excellent than it, and so this island, already conceived by you to be more excellent than others, will not be more excellent.'

(5) Anselm's argument, therefore, would prove the existence of anything which is first deemed to be the most excellent of its kind.

The contention that if one starts with any suitably defined fiction, one can think it into existence by following the lines of the ontological argument, has long been a major objection to it. Gassendi,[17] Caterus,[18] Schopenhauer,[19] and Reichenbach,[20] among many others, have all taken this standard line of attack. Yet

16. Para.6 of Gaunilo's Reply on Behalf of the Fool, p.165, from which the following quotations are taken.

17. The Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. by E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge University Press, 1970), vol.II, p.187.

18. ibid., p.8.

19. The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, in ed. Alvin Plantinga, The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan, 1968) pp.65-67.

20. The Rise of Scientific Philosophy (Berkeley; University of California, 1951), p.39.

Anselm hardly bothers to reply to this apparently devastating criticism levelled by Gaunilo, saying simply that '...if anyone should discover for me something existing either in reality or in the mind alone - except "that than which a greater cannot be thought" - to which the logic of my argument would apply, then I shall find that Lost Island and give it, never more to be lost, to that person' (Reply III, p.175). The apparent oddity of this is regarded by many as of no particular importance. Jonathan Barnes,[21] for example, while actually citing a small extract from Bonaventure's amplification of Anselm's reasoning, for which Barnes thinks there is nothing to be said, and which he thinks has nothing to do with Anselm, fails to notice the significance of the reply for an interpretation of the argument. In fact, Bonaventure's amplification is precisely to the point, and worth quoting in full:

> Against the objection of an island than which nothing better or greater can be conceived, we must say that there is no similarity /between this subject and this predicate/. For when I say 'a being than which nothing greater can be conceived', there is no repugnance here between the subject and the predicate, so that this being can be conceived in a rational way. But when I say 'an island than which nothing greater can be conceived', there is a repugnance between the subject and the predicate. For 'island'

21. The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan, 1972), p.28.

> refers to a defective being, while the predicate designates the most perfect of beings. Therefore, since there is a direct opposition here, this island is conceived irrationally, and in thinking it the mind is divided against itself. It is no wonder, therefore, that we cannot infer that this island exists in reality. It is otherwise, however, in the case of 'being' or 'God', since this is not repugnant to the predicate.[22]

Although failing to distinguish perfection from greatness, and putting the matter somewhat dramatically, Bonaventure clearly has in mind the ontological notion of greatness. And the idea of an island which enjoys ontological supremacy, which is more cognitively reliable, and more valuable, in some ultimate sense, than any other island, is nonsense. One island cannot 'exist more truly' than another. The Form of Island may perhaps be said to exist more truly than any particular island, but that is another matter. No island, no golden mountain, no coin which is or might be in the world is any more cognitively reliable, or ultimately valuable, in itself, than any other. Empirical entities and God are in different ontological classes; and whereas 'greater' in the phrase, 'an island, than which a greater cannot be thought' serves to compare it with other members of its own class - if it serves to do anything at all - in the phrase, 'a being, than which nothing greater can be thought', it serves to compare that being not only with

22. De Myst. Trin. Q.1, a.1, sol.opp.6, given by A. Daniels, 'Quellenbeitrage und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Gottesbeweise im XIII Jahrhundert', in Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters, 8,1-2 (Münster; Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1909); cited by Hick and McGill, p.24, fn.12.

other beings, but, more importantly, the class of which that being is the sole member, with all other classes. The phrase, 'an island, than which nothing greater can be thought' is quite absurd, since there could not possibly be any such island. Something more cognitively reliable and valuable than any possible island can always be conceived. In (1) above, therefore, there is no parallel between a Lost Island and God; (3) as it stands is false, and if 'more excellent' were amended to 'greater', then the reasoning in (4) could not apply to islands or the like. (5) is therefore not the case. Anselm, working within a platonic metaphysics, had no need of any further argument against Gaunilo on this point.

Pari rationis, the form of Anselm's argument cannot be used for the sort of "ontological" disproof (or proof) of the devil which has recently been proposed. Neither C.K. Grant's remark that '...if it is supposed that existence is one of the properties comprised in the concept of perfection, then non-existence must be a property of a completely imperfect being',[23] nor R.J. Richman's opposite view, that if 'I have in my mind the idea of a being than which nothing more evil can be conceived.../then/... if this being exists in reality it is more evil than if it exists only in the mind .../so that/... such a being (called "the Devil") exists

23. 'The Ontological Disproof of the Devil', Analysis, 17 (1957), pp. 71-2.

(in reality)'[24] have anything at all to do with Anselm's argument. For Anselm is not concerned to argue to God's existence on the basis of his perfection or supreme goodness. His point is that God is the most real entity conceivable; and that non-fictions are more real than fictions. Thus any argument of the same form in respect of the devil's non-existence would have to start as follows: the devil is that than which nothing less real can be thought. But who would wish to argue to his non-existence on such a basis? And any proof of the devil's existence would have to be based on a comparison of existent with non-existent evil in terms of degree of evil. But this is just the sort of comparison which Malcolm and others rightly reject, and which I have shown is absent from Anselm's argument.

24. Robert J. Richman, 'The Ontological Proof of the Devil', Philosophical Studies, 9 (1958), pp.63-4. I think this red herring was first floated by Albert A. Cock. in 'The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God', PAS, 18 (1918), pp.363-384. The rather amusing debate arising from Richman's article may be traced through the following: Theodore Waldman, 'A Comment Upon the Ontological Proof of the Devil', Philosophical Studies, 10 (1959), pp. 59-60; Robert J. Richman, 'The Devil and Dr. Waldman', Philosophical Studies, 11 (1960), pp. 78-80; Oliver A. Johnson, 'God and St. Anselm', Journal of Religion, 45 (1965), pp.326-334; David and Marjorie Haight, 'An Ontological Argument for the Devil', The Monist, 54 (1970), pp. 218-220; Wolfgang L.F. Gombocz, 'St. Anselm's Disproof of the Devil's Existence. A Counter Argument Against Haight and Richman', Ratio, 15 (1973), pp.334-337; and Robert J. Richman, 'A Serious Look at the Ontological Argument', Ratio, 18 (1976), pp.85-89.

3. NECESSITY AND ANSELM'S ARGUMENT

The attempt by Hartshorne and Malcolm to relocate Anselm's argument in Ch.III of the Proslogion, and to present a reinterpretation of Anselm in modal terms, focuses attention on the role of necessity in the argument. Just as an assessment of Anselm's argument requires a proper understanding of his concept of greatness, so it requires a proper understanding of his modal terminology. For not only does the question of whether there is more than one independent argument for the existence of God in the Proslogion and Reply depend on it, but, as we shall see in Ch.6, such an understanding helps to clarify certain logical features of 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'. I shall consider first the role of 'necessity' in Anselm's thought, using Cur Deus Homo and the Monologion to supplement the Proslogion and Reply; then examine what Anselm means when he says that 'God cannot be thought not to exist', so as to make clear his own conception of the relationship between Proslogion II and III; and finally analyse Hartshorne's modal argument in its own right. (I shall concentrate here on Hartshorne, because it is he who has been the chief proponent of a modal reinterpretation of Anselm, and because his modal argument is presented in a more rigorous form than Malcolm's.)

It is as well to begin by saying what I take to be the logical necessity which occupies Hartshorne's,

and Malcolm's, attention; and although modal logicians appear not to have settled on any one account of what constitutes logical necessity, I hope that what I propose is reasonably uncontroversial. I shall take it, then, that logical necessity pertains to propositions only; and that a proposition is logically necessary if and only if the truth-value it has is its only truth-value conceivable, given the meaning of the words in that proposition.

In Cur Deus Homo, II, XVIII(a), Anselm distinguishes between 'antecedent' and 'subsequent' necessity. Of the former he says:

> ...necessity is always either compulsion or restraint; and these two kinds of necessity operate variously by turn, so that the same thing is both necessary and impossible. For whatever is obliged to exist is also prevented from non-existence; and that which is compelled not to exist is prevented from existence.
>
> - p.274.

This notion of necessity is conceived in terms of coercion or constraint; Anselm contrasts it with 'free authority' (II,XVII,p.270). If a person's action is necessary, or performed of necessity, in this sense, then the suggestion is that he is unable to act otherwise owing to some external imposition: 'Since, then, the will of God does nothing by any necessity, but of its own power, and the will of that man /Christ/ was the same as the will of God, he died not necessarily, but only of his own power' (p.272). The will of God cannot be coerced or

constrained. In this case, the notion of necessity is factual rather than logical: it is a matter of fact that '...God does nothing by necessity, since he is not compelled or restrained in anything'(II,V,p.244).[1] Whether such factual necessity may be asserted in contingent propositions, however, or whether a proposition like 'God is not compelled in anything' is a necessary proposition is clearly of central importance, and will be discussed in Ch.6. But the point here is that Anselm does not ask this question - the idea of logical necessity as it appears in modal logic is absent from his thought. The coercion or constraint in question is never a matter of the meaning of words. Hartshorne and Malcolm cannot therefore hang any reinterpretation of Anselm on this notion of antecedent necessity.

Anselm also uses 'necessity' in the context of discussions of purpose, in a way apparently consistent with his basic usage in the context of coercion or constraint. For it could plausibly be maintained that the purpose in question in the following sorts of example acts as a coercive force, in some mental sense:

> ...I am rather inclined to the belief that there was not, originally, that complete number of angels necessary to perfect the celestial state...
>
> - Cur Deus Homo,I,XVIII,p.214.

and

> ...where these /words/ are, no other word is

1. See also e.g. Cur Deus Homo,I,VI,p.186; II,VII, p.246; II,X,pp.252,254: and Monologion,LXXIX,p.143.

necessary for the recognition of an object.
- Monologion,X,p.57.[2]

The notion of necessity appears in Anselm in a causal sense as well:

> And this question, both infidels are accustomed to bring up against us...and many believers ponder it in their hearts; for what cause or necessity, in sooth, God became man...
> - Cur Deus Homo,I,1,p.178.

In the first two examples, that necessitates x, for which to take place, or for which to be the case, it is necessary that x; and in the latter, the cause of x necessitates it. In this way, then, there is a coercive element in the situation. But whether perspicuous or not, neither of these sorts of necessity has anything to do with logical necessity.

Subsequent necessity, 'that necessity which Aristotle treats of ("de propositionibus singularibus et futuris") and which seems to destroy any alternative and ascribe a necessity to all things' (Cur Deus Homo, II,XVIII(a),p.277), is contrasted with antecedent necessity thus:

> ...when the heavens are said to revolve, it is an antecedent and efficient necessity, for they must revolve. But when I say that you speak of necessity, because you are speaking, this is nothing but a subsequent and imperative necessity. For I mean only that it is impossible for you to speak and not to speak at the same time, and not that someone compels you to speak. For the

2. See also e.g. Cur Deus Homo,I,X,pp.200-1; I,XVIII,p.216; II,VIII,p.248; II,XVI,p.267: and Monologion,LXXIV,p.139.

> force of its own nature makes the heaven revolve; but no necessity obliges you to speak.
>
> - pp.276-7.

I am not here concerned with whether or not this is a particularly happy use of the term 'necessity'. Rather, I simply note that D.P. Henry considers that there are good grounds for interpreting Anselm's 'subsequent necessity' as an exemplification of 'the logical thesis to the effect that (where "p" is a propositional variable) for all p, if p then p...'.[3] If this is indeed the case, and it is consistent with Anselm's view that 'wherever there is an antecedent necessity, there is also a subsequent one; but not vice-versa' (p.277), then the concluding clause of the statement 'Necessarily, if God exists, then God exists', is necessarily true only if God actually exists. One cannot of course use Anselm's 'subsequent necessity' to conclude that God exists from the fact that 'God exists' is a necessarily true proposition (if it is) because all that follows from the fact that 'God exists' is necessarily true is that 'God exists' is necessarily true. The necessity attaches not to the proposition 'God exists', but to the proposition 'If God exists, then God exists':

> By this subsequent and imperative necessity was it necessary (since the belief and prophecy concerning Christ were true, that he would die of his own free will) that it should be so.
>
> - p.277.

3. D.P. Henry, The Logic of St.Anselm (Oxford University Press, 1967),p.178.

It seems that all Anselm is saying here is that it is necessarily the case that if it is true that p, then p; for if p did not follow, a contradiction would arise. It would be true that p, and it would not be true that p. If it is true that God exists, then, of necessity, God exists. The necessity involved is not necessity in the sense of 'analytic truth', but necessity in Anselm's 'subsequent' sense, another way of putting which might be to say that contradictory states of affairs cannot both be the case. If it is true that God exists, then he exists, just as, if it is true that Anselm said such-and-such, then he said it. The appropriateness of Anselm's calling this a necessary state of affairs is not here at issue. What is important is to see that the sense in which God exists of necessity, in the present sense of 'subsequent necessity', if he exists, or if it is true that he exists, is quite different from the sense in which propositions like 'Triangles have three sides', or 'Some squares are circular' are necessary propositions. There is nothing remarkable or special or unique about the concept of God which entails his necessarily existing, for 'If x exists, then of necessity, x exists' is true for any value of x: 'This subsequent necessity pertains to everything...'(ibid.). This interpretation of the notion of subsequent necessity seems to make the best sense of its usage in Cur Deus Homo. Quite obviously it is not the same notion of necessity as

that in modal logic; Anselm's insistence that subsequent necessity pertains to everything is sufficient for us to see that it is quite different from propositional necessity.

Common in Anselm, especially in the Monologion, is the idea of, as Henry terms it, inferential necessity.[4] A conclusion is said to be necessary, because only it and no other conclusion is obtainable from the premisses given, if one reasons validly. Such a conclusion need not, of course, be necessarily true in that the conclusion is analytic. Rather, the necessity resides in our being forced, by rational argument, to the conclusion:

> Therefore the rational existence of the truth must first be shown, I mean, the necessity, which proves that God ought to or could have, condescended to do those things we affirm.
>
> - Cur Deus Homo, I, IV, p.184.

> How, then, shall these propositions, that are so necessary according to our exposition, and so necessary according to our proof, be reconciled?
>
> - Monologion, XXII, p.78.[5]

If it is true that the programme at the Odeon changes every Sunday, and tomorrow is Sunday, then, of necessity, the programme at the Odeon will change

4. Or, as Charlesworth terms it, syllogistic necessity: Charlesworth, p.34.
5. See also e.g. Monologion, I, pp.38-40; II, p.40; IV, p.43; VII, p.51; XIII, p.60; XIX, p.70; XXIX, p.90; XXXI, p.92; XXXV, p.99; XXXVIII, p.101; XLI, p.104; LI, p.115; LIII, p.115; LVII, p.119; LXV, p.131; LXXII, p.138; LXXVIII, p.143: and Cur Deus Homo, I, X, p.201; I, XXV, p.237; II, IX, p.251.

tomorrow; or, the programme will necessarily change tomorrow. Clearly, however, 'The programme will change tomorrow' is not a necessary proposition.

Of the ways in which Anselm uses the concept, or concepts, of necessity in Cur Deus Homo and the Monologion, then, none corresponds to logical necessity. If, as Hartshorne and Malcolm think, Anselm does use the alleged logical necessity of 'God exists' as the basic premiss in a proof of God's existence in Proslogion III and the Reply, then his use of that notion - so far as works to do specifically with God, his attributes, and his relation to man, are concerned - is peculiar to the Proslogion and Reply. And even if that were in fact the case, we would still be left with the unpromising task of accounting for the total absence from Cur Deus Homo, probably written between 1094 and 1098, of a world-shattering idea, an idea, if it is intelligible, from which we may deduce God's existence; an idea introduced some twenty years earlier in the Proslogion and Reply. Most importantly, we should have to account for its absence from Ch.XVIII(a) of Bk.II, where Anselm specifically discusses 'How, with God there is neither necessity nor impossibility...'(p.273).

If we turn to the Proslogion, we find that the title of Ch.XXIII reads:

> That this good is equally Father and Son and Holy Spirit; and that this is the one necessary being which is altogether and wholly and solely

good.

- p.145.

This might at first be thought odd, since it suggests that there are a number of necessary beings, of which only one is wholly good. If Anselm has earlier, in Ch.III, singled out the necessity of God's existence as being unique to God, why does he now deny just that? He certainly seems to do so, concluding the chapter thus:

> 'Moreover, one thing is necessary.' /Luke,X,42/ This is, moreover, that one thing necessary in which is every good, or rather, which is wholly and uniquely and completely and solely good.
>
> - p.147.

The first sentence ('Moreover, there is one thing needful' in the Authorized Version) suggests one necessary being; but the comment again suggests several. There may be a confusion in this passage between 'necessary' in the sense of 'needful', 'needed by us' (God is the only thing we really do need, according to the biblical quotation) and 'necessary' in some other sense. For in his comment on the quotation, Anselm appears to be saying - as in the title of the chapter - that this necessary thing is different from all other necessary things because it is wholly good. Although it is possible to read Anselm's 'necessary' in the same way as in his quotation, without the suggestion of several necessary things - but at the cost of reading it other than in the chapter's title - I think my proposed reading better. For it is clear, as we

shall see, that Anselm does not take God's unique status to reside in his necessity.

As this is the only passage in the Proslogion where Anselm uses 'necessary' of God, it would seem that the way in which he is said to be necessary here accords, or fails to accord, with Anselm's ascription to us, in Ch.III, of an inability even to think that God does not exist, ought to shed light on the question of whether or not Ch.III is a proof of God's existence based on the idea of his logically necessary status. Whatever it is exactly that Anselm may mean by saying that something exists necessarily in this sense, it is clear that God's being necessary is not for Anselm sufficient to distinguish him from all other beings, since he refers to God as 'the one thing necessary... which is wholly...good'. This alone suggests that Hartshorne's characterization of 'Anselm's Principle' as 'perfection could not exist contingently'[6] (quite apart from my earlier objections to the idea of perfection) is mistaken. For, if perfection (i.e., God) is not thought to be unique in existing necessarily, then any proof of God's existence based on this sense of 'necessary existence' could equally well be used to prove the existence of all or any of those other beings whose existence is treated as necessary. But if that were indeed the case, why does

6. 'The Irreducibly Modal Structure of the Argument', in Hick and McGill,p.335; (Ch.2,sec.VI,pp.49-57 of The Logic of Perfection (La Salle; Open Court, 1962)). Cf. Norman Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', ibid., pp.301-320.

Anselm not seek to prove that God exists in a similar way to that in which he would seek to prove that other necessary beings exist? Why does he go to all the trouble of trying to prove, in Ch.III, not that God 'necessarily exists', but that 'something than which a greater cannot be conceived so truly is that it is impossible to conceive of it as not existing'? Anselm actually distinguishes God from other necessary beings, and not, as Hartshorne thinks, God from other beings on account of his necessary status. Unlike anything else, necessary or not, God exists 'so truly that he cannot be thought not to exist'. If God's existence did follow from his necessary status, in Anselm's sense of 'necessary', then the existence of everything which has this necessary status would also follow from it. But this is not the case: 'The salient point, and one which is totally overlooked by most moderns, is that beings which are necessary (i.e., not possible not to be) are, according to the Boethian cosmological background of the commentaries from which Anselm draws his modal logic, comparatively commonplace. One has only to look up into the night sky to see evidence of many such beings. The heavenly bodies provide Boethius with a set of standard examples of necessary beings.'[7] But the heavenly bodies, although they exist, and are necessary, can be imagined not to exist, unlike God. If, however, their existence were to

7. D.P. Henry, Medieval Logic and Metaphysics (London; Hutchinson, 1972), pp.108-9.

follow from their status as necessary beings, they could not be imagined not to exist, since, if one were to imagine, say, a star as not existing, it would not in fact be the star one was actually imagining, because one cannot imagine something as not existing which is unable[8] not to exist: but stars, unlike God, are not unable not to exist. That, at least, is Anselm's doctrine. If we know that something is unable not to exist, we cannot imagine it as not existing, just as one cannot imagine a triangle as not having three sides. But, whereas in the case of triangles, we cannot imagine them as other than three-sided because it is a matter of logic that they have three sides - anything not three-sided, is, as a matter of logic, not a triangle - Anselm's reasons for supposing that we cannot imagine God as not existing because he is unable not to exist, are rather different. What these are we shall see later (p.55ff.). According to Anselm, God is to be distinguished from all other beings in that he cannot be imagined not to exist; but he does not call that feature of God his necessary status, since 'to prove that God was a necessary being, or that God necessarily existed, would scarcely be a way

8. Anselm does not ask the crucial question as to the modal status of a proposition such as 'God is unable not to exist', since the modern distinction between necessary and contingent propositions was not available to him. Nowhere to my knowledge does he elaborate on the nature of this inability on the part of God. Clearly, however, this is a crucial issue; but I shall not discuss it until Ch. 6, because in this chapter I am concerned only with what is and what is not attributable to Anselm, rather than with an assessment of what he says. For the time being, then, the reader must make do with 'unable' tout court.

of exalting God above his creation'.[9] The point is that, for Anselm,'"x exists" is necessarily true' is not equivalent to 'x cannot be thought not to exist'.

In Anselm's Reply, it is inferential necessity which is prominent, although it is often far from clear that it is in fact inferential necessity which is the notion present. Indeed, it seems to be this notion which is largely responsible for misleading Hartshorne.[10] One example will be enough to show this:

> I insist, however, that simply if it can be thought to exist[11] it is necessary that it exists in reality. For 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' cannot be thought save as being without a beginning. But whatever can be thought as existing and does not actually exist, can be thought as having a beginning of its existence. Consequently, 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' cannot be thought as existing and yet not actually exist. If, therefore, it can be thought as existing, it exists of necessity.
>
> - Reply,I,pp.169-171.

9. D.P. Henry, op.cit., p.108.
10. See also e.g. Reply,II,p.173; V,p.183; IX,p.189; X,p.189: and Gaunilo's Reply,1,p.157; 5,p.163; 7,p.165. Hartshorne brackets Chs.V and IX of Anselm's Reply with Ch.I in arguing for his reinterpretation of Anselm's argument, and this leads one to suspect that Anselm's 'inferential necessity' plays an important part in misleading him. (See e.g. his introduction to St. Anselm: Basic Writings,p.2.)
11. Charlesworth omits 'to exist' from his translation, although it appears in Anselm's Latin: 'si vel cogitari potest esse...'(p.168). This omission could be misleading, since Anselm is trying to show that if God can be thought to exist, then he exists; and not that if God can be conceived at all, then he exists. He argues the latter later on in Reply I.

This passage is one of those that Hartshorne takes to be part of the set of arguments used by Anselm to establish the logical necessity of God's existence: indeed, it is central to his thesis.[12] While an analysis of this passage in terms of logical necessity is clearly possible, it is out of place as an analysis of an C11th. text. Anselm did not possess the modern notion of logical necessity, and it is therefore wrong to ascribe to him the witting invention of an argument based on such a notion. Inferential necessity and propositional necessity are quite different. Perhaps an example might make clearer just what is going on in Anselm. Consider the following:

(1) Bananas are yellow.

(2) 'Being yellow' entails 'being coloured'.

(3) Therefore, bananas are coloured.

Anselm might say, for (3), 'Therefore, bananas are necessarily coloured'; but 'bananas are coloured' is certainly not a logically necessary proposition. It merely follows necessarily from (1) and (2). Bananas, being yellow, cannot but be coloured, given the truth of (1) and (2); and, if we follow the argument correctly, we cannot but come to the conclusion, (3). Now compare the following argument:

(1a) God is that than which nothing greater can be thought.

(2a) 'That than which nothing greater can be thought' entails 'existing'.

(3a) Therefore, God exists.

12. Charles Hartshorne, Anselm's Discovery (La Salle; Open Court, 1965), pp.15,34,87,93.

(3a) follows necessarily from (1a) and (2a). God, being that than which nothing greater can be thought, cannot but exist, given the truth of (1a) and (2a); and, if we follow the argument correctly, we cannot but come to the conclusion, (3a). This is no modal argument. In fact, it is Anselm's argument in Proslogion II. (It does of course differ in at least one crucial respect from the argument about bananas. Bananas can, I think, be imagined not to be coloured. One can imagine colourless bananas, and still imagine bananas, because it is not the case that nothing which is not yellow can be a banana. One cannot, however, imagine God as non-existent, and still imagine God, because it is the case - by definition - that nothing which is not that than which nothing greater can be thought can be God.)

Now, the argument in Reply I may be stated as follows, with 'T' for 'that than which nothing greater can be thought':

(1) T 'cannot be thought save as being without a beginning', since

(2) anything that exists and has never not existed is greater than anything that exists but has at some time not existed.[13]

(3) But any non-existent entity, which can nevertheless be conceived to exist, must be conceived as having a beginning. Therefore

(4) T cannot be a non-existent entity which can be conceived to exist. Thus

(5) if T is an entity which can be conceived to

13. This premiss is not stated explicitly in the Proslogion or Reply: But see Proslogion, XIX and XX, and Monologion, XVIII.

exist, then T cannot be a non-existent entity.

Therefore

(6) T must exist if it can be conceived to exist.

Now this is certainly a separate argument for the existence of God: but Anselm's conclusion, that if T 'can be thought as existing, it exists of necessity', does not bring in the notion of logical necessity. Anselm is simply saying that the conclusion follows 'of necessity': this is another example of inferential necessity. The reason for Anselm why T must exist if it can be conceived to exist, is not that T's existence is a matter of logical necessity, but that T cannot be a non-existent but conceivable entity, since such entities have a beginning; but T cannot, by definition, have a beginning. So if T is a conceivable entity, it must be an existent and not a non-existent, entity. There is no modal argument here at all. Hartshorne is misled because the entities referred to in (3) are in fact what we would call logically possible entities - entities which can be conceived of as existing but which do not in fact exist. Certainly, Anselm contrasts T with such entities: but it is not their modal status which he contrasts, but rather the fact that T 'cannot be thought save as without a beginning', with the fact that the other entities in question can be so conceived. Now, it may indeed be the case that if T is without a beginning, i.e., if T is eternal, then 'T exists' must be a necessary proposition (see Ch.6): but whether this is so is a separate issue from that under discussion here. What Anselm is concerned to do in this passage

is to show that, since God cannot be a member of the class of entities which may begin to exist, he cannot be a member of the class of fictions: for the two classes are mutually exclusive. Certainly, it may be the case that Anselm's idea of supreme greatness contains that of eternal existence, in which case, given that God is by definition supremely great, it follows that it is necessarily, or analytically, true that he is eternal. And it may furthermore be the case that an eternal being exists necessarily, in that the proposition asserting his existence must be a necessary proposition, as Hartshorne and Malcolm maintain. Anselm's argument, however, does not rest on this, but rather on his principle that eternal existence is greater than temporal existence. If God's existence is logically necessary, an issue with which Anselm was not concerned, then that this is so is quite distinct from the fact that God's existence follows necessarily from certain premisses.

Similar considerations apply to the second argument in Reply I, on which Malcolm hangs so much in 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments': 'necessarily' in Anselm's statement of the thesis, 'even if it can be thought of, then certainly it necessarily exists'(p.171), would seem to refer to the unavoidability of the conclusion. Here, in fact, there may be some doubt as to whether it is inferential necessity or coercive necessity which Anselm has in mind. But the latter would suggest that our ability to think of God in some

way coerces him; and this runs counter to Anselm's other statements on the matter, and indeed counter to his view that what is the case causes the truth of statements.[14] Furthermore, the third argument of what is clearly a trio of arguments of a similar form in Reply I makes no mention of necessity; it claims simply that God 'exists as a whole at every time and in every place'(p.173), because anything which does not so exist can be thought not to exist, and this is not true of God. In fact, the statement of this tells quite conclusively against Hartshorne's and Malcolm's interpretation of Anselm: 'But "that than which a greater cannot be thought" cannot be thought not to exist if it does actually exist...'(p.173, my underlining). Surely this shows that Anselm does not mean by 'cannot be thought not to exist' what Hartshorne and Malcolm mean by 'exists necessarily'; for the factual condition, 'if it does actually exist', cannot state the condition for the truth of a necessary proposition, whereas it can and does state the condition for the truth of Anselm's claim that '(it) cannot be thought not to exist'. The movement of Anselm's thought is the exact reverse of that in modal logic, namely from what is in fact the case to what can be thought, and not from what can be thought to what is necessarily the case. The notion of logical necessity is absent from Reply I.

14. Dialogue on Truth, in Selections from Medieval Philosophers, ed. and trans. by Richard McKeon (N.Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929): '...nothing is true except by participating in truth, and therefore the truth of what is true is in that which is true; but the thing stated is not in the true statement and therefore it must be called, not the truth of it, but the cause of its truth'(p.153).

In Reply I, Anselm elaborates on the implications of God's being 'that than which nothing greater can be thought': and he gives two arguments to God's existence based on the formula's being understood. Rather than treating the passage as an elaboration of Proslogion III, therefore, as Hartshorne and Malcolm take it, it would be better to regard it as an elaboration of Proslogion II, the argument of which is based on just the same point. Certainly, to treat the two arguments to God's existence in Reply I as arguments from the necessary truth of the proposition 'God exists' is altogether wrong. I do not of course deny that the passage has modal implications, and that these are central to an assessment of Anselm's argument - indeed I shall argue in Ch.6 that they are crucial. But there is no modal argument in Anselm's Reply.

We may now turn to Proslogion III, and the claim that God 'cannot be thought not to exist'. Hartshorne regards this chapter as stating 'the essential point'[15] of Anselm's argument, that, in the case of God, '"existence" is not a mere question of fact, but of logical necessity'.[16] But, whether or not it may turn out to be the case that God's existence is a matter of logical necessity, Anselm's arguments in Proslogion III are more complex and circuitous than Hartshorne takes them to be; and the intended conclusion

15. Introduction to St.Anselm: Basic Writings, p.2.
16. ibid., p.3.

is not at all what he takes it to be.

Of the two arguments in the chapter, the second is an elaboration of the first, and a reiteration of its premiss on the basis of its conclusion. Only the first argument need concern us for the moment. It may be put as follows:

(1) We can conceive of something such that its non-existence is inconceivable.

(2) This is greater than anything, the non-existence of which is conceivable.

(3) If the non-existence of that than which nothing greater can be thought were conceivable, then it would not be that than which nothing greater can be thought,

(4) since the entity referred to in (1) would be greater than it (from (2)).

(5) But that than which nothing greater can be thought cannot not be that than which nothing greater can be thought.

(6) Therefore that than which nothing greater can be thought is such that its non-existence is inconceivable.

If Anselm does not mean by 'its non-existence is inconceivable' that its existence is logically necessary, then what does he mean? How are we to understand the argument?

In Reply IV, Anselm refers to 'the distinguishing characteristic of God /as/ not to be

able to be understood not to exist' (p.177). Whereas 'many things, the while they do exist, cannot be thought of as not existing' (in the sense that, if we know a thing exists, we cannot at the same time think it does not exist; but not in the sense that we cannot imagine that it does not exist), 'it is the distinguishing characteristic of God that He cannot be thought of as not existing' (p.179) (in both senses). This brings out clearly the point that Anselm regards God's inability to be thought not to exist as one of his attributes. So far, this accords with the view that Anselm attributes necessary existence to God. Reply III, however, makes it clear that God's inability to be thought not to exist follows from his inability not to be:

> It has already been clearly seen, however, that 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' cannot be thought not to exist, because it exists as a matter of such certain truth...
>
> - p.175.[17]

Clearly, then, 'The "truth of thought" embodied in the incapacity to think of God as non-existent is the consequence of the "truth of being" of the "nature" whose existence has been proved in Proslogion II'.[18] For Anselm, God's inability not to exist logically precedes his inability to be thought not to exist. Again, the movement is from what is the case, to what can truly be thought to be the case; whereas on

17. Cf. Reply, I, p.173. This is of course in accord with Anselm's epistemology, as stated in the Dialogue on Truth (op.cit.).
18. D.P. Henry, op.cit., p.110.

Hartshorne's interpretation, the movement is from what is, or can be, thought to be the case, to what actually is the case, from a necessarily true proposition about God, to God's existence.

We are now in a position to re-examine Proslogion III. The first argument, outlined above, shows that God is unable to be thought not to exist, because, if this were not the case, he would not be that than which nothing greater can be thought. The argument is a reductio, of which an exactly similar form could be used to show that God had any property, to have which renders him greater than he would be were he not to have it. That in this particular case, the property should be the inability to be thought not to exist is of no special consequence. We know, therefore, that we are conceiving of God correctly, only if we conceive of him as existing; and we know this, because to do otherwise engenders a contradiction. But why is this? Why is something, the non-existence of which is inconceivable, greater than anything, the non-existence of which is not inconceivable? We saw earlier Anselm's grounds for holding that existents have a higher ontological status than non-existents, but what are his grounds for holding that entities with the attribute of being unable to be thought not to exist have a higher ontological status than entities lacking this attribute? Anselm says that 'this being so truly exists that it cannot even be thought not to exist'. And our inability to think of God as non-existent is a consequence of his existing 'so truly' that he cannot be thought

not to exist. It is thus evidence that God exists in such a manner that he cannot not exist - that is, that he exists in the highest degree. Being unable to be thought not to exist is a consequence of existing in the highest degree; therefore, if discovered, it is evidence of the latter. But it has been discovered, inasmuch as its putative absence has been shown to engender a contradiction. We thus have evidence that God exists in the highest degree.

This is what is spelled out by Anselm in the second of his arguments in Proslogion III:

(1) 'You exist so truly, Lord my God, that You cannot even be thought not to exist.' Since,

(2) You are indeed that than which nothing greater can be thought (and thus exist in the highest degree, as was shown in Ch.II); and since

(3) 'everything else there is, except You alone, can be thought of as not existing'.

(2) eliminates the possibility of God's not existing in the highest degree, in one way, by showing that a denial of (2) is a contradiction ('...the creature would be above its creator and would judge its creator - and that is completely absurd'). (3) reinforces that conclusion by reminding us that, since everything except God can be thought of as not existing, everything which exists, exists in a lesser degree than God; for what we are able to think as regards the ability of something to exist or not to exist is evidence of that ability. The second argument in Proslogion III, in particular (3) above, explains the assumption made in the first argument in

the chapter that something which cannot be thought not to exist is greater than something which can be thought not to exist.[19] The suppressed assumption in all this, however, is an instance of Anselm's epistemological principle that what is the case causes the truth of the statement that it is the case. As McGill says, Anselm holds that '...whenever we conceive of something that does exist but might not exist, that thing always shows the possibility of its non-existence to our minds.../"that than which a greater cannot be conceived"/ does not show any possibility of its non-existence to our minds...(so) there is objectively within it no possibility of its non-existence'.[20] That God cannot be thought not to exist is proved by a reductio: the grounds for that reductio are the conclusion of Proslogion II, that God exists, and Anselm's epistemological principle. Our inability to think that God does not exist, if it is truly God we have in mind, is a peculiar property of God, because it depends on his inability not to exist; our inability is evidence of God's inability insofar as it is an attribute of God which is evident to us, and which can be evident to us only if God is indeed unable not to exist. However problematic this may be, and Anselm does fail to give detailed grounds for his position in the Proslogion, Reply, Monologion, or Cur Deus Homo,[21] what emerges

19. This makes it the more odd that Henry should think that the sense of 'greater than' in Ch.III is 'quite diverse from that which figures in the Chapter 2 proof'(The Logic of St.Anselm,op.cit.,p.146).
20. Hick and McGill,p.26,fn.14.
21. But see fn.17.

clearly is that the movement of Anselm's thought in Proslogion III is not, as Hartshorne and Malcolm would have it, from any logical necessity of God's existence to his existing, but the very opposite: 'It is evident, then, that it /that than which nothing greater can be thought/ neither does not exist, nor can not exist, or be thought of as not existing' (Reply V,p.181). That God does exist is the conclusion of Proslogion II; that he cannot be thought not to exist the conclusion, derived from his being unable not to exist, of Proslogion III.

I have argued that in claiming that God is unable not to exist, Anselm is not to be understood as claiming that 'God exists' is a necessarily true proposition. This might be an appropriate place, therefore, to ask what he does mean by the claim. In Ch.XIII of the Proslogion, Anselm writes:

> All that which is enclosed in any way by place or time is less than that which no law of place or time constrains. Since, then, nothing is greater than You, no place or time confines You but You exist everywhere and always. And because this can be said of You alone, You alone are unlimited and eternal... You alone are said to be eternal because, alone of all beings, You will not cease to exist just as You have not begun to exist.
>
> - p.133.

And he goes on to say:

> You were not, therefore, yesterday, nor will you be tomorrow, but yesterday and today and

> tomorrow You are. Indeed You exist neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but are absolutely outside all time. For yesterday and today and tomorrow are completely in time; however, You, though nothing can be without You, are nevertheless not in place or time but all things are in You.
>
> - Ch.XIX,pp.141-143.

This is to say that God is eternal and self-sufficient; and Anselm deduces this on the basis of his original formula, that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought. 'For "that than which a greater cannot be thought" cannot be thought save as being without a beginning'(Reply I, p.169); '...that which does not have an end in any way at all is beyond that which does come to an end in some way' (Pros.XX,p.143). That being which is 'completely sufficient unto (Himself), needing nothing, but rather He whom all things need in order that they may have being and well-being'(Pros.XXII,p.145) is the most real possible being. The form of the argument is this: if x is (or does) p, then x is not a; but x is a; therefore x cannot be (or do) p. This makes it clear that God cannot not exist because he is eternal and self-sufficient.

A good exposition of the relation between God's self-sufficiency and his timelessness is given by Anselm himself in the Monologion: although there he does not derive these truths about God from the definition of him as that than which nothing greater can be thought. Rather, the movement is the other way. God, since he is a self-sufficient being, most truly

exists: '...that which exists through itself exists in the greatest degree of all things' (Ch.III,p.42). Having concluded that there is indeed a being through whom everything there is has its being, Anselm continues: 'Since, then, all things that are exist through this one being, doubtless this one being exists through itself'(ibid.) and 'this Nature derives existence from itself, but other beings from it' (Ch.V,p.46). He explains this as follows:

> Since it is evident, then, that this Nature is whatever it is, through itself, and all other beings are what they are, through it, how does it exist through itself? For, what is said to exist through anything apparently exists through an efficient agent, or through matter, or through some external aid, as through some instrument. But, whatever exists in any of these three ways exists through another than itself, and it is of later existence, and, in some sort, less than that through which it obtains existence.
>
> But, in no wise does the supreme Nature exist through another, nor is it later or less than itself or anything else. Therefore, the supreme Nature could be created neither by itself, nor by another; nor could itself or any other be the matter whence it should be created; nor did it assist itself in any way; nor did anything assist it to be what it was not before.
>
> - Ch.VI,pp.46-7.

From this, it follows that God is eternal:

> But it is certain, according to truths already made plain, that in no wise does it derive existence from another, or from nothing /since nothing can derive existence from nothing/;...Moreover, it cannot have inception from or through itself, although it exists from and through itself. For

> it so exists from and through itself, that by no means is there one essence which exists from and through itself, and another through which, and from which, it exists. But, whatever begins to exist from or through something, is by no means identical with that from or through which it begins to exist. Therefore, the supreme Nature does not begin through or from itself.
>
> Seeing, then, that it has a beginning neither through nor from itself, and neither through nor from nothing, it assuredly has no beginning at all. But neither will it have an end. For, if it is to have an end, it is not supremely immortal and supremely incorruptible. But we have proved that it is supremely immortal and supremely incorruptible. Therefore, it will not have an end.
>
> Furthermore, if it is to have an end, it will perish either willingly or against its will. But certainly that is not a simple, unmixed good, at whose will the supreme good perishes. But this being is itself the true and simple, unmixed good. Therefore, that very being, which is certainly the supreme good, will not die of its own will. If, however, it is to perish against its will, it is not supremely powerful, or all-powerful. But cogent reasoning has asserted it to be powerful and all-powerful. Therefore, it will not die against its will. Hence, if neither with nor against its will the supreme Nature is to have an end, in no way will it have an end.
>
> - Ch.XVIII,pp.68-9.

An eternal being, then, cannot derive its existence from anything, since if it did, it would either have begun to exist, and thus it would not be eternal, or it would be self-caused, which Anselm regards as incoherent, since if a causes b, a and b cannot be identical. Nor can it be dependent for its continuing existence on anything

other than itself, since it would then be possible that it should cease to exist, thereby not being eternal. Nor, if it is self-sufficient, can its existence come to an end, since, if its existence came to an end of its own volition, it would not be what it is - eternal - and if its existence were brought to an end by something other than itself, it would not be self-sufficient.

I shall analyse this in detail in Ch.6, particularly the modal status of God's inability not to exist, and thus the question of the modal status of the existence of an eternal and self-sufficient being. It is clear, however, that these questions do not arise in Anselm's own work; and therefore that, contrary to Hartshorne and Malcolm, Ch.III of the Proslogion is not the repository of Anselm's argument for the existence of God. Before I return to Ch.II, however, it will be as well to examine Hartshorne's own version of the argument: for if it should be a successful argument, then its not being a correct interpretation of Anselm would be a comparatively insignificant matter.

Hartshorne's most thorough attempt to present the ontological argument in modal terms is the formal argument he gives in The Logic of Perfection.[22] I quote in full:

22. op.cit.; see fn.6.

"q" for "(∃x)Px" There is a perfect being, or perfection exists

"N" for "it is necessary (logically true) that"

"∼" for "it is not true that"

"v" for "or"

"p→ q" for "p strictly implies q" or "N∼(p &∼q)"

1.	q → Nq	"Anselm's Principle": perfection could not exist contingently /hence, the assertion that it exists could not be contingently but only necessarily true[23]/
2.	Nq v ∼Nq	Excluded Middle
3.	∼Nq → N∼Nq	Form of Becker's Postulate: modal status is always necessary
4.	Nq v N∼Nq	Inference from (2,3)
5.	N∼Nq → N∼q	Inference from (1): the necessary falsity of the consequent implies that of the antecedent (Modal form of modus tollens)
6.	Nq v N∼q	Inference from (4,5)
7.	∼N∼q	Intuitive postulate (or conclusion from other theistic arguments): perfection is not impossible
8.	Nq	Inference from (6,7)
9.	Nq → q	Modal axiom
10.	q	Inference from (8,9)

For the purpose of the following discussion, I shall allow Hartshorne the notion of perfection, since it does not affect my criticism of his argument: but Anselm is of course concerned with the notion of supreme reality.

An obvious objection to the argument is that if, as some logicians hold, 'every proposition entails

23. Added at Hartshorne's request, as cited in Hick and McGill, p.335,fn.2.

every necessary statement',[24] (1) - (7) are strictly superfluous. (8) could be derived from any proposition: and the argument would then immediately focus on the coherence or otherwise of the concept of a necessary perfect being, i.e., on (7). However, since the paradox, if such it is, does not affect Hartshorne's argument especially, but poses problems for modal logic in general, I shall not pursue the point.

The question of the relation between God's necessary existence and the necessary status of the proposition 'God exists' is complex. Is Hartshorne's coda to (1) admissable? If not, then the modal argument collapses right away, since the logical necessity of 'God exists' would not tell us that God actually existed. The modal status of the proposition asserting God's existence would carry no implications about the necessity or otherwise (in some non-propositional sense) of God's existence. By describing God's existence as 'necessary', it is implied that God 'is dependent upon nothing whatever';[25] that 'through itself and from itself, it is whatever it is';[26] that God is 'indispensable'.[27] By describing 'God exists' as a necessary proposition,

24. Alvin Plantinga, God and Other Minds (Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1967), p.55. Hartshorne in fact acknowledges that 'the divine existence is entailed by any fact or truth whatever, being as a priori as "p v~p"' (Anselm's Discovery, op.cit., p.46).
25. Plantinga, 'A Valid Ontological Argument?', reprinted in ed. Plantinga, The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan, 1968), p.171.
26. Anselm, Monologion, VI,p.49.
27. Terence Penelhum, 'Divine Necessity', in ed. B. Mitchell, Philosophy of Religion (Oxford University Press, 1971), p.189.

or rather, as a logically, or necessarily true proposition - an important distinction, as we shall see - it is implied that to deny that God exists is to commit a logical mistake. It is a failure to understand one or both terms in the proposition; a failure to understand that '"God does not exist" is self-contradictory'.[28] The question we must ask is: could 'the real necessity of the divine existence... be correctly asserted in a proposition which could have been false'?[29] Writers such as Hick, Plantinga, Penelhum, and Kenny think it could be.[30] Hartshorne retorts: 'God is either conceived as the indispensable ground of all possibilities, whether "factual" or "logical", or he is not so conceived. If he is not, then he is also not conceived as without conceivable superior...propositional necessity mirrors objective necessity'.[31] The first part of this response raises the question of the sense of 'without conceivable superior'; and the second part the question of the relation between logical and non-logical necessity. Hartshorne seems to be suggesting something very like Prior's view that logical necessity is dependent upon

28. Plantinga, 'A Valid Ontological Argument?', op.cit., p.163.
29. Hartshorne, 'Rationale of the Ontological Proof', Theology Today, 20 (1963), p.281.
30. 'A Critique of the Second Argument', in Hick and McGill, pp.341-3; 'A Valid Ontological Argument?', op.cit.; 'Divine Necessity', op.cit.; 'God and Necessity' in ed. Williams and Montefiore, British Analytical Philosophy (London; RKP, 1966) respectively.
31. Hartshorne, 'Rationale of the Ontological Proof', op.cit., pp.281-2.

'pre-logical necessity'.[32]

As the first question applies to all forms of the ontological argument, but the second only to the modal version, let us first look at the latter. One way of posing it is to ask in what sense God may be unable not to exist (see fn.8). If his inability not to exist were not a logical, but a factual, inability, then not only would this be a serious limitation upon a supposedly unlimited being (he would be unable, insufficiently powerful, to exert influence over his own existence, unable, for instance, to terminate it) but it would also indicate a state of affairs which could have been different: if God is not logically unable not to exist, then something could, logically, happen to terminate his existence. And this seems, to say the least, very odd. On the other hand, if God's inability not to exist is not, so to speak, an impediment, then it would seem that he is logically unable not to exist; it is no limitation on God that he cannot contravene logic, Aquinas tells us. Now, men are logically unable to be feathered quadrupeds. Even if the human race were suddenly to be wiped out, it would remain the case that men are logically unable to be feathered quadrupeds. Applying this feature of the idea of logical inability to God's supposed logical inability not to exist, we find that, even if God did not exist, it would nevertheless be the case that God

32. Arthur Prior, 'Is Necessary Existence Possible?', Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, 15 (1955), p.546.

would be logically unable not to exist. And if that is so, then, as Shaffer insists,[33] $Nq \not\rightarrow q$ - which seems also odd, not to say paradoxical. What this may suggest, I suppose, is that 'The notion of God, like the notion of the class of all classes not members of themselves, has plainly unique logical properties...'.[34] But perhaps we need not be driven so far so quickly.

Whatever the relationship between God's factually necessary existence and his logically necessary existence, with which I shall be closely concerned in Ch.6, Hartshorne's argument is anyway faulty. The trouble with his insistence that, if God could not exist contingently, then the assertion that he exists would have to be necessarily true, is that he appears to be making two incompatible moves. For if he wants the logically necessary truth of 'God exists' as the basis for concluding that God does in fact exist (9), then it is viciously circuitous to justify the necessary, as opposed to the contingent, status of 'God exists' by an appeal to God's putatively actual existence. If a state of affairs, s, <u>follows from</u> a proposition's, p's, being <u>logically</u> and not contingently, true, then s cannot also be the <u>ground</u> of p's logical status being necessary rather than contingent. Hartshorne tries to have it both ways, by inferring from the logical status of q to its material truth (9), and basing the logical nature of

33. 'Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument', reprinted in Hick and McGill, pp.226-245.
34. J.N. Findlay, a comment on his 'Can God's Existence be Disproved?', in ed. Plantinga, op.cit., p.121.

the truth of q on its material truth (1).

This may become clearer by examining (1) more closely. '"There is a perfect being" implies "It is necessary that there is a perfect being"' may imply either that if there is a perfect being, then the proposition asserting that to be the case will be necessarily true, or that if there is not a perfect being, then the proposition asserting that to be the case will be necessarily false. But all this tells us is that God falls into the category of beings, the existence of the members of which is not contingent, but necessary. (He may, of course, be the sole member of that class.) It does not tell us whether it is necessarily <u>true</u> or necessarily <u>false</u> that God exists; merely that, if true, then necessarily true, and if false, then necessarily false.[35] 'If God exists, he necessarily exists' may be read in two ways. (1) It is a logical error to think of God's existence or non-existence as a contingent matter, since it is a matter of logical necessity: if God does exist, he necessarily exists; if he does not exist, he necessarily does not exist. 'Necessarily' here is taken as 'either necessarily true or necessarily false', but it does not say which. (2) If 'God exists' is a coherent proposition, then it is a necessarily true proposition. The coherence

35. Cf. David Pailin, 'An Introductory Survey of Charles Hartshorne's Work on the Ontological Argument', in ed. F.S. Schmitt, <u>Analecta Anselmiana</u> (Frankfurt; Minerva, 1968), p.202: 'Hartshorne confuses the "necessary existence" which describes the mode of existence appropriate to God with a "necessary existence" which refers to what a complete list of the actual entities of any possible world must include...'; see also p.211.

of the proposition is a necessary and sufficient condition of God's actually existing. However, (2) is a mistake. The necessary truth of propositions does not depend on states of affairs; their truth does, but not the necessary status of that truth. There is in Hartshorne's argument this subtle shift. In step (1), 'q' reads 'There is a perfect being', and 'Nq' reads 'It is necessary that there is a perfect being'. But the latter is ambiguous. It could read, and in (1) should read, '"There is a perfect being" is a necessary proposition'; or it could read, as it does in (2) and all subsequent steps, 'It is necessarily true that there is a perfect being'. It cannot be read thus in (1), because 'It is necessarily true that there is a perfect being' cannot be implied by 'There is a perfect being': 'q' in (1) would have to be '"There is a perfect being" is true'. Either Hartshorne assumes in (1) that there is in fact a perfect being, in which case he assumes the conclusion of his argument, or he shifts from reading 'Nq' in (1) as '"There is a perfect being" is a necessary proposition' to reading it in (2)ff. as 'It is necessarily true that there is a perfect being'. If Hartshorne is not assuming his conclusion in (1), which, I presume he would not wish to claim to be doing, then the disjunction in (2) should not be 'It is true that it is necessary that there is a perfect being, or it is not true that it is necessary that there is a perfect being': rather, it should be 'It is true that "There is a perfect

being" is a necessary proposition, or it is not true that "There is a perfect being" is a necessary proposition'. It would appear that Hartshorne's use of the symbol 'N' is misleading, for what it is used to symbolize is ambiguous. 'It is necessary that' is not the same as 'It is logically true that'; its equivalent is 'It is either logically true or it is logically false that'.

A similar confusion between modal status and truth-value runs through Hartshorne's use of Becker's Postulate. If we accept the postulate as valid, and it seems reasonable to do so,[36] then Hartshorne's using it is in order, although perhaps somewhat eccentric, since, as Pailin points out,[37] we might well be prepared to accept the disjunction in (6) anyway, and start the argument from there (given what Hartshorne calls 'Anselm's Principle'). Some comments on Hartshorne's use of the postulate, however, might prove fruitful, since, I suspect, it is his misunderstanding of the postulate which may be behind his refusal to accept that God necessarily exists if and only if he actually does exist.[38] He seems to resist taking (1) as 'If there is a perfect being, then that perfect being necessarily exists' by objecting that if God could necessarily exist, then he does necessarily exist (and he can - (7) - so he does). Since God, if he

36. W. and M. Kneale, The Development of Logic (Oxford University Press, 1962), p.551.
37. op.cit., p.210.
38. Hartshorne, 'What Did Anselm Discover?', in Hick and McGill, pp.326-7.

exists, is the ground of all possibility and meaning, Hartshorne insists, the conditional in 'If God exists, he necessarily exists' can be conditional only upon God. This appears reasonable; it would be odd to say, 'If triangles have three sides, they necessarily have three sides'. It rests, however, on a confusion of (i) If God's existence could be necessary, then it is necessarily true that it is necessary (Becker's Postulate - modal status is always necessary) with (ii) If it could be necessarily true that God exists, then it is necessarily true that it is necessarily true. The point is that God's existence could be necessary whether or not he actually existed: but 'God exists' could be necessarily true only if he does actually exist. (ii) is false. If it could be necessarily true that God exists, then 'God exists' must be either necessarily true or necessarily false. What is precluded is the possibility of the proposition's being contingently true or contingently false. If it is logically possible that God's existence is necessary, then 'God's existence is necessary' is necessarily true. But the truth of '"God exists" is necessarily true' depends, not on the logical possibility of its being necessary, but on what is actually the case. Hartshorne confuses the possibility of a proposition's having a particular modal status with the possibility of the truth of the proposition. Becker's Postulate states that, if it is possible that p is a necessary proposition,

then it is necessarily true that p is a necessary proposition. The possibility, and the necessary truth derived from it, refer to the modal status of p, not to its truth: p could be necessarily false. For instance, by Becker's Postulate, it is not contingently, but necessarily, true that 'Triangles have three sides' and 'Triangles have ten sides' are both necessary propositions. But Becker's Postulate does not tell us that the former is necessarily true, and the latter necessarily false. Or, to take a proposition whose modal status might be unclear: 'The Good is good'. If 'The Good is good' could be a necessary proposition, then '"The Good is good" is a necessary proposition' is necessarily true. But even if it is the case that '"The Good is good" is a necessary proposition' is necessarily true, that does not tell us anything about the (necessary) truth or falsity of 'The Good is good'. It might be necessarily true or necessarily false. What is excluded is contingent truth and contingent falsity, not necessary falsity. All that is <u>necessarily true</u> is that the proposition is either necessarily true or necessarily false.

A confusion of logical and epistemic questions lies also behind the ambiguity of (7). $\sim N \sim q$ may be taken either as $\sim(N \sim q)$ - a logical claim about the meaning of 'a perfect being exists' - or as $\sim N(\sim q)$ - an epistemic claim to the effect that a perfect being exists. If it is taken as a logical claim, then only the possibility of God's existence

is affirmed (the notion is coherent, that is): if it is taken as an epistemic claim, then, of course, it begs the question.[39] If perfection is not impossible, then of course perfection is possible. The possibility of a necessarily existing perfect being, however, does not show that such a being exists, but only that, if such a being exists, then it exists necessarily and not contingently. (Even this is the case only if we accept that logical necessity is, at least in this case, based upon factual necessity - if we do not, then Hartshorne's argument is about propositions about God, and only about propositions about God.) (7), then, does not bridge the gap between (6) and (8).

But even if it did, it remains what Hartshorne calls an 'intuitive postulate', and according to his own notes, a conclusive proof that perfection, in the sense required by the argument, is indeed a coherent notion, would probably be enough to establish God's existence anyway.[40] However that may be, the presence in the argument of an intuitive postulate to the effect that supreme perfection is not impossible seems to make all Hartshorne's manipulation of modal logic redundant, for it leaves him in no better a position than Anselm's, whose far simpler argument in Proslogion II raises the question of whether the idea of 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' makes sense; and that is

39. For an excellent discussion of this point, see Pailin, op.cit., pp.210-11.
40. Pailin, ibid., p.210, fn.95.

precisely the question raised by the first part of Hartshorne's response to objections to his modal argument (p.62). Not only is Hartshorne's argument not a correct interpretation of Anselm's thought, but it fails to stand as an argument in its own right. Could there be a better modal argument for the existence of God? I rather think not, for not only would it have to cope with the question of whether the idea of a being without conceivable superior is coherent, a difficulty shared by traditional forms of the ontological argument, but, even given the acceptability as an axiom in modal logic of Becker's postulate, it remains the case that it refers to the relation between the possibility of a proposition's having the modal status of necessity and the logical necessity of its having that status, not its being true or false.

4. PROSLOGION II

Having discussed Anselm's metaphysical background, and established that the nub of his argument is not to be located in Ch.III, I am now in a position to examine in detail the argument of Proslogion II. It may be set out as follows:

(1) '...We believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought'.

(2) 'Something than which nothing greater can be thought' is understood, and

(3) it therefore exists 'in the mind'.

(4) Assume that that than which a greater cannot be thought exists in the mind alone; then

(5) that than which a greater cannot be thought can be conceived to exist in reality.

(6) To exist in reality and in the mind is greater than to exist in the mind alone.

(7) Therefore (4,5,6) something can be conceived to be greater than that than which a greater cannot be thought;

(8) 'But this is obviously impossible.'

(9) 'Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the mind and in reality.'

Before considering whether or not the argument is valid, however, it will be necessary to make clear just how it is to be understood.

Anselm's formula ((1) above) takes the following forms in his text:

(a) something than which nothing greater can be thought
(aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit)

(b) that than which a greater cannot be thought
(id quo maius cogitari nequit/non potest/non possit)

(c) something than which a greater cannot be thought
(aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet/potest/possit)

(d) that than which nothing greater can be thought
(id quo maius cogitari non potest)

(a), (b), and (c) occur, in that order, in Ch.II: (b) and (c) in Ch.III: (d) in Ch.IV. In the Reply, (b) is by far the most common, but (c) also occurs occasionally. I do not think that anything crucial hangs on these variations as they occur in the text, since Anselm appears to use them interchangeably.[1] One of the variations, however, may help make clearer just what Anselm has in mind. For 'God is something than which...' ((a) and (c)) might appear to suggest a description of God: 'God is that than which...'((b) and (d)) a definition. But it is clear from (1) - (9) above that Anselm himself does not differentiate between 'something than...' and 'that than...'. Further, God is said to be that/something than which nothing greater can be thought only at the beginning of Ch.II, and in Chs.IV and V. Otherwise the formula is 'that/something than which a greater cannot be thought'. If God is that/something than which nothing greater can be

1. Cf. Jonathan Barnes, The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan,1972), p.5.

thought, it follows that he is that/something than which a greater cannot be thought, but not vice-versa. He could be the being than which a greater being cannot be thought without being that/something than which nothing greater can be thought. '...than which a...' carries with it a suggestion of God as a being which is absent from '...than which nothing...'. One might speculate as to whether or not Anselm might have sensed this, and therefore used '...than which nothing...' at the beginning of the argument in order to escape the charge of prejudging the nature of God, but then forgetfully slipped into '...than which a...'. But such speculation is highly fanciful. However that may be, since the formula employing 'nothing' suggests a reference to an ontologically supreme entity somewhat more strongly than that employing 'a' (nothing greater can be conceived, and not just a greater being cannot be conceived) I shall adopt the former variant throughout, except when quoting directly from Anselm.

As I have suggested that 'something than which nothing greater can be thought' may more aptly be taken as a description, and 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' as a definition, this will be an appropriate place to consider the nature of Anselm's formula. It is generally assumed to be a definition: Barth, however, takes it to be a 'revealed Name of God';[2] and La Croix objects to the general assumption

2. Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. Ian Robertson (London; SCM, 1960), pp.73-89.

because he wishes to maintain that Anselm's subject in Chs.II and III of the Proslogion is not God, but 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'.[3] What Barth means by 'a revealed Name of God', and what its relation might be to the notion of definition or description, I do not know; certainly he presents no argument that the formula is not a definition, and I can only think that his characterization of it is chosen simply to fit in with his general view of the argument as an expression of faith rather than as a serious attempt to convince the Fool. La Croix makes no suggestion as to what the formula is, if not a definition; and apart from the fact that its being a definition does not fit in with his exceedingly odd interpretation of the argument,[4] his objection is that, as a definition, the formula has no religious significance. But that is of course an absurd view when we remember the platonic context of Anselm's thought: it is precisely because the formula, being a definition, and thus acceptable to the Fool, can be shown to have the utmost religious significance that Anselm chooses it. There are, however, two other objections against taking the formula as a definition. First, and most important, is that if it is a definition, then its subject, 'God', cannot be a proper name - and Anselm is clearly using 'God' as a proper name in much

3. Richard R. La Croix, Proslogion II and III (Leiden; E.J.Brill 1972), pp.14-19.

4. See my review of Proslogion II and III, in Philosophical Studies (Eire), vol.XXIII.

of the Proslogion. This will be discussed at length in Ch.7. For the moment, let me simply note that, if the formula is a definition, as I argue below that it is, then what it defines cannot be either a proper name or its bearer. Secondly, the formula apparently tells us something about what can be thought, rather than about its purported definiendum. Anselm's definition would seem to be singularly indirect, to say the least. If we recall, however, that for Anselm our inability to think that something is or is not the case is due to a necessity or impossibility de re regarding the subject of our thought, then we see that his formula is, in his eyes at least, a logical consequence of God's manner of existing: God is that than which nothing more real can be thought, because God is that than which there can be nothing more real. That is why we may take 'God is the most real entity possible' as a synonym for Anselm's formula.[5]

5. This might appear to engender a contradiction in Ch.XV, where God is said to be 'also something greater than can be thought'. But this is nevertheless not to be read as 'also something greater than possible'. The point is that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought because he is that than which there can be nothing greater (= than which nothing greater is possible), but is nevertheless greater than can be conceived. Putting it crudely, 'possible' has a wider range of reference than 'can be conceived'. La Croix' objection to this synonym, that it can be maintained 'only if we are willing to allow that in Chapter XV Anselm intended either to assert that God is logically impossible or to put forward a meaningless statement...'(op.cit., p.51) is thus invalid. The same goes for Gareth Matthews' 'On Conceivability in Anselm and Malcolm', Philosophical Review, 70 (1961), pp.110-111.

If the formula were not a definition, then presumably it would be a description. Consideration of the relative merits of taking it as one or the other confirms that it is to be taken as a definition, and strongly suggests that it was Anselm's intention that it should be understood thus, although he nowhere explicitly says so. If God were being described as that than which nothing greater can be thought, the Fool might well ask what leads Anselm to suppose that the description actually fits him. The description will be true only if God actually exists: for, since all existents are greater than any non-existent, and given that there is something which exists, God may truly be described as the greatest possible entity only if he exists. If the formula is a definition, however, then all such criticism of Anselm, namely that he begs the question, is misplaced. For given that the definition is coherent - and that is something Anselm assumes, as we shall see later - then there is something which is the definiendum. And this is the basis on which Anselm carries the Fool with him. If the Fool understands the formula, and 'obviously if it is spoken of in a known language and he does not understand it, then either he has no intelligence at all, or a completely obtuse one' (Reply II, p.173), then he cannot without contradiction hold that it has no subject. (Again, Anselm's identification of God as this subject, his assumption that it is God, the being so named in the Christian tradition, who is what is being defined, will occupy

us in Ch.7.) The point is central to a proper understanding of the argument. It is because the formula is a definition that it is a means of seeking to convince the Fool. Were it a description, then its truly describing anything, let alone God, would be in question, even if the Fool understood it; but once the Fool admits to the coherence of a definition, then there can be no question of its not truly defining something. To put it another way: a description is contingently true of what it describes, whereas a definition is necessarily true of what it defines. What is more, a definition is the definition of one sort or class of thing only, whereas a description may describe all sorts of things: that it individuates in this way is what makes something a definition rather than just a description. And of course Anselm wants his formula to pick out one sort of thing only; but this it could not do, were it a description.

This is closely connected with Anselm's reason for couching his formula in terms of 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', rather than 'that which is greatest'. 'Greatest' could be only a description, contingently true of its referent; as a description, even if now true, it could have been, or could in future be, false. This is the gist of Anselm's reason, in Reply V, for pointing out to Gaunilo in no uncertain manner that 'nowhere in all that I have said will you find such an argument, /that

that which is greater than everything exists in the mind.../' (p.179):

> For it is not as evident that that which can be thought of as not existing is not that which is greater than everything, as that it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought. And, in the same way, neither is it indubitable that, if there is something which is 'greater than everything', it is identical with 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'; nor, if there were /such a being/, that no other like it might exist - as this is certain in respect of what is said to be 'that than which nothing greater can be thought'. For what if someone should say that something that is greater than everything actually exists, and yet that this same being can be thought of as not existing, and that something greater than it can be thought, even if this does not exist?
>
> - p.181.

'That than which a greater cannot be thought' cannot refer to something which can be thought not to exist, whereas 'that which is greater than everything' can do so. For, given that it is possible that there is something which cannot be thought not to exist, this will be greater, if it exists, than anything that can be thought not to exist - and it could be that the greatest thing there actually happens to be is something which can be thought not to be, in which case it would not be the greatest thing that can be conceived. The referent of 'that which is greater than everything' could be a dependent, temporal entity; but, given that an eternal, self-sufficient entity is conceivable, such an entity could not be the greatest possible

entity, since 'whatever can be thought of as not existing...if it does not exist, indeed even if it should exist, (it) would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought'(pp.179-181). 'That which is greater than everything' is a description *de re*: and as the Fool disagrees with Anselm about what is the case *de re*, no description can serve as something to which both may accede. (It is for the same reason that Anselm does not simply say that God is 'that than which there can be nothing greater'; this is for him a description *de re*, since 'potest esse', as I argued in Ch.3, makes a claim about what we should call a factual state of affairs, rather than about thought, i.e., about what we should call logical possibility. That nothing greater can be thought, since it is the case because there can be nothing greater, is evidence of the latter: and this of course is the basis on which Anselm seeks to convince the Fool.) That than which nothing greater can be thought and that which is greater than everything are in fact one and the same entity; but that this is so must wait on a proof that the greatest possible entity exists - in which case it will of course be the greatest entity there is. Only if there indeed exists something which cannot be thought not to exist is there a unique, independent, self-sufficient entity. If there is no such entity, then whatever it is which is the greatest there is might in fact be a number of things, depending on the metaphysical

scheme subscribed to: all the material objects there are, for example. One can always conceive of something more real than the most real thing there happens to be. But, by definition, nothing more real than God can be conceived. Therefore God cannot be the most real thing there happens to be, but rather the most real thing there can be. And this cannot be a description of God, since descriptions can have been, or come to be, false. Therefore God must be the most real thing possible, and 'the most real thing possible' must define, and not describe, him.

The most real entity possible cannot be a fiction, otherwise it would not be the most real entity possible. That it why Anselm fastens onto 'greatness' for his formula, and not onto some attribute of God, such as, for example, his sustaining the world. Such an attribute could be an attribute of a fiction: if the world is sustained, and there is therefore something which sustains it, then whatever that is must be non-fictional. But, of course, there is no reason why the Fool should accept that the world is sustained - or moved, created, designed, etc. Against all these, it may be said that they require the notion of God's existing for their explication and understanding. What makes the ontological argument different from all versions of the cosmological, however, is that it is precisely this problem which is avoided. Rather, something already believed to be the case is shown to imply that God exists - what is assumed is not some empirical or quasi-empirical belief about the world,

but a shared metaphysics. The significance of this, and the extent to which the success of the argument other than as a purely formal exercise depends on such initial agreement in metaphysics, will be discussed in Ch.5. The point here is that Anselm is arguing against the Fool on grounds of reason alone.

Nevertheless, Anselm's definition is incomplete in two ways. It incompletely specifies what God is; and it cannot be fully understood, either by the Fool, or by the believer. We must be careful to distinguish between the implications of this for an assessment of the validity or otherwise of Anselm's argument, and its implications for the truth of his conclusion. The latter will be discussed in Chs. 7 and 8; here I shall deal only with the former.

In Ch.XV of the Proslogion, Anselm writes that

> You are also something greater than can be thought. For since it is possible to think that there is such a one, then, if You are not this same being, something greater than You could be thought - which cannot be.
>
> - p.137.

God is more real than we can conceive: the definition given of him, therefore, that he is the most real entity possible, cannot tell us exactly what he is like. Rather, Anselm's formula gives us the conditions which it is necessary for x to meet if x is God, but not the sufficient conditions. It

is a partial definition, in the same way that 'a spherical object' is a partial definition of a football. If x is a football, then x must be spherical; but that x is spherical will not ensure that x is a football. From partial definitions, logical consequences may be deduced about the definiendum. Indeed, it is therein that their meaning lies, or, as we may prefer, that is their use: '..."that than which a greater cannot be thought" is understood and is in the mind to the extent that we understand these things /that it exists as a whole, etc./ about it' (Reply I, p.173). Whether or not sufficient can be deduced from Anselm's partial definition to enable us to know what we are talking about when we talk about God, is of course the crucial question about Anselm's conclusion. Nor can even this admittedly partial definition be fully understood by the Fool, who can merely 'form an idea from other things of "that than which a greater cannot be thought"' (Reply VIII, p.187),[6] and understands it 'in some way, /whereas/ he would understand the former /God/ in no way at all' (Reply VII, p.185). In fact, Anselm is committed to the view that neither the Fool nor the believer can fully understand the formula - although he nowhere states this - because of what he says in Ch.XV. If God is more real than can be conceived, and if a partial definition of God

6. This shows as against La Croix, incidentally, just what the religious significance of the formula is.

is that he is that entity which is the most real possible, then, to the extent that God's reality, i.e., God, cannot be conceived, the partial definition of him likewise cannot be conceived, i.e., its meaning cannot be fully understood.

The question of the intelligibility of Anselm's formula must of course be central in any critique of the argument. Gaunilo's point is directed against the entire metaphysical framework within which the argument takes place (whether or not he himself would see it in this light):

> ...I can so little think of or entertain in my mind this being (that which is greater than all those others that are able to be thought of, and which is said to be none other than God Himself) in terms of an object known to me either by species or genus, as I can think of God Himself, whom indeed for this very reason I can even think does not exist. For neither do I know the reality itself, nor can I form an idea from some other things like it since, as you say yourself, it is such that nothing could be like it.
>
> - Reply on Behalf of the Fool,4, p.161.

It is remarkable that this passage has been ignored - entirely ignored as far as I know - in discussions of Anselm's argument, for it is very much to the point, and, as we shall see below, foreshadows Aquinas's better known objections. If whatever it is which is such that nothing greater can be thought is quite different from anything else, then how can I know what it is like? The point is of course one which

has often been made against Plato's Forms. Further, and this is where the similarity to Aquinas is noticeable, if God is defined as that than which nothing greater can be thought, then, given the unknowability of the definition, God himself cannot be known. Anselm's reply to this is very interesting:

> For since everything that is less good is similar in so far as it is good to that which is more good, it is evident to every rational mind that, mounting from the less good to the more good we can from those things than which something greater can be thought conjecture a great deal about that than which a greater cannot be thought. Who, for example, cannot think of this (even if he does not believe that what he thinks of actually exists) namely, that if something that has a beginning and end is good, that which, although it has had a beginning, does not, however, have an end, is much better? And just as this latter is better than the former, so also that which has neither beginning nor end is better again than this, even if it passes always from the past through the present to the future. Again, whether something of this kind actually exists or not, that which does not lack anything at all, nor is forced to change or move, is very much better still. Cannot this be thought? Or can we think of something greater than this? Or is not this precisely to form an idea of that than which a greater cannot be thought from those things than which a greater can be thought? There is, then, a way by which one can form an idea of 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'.
>
> - Reply VIII, p.187.

It is not clear whether he intends to suggest that one may obtain an idea of that than which nothing greater

can be thought by ascending, intellectually, from good to better entities; or by ascending from inferior to greater entities in the same sort of way in which one might ascend from good to better entities. The former seems perhaps the more likely, in which case his deduction of value from ontological status in Chs.V ff. of the Proslogion may have misled him into failing to distinguish between the two. Perhaps it is his eagerness to show that he is not presupposing the existence of that than which nothing greater can be thought that induces him to conflate the two: for 'that which does not lack anything at all, nor is forced to change or move' may be better than something which does lack certain things, etc. whether or not it (the former) actually exists, but it certainly cannot be greater, more real, unless it does exist.[7] Nevertheless, it is clear that Anselm is suggesting that a conception of that than which nothing greater can be thought may be built up by means of a via negativa. The entity in question cannot be temporal, nor dependent for its existence on anything else: thus it must be eternal and self-sufficient. Gaunilo is wrong in thinking that no idea whatsoever can be formed of that than which nothing greater can be thought. Nevertheless, as we shall see in later chapters, whether such an idea as can be formed is sufficiently determinate for Anselm's purpose is a question to which he gives no satisfactory answer.

7. Unless 'something of this kind' refers forward, and not back - in which case see p.98ff.

Aquinas's basic objection to Anselm's argument also concerns the definition he employs, and its relation to the possibility of knowledge of God. The distinction between something's being self-evident in itself, and its being self-evident to us, which is what is often identified as Aquinas's rebuttal of Anselm, is, as Matthew Cosgrove argues in his definitive paper, 'Thomas Aquinas on Anselm's Argument',[8] an objection to Anselm's conclusion that the Fool cannot deny God's existence without contradiction, rather than an effective reply to Anselm's argument; although it is the basis of what Cosgrove and Gareth Matthews[9] both take to be a conclusive objection. Let me make this clear. 'But, since we do not know concerning God what he is,' Aquinas writes, '/the proposition, "God exists"/ is not self-evident to us; but needs to be demonstrated through those things which are better known to us and less known according to nature, namely through /his/ effects.'[10] But, whether or not Aquinas's distinction between two alleged modes of self-evidence is satisfactory, what he writes here is no argument against Anselm, just as Gaunilo's assertion that God is unknowable is no argument: for it is precisely by

8. Review of Metaphysics, 27 (1974), pp.513-530. Cosgrove offers a comprehensive discussion of all Aquinas's objections, showing that they are either to be subsumed under that in Summa Contra Gentiles, I,11, or fail to strike against Anselm's argument.
9. 'Aquinas On Saying That God Doesn't Exist', The Monist, 47 (1963), pp.472-477; cited by Cosgrove as the basis of his own interpretation.
10. Summa Theologica, Ia,q.2,a.1,ad.1.

defining God as he does that Anselm seeks to show what is known - to the Fool as well as to the believer - about God. The definition of God, which Aquinas himself appears to accept in the Summa Theologica,[11] does tell us something about what he is. Aquinas's objection is no advance on Gaunilo's, although, of course, it raises the same ultimate question as to the nature of what the definition tells us. In fact, Anselm's definition tells us more than Aquinas's claim that the essence of God is to be; and of course Aquinas's concession that 'we do not know concerning God what he is' raises, even more acutely than Anselm's view, the question of our being able to say anything intelligible about God at all (see Chs.7 and 8).

The argument which Cosgrove, rightly I believe, picks out as the most important of those Aquinas advances against Anselm is that in Summa Contra Gentiles, I,11: 'For it is not a difficulty that given anything either in reality or in the intellect something greater can be thought, save only for him who concedes that there exists something in reality than which a greater cannot be thought.'[12]

11. Ia,q.2,a.1,ad.2.

12. cf. In Primum Librum Sententiarum, dist.3,q.1, a.2, 4 (cited by Cosgrove, op.cit., p.523): '...the reasoning of Anselm is to be understood thus. After we understand God, it is not possible that it be understood that God exists, and that he could be thought not to exist; but from this it does not follow that someone could not deny or think that God does not exist; for he can think that nothing of this sort exists than which a greater cannot be thought; and therefore his reasoning proceeds from this supposition, that it should be supposed that something does exist than which a greater cannot be thought.' Cosgrove

(I shall not puzzle about the sense of the qualification: if 'something greater can be thought', then surely nobody can make such a concession.) Again, I think Cosgrove is right in rejecting Hartshorne's view of this passage as an espousal of positivism,[13] since 'It is not the impossibility of God existing, but the impossibility of conceiving something so great that a greater cannot be conceived, which Thomas thinks a plausible position.'[14] This is of course consistent with his insistence that we do not know what God is, only that he is: we cannot know of God that he is that than which nothing greater can be thought, because that definition is incoherent. Now this is clearly a far

> thinks that this is the same objection, since, if Aquinas were making a factual, and not a logical, claim about that than which a greater cannot be thought, he would be begging the question against Anselm, as in his reply in the Summa Theologica (Ia, q.2, a.1.ad.2), where Anselm's argument is simply ignored. In fact, it seems to me that this is a quite different objection, directed against the argument of Proslogion III, which Aquinas does not misinterpret as a modal argument for the existence of God. Having correctly summarized Anselm's argument ('God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. But that which cannot be thought not to exist is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Therefore God cannot be thought not to exist, since he is that than which nothing greater can be thought.' (dist.3,q.1, a.2,4)) he objects to Anselm's claim that God cannot be thought not to exist, since it is based on the conclusion of Proslogion II, a conclusion which Aquinas does not accept. Anselm's reasoning does indeed proceed from the supposition that 'something exists than which a greater cannot be thought'; but it is a supposition justified by the argument of Ch.II. Aquinas's objection here assumes the success of his argument against the latter.

13. Charles Hartshorne, Anselm's Discovery (La Salle, Ill.; Open Court Publishing Company, 1965), p.161.

14. Cosgrove, op.cit., p.527.

more serious objection to the argument than that in the Summa Theologica. But would Anselm wish to disagree with Aquinas about the impossibility of conceiving God's greatness? The passage from Proslogion XV clearly shows that he would not: 'You are also something greater than can be thought'. (Since Anselm holds that eternity and self-sufficiency, plus all the attributes he infers from these, are merely necessary, and not necessary and sufficient conditions of an entity's being that than which nothing greater can be thought, let us grant that he would agree with Aquinas that 'given anything...a greater can always be thought'. This view relies on the position that the nature of maximal reality cannot be fully determined by thought, at least not by our thought, a position which Anselm and Aquinas share precisely because they hold that that entity which they take to be the most real entity there is, namely God, is not fully knowable (in Anselm's case) or not knowable at all (in Aquinas's case). I shall not dispute that view here.) The contradiction that there might appear to be between Ch.XV and Ch.II evaporates as soon as we remember that 'You are that than which nothing greater can be thought' is a partial definition, one which is not fully determinative of its subject. Ch.XV describes what is defined in Ch.II; the description is deducable from the definition.

The point is that if we take 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' as Aquinas

appears to have done, and as Matthews and Cosgrove do, namely as referring to a definite, specifiable entity, then Aquinas's criticism is in order. It is indeed impossible to conceive something 'so great that a greater cannot be conceived'.[15] But this is crucially ambiguous. Does it mean that it is impossible to conceive a specific entity which is unsurpassably great, or that it is impossible to conceive that there is an unsurpassably great entity? In the context of Aquinas, it clearly means the former: '<u>given</u> /my underlining/ anything either in reality or in the intellect, something greater can be thought...'.[16] Matthews' comment on this passage[17] relies on taking the phrase like this, and he is right in thinking that, however great any entity one cares to name may be, it is always in principle possible to conceive a greater (given that the nature of maximal reality cannot be fully determined). Anselm, however, did not mean by 'God is that than which nothing greater can be thought' that God is a definite, specifiable entity which has as its defining attribute the impossibility of our conceiving a greater entity: rather, God is <u>whatever</u> is such that nothing greater can be conceived. Anselm does not need to hold that we are able to conceive what that specific entity is like, which is so great that

15. ibid.
16. <u>Summa Contra Gentiles</u>, op.cit.
17. 'Aquinas On Saying That God Doesn't Exist', op.cit., p.475.

nothing greater can be thought, nor even that we can conceive exactly what God's greatness itself is like; he maintains only that the degree of God's greatness is the highest possible degree. Matthews himself notices precisely this point: 'Prima facie, it is a special virtue of Anselm's ontological argument, as contrasted with, say, Descartes's that it would seem to hold even though we do not have a "clear and distinct idea" of God. All we need to know is that God is something a greater than which cannot be conceived.'[18] If this is the case, however, then his analysis, which Cosgrove takes over, while correctly interpreting Aquinas, fails to strike against Anselm. Matthews writes:

> Instead he /the athiest/ can say this:
>
> 2) For any given thing, a greater thing can always be conceived.
>
> (2) is the logical equivalent of this:
>
> 3) There is nothing than which a greater cannot be conceived.
>
> (2) and (3) are the contradictory of this:
>
> 4')There is something than which a greater cannot be conceived.[19]

But (2) is the logical equivalent of (3) only if (3) is taken to mean that there is no entity which we can specify and of which we can truly say that no greater entity than this is conceivable. However, (3) may be taken as meaning that we cannot conceive of there being anything such that nothing greater than it is possible: and only if it is thus taken does it contradict the sense in which Anselm would

18. ibid., p.473.
19. ibid., p.475.

assert (4'). But in that case it is not the logical equivalent of (2); and nor, of course, would Anselm admit that it is true. And in this, Aquinas could not disagree with him, since he believes that we are able to know that God exists. The point is this: we can clearly conceive that there is such a thing as God, without being able to specify exactly what that thing is like. This is the crucial distinction which Aquinas appears to fail to apply when criticising Anselm's argument. It is true to say of God, Anselm argues, that it is inconceivable that there should be anything greater than he is, and, a fortiori, that nothing greater than he is can be conceived; but that is not to say that God, or his greatness (or, indeed, any other of his attributes) is itself conceivable. If we are unable to conceive anything greater than God, even though God is greater than we can conceive, and there is no contradiction in this, then of course Aquinas's objection to Anselm's definition has no force. Anselm himself in fact provides the counter-argument in a rather different form, in the course of his reply to Gaunilo's original objection:

> But even if it were true that /the object/ that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thought of nor understood, it would not, however, be false that /the formula/ 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' could be thought of and understood. For just as nothing prevents one from saying 'ineffable' although one cannot specify what is said to be ineffable; and just as one can think of the inconceivable - although one cannot think of

> what 'inconceivable' applies to - so also, when 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' is spoken of, there is no doubt at all that what is heard can be thought of and understood even if the thing itself cannot be thought of and understood.
>
> - Reply IX, pp.187-9.

Having dealt with steps (1) and (5) of the argument, let us now turn to (2), (3), and (6). In Reply II, Anselm writes:

> Observe, then, that from the fact that it is understood, it does follow that it is in the mind. For, just as what is thought is thought by means of a thought, and what is thought by a thought is thus, as thought, in thought, so also, what is understood is understood by the mind, and what is understood by the mind is thus, as understood, in the mind. What could be more obvious than this?
>
> - pp.173-4.

If I think of Canterbury Cathedral, it is in my thought; if I understand the phrase, 'the tallest man in Canterbury', then it is in my mind. Although we should not care to put it like this, it is clear that for Anselm 'to be understood' is synonymous with 'to be in the mind'. But this is ambiguous. What is understood is the definite description, 'the tallest man in Canterbury'; but what is in the mind is the tallest man in Canterbury. Otherwise, (6) would compare entities with propositions. Whereas what is thought of may perhaps be said to be in thought ('Whom did you have in mind?') and this is simply another way of saying that it is thought of,

what is understood is not the same as what one has in mind or what might be said to be in the mind. (Unless we are talking of understanding persons: 'I just can't understand old Fred.' Maybe I have old Fred in mind when I say this.) Expressions are understood; and if anything is in the mind in any sense at all, it is their referents. To talk in this context of 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' as being in the mind, therefore, is misleading, since it is not the same as saying that it is understood. What Anselm means, of course, is that if the phrase 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' is understood, then it is obviously intelligible, or conceivable; it makes sense. And if it makes sense, then it has a possible referent. Its referent may exist. While it is true that 'x is in the mind' differs from 'x is logically possible' in that it suggests a reference to a person, whereas the latter phrase does not, it is, I think, misconceived as an objection to Charlesworth's interpretation of 'est in intellectu'.[20] There are, no doubt, some logically possible entities which have not (as yet) been conceived by anyone; but, precisely because logically possible, they are conceivable (in theory by anyone). If x has been conceived by someone, then, trivially, x can be conceived, or is conceivable. And to say that x is conceivable is to say that x is logically possible. 'X is logically possible' cannot

20. Barnes, op.cit., p.10.

be taken as 'x is in such-and-such's mind': but 'x is in such-and-such's mind', while it may not mean 'x is logically possible', certainly implies that it is. Even if (3) does not mean 'it /the formula/ is logically possible', it implies exactly that. We may therefore make the following amendments to the argument (p.72):

(3.1) it is therefore logically possible.

(4.1) Assume that that than which nothing greater can be thought does not exist in reality, but is merely logically possible.

(6.1) To exist in reality is greater than to be merely logically possible.

(9.1) Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists in reality, and is not merely logically possible.

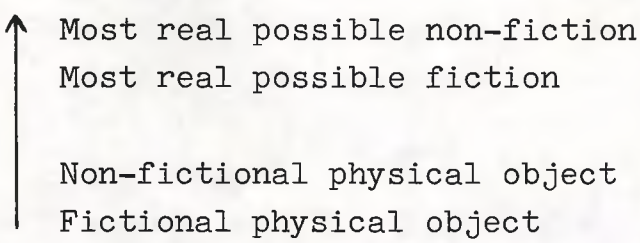
In order to avoid being sidetracked by what may at first sight appear to be considerable difficulties in the notion of comparing existent with possible entities, let us remind ourselves of just how Anselm makes the comparison. To exist in reality, he says, is <u>greater</u>, ontologically greater, than to be merely logically possible. The paradox of an actual evil being 'better' than a possible one, is thus ruled out at the start. Nor need we worry about the difficulties involved in trying to compare £1000 with a possible £1000, which 'is not some queer ghost-like kind of (actual, real) money...not a sum

of money, albeit of a peculiar kind',[21] by saying that £1000 has all the properties of a possible £1000, plus existence. This is not because 'exists' is a unique kind of predicate, or because God's uniqueness allows predicates attaching to him to escape the usual logical demands made of them - although the former is, I believe, the case; and the latter I shall discuss in Ch.8. Rather it is because, as Charlesworth suggests, 'A conceptual £100 is greater than a conceptual £50 /in a quantitative, non-Anselmian sense of 'greater'/ and a real £100 is greater than a real £50; but in Anselm's sense a real £50 is "greater" than a conceptual £100.'[22] To put it another way, Anselm compares actual existence with logical possibility. The ontological scale which is used to make such comparisons compares classes, and not individuals. Anything which belongs to the class of those things which exist is greater than anything which belongs to the class of those things which are merely logically possible. It is important to see that this is Anselm's procedure and that he is not simply comparing a fictional with a non-fictional God: that is, (6) above refers not to single entities, but to two sorts of things, fictions and non-fictions.

Anselm's principle as stated in Proslogion II appears to have misled commentators: 'For if it exists solely in the mind even, it can be thought to exist in reality also, which is greater.' This may

21. Charlesworth, p.64.
22. ibid., p.68.

give the impression, especially if it is assumed that Anselm is talking in terms of perfection, and arguing that existence is an attribute making for perfection, that a fictional God is being compared with a non-fictional God. The passage from Reply VIII quoted earlier (p.85) may suggest such a view even more strongly: 'Again, whether something of this kind actually exists or not, that which does not lack anything at all, nor is forced to change or move, is very much better /= greater?/ still.' (p.187)[23] Unless Anselm is simply making a mistake here, and forgetting that actually existing is a necessary condition of something's being greater than any given existent, it would appear that Anselm is thinking of existence as an attribute, with the result that the scale of reality with which he is working is not that described in Ch.2, but rather something like this.



Indeed, just such a view is attributed to Anselm by Paul Miller in his illuminating paper, 'The Ontological Argument for God', where he supposes Anselm to be arguing that 'That which lacks nothing which would make it the greatest conceivable being must necessarily exist, since existence is a thinkable perfection adding to the greatness of that to which it is predicated.'[24]

23. See fn.7.
24. The Personalist, 42 (1961), p.346.

But such a scale of reality is clearly absurd: why should, for instance, a fictional star be more real than a non-fictional earthworm (given, for the sake of argument, that stars, being everlasting, as Anselm takes them to be, are higher up the scale than earthworms)? For as we have seen, it is the degree of ontological independence of an entity which determines its relative position on the platonic scale; and all fictions are less ontologically independent than any non-fiction. Admittedly neither Plato nor Anselm put the matter in these terms. Nevertheless, if this were not an accurate interpretation of the scale, then I do not see how Anselm's principle could be used to show that God exists in reality (is non-fictional). For if the principle were limited in application to God, and thus applied to nothing else at all, what grounds would there be for supposing it to hold? And if it were limited in application to fictional and non-fictional examples of individual entities, as suggested in the scale above, what grounds would there be for supposing a non-fictional x to be greater than a fictional x, even though both were less great than a fictional y? If its being a fiction made a fictional tree less real than a non-fictional tree, then how could a fictional angel be more real than a non-fictional tree? 'Real' would be used in two quite different ways, with the result that the whole notion of a scale would collapse, and we would be left able to make comparisons in respect of reality only of

fictional with non-fictional individuals. This would go against all the evidence of Anselm's writings as discussed in Ch.2. I think it a not unreasonable supposition, therefore, that the passage in Reply VIII is no more than a mistake on Anselm's part.

I suspect it is his neglecting that Anselm's principle asserts that any non-fiction is more real than any fiction which lies also behind D.P. Henry's curious counter-argument against the conclusion of Proslogion II in Medieval Logic and Metaphysics.[25] Since it might appear initially plausible, and would certainly dispose of Anselm's argument without further ado were that plausibility to be confirmed, it may be as well to discuss it in some detail. Henry writes:

> Hence on his own principles the vital section of the argument which we have been considering could equally well (or even more feasibly) read:
>
> 3.20 It is certain that that-than-which-a-more-great-cannot-be-thought must only be in the understanding.
>
> 3.21 For if it is at least in the understanding, it cannot be thought also to exist in fact, since this would be more great.
>
> 3.22 On this account if that-than-which-a-more-great-cannot-be-thought exists in fact, then
>
> 3.221 that very thing than which a more great is not able to be thought is that than which a more great is able to be thought.
>
> 3.3 But obviously this (3.221) cannot be.
>
> 3.4 Hence without any doubt something-than-which-a-more-great-is-not-able-to-be-thought cannot exist both in the understanding and in fact.[26]

25. London; Hutchinson, 1972, pp.116-7.
26. ibid., p.117.

One way of seeing what is wrong with this is to recall that Anselm's principle is that anything in reality is greater than anything in the understanding alone. Thus, nothing which is in the understanding alone can be that than which nothing greater can be thought, since, given that there is something in reality, the latter is (or are all) greater than anything in the understanding alone. (3.221) is therefore not the contradiction produced. Rather, this contradiction arises:

3.221' that very thing than which a more great is not able to be thought is that than which everything in reality is greater.

And the conclusion must therefore be modified as follows:

3.4' Hence without any doubt something which does not exist in reality cannot be that-than-which-a-more-great-is-not-able-to-be-thought.

What this shows, of course, is that the alternative to Anselm's claim that that than which nothing greater can be thought is a non-fiction (exists in reality and in the understanding) is that it is nonsense, existing therefore neither in reality, nor in the understanding, since it cannot be thought at all. But this I shall examine later.

The point to be made here is that if God were merely a logical possibility then anything existent - a statue of Baal, the person next door, this sheet of paper - would be greater than he; but, since he is that

than which nothing greater can be thought, that cannot be the case. God is not the god than which a greater god cannot be thought, but that thing than which nothing greater can be thought. He is ontologically superior to anything and everything else. The ontological class of which he is the sole member is superior to all other ontological classes, which are comprised by everything else there is. Now, if x is logically possible, but does not exist, or has never existed, then x is a figment of the imagination, a mythical entity, a fictional entity, or some other product of the human mind. If x is not a fiction, although logically possible, if, that is, it is a logically possible entity which has not yet been conceived by anyone - allowing that we can intelligibly talk of such an entity at all - then it either exists, or has existed but no longer exists. And if x is logically possible ('est in intellectu') and exists, ('est in re') or has existed, then it cannot of course be a fiction. This is the force of Anselm's comparison in (6): existents are greater than fictions. We can now make some further amendments to the argument:

(4.2) Assume that that than which nothing greater can be thought is an entity which does not exist, but is a fiction.

(6.2) Any entity which exists is greater than any entity which is a fiction.

(9.2) Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that that than which nothing greater can be thought is an existent entity, and not a fiction.

In order to become clearer about (6.2), and to see just how it shows that criticisms in terms of the dogma that existence is not a predicate are irrelevant, it will be helpful to examine in some detail elements of Plantinga's acute discussion of the ontological argument in God and Other Minds.[27] Having discussed the question of existence and predication, he concludes with the following restatement of the argument:

> Finally, Anselm's argument can easily be restated so that the notion of existence in the understanding plays no part in it, in which case it cannot be thought to involve predicating real existence of a being presupposed to exist in the understanding:
>
> (1) Suppose that the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater does not exist (assumption for reductio).
>
> (2) Any existent being is greater than any non-existent being.
>
> (3) The Taj Mahal exists.
>
> (4) Hence the Taj Mahal is greater than the being than which it is not possible that there be a greater (1,2,3).
>
> (4) is necessarily false; hence the assumption of (1), (2) and (3) is necessarily false. (2) is necessarily true. Therefore, the conjunction of (1) and (3) is necessarily false; and so 'The Taj Mahal exists' entails 'The being than which none greater can be conceived exists'. But the former proposition is obviously true; hence the latter is, too.[28]

The following chapter centres around (2), several possible interpretations of which Plantinga uses to generate unacceptable conclusions from arguments of

27. Ithaca; Cornell University Press, 1967.
28. ibid., pp.62-3.

the same form as his restatement of Anselm's. In attempting to explicate (2), he tries various formulations in terms of A and B sharing the same properties and having no other properties besides those shared, the sole difference between them being that A exists and B does not - and this makes A greater than B. Plantinga rejects all of these formulations,[29] as of course he must if he is to make sense of Anselm's principle. For if A exists and B does not, then whatever properties either may have or lack, A is greater than B; their properties have no bearing on their ontological greatness. Indeed, Plantinga arrives at a formulation of (2) which shows just that:

(2e) If A exists and B does not, then A is greater than B.[30]

The first unacceptable conclusion he generates is that 'obviously in this way we can go on to prove the existence of the greatest possible thing of any kind you please',[31] using as his example 'The greatest possible horse', which 'is to be read as "the horse than which it is not possible that there be a greater"'.[32] But, as was shown in the discussion of Gaunilo's 'perfect island', this is nonsense. No horse can be ontologically greater than any other horse. The second conclusion is that 'by using this form of argument we can show that God both does and does not exist'.[33]

29. ibid., pp.67-71.
30. ibid., p.72.
31. ibid., p.74.
32. ibid.
33. ibid.

But the premiss,'(1) The being greater than a does not exist'(where 'a' is 'a greatest actual being')[34] is nonsensical, unless it is taken to mean that there is no being greater than a, which is clearly not what Plantinga has in mind, for his argument runs:

(2e) If A exists and B does not, then A is greater than B.
(3) The Taj Mahal exists.
.
.
.
(6) The Taj Mahal is greater than the being greater than a - (2e), (3).[35]

(6) suggests that there is a being greater than a, some fictional being greater than the greatest actual being: but no fictional being can be greater than the greatest actual being, or greater than any actual being for that matter. The suggestion in (1), that there is a being greater than a, but that that being is not an existent, but only a fictional,being, is nonsensical. If (1) were taken to mean that there is no being greater than a, then it would of course be trivially true - if a is the greatest actual being, then there cannot be any being greater than it, since actuality (= reality) is the measure of greatness. The concept, 'the being greater than a' is self-contradictory. The same line of reasoning may be applied to Plantinga's next argument, in which he concludes, that, by (2e), 'if there are any Guatemalans at all, there is an infinite set of them'.[36] The argument relies on the

34. ibid.
35. ibid.
36. ibid., p.76.

following:

> ...Suppose there is at least one /Guatemalan/, and call him Hector. Now there is a Guatemalan greater than Hector. For suppose there is none: then the Guatemalan greater than Hector does not exist. But then by (2e) Hector is greater than the Guatemalan greater than Hector.[37]

The notion of a Guatemalan greater than Hector is, if Hector exists, nonsense; the idea to which such a supposition gives rise, that 'the Guatemalan greater than Hector does not exist', is fallacious in suggesting that there is such a Guatemalan, but that he is a non-existent Guatemalan. There simply is no Guatemalan greater than Hector, given that Hector is an existent Guatemalan. The supposition that there is none does not lead to the conclusion that there is a non-existent one.

Plantinga's misunderstanding of the concept of greatness is clearly revealed when he considers

> (6") The greatest possible being does not exist and the greatest possible being is (for that very reason) a lesser being than the Taj Mahal.[38]

37. ibid. Plantinga's argument continues: 'hence it is false that there is no Guatemalan greater than Hector. Our proof, however, depended upon no special facts about Hector; hence we can generalize our conclusion to the result that for any Guatemalan there is a greater. Given that the relation greater than is transitive, irreflexive, and asymmetrical, it follows that the set of Guatemalans is infinite. Hence if there are any Guatemalans at all, there is an infinite set of them.'

38. ibid., p.80.

He says that it 'does not at any rate appear to be necessarily false'.[39] But of course (6") makes no sense. If any existent being is greater than any non-existent being (Plantinga's (2e), my (6.2)), then the greatest possible being cannot be a non-existent being. And that is precisely Anselm's conclusion (9.2): Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that that than which nothing greater can be thought is an existent entity, and not a fiction.

Let us return to (6.2). In discussing Plantinga, I argued that the notion of a non-existent being, a fiction, which is greater than an existent being is nonsense. If that is the case, then (6.2) is a necessary proposition. If it is true that 'the merest earthworm really /is/ a good deal more impressive than the most exalted but merely fictitious being',[40] then it is contingently true. An earthworm need not be more impressive than any fictitious entity; we can, I think, at least imagine some fictitious being to be more impressive than an earthworm. How impressive a thing is depends on how much it impresses us; and Lady Macbeth, for instance, may be a good deal more impressive than any earthworm. But she cannot be greater: existence is a necessary condition of greatness. If we were to take (6.2) as a contingent statement, then what grounds would there be for supposing it to be true? If it is not logically impossible that any

39. ibid.
40. ibid., p.72.

existent entity should be greater than any fiction, then 'greater' must be understood in the same sort of way as 'more impressive' was understood above, that is, as a description over the correct application of which there can be disagreement, without there being disagreement about the facts of the matter. People might admit that an earthworm is a living organism and Lady Macbeth the product of Shakespeare's imagination, but yet disagree as to which is the more impressive. If I agree that Jones measures 6ft., and Brown 5ft.10ins., however, I would be irrational not to agree that Jones is taller than Brown; 6ft. is more than 5ft.10ins., and 'being taller' means 'measuring more'. To take (6.2) as a contingent statement, likening 'greater' to 'more impressive' rather than to 'taller', would demand an answer to the question, What does 'greater' mean? If the answer given were in terms of impressiveness, or any other non-ontological concept, then it would remain to be shown conclusively that existent entities were indeed greater than fictions. I do not see how that could be done. If the answer given were in terms of an ontological concept, on the other hand, then that would show that (6.2) was not a contingent proposition, but a necessary one, which is in fact what it is. (6.2) is necessarily true because, for Anselm, greatness entails existence in reality.

If it is necessarily true that any entity which exists is greater than any entity which is a mere fiction, then it follows that it is necessarily

true that that than which nothing greater can be thought is an existent entity, and not a fiction: if greatness entails existence in reality, then the greatest possible entity must exist in reality. In its platonic setting, then, Anselm's ontological argument is valid. Clearly, it is self-contradictory to maintain of one and the same entity that it is both the most real entity possible, and that it is not real, or does not exist. Anselm shows that those who, like the Fool, admit the notion of 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' are thereby committed to the supposition that it actually exists, since this is just what the definition of the entity entails. Those who hold that God does not exist, Anselm might have said - but does not say - cannot hold also that there is anything which is such that nothing greater can be thought. What is more, they must hold that there cannot be such an entity, that the notion is nonsense; since, if they thought that it just happened to be the case that there was no such entity, they would be misunderstanding the notion altogether. Whatever particular entity the Fool rejects as a candidate for the object of the definition, then, if the definition is coherent, some other entity must fit it, for if no entity fitted it, the definition would not define anything. There is no question of including 'the predicate actuality or existence, either openly stated or wrapped up for decency's sake in some other

predicate...',[41] in a conception 'hatched in your own sinciput',[42] which Schopenhauer, Kant, et al. have diagnosed as the fundamental sleight of hand involved in the ontological argument: rather, our attention must be directed to the coherence or otherwise of the metaphysical system on which the argument relies, and of which it is in fact a basic prop, in particular to the coherence or otherwise of Anselm's formula itself. This, of course, is what Leibniz saw very clearly when he said that 'The Scholastics, not excepting even their Doctor Angelicus, have misunderstood this argument, and have taken it as a paralogism... It is not a paralogism, but it is an imperfect demonstration, which assumes something that must still be proved in order to render it mathematically evident; that is, it is tacitly assumed that this idea of the all-great or all-perfect being is possible, and implies no contradiction.'[43]

The argument is formally valid. Nevertheless, all the crucial questions remain. How is 'existence' related to the 'reality' of the platonic system in which Anselm's argument operates? After all, a basic difficulty with the Theory of Forms is just this, that Plato fails to convince us that his supremely real

41. Schopenhauer, The Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason, trans. K. Hillebrand (London; George Bell & Sons, 1897, rev.ed.): given in ed. A. Plantinga, The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan, 1968), Ch.7, p.66.

42. ibid., p.67.

43. New Essays Concerning Human Understanding, trans. A.G. Langley (La Salle, Ill.; Open Court, 1949, 3rd.ed.): given in A. Plantinga, op.cit., p.55.

entities actually exist, that is, that they are not fictions. Surely 'real' is being used in one way in 'E is the most real entity possible', and in quite another way in 'E is real, or exists'. Let us therefore turn our attention to the concepts of reality and existence.

5. EXISTENCE

When we say of something that it exists, we usually mean to assert that it is ontologically independent of human beings, that it is not something which has been made up. Thus coelacanths and condors exist - unlike unicorns or Hamlet, they are not figments of our imagination or creations of our intellect. In brief, the latter are fictions, the former are not. The former are in no way dependent on there being human beings for their being what they are. Coelacanths and condors would be a variety of fish and a variety of bird respectively even if there had never been any human beings to conceive of them or to describe them, and would continue to be what they are even after the demise of the human race. That there are such things as coelacanths, condors, etc., is not logically dependent on human thought or imagination. That there are such things as unicorns (a variety of mythical beast) and Hamlet (a fictional character) is logically dependent on human thought or imagination, since there would be no such things as mythical beasts, fictional characters, etc., if there were no human beings to imagine or conceive them. To say that x exists, then, is to assert that x is not a fiction.

An immediate problem is that, whereas the membership of the class of fictions is in principle easy to determine - anything which is, so to speak, entirely a product of some human mental operation is a fiction - the membership of the class of non-fictions

is a matter of controversy. Thus, I have so far identified this class only negatively. It is tempting to conclude that 'x exists' means 'x occupies spatio-temporal position', and this is doubtless just what it very often does mean, or rather, just what it amounts to. Assuming, reasonably, that material objects exist in space and time, then in those cases where x is some material object, 'x exists', inasmuch as it asserts that there is such a thing as x, that x is not a fiction, asserts that x is in space and time. But this is surely not the case where x is not a material object. The temptation to insist that 'x exists' is always to be understood as 'x occupies some spatio-temporal position' is a product of the assumption that only material objects are non-fictions, that for any x whatever, either x is a material object, or x is a fiction. In brief, the assumption, or, more charitably, the position, is that of materialism. But of course, this is the case only if it is held that 'x exists' (= 'x occupies some spatio-temporal position') and 'x is a fiction' are the only possible alternatives, that there can be no non-fictional x which does not exist, but which rather subsists, is, is real, has being, or whatever.

This latter position, however, which may be characterized as the thesis that everything is, but not everything exists, seems quite unhelpful, since it does not of itself solve the problem posed by the materialist, namely that of specifying what something

is, if it neither exists nor is a fiction. Quine characterizes it very conveniently:

> A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: 'What is there?' It can be answered, moreover, in a word - 'Everything' - and everyone will accept this answer as true. However, this is merely to say that there is what there is. There remains room for disagreement over cases...[1]

The proponent of such a view 'genially grants us the non-existence of Pegasus and then, contrary to what we meant by non-existence of Pegasus, insists that Pegasus is. Existence is one thing, he says, and subsistence another.'[2] This is what Russell suggested in Principia Mathematica when arguing that being is a general attribute of everything, a view which he thought (before formulating his later and better-known position) would solve the problem of negative existentials:

> Being is what belongs to every conceivable term, to every possible object of thought... 'A is not' implies that there is a term, A, whose being is denied, and hence that A is...Numbers, Homeric gods, relations, chimeras, and four-dimensional spaces all have being, for if they were not, we could make no propositions about them. Thus being is a general attribute of everything, and to mention anything is to show that it is. Existence, on the contrary, is the prerogative of some only among beings.[3]

1. 'On What There Is', reprinted in From A Logical Point of View (Cambridge, Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1953), p.21.
2. ibid., p.23.
3. Principia Mathematica (London; George Allen & Unwin, 1937, 2nd.ed.), p.449.

Whatever the merits of this as a solution to the problem of negative existentials, or rather that of reference to non-existents generally, it does not help us with the question of the meaning of 'exists' as posed by the materialist, since the solution which it suggests (that there are things which do not exist, yet which are not fictions) is an empty one. If being is a general attribute of everything, then to say of something that it is, is not to say anything about it to distinguish it from anything else. To maintain that Pegasus 'is, but does not exist', tells us nothing about Pegasus other than that he does not occupy any spatio-temporal position, something which the simple statement 'Pegasus does not exist' would itself tell us. If we were to say of numbers, for instance, that they are, but that they do not exist (= occupy some spatio-temporal position) we would still be left with the problem with which we started out: what are they, given that they are not material objects? As Findlay puts it, 'If being means anything at all, the statement that X is must contribute something to our knowledge, and this will be so only if it is conceivable that X is not. A being which automatically belongs to every entity and whose contrary is inconceivable is really nothing at all.'[4] And, I would add, it can be conceivable that X is not, only if we know what X is purported to be. Only if the concept of being has some specified content can we decide of any given x, whether or not it is: and if some content is specified, then

4. Meinong's Theory of Objects and Values (Oxford University Press, 1963, 2nd.ed.), p.47.

we can say what x is and is not.

Another possible way of avoiding the problem of specifying the manner of existence of those things which are said to exist although they do not occupy any spatio-temporal position is what might be characterized as the thesis that everything exists in its own way. Alston advocates just such a view in 'The Ontological Argument Revisited',[5] as a means of saving the argument from the hoary objection that existence is not a predicate (since 'Before we can attach any predicate to anything...we must presuppose that it exists'[6]); it is an example of the convolutions which critics feel constrained to perform once they have accepted an entirely irrelevant objection to the argument. Alston propounds a thesis of 'modes of existence'. 'We can', he maintains, 'use one mode of existence to set up the subject, and another mode of existence as the predicate. At least, once we recognise the diverse modes of existence, the standard arguments are powerless to prevent this.'[7] These modes of existence are 'existence in reality', 'existence in fiction', 'existence in myth', etc. Everything exists in some mode or other, so that the apparent problem of referring to non-existents disappears; Pegasus, who exists in myth, does not exist in reality. The proper objection to the ontological argument then becomes

5. Reprinted in ed. Alvin Plantinga, The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan, 1968), pp.86-110.
6. ibid., p.89.
7. ibid., p.94.

this: 'Now it seems to be a defining feature of all nonreal modes of existence that any statement about something which exists in such a mode will have no implications with respect to real things, except for its real correlate and any implications that might have...If the existence of something in one mode should imply its existence in another mode, the distinction between these two modes would crumble.'[8] But the distinction cannot be maintained anyway. Either modes of existence are sorts of existence or they are not. If they are, then we still face the problem of specifying just what existence is, given that it is not occupation of some spatio-temporal position. I see no alternative to some such line as this, that for any x, if x is in any mode of existence, then x is; and we have seen already the unhelpfulness of this. If, on the other hand, modes of existence are not sorts of existence, then what are they? Once again, we are left with the difficulty of specifying, with reference to each mode of existence, just what it is to exist in that mode. (If modes of existence are not sorts of existence, then of course it becomes very misleading to say that everything exists, even if this is qualified by 'in its particular mode'.) And if one tries to posit existence in reality as somehow a logically basic mode of existence, from which the other modes get their sense, then the whole point of Alston's scheme is lost, since we would have to specify what it was to

8. ibid., pp.103-4.

exist in reality: either it is to occupy some spatio-temporal position, or it is not. If it is the former, then we have not progressed beyond our original difficulty. If the latter, then again, we must say just what it is.

This is precisely what Quine suggests we do, when he argues that 'exists' does not have spatio-temporal connotations:

> If Pegasus existed, he would indeed be in space and time, but only because the word 'Pegasus' has spatio-temporal connotations, and not because 'exists' has spatio-temporal connotations. If spatio-temporal reference is lacking when we affirm the existence of the cube root of 27, this is simply because a cube root is not a spatio-temporal kind of thing, and not because we are being ambiguous in our use of 'exists'.[9]

Everything is (something) - but this is trivial. Of those things which exist, some occupy some spatio-temporal position, and others, like numbers and feelings, do not. What it means to say of numbers and feelings that they exist, that they are not fictions, depends on just what it is that numbers and feelings are, what sorts of thing they are. Ideas, for instance, may be said to exist; the idea of space-travel existed long before space-travel became technically possible. Someone, or some people, had such an idea. Assuming, as against the Platonists, that ideas are invented and not discovered, so that, in my terminology, ideas are fictions, we see that fictions too exist. What that

9. op.cit., p.23.

means, however, is that they are created and sustained by people - just the opposite of what it means to say of three-toed sloths, for instance, that they exist. This view is in fact not so very different from Alston's; it is less systematic, however, and also clearer about what it is that determines the nature of a 'mode' of existence, namely the thing which exists in that particular way. Some things, then, do not exist, although the idea of them exists: Pegasus, unicorns, etc. And yet, since Pegasus and unicorns <u>are</u> ideas - for they do not exist - they too exist! The point is, of course, that in saying 'Pegasus does not exist', one means that Pegasus, who might be thought to be a horse, is in fact an idea, and not a horse at all. It is the <u>context</u> which enables us avoid the apparent puzzle about referring to non-existents. To say that Pegasus does not exist is to regard Pegasus as at least a candidate for existence; and that in turn is to have a notion of what sort of thing Pegasus would be if he actually existed. To say that he does not in fact exist is to say that Pegasus, being what he is, is not that sort of thing after all, namely, not a horse-like animal. He is a fiction. And fictions, although they may exist inasmuch as they are created and sustained, do not exist in the way that animals exist. When asking whether Pegasus existed, we thought it possible that Pegasus might be a species of animal; now we find he is not, so we say he does not exist. If x is a member of the class of fictions, then x does not exist. The class

of fictions itself, however, does exist, which is to say that it is a coherent (possible) idea which has been conceived. It may even be that the idea of a square circle exists, since for an incoherent idea to exist, it need only be mentioned; that is what it is - all it is - for an incoherent idea to exist.

I seem now to have found myself in a position disturbingly similar to that of Alston. Of course we are quite at liberty to maintain that everything exists in some way or another, since everything is something or other; whereas some things do not exist inasmuch as they are not in fact the sort of thing which they are posited to be. But although this seems true, it is distinctly unhelpful. It is particularly unhelpful when it is remembered that I started out by suggesting that to say that x exists is to assert that x is not a fiction (p.112). This now turns out to be the case only where 'x' is something which has been posited as non-fictional, something which was thought possibly to be a non-fiction. Unless Quine's thesis is to collapse into Alston's, as Barnes thinks it does,[10] he must be understood as saying that 'x exists' means 'x is indeed the sort of thing it was taken to be when the question of its existence came up'. The point is, it seems to me, that questions of the existence of things come up just in those cases where we are wondering whether or not the thing in question is a fiction: where we know

10. Jonathan Barnes, The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan, 1972), p.48.

already that x is a fiction (as in the case of Pegasus) we do not ask whether it exists. Furthermore, 'exists' does have spatio-temporal connotations, outside of philosophical literature at least. This should hardly be surprising, since the underlying assumption of contemporary western thought is that reality is exclusively spatio-temporal, or material; that the contrary of 'x is a fiction' is 'x occupies some spatio-temporal position', or 'x is a material object'.

There are of course problem cases, where there is uncertainty about whether or not to say of something that it exists - and these are just those cases which might be thought to suggest that reality is not exclusively spatio-temporal. Perhaps consideration of the following two examples might help us to see just why discussion of the ontological argument so often becomes tied up in discussions of various doctrines about what it means to say of something that it exists.

Consider Joan, a spiritualist, who believes that beings survive their death in some non-physical form. One can imagine her recounting the following tale. 'My grandfather died in 1952, and for the first few years he used to get in touch with me quite often. But then, about ten years after he passed over, his communications became less frequent, until I hardly ever used to hear from him. In early February of 1969, the messages became very faint, and I haven't heard from him since October 23rd., 1969. He must have

crossed over onto the next plane, where I'm sure we'll all meet up again at some point. And of course we'll meet in spirit, not in body; that's the joy of it.' No doubt not all spiritualists would be happy with all of this monologue, and of course it raises all sorts of philosophical problems. However, it at least enables us to ask how someone like Joan would respond to the question, So you think your grandfather still exists? Whether there is an orthodox spiritualist view on this I do not know; but I think we may imagine Joan replying either affirmatively or negatively. If she agrees that her grandfather still exists, then clearly she does not mean by 'he still exists' that he still occupies some spatio-temporal position. His body, that part of him which once was in space and time, is dead: it is his spirit which still exists. And a person's spirit, since it is not a material entity, does not occupy any spatio-temporal position. Thus, if Joan agrees that her grandfather still exists, she is committed to using 'exists' without any spatio-temporal connotation. Such a commitment, I suggest, would arise from a conviction that it is extremely odd to deny that something real does not exist. Joan thinks that it is not the case that her grandfather, considered as a currently living being, is a fiction; thus she says that he (still) exists. On the other hand, she may deny that her grandfather still exists, precisely because saying that he exists would carry the suggestion of continuing spatio-temporal position, which is of

course something she wants to deny. It seems to me clear that this does not in any way modify her conviction that her grandfather, considered as a currently living being, is not a fiction. 'Exists' does not in all contexts have a clearly unambiguous use.

Another area where similar difficulties arise is of course the metaphysical system on which Anselm's argument is based, namely Plato's Theory of Forms. Are we to believe that the Forms exist? Vlastos suggests we should not, because of the spatio-temporal connotations of existence-statements:

> ...it may be worth pointing out that in contexts where his need to express existence in our common use of the term...is most urgent he /Plato/ tends to eke out 'to be' with locatives: 'it makes no difference whether it (the Ideal State) exists somewhere or will exist...' (Rep.592b); we should not fear that the soul may be dissipated at death, 'vanishing into thin air and existing nowhere' (...Phdo.84b, Hackforth's translation).[11]

He writes further:

> As we commonly use the word 'existence', degrees of it (as distinct from degrees of perfection of things in existence) makes no sense whatever; the idea of one individual existing more, or less, than another would be a rank absurdity...Would anyone seriously suggest that Plato wants to undermine our faith in the existence of the beds we sleep in, buy and sell, etc., when he compares their 'being' unfavourably with that of their Form in Rep.X? His contention that they are not 'really real' surely presupposes their existence.[12]

11. 'Degrees of Reality in Plato', in ed. Renford Bambrough, New Essays on Plato and Aristotle (London; RKP, 1965), p.7, fn.5.

12. ibid., pp.8-9.

But if the Forms do not exist, although they are real - more real than things which do exist - then the nature of reality is not exclusively spatio-temporal. However, this leaves one wondering just how one is to think of the Forms, entities which are real, but which cannot be said to exist. The temptation is to think of them as concepts; and then it would be odd, for us if not for Plato, to say that they are more real than physical objects, since the idea of concepts not dependent for their being on the human mind is, to say the least, difficult. This may be the thinking behind Grube's conviction that '...to look upon the Ideas as concepts in any shape or form is a mistake, for a concept cannot by definition exist until the mind has conceived it, and this Plato quite deliberately refused to admit of his Ideas. They are rather the objective reality to which the concept corresponds, and they exist whether we know them or not. If the whole human race were senseless savages, the eternal Form of Justice would exist as fully in any case, though it would be even less perfectly realized in the world.'[13] However, if the 'eternal Form of Justice' is not an entity occupying some spatio-temporal position and not a concept, or not just a concept, then what are we to understand by the affirmation of its existence? Vlastos suggests that 'real' is used by Plato in two senses: 'cognitively dependable, undeceiving'; and a sense 'which becomes most prominent when he thinks of

13. Plato's Thought (London; Methuen, 1935), p.49. Cf. Plato's 'Phaedo', trans. with introduction and commentary by R.Hackforth (Cambridge University Press, 1955), p.143.

the "really real" things, the Forms, as objects of mystical experience',[14] a sense in which 'the word functions as a value-predicate, but one that transcends the usual specifications of value, moral, aesthetic, and religious ...'.[15] This is doubtless correct. Plato's notion of the nature of reality is certainly not spatio-temporal, for the spatio-temporal features of the world are to be located in the second division of knowledge. They are less real than the Forms, which are 'known but not seen'.[16] However, to gloss 'real' by 'cognitively reliable and, in some cases, mystically valuable', leaves something out of account:

> ...the Good not only infuses the power of being known into all things known, but also bestows upon them their being and existence, and yet the Good is not existence, but lies far beyond it in dignity and power.[17]

The Good is both cognitively reliable and valuable, or rather, it is the source of cognitive reliability and of value;[18] but it seems to be more than that. As Russell once said of a universal,'It is neither in space nor in time, neither material nor mental; yet it is something.'[19] Vlastos's account of how we are to understand the reality of Forms makes them too dependent

14. op.cit., p.7.
15. ibid.
16. Republic 507b.
17. ibid., 509b.
18. see Republic 505b and 508e.
19. The Problems of Philosophy (Oxford Univeristy Press, 1967), p.56.

on us: we find them cognitively reliable and valuable, but what are they? What sort of entity are they - if not concepts invented to solve epistemological and axiological problems? If the nature of reality is defined for Plato solely in terms of value and cognitive reliability, and not in terms of those things which occupy spatio-temporal position, we still want to ask of the most real entities, the Forms, whether or not they exist. If not, then their objectivity and independence of the human mind seems in jeopardy; if they do exist, then how do they exist, given that they do not do so in the way that material objects exist?

The same problem arises when theologians talk about the existence or otherwise of God. Etienne Gilson, for example, wants to maintain most strongly that God exists:

> Thinkers like Plato and Aristotle, who do not identify God and being, could never dream of deducing God's existence from his idea; but when a Christian thinker like St. Anselm asks himself whether God exists, he asks, in fact, whether Being exists, and to deny God is to affirm that Being does not exist... The inconceivability of the non-existence of God could have no meaning at all save in a Christian outlook where 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.[20]

According to Gilson, then, 'Being does not exist' is a contradiction; and God, since he is identified with

20. The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy (London; Sheed and Ward, 1936), p.59.

Being, must therefore exist. However, Paul Tillich takes a quite contrary view:

> The being of God is being-itself. The being of God cannot be understood as the existence of a being alongside others or above others. If God is a being, he is subject to the categories of finitude, especially to space and substance... /Being-itself/ stands in contrast to every being. As classical theology has emphasized, God is beyond essence and existence. Logically, being-itself is "before," "prior to," the split which characterizes finite being...Thus the question of the existence of God can be neither asked nor answered. If asked, it is a question about that which by its very nature is above existence, and therefore the answer - whether negative or affirmative - implicitly denies the nature of God. It is as atheistic to affirm the existence of God as it is to deny it. God is being-itself, not a being.[21]

For Tillich, then, 'x exists' does not mean the same as it does for Gilson. Gilson, it seems, does not wish to deny existence to anything which is real. When he writes of 'a transcendent God whose pure act of existing is radically distinct from our own borrowed existence',[22] he is presumably prepared to answer the question, 'But how can both God and men exist?' in these terms:'-even if we cannot imagine supra-temporal or non-temporal existence, we can conceive it by divesting the words that we use of their suggestions of temporality'.[23]

21. Systematic Theology (Welwyn; Nisbet, 1968), Vol.I, pp.261-3.
22. God and Philosophy (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1959), p.54.
23. Etienne Gilson, Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages (N.Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p.100. (I am sure Gilson would say the same of supra- or non-spatial existence.)

He is right, of course, to distinguish being unable to conceive from being unable to imagine; but can we conceive of non spatio-temporal existence, either by divesting our words of their spatio-temporal suggestions, or in any other way? Tillich would want to say that we cannot conceive of non-finite (i.e., non-spatio-temporal) existence, and that therefore we cannot say of God that he exists.

Let us now return briefly to Anselm's principle (Ch.4): Any entity which exists is greater than any entity which is a mere fiction. If existence-statements necessarily have spatio-temporal implications, and there are real things which do not exist, then there are no adequate grounds for holding the principle to be true, for, if some real things do not exist, there is no reason to suppose those (real) things which do exist to be ontologically greater than the former; that would be to ascribe ontological supremacy to spatio-temporal entities. But there are no compelling reasons for doing so. The metaphysical background within which Anselm works is of course one where non-spatio-temporal entities, the Forms, are greater than entities occupying some spatio-temporal position. If, on the other hand, existence-statements necessarily have spatio-temporal connotations, and all real things exist, then the principle is not strictly true, although it may at first sight appear to be. For if reality is wholly spatio-temporal, then spatio-temporal entities are not, strictly, more real than mere fictions; rather, spatio-

temporal entities are real, and fictions are not real. On the materialistic view no doctrine of degrees of reality is possible. The materialist might modify his position to allow that at least some fictions are real in some sense (i.e., they are objects of experience), but that this sense is different from, and doubtless logically subordinate to, the sense in which spatio-temporal entities are real. He might, that is, be willing to talk of kinds, rather than degrees, of reality - as Vlastos suggests Plato should have done[24] - but even if he is so willing, the assertion of Anselm's principle is not open to him. For he has no means of comparing the ontological status of one kind of reality with another; if he had such means, then whatever constituted them would be the criterion of 'real' reality; and material, and any other, reality would be less real than the means of comparing them. And then at least one real entity, or class of entity, would not exist, would not, that is, be spatio-temporal.

Four points emerge from this discussion. First, to say that x exists often implies that x is a spatio-temporal entity, because it is commonly assumed that the material world constitutes reality. Second, 'x exists' need not carry such a connotation; as Quine suggests, the ascription of existence to x follows, and cannot precede, a decision as to the sort of thing

24. op.cit., pp.18-19.

x is, or is purported to be - otherwise we find ourselves proscribing perfectly good expressions of the form 'x exists'. Third, we need have no particular interest in a resolution of the problem of how best to employ the word 'exists' so as to cause least confusion. Anselm's argument is concerned with the question of whether or not there is a God, and when he claims that God exists there is no suggestion of 'exists' carrying any spatio-temporal connotation: indeed, Chs.V - XXV of the Proslogion are partly concerned to explain how properties apparently attributable only to spatio-temporal entities may be attributed to God despite his being non-spatio-temporal. This, as I shall argue, is just the difficulty which Anselm's argument cannot avoid. Fourth, it is clear that to posit x as a subject of reference need not be to posit x as existing, or as real; 'x exists' and 'x is real' may therefore be forms of informative proposition. Whether or not we wish to say of God that he exists, then, the question at issue is this: is God real, or (to use the terminology I introduced in Ch.2) is he a fiction? The logic of 'exists' has no special relevance to consideration of the ontological argument, for, as Royce puts it, '...an object is said to be real, in scholastic usage, in so far as it is viewed as outside of the knowing mind, and so as in contrast to a mere idea'.[25] In order to answer the question whether God is real or a fiction it is necessary to see what sort of thing God might be.

25. Entry under 'Latin and Scholastic Terminology' in the Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology (Gloucester, Mass.; Peter Smith, 1928), Vol.I, p.633.

This Anselm discusses in Proslogion III - XXV, after concluding in Ch.II that he is real; but the question of God's reality cannot be decided before the question of his nature. To say that God is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' does not tell us enough about the sort of thing that God is purported to be for us to know what it would be for God to be real, and not a fiction. This is what I shall be concerned with in the following chapters.

One way of seeing the nature of the problems which will arise is to consider further the relation between Anselm's argument and the Theory of Forms. Having introduced 'real' for 'non-fictional', it is now clear that Plato's notion of reality (being an object of knowledge, and, therefore, of value) is not necessary for Anselm's argument. Any notion of reality will do, so long as degrees thereof are admitted. Anselm's argument is platonic, not because it relies on the content of Plato's Theory of Forms, but rather because it relies on that theory's form: God and the Good are different entities, but they both occupy similar positions within metaphysical systems of a similar form, that is, within hierarchical systems. The sort of reality ascribed to God must be one capable of being ascribed, in lesser degree, to other entities. This is of course obvious, since, as we shall see in Chs. 7 and 8, if God's reality were not in some way the same sort of reality as that of (some) other things, God would have no connection with anything else. But

the Judaeo-Christian God cannot be absolutely different in kind from everything else. On the other hand, however, if God's reality is not to be entirely different in kind from that of everything else, then it must certainly be of a higher degree than that of anything else (this is of course the point behind Anselm's formula), otherwise God would not be something other than, and superior to, everything else.

Christianity and Platonism have thus in common a basic difficulty, namely that of giving an account of the relation between differences in kind and differences in degree. This is of course what makes the whole notion of a hierarchically structured reality so problematic. In Ch.2 I distinguish two uses of 'reality': (1) to cover all that there is, all the individuals and all the sorts of things there are, fictions as well as non-fictions; and (2) to cover only those things which are ontologically independent of our thought. In the following, I shall refer to these as '$real_1$' or '$reality_1$' and '$real_2$' or '$reality_2$' respectively. Now although it may be intelligible to say that everything there is, is part of reality (= $reality_1$) it is not particularly useful or informative: if this is how 'real' is used, then 'x is real' does not serve to distinguish x from anything else. And of course, the claim that the Forms alone are truly real is made on the basis of '$real_2$'; only the Forms are truly ontologically independent. If, however,

the Forms are to be compared with other sorts of entity, then there must be something which they have in common with them, on the basis of which comparison in terms of degree may be made. But nothing else that comprises the ontological scale can be $real_2$, since everything other than the Forms is to a greater or lesser degree ontologically dependent. Nor will $reality_1$ do as a basis for comparison since obviously no degree of $reality_1$ is possible. Everything there is, is something or other tout court: there can be no question of x's being a particular sort of thing to a certain degree. Either, for example, a unicorn is a mythical creature or it is not. Of course, x may be partly one sort of thing, and partly another - but however many sorts of thing x may partly be, it cannot be any of them to a greater or lesser degree. Whereas it makes perfectly good sense to say that what the abominable snowman is, is comprised partly by 'animal' and partly by 'mythical beast', it makes no sense to say that the abominable snowman's being an animal, or his being a mythical beast is a matter of degree. The abominable snowman may be several kinds of thing; but, with reference to any one of them, he either is or is not an example thereof. Nor are the sorts of thing designated by 'animal' and 'mythical beast' respectively degrees, either one of another, or of some third sort of thing. If Plato's suggestion that different sorts of thing are objects of knowledge to different degrees is to be intelligible, then necessary knowledge,

empirical knowledge, and opinion must all be degrees of some one thing, or sort of thing, of which degrees are possible. But there appears to be no candidate for this position. Not all are species of knowledge; nor does there appear to be anything else of which degrees are possible, and of which they are all species. This is of course no more than a brief resumé of the standard criticism of the Theory of Forms, that the nature of the ontological scale appears to be identical with its variable, although such identity (between '$real_1$' and '$real_2$') is logically impossible. Just as a Form is both an individual and a species of thing, so it is both a member of the class of real things, and the sole sort of thing which is real. Now, Anselm's idea of God, that is the Christian idea of God, faces the same difficulty. Eternal and self-sufficient reality, God's sort of reality, is also the highest possible degree of reality, a reality which is common to all real things. On the one hand, there are differences in kind between God's sort of reality and all other sorts of reality (or, between the way in which God is real and the ways in which all other things are real): and on the other, God's reality is the highest possible degree of reality. If this is to be intelligible, then there must be some way of achieving a logical reconciliation between these two apparently contradictory claims. This is what theories of analogy attempt to do, and it is to these that I shall turn in Ch.8.

For the present, however, it is important

to see that Anselm's argument is logically independent of the Theory of Forms itself, even though it is dependent on a hierarchical view of reality. To show that this is the case, I shall state the argument in what may be termed - although without his approval of course - Geachian terms. Geach writes:

> But in fact the proposition 'A God exists' does not ascribe the attribute of existing to some God or other - thus, either to the true God or to some false God - but rather affirms that something-or-other has Divine attributes.[26]

Taking up this way of understanding the proposition 'God is real', we may for Anselm's definition of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought substitute:

(1) The divine attributes are the set of attributes constituting maximal reality (call the set M).

The argument then proceeds as follows:

(2) Suppose there is nothing which has M; then

(3) there is nothing which is maximally real.

(4) But something-or-other must be that which is maximally real (= Anselm's assumption that 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' is coherent).

(5) Therefore something-or-other has M.

(6) Since, if x is maximally real, x is real,

(7) whatever it is which has M is real.

Only if M is a fiction, so that whatever it is which has M - insofar as it has only M - is a fiction, will

26. 'On Worshipping the Right God', in God and the Soul (London; RKP, 1969), pp.114-5.

the argument fail: for it is a necessary condition of M's not being a fiction that 'M' be coherent, i.e., that M is a set of attributes which it is possible for something-or-other to have. And of course that is just what is in doubt.

A necessary condition of our intelligibly defining God as the most real entity possible, or the maximally real entity, is that it should be logically possible that God be not a fiction, since, as we have seen, the determination of the ontological status of an entity must be logically prior to the determination of its reality. Or, to put it another way, in order to determine whether the notion of God as the most real entity possible is a coherent one, we must first determine in what God's reality would consist, were he indeed real. If there were such an entity as God, what sort of entity would it be?

The peculiar difficulty of answering this question lies of course in God's uniqueness. One way to bring this out is to consider Aquinas's discussion of Aristotle's 'being through itself'.[27] This idea is used, Aquinas says, to divide being 'into the ten genera'; and when used in this way, '"being" can be said only of something which exists in

27. On Being and Essence, in Selected Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, trans., with introduction and notes, by Robert P. Goodwin (Indianapolis; Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), pp.33-4, a discussion of Metaphysics V, 7, 1017a 22-35.

reality'.[28] If, however, we say, 'God is a real entity', i.e., 'There is a God', or 'Something-or-other has divine attributes', we are not referring to a member of any of the ten genera (or however many genera we may care to posit). We are not saying of 'some kind of objects' that something 'is that sort of thing'. For God is outside all the genera: as Aquinas himself says, 'The act of existing which God is is such that no addition can be made to it. Hence, by its very purity, this act of existing is distinct from every other act of existing.'[29] But if God is distinct from every other sort of real entity, then to say that there is a God leaves unanswered this crucial question: What is God? or A real what is God? And without an answer to this question, the assertion that there is a God has no clear sense. I am not arguing that we need to know fully what God is (indeed, I defended Anselm against Aquinas on this point in Ch.4) for that is not the case of any entity to which we may legitimately refer; but rather that we must know what sort of entity something is alleged to be before we can ask whether or not it exists. Thus the Thomistic way round this problem fails altogether to meet the point. Consider

28. ibid., p.34. Aquinas continues: 'In another way it signifies the truth of propositions.../and/... can be attributed to anything concerning which an affirmative proposition can be formed, even if it posits nothing in reality'. But this is not a very helpful way, being an apparent forerunner of the thesis that everything is, but not everything exists.

29. ibid., p.58 (my underlining).

these remarks of Gilson for example: 'Where existence is alone, as is the case in God, Whose essence is one with His existence, there is no becoming. God is, and, because He is no particular essence, but the pure act of existence, there is nothing which He can become, and all that can be said about Him is, He Is.'[30] Whether or not it is legitimate to assert that God cannot become anything, or change in any way, Gilson's grounds for holding that this is the case will not do. What is 'the pure act of existence', and how does it differ from no act of existence at all? If 'He Is' is all that can be said of the nature of God's reality, then the conclusion that 'God' is an incoherent concept becomes very tempting. I shall therefore turn to consider what sort of thing God might be, even though acknowledging that he may be the sole entity which is that sort of thing.

30. Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto; Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952), p.180.

6. WHAT IS GOD?

I shall begin by returning to some of the issues discussed in Ch.3; for it is Anselm's claim that God is unable not to exist that I think provides the best starting-point for a discussion of the nature of God. It is God's inability not to exist which marks off his manner of existence from that of all other existents. Some of what follows, therefore, will recapitulate elements of Ch.3, but from the point of view of developing an assessment of Anselm's argument, rather than from that of its proper interpretation.

In Ch.3, I argued that Proslogion III constitutes the beginning of Anselm's discussion of God's nature, which, it will be remembered, he thinks it a particular virtue of his formula to establish, as well as establishing that there is a God: '...I began to wonder if perhaps it might be possible to find one single argument that for its proof required no other save itself, and that by itself would suffice to prove that God really exists, that He is the supreme good needing no other, and is He whom all things have need of for their being and well-being, and also to prove whatever we believe about the Divine Being' (Pros., Preface, p.103). Anselm says that we cannot think of God as not existing; and that this is so because God cannot not exist. This latter claim, I argued, does not amount - for Anselm - to the claim that 'God exists'

is a necessary proposition: rather, he understands it as stating that God is eternal and self-sufficient.

Now, I left unanswered at the end of Ch.3 the crucial question of how exactly we are to understand the claim that God is unable not to exist, that he is eternal and self-sufficient, and specifically, what the modal status of such a claim might be. For, although this is not a question raised by Anselm - the notion of logical necessity, as I have argued, is absent from his work - it is central to an understanding of what sort of thing God is. Is it a putative matter of fact that God is unable not to exist (unable not to be real) or is this a logical claim? An answer to this question clearly has important implications for an investigation of the alleged nature of God: since, if the claim is a logical one, then God, if there is a God, will be a necessarily existent being precisely in that sense of 'necessarily existent being' which Hume and Kant hold to be a nonsense, and not merely in the sense Anselm explicates in the above passage from his Preface, namely that of 'factual necessity', or 'ontological necessity' - 'He whom all things have need of for their being and well being'. I have already shown that, inasmuch as he does not think in terms of logical necessity, Anselm himself can offer us no great help with this question. He does come near to facing this sort of issue in the following passage in Cur Deus Homo, however, and the outcome is interesting:

> And as, when God does a thing, since it has been done, it cannot be undone, but must remain an

> actual fact; still, we are not correct in saying that it is impossible for God to prevent a past action from being what it is. For there is no necessity or impossibility in the case whatever, but the simple will of God, which chooses that truth should be eternally the same, for he himself is truth.
>
> - II, XVIII(a), pp.273-4.

In modern terminology, this would seem to imply that logical laws themselves are dependent on God's will, and that any law of logic is therefore subject to alteration or cancellation at God's behest. Such a view may or may not be intelligible; it would certainly raise grave difficulties for logicians, implying as it does that the truth-values of logical truths could be altered at God's will. The whole notion of the necessity of necessary propositions (Becker's Postulate) would be vitiated by such a view, since it would be merely a contingent matter that 'truth should be eternally the same', a matter contingent on God's choice. And inasmuch as that were the case, the concepts of 'necessary truth' and 'contingent truth' would certainly need to be revised. However all that may be, what is clear is that there would be little point, if any, in the question which one wishes to ask concerning the above quotation: is it a necessary or a contingent truth that 'the simple will of God...chooses that truth be eternally the same'? This is of course just what I wish to ask of God's alleged inability not to be real.[1]

1. The same question may be asked of e.g. Anselm's claim that Christ '<u>could</u> not avoid death', which he says refers 'to the <u>unchangeableness</u> of his purpose...' (<u>Cur Deus Homo</u>, II, XVIII(a), p.275, my underlining).

In order to be quite clear how this question arises, I shall refer again to Reply I:

> Further: even if it can be thought of, then certainly it necessarily[2] exists. For no one who denies or doubts that there is something than which a greater cannot be thought denies or doubts that, if this being were to exist, it would not be capable of not-existing either actually or in the mind - otherwise it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought. But, whatever can be thought as existing and does not actually exist, could, if it were to exist, possibly not exist either actually or in the mind. For this reason, if it can merely be thought, 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' cannot not exist.
>
> - p.171.

Are we to take this as asserting that God cannot as a matter of fact not-exist, or that he logically cannot not-exist: or, is the proposition, 'God cannot not-exist' a contingent or a necessary proposition? I think it is clear that Anselm's conception of God is such that it implies that God's reality is a matter of necessity, and not contingency. For if 'God cannot not-exist' were a contingent proposition, then it would be logically possible that it be false; and that if true, circumstances should so change as to render it false (and vice-versa). Thus it would be logically possible that God could not-exist, that is, that God be not real. But if that were the case, then we could think of God as not real. This, of course, is just the point that Anselm, in the absence of the

2. see Ch.3, p.47.

contemporary categories of necessity and contingency, cannot take into account: his view that God is unable not to exist, and that therefore we are unable to think of him as non-existent, if we are thinking truly, ignores the crucial question of the modal status of 'unable' in 'God is unable not to exist'. If, in an attempt to avoid embroiling Anselm in modal logic, it were said that 'God cannot not-exist' is true simply because God, as it happens, cannot not-exist, and that it would become false if circumstances were to change, then that would of course be to concede the contingency of the proposition. And if that were conceded, then again, it would have also to be conceded that 'God cannot be thought not to exist' is false. On the other hand, if it were said that circumstances could not change, then we should have to ask whether the force of 'could' here is factual or logical. In short, it is clear that the question of the modal status of God's reality cannot be avoided, even though it does not arise in Anselm; and that, if Anselm is right to insist that we cannot think of God as not existing, then, by implication, 'God cannot not-exist' is a necessary proposition.

It is easy to see why this should be so. In platonic metaphysics, it is necessary existence which ensures the complete ontological independence of an entity from the material world. Fictions depend for their being on the existence of thinking agents, i.e. human beings; items in the material

world, including human beings, depend for their being on other items of similar ontological status; but the Forms depend on nothing. Inasmuch as there are no conditions for the existence of the Forms, their existence can in no way be dependent on what happens to be the case, on circumstances. That is, their existence cannot be a contingent matter. And if it is not a contingent matter, it must be a matter of necessity. It may be objected, of course, that because the notion of necessary existence is logically unsound, there can be no Forms, just because it is claimed that they exist necessarily. Far from the Forms being necessarily existent entities, they are logically impossible, and, as such, fictions. As I have said previously, this is not a matter that can be decided by fiat; quotation of the dictum that there can be no necessary existents does not of itself provide any solution. It is part of Hartshorne's contribution to discussion of the ontological argument that he focuses on this: 'Thus that God's essence should imply his existential status (as contingent or necessary) is not an exception to the rule, but an example of it, since the rule is that contingency or non-contingency of existence follows from the kind of thing in question.'[3] Rather, the logical circumstances which arise from the positing of any given entity alleged to be a necessary existent must be investigated.

3. 'The Necessarily Existent', in ed. A. Plantinga, The Ontological Argument (London; Macmillan, 1968), p.130; taken from Man's Vision of God (N.Y.; Harper and Row, 1941).

The entity in question here is God; therefore we must examine the concept of God.

The first point about Anselm's 'God', then, is that it is by implication the concept of a necessarily real entity. Now, is the Christian God, the God worshipped by Christians, a necessarily real entity? To what extent is the being defined by Anselm as that than which nothing greater can be thought to be identified with the Christian God? Let us begin by considering whether or not a Christian accepts that it just so happens that there is a God. For, if 'God is real' is a contingent proposition, then, if there is indeed a God, it is contingently true that there is a God - that is to say, it could conceivably be the case that there be no God. It is not in fact the case, since there happens to be a God. If, however, it happens to be the case that there is a God, it might, as with all other contingent existents, happen to be the case that there is no God. That is to say, things might have been different: there is a possible world in which 'There is a God' is false. This seems to me clearly unacceptable for a Christian. For, if he were to take 'There is a God' as a contingent proposition, then he would have to be prepared to accept, for instance, that there may have been a time when there was no God, or that there may come a time when there will no longer be a God. He would have to be prepared to accept that something could occur to render the proposition 'There is a God'

false. This, surely, is the mark of contingent existents. God, unlike any individual item in the universe, surely does not happen, as a matter of fact, to exist. In this, Findlay was clearly right when using the conviction that God's 'non-existence must be wholly unthinkable in any circumstances'[4] as the basis of his alleged disproof of God's existence.

If 'There is a God' is not a contingent proposition, then, apparently, it must be a necessary proposition. This, of course, is just what Findlay, Hartshorne and Malcolm conclude. However, if 'There is a God' is a necessary proposition like other necessary propositions, then certain problems arise. Necessary propositions are propositions which are true or false in virtue of the meaning of the terms in the proposition: 'Triangles have three sides' is a necessary proposition, because by 'triangle' we mean a three-sided figure. Necessary truths or falsehoods are true or false by convention, we might say; they are true or false in virtue of the way in which we choose to use certain words. Necessary propositions are truths merely of the logic, or the language, which certain people have invented. Their application, therefore, is limited to what I have termed fictions, that is, to matters which are creations of the human mind; they have no application to anything which is ontologically independent of human beings. Thus, as

4. 'Can God's Existence Be Disproved?', reprinted in ed. A. Plantinga, op.cit., p.117.

Raziel Abelson has it, it would seem that 'The question is, does the man who worships God believe Him to exist in the way numbers, concepts, or laws of nature exist, or rather in the way a gold miner believes gold to exist in a mine on which he has spent his last cent...?'[5] It is precisely the former sorts of things, which can be the subject of necessary propositions, from which the Christian attempts to distinguish God.

It would appear, then, that 'God is real' is neither a contingent proposition, nor a necessary one; that God's existence is neither like the existence of empirical entities, nor like that of ideas. The former, propositional, claim appears odd, not to say paradoxical; but the latter claim, about the nature of God's reality, has not the same peculiarity. After all, that is just the point about God - he is like nothing else. But, as I have emphasised earlier, the matter cannot be left there, since, if all we can say about God is that he is quite unlike anything else, we cannot begin to answer the question of his existence. Let us then abandon, temporarily at least, the question of whether or not God is a necessarily existent sort of entity, and turn instead to examine the implications of a claim about the sort of entity God is, about which all, or certainly most, seem agreed: namely that God is

5. 'Not Necessarily', Philosophical Review, 70 (1961), p.74.

an eternal, self-sufficient being. (I say 'self-sufficient' in preference to 'self-existent', because the latter might, mistakenly or not, be thought to carry with it a suggestion of God's bringing about his own reality, a suggestion which I would prefer to avoid. The notion of an uncreated God seems to be somewhat less problematic than that of a self-created God.) Not surprisingly, discussion of this claim, in the recent literature engendered by Hartshorne's and Malcolm's writings, has been very closely bound up with the question of the modal status of God's alleged existence, so that what follows may throw some further light on that question.

I showed in Ch.3 why Anselm considers that God must be eternal and self-sufficient: eternity and self-sufficiency are the marks of ontological independence. Since the supreme Nature does not derive its existence from anything, Anselm writes in the Monologion, it 'has a beginning neither through nor from itself...nor from nothing, /so/ it assuredly has no beginning at all. But neither will it have an end. For, if it is to have an end, it is not supremely immortal and supremely incorruptible.' (Ch.XVIII, pp.68-9.) Having shown why God cannot be thought of as being in any time or place, he goes on to explain 'How /he/ is better understood to exist always than at every time', for since God 'is immutable and without parts, is not (therefore) the term which seems to mean all time more properly understood, when applied to this Substance, to signify

eternity, which is never unlike itself, rather than a changing succession of times, which is ever in some sort unlike itself?' (Ch.XXIV, pp.82-3.) Since God is self-sufficient, he is eternal;[6] he can neither begin nor cease to be what he is. This is not to be understood as meaning that God's reality is everlasting or interminable, but rather that it is outside time altogether, since the passage of time implies the possibility of change. Just this possibility, however, the possibility of real, i.e., empirical change, is what Anselm wishes to deny. This is surely part of the traditional Christian concept of God, derived from a combination of Judaic and Greek ideas. Whatever the philosophical objections of, for instance, Hartshorne, who wants to replace this idea with a concept of God, derived from process philosophy, as subject in some ways at least to real change, i.e., to contingency, it would surely not do for one adhering to the central Christian concept of God to deny eternity and self-sufficiency of him. On this at least there is agreement among those, shortly to be discussed, who are divided about the relationship between the claim that God is eternal and self-sufficient, and the claim that 'God is real' is a necessary proposition.

I shall mostly confine myself to the notion of

6. Cf. John Hick, 'Necessary Being', Scottish Journal of Theology, 14 (1961), p.365: 'A self-existent being must be eternal, i.e., without temporal limitation. For if He had begun to exist, or should cease to exist, He must have been caused to exist, or to cease to exist, by some power other than Himself; and this would be inconsistent with His aseity.' Cf. also Hick, 'God As Necessary Being', Journal of Philosophy, 57 (1960), p.733.

'eternity', since the substance of the claims that God is eternal and that he is self-sufficient seem the same: both imply that God is ontologically independent, and that is the nub of the argument. Now, it is clear that 'It is necessarily true that God is real' implies 'God is eternal and self-sufficient'. For if God were in time, it would make sense to ask questions about the time before he came to be, and a possible time after he might cease to be: and if God's coming to be were caused by something, his reality would be a dependent reality. But then it would be logically possible that some event or state of affairs should bring about an end to, or have prevented the beginning of, his reality - in which case 'God is real' could not be a necessary proposition. (Nor, of course, as Anselm says in Reply I, can it be true of something which is not eternal that it cannot be thought not to exist.) To say of an entity that it necessarily exists, is to say that nothing that may occur could have any bearing on the truth of the proposition in question: it could not come about, therefore, that the entity does not exist. Nor can there have been a time when it did not exist. But if there can have been no time at which an (existing) entity did not exist, nor a future time at which it will not exist, then that entity is eternal. That is to say, it is not in time at all, so that whatever may occur (and whatever occurs, occurs in time) can have no effect upon its existence.

What is of greater concern, however, is whether a proposition asserting the existence of an eternal entity must be a necessary proposition. For if so, then, given that God is eternal, the proposition 'God is real' must be necessary, with the result that God is a necessary being in just that sense to which Hume and Kant so strongly object. It is of course this question which is prominent in the debate between Hartshorne and Malcolm, and their opponents, about the soundness or otherwise of Anselm's so-called second argument: the nature of God's existence is such, Hartshorne and Malcolm maintain, that it could not be asserted in a contingent proposition. If they are right, then there is an obviously crucial respect in which God differs from all (other) beings.

The question then is this: does 'God is eternal' imply '"God is real" is a necessary proposition'? Hartshorne's view, implicit in all his work on the ontological argument, is that God's reality must be necessary,[7] since, 'were God to exist, yet his non-existence to be conceivable, he would either exist by

7. According to Hartshorne, his existence, but not his actuality, must be necessary: see e.g., 'What Did Anselm Discover?', in Hick and McGill, pp.329-333; and his introduction to St. Anselm: Basic Writings, trans. by S.N. Deane, pp.15-18. 'Actuality', or 'concrete existence', is a term he takes from process philosophy, and applies to God in order to differentiate between his (necessary) existence and (contingent) activity, which is part of his notion of 'neo-classical theism'. I find this idea quite unclear.

sheer chance or luck, or else owing to some cause';[8] and since he is eternal it cannot be the case that he exists by sheer chance or luck, or else owing to some cause. That he exists, then, must be the case necessarily and not contingently. It is Malcolm, however, who argues explicitly that 'from the supposition that it could happen that God did not exist it would follow that, if He existed, He would have mere duration and not eternity'.[9] At least, he explicitly moves from the ascription to God of eternity, to the ascription to God of necessary existence:

> If God, a being a greater than which cannot be conceived, does not exist then He cannot <u>come</u> into existence. For if He did He would either have been <u>caused</u> to come into existence or have <u>happened</u> to come into existence, and in either case He would be a limited being... If He does exist He cannot have come into existence (for the reasons given), nor can He cease to exist, for nothing could cause Him to cease to exist nor could it just happen that He ceased to exist. So if God exists His existence is necessary.[10]

8. 'What Did Anselm Discover?', in Hick and McGill, p.326.
9. 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', ibid., pp.307-8. Cf. Aristotle, <u>De Generatione</u>, II, 12, 338[a], 1-4: 'For what is "of necessity" coincides with what is "always" since that which "must be" cannot possibly "not-be". Hence a thing is eternal if its "being" is necessary: and if it is eternal, its being is necessary.' Cited by Hartshorne, <u>Anselm's Discovery</u> (La Salle, Ill.; Open Court, 1965), p.141.
10. ibid., p.309.

Malcolm seems simply to take it for granted that the existence of an eternal entity could not be asserted in a contingent proposition, rather than offering any thorough-going argument. This is, I think, understandable, since there appears very little to be said. If God is eternal, then he is outside time, in the sense that his existence is not in any way dependent on anything that may happen, or may have happened. Whatever happens, happens in time. Therefore there can be nothing on which God's existence is contingent. Therefore his existence must be necessary.[11] On the face of it, the argument seems quite conclusive.

In the replies which Malcolm's article elicited, however, the objection is made, in a variety of ways, that 'for all that he has shown us, it could still be just a fact that God eternally is'.[12] Penelhum's objections seem very weak, however. He continues:

> For one thing, if eternal being were by that very fact also logically necessary being, then, since presumably logically necessary being is unique, there could be no eternal created beings. In any case it seems to cry out for demonstration that nothing can be eternally just so. (Of course, it may be a logical truth that if anything is a property of God it is eternally

11. Cf. Jerome Gaspard, 'On the Existence of a Necessary Being', Journal of Philosophy, 31 (1934), pp.5-14.
12. Terence Penelhum, 'On the Second Ontological Argument', Philosophical Review, 70 (1961), p.90.

a property of Him; but this does not tell us whether there is a being to whom such properties eternally belong.)[13]

But the argument given above implies just this, that there can indeed be no eternal created beings, since, if something has been created, it must have been created at a particular time, and can therefore not be eternal - there is a time, the time preceding the moment of its creation, when it did not exist. The medieval view that there are created eternal things, such as the stars, which can nevertheless be thought not to exist,[14] is surely unacceptable on these very grounds. Since the stars are created things, they cannot be eternal. Plantinga argues in a similar vein to Penelhum in his reply to Malcolm:

(a) N(God never has and never will begin to exist).
(b) N(God never has and never will cease to exist).
(2a) God exists - antecedent of (2)[15]

Therefore

(2c) N(God exists) - consequent of (2).

Once again it is apparent that (2c) does not follow from (a), (b), and (2a). What does follow is:

(2c') God always has existed and always will exist.

To put it differently, (a) and (b) together entail the following necessary conditional:

(2') N(If at <u>any</u> time God exists, then at <u>every</u> time God exists).

If God cannot (logically) come into or go out of existence, it is a necessary truth that if He ever exists, He always exists. But it does not follow

13. ibid.
14. D.P. Henry, <u>Medieval Logic and Metaphysics</u> (London; Hutchinson, 1972), pp.108-9.
15. (2) is, 'If God exists, His existence is logically necessary.'

> that if He exists, the proposition "God exists" is necessary.[16]

But on what is the truth of (2c') contingent? If God always has existed and always will exist, then how can 'God exists' be a contingent proposition, given that nothing could occur to render it false? If Plantinga accepts (2'), as he does, then he must also accept that, if God exists, then God exists at every time. But if God exists at every time (and this is a necessary truth), then there can be no time at which he does not exist, with the result that nothing can occur to affect his existence (either to have brought it about in the past, or to terminate it in the future): and in that case, there can be nothing on which the truth of the proposition 'God exists' could be contingent. How could it 'just happen(s) that God always has and always will exist (and so happen(s) neither to begin nor cease existing, nor /be/ caused either to begin or cease existing)'?[17] Further on, Plantinga produces an uncharacteristically sloppy argument against 'the supposition that God merely happens to exist'[18] entailing 'that "God will cease to exist" is sensible (proposition (b))'.[19] Given that God is eternal, he argues, 'it obviously will not "make sense" to suppose that God will cease to exist',[20] since that would entail that 'There is

16. 'A Valid Ontological Argument?', reprinted in ed. A. Plantinga, op.cit., p.165.
17. ibid., p.166.
18. ibid., p.169.
19. ibid., p.168.
20. ibid., pp.168-9.

a time at which God exists, and a later time at which He does not',[21] a proposition which is contradictory. 'Hence the supposition that God merely happens to exist does not entail (b).'[22] But of course that is only to repeat the assumption that God's eternal existence may be asserted in a contingent proposition: it could equally well be said that since 'the supposition that God merely happens to exist' does entail (b), a proposition which entails a contradictory proposition, the supposition in question must be false. And, presumably, if the supposition that God may merely happen to exist is false, then 'God exists' cannot be a contingent proposition.

Hick's objections are also in much the same vein, although he in fact comes near to refuting them himself. Having cited God's aseity as the logical source of his eternity, and described this as 'the essence of the (contrasting) notion of God as sheer ultimate, unconditioned reality, without origin or end',[23] that is, of God as a necessary being, which 'sense of ontological or factual necessity'[24] he distinguishes from logical necessity, he goes on to say:

> Again, to refer back to Findlay's discussion, it is meaningless to say of the self-existent being that he might not have existed or that he merely happens to exist...There is no conceivable event

21. ibid., p.169.
22. ibid.
23. 'A Critique of the "Second Argument"', in Hick and McGill, p.346.
24. ibid.

> such that if it had occurred, or failed to occur, a self-existent being would not have existed; for the concept of aseity is precisely the exclusion of such dependence.[25]

If it is indeed meaningless to say of the self-existent being that he merely happens to exist, then, surely, to hold that 'God exists' is a contingent proposition is mistaken: if it cannot, logically cannot, be the case that God merely happens to exist, then it must be the case that God either does not and cannot exist, or exists and cannot but exist. There are no other possibilities. Elsewhere, Hick objects to the contrast between happening to exist and existing necessarily: 'But Findlay, after ruling out the notion of necessary existence, in relation to which alone the contrasting idea of "merely happening to exist" has any meaning, continues to use the latter category...'.[26] If the notion of necessary existence is rejected on empiricist grounds, however, as in Hick's case, then it is rejected precisely because it is an empiricist tenet that, for any x, if x exists, it is possible that something-or-other should bring it about that x does not exist (or have brought it about that x did not exist). That is to say, for any x, if x exists, then it so happens that x exists - it could be, or could have been, otherwise. Surely Hick does not intend to suggest that this tenet, the very tenet on which he bases his rejection of 'necessary existence', is meaningless? Of course 'merely

25. ibid., p.347: cf. Hick, 'Necessary Being', op.cit., p.366.
26. 'God as Necessary Being', op.cit., p.731.

The necessary proposition is 'If there is an eternal being, it exists necessarily (i.e. eternally)'

happening to exist'[27] does not, for an empiricist, 'stand in contrast to some other mode of existing':[28] rather the notion of existence is held not to be capable of having necessary application, in contrast to other notions (e.g. roundness, straightness, etc.) which are held to be so capable. 'The existence of God is either logically necessary or logically impossible'[29] is a dilemma which has no substance, Hick maintains. And yet he goes on to say that Anselm, in Reply I, proves 'that God is not nonexistent-but-capable-of-existing, that is, that he is not contingently nonexistent':[30] and that '...it is by definition impossible for an eternal being to cease to exist. If there were an eternal being, its nonexistence would in that case be impossible.'[31] Of course 'it does not follow from this circumstance that there is an eternal being'[32] - but nor is to maintain that 'God exists' is a necessary proposition to maintain that there is such a being. Again, if the nonexistence of an eternal being were impossible, given that there actually were such an eternal being, then it would be possible that 'God exists' be a necessary proposition; it would be a possibility which depended for its realisation on there existing an eternal being. But, by Becker's Postulate, if a proposition could be a necessary proposition, then

27. ibid.
28. ibid.
29. 'A Critique of the "Second Argument"', op.cit., p.354.
30. ibid., p.355.
31. ibid., p.356: cf. Hick, 'God as Necessary Being', op.cit., p.733.
32. ibid.

9 equate (factually) necessary existence
with eternal-9-independent-existence.

9r is eternal (i.e. without beginning or end) because
that which cannot destroy it never does.

it must be - modal status is always necessary. Hick seems here to have been misled into supposing that an eternal being could have commenced to exist. If it could have come into existence, then, of course, it might not have done so, in which case the proposition asserting its existence cannot be necessary. But if a being is eternal, then not only can it not cease to exist, but it could also not have commenced to exist. (Elsewhere, when arguing against the idea of the possibility of God's "suicide", he in fact says just this: '...an absolute end is as inconceivable as is an absolute beginning'.[33]) This objection to the necessary status of 'God exists' cannot stand.

Hick's final objection to equating necessary with eternal existence is that 'it is possible to conceive of something existing eternally, not because it is such that there is and could be no power capable of abolishing it, but only because, although there are powers capable of abolishing it, they always refrain from doing so'.[34] Have there always been such powers, and will they continue for ever to exist? Do they happen always to refrain from abolishing it? If so, then it could be abolished: but then it could be abolished in time, since, presumably, its abolition would be an event, and events cannot take place outside time. If, however, it could be abolished in time, then I fail to see how it would be an eternal entity. If something is eternal, then,

33. 'Necessary Being', op.cit., p.366.
34. 'God as Necessary Being', op.cit., p.732: cf. 'Necessary Being', op.cit., p.358.

as Hick says of God, it is 'not capable of being destroyed'.[35] But then, I maintain, there can be nothing on which the proposition asserting its existence could be contingent; in which case the proposition must be necessary.

The nub of the argument against this view is, I suspect, the existence of apparently eternal entities whose existence is nevertheless not logically necessary. Abelson argues along these lines:

> Atemporality and aspatiality apply just as well to rules, concepts, propositions, laws of nature, meanings, space-time slabs, and other abstract entities whose existence is clearly not necessary. Thus to say that God is eternal, in the sense of atemporality and aspatiality, does not entail that His existence is necessary in any but a Pickwickian sense of "necessary", any more than the atemporal existence of the law of nature that copper conducts electricity entails the necessity of the law.[36]

There are some complex issues here. Firstly, it is not at all clear that rules, concepts, propositions, laws of nature, meanings, and space-time slabs do exist atemporally. Rather, inasmuch as they are abstract entities, it seems to me that they do exist in time - rules, propositions, concepts and meanings (leaving aside laws of nature and space-time slabs

35. ibid. Cf. 'Necessary Being', op.cit., p.366: 'Third, there is an additional contradiction in the notion of sheer unqualified being ceasing to exist.' He shows the contradiction in the following paragraph.

36. 'Not Necessarily', op.cit., p.73.

for the moment) are all invented, or created entities. That is, they are products of the human mind, or, as I have been using the term, fictions. In the case of any particular example of one of these, there was a time when it did not exist, and there may well come a time when it no longer exists. Rules, concepts, propositions, and meanings all come into and go out of existence; in that sense, therefore, their existence is not atemporal. To say this is not to say that their existence is the same sort of existence as that of other temporal entities, for instance material objects, but merely to point out that although atemporality may <u>apply</u> to them, that is not the same as saying that their <u>existence</u> is atemporal. Some rules may be thought to apply at any and every time: a concept may fall into disuse, but be ever capable of resurrection: the truth-value of propositions may be unchangeable: once established, meanings, like concepts, may be ever capable of resuscitation. At least, that is the sort of thing I suppose the claim that atemporality applies to these entities amounts to. I certainly do not see what else the claim might mean, other than that they neither come into nor go out of existence; but then the claim would be simply false. These entities, like material objects, are all <u>made</u> in some way, and therefore must exist in time. Laws of nature and space-time slabs may be like the others in Abelson's list in this respect. On the other hand, they may be thought to exist independently of their being

conceived, to be non-fictional entities. I do not wish to arbitrate between these views here. However, if they are non-fictional entities, then certainly they would seem to be eternal, in the sense that there never was a time when they existed, nor can there ever be a time when they will no longer exist. Nor is their existence necessary, since things could have been otherwise; copper might not have conducted electricity. (It might be argued that, even if laws of nature and space-time slabs are not human creations, nevertheless they cannot just be; someone or something must have created them. If that is the case, and they are for instance God's creations, then, being creations, they do not exist eternally. Penelhum's objection to the impossibility of eternal created entities, as I argued above, has little force.)

Laws of nature and space-time slabs might, then, be examples of eternally, but not necessarily, existent entities. Even if self-sufficiency, which, as I have said, seems to me the logical basis of eternity, were brought in here in an attempt to reinforce the case against contingently existing eternal entities, the problem would remain. Laws of nature and space-time slabs cannot be self-sufficient - they cannot have within their own being the ground of their existence. This would certainly be true given the assumption that everything

there is, except God himself, is his creation; but of course the view that laws of nature, space-time slabs, the universe itself, etc., just happen to exist is a rejection of that very assumption. The whole notion of inquiring into the grounds of the existence of these sorts of things may be regarded as a - perhaps theologically based - mistake. We cannot, therefore, dispose of all Abelson's counter-examples by insisting that they are not examples of eternally existing entities. Furthermore, other entities may join the list: 'For all we know, certain elementary physical particles - for example, electrons - may always have existed, in which case they surely don't depend upon anything for coming into existence. And for all we know there may be nothing upon which they depend for their continued existence.'[37] If electrons always have existed, and do not depend on anything for their continued existence, it is puzzling to think on what the proposition 'Electrons exist' could be contingent, just as it is puzzling to think on what the proposition 'Copper conducts electricity' is contingent if the relevant law of nature exists eternally and is non-fictional. (It may of course be the case that electrons, like laws of nature, are fictions, and that this is true of <u>all</u> the possible counter-examples.[38] But that seems too slender a thread on which to hang

37. Plantinga, 'A Valid Ontological Argument?', op. cit., p.170.
38. See e.g. such philosophers of science as Thomas Kuhn.

the case.) And yet 'Electrons do not exist', like 'Copper does not conduct electricity', certainly does not seem to be a necessary proposition, as Plantinga points out.[39] What one may ask, however, is on what it is contingent that electrons depend on nothing for their coming into and continuing in existence. Or, to put it another way, on what is it contingent that electrons (or laws of nature, or space-time slabs) are the sort of thing that they are? A not very helpful answer to both questions is this: these facts are contingent on things being as they are. Since things might have been otherwise (there are other possible worlds) the proposition asserting the existence of electrons is a contingent one. Again, I am not at all happy about this, since there seems at least a prima facie case that, if things were other than they are, in such a way as to alter the manner of existence of electrons, etc., so that they did depend for their coming into and going out of existence on other entities, then they would not be the sort of thing they are (assuming that they do exist eternally). That is to say that eternal existence can be ascribed only necessarily, since, if it were contingently true that x is eternal, then it would be possible that x should cease to be eternal - but then x would not be eternal at all (see p.159). And if 'x exists eternally' must be a necessary proposition, then so must 'x exists' - since the former implies the latter - in which case eternal existence can be ascribed only to those entities

39. 'A Valid Ontological Argument?', op.cit., pp.170-1.

whose existence is logically necessary. There can be no contingently existing eternal entity. This would imply that either electrons exist necessarily, or they are fictions (more explicitly, explanatory hypotheses). However, even if I am quite wrong in this, then there would seem to be a difference between God and electrons, etc., which would anyway dispose of the latter as counterexamples to the thesis that if God exists eternally, the proposition asserting his existence is necessary and not contingent. In the case of God, but not in the case of electrons, etc., it is necessarily true that he is eternal. God's eternity, his being the sort of thing he is, is not contingent on things being as they are. Whereas the eternity of electrons is contingent on things being as they are, so that the proposition 'Electrons exist' is a contingent proposition, the eternity of God is not contingent on anything, so that the proposition 'God exists' cannot be contingent. Plantinga notes this point: Malcolm may have had in mind, he writes, that 'the assertion that God does not depend upon anything is necessary. And it is inconsistent to hold both that God's existence is contingent and that it is a necessary truth that He depends upon nothing at all either for coming into or for continuing in existence... But I must confess inability to see the inconsistency.'[40] If, however, 'God is eternal' is a necessary truth, and it is therefore logically impossible that God should depend upon anything for coming into or continuing in existence, then, again,

40. ibid., p.171.

on what could the truth or falsity of the proposition 'God exists' be contingent? Whereas in the case of, say, electrons, the truth or falsity of the proposition asserting their existence is contingent on how things are (even if it is the case that electrons exist eternally) in the case of God, the truth or falsity of 'God exists' is not so contingent. That, surely, is the point of insisting that it is necessarily, and not contingently, true that God is eternal. In contradistinction to Plantinga, I must confess that I am unable to see how 'God exists' could be a contingent proposition given the necessary truth of 'God is eternal'.

If the proposition 'God exists' is not a contingent proposition, then, presumably, it must be a necessary proposition. The immediate objection to this is of course that, if 'God exists' is a necessary proposition, then its denial must be self-contradictory - but surely one cannot convict of self-contradiction all those who deny and have denied that there is a God. Yet it is precisely this which Anselm does in Proslogion II - IV. The Fool is able to deny God's existence only because he fails to realise that to do so is self-contradictory. And yet this is not to say that it is necessarily true that God exists. The failure of Hartshorne and Malcolm to maintain a distinction between necessary status and necessary truth in their arguments seems to be the seed of much of the subsequent confused argument about the modal

status of 'God exists'. They both object to the proposition, 'If God exists, then he necessarily exists', on the grounds that the antecedent clause implies that it is possible that God does not exist, which would contradict the subsequent clause, one which excludes that very possibility.[41] But this is a confusion. Clearly, the modal status of 'God exists' cannot depend upon the truth or falsity of 'God exists', as it would seem to be held to depend by those who propose that if God exists, he necessarily exists. But surely no one claims that. It is the truth of 'God necessarily exists', and not its modal status, which is held to depend on the truth or falsity of 'God exists'. This becomes clearer if the proposition which Hartshorne and Malcolm take to be self-contradictory is filled out: 'If God exists, then it is necessarily true that he exists'. The point is that, contrary to Malcolm, those who maintain this proposition to be true do not (or should not) 'agree that the proposition "God necessarily exists" is an a priori truth'.[42] It is an a priori proposition, and,

41. See Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments', op.cit., pp.315-7, and Hartshorne, 'What Did Anselm Discover?', op.cit., p.327: 'Yet critics of the argument often commit the absurdity of saying, "God's existence is necessary only upon the condition that he exist."' Careful critics commit no such absudity; rather, they maintain that 'God exists' is a necessary truth only upon the condition that he exist. It is a necessary proposition, of course, whether or not he exists. Penelhum, in 'On the Second Ontological Argument', op.cit., p.92, and R.E. Allen, in 'The Ontological Argument', Philosophical Review, 70 (1961), p.63, do not appear to have been careful about this, for they commit just that mistake.

42. Malcolm, op.cit., p.317.

as such, may be either an a priori truth or an a priori falsehood. And whether it is the former or the latter depends on the truth or falsity of 'God exists'. Its being a priori, as opposed to contingent, depends on the sort of existence which is being ascribed to God, which in turn depends on the sort of entity God is thought to be. Furthermore, there is clearly a condition available for the antecedent clause of the proposition 'If God exists, then it is necessarily true that he exists' - namely the coherence or otherwise of 'God'. If God exists, and whether he does or not depends on whether or not it is possible that he exist, which in turn depends on the coherence or otherwise of the concept of God, then the truth that he exists is a necessary truth; if the concept of God is incoherent, so that it is impossible that God exist, then the proposition 'God exists' is a necessary falsehood.[43] 'If God exists, then it is

43. Cf. e.g. Jerome Shaffer, 'Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument', in Hick and McGill, p.242, where he argues that 'if someone uses the sentence, "God exists" tautologically, he tells us only that being an existent is a logical requirement for being God. If, on the other hand, someone asserts, "God exists" nontautologically, then he claims that the term "God" has extension, applies to some existent. In the case of the Ontological Argument the only valid conclusion is an intensional statement about the meaning of the concept of God.' The point is, however, that in this case, whether or not the term in question, 'God', has an extension, depends on the coherence or otherwise of the intensional statement about 'God'. If God exists, then it is necessarily true that he exists; and whether or not he exists depends upon the possibility of his existing. The logically prior determinant of this possibility is the logical coherence or otherwise of its being a logical requirement for x to be God, that x should be an existent.

necessarily true that he exists' is quite unobjectionable - indeed, it is true. Anselm's argument fails, because the Fool contradicts himself only if it is the case that it is possible that there be a God, and this is something which Anselm takes for granted; which Hartshorne maintains is intuitively the case (although in fairness, he maintains also that 'The only logically admissable way to reject theism is to reject the very idea of God as either contradictory or empty of significance'[44]); and which Malcolm maintains need not be demonstrated, since he suspects that 'the argument can be thoroughly understood only by one who has a view of that "form of life" that gives rise to the idea of an infinitely great being, who views it from the inside...'.[45] What actually needs to be done, is to investigate whether it is possible that there be a God. If it is possible, then it is necessarily true that God exists, for, as Aristotle has it, in the case of eternal things, what may be must be:[46] and this itself is the first item of information to be noted in pursuing that investigation. God is that sort of entity which exists necessarily, or is necessarily real.

Thus, to take up from Ch.3 the question of whether there might not be available a modal argument superior to Hartshorne's, we can in fact formulate

44. 'What Did Anselm Discover?', op.cit., p.322.
45. op.cit., p.159.
46. Physics, III, 4, 203^b, 30.

an extremely simple one:

(1) God is eternal (by definition).

(2) For any x, if x is eternal, then 'x exists' is a necessary proposition (from the argument above).

(3) Therefore 'God exists' is a necessary proposition.

(4) Thus, 'God exists' is either necessarily true or necessarily false.

(5) If 'God exists' is not necessarily false, it is necessarily true.

(6) Thus, if it is possible that 'God exists' is true, then it is necessarily true; that is, if 'God exists' is a coherent proposition, then it is a necessarily true proposition.

(7) Therefore, if it is possible that God exists, then he (necessarily) exists.

That, however, is as far as the argument can take us: (3) does not imply anything at all about the truth-value of 'God exists', but only something about its modal status. And what that does, is to tell us something about the nature of the entity whose existence that proposition asserts. It is the sort of entity the existence or nonexistence of which is established solely by an inquiry into the possibility of its existence.

This is in fact what I take to be the major philosophical achievement of Anselm's argument. In excluding the possibility of a logically possible,

but fictional, eternal and self-sufficient entity, it shows that (for example) the Christian God cannot just happen to be a fiction, a product of human thought, imagination, etc. Rather, if there is no such God, if he is a fiction, then there can be no such God: he is necessarily a fiction, for, like the square circle, he is impossible. One of the traditional objections to the argument, therefore, that it consists in an illegitimate move from thought to reality, may more clearly be seen to be mistaken. For the argument points out that there is something of which it is true that it is either an impossible fiction (a logically incoherent thought) or a real, non-fictional entity, since the possibility that it be a possible fiction (a logically coherent thought, but one which happens to be uninstantiated) is excluded. For suppose that x is a possible fiction; then it cannot be a necessary existent, since, precisely because it is a fiction, it is logically possible that it should not have been conceived, and thus that it should not exist, for the existence of fictions is contingent upon their being conceived. But God is a necessary existent: therefore he cannot be a possible fiction. Thus, either he is a real entity, or an impossible fiction. Either there is a God, or 'God' is incoherent. To put it somewhat differently, because the concept of God is that of a necessarily existent entity, it cannot but be either instantiated or uninstantiable. Just as the square circle is necessarily both square and circular, and

therefore an impossible fiction, so God necessarily exists, and is therefore either an impossible fiction or a necessarily instantiated non-fiction. Rather than being a movement from thought to reality, then, the ontological argument consists in an analysis of a particular idea, to show what must be the nature of the entity which is its instantiation; and Anselm's failure is a failure to consider the alternative possibility to the one he describes. God may be defined as that which is the most real possible, but nevertheless be a fiction: for if the definition turns out to be incoherent, then God is necessarily a fiction, since what is defined is an impossible entity, and all impossible entities are fictions.

Anselm fails to consider this possibility because it does not occur to him that his Fool might argue that 'God' is a nonsense, that the definition with which he begins - 'God is that than which nothing greater can be thought' - is one which is incoherent. Thus the failure is present right from the start, in Ch.II, and not in Ch.III: for Anselm, having established that God exists in Ch.II, could go on from (7) above to show that God necessarily exists, since, given that God exists, it is most certainly possible that he exists. The point is of course that it is Ch.II in which the argument itself is to be found, and it is an argument which does not rely for its formal consistency on the idea of necessary existence. If necessary existence were no part of 'the most real

entity possible', then the argument in Ch.II would remain unaffected: it is simply that the business of inquiring into the sense of 'the most real entity possible' would take a different form. Or, to put it in Anselm's terms, the explication of God's nature on the basis of his being that than which nothing greater can be thought, an explication which begins in Ch.III, would take a different turn. But in that case of course, God would not be at all the sort of being which Christianity takes him to be. Were it not the case that 'something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be thought not to exist' (Pros.III, p.119.) and God were alleged to be merely contingently real, then the problem would immediately arise as to the difference between God and items in the world (his creation). To insist on the modal status of necessity in respect of God's existence, and with that on his eternity and aseity, is to differentiate between God and everything else, or at least between God and all empirical, or material, entities: the most bounteous island, the most perfect saint, the sum of all the dollars ever printed, even the universe itself, are all excluded as candidates for the definition, 'the most real entity possible'. If the notion of necessary existence is incoherent, and it cannot be a necessary condition of something's being the most real entity possible that its existence be necessary, then on what grounds could a particular entity be picked out as being the most real possible? All

contingent entities are to some extent alike in respect of their reality, precisely because they are contingent: it is necessary existence that marks off God from his creation.

God, then, is not an empirical entity - but nor is he alone in being alleged to be a necessarily existent one. The Forms, Substance, and the Absolute have at one time or another been put forward as necessary existents, and it will help to become clearer about just what is at stake in the claim that it is God who is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' if we attempt to substitute one of these for God in Anselm's argument. In view of Anselm's undoubted Platonism,[47] it may be as well to substitute some platonic Form, one which could plausibly be regarded as the most real possible entity within platonic metaphysics proper. I shall substitute the Good, rather than any other Form, for God, because Plato clearly conceives of it as being more exalted than the other Forms; it may thus be very plausibly regarded as

47. It is interesting to note, in this context, the prominence which Anselm attaches to the notion of immutability as a feature of 'absolute' existence, since it is of course immutability which is for Plato a mark of the Forms, enabling them to be objects of knowledge, and not of mere opinion, and therefore fully real, in contrast to the "semi-reality" of the empirical world: 'But since...all other beings, in accordance with some cause, have at some time been, or will be, by mutation, what they are not now; or what they were not, or will not be, at some time; and, since this former existence of theirs is no longer a fact; and their existence in a transient, and most brief, and scarcely existing, present is hardly a fact - since, then, they exist in such mutability, it is not unreasonably denied that they exist simply, and perfectly, and absolutely; and it is asserted that they are almost non-existent, that they scarcely exist at all.' (Monologion, XXVIII, p.88.)

something than which nothing more real is possible.[48] I will not discuss the question whether Plato's positing of the Good as 'beyond' existence in fact jeopardises his entire system, making the real, the knowable, depend ultimately on something beyond reality and knowledge - as Gilson maintains[49] - but simply put forward what I think is a plausible view, that supreme reality is to be found, in Plato's system, in the Good.

I shall use the form of the argument given in Ch.4, substituting the formulations of (4.2), (6.2), and (9.2) for (4), (6), and (9) respectively.

(1a) We believe the Good to be something than which nothing greater can be thought.

(2) 'Something than which nothing greater can be thought' is understood, and

(3) it therefore exists 'in the mind'.

(4) Assume that that than which nothing greater can be thought is an entity which does not exist, but is a mere fiction; then

(5) that than which nothing greater can be thought can be conceived to exist in reality.

(6) Any entity which exists is greater than any entity which is a mere fiction.

(7) Therefore (4,5,6) something can be conceived

48. See Republic, 508e, 509b.

49. Being and some Philosophers (Toronto; Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952, 2nd. ed.), p.20. Cf. Vlastos, 'Degrees of Reality in Plato', in ed. Bambrough, New Essays on Plato and Aristotle (London; RKP, 1965), pp.1-20.

to be greater than that than which nothing greater can be thought;

(8) 'But this is obviously impossible':

(9) Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that that than which nothing greater can be thought is an existent entity, and not a mere fiction.

Remembering that 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' = 'that than which nothing more real can be thought' = 'the most real possible entity', we find that the Good is indeed real. But of course (1a) is problematic: what does it mean to say that the Good is the most real entity possible? Given the sort of entity Plato takes the Good to be, how can it be anything other than a fiction; how, that is to say, can it be real at all? For Plato, of course, 'truly to be means "to be immaterial, immutable, necessary, and intelligible". That is precisely what Plato calls Idea. The eternal and intelligible Ideas are reality itself.'[50] The problem is, can 'to be' be used to mean this and yet remain coherent, given that it must connote nonfictionality? (There is no compelling reason why 'x is real' must mean, among other things, that x is not a fiction: 'real' could be used in such a way as not to connote nonfictionality. But of course, if used in such a way, then to show that x is real is of no interest where the question of the fictionality or nonfictionality of x is at stake.) Certainly the Good is real, indeed the most

50. Gilson, God and Philosophy (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1944), p.24.

real entity possible, by definition. It is necessarily real in Plato's system. As I have already indicated, however, this is achieved only at the expense of cutting off the Good from the world, much as Plato may try to avoid this. Given the sort of entity the Forms are supposed to be - necessarily real entities - no plausible connection is made between them and the world. No coherent account is available of 'participation in the Forms', or of 'partaking of the Forms'. Thus, to say that the Good is necessarily real (by definition), or indeed to maintain that it is anything but a fiction, and not real at all, is simply to insist on using 'real' in a way idiosyncratic to Plato's metaphysics. As I have said, there is nothing wrong in itself with this, and no doubt any metaphysical system has as part at least of its raison d'être the conviction that our "common sense" view of reality is in need of modification, alteration, or extension. Insofar as such a system claims to be dealing with non-fictions, however, the use of 'real', or whatever word or phrase may take its place, must be such as to allow that 'x is real' be compatible with 'x is non-fictional'. Of course, Plato thought the Forms were independent of the human mind; but this is just what he fails to prove. We do not take up his metaphysical recommendations precisely because it seems that the outcome of the system is that it is after all fictions which are being elevated to the highest ontological status, the very opposite of

Plato's intention. (1a) turns out to be self-contradictory.

It might be possible, I suppose, to make the relation between the Forms and the world coherent by regarding the Forms as manufactured models of explanation and nothing else - mistaken models perhaps, insofar as transcendental idealism is mistaken (and whether it is or not is not the issue here). To do this would certainly deny reality to the Forms, a denial which would, however, be quite in order. For if the Forms are no more than explanatory models for epistemology, then the question of fictionality or non-fictionality does not arise. Such transcendental models have no clear status with regard to the question, fiction or not? To adopt this method of dealing with the Forms, however, would be to remove just that similarity between the Good and God with which we have been concerned. The question, fiction or not, is the crucial question about God. To put it another way, Anselm's argument cannot be considered on a par with an uninterpreted axiom system in geometry. That is, the question of the reality or otherwise of geometrical figures is not at issue, since the purposes served by geometry do not require that it be anything other than a system dealing with fictions. However, an uninterpreted theological axiom system is of itself useless for Christians, since it is a fundamental requirement of Christianity that the referent of propositions about God be non-fictional.

Otherwise, of course, Anselm could be given his conclusion without further ado, as can the theoretical geometer. If it is worth making at all, then the claim that there is a God must be understood as asserting that God is not a phantasm, a figment of the imagination, a psychological projection, or even an indispensable explanatory model, but an actual entity.

Anselm's claim that God exists, which we may understand as a claim that he necessarily exists, since he is 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', or the most real entity possible, rests on two assumptions. The first is that the concept of a necessarily existing entity is a coherent one, that is, that it is logically possible that something-or-other be a real (i.e., non-fictional) necessary existent. The second, assuming that it is possible that there be such an entity at all, is that <u>God</u> is such an entity. These two assumptions are of course logically interrelated, it being the second which is fundamental. I shall now see what, if anything, may be done to substantiate them.

7. THE INTELLIGIBILITY OF GOD.

It is of course a central tenet of empiricism that there can be nothing which is a necessary existent, and that all metaphysical systems which posit something or other as both non-fictional and necessarily existent are thereby condemned. Thus Kai Nielsen: 'Fictional or purely ideational conceptualizations apart, there is only one sort or level of existence and this is to have a place in space-time.'[1] Or, to put it in the more Quinean manner adopted in Ch.5, there is nothing non-spatio-temporal which is not fictional. As I have argued earlier, simply to accept this as an a priori tenet will not do. Conversely, however, it must be remembered that the logical possibility of whatever reality is posited as fundamental in a given metaphysical system is always the central question at issue in considering that system as an account of how things actually are. To establish the logical possibility or otherwise of such a putative reality, it is always necessary to examine the candidate(s) put forward for the position. The procedure is the same for non-hierarchical systems, where there can be no question of one (or one class of) thing's being more real than another, as it is for an idealist system such as Plato's. That is to say, whether what is taken to be fundamentally real is, for example, the Forms, or the entire membership

1. Contemporary Critiques of Religion (London; Macmillan, 1971), p.14.

of the class of spatio-temporal existents, the claim is tested in the same way; one must ask whether particular putative Forms and particular putative spatio-temporal entities respectively can have the attributes they acknowledgedly have and be the sort of thing it is suggested they are. Can the Form of Bed be both a plane surface on which to sleep and a Form? If not, then what is it, and what is its relation to this or that bed? Can a bed be both a plane surface on which to sleep and a spatio-temporal entity? It is just to the extent that there appears to be no incoherence or unintelligibility in describing beds, chairs, etc., as spatio-temporal entities that the metaphysical system within which spatio-temporal existents are what is fundamentally real gets a grip on our thought. And naturally, within such a system, it would be absurd to deny reality to any member of the class of spatio-temporal existents. In the following quotation, for instance, Nielsen might care to substitute 'spatio-temporal existents' for 'substance':

> The point hinges, of course, on the fact that substance is that which is metaphysically fundamental. In the case of things which are not fundamental, it may well be foolish for us to deny their existence; for in doing so we may contradict the obvious testimony of experience, and we may also contradict a wide range of judgements of whose truth we are certain. Still, such denials are not unintelligible. In denying the existence of substance, however, we would not merely contradict the obvious testimony of experience, nor would we merely contradict some limited range of judgements of whose truth we

> are quite confident. We would rather contradict all judgement whatsoever! For given that substance is the whole of reality, in denying the existence of substance we would be denying the existence of reality itself - i.e., we would be refusing to posit anything whatsoever as a subject of judgement.[2]

This is surely right, with the important exception of the suggestion that in denying the existence of substance it would not be not merely the testimony of experience which we would contradict: rather, it would not be the testimony of experience at all which would be contradicted, but judgements alone. To deny the reality of a fundamental metaphysical entity is not at all like denying that a particular thing is an example of that sort of entity. To deny the reality of spatio-temporal entities, as in Advaita Vedanta for example, is not at all the same sort of thing as to deny that such-and-such a thing in the distance is a spatio-temporal entity. However, the important point here is that if 'substance' is eschewed as 'that which is the whole of reality', and 'spatio-temporal existents' substituted, then the reality of spatio-temporal existents cannot sensibly be questioned, since it is they which constitute the class of real things. To question this, one would not ask of an acknowledgedly spatio-temporal entity whether, being a spatio-temporal entity, it is real. Rather, one would call into question the system which regarded spatio-temporal

2. Michael Young, 'The Ontological Argument and the Concept of Substance', American Philosophical Quarterly, 11 (1974), p.189 (my underlining).

entities as constitutive of what is real by asking whether, for instance, a chair, given its attributes, could be a spatio-temporal entity. In the same way one would question, for example, Spinoza's system, not by simply asserting that 'substance', since it is a concept of a necessary existent, cannot be coherent, but by asking the 'further question what the specific nature of substance is';[3] that is, by analysing alleged examples of it (in Spinoza's case, the single example, God). Whatever the metaphysical fundamental under discussion, the question is always this: can one use the concept in the manner suggested without falling into unintelligibility?

To return to Anselm then, the question to be asked is the following: can 'necessary existent' (as I have earlier analysed it) be used intelligibly and without contradiction? And to answer it, we must see whether God, the candidate put forward for the office and title of necessary existent can have the attributes he is said to have and be a necessary existent. The question does not arise in the Proslogion of course, because an affirmative answer (with 'eternal and self-sufficient' for 'necessary') is assumed. No C11th. monk would seriously contemplate the possibility that talk of God is unintelligible: Anselm's 'strongest argument that...God...is not understood nor thought of, and is not in the mind nor in thought...is to appeal to (Gaunilo's) faith and to (his) conscience' (Reply I, p.169). That the question

3. ibid., p.182.

does not arise, however, and that its not arising conceals a logical distinction between God and that than which nothing greater can be thought, is of the first importance, not only because the question is itself a central one, but also because the distinction's being concealed lies at the heart of the peculiarly chequered history of Anselm's argument. The difference between the two basic camps - those, like Schopenhauer, who think the argument obviously invalid, and those, like Bonaventure, for whom it is obviously true - is that the former see only an a priori proof of the existence of an individual, and the latter only an affirmation of the existence of reality. These two groups, like Anselm himself, fail to make a clear distinction between showing that the reality of that which is most real in a given metaphysical system cannot be denied, and showing that it is such-and-such which, or who, is this entity (or a member of the class of these entities). Those who reject the argument, but uncomfortably and without final conviction, would appear to be torn between denying what is obviously true and affirming something in a manner in which it obviously ought not to be capable of being affirmed, just because of the failure to separate the question of God's existence from the assertion of the existence of that than which nothing greater can be thought.

It is worth noting that the identification of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought is crucial in two ways: the success of Anselm's

argument as a proof of God's existence turns on it; and the vindication of the hierarchical metaphysics within which the proof operates depends on it. The first is quite obvious, but the second perhaps less so. The point is this. If God is not that than which nothing greater can be thought, the most real entity possible, then what is? The absolutes of Plato and Hegel, for instance, would appear to have been discredited, which is why a hierarchical view of reality is unfashionable, to say the least. But God - or some God or other - is still an obvious candidate. For whatever the nature of whatever it is which is the most real entity possible, it is very plausibly the subject of reverence and awe; and God, what- or whoever he is, is very plausibly the most real entity possible. Of course this need not be the case, but if our philosophical and/or religious views are such as to permit the serious contemplation of a philosophical proof of the existence of God at all, if we do not regard philosophy and religion as mutually irrelevant, then this plausibility is important. Certainly, material objects are hardly suitable objects of religious worship (although it is as well to remember Comte's 'positive religion' here); and certainly the Greek gods of Olympus were not regarded as metaphysically fundamental at first. However, not only would it be difficult for a Christianity which retains its Hellenism to admit a metaphysical absolute other

than its God, but it would also be difficult for a hierarchically-minded metaphysician not to regard his absolute as a god, even if as a "philosophers' god" only, precisely because Christianity has traditionally wanted to make metaphysical claims about its God.

Perhaps the application of the distinction discussed above to Anselm's text, and its crucial importance for an evaluation of his argument, may be made clearer by examining something else which Anselm does not treat directly, and in the light of that, applying the distinction specifically to his subject, God.

Anselm defines God as that which is maximally real; and as we have seen, maximal reality entails eternity and self-sufficiency, inasmuch as to be eternal and self-sufficient is, within Anselm's metaphysics, to be maximally real. But on what basis is this definition proposed? To echo another question often asked, does Anselm hold God to be maximally real because he is eternal and self-sufficient, or are timelessness and self-sufficiency the conditions of maximal reality because God is eternal and self-sufficient? Does Anselm begin with platonic metaphysics, into which he is able to fit God rather than, say, the One, as that which is maximally real because he thinks that it is God, who, being eternal and self-sufficient, measures up to the standard of maximal reality laid down by the

metaphysical system? Or does he rather choose this particular system because he thinks it an accurate account of how things are inasmuch as its standard of maximal reality coincides with certain of God's features? The question is of course intended as a logical, and not a psychological, one. It is tempting to suppose that it is the Christian conception of God which logically precedes Greek metaphysics in Anselm's thought, and this is certainly a view which would reinforce the criticism that his argument is trivially circular. Consider the following from the Proslogion:

> But clearly, whatever You are, You are not that through another but through Your very self. You are therefore the very life by which You live, the wisdom by which You are wise, the very goodness by which You are good to both good men and wicked, and the same holds for like attributes.
>
> - Ch.XII, p.133.

Now, this passage might suggest that since God has his life, wisdom, and goodness 'through /His/ very self', it is his being God which renders his being and his attributes supreme. And if this notion is applied to the assertion that God is 'the being who /alone/ exists in a strict and absolute sense' (Pros.XXII, p.145) ('You are...the very life by which You live...') we find that God is maximally real simply inasmuch as he is God: 'If God is God, God exists; and since the antecedent is evident, the conclusion is evident

likewise.'[4] However, the antecedent, 'God is God', is crucially ambiguous. Were this view of Anselm's grounds for saying that God is maximally real an accurate interpretation of his thought, then 'God' would in both its instances function as a proper name. But since definitions cannot be given of proper names or their bearers, Anselm's formula, 'God is that than which nothing greater can be thought', would have to be treated as a description, and not a definition, of God, with the result that Anselm could not show that the Fool contradicts himself if he accepts the formula but not the conclusion. Anselm would be saying merely that God, since he is to be described as maximally real, is real: God, being God, exists. The argument would indeed be trivially circular, and hardly an argument at all. If, however, we take the formula as a definition of God, and I have argued in Ch.4 that the balance of evidence favours such an interpretation, then it must be a definition of whatever it is which is God, that is, of 'God' as a descriptive predicable. Bonaventure's view will therefore have to be understood like this: God (= proper name) is God (= descriptive predicable); therefore he exists. This would in turn suggest that God is maximally real because he has the features required for an entity to be maximally real, and that

4. Bonaventure, De Myst. Trin., I,1,29,t.v., p.48; cited by Etienne Gilson, The Philosophy of Bonaventure, trans. Dom Illtyd Trethowan and F.J. Sheed (London; Sheed and Ward, 1940), p.128.

these are logically independent of God, their bearer.

Henceforth, then, I shall use 'God' when using the word as a proper name, and 'god' when using it as a descriptive predicable, except in those instances where I quote, whether directly or indirectly, and do not wish to introduce a distinction which the author does not make. In such cases I shall use 'God'.

Once the distinction between 'God' and 'god' is recognized, and applied to Anselm's argument, we see that it must be God's being god which makes his being and his attributes supreme. Anselm derives his idea of ontological supremacy, not from God's traditional attributes, but from Greek metaphysics: at least, this is how the logic of his thought moves, whatever its psychological movement. He regards God as maximally real because he measures up to logically independent standards of reality. This seems in fact quite clear from the body of the thoroughly platonic Monologion text, and is strongly suggested by other passages from the Proslogion. In Ch.XIII for example, we read:

> All that which is enclosed in any way by place or time is less than that which no law of place or time constrains. Since, then, nothing is greater than You, no place or time confines You but You exist everywhere and always.
>
> - p.133.

God, being supremely great, must be unconfined by place or time because so to be unconfined is a condition of maximal greatness: the argument moves from the

metaphysical principle to the definition of God, and so to his being unlimited. Perhaps the clearest passage in the Proslogion to support this view is in Ch.XXII:

> And You are the being who exists in a strict and absolute sense because You have neither past nor future existence but only present existence; nor can You be thought not to exist at any time.
> - p.145.

Necessarily existing only in the present (which is for Anselm synonymous with existing 'neither yesterday nor today nor tomorrow but /being/ absolutely outside all time' (Pros.XIX, p.141)) is a condition of existence 'in a strict and absolute sense'. This follows the pattern of argument of the Proslogion as a whole: God is defined as that which is supremely real, from which it is deduced that God cannot be a fiction, and that he is moreover eternal, self-sufficient, etc.

In terms of Proslogion II-IV then, we may say that Anselm does not distinguish between 'deus' as a description of 'dominus', and 'deus' as the name of him who is 'dominus'. Thus in Ch.II he addresses 'domine' (God) as 'You who give understanding to faith', saying of him (god) that he is 'something than which nothing greater can be thought'. In Ch.III he addresses God as 'domine deus noster/meus' (god): 'And You /God/, Lord our God /god/, are this being' (which cannot be thought not to exist). In Ch.IV, 'God /god/ is that than which nothing greater

can be thought'. In the Reply of course, where Gaunilo, and not God, is addressed, his usage is much more consistent with that in Proslogion IV.

Furthermore, if the distinction between God and god is applied to certain passages in Anselm which are puzzling when considered against the interpretation of the text which I am proposing, the puzzlement is fairly readily removed. Firstly, the very introduction in Ch.II of Anselm's formula:

> Now we believe that You are something than which nothing greater can be thought.
>
> - p.117.

As I have said, this formula must be taken as a definition in order to carry the Fool along at all; but if it is so taken, then what it defines cannot be a proper name or its bearer. And yet it is quite clear that Anselm is addressing God, and just as clear that simply to state that we believe (whoever 'we' may refer to) that God is something than which nothing greater can be thought is hardly an adequate starting-point for his argument. The Fool knows very well that Anselm and his fellow believers believe it - but he does not. What Anselm and the Fool do believe in common, since they share a common metaphysics (and this Anselm simply, but reasonably, assumes) is that god is something than which nothing greater can be thought. And they both believe it because it is for both of them a matter of definition. Anselm is able to have it both ways because he does not distinguish God from god. Now consider again the first paragraph of Anselm's Reply:

> I reply as follows: If 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' is neither understood nor thought of, and is neither in the mind nor in thought, then it is evident that either God is not that than which a greater cannot be thought or is not understood nor thought of, and is not in the mind nor in thought. Now my strongest argument that this is false is to appeal to your faith and to your conscience.
>
> - Reply I, p.169.

Here it is clear that Anselm is not appealing, as he was when addressing the Fool, to a belief shared in virtue of a metaphysics shared, but rather to a belief shared in virtue of a religious faith shared. This is of course what he sets out in his Reply to do: 'Since it is not the Fool, against whom I spoke in my tract, who takes me up, but one who, though speaking on the Fool's behalf, is an orthodox Christian and no fool, it will suffice if I reply to the Christian.' (Preface, p.169) But if Anselm is replying to the Christian alone, he cannot seriously be taking Gaunilo to be speaking on the Fool's behalf. Anselm uses 'God' as a proper name here, and appeals to Gaunilo's faith and conscience that the bearer of the name is indeed god, i.e., that than which nothing greater can be thought. This alone would be in order - Anselm may appeal to a Christian's faith and conscience on matters of Christian belief. Nor would there be anything objectionable to such an appeal to agree also that God is understood and thought of if it were directed against the Thomistic

kind of objection that God cannot (essentially) be known - but it is not so directed. It is directed against the objection that 'that than which nothing greater can be thought' cannot be understood, that is, against an objection to a metaphysical tenet, the tenet that 'that which is maximally real', i.e., 'god', is unintelligible: for Anselm continues, 'Therefore "that than which a greater cannot be thought" is truly understood and thought and is in the mind and in thought.' (p.169) And in such a case an appeal to faith and conscience is misdirected. However, if it is borne in mind that Anselm does not distinguish God from god, the confusion here becomes clearly explicable precisely as stemming from the failure to make such a distinction.

Finally, I shall consider the conclusion of Reply X, where it would perhaps appear that Anselm does make a distinction very much like the one which I maintain is absent from his thought.

> I think now that I have shown that I have proved in the above tract, not by a weak argumentation but by a sufficiently necessary one, that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists in reality itself, and that this proof has not been weakened by the force of any objection. For the import of this proof is in itself of such force that what is spoken of is proved (as a necessary consequence of the fact that it is understood or thought of) both to exist in actual reality and to be itself whatever must be believed about the Divine Being. For we believe of the Divine Being whatever it can, absolutely speaking, be thought better to be

> than not to be. For example, it is better to be eternal than not eternal, good than not good, indeed goodness-itself than not goodness-itself. However, nothing of this kind cannot but be that than which a greater cannot be thought. It is, then, necessary that 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' should be whatever must be believed about the Divine Nature.
>
> - pp.189-191.

From the first two sentences, it seems that Anselm is saying that he has proved that that which is god ('something than which a greater cannot be thought') is real, and has those attributes and that nature which we (namely Christians) must believe God to have. For we believe, he continues, that God is eternal, and that he is good; but anything which is these must be that which is maximally real, i.e., that which is god ('that than which a greater cannot be thought'). That which is god, therefore, must have those attributes we believe God to have and thus be what God is. Anselm might be thought to distinguish in the last sentence that than which nothing greater can be thought from the Divine Nature, and to conclude that he has succeeded in doing what he set out in Ch.II of the Proslogion to do, namely to understand that 'You exist as we believe You to exist, and that You are what we believe You to be' by showing that the being here referred to, God, is indeed that than which nothing greater can be thought, i.e., god. One may gain from this the impression, as La Croix

has,[5] that Anselm's whole purpose in the Proslogion is to prove that whatever it is which is such that nothing greater can be thought is real, and that it is of such and such a kind; and then, on grounds of 'faith and conscience' to identify this entity with the bearer of the name God. This would of course entail that Anselm's formula be taken as a description and not a definition, and that therefore the argument be not taken as a philosophically serious attempt to convince the Fool, for it would be that than which nothing greater can be thought, rather than God, which is Anselm's direct subject in the Proslogion. But then the Fool would hardly need convincing, given that he shares Anselm's metaphysics; and he would certainly not be impressed by the assertion of a certain description of the Divine Being ('For we believe of the Divine Being whatever it can, absolutely speaking, be thought better to be that not to be.' (Reply X, p.191)) on the basis of which Anselm states his conclusion. It is of course the case that Anselm does fail to establish the identification of God, rather than some other entity, as god. But surely there can be no question that it is Anselm's intention to convince the Fool, and that, had he the distinction clearly in mind between God and god, between the Divine Being

5. R.R. La Croix, Proslogion II and III (Leiden; E.J. Brill, 1972). La Croix argues that Anselm actually intends to make, and succeeds in making, a logical distinction between 'God' and 'that than which nothing greater can be thought', the latter not being a definition. But his argument carries no great conviction: see my review in Philosophical Studies (Eire), vol.XXIII.

and that than which a greater cannot be thought, he would have realized that - given the distinction - he could not convince the Fool that he is contradicting himself in asserting that there is no God, but that the contradiction would arise only if the Fool were to deny that there is that than which nothing greater can be thought, i.e., god. Far more likely is that Anselm simply does not make the distinction, and that the apparent naivety of the passage is as real as it is apparent. Certainly, Chs.V - XXV of the Proslogion constitute an argument that God is as 'we believe You to be', i.e., that having the divine attributes follows from God's being that than which nothing greater can be thought: and clearly, this is effectively an argument that it is God who is to be identified as god. That than which nothing greater can be thought, namely god, must be something with such-and-such attributes, since to have these follows from being maximally real; these attributes are just those which are traditionally ascribed to the entity named God; therefore it is God who is god. Nevertheless, although Anselm's argument is in effect as just outlined, this clearly does not represent his intention. Rather, his intention in these chapters is to show that God, who is that than which nothing greater can be thought, must have just those attributes which tradition ascribes to him, since it follows from the definition that the entity so defined should have them. Part of what he is doing is to attempt to explain how someone like God can be said to have

those attributes, how they are to be understood (e.g. Ch.VI, 'How He is perceptive although He is not a body'). There is, however, no question at all - for Anselm - of having to succeed in doing that in order to justify the definition he gives in Ch.II. That the attributes follow from the definition is for Anselm confirmation that God indeed has them, that 'You are as we believe You to be'; and that they are so deducible is what he expects to convince the Fool that this is so, rather than being something he intends to function as a justification for identifying that than which nothing greater can be thought as God. He does not see that the intelligibility of the definition with which he starts is in fact dependent on the very possibility of its being given some specific content. For him, Geach's suggestion that 'the proposition "A God exists"... affirms that something-or-other has Divine attributes'[6] is to put matters back to front. Rather, 'God exists' affirms that he who has divine attributes exists. Thus the possibility of something's having divine attributes is not for him at issue in the question of whether or not there is a God: there is no question of having to show that it is God who has the attributes of that than which nothing greater can be thought. God is that than which nothing greater can be thought, and therefore exists; he is that than

6. 'On Worshipping the Right God', in Peter Geach, God and the Soul (London; RKP, 1969), p.115.

which nothing greater can be thought, and therefore has certain attributes. The latter is a quite separate matter from the proof of God's existence. La Croix' interpretation of Reply X is thus mistaken, and it is mistaken precisely because it neglects the fact that Anselm's thought was deeply embedded in the platonic tradition, and therefore liable to fail to distinguish individual from species, the bearer of a proper name from the subject of a definition.[7]

The identification of god with God is of course one which is at the centre of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, appearing most commonly as an assimilation of the logical functions of a proper name with that of a descriptive predicable. It is to this matter that I shall now turn, in order to begin to see what would be involved in trying to answer the question, Can God be god? For it is on the answer to this question that the ultimate success or failure of Anselm's argument depends.

> Lo, I shall go to the children of Israel, and say to them: The God of your fathers hath sent

7. It is interesting in this context to note the following passage from the preface of the Monologion: 'In stating that the supreme Trinity may be said to consist of three substances, I have followed the Greeks, who acknowledge three substances in one Essence, in the same faith wherein we acknowledge three persons in one Substance. For they designate by the word substance that attribute of God which we designate by the word person.' (p.37) Given the development of the concept of substance, such equanimity as between 'substance' and 'person' cannot of course be contemplated; indeed, how something which is substance can have the sort of qualities ascribed to God is just what will be at issue.

> me to you. If they should say to me: What is his name? What shall I say to them? God said to Moses: I AM WHO AM. He said: Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: HE WHO IS hath sent me to you.[8]

Moses seems not to have had much difficulty with this strange phrase, HE WHO IS - but the problems lurking within it have remained at the heart of the Judaeo-Christian doctrine of God. The phrase seems to describe someone, and yet it is given also as a name, YHWH. The Jewish Encyclopaedia tells us that 'Like other Hebrew proper names, the name of God is more than a mere distinguishing title. It represents the Hebrew conception of the divine nature or character, and of the relation of God to his people... In appearance, YHWH (יהוה) is the third person singular imperfect "kal" of the verb היה ("to be"), meaning, therefore, "He is," or "He will be," or, perhaps, "He lives," the root idea of the word being, probably, "to blow," "to breathe," and hence "to live".../In Exodus 3.14/ the meaning would, therefore, be "He who is self-existing, self-sufficient", or, more concretely, "He who lives", the abstract conception of pure existence being foreign to Hebrew thought.'[9] HE WHO IS is the name of the holder of some office, the office of God. The word 'God' functions in the above-quoted passage as a descriptive predicable, like 'King', or 'Chairman'. Yet the name YHWH, we are told, is not

8. Exodus 3. 13-14.
9. Entry under 'Names of God' in The Jewish Encyclopaedia (N.Y.; Ktav, 1964).

just a name, like 'Michael', 'Rachel', or 'Arthur'; it is a name which tells us something - a great deal, in fact - about its bearer, rather like, say, 'Hatchet-face', or 'Finebeard'. 'God', then, functions both as a descriptive predicable, and as a special sort of name, having taken over the latter role from 'Jehovah', itself of course an anglicization of 'YHWH'. The name is a special sort of name inasmuch as it can be used only of a certain entity, one with particular attributes.

'The God of the Bible is a person; i.e., a being self-conscious, with will and purpose, even though by searching man can not find Him out (Job xi. 7; Ps. xciv.7,8,9,10,11; Isa. xl.28; Ps. cxiv.3)'[10] - a person very different from other persons, then. With the influence of Greek thought on Christianity, what we may regard as the literal-mindedness of earlier Judaic Biblical thought diminished, with the result that sooner or later the distinction between the office and its holder comes increasingly to be blurred. 'God' as the equivalent of 'YHWH', and 'God' as that named YHWH merge into each other. That, of course, is a very schematic, and certainly an a-historical, way of putting it. Nevertheless, I think that it is not controversial as a description of a certain state of conceptual affairs, and it may help make clearer what is going on in the Proslogion. Anselm, as I would put it in the light of the above,

10. ibid., entry under 'God'.

addresses not YHWH (or Jehovah), but God as god.

So far, then, we have seen that 'God' has a dual function: sometimes it is used as a name with a meaning attached, 'He who is'; and sometimes as a descriptive predicable, 'god', which, it is claimed, can truly describe only one being, the being named God. It is not that it just so happens that only one being fits the description; rather, the description is logically tied to that one being. There is of course a temptation to insist that the word 'God' is properly speaking a name and a name only - as Paul Ziff would have it, an 'improper proper name'[11] - or that it is a descriptive predicable and a descriptive predicable only, as Geach insists.[12] But these temptations are to be resisted. For as Michael Durrant has demonstrated quite clearly and decisively in The Logical Status of 'God'[13] there are always counterexamples to be found, propositions occuring within religious discourse which are both common and uncontroversial, where 'God' functions otherwise than as a proponent of any single-function theory of the logic of 'God' would claim. Geach's fundamental reason for insisting that 'God' must be a descriptive predicable seems to be that he thinks it is a necessary condition

11. 'About God', in ed. Sidney Hook, Religious Experience and Truth (Edinburgh; Oliver and Boyd, 1962), passim.
12. op.cit., pp.108-9.
13. London; Macmillan, 1973.

for Christian claims about people worshipping false gods that 'God' should be a term of that sort. But he is wrong. He says, rightly, that '... a man may at once truly believe, or even know, that there exists a President of France, i.e., that someone-or-other is President of France, and have a quite mistaken belief as to who holds that position...'.[14] That is, a man may believe or know that someone or something is god, but be mistaken as to his or its identity; he may think, for example, that a certain cat is god. To allow for this, and clearly it must be allowed for, otherwise the religious believer who is not a Christian cannot be making an error, which is just what Christianity insists he is doing, 'god' must function as a descriptive predicable in propositions such as 'He is worshipping a false god'. Nevertheless, precisely because that is the case, one may without any logical impropriety inquire after the identity of the referent of the description, 'god': who or what holds this office? If it is not the cat, then who or what is it? The answer is, God. Here, 'God' is a proper name. If Geach will not have that, then it is as though he were unwilling to allow the being to whom the descriptive predicable 'god' may truly be applied to have a name: but clearly he does have a name. Indeed, he has a number of names - Jehovah, He Who Is, God. On the other hand, if it is insisted that 'God' functions solely as a name, proper,

14. op.cit., p.115.

improperly proper, or what have you, then false identification of something as God becomes impossible, because names lack criteria of application which are essential: if a name is just a name, then it can be given to anyone or anything. One could simply choose to name a certain cat God, and not thereby be committing an error. But, the Christian claims, to do that would be an error, as opposed to being merely impious, an alternative claim, or whatever. And it would be an error because the cat cannot be god since it does not possess the requisite attributes: therefore to call it God is erroneous. If anything is properly called God, then it must have certain attributes which no cat has - omniscience, divine mercy, and so on. Normally, of course, such qualifications are not needed in order that something be correctly named. Whether so-and-so is or is not John depends on whether he has the attributes of the person (i.e., is the person) we know to be named John; but it is no error to give the name John to some other person, with different attributes. Which people have which names is a contingent matter; but which entity bears the name God depends on the nature of the entity in question, that is to say, on whether or not it is truly describable as god. Even such a brief discussion as this is sufficient to indicate that 'God' does not have some one logical function only. Durrant's conclusion, '...that there are fatal difficulties for any scheme in which "God" is introduced as having a single status such that

we can offer a coherent and consistent account of the form of proposition expressed by sentences of the form "God is F"'[15] is one which I shall, accordingly, accept without further debate.

The name God carries with it a meaning, it connotes a certain description: the descriptive predicable, 'god', can truly describe only a unique referent, namely God. The latter claim, if true - and it is a central Christian tenet that it is true - explains why the former claim arises. For if only God can be god, then the name God might quite reasonably be expected to carry some connotation of the descriptive predicable, 'god'. If the description, d, could be true of only one entity, E, then, since only E could be d, 'E' might well come to connote 'd'. Perhaps the following will point up what I have in mind here. Suppose there is some one type of virus which is the most complex virus possible, it being true by definition that any virus-like thing more complex than that virus would be something other than a virus. Imagine further that, ex hypothesi, there could be only one virus of which it could be true that it is the most complex virus possible. Let us name that one virus Xynonenes; then the proposition that only Xynonenes could be the most complex virus possible would be true. Now, let us imagine also that being the most complex virus possible meant that Xynonenes was also the deadliest virus known to man.

15. op.cit., p.110.

Would one not expect some such word as 'xynonenetic' to come into use? Other viruses, for instance, might be rather xynonenetic; others might be thought by the scientists who discovered them actually to be xynonenetic, being thought, erroneously perhaps, to be as complex and as deadly as Xynonenes. 'Xynonenes' might well come to connote 'xynonenetic'. 'Xynonenes is xynonenetic' would come to be a truism, perhaps even a trivial truism. Disputes might even eventually occur as to whether Xynonenes really was xynonenetic: that is, it might come to be doubted whether Xynonenes truly was the most complex possible virus, or whether some other virus was not more complex; or whether, given the newly-discovered fact that complexity and deadliness are not correlated in the manner previously described when conjoined with having a cubic structure, as Xynonenes has, the virus named Xynonenes really could be xynonenetic at all. Xynonenes is now no longer a paradigm - or even an example at all - of a xynonenetic entity. We are in a rather similar position in respect of God and god. Can the being named God be god? If not, if it is logically impossible that an entity having the attributes which God has should be god, then God cannot be real. If, that is, the being named God cannot have those attributes which he is held to have, among them those attaching by virtue of his being god, then he must be a fiction, a creation of the human mind. For

a logically impossible entity, whatever its name, cannot be anything other than a fiction.

Another way of approaching this is by means of the currently fashionable neo-Wittgensteinian view of religious, and other, discourse as constituting logically separate, or at least separable, areas of discourse; it is within these alone that the content and meaning of those propositions is established, the unique occurence of which within a particular area of discourse serves to mark off that area from others.[16] D.Z. Phillips affords perhaps the best example of such an approach. Without entering on a detailed discussion of the notion of a language-game, or of Phillips' views in general, I shall distinguish two positions, one or the other of which, or each at different times, are attributable to Phillips. The first position, which I shall term 'strong', is that areas of discourse, language-games, are logically quite separate from each other, and that criticism across such areas is therefore impossible. On this view, language-games would seem to be linguistic counterparts of Hare's 'bliks'. The second position, which I shall term 'weak', is that although areas of discourse are logically separable from each other, they are nevertheless not absolutely logically discrete. Philosophical criticism, therefore, is possible

16. I say 'neo-Wittgensteinian' without intending that this should imply anything about Wittgenstein's <u>own</u> views about religious language, or language in general.

across language-games. Phillips himself is conscious of there being these two positions, and distinguishes them, arguing in favour of the latter, in 'Religious Beliefs and Language-Games'.[17] The former is characterized as the view that 'religious believers can say what they like', a view perhaps attributable to philosophers when they 'talk of language-games as having criteria of intelligibility within them, and of the impossibility of rendering one language-game unintelligible in terms of criteria of intelligibility taken from another';[18] and the weak position as one which allows that 'What is said /in religion/ falls under standards of judgment with which we are already acquainted. When what is said by religious believers does violate the facts or distort our apprehension of situations, no appeal to the fact that what is said is said in the name of religion can justify or excuse the violation or distortion.'[19]

Now, consider some of the things Phillips says about the reality of God:

> It is not that <u>as a matter of fact</u> God will always exist, but that it <u>makes no sense</u> to say that God might not exist.[20]

17. Ch.V of D.Z. Phillips, <u>Faith and Philosophical Enquiry</u> (London; RKP, 1970). Chs.I-IV incline towards the strong position; Ch.V itself is intended as a retraction of that position.
18. ibid., p.92.
19. ibid., pp.98-9.
20. 'Philosophy, Theology, and the Reality of God', Ch.I of D.Z. Phillips, op.cit., p.2.

I have argued that this is true of god, given that the concept is coherent. But whether or not the claim can be extended to God is another question, and one with which Phillips can help us. Citing Peter Winch, he writes that 'What I tried to urge was that the distinction between the real and the unreal does not come to the same thing in every context';[21] and he continues with a case which I have already, albeit tacitly, accepted, in allowing Anselm to talk of reality in his platonic way, as against insisting that 'real' be properly applied only to spatio-temporal entities. The question of the legitimacy or otherwise of the concept of necessary existence is of course one which centres on just this point: to dismiss it out of hand, on the grounds that questions of existence are questions of fact, whereas modal questions are questions of thought, or of logic, is to be wedded to a view of metaphysics which would have curtailed discussion of the ontological argument some chapters ago, and which I have already rejected. I shall therefore accept the sort of position underlying statements such as these:

> ....it is <u>within</u> religious discourse that we find what is meant by the reality of God;[22]
>
> Despite the protests of these philosophers against an appeal to religious language to

21. 'Religious Belief and Philosophical Enquiry', ibid., Ch.IV, p.63.
22. ibid., p.70.

> find out what is meant by the reality of God, what they have done is to impose the grammar of another mode of discourse on religion - namely, our talk about physical objects. Thus, Hick merely begs the whole question by talking about 'the natural and ordinary meaning of words';[23]
>
> Understand what is meant by the divinity of God, and you understand what is meant by the reality of God at the same time.[24]

Phillips himself, of course, has no need of the ontological, or any other, argument for the existence of God. For him, 'God is real' is just like 'Physical objects are real', and since specific physical objects are '...examples of the kind of thing we mean by talking about physical objects... There is no question of justifying the criteria for our use of "physical object": that is how we do use the concept. The comparison with the reality of God was meant to be at this grammatical level. In each case there would be no question of a general justification of the criteria for distinguishing between the real and the unreal.'[25] There is for him

23. 'Religion and Epistemology: some Contemporary Confusions', ibid., Ch.VII, pp.131-2.
24. 'Religious Belief and Philosophical Enquiry', op.cit., p.73.
25. ibid., p.70. Cf. Paul J.W. Miller, 'The Ontological Argument for God', The Personalist, 42 (1961), p.342: 'Philosophers are often accused by their critics of having made arbitrary assumptions. Such charges often stem from a failure to understand the internal coherence of a philosophy. St.Anselm is often thought to have assumed that what is necessary for thought is also necessary in fact. But the whole argument, as Anselm himself saw perfectly, rests on the notion that when a term is thought together with

no more argument about the veridicality of God's reality than about the veridicality of the reality of physical objects: and to establish this, it is enough that we, or some of us, use 'real' in this way.[26] Nevertheless, remembering our characterization of the problem with which Anselm is left (Can God be god?) Phillips' line can be illuminating, since his conclusion about the question of the reality of God, in one place at least, comes to exactly that, although he would no doubt not wish to approach its solution in the way I do: '...the philosophers want to know what is meant by "real" ("exists") in the statement "God is real (exists)"',[27] and, I would add, whether what is meant makes sense. But I shall return to that. His parallel with questions about the physical world is instructive:

> I suggest that more can be gained if one compares the question, 'What kind of reality is divine reality?' not with the question, 'Is this physical object real or not?' but with the different

> its meaning the mind is already in contact with an irreducible reality. Thought is always of some reality or thing (res). As soon as a term is "used" and not merely "mentioned" (which is the modern terminology corresponding to Anselm's distinction of res and vox), some kind of determinate reality has been designated. It is an abuse of language to say that the concepts in the mind present necessities merely of thought, as if their intrinsic properties might be altered by other thoughts.'

26. This appears to be his position in Chs.I-IV, if not in Ch.V, of Faith and Philosophical Enquiry, op.cit.

27. D.Z. Phillips, The Concept of Prayer (London; RKP, 1965), p.23. Cited by John Hick, 'The Justification of Religious Belief', Theology, 71 (1968), p.103.

> question, 'What kind of reality is the reality of physical objects?'. To ask whether physical objects are real is not like asking whether this appearance is real or not, but how can I find out whether the physical world is real or not? This latter question is not about the possibility of carrying out an investigation. It is a question of whether it is possible to speak of truth and falsity in the physical world; a question prior to that of determining the truth or falsity of any particular matter of fact. Similarly, the question of the reality of God is a question of the possibility of sense and nonsense, truth and falsity, in religion.[28]

On this analogy, what Anselm has done is to show that the Fool's assertion that there is no divine reality would be parallel to a denial of the reality of the physical world, a denial which it would be simply a mistake to make, since 'reality' is used in that particular way. What he does not realise, however, is that the question of 'the possibility of sense and nonsense, truth and falsity' remains; moreover, so far from the implicit assumption that claims about God's reality are coherent being tolerable, it is precisely the truth or falsity of that assumption on which the claim that there is a God rests. Anselm is content to appeal to Gaunilo's faith and conscience that it is not the case that 'God...is not understood nor thought of, and is not in the mind nor in thought' (Reply I, p.169),[29] and that therefore God can be thought

28. 'Philosophy, Theology, and the Reality of God', op.cit., p.3.

29. The whole tenor of Gaunilo's arguments, of course, excludes the possibility that he might think 'God' to be incoherent, rather than just unknowable.

(that 'God' is a coherent concept). However, the issue cannot be left like that, but must be subjected to analysis, just like the concept of physical reality. Anselm himself would not of course have put it in this sort of way, since his view of reality was quite different to that of Phillips - indeed, we might say that Anselm is to be distinguished from Phillips in this respect in that he has a view of reality, whereas Phillips has views about how 'reality' is, and perhaps ought to be, used. Anselm leaves us with the problem of whether or not 'God' is coherent; and it is a problem which can be approached without contravening Phillips' thesis that it is a mistake to judge what goes on within one language-game by the canons, criteria, or rules of another. At least, it can be approached on condition that one is prepared to grant that 'sense and nonsense, truth and falsity' do not vary in sense from one language-game to another in such a way that their different senses are logically independent of each other: that is, so long as one accepts only the weak, but not the strong position as outlined above. I shall not, therefore, argue on any a priori grounds against the coherence of the Christian concept of God. I shall not argue, for instance, that only spatio-temporal existence, or reality, is possible; or that, since only human beings can exercise will, 'God wills x' is incoherent.

What kind of reality, then, is divine reality? In the first place, it is an eternal and

self-sufficient kind of reality - just as the reality of physical objects is a spatio-temporal kind of reality. And, just as in the case of spatio-temporal reality, it is necessary to look at alleged examples of such a sort of reality in order to settle any doubt there may be about the sense of the category in question. Indeed, to look at alleged examples is all there is to be done. Consideration of a question about the spatio-temporal kind of reality, the reality of physical objects, may help to clarify this. Often, of course, we ask whether such-and-such is a physical object: and in that case we look and see whether it is spatio-temporal, or whether, for instance, it disappears when the weather conditions change (i.e., a mirage) or when the effects of a certain drug wear off, which those have taken who claim to see, or feel it (i.e., a hallucination). Of course there are complications. If the process of looking and seeing is suspected to be inappropriate, then one way of describing what is going on is to say that the very concept of physical reality is being questioned: given the features which things which are alleged to be physically real are alleged to have, can there after all be physically real things? Does 'physical reality' make sense? Is it a coherent concept? Such doubts are rare; most of our philosophical doubts about physical reality are doubts about the certainty of our knowledge of it, rather than about its very possibility. Our doubts tend not to be about the appropriateness of looking

and seeing, but about the possibility of such a procedure yielding knowledge. There are occasions, however, when we might ask of something whether it could be a physical object, and what we ask is often whether there could be such a thing, given that it is supposed to be a physical object. On reading H.G. Wells' The Time Machine, for instance, one might ask, Could there really be such a thing as a time machine? In asking that question, we are assuming that a time machine is supposed to be a physical object, and not, perhaps, an object of science fiction; for we know that, on the latter supposition, there certainly can be such a thing - there it is, in the pages of The Time Machine. The question involves finding a satisfactory answer to something like the following: given the nature of physical objects (i.e., given our concept of physical reality) and given our concept of time, could there be an x, such that x is a physical object and can 'travel' forward and backward in time? It is important to note that an answer depends on our concept of time, as well as on our concept of physical objects. The possibility of there being such a thing as the time machine described in Wells' book depends on the coherence of what we might call a composite concept (composed of 'physical object' and 'time'): both the latter concepts must therefore be considered in assessing the coherence of the composite. If we answer that there could not be such a thing as a

time machine, then we might say, correctly, that Wells' time machine must be made up, must be a figment of the imagination; for it could not be real.

The distinction between things that are real, and things that are made up, is one which I suspect is common to all language-games, if there are such things at all (if 'language-game' is coherent!). However that may be, it is certainly a distinction to be found in Christian discourse. Just as Wells' time machine could not be real, so, Anselm wants to argue, God could not be made up. This question - Is God real? - is a question within the language-game, as Phillips would say. That is what makes it so important, for it is why Christians may doubt whether God does, after all, exist, and yet remain Christians. One might say that the question of God's existence is a religious question, just as the question of the existence of the devil is a religious question.

A brief discussion of the devil may in fact be of assistance here. Without trying to establish the nature of the original concept of the devil, whether it began as an anthropomorphic notion or became one, only to change again later, it is clear that there was once current, and may still be current among some Christians, I suppose, a conception of the devil as Lucifer; that is, as a superhuman being who is wholly evil, and whose powers are exceeded

only by those of God. Very few people today would want to say that there is such a being as Lucifer, where 'Lucifer' names such a being. One plausible account of the process whereby the change has occured is this. Whether the devil's reality was the same sort of reality as God's, or whether it was uniquely devilish, as opposed to divine, I would not care to speculate. However, what happened was that it came to be realised that the sorts of qualities and properties attaching to Lucifer could not attach to the members of the class of entities of which the devil was a (sole?) member. There could be no x, such that 'x is Lucifer', and 'x is the devil', were both true. The parallel is with the proposition about time machines: there can be no x such that 'x is a time machine' and 'x is a physical object' are both true. What happened historically, was that the concept of the devil's reality was changed, and the notion of Lucifer dropped. Both elements of the composite, 'Lucifer', were modified. The outcome is that it is generally agreed that talk about Lucifer is incoherent: Lucifer cannot be the devil (unless it is agreed that the talk is merely figurative, in which case it is of course conceded that Lucifer is not real, only made up).

Now, we may ask a similar question about God. Can God be god? Or, can God be divine? As with the time machine and Lucifer, both elements of

the composite, 'God', must be examined. We can put the question like this: given the nature of divine entities (i.e., given our concept of divine reality), and given our concept of God (i.e., given the attributes of the being named God), can there be an x, such that x is divine and x has the attributes we predicate of God? Is the Christian notion of what God is - divine, i.e., eternal and self-sufficient, loving, just, etc. - coherent? If it is coherent, then God can be god, and thus is god. If not, and whatever it is which is god could not have all the attributes traditionally ascribed to God, then what 'God' names must be a fiction. For if the concept of x is an incoherent concept, then x is impossible; and all impossible entities - time machines on Wells' model, square circles - are fictions. This, of course, is what the whole debate is about: is God merely an invention, or is he real? What Anselm's argument shows, is that this question awaits an answer to the question of the possibility of God's being real.

It has usually been overlooked that the ontological argument establishes its conclusion if god is taken as its subject. But that it does so on this condition is of course nothing very startling, since Anselm's concern is with the possibility of establishing that God is not a fiction, rather than with an exposition of the mechanics of a particular system of metaphysics. Nevertheless, given the

traditional Christian conception of God as eternal and self-sufficient, i.e. of God as god, the argument of the Proslogion serves in fact to provide an analysis of the nature of the question of God's existence, insofar as it consists in an explication of the nature of God, at first by means of identifying God as god (Chs.II-IV) and subsequently by discussing how the qualities traditionally attributed to God are to be understood in the light of that identification. The argument leaves us with the problem of considering that identification. If it turns out that God cannot be god, if the definition of god accepted by the Fool is such as to be inconsistent with God's attributes when he is identified as that which is god, then the argument fails in its intention. If such an identification can be made, however, and if the metaphysical system within which the argument takes place can be accepted, then the argument will succeed in establishing Anselm's conclusion; and the major factor in considering the metaphysical system must be the success or failure of this identification, since it is on this that the coherence of the system depends. For if a metaphysical system can produce at its summit only an eternal and self-sufficient x, where x cannot be substituted in any way at all, then the system had better be discarded. Or, to put it in rather more contemporary terms, if a particular way of using words like 'real', 'eternal', and 'self-sufficient' leads only to the positing of an entity

which is these, but of which nothing further can be said, then that way of talking seems rather pointless, to say the least. For this would not be sufficient to tell us what sort of entity we were considering, since we would not know how to specify it; and unless we can do just that, we are not in a position to say whether or not it may be real, or just an illusion.

And of course, that is the crucial question. If God were just an illusion, then those relationships between God and man which are the sine qua non of the Christian belief in God would be rendered impossible. Feuerbach puts this extraordinarily well:

> Real, sensational existence is that which is not dependent on my own mental spontaneity or activity, but by which I am involuntarily affected, which is when I am not, when I do not think of it or feel it... But God is a sensational existence, to which however all the conditions of sensational existence are wanting: - consequently an existence at once sensational and not sensational, an existence which contradicts the idea of the sensational, or only a vague existence in general, which is fundamentally a sensational one, but which, in order that this may not become evident, is divested of all the predicates of a real, sensational existence. But such an 'existence in general' is self-contradictory.[30]

30. The Essence of Christianity (N.Y.; Harper Torchbooks, 1957), p.200. Cf. Austin Farrer, Finite and Infinite (London; A.& C.Black, 1959, 2nd. ed.), p.35: 'Thus the mere notion of the Absolute Being is the name of a problem. It stands for "An existent (or activity) having that character which fits it to occupy a certain place (viz. the highest) in the scale of existents; or

His terminology is quite different, but what he is saying is very similar to what I am putting forward: a 'reality in general' is no reality at all. Nor need we assume at the outset that the only sort of reality possible is 'sensational' reality, as Feuerbach does:[31] nevertheless, if the final outcome of a metaphysical system which sets out to show that there is another sort of reality is as empty as suggested above, then Feuerbach's assumption becomes an increasingly attractive conclusion.

Before I go on to discuss the sorts of consideration which need to be taken into account in attempting to give an answer to the question, Can God be god?, I think it would be useful briefly to review the nature of the question, and its implications for Anselm's argument. Whether or not God can be god depends in the first place on whether anything can be god; that is, on whether there is any set of attributes which such a thing as god can

to perform a certain function in the system of existents". The notion specifies the nature of the "place" and the "function", but the "character" it cannot of itself specify; it merely dictates "some character", and leaves the determination of this indeterminate to some other consideration.'

31. op.cit., pp.199-200: 'His existence being proved, God is no longer a merely relative, but a noumenal being (Ding an sich): he is not only a being for us, a being in our faith, our feeling, our nature, he is a being in himself, a being external to us - in a word, not merely a belief, a feeling, a thought, but also a real existence apart from belief, feeling, thought. But such an existence is no other than a sensational existence; i.e., an existence conceived according to the forms of our senses.'

have. This is equivalent to the question, Does 'god' make sense? Secondly, if there is such a set of attributes, if 'god' is intelligible, we must ask whether the set of attributes which God is traditionally said to possess is logically compatible with the former set. Since our interest here is in God, rather than in The Good, The Absolute, or whatever, we may use 'God' in attempting to answer the first question. The two questions therefore become one: Can God, with the set of attributes traditionally ascribed to him, be the sort of thing described as god? It is of course important to remember that an affirmative answer to this question would not of itself be sufficient to show that both Anselm's conclusions are correct, that God is real, and that he is what he is believed to be. Only if it can be shown that God's attributes follow from his being god, that is, that the nature of whatever is god must be such-and-such, would the latter be shown to be the case. (This is what Anselm tries to do in Chs.V-XXV of the Proslogion.) The logical necessity or otherwise of God's having certain attributes need not concern us here however; nor need the question of the logical compatibility of certain attributes with others. It is Anselm's first conclusion only that is at issue. The question whether any of the attributes traditionally ascribed to God may intelligibly be ascribed to god, given

that it is a logical requirement of anything's being god that it be eternal and self-sufficient, is what is of concern here. To put it another way, can we intelligibly ascribe any attributes to an entity whose existence is a matter of logical necessity, of a kind to tell us what sort of entity it is? For if not, then all we have is an entity which is eternally and self-sufficiently whatever it is: and such an entity would be merely an empty Absolute, and not God at all. If, however, we can intelligibly ascribe such a set of attributes to god, if it is possible that God be god, then God is indeed real. For if it is possible that God is god, then it is possible that God is eternal and self-sufficient; thus it is possible that 'God is real' is necessarily true; therefore, 'God is real' is necessarily true; and so God is real.

8. KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

> The grand principle, the central point of Christian sophistry, is the idea of God. God is the human being, and yet he must be regarded as another, a superhuman being. God is universal, abstract being, simply the idea of being; and yet he must be conceived as a personal, individual being; - or God is a person, and yet he must be regarded as God, as universal, i.e., not as a personal being. God is; his existence is certain, more certain than ours; he has an existence distinct from us and from things in general, i.e., an individual existence; and yet his existence must be held a spiritual one, i.e., an existence not perceptible as a special one... A God who does not trouble himself about us, who does not hear our prayers, who does not see and love us, is no God; thus humanity is made an essential predicate of God; - but at the same time it is said: A God who does not exist in and by himself, out of men, above men, as another being, is a phantom; and thus it is made an essential predicate of God that he is non-human and extra-human. A God who is not as we are, who has not consciousness, not intelligence, i.e., not a personal understanding, a personal consciousness (as, for example, the 'substance' of Spinoza), is no God. Essential identity with us is the chief condition of deity; the idea of deity is made dependent on the idea of personality, of consciousness, quo nihil majus cogitari potest. But it is said in the same breath, a God who is not essentially distinguished from us is no God.[1]

Clearly, God is supposed by Christians at least to resemble a person. This is not of course to say that he is supposed to be some sort of super-person, but

1. Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity (N.Y.; Harper and Row, 1957), p.213.

only that insofar as there is any resemblance at all to anything else, that resemblance is to a person. God knows, acts, wills, loves, answers, is pleased and displeased, etc. - and neither living organisms other than persons, non-living objects, artifacts, nor ideas are like that. None of these can have moral qualities, enter into personal relationships with people, and choose or initiate reasoned actions. In short, although God is certainly not a person, not even a uniquely exalted person, neither is he impersonal being, an object only of the knowledge of metaphysicians. It is precisely his entering into personal relationships with people, and all that that entails, which distinguishes the being named God from the absolute of metaphysics, the God of Christianity from the 'being itself' or 'ground of being' which is no more than that. We might say that God is being itself, but that being itself is not god - only God is god.

Now, to find out what sort of thing something is, we must enquire about what is true of it, what its properties are. We know already that God is, apparently, eternal and self-sufficient; but we know also that it is not enough to know this, both because this alone is not enough to mark out what God is like - other sorts of things are, or are said to be, eternal and self-sufficient - and because these predicates alone are not enough to tell us what anything is like, of which they are said to be true.

If there is anything which is eternal and self-sufficient, then it is eternally and self-sufficiently x, y, and z. For even if we suppose that 'eternal' and 'self-sufficient' can be understood adjectivally, rather than adverbially only, the notion of a class of eternal and self-sufficient entities, without further qualification, is quite opaque. It is as if there were posited a class of time-bound, ontologically dependent entities, with the difference that whereas the latter tells us nothing because nothing (except the former class) is excluded, the former tells us nothing because we do not know what is included, only that everything in other classes is excluded. If there is anything which is eternal and self-sufficient, it must be eternally and self-sufficiently something or other. Feuerbach sees this very clearly, when he argues that the nature of the properties to be attributed to God determines what God is: 'Wherever, therefore, this idea, that the religious predicates are only anthropomorphisms, has taken possession of a man, there has doubt, has unbelief, obtained the mastery of faith. And it is only the inconsequence of faint-heartedness and intellectual imbecility which does not proceed from this idea to the formal negation of the predicates, and thence to the negation of the subject to which they relate. If thou doubtest the objective truth of the predicates, thou must also doubt the objective truth of the subject whose predicates they are. If thy predicates are

anthropomorphisms, the subject of them is an anthropomorphism too. If love, goodness, personality, &c., are human attributes, so also is the subject which thou presupposest, the existence of God, the belief that there is a God, an anthropomorphism.'[2] What we must ask, then, is how the predicates attaching to God are modified by being true of an eternal and self-sufficient being.

God is, for example, eternally and self-sufficiently good, powerful, and wise, and his love for man is eternal and self-sufficient. But that is just the problem. His love for man is not like anyone's love for an individual, or even for man in general; it is eternal and self-sufficient. (There is of course the further problem of the compatibility or otherwise of certain of God's attributes one with another; but my concern here is only with the prior difficulty of intelligibly predicating of God any attributes at all.) None of God's qualities are like any of the qualities of any other being: they are eternal and self-sufficient. Of course that must be so; otherwise he would be the same sort of thing as some other beings. But this he is not, for if he were, he could not be God. For God, we are told, is not the same sort of thing as anyone or anything else - that is the point. Otherwise Feuerbach's identification of God with man's potential nature is just what we would be left with. Now, in order to discover whether the sort of thing

2. ibid., p.17: see also pp.13-25, passim.

God is supposed to be is something he could be, we must inquire what that sort of thing is supposed to be like; or, to put it another way, in order to discover whether God could be real, we have to see whether his alleged manner of being is a logically possible manner of being. And to do that, we cannot do anything but examine his alleged attributes. Unfortunately, however, we find that his alleged attributes are modified in a certain unique way; they are possessed eternally and self-sufficiently. Thus we must ask whether the notion of possessing certain attributes eternally and self-sufficiently is coherent. Can we conceive, for instance, of a love that is eternal, that does not depend in any way at all upon what happens or might happen? What sort of love would this be? The problem is, of course, that one of the things we usually understand by someone's being said to love us is just that his continuing to do so depends on a number of factors, that whether or not that love will continue into the future is a contingent matter. And the same applies to all of God's putative qualities; how can we understand what they say about God, when it is so very different from what they say of anyone else, when what they say of anyone else <u>excludes</u> their being eternally and/or self-sufficiently applicable? It is not only an epistemological problem, but also, of course, a religious one. Feuerbach again puts the point succinctly:

> God as God - the infinite, universal, non-anthropomorphic being of the understanding, has no more significance for religion than a fundamental general principle has for a general science; it is merely the ultimate point of support... If he be of a different nature, how can his existence or non-existence be of any importance to man? How can he take so profound an interest in an existence in which his own nature has no participation? ... But how could /man/ find consolation and peace in God if God were an essentially different being? How can I share the peace of a being if I am not of the same nature with him? If his nature is different from mine, his peace is essentially different, - it is no peace for me. How then can I become a partaker of his peace if I am not a partaker of his nature? But how can I be a partaker of his nature if I am really of a different nature?[3]

The problem may be schematised as follows:

(1) Could God be real?

(2) To answer (1) we need to know what sort of thing God is supposed to be.

(3) He is supposed to be something eternal and self-sufficient, as well as having properties G.

(4) Does it make sense to say of any G that it is eternal and self-sufficient?

(5) Apparently not, since it is not at all clear how any G could be eternal and self-sufficient.

(6) But this is not to say that (4) must have a negative answer.

(7) How, then, does 'eternal and self-sufficient'

3. ibid., pp.44-5.

modify 'G'?

(8) The sense of 'G' which is true of God is the sense appropriate to God, just as the sense in which 'P' is true of persons is the sense appropriate to persons, i.e., to finite, ontologically dependent beings.

(9) But what is the appropriate sense of 'G'?

(10) In order to answer (9), we need to know what sort of thing God is supposed to be.

There are two ways apparently available for dealing with this roundabout: a theory of analogy, and what I have earlier termed the Language-Game Theory. It is on these that the ultimate success or failure of Anselm's argument depends: and, while a full treatment of them would require a separate book, I shall nevertheless at least indicate why I think that both fail.

There are various views about how we may predicate attributes of God analogically. A brief and generalized account will suffice, however, for the root problem is common to all.[4] I shall concentrate on Aquinas's approach, since what he has to say is central to all theories of analogy. All examples of the theory depend on the notion that God's being and the being of man are neither absolutely separate and distinct from each other, nor yet the same: 'The

4. An extremely good exposition of theories of analogy, especially that of Aquinas, is to be found in Battista Mondin, The Principle of Analogy in Protestant and Catholic Theology (The Hague; Martinus Nijhoff, 1968): and an adroit critique of the principle of analogical predication of God in Humphrey Palmer, Analogy (London; Macmillan, 1973).

ontological ground of the analogy between God and other beings is the relation of efficient causality of these beings to God.'[5] Some of Aquinas's remarks about his doctrine should make this clearer.

> The third way of predicating is according to both concept and real being, and this happens when there is no equality either in concept or in existence, as being is predicated of substance and of accident. And in these instances the nature in common must have some manner of real existence in each of the things of which it is predicated, yet differing according to greater or less perfection... It follows from this that truth in God differs from truth in creatures because it does not exist in the same manner in both.[6]

> We must assert that we may not predicate anything univocally of the creature and God, for in univocal predication the intelligible nature that the name signifies is common to each thing among those of which that name is predicated univocally (in one way). Hence there is an equality among things of which the name is univocally predicated... We cannot say, on the other hand, that whatever is predicated of God and creature is predicated purely equivocally, since if no real likeness of creature to God existed, his essence would not be the likeness of creatures and then he would not know creatures through knowing his own essence. In that case also we could not know God by knowing creatures, nor among the names appropriate to creatures would any one of them be more predicable of him than others, inasmuch as when no likeness is

5. Mondin, op.cit., p.34.
6. Commentary on Sentences, I, d.19, q.5, a.2, ad.1.

> present as in equivocals, any name will do. So we must state that the name 'knowledge' is predicated of God's Knowledge and of ours neither wholly univocally nor purely equivocally, but by analogy, which merely means according to a proportion.[7]

Now, let us consider as an example, the proposition that God is merciful. 'Merciful' cannot be a univocal term here: that is to say, it cannot be a term whose meaning is exactly the same in all instances of its occurence. For if it were, then its meaning in 'God is merciful' would be the same as its meaning in 'John is merciful'. But if that were so, then God's mercy and John's mercy would be the same - and this would be the case with all univocally predicable terms. However, if the set of properties, p, predicable of God are predicable also of John, then, to that extent, God and John must be the same sort of being. If, for instance, God is merciful, kind, loving, strong, and wise, in the same way that John is merciful, kind, loving, strong, and wise, then God and John must be alike. And if John is a human being, merciful, kind, etc., in the way human beings are, then the same must be true of God. But of course, the whole point is that God is not like human beings. That is why we can say of him things we cannot say of people: that he is, for instance, omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, self-sufficient. To the extent that he is all of these, he cannot be like people, who cannot be any of these. But if he is

7. On Truth, q.2, a.11.

unlike people, unlike John for instance, then he cannot be merciful, kind, loving, strong, and wise in the same way that John can be these things. On the other hand, however, he cannot be merciful, etc., in a way quite unlike the way in which John is, for then these words would be used equivocally: that is, they would mean one thing when applied to John, and quite another when applied to God. And then the question would obviously arise, what do they mean when applied to God, and why, since they get their sense from their application, predicate them of God at all? If to say that God is merciful, kind, loving, strong, and wise is not to say of him what we say of John when we say he is these, why say of God that he is these at all? Why not say something else? Would that not be less confusing? The trouble is, of course, that there is nothing different to be said, so that we are presented with two alternatives: on the one hand, saying nothing of God; and on the other, explaining how it is that we can say certain things of him, without using terms either univocally or equivocally. A theory of analogy tries to do the latter. Thus we can say both that John is merciful and that God is merciful. God and John are both merciful: but God is more perfectly so than John. To understand what 'merciful' means when predicated of God, we need merely to "magnify" our concept of mercy as understood when predicated of John, making it "more perfect".

At this point, we have two ways forward. Either John's mercy is to his being, as God's mercy is to God's being: so that, inasmuch as God's being is eternal and self-sufficient, so too is his mercy. Or God's being and John's being are degrees of the same sort of being, with the difference that God's being is perfectly realised, whereas John's being is realised only imperfectly: so that God's mercy is fully realised, while John's is realised only partially. It seems unclear just how Aquinas relates these two sorts of analogy, which Cajetan terms the analogy of proper proportionality and the analogy of attribution respectively; the vast literature devoted to the subject would appear inconclusive. Nevertheless, this need not deter us, since, regardless of whether God's mercy and John's mercy differ in degree, or in kind, or both, the same problem remains: how can they be similar enough both to be termed 'mercy'? Let me try to make this clear. Aquinas's analogy of proper proportionality seems designed to deal with a difference in kind: 'Aquinas is careful to insist that no creature has a perfection in the same way that God does, and that the imperfect likeness between creature and God is not a generic one (I Sent.22,1,2; S.T. 1a, xiii, 5 ad 2); moreover, he allows that each kind of creature has its own special kind of perfection - the goodness of a man, for instance, is not directly comparable to that of a sharp knife.'[8] His analogy of attribution, however,

8. Patrick Sherry, 'Analogy Today', Philosophy, 51 (1976), p.435.

seems designed to deal with a difference in degree: 'We take a perfection, remove from it whatever is creaturely or implies a limit, then we project it without limit and attribute it to God.'[9] And as Sherry points out, Aquinas seems to want both: 'Nor is much gained by saying that there is a proportional likeness between God's attributes and ours, that, for instance His knowledge stands to His essence as our knowledge stands to created beings (IV Sent. 49, 2, 1 ad 2), since this still tells us nothing about the connection between the two. Hence Aquinas also insists that God is indeed good, wise, and so on in Himself, that our perfections have some likeness to His, as images related to an original, and indeed that they can be said to "participate" in His (S.T. 1a,vi,4; xiii,5,6,10; xiv,6).'[10] Even supposing that we could take an attribute and 'remove from it whatever is creaturely or implies a limit' (and I do not see how we can), this would result merely in magnification of the attribute; and this is why proper proportionality is brought in, to allow for a difference in kind, a theory which on its own 'tells us nothing about the connection between' God's mercy and John's mercy. Combining the two sorts of analogy, however, presupposes that what is a difference in kind may yet be also a difference of degree - which is precisely the problem about predicating attributes

9. ibid.
10. ibid., p.434.

of God which Aquinas's theory sets out to solve. Humphrey Palmer has a single characterization of such a combination which makes this point clear:[11]

$$\frac{\text{'love' in God}}{\text{'love' in man}} : : \frac{\text{being of God}}{\text{being of man.}}$$

But as he points out, there are two unknowns here: 'love' in God, and the being of God. The only way to know what God is like, the manner of his being, in short, his being, is to know what his love, mercy, strength, etc., are like. That is how analogy gets going. We know what it means to say of a man that he is strong, and it makes sense to say of the smell of a rose that it is strong, since, knowing what roses are like, we know how 'strong' is to be understood when applied to them. And we know what roses are like, inasmuch as we can make univocal predications of them. In the case of God, however, there are no such predications to be made, other than ones which are problematic anyway, ones which do not suffice to tell us what sort of thing God is (e.g., God is eternal and self-sufficient). Where we draw the line between literal and analogical statements about God makes no difference to <u>that</u> difficulty. Even if we can predicate self-sufficiency and eternality of God literally, univocally, all we are thereby doing is to modify negatively our attribution to him of other predicates. We find that God's mercy, love, kindness, strength and wisdom are not like anyone else's; they

11. <u>Analogy</u>, op.cit., p.16.

are eternal, and not subject to external determination or modification - but the trouble is, we have no positive idea what it would be for this to be the case, and so we do not know how to set about modifying the predicates in question. What would a love be like which was unlimited, a love which, presumably, had no contingent conditions for its existence? What would a love be like, the exercise of which could never be in real doubt, about which there could be no possibility of a crise de conscience? Even if we allow, at least for the sake of argument, that to have a physical body is not a necessary condition of doing any of the things which God is said to do,[12] then, if God is not to be, for instance, loving simply to a greater degree than men, but if his love is rather to be also of a different kind, then I fail to see how, on this sort of account, we are to understand the term as applied to God. To say that God's love is to his being, as man's love is to man's being, is no better than to say that God's love, unlike man's, is eternal and self-sufficient. This problem arises in respect of any attribute we may care to predicate of God, with the result that theories of analogy can furnish no answer to the question, What is the appropriate sense of the terms used to predicate attributes of God?

The assumption underlying all such attempts is that talk of God's being, in contrast to man's

12. See e.g., W.D. Hudson, A Philosophical Approach to Religion (London; Macmillan, 1974), p.173ff.

being, is intelligible - even if only minimally - in some direct way, a way which does not require as a matter of logic that we first understand the application of predicates to God. But there is no way of indicating what sort of thing God is, so that we may then talk of the nature of God's being modifying the predicates which attach to him, other than by specifying the sense in which those predicates attach to him. To 'allow for an "open horizon" in which we use language to point in the direction in which God is to be found rather than to represent Him'[13] is insufficient for the purpose of telling us what God is. Of course, the Thomist position is that 'all that can be said about Him is, He Is',[14] that we cannot know what God is: and if this is not to be a straight contradiction of Aquinas's whole Theory of Analogy, by means of which he tries, after all, to say something about God, then 'to point in the direction' of God can be understood only as a via negativa. It is in fact precisely because the being of God is unknown that the love of God also remains unknown; thus I rather suspect that Aquinas's position is self-contradictory. Nevertheless, even if this is not so, and Aquinas intends with his theory only to show how we may escape saying false things of God, then it still cannot help us. For it is a positive attribution

13. Sherry, op.cit., p.435.
14. Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto; Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952, 2nd.ed.), p.180.

which we need to be able to make, in order to discover what God is; and unless we can do this, we cannot be in a position to know whether or not 'He Is' may be said of God, simply because we can have no idea what it means. Unspecifiable being is no being at all: a mode of reality which is by its nature unspecifiable is no reality at all. We specify the mode of reality of a thing by saying which predicates apply to it: but to say that certain predicates apply, although their sense is unknown, tells us nothing. To say that they are intelligible only by means of understanding the way in which they are modified by God's being, that is, by God's nature, or the nature of his reality, merely compounds the confusion. We are left with two unknown terms, knowledge of each presupposing knowledge of the other.

Anselm would no doubt maintain as against this that the nature of God's being surpasses our understanding (e.g., Proslogion XV), with the result that we cannot expect to understand precisely how that being modifies God's predicates. Indeed, he foreshadows Aquinas's Theory of Analogy in the Monologion: '...If, then, the familiar sense of words is alien to that Being, whatever I have inferred to be attributable to it is not its property.../but/ often we see a thing, not precisely as it is in itself, but through a likeness or image, as when we look upon a face in a mirror.../so/ whatever terms seem applicable to that Nature do not reveal it to

me in its proper character, but rather intimate it through some likeness...'.[15] Nevertheless, even if we cannot conceive the full reality of God, we must be able to understand its nature sufficiently to be able to make judgements concerning it; that is, we must know what sort of thing God is, even if we cannot conceive God fully.[16] However, that knowledge

15. LXV, pp.129-130. See also XV and XXXI, and Proslogion, XVII. Perhaps the most interesting passage in this context, however, is in Monologion, XXXVI, pp.99-100: 'For none can doubt that created substances exist far differently in themselves than in our knowledge. For, in themselves they exist by virtue of their own being; while in our knowledge is not their being, but their likeness. We conclude, then, that they exist more truly in themselves than in our knowledge, in the same degree in which they exist more truly anywhere by virtue of their own being, than by virtue of their likeness...how can the human mind comprehend of what kind is that expression and that knowledge, which is so much higher and truer than created substances; if our knowledge is as far surpassed by those substances as their likeness is removed from their being?'

16. Thus the following will not do as a defence of analogy because it fails to distinguish between 'what something is' and 'what sort of thing something is': 'Indeed, if we had to know completely and in detail the nature of something in order to intend it in idea and refer to it in speech, if, that is, we had to know fully what something is before we could know that it is, wonder whether it is, or even think of it or refer to it in speech, then such intention and reference would be impossible in many, if not all, instances in which they obviously are not impossible. In knowing that some individual person or thing exists, or simply in thinking or referring to it without positing its existence, we individuate it intentionally and referentially, i.e., refer unambiguously to it, long before we succeed, if indeed we ever do, in knowing what it is completely and in detail.' - R.M. Lemos, 'Anthropomorphism and Analogy', The Personalist, 47 (1966), pp.119-120. What Lemos says is of course true of 'some individual person or thing' (provided that 'thing' refers to some specifiable sort of thing, i.e., a physical object, or an idea). There is no logical difficulty in talking about an individual person's existing, however little we may know about him - provided we do know that he is a

is something which the Theory of Analogy fails to make possible: it does not allow us to specify God's being - the way in which he is real - and so we cannot know whether it is possible that a particular individual, God, be real. That is to say, we cannot judge whether or not the set of attributes predicated of God is consistent with his being eternal and self-sufficient, because, although we know that all the members of that set are somehow modified by being said to be eternal and self-sufficient, we cannot specify the modification. We do not, therefore, know just what it is, the consistency or inconsistency of which needs to be demonstrated.

What we might well term the Problem of Uncertainty with which the Theory of Analogy finds itself saddled appears in a very similar guise in the Language Game Theory; less kindly, it might be called the Problem of Unintelligibility. As I have said, D.Z. Phillips objects, quite reasonably, to the imposition on God of physical-object talk. God, he maintains, is not a physical object; what we may truly say of God, therefore, cannot be put in terms appropriate to talk of physical objects. When Hick writes that 'To rule out the question whether God exists as logically improper is by implication to deny that

> person. But we cannot say of an entity whether or not it exists, if we do not know what sort of thing it is, because we need to know just that in order to know what it would be for the entity in question to exist.

the core religious statements, such as "God loves mankind" or "God is guiding the universe to his own end for it", are factually true or false',[17] Phillips rightly objects that what we mean by saying of something that it is a fact, is such we should not say of God's existence, love, or care, that these are facts. Matters of fact are matters about the physical world, and 'when he /Hick/ says, "There is, to be sure, no question whether God contingently exists"', Phillips' comment is apposite: 'I should have thought it followed from this that the reality of God cannot be what Hume called a matter of fact and existence.'[18] So far, so good: as Aquinas says, 'there is no equality either in concept or in existence...'[19] between God and man, or between God and the physical world. Unless Hick is proposing an extension of 'fact' as it is commonly used, that is, in relation to the physical world alone, then talk of factual truth or falsity tout court in respect of God's reality is misleading. Similarly, even granting that 'exists' need not be limited in application to physical objects, talk of God's existence is nevertheless uninformative unless and until we know what sort of thing God is, and thus what sort of existence we are discussing. As with Aquinas then, the question immediately arises, What

17. 'The Justification of Religious Belief', Theology, 71 (1968), p.101.
18. 'Religious Belief and Philosophical Enquiry', Ch.IV of D.Z. Phillips, Faith and Philosophical Enquiry (London; RKP, 1970), p.71.
19. See fn.6.

is God's reality a matter of? And, as with Aquinas, there is no answer to be given which is not itself in terms of God. In a way, of course, that should not be at all disquieting, for the same is true of the reality of physical objects: that is a matter of fact, and matters of fact are matters about the reality of physical objects. The crucial difference is that we know what we mean when we say things of physical objects. I do not intend discussing the merits or otherwise of the notion of a 'language-game' as such, anymore than I discussed the entire metaphysical backdrop for Aquinas's Theory of Analogy. What is important here is that, even if the Language-Game Theory were adequate as a theory of language, it could not stop the roundabout: indeed, it reinforces it.

What Phillips says about a person's love of God brings this out. '...Coming to see the possibility of such love amounts to the same thing as coming to see the possibility of belief in God'.[20] I do not wish to deny that statement, nor argue that belief in God is like believing a hypothesis; but merely to ask what Phillips means by 'love'. He writes:

> Temporal love, then, is marked by certain characteristics: it depends on how things go, it may change, and it may end in failure. Eternal love, it is said, is not dependent

20. 'Faith, Scepticism, and Philosophical Understanding', Ch.II of D.Z. Phillips, op.cit., p.29.

> on how things go, it cannot change, and it cannot suffer defeat.[21]

But if eternal love is in no way dependent on how things go, if it cannot - logically cannot - change, and cannot - logically cannot - suffer defeat, then by what token is it love? What sort of love is it, this love which is quite different from any of the other sorts of love with which we are familiar? Even if there is no one characteristic, or one set of characteristics, common to all the sorts of love there are, even if there is no essence of love, nevertheless, what resemblances are there between eternal and other sorts of love? Not even the biggest family, it seems to me, could include the former: if eternal love is not in any way dependent on how things go, if it is unchangeable, then the very ties by which it could be related to other sorts of love are broken. 'Eternal love', it seems, is something quite different from parental love, erotic love, aesthetic love, etc. There is no resemblance, no analogy; just as sceptical doubt is a quite different thing from 'everyday' doubt. There may be some set of attitudes, beliefs, feelings, etc., which together make up an example of eternal love. But if there is, to call it a species of love seems quite misleading, if it truly is the case that it is not dependent on how things go, cannot change, and cannot suffer defeat.

21. ibid., p.23.

As I said in Ch.7, Phillips tries to modify his position somewhat; and what he says brings him even closer to the Theory of Analogy:

> Consider, for example, Jesus's words, 'Not as the world giveth give I unto you.' Here the force of the contrast between the teaching of Jesus and worldliness depends, logically, on both sides of the contrast. One could not understand the sense in which Jesus gives unless one also understands the sense in which the world gives. So far from it being true that religious beliefs can be thought of as isolated language-games, cut off from all other forms of life, the fact is that religious beliefs cannot be understood at all unless their relation to other forms of life is taken into account.[22]

Even more forcefully, he goes on to say:

> What is said falls under standards of judgement with which we are already acquainted. When what is said by religious believers does violate the facts or distort our apprehension of situations, no appeal to the fact that what is said is said in the name of religion can justify or excuse the violation and distortion.[23]

What is said in religion, then, must not violate or distort what is said outside religion. We understand, for instance, the sense of predicates when we apply them to persons, or physical objects; moreover, that sense must not be contradicted by the sense of predicates when applied to God. Indeed, in order to understand 'the sense in which Jesus gives', we must know what it means for you or I to give. But just

22. 'Religious Belief and Language-Games', Ch.V of D.Z. Phillips, op.cit., p.97.

23. ibid., pp.98-9.

how do we proceed from an understanding of 'John gives' to an understanding of 'Jesus gives', or from 'John is strong' to 'God is strong'? Phillips does not say: and I cannot but conclude that his 'weak' position collapses into the 'strong'. He is in fact left with just those problems which are left unsolved by the Theory of Analogy.

Either language-games are autonomous or they are not. If they are, then there can be no question of needing to understand the way in which the world gives in order to understand how Jesus gives; for to maintain that language-games are autonomous is to hold that everything said in a given language-game must be capable of being understood without help from any other language-game. The view of our activities in the world, not to say of the world itself, as a jumble of discrete and mutually irrelevant games to which such a position condemns us has led Phillips to adopt the view that language-games are not autonomous. But if they are not, then some account must be possible of their interrelations. When it comes to talking of God, however, that is precisely what, it seems, we are unable to provide. God's love, it is said, is eternal: but that, as we have seen, is not to modify the concept of love, rather to employ another concept altogether. The same applies to other predicates of God. Even if it be granted that the notion of an agent without a body can be given sense, action which cannot go wrong,

which cannot be foiled, and which is in no way dependent for its success on the nature of what is acted upon, seems to me not to be a species of action at all. Omnipotence, that is, is something quite different from the greatest power conceivable. To present finite action and infinite action as both species of action, without being able to give an account of one in terms of the other, is quite misleading. What sense can be given to any notion of action which is not finite action? The modified Language-Game Theory does not offer any solution to the problem of how we may intelligibly talk about God.

At this stage, it may perhaps be suggested by some that only believers can understand what is said of God at all. This sort of position, that it is necessary to believe in order to understand, is the basis of Karl Barth's account of Anselm's procedure and intentions,[24] an account which may be characterized as a theological counterpart to the sort of Wittgensteinian fideism perhaps best exemplified by Winch, in his famous 'Understanding a Primitive Society'[25] (although, as I shall show (p.253), there is an important difference between their positions). As an account of Anselm's Proslogion, such a view is quite bizarre. After all,

24. Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, trans. by Ian Robertson (London; SCM, 1960).

25. Reprinted in ed. D.Z. Phillips, Religion and Understanding (Oxford; Basil Blackwell, 1967), pp.9-42.

Anselm, an Augustinian first and foremost, is giving an argument, and he intends it to convince the Fool that he cannot consistently deny the existence of God. Argument would be quite misplaced for a Barthian, however: how could the Fool understand what was being said to him? Anselm's whole procedure depends on the Fool's initially understanding what is said, but understanding it inadequately, without realising the full implications of the propositions to which he assents. Without this partial understanding on the Fool's part, no argument would be possible at all: without some understanding, no inadequate understanding would be possible. For suppose that believers alone can judge the consistency of God's attributes, that they alone can be in a position to say whether the proposition 'God is god' is true or false, since they alone are able to understand its terms: then any analysis by those who do not assent to the proposition will necessarily be something other than an analysis of that proposition, and any argument about God's reality would be impossible. But if only those who believed that there could be such an entity as that named God could be in a position to judge whether or not there could be such an entity, why should we, as philosophers, be interested in the question? Indeed, how could we be interested in it? Perhaps the logical outcome of such conceptual relativism is that we should not be interested in it, that we are making a mistake in addressing ourselves to the matter at all. I cannot

discuss the issue at length here. Nevertheless, I think it takes only a very brief indication of one of its implications to persuade us that it ought not to be taken very seriously as a philosophical solution.

If only a believer can be in a position to give an answer to the question, 'Do God's attributes form a consistent set?', then the possibility of a negative answer is ruled out a priori. Since only believers can understand the question, a negative answer could be given only by one who was a believer; if, however, a believer were to answer, 'No', then, insofar as such an answer would constitute overwhelming grounds for abandoning belief, he would cease to be a believer in the very act of so answering. (If a negative answer were not taken as overwhelming grounds for abandoning belief, belief in a logically impossible entity, then reason would have no place at all in the matter of religious belief: and that, to say the least, is a philosophically self-defeating position.) But, if our respondent were, in answering 'No', no longer a believer, then, ex hypothesi, he would no longer be in a position to understand the question, with the result that he could no longer give any reply at all. To answer 'No' to the question, 'Do God's attributes form a consistent set?', would be logically impossible, since a necessary condition of understanding the question at all is to assent to a positive answer.

Not only would philosophy be debarred, on this view, from saying anything substantive about the existence of God, but rational apostasy would be rendered logically impossible. No believer could come to the rationally-held opinion that God could not be as he had thought him to be. Perhaps even more importantly, religious doubt about the nature of God would be ruled out, for if the wavering believer doubted whether God truly was, or could be, as he had until then believed him to be, he would be putting himself in the exceedingly odd position of only "half-understanding" what it was he doubted. The stronger his doubt became, the less could he understand the proposition doubted: and the only way to become clearer about the meaning of the proposition whose truth he was doubting would be to stop doubting it. But that would surely be absurd: religious belief, conversion, apostasy, would be questions merely of switches of blik-like attitudes, with no rational grounds for their being possible, and the doubt which so many Christians see as an integral part of religious faith would be a simple logical error. To doubt <u>at all</u> would be a logical mistake. These consequences of an extreme conceptual relativism must surely be grounds enough on which to dismiss it.

So far, we still have no more information about God than that he is eternal and self-sufficient: neither the Theory of Analogy nor the Language-Game Theory, if I may call it such, enables us to answer

our question as to what sort of thing God is in such a manner as would make possible a decision regarding the coherence or otherwise of the assertion that God is real. Both these theories, of course, are philosophical views, requiring no element of faith (other than in reason, perhaps) as a pre-condition of their being propounded. In view of the failure of either of them to make talk about God intelligible, however, it is perhaps worth investigating a radically different approach, one that has a theological rather than a philosophical basis, and one, moreover, that is of particular importance in relation to Anselm's argument: for it underlies Barth's theologically influential, although thoroughly misconceived, view of it. I propose, therefore, to examine the epistemological basis of Barth's view of Anselm's argument, namely analogia fidei.

A reader who is not unsympathetic to Anselm's argument as I have presented it may at this point hark back to Ch.I of the Proslogion and find what appears to be a giveaway:

> For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I believe so that I may understand. For I believe this also, that 'unless I believe, I shall not understand' /Is.vii.9/.
>
> - p.115.

Surely Anselm is saying here that faith, belief in God, is a prerequisite of understanding his argument: faith, not reason, must ultimately persuade us that God can be, and is, god. Karl Barth is surely right to focus on this statement in his determinedly

anti-philosophical interpretation of the argument as a theological exposition of the nature of the Christian's belief in God, rather than as an attempt to persuade the atheist on purely rational grounds that he is mistaken in his atheism. Faith in God, belief that there is a God, is the edifice on which the argument does, after all, rest: understanding is grounded in faith, for Anselm as for Barth. And yet, if that is the case, how can Anselm expect the Fool - whom he does address, and who does not believe - to understand? If he does not expect the Fool to understand, and thereby give assent to, the proposition that there is a God, then what is the Fool doing in the pages of the Proslogion? Barth's solution to this apparent problem for his interpretation of the nature of the work is to suggest that the role of the Fool is to confirm that only the believer is in a position properly to understand, since he, the Fool, being a fool, cannot but fail so to understand. Barth is not explicit about precisely what it is that the Fool cannot understand, but it seems clear that it is, in the first place, God. Insofar as he is incapable of understanding God, he is incapable also of understanding himself, or anything else, as dependent on God. For Barth, understanding of God logically precedes understanding of anything else: 'Should the creature fail to hear this Name of God and the prohibition it contains then that can only mean that he has not yet understood the Creator as such nor himself as creature. It is in faith that he understands Him

and himself within this relation...'.[26] Only the believer is in a position to understand anything of the true nature of God, and, therefore, of anything else; and it is for this reason that there can be no serious attempt by a believer rationally to persuade the Fool that he is wrong. The Fool, so to speak, inhabits a different world, a world of willful ignorance of the true nature, and thus the true significance, of things. (Thus, for example, Barth cites approvingly Ehrenberg's criticism of Feuerbach as 'a "non-knower /Nichtkenner/ of death", and "a mis-knower /Verkenner/ of evil"',[27] for Feuerbach, as one who denies the independent reality of God, cannot know the true nature of death, and must misunderstand the significance of the existence of evil.)

Importantly, however, the world inhabited by the Fool is not a world from which knowledge per se is absent. 'The insipiens', Barth writes, 'seems to confront him as living confutation of his proof: he can think of God as not existing. Anselm does not deny this fact...he is an insipiens and as such thinks on a level where one can only think falsely - though without violating the inner consistency of that level.'[28] On Barth's view, the Fool can without inconsistency continue to think as he does, on the Fool's own "level" - or, as I would prefer, using his

26. Barth, op.cit., p.153.
27. Introductory Essay in Feuerbach, op.cit., p.xxviii.
28. op.cit., p.165.

own categories. And no trans-categorical reasons can be given him for abandoning his thinking for that of the Christian, with its Christian categories. Conversion to Christianity, then, must be entirely a matter of faith, and notional assent to Christian tenets can be given only after the appropriate leap of faith. Reasons can be understood as reasons only within the terms of the Christian's and non-Christian's categories respectively. What counts as a reason for belief for the Christian (e.g., the Word of God as revealed in the Bible) does not count as such for the non-Christian, because for him it is something different (e.g., ancient history and mythology). All that the theologian can do is present what he takes to be the case; this is why Barth is so averse to natural theology, regarding it as a category mistake of the most drastic kind. The theologian can apprently present the non-believer with something, even though he cannot argue with him: 'Even in respect of the most obstinate unbeliever it can be accomplished that the inner consistency and to that extent the meaning of the Gospel-message is intelligible to him.'[29] The similarity noted earlier between Wittgensteinian and Barthian thought in

29. Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (Edinburgh; T.& T. Clark, 1936 onwards), IV,3, p.848; quoted by H. Hartwell, The Theology of Karl Barth (London; Duckworth, 1964), p.45. See also I, 1, p.276. I am not at all clear how the unbeliever can understand the Gospel-message on Barth's view. How could he even be shown its consistency, when, it is alleged, 'he thinks on a level where one can only think falsely'? If terms are not properly understood, how can they be known to be consistent or inconsistent?

respect of the possibility of rational communication between believer and non-believer is particularly strong at this point, although, of course, the difference is most important. Barth's view of understanding and belief is not like that of Winch, when he argues that the system of thought of the Azande is different from that of the scientific West, and that, furthermore, there is no 'neutral' reality to which one system of thought approximates more nearly than does the other. Rather it is as if Winch had followed Evans-Pritchard to Sudan, there undergone a conversion to the Zande view of reality, and returned to write a paper in which he stated that the Azande, with their different system of thought, were the only people to be in a position to grasp the nature of reality, since reality was as the Azande take it to be (although their knowledge of it is imperfect and inadequate, for reality is by its nature such as to elude any merely human understanding).

As an interpretation of Anselm, Barth's claim about the Fool is clearly ridiculous, since it is perfectly evident from the Proslogion that it is Anselm's intention to give compelling philosophical reasons why the Fool should abandon his position. The contradiction with which the Fool finds himself saddled if he denies that there is a God after having assented to the proposition that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought is just that, a contradiction, and certainly not some sort of

"contradiction" between "levels" of thought. When explaining, in Ch.IV, how it is that the Fool was able to deny that there is a God, Anselm says that it was because he did not understand 'the very object which the thing is' (the thing, that is, to which the word 'God' is applied); he did not understand that the denial of God is a self-contradiction because he did not understand the logical import of the definition of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought. In saying, 'There is no God', the Fool used 'God' without knowing what it meant. (I would argue, of course, that this is true only of 'god'.) If Anselm thought such knowledge impossible in the absence of faith, why would he conclude the previous chapter with these words: 'Why then did "the Fool say in his heart, there is no God" /Ps. xiii,I, liii.I/ when it is so evident <u>to any rational mind</u> that You of all things exist to the highest degree? Why indeed, unless <u>because he was stupid and a fool</u>?' (p.119, my underlining) If it is truly the case that it is 'evident to any rational mind' that there is a God, then the Fool, if he continues to deny that there is a God, is irrational: in which case, how can he think 'without violating the inner consistency' of his thinking? Anselm's whole argument is directed towards showing that the Fool is thinking irrationally if, after having attended to Anselm's argument, he persists in his atheism. He is making a <u>logical</u> error, he is being inconsistent, not on some level different from that on which Anselm thinks, but on

the very same level, that on which all rational thought takes place. It is precisely their being capable of rational thought that Anselm and the Fool have in common, despite the difference between them in respect of religious belief; there is no question of one thinking on one level, informed by faith, and the other on another, although logically respectable, level (or, in another terminology, of their playing different language-games). If the Fool persists in his foolishness, he is '_stupid_', and not a consistent unbelieving thinker. Were Barth's interpretation correct, then Anselm's _argument_ would be entirely superfluous, and there would be no reason why the Fool should even listen to him in a critical, rather than a potentially devotional, way.

Nevertheless, Anselm does say that he believes that he should not understand unless he believed; and yet he expects the Fool to understand the argument, although he does not believe. Clearly, this stands in need of explanation. Just what is it that Anselm believes that he should not understand but for his belief? It cannot be his own argument, if he believes, as he does, that the Fool is capable of understanding it. These are the two sentences immediately preceding Anselm's avowal: 'I do not try, Lord, to attain Your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it. But I do desire to understand Your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves.' (_Pros._I, p.115.)

What Anselm believes he needs to believe in order to understand it, appears to be God's truth, a truth he both believes and loves. It is surely reasonable to suppose that it is the existential import of God's truth that Anselm has in mind: it is existential assent, as distinguished from notional assent, that he has in mind here.[30] For a Christian, notional assent, the sort of assent Anselm is seeking to show that even the Fool cannot consistently withold, is inadequate; and the sort of understanding of God necessary for a Christian life is a matter of faith, trust, belief. The understanding necessary for a Christian life is a very different sort of understanding from the purely intellectual understanding of which Anselm believes the Fool to be capable, even though, of course, existential understanding may be attained by the newly-converted Christian after he has attained intellectual understanding. However, such existential understanding is neither a necessary condition of coming to a Christian faith, nor a sufficient condition of the fullness of such faith, the fullness which demands complete trust in, and self-subordination to, God. But, as Barth agrees,[31] it is a necessary condition of the fullness of faith. (As a monk of course, Anselm would have aimed at precisely such faith.) It is Anselm's whole point that only notional assent and no more is required of

30. Cf. Charlesworth, pp.27-8.
31. Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum, op.cit., pp.99-100.

the Fool to show that his denial of the existence of God is inconsistent - and not, like Peter's denial of Christ for instance, a betrayal. The 'fullness' of God's truth is, after all, such as to preclude full understanding of it on anyone's part, including Anselm's:

> For how great /quanta/ is that light from which shines every truth that gives light to the understanding! How complete is that truth in which is everything that is true and outside of which nothing exists save nothingness and falsity! How boundless is that which in one glance sees everything that has been made, and by whom and through whom and in what manner it was made from nothing! What purity, what simplicity, what certitude and splendour is there! Truly it is more than can be understood by any creature.
>
> - Pros. XIV, pp.135-7.

> Therefore, Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are also something greater than can be thought...
>
> - Pros. XV, p.137.

Anselm certainly acknowledges that his capacity to understand anything at all about God is a gift of God: but that is not to say, as a Barthian position would imply, that such understanding is possible only on the basis of faith. Could my soul, Anselm asks, 'understand anything at all about You save through "Your light and Your truth" /Ps.xlii.3/? If, then, it saw the light and the truth, it saw You. If it did not see You, then it did not see the light or the truth. Or is it that it saw both the truth

and the light, and yet it did not see You because it saw You only partially but did not see You as You are?' (Pros. XIV, p.135.) It is through God's 'light and truth' that understanding is possible, just as, for Plato, it is through the Good that understanding is ultimately possible; and that, for Anselm and Plato respectively, is an epistemological fact, true of the understanding of everyone, whether or not, respectively, he himself believes in God or concurs with the Theory of Forms. It is thanks to God that the Fool is able to understand God, as well as anything else he understands, whether or not he himself acknowledges the fact. God, after all, is the creator, the source of being, so that Anselm would agree with Barth when he writes:

> The reason why there is such a thing as existence is that God exists. With his existence stands or falls the existence of all beings that are distinct from him...it is the existence of God that is the criterion of general existence...he and he alone is objective reality. Because God exists in the inexplicable manner which thought cannot dismiss...for that reason there is objective reality and the possibility of its being conceived...[32]

Where they differ, and differ crucially, is in their epistemology, and not in their ontology: in Barth's case, but not in Anselm's, epistemology is grounded in Christian faith. When Barth writes that 'the knowledge of all other existences (just the opposite

32. ibid., pp.154-5.

of what Gaunilo thinks) stands or falls with the knowledge of this /God's/ Existence',[33] he implies that knowledge of God, which is possible only for those who believe in God, is a necessary condition of true knowledge of anything at all.[34] His analogia fidei is analogy in the order of knowledge, rather than analogy in the order of existence, as Aquinas's analogia entis is. Anselm's position, however, seems quite clear: certain things about God can be known by anyone. Once the argument is understood by the Fool, and understood to be rationally compelling, then, if the Fool is rational, he must believe that there is a God. It is on that basis that his faith can develop, and that he can come to appreciate more about God than merely knowing that he is real and what certain of his attributes are, which is, after all, only a beginning for the Christian.

Doubtless no treatment of Anselm's 'credo ut intelligam' and its relation to the role of the Fool in the argument is final: but in view of the complex nature of the Proslogion, a mixture of subtle philosophical reasoning on the one hand, and rapt devotion on the other, it seems a reasonable view to

33. ibid., p.100.

34. See e.g., Church Dogmatics, op.cit., I,1, p.148n.: 'For we know nothing of our created state, but only through the Word of God...To "start from man" can only mean to start with man of the lost status integritatis, that is, of the presently existing status corruptionis...There is a way from Christology to anthropology. There is no way from anthropology to Christology.' Also Hartwell, op.cit., pp.43, 48-9.

take, doing violence neither to Anselm's stated philosophical aim, nor his metaphysics, nor to the devotional context of the argument. When Anselm says in the Preface of the Proslogion that its title was originally to be Faith in Search of Understanding, this is to be best understood as referring to his search for 'one single argument that for its proof required no other save itself, and that by itself would suffice to prove that God really exists, that He is the supreme good needing no other and is He whom all things have need of for their being and well-being, and also to prove whatever we believe about the Divine Being' (p.103), an argument rationally compelling for everyone, one which Anselm felt it incumbent on him, as a Christian, a man of faith, to find. That he wrote it 'from the point of view of one trying to raise his mind to contemplate God and seeking to understand what he believes' (ibid.) in no way implies that it was written only for those sharing that point of view. No; intellectual argument was regarded by Anselm as a religious duty: 'After I had published, at the pressing entreaties of several of my brethren, a certain short tract /the Monologion/ as an example of meditation on the meaning of faith from the point of view of one seeking, through silent reasoning within himself, things he knows not - reflecting that this was made up of a connected chain of many arguments...' (ibid.). Nowhere in the Proslogion is it suggested that all beings have need

of knowledge of God for their knowledge of being, or of anything else, or that such knowledge must be grounded in faith. Nor is there any mention of faith as a prerequisite of knowledge, either of God or of anything else, in De Veritate,[35] where one would expect to find such a claim at least implicitly made, were Barth correct. In fact, having accepted the disciple's statement, '...we believe God is truth...' (p.151), Anselm eventually goes on to say that 'We can, therefore, if I am not mistaken, state as definition, that truth is rightness perceptible to the mind alone.' (p.172 , my underlining.)

Let us return from our excursion into Barth's view of the significance of the Fool and of Anselm's 'credo ut intelligam' to the question of how the coherence or otherwise of talk about God may be established. The importance for this question of Barth's approach to the question of the relationship

35. Dialogue on Truth, in ed. and trans. by Richard McKeon, Selections from Medieval Philosophers (N.Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929) vol.I, pp.150-184. McKeon himself claims in his introduction that 'It is important /for Anselm/ that faith precede understanding, since of the two sources of human knowledge, reason and faith, faith can exist without reason, but reason can not exist without faith. In rational inquiry there must be a foundation of faith in the principles of the inquiry and in the principles of the understanding itself.' (p.142; quoted by Charlesworth, p.37,fn.1.) There is a confusion here between religious faith and faith in reason. The former plays no part in the Dialogue, whereas the latter is just what makes Anselm's writing philosophical, and not purely theological.

of reason to faith in the Proslogion lies in the epistemological position implicit within it. As what might be termed epistemological fideism, Barth's position is an inversion of analogia entis.[36] That is, his analogia fidei proceeds from the univocal predication of terms in the case of God, to their analogical predication in other cases, with God always the prime analogate:

> Again, general philosophical concepts, such as, for instance, being, time, and eternity, as well as the perfections (attributes) of the Triune God, in particular those of his omnipotence, omnipresence and constancy, assume in Barth's teaching a quite specific concrete theological meaning which is wholly and exclusively determined by the particular event of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. This is true even of familiar concepts of everyday life such as, for instance, person, personality, father, and love, which in Barth's view are exhibited in their original and true meaning in the being of the Triune God only.[37]

It is not our attribution of, for example, love to God that stands in need of explanation and justification in terms of our understanding of 'love' as used in sentences such as 'Sue loves Arnold', or 'Gandhi loved his fellow men'. We do not begin with knowledge of 'love' in proportion to man's being, and then attempt

36. His opposition to the Roman Catholic Church is based on its affirmation of 'an analogia entis, the actuality of a likeness in the creature to God even in a fallen world and therewith the possibility of applying the profane "es gibt" (there is) even to God and divine things...' - Church Dogmatics, op.cit., I,1, p.44. Cf.ibid., pp.278-9, 499, and II,1, p.224ff.

37. Hartwell, op.cit., p.24. Cf.pp.43, 48-9, 59.

to derive therefrom knowledge of 'love' in proportion to God's being. Rather, it is a knowledge of 'love' as predicated of God with which we must begin if we are to understand the term in any of its applications, and it is only on the basis of 'love' as predicated of God that we can correctly predicate it of anything else. Thus, only the believer can be in a position properly to understand terms such as 'love', 'mercy', 'justice', 'father', 'compassion', and 'wisdom' in their normal, everyday application. Ultimately, then, all understanding rests on faith. Barth's position is not that of McKeon (fn.35), but the far more radical one that faith in God is a logical prerequisite of all true understanding, with the result that any inquiry about God must start from God, not only on pietistic grounds, but also on logical grounds. Otherwise it is bound to lead to an impasse, our own present position with Anselm's argument, or to falsehood.[38] Barth, unlike Aquinas, starts from God, starts, that is, from the meaning of words as they apply, univocally, to God. The attraction of such a procedure for the theologian is obvious, for it enables him to avoid confronting the very problem with which we are concerned. Hartwell comments on Barth's claim that 'God is known through

38. See H.R. Niebuhr, Foreword to Feuerbach, op.cit., p.viii: 'Barth recommends Feuerbach to students of theology in order that they may see what the outcome is bound to be of every theology that begins with man's subjective states, be they man's God-consciousness, or his sense of the Holy, or his need for a spiritual victory over nature. The theological statements resulting from such an inquiry are bound to be anthropological, though in a different sense than Feuerbach's.'

God and through God alone':[39] 'Hence Barth also refuses to enquire whether God is actually known and whether he can be known.'[40] Inasmuch as it rests on faith, however, such a solution cannot be open to a philosophical enquiry: and for those who have faith, the problem does not arise anyway, for they either believe[41] that talk about God is coherent, regardless of, or despite, the philosophical difficulties that it poses, or it is a problem which, qua philosophical problem, is irrelevant to their religious belief. Indeed, they may take very seriously the biblical passage where Paul writes that 'God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish. As God in his wisdom ordained, the world failed to find him by its wisdom, and he chose to save those who have faith by the folly of the Gospel.'[42] But then my concern is not with these, for on their view argument for - or against - the existence of God is entirely superfluous, not to say deeply misconceived, and certainly not the serious business of faith that it is for Anselm. Nor is such a position particularly attractive as epistemology,

39. Church Dogmatics, op.cit., II,1, p.44.
40. Hartwell, op.cit., p.101.
41. 'Believe' as in 'He believes in God', not as in 'He believes it will rain tomorrow'. Confusion continues to be spread by those who do not make this Wittgensteinian distinction: see e.g. Robert Brecher, 'Knowledge, Belief, and the Sophisticated Theodicist', The Heythrop Journal 17 (1976), pp.178-183 for criticism in this vein.
42. I Cor.20-21.

for we are asked to agree that the proper meaning of certain ordinary, everyday words is to be found in their application to God; their ordinary use yields only an imperfect and inadequate meaning, so that, even as believers, 'we know no true word'.[43] But that is not all. It is not just that this notion of how we are to undertstand what words mean runs quite contrary to the prevailing Wittgensteinian view - after all, this view is not sacrosanct - but

43. Church Dogmatics, op.cit., I,1, p.499; cf. Charles Hartshorne, 'The Idea of God - Literal or Analogical', The Christian Scholar (1956), p.136. Actually, Barth wishes to maintain both that no proper understanding of God is possible, either for the unbeliever or the believer, and that only the believer can be in a position properly speaking to know anything at all, let alone God, because the meanings words have in ordinary use derives from their meaning in application to God. It seems that he is saying that the Christian at least is in a position to know that his knowledge of what words mean is inadequate, but that the non-Christian, since he cannot know even that, must be thinking along lines which are totally false, rather than merely inadequate: 'The proof of faith consists in the proclamation of faith. The proof of the knowability of the Word of God consists in confessing it. In faith and confession the Word of God becomes a human thought and a human word, certainly in infinite dissimilarity and inadequacy, yet not in utter alienation from its archetype; but in its entire humanly sinful perversion of its real copy, as the veiling of the divine, its unveiling at the same time.' (ibid., p.276) But his position is not really clear, let alone tenable: '...it is precisely in God that the Father-Son relationship like all creaturely relationships, has its original and proper reality (p.495)... But we only know the figure of this reality in its twofold inappropriateness as a creaturely, and as a sinful-creaturely figure. We can only speak of the truth in untruth. We know not what we say, when we call God Father and Son.' (p.496) This last suggests that not even the believer can know what 'father' and 'son' mean in their ordinary use. But perhaps we should not expect any view of language which makes access to meaning the province of certain groups only to issue in anything but incoherence.

that it carries with it a crucial consequence. Inadequate though the believer's understanding may be, the unbeliever cannot possess even that. Consider for example the following passage from Barth's Church Dogmatics:

> Our words are not our property, but His... We use our words improperly and pictorially - as we can now say, looking back from God's revelation - when we apply them within the confines of what is appropriate to us as creatures. When we apply them to God they are not alienated from their original object and therefore from their truth, but, on the contrary, restored to it. (Note) For example, the words 'father' and 'son' do not first and properly have their truth at the point of reference to the underlying views and concepts in our thought and language, i.e., in their application to the two nearest male members in the succession of physical generation of man or of animal creation generally. They have it first and properly at a point to which, as our words, they cannot refer at all, but to which, on the basis of the grace of the revelation of God, they may refer, and on the basis of the lawful claim of God the Creator they even must refer, and therefore, on the basis of this permission and compulsion, they can actually refer - in their application to God, in the doctrine of the Trinity. In a way which is incomprehensible and concealed from us, but in the incontestable priority of the Creator over the creature, God Himself is the Father and the Son. If we apply these words to God, we do not withdraw from them their original meaning, nor do we speak "as if". On the contrary, we speak in the original truth of these words.[44]

44. II, 1, pp.229-30.

If God is indeed the prime analogate, then no unbeliever can, qua unbeliever, properly understand e.g. 'father' and 'son', since understanding of the prime analogate must precede proper understanding of the other analogates (which is why, according to Barth, 'we know no true word'). Given that the unbeliever holds the (mistaken) belief that there is no God, and therefore must be mistaken regarding the identity of the prime analogate - if he thinks of language in these terms at all - it follows that he cannot understand the prime analogate, and thus that he cannot properly understand the other analogates.

The attempt, so to speak, to start from God and thus to bypass the problem of the sense of 'God' cannot be part of any philosophical exercise: and as theological procedure, although perhaps tempting, it must serve to remove theology from the orbit of rationality. As Barth himself acknowledges, delightedly, it cannot possibly underpin an argument for the existence of God, since the theological position of which it is the mainstay regards just such arguments, and indeed the whole of natural theology, as fundamentally misconceived. At the heart of this is a view which is the exact opposite of that evinced by Anselm's procedure, namely that '...where God's own revelation of His truth fails to convert the unbeliever, there man's apologetics cannot succeed either'.[45]

45. Hartwell, op.cit., p.46.

Another way of putting the objection to Barth is to contrast his position with that of Descartes, when he claims that the atheist can be certain of nothing:

> That an atheist can know clearly that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right angles, I do not deny, I merely affirm that, on the other hand, such knowledge on his part cannot constitute true science, because no knowledge that can be rendered doubtful should be called science. Since he is, as supposed, an Atheist, he cannot be sure that he is not deceived in the things that seem most evident to him, as has been sufficiently shown; and though perchance the doubt does not occur to him, nevertheless it may come up, if he examine the matter, or if another suggests it; he can never be safe from it unless he first recognises the existence of a God.[46]

For Descartes as for Barth, all existence and all possibility of attaining knowledge depends on the existence of God (where 'I know that x' is held to entail 'I am certain that x'). But for Descartes it does not follow from that fact, if it be a fact, that all knowledge of certain terms depends on knowledge of, or on knowledge of the existence of, God, as Barth would have it. Even if, as Descartes holds, the atheist can be certain of nothing, since, not believing that there is a God, he cannot have good reason for believing, and thus cannot know,

46. Reply to Objections II, in The Philosophical Works of Descartes, trans. by E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross (Cambridge University Press, 1970), vol.II, p.39. Descartes' choice of example here suggests, incidentally, that it was his view that even necessary propositions may be doubted.

that he is not suffering from illusion or delusion of some sort, nevertheless, that is not to say that he cannot understand certain terms, or that there is anything at all which he cannot fully, or properly understand, or understand "as it really is". For Descartes, the possibility of attaining any (certain) knowledge depends on the existence of God, and not on the knowledge of God or of his existence: that is, it depends on an ontological, rather than on an epistemic condition. Perhaps Descartes' own example of the round tower might help to make this clearer. The atheist cannot be certain that what he sees before him is a round tower, or, indeed, that there is anything before him at all; he is in no position to know that he is not being deceived in some way, that, for instance, what he takes to be a round tower is not a square steeple, or, perhaps, a mirage. (We may of course be convinced by Bouwsma's argument to the effect that such systematic deception is logically impossible, since it is ordinary usage that yields the sense of 'round', 'square', 'tower', 'steeple', 'mirage', etc.[47]) However that may be, it is certainly not the case for Descartes that the atheist is in no position to understand any of the terms in the proposition, 'That is a round tower'. He knows very well what a tower is, and what the word 'round' means; he knows, for instance, how towers differ from

47. O.K. Bouwsma, 'Descartes' Evil Genius', in O.K. Bouwsma, Philosophical Essays (Lincoln; University of Nebraska, 1969), pp.85-97.

steeples, and what differences he may expect to find between round and square examples of each. (It is just such knowledge, which must be present if the example is to get off the ground at all, on which Bouwsma plays to make his point about the ultimately vacuous nature of Descartes' position.) The failure is not one of understanding, but one of knowledge. There can be no sufficiently good grounds for the atheist's claiming to know that there is a round tower before him; and, in the absence of suitable justification for his belief that there is such a thing there, that belief cannot yield the certainty necessary for knowledge.

If, however, the possibility of attaining knowledge depends on some epistemic condition, such as knowing (and thus understanding) God, or knowing that certain things are true of God (and thus understanding the terms involved), then the belief that there is no God leads, it seems, to the impossibility of understanding any given item of ostensible knowledge, and, therefore, of knowing it. (If I believe that there is no God, i.e., that God is a figment of the imagination, I can nevertheless maintain that certain things are true of this entity: but, of course, the sense in which these may be true of it will be crucially different from the sense in which they may be true of God. There is all the difference in the world between a real being's wisdom,

power, etc., and the wisdom, power, etc., of a fictional entity. The latter may lose them if we alter our conception of it; a real being remains what he is whatever changes in our conception of him. And a power or wisdom which may disappear purely as the result of someone's change of mind is manifestly different from a power or wisdom which is not so dependent.) To return to the round tower: just what is it that I cannot know in respect of there being a round tower before me if it is the case that knowledge depends on knowledge of God, and if I do not have such knowledge, for whatever reason? What could be the nature of such a dependence? For Descartes, there being no God would preclude my knowing that there is a round tower before me. But of course, my not knowing God, or knowing anything about him, is not to say that there is no God, so that, for Descartes, one who is entirely ignorant of God is by no means precluded from knowing that there is a round tower before him. For Barth, however, there are certain things which one who does not know God cannot know: knowledge of God (albeit utterly inadequate and possible only thanks to God's grace) is a necessary condition of certain propositional knowledge.[48] Let us take as an example the proposition that John is free. In order to be said to know that John is free, I must understand 'free' in the proposition in question. But that is

48. e.g. Church Dogmatics, op.cit., II,1, p.75: 'Only as we know God's lordship will our own ideas of lordship have content, and, within their limits, existence.'

just what an unbeliever cannot do, since 'free' as applied to John cannot be understood in the absence of an understanding of 'free' as applied to God:[49] and this latter understanding must be absent, since the unbeliever believes that there is no God for 'free' to apply to. Therefore, he cannot be said to know that John is free. For Barth, then, the atheist is precluded from understanding certain words, because, believing that there is no God, he is in no position to understand them as applied to God; and thus he cannot be said to know truths expressed in propositions containing these words. We may say that for Barth, the atheist can know nothing.

But perhaps this is an exaggeration. Presumably anyone holding such a view would restrict its scope to cover certain terms only, i.e., those which it was believed may truly be predicated of God. The round tower example would of course be inappropriate, since 'round' is not to be predicated of God; nor is he a tower. Terms of which the thesis might be thought to be true would be, for example, 'just', 'good', 'true', 'father', 'son', 'wise', 'merciful', 'powerful', 'creator', 'loving', and 'kind'. Barth himself does not say just which terms should be understood on the basis of <u>analogia fidei</u>, but presumably the intention is that it be

49. '...that divine liberty, which alone really deserves to be called liberty' (ibid., I,1, p.523n.).

all those which are used to predicate those attributes which God is traditionally believed to possess. Which these are, is, I suppose, revealed by God himself.[50]

Barth's analogia fidei, even if thus restricted, nevertheless does not afford a means of coming to understand what sort of entity God is, since it consists in what might be termed a fideistic theory of meaning in respect of terms which have a perfectly clear, ordinary sense. If it is objected that this is just the assumption that Barth wishes to challenge with his fideism, then one can do no more than point out that the position is, by definition, unverifiable by the non-believer (or, perhaps, even the non-Christian), and thus of no philosophical use - which Barth would of course be only too happy to concede.

50. This again is not clear. Barth nowhere to my knowledge states explicitly what he takes such limits to be, and in two places at least seems to suggest that he is to be taken as referring to all language: 'Not all man's language is about God. Perhaps it really might and ought to be... As it is, everything is quite otherwise... We know man...not as man in his original state nor yet as man in the realm of glory. Of the one or the other we should, of course, have to say, All his language is language about God.' (ibid., I,1, p.51.) See also II,1, pp.229-30.

9. CONCLUSION

Although my treatment of the available theories of analogy has been by no means exhaustive, I think I have indicated sufficiently why they are unsuccessful in making talk of God intelligible. And since I have argued that the possibility of a consistent account of such talk is a necessary condition of answering the question, What is God? it would appear that Anselm's argument is left in a rather unpromising position: for its conclusion, that God is real, cannot be judged true or false until and unless this question is answered. However, although neither *analogia entis*, 'language-games', nor *analogia fidei* can provide the account needed, that is not to say that such an account is impossible, that there might not be some other means of providing it. But I do not know of such a means; nor am I optimistic about the likelihood of one being found. For God, he who bears this name in the Christian tradition, is a platonic god, so that any means of making talk about him intelligible in such a way as to make it possible to judge whether or not he is real and not a fiction would have to be capable of overcoming the root problem of platonic metaphysics - the relation between differences in kind and differences in degree. The question is indeed a variation on a theme by Plato. *Some* kind of theory of analogy would therefore seem to be indicated.

Now, the logical starting-point of analogia entis is knowledge of the meaning of words as predicated of things in the world; that of analogia fidei some sort of grasp, albeit inadequate and open only to the faithful, of the meaning of words as predicated of God; while the language-game theory objects to the very notion of any given starting-point. This seems to leave open only one further possibility, that of starting from knowledge, available to all rational men, of the meaning of words as predicated of God: the epistemic condition of the knower as in analogia entis, but the logical movement as in analogia fidei. Such a theory may or may not be possible; but it would certainly entail a return to essentialism, and with a vengeance.

Of course, the other way forward is to abandon platonic metaphysics altogether, and adopt a different concept of god, and thus a different idea of the nature of God. Hartshorne's neo-classical theism is one example of such an attempt; but one must ask to what extent such modifications may be made before they cease to be claims about God at all. For if claims about the nature of his ontological status are modified, the more easily to accommodate claims about his personal qualities, then the danger of anthropomorphism looms large. Indeed, it is just to the extent that the need for a theory of analogical predication is removed that God's 'special existence',

to use Barth's phrase, is threatened: but the appropriateness or otherwise of such modification is in the end a question for Christians to decide.

On the other hand, if claims about God's personal qualities are modified, the more readily to accommodate claims about the nature of his ontological status, as in Tillich's work for instance, it becomes difficult, if not impossible, to avoid substituting a metaphysical 'Absolute' for the god of Christianity. And yet I suspect that the most interesting area of any development of the study of Anselm's argument lies in this direction. For what Anselm puts forward in Proslogion II is not only an argument for the reality of God, but, as I have urged, also in effect a means of attempting to justify a platonic, that is, a hierarchical system of metaphysics - one within which it is God who occupies the position of supreme reality. Thus Anselm's failure to establish that God is real, because his conclusion remains void for uncertainty, is also a failure to justify such a metaphysical system. Perhaps the way forward, then, is to develop the concept of god in the direction of some sort of Absolute, to serve as what may be termed an epistemological anchor, the reality of which is a necessary condition of knowledge. This would produce a transcendental argument for the reality of such an Absolute, but I doubt whether it would yield any very satisfactory religious conclusions.

However, for those who are dissatisfied with current metaphysics, or rather the lack of metaphysics, and who still hanker to be able to talk about such things as the structure of reality, let alone talk about it in hierarchical terms, Anselm's argument may yet prove a useful tool. For it does at least show how and why it is nonsensical to deny the reality of something when once it has been agreed to be maximally real.

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