

From the *Prosologion*, Anselm of Canterbury 1077, Hopkins and Richardson trans.

CHAPTER TWO

God truly [i.e., really] exists.

Therefore, O Lord, You who give understanding to faith, grant me to understand— to the degree You know to be advantageous— that You exist, as we believe, and that You are what we believe [You to be]. Indeed, we believe You to be something than which nothing greater can be thought. Or is there, then, no such nature [as You], for the Fool has said in his heart that God does not exist? (Psalms 13:1 & 52:1(14:1 & 53:1)). But surely when this very same Fool hears my words “something than which nothing greater can be thought,” he understands what he hears. And what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand [i.e., judge] it to exist. For that a thing is in the understanding is distinct from understanding that [this] thing exists. For example, when a painter envisions what he is about to paint: he indeed has in his understanding that which he has not yet made, but he does not yet understand that it exists. But after he has painted [it]: he has in his understanding that which he has made, and he understands that it exists. So even the Fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be thought is at least in his understanding; for when he hears of this [being], he understands [what he hears], and whatever is understood is in the understanding. But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding. For if it were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality— something which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought were only in the understanding, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would be that than which a greater can be thought! But surely this [conclusion] is impossible. Hence, without doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.

CHAPTER THREE

[God] cannot be thought not to exist.

Assuredly, this [being] exists so truly [i.e., really] that it cannot even be thought not to exist. For there can be thought to exist something which cannot be thought not to exist; and this thing is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought could be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought— [a consequence] which is contradictory. Hence, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly that it cannot even be thought not to exist. And You are this [being], O Lord our God. Therefore, O Lord my God, You exist so truly that You cannot even be thought not to exist. And this is rightly the case. For if any mind could think of something better than You, the creature would rise above the Creator and would sit in judgment over the Creator— something which is utterly absurd. Indeed, except for You alone, whatever else exists can be thought not to exist. Therefore, You alone exist most truly of all and thus most greatly of all; for whatever else exists does not exist as truly [as do You] and thus exists less greatly [than do You]. Since, then, it is so readily clear to a rational mind that You exist most greatly of all, why did the Fool say

in his heart that God does not exist? (Psalms 13:1 & 52:1 (14:1 & 53:1)). — why [indeed] except because [he is] foolish and a fool!

CHAPTER FOUR

How the Fool said in his heart that which cannot be thought.

Yet, since to speak in one's heart and to think are the same thing, how did [the Fool] say in his heart that which he was unable to think, or how was he unable to think that which he did say in his heart? Now, if he truly [i.e., really]— rather, since he truly— both thought [what he did] because he said [it] in his heart and did not say [it] in his heart because he was unable to think [it], then it is not the case that something is said in the heart, or is thought, in only one way. For in one way a thing is thought when the word signifying it is thought, and in another way [it is thought] when that which the thing is is understood. Thus, in the first way but not at all in the second, God can be thought not to exist. Indeed, no one who understands that which God is can think that God does not exist, even though he says these words [viz., “God does not exist”] in his heart either without any signification or with some strange signification. For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought. Anyone who rightly understands this, surely understands that that [than which a greater cannot be thought] exists in such way that it cannot even conceivably not exist. Therefore, anyone who understands that God is such [a being] cannot think that He does not exist. Thanks to You, good Lord, thanks to You— because what at first I believed through Your giving, now by Your enlightening I understand to such an extent that [even] if I did not want to believe that You exist, I could not fail to understand [that You exist].

CHAPTER FIVE

God is whatever it is better to be than not to be. Alone existing through Himself, He makes all other things from nothing.

What, then, are You, O Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be thought? What indeed are You except that which— as highest of all things, alone existing through Himself— made all other things from nothing? For whatever is not this is less great than can be thought. But this [less greatness] cannot be thought of You. Therefore, what good is lacking to the Supreme Good, through whom every good exists? Consequently, You are just, truthful, blessed, and whatever it is better to be than not to be. For it is better to be just than not-just, blessed than not-blessed.