

EXPERIENCING GOD IN THOUGHT. TOWARDS A NEW INTERPRETATION OF ANSELM'S ARGUMENT (*PROSLOGION* 2–4)*

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Nur wo Du Gott denkst, denkst Du, rigoros gesprochen
Ludwig Feuerbach

I. *The Rule of Thinking*

I.1. The interpretative approach to be presented is fundamentally determined by the fact that Anselm's proof does not deal with something objective or conceptual that would be external to it as a proof, but that it is a proof from thinking itself and thus itself the thinking of which it speaks, with constant use of the terms *cogitare* and *intelligere*. This means that, in the execution of the proof, through thinking, what it seeks to prove arises from itself – one may term it 'performative'. It does not remain external to what is to be proven, but is itself

* The present issue of *Mediterranea* includes the English version (by Andrea Aldo Robiglio) of a lecture originally delivered at the plenary session of the Göttingen Academy of Sciences on 3 July 1998 and subsequently published in German: JOACHIM RINGLEBEN, « Erfahrung Gottes im Denken: Zu einer neuen Lesart des Anselmschen Argumentes (*Proslogion* 2-4) » [1998], *Nachrichten des Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen*, I. Philologisch-Historische Klasse, 2000, nr. 1, p. 4–36. For the purposes of this new edition, the text has been thoroughly revised by the author and supplemented with a new appendix, thereby constituting a fresh contribution. Anselm's *Proslogion* and his other writings are cited according to the edition: SANCTUS ANSELMUS CANTURIENSIS EPISCOPUS, *Opera omnia*, ed. FRANCISCUS SALESII SCHMITT, 6 vols., Thomas Nelson & Sons, Edinburgh 1946–1961, with reference to page and line numbers. It should be noted that all the works examined here – namely the *Proslogion*, *Monologion*, and *De veritate* – are included in vol. I of the edition published in 1946. The author's reading has recently been reaffirmed in JOACHIM RINGLEBEN, « Der sogenannte ontologische Gottesbeweis – Anselms Argument im Vergleich mit Descartes », *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 66 (2024), 4, p. 465–485, < <https://doi.org/10.1515/nzsth-2024-0051> > (last accessed June 2026).

only the thinking execution of what arises in it. It is the actualization of what it deals with; it is its self-evidence for thinking. This proof is the representation in thought of what is to be proven. Therefore, the thinking that follows the proof already experiences within itself what is proven *eo ipso*. The proof is the intellectual way in which its subject – the existence of God – is and is experienced as proving itself in thought.

This heuristic thesis must prove itself in the understanding of the proof as a whole and of all its individual steps. The key to this is contained in the famous opening statement, according to which God is believed to be « aliquid, quo nihil maius cogitari possit », ¹ a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Even though Anselm does not explicitly prove *that* God is identical with what is named in this formula until chapter 3, this (final) step of the proof, like the first step taken here in chapter 2 concerning the existence of such an « aliquid », depends on a correct understanding of that formula, i.e. one that is consistent with the proof. Anselm himself claimed that understanding this formula is sufficient to prove the existence of that « than which nothing greater can be conceived (*quo maius cogitari nequit*) ». ²

I.2. It is widely accepted that this formula is not a concept of God, for example in the sense of a definition of essence. ³ When Anselm begins by presenting his thesis as a *propositio*, he says: « we believe that you are something (*credimus te esse aliquid*), *quo nihil maius cogitari possit*) », ⁴ he is not making the « assumption » of a

¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, p. 101.5. Quite obviously, the formula goes back primarily to Anselm's reading of Augustine; cf. ALEXANDRE KOYRÉ, *L'Idée de Dieu dans la Philosophie de St. Anselm*, Leroux, Paris 1923, p. 40 f.. It is well known that in the *Monologion* Anselm attempted to prove the existence of God using the concept of *bonum per seipsum*, which as *summe bonum* is at the same time also *summe magnum* (ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, chap. 1; p. 15.5 and 11).

² ANSELMUS, *Quid ad haec* [scil. 'Gauilonis pro insipiente'] *respondeat editor ipius libelli*, hereafter *Responsio*, in, ID., *Opera omnia*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, p. 138.30–139.3.

³ In this respect, it cannot be said that Anselm's argument is about « wanting to extract » being from a concept or existence from an idea, cf. IMMANUEL KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in: *Kants Werke*, Akademie Textausgabe, vol. III, de Gruyter, Berlin 1968, B 631. Even JOHN LESLIE MACKIE, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the existence of God*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1982, speaks of a « mere concept » or « mere definition » (ibid., p. 52; also for *Prosl.*, chap. 3, p. 88). This brings him to his criticism of Anselm: one does not need to include non-existence in one's concept (viz. insofar as it is merely a concept); cf. ibid., p. 52 (on the question of instantiation: p. 51, 54). Mackie then returns to Kant: « appealing to and illustrating Kant's final dictum that 'Whatever, and however much, our concept of an object may contain, we must go outside it, if we are to ascribe existence to the object' » (ibid., p. 55; KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 629).

⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.5. This second sentence of the first paragraph of chapter 2: « Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid... » (ibid., p. 101.2 f.) requires a preliminary understanding of what we *actually* believe when we believe. It provides the hermeneutic key that unlocks *what* we believe when we believe *that* God exists (« quia es sicut credimus »; p. 101.4) and *that* is what we

being that has the « property » mentioned in the formula – can this formula even be misunderstood as a statement of property?⁵ – but rather he states: God is only conceived when he – whatever his essence may be – is conceived in such a way that nothing greater than him can be conceived *in thought itself*, or when God is conceived as something beyond which nothing greater can be *conceived*.⁶ By referring to the act of thinking, the expression *maius cogitari*, Anselm's instruction on « how one must think if one wants to think about God » is at the same time an explanation of how one must think in order to *think* at all. It is therefore not just a matter of « theological rules on how to think about God so that we actually think about the God we profess and pray to, and not something completely different »,⁷ but of rules of thinking as true thinking. This explains the striking «lack of content» in the formula.⁸ It does not provide a concept of God; rather, it functions as a kind of « rule of thinking »⁹ which, instead of determining what God is, prescribes a « way of thinking »¹⁰ through which God may genuinely be thought. But this also means « that in this formula, thinking

believe him to be (« hoc es quod credimus »; *ibid.*). Strictly speaking, *credimus* in the second sentence does not simply mean the same thing as *credimus* in the first sentence, but rather its actual intention.

⁵ Nevertheless, Hubbeling still assumes that Anselm is referring to the « essence » of God and, in particular, that the *maius* refers to the « property » of such an essence, namely that it also exists (HUBERTUS GEZINUS HUBBELING *Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1981, p. 80 and 84). Anselm allegedly « concludes from a logical possibility to a real possibility » (*ibid.*, p. 82 and 85). If the result is then: « A being beyond which nothing greater can be conceived is conceivable » (p. 80, 83, 84), two things must be noted in response: a) Anselm is not concerned with the conceivability of a being as such, but with the conception of something that can only be conceived as unsurpassable in thought; b) that thinking encounters something beyond which nothing greater can be conceived, which is not only the « conceivability » or Hubbeling's « logical possibility », but already the thinking of what is to be thought.

⁶ Thus INGOLF ULRICH DALFERTH, in a study that has significantly shaped recent theological discussions of the *ratio Anselmi*, offers a subtle and, to my mind, largely persuasive account: « *Fides quaerens intellectum*. Theologie als Kunst der Argumentation in Anselms's *Proslogion* », *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 81 (1984), p. 54–105; here: 78 f..

⁷ DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 80.

⁸ DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 80.

⁹ Thus DIETRICH KORSCH in the concluding section of his essay: « *Intellectus fidei*. Ontologischer Gottesbeweis und theologische Methode in Karl Barths Anselmbuch », in DIETRICH KORSCH, HARTMUT RUDDIES (eds.), *Wahrheit und Versöhnung. Theologische und philosophische Beiträge zur Gottelehre*, Gerd Mohn Verlag, Gütersloh 1989, p. 143. Understanding the formula « Quo maius cogitari nequit » as a *rule of thinking* means that, in this formula, thought has to do with itself (*ibid.*). Therefore, the same applies to Korsch: *maius* is then not to be related to *id* or *aliquid*, but to *cogitari* (*ibid.*); it is about the « continuous application of thought to itself » (*ibid.*). My reading of the argument is very close to this; see note 19 below.

¹⁰ DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 79.

has to do with itself » – and not with a supreme being named God.¹¹ However, even for this expression « rule of thinking », it is not a rule that is opposed to thought, a presupposed rule for all possible instances of thought, but rather one that must be realized and understood by thought as such in its comprehension, i.e. that it concerns the movement by which real thinking grasps itself, or in other words, the rule by applying which thinking can become aware of itself as thinking.¹²

To anticipate: the formula *quo nihil maius...* refers to the fact that God – if he is indeed God – is always conceived in thought as the « greater » entity. In order to express the relativity of this determination in relation to thought, the term *maius* is used rather than *maximus*, *summus*, or similar terms.¹³ It refers to a specific act of thought that transcends its own limits (« quo... maius »).

This relativity to thought is also evident in the equivalence that Anselm attributes to the formulations « beyond which nothing greater can be thought (*quo maius cogitari non potest*) »¹⁴ and (« nothing greater can be conceived (*quo nihil maius cogitari possit*) »).¹⁵ A mode of being (*nihil maius*) thus corresponds equivalently to a mode of thinking this being (*cogitari non potest*). In other words, the negation of thinking (« cannot be thought ») corresponds precisely to a negation of the thought (« nothing greater »). Anselm thus indicates linguistically that the thought is reflected in the thinking of it, or that a negation undertaken by thinking is reflected in the thought.

The thought articulated by the formula (which, as it turns out, is a thought of God) is thus the 'highest' thought, in the sense that it possesses a determinately specifiable content. Yet it is so only insofar as it proves irrefutably capable of giving rise to an even higher (*maius*) thought, through which thinking turns critically upon itself and distances itself from its own prior determinations.

To understand this, everything depends on the meaning that *maius* has in the proof, and thus for thinking itself. Surprisingly, many interpreters have paid too little attention to this *maius* and have often taken it quite uncritically in an external, summative sense: « greater » is that which exists not only in the mind

¹¹ This fundamental insight, which I share with Korsch, provides the most important argument against Gaunilo's island-objection. Cf. KORSCH, « *Intellectus fidei*. Ontologischer Gottesbeweis und theologische Methode in Karl Barths Anselmbuch ».

¹² Cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 104 (and 102).

¹³ In this respect, Cusanus's formula is not entirely clear: « maximum autem hoc dico, quo nihil maius esse potest » (*De docta ignorantia* I, 2; in NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, ed. LEO GABRIEL, vol. I, Herder, Vienna 1964, p. 198).

¹⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.18.

¹⁵ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.5.

but also in reality. According to this view, a thought plus the existence of that thought is « greater » than a mere thought.¹⁶

The formula itself presupposes that, beyond everything thought as such (*eo ipso*), something « greater » can be thought – with the exception of the unique case under discussion here. Being able to think something greater is the possibility of transcending what is thought by thinking as such. This possibility is the potency of thinking as thinking. The special case of a « *quo maius cogitari nequit* »¹⁷ must make itself clear to thinking itself as something in which it necessarily thinks its inability to go beyond it as thinking, so that in this case – that of the elucidation of a *maius, quo...* – thinking, in one and the same act, comprehends its own limit and thereby comes into its own as thinking. In no case, therefore, may such a *maius* be imposed externally on thinking (or on the proof) – for example, in the sense of external assumptions that a thought plus reality is naturally « greater » than a mere thought.¹⁸ For the invocation of such an external thesis would place thought – and therefore the proof itself – in contradiction with its own presuppositions.

Let us try to clarify the formula in this sense. It speaks of that beyond which nothing greater « can be thought ». This means, first of all, that it is not something that is (or should be) greater than everything else (including everything thought and thinkable), nor is it something that is thought to be greater than anything else that exists, is thought or is thinkable (i.e. not something that is thought of as « the greatest »). Rather, it is solely about something that exists in thought only in such a way that thought becomes aware of its own ability to think and of its inability to conceive of anything greater. If the formula *quo maius cogitari nequit* suggests something like a limit of thought, then this must arise within thought itself and prove unavoidable for it. In this context, the *non posse* does not denote a merely factual limit, but rather the attempt to think beyond the very possibility of thought itself. The *maius* is thereby shown to be the greater, namely that which must, for good reason, be conceived as unsurpassably greater.

This further implies that the *maius* must disclose itself within thought itself as an incontrovertible experience of thinking as such, as an insight intrinsic to the act of thought. The *non posse*, therefore, cannot merely be posited in the abstract; it must be grasped by thought itself and arise immanently in the course of its own unfolding.

¹⁶ Hubbeling also understands *maius* as the addition of reality to a « mere » thought, cf. HUBBELING, *Einführung in die Religionsphilosophie*, p. 80. This is obviously also the case with MACKIE, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 49 f., 51 and 52.

¹⁷ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16.

¹⁸ See HERBERT VORGRIMLER, *Theologische Gotteslehre*, Patmos, Düsseldorf 1998 (3rd ed.), p. 27.

The fact that nothing greater than that *aliquid* can be thought ultimately means that thinking is not only factually incapable of doing so in a particular case, but incapable of doing so as thinking in general. The articulated and intellectually grasped impossibility-in-principle partakes, as such, of the necessity proper to thought itself. Only as a necessary thought of thought would this impossibility be established for thought as such.¹⁹

II. Anselm's Original Insight

These considerations concerning the key formula suggest that any interpretation of Anselm's argument must begin by asking where and in what sense the meaning of the '*maius*' is specified within the text itself.

Anselm introduces his proof by engaging the « fool » (*insipiens*) of Psalm 14:1 (Psalm 53:1), who denies the existence of God. His aim is to show that even the denier cannot evade the cognitive force of the formula « *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* ». For upon hearing these words, the *insipiens* cannot but grasp their meaning: « *intelligit quod audit* ».²⁰ The extent to which this apparently trivial statement introduces the proof is revealed in Anselm's next sentence, which takes up the theme of « understanding (*intelligere*) » and has always been of particular importance to interpreters.

II.1. « And what he understands exists in his intellect (*et quod intelligit in intellectu eius est*) ».²¹ This important sentence clearly marks a step forward in the line of reasoning of the proof and is intended to guide the fool along the path of thought; it is therefore not merely a repetition of the claim that the fool must have understood what he hears when he hears that formula. The two parts of the sentence relate to each other in such a way that the relative clause refers to the act of understanding or proper thinking (« *intelligit* »), while the main clause, as an implication of such *intelligere* (or a conclusion drawn from it), states the existence of what is understood (or thought) and exists within the act of understanding (« *in intellectu est* »).²² Here the emphasis falls on '*est*'. The

¹⁹ It should be noted that thinking here does not signify merely having an idea, forming a representation, or the alike. The proposition that something « cannot » be thought can be justified only within thought itself, namely as a necessary insight arising from thought's « experience » of itself, from thought reflecting upon its own activity.

²⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.8.

²¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9.

²² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.18. See also the Fragment on the *aliquid* first brought to light by FRANCISCUS SALESIUS SCHMITT, *Benediktiner von Grüssau. Ein neues unvollendetes Werk des hl. Anselm von Canterbury*, Aschendorff, Münster 1936 (Beiträge zur Geschichte und Philosophie des Mittelalters, 33/ 3), p. 42 f.; for an analysis, see DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 87 f. (with note 145).

sentence articulates a distinction between that which is thought and the act of thinking through which it is thought.²³ If the relative clause formulates, as it were, the act of understanding in the mode of *intentio recta* (cf. verb: *intelligit*), the main clause formulates, in a reflective mode – viz., *intentione obliqua* –, the epitome of thought (cf. noun: *in intellectu esse*), insofar as it possesses a certain being for thought (*est*). The structure of the sentence thus expresses a distinctive feature of understanding: what is understood enjoys a certain distinctness, independence, and resistance – perhaps even effectiveness – with respect to the act of understanding that apprehends it. Understanding (*intelligere*) is therefore not a simple act, but the disclosure of a difference between the act of understanding and that which is understood, between thinking and what is thought. Thinking is thus conceived as the constitutive distinction between the execution of thinking (*intelligere*) and the being of what is thought in it, for it (*in intellectu esse*).

It will become apparent later that this distinction between thinking and what is thought, as thinking takes place, reproduces within thinking precisely the difference that is the subject of the proof, namely the difference between what is thought as such (*in intellectu esse tantum*) and what is to be thought (actual being, *in re esse*).

Perhaps we may take one step further at this point, in keeping with the overall thrust of the interpretation. Since what one understands (*quod intelligit*), according to Anselm, is also « in intellectu eius », it seems reasonable to assume that one must also understand (*intelligere*) that it is *in intellectu*. But then this very *intelligere* is itself also *in intellectu eius*: in understanding something, one simultaneously understands that one's understanding of it is (only) in this understanding. Understood in this way, the structure of Anselm's sentence articulates the actual content of *intelligere* as it is in itself. If this were not the case, it could not be said of the « fool » that he does not (yet) understand « illud esse ».²⁴ If there is to be any possibility of understanding it as existing (« intelligat illud esse »), then he must already be able to recognise that it is first *in intellectu eius* before he can recognise that it is not only *in intellectu eius*, but absolutely. The *intelligere* of something (« quod ») is therefore, first and foremost, an *intelligere* of the fact that it is *in intellectu*, and then, in one case, it may also be an *intelligere*

²³ WOLFGANG RÖD, *Der Gott der reinen Vernunft. Die Auseinandersetzung um den ontologischen Gottesbeweis von Anselm bis Hegel*, Beck, Munich 1992, p. 32, notes that Anselm did not 'define' « being in the intellect » and then adds: « Anselm apparently took it for granted that what is thought is a kind of object and, as such, has a kind of being ».

²⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9: « Sed certe ipse idem insipiens, cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: 'aliquid quo maius cogitare non potest', intelligit quod audit; et quod intelligit in intellectu eius est, etiam si non intelligat illud esse ».

illud esse and, in another case (which is in fact the case with the fool), a *non intelligere illud esse*.

In any case, if this distinction between *intelligere* and *in intellectu esse* can be shown to be binding on the fool (« *convincitur* »),²⁵ then it must also be possible to render intelligible to him the proof of truth of the « *aliquid, quo nihil maius cogitari possit* », which Anselm's argument is directed at. The conceptual meaning of *maius* must be understood from this distinction, which is constitutive for thinking, and to do precisely this means to have understood Anselm's proof.

First, however, Anselm emphasizes the limits of this preparatory step. The fool must be able to understand what has been explained – namely, the distinction between thinking and what is thought, as disclosed within thinking itself – even if he does not (yet) understand that the *aliquid* exists: « *etiam si non intelligat illud esse* ».²⁶ For the moment, therefore, he remains within the sphere of thinking as such, without yet making the transition from what exists only *in intellectu eius* to what also exists outside thought.

Anselm formulates this further step, which the fool has not yet grasped and which is completed only in the final section of the chapter, in terms closely corresponding to those of the preceding insight. Might it be that the fool is a fool precisely because he has not yet fully understood – or thought through – what is already contained in the interplay of the relative clause and the main clause? If so, Anselm's claim would be that, when consistently understood, the thinking of what is understood in thought is already, in itself, an understanding of its real being.

This interpretation accords with Anselm's own remark in the reply to Gaunilo that understanding the mere verbal expression *quo maius...* does not yet constitute knowledge of the thing signified.²⁷ In my reading, this remains true so long as the formula is not related to thinking itself. To have the *quo maius...* *in intellectu* instantiates a distinctive case of thinking something. What is to be thought in these words is the present actuality of the law of thought itself.

II.2. However that may be, Anselm immediately follows with a sentence that returns to the distinction just discussed and states explicitly: « *Aliud enim est rem esse in intellectu, aliud intelligere rem esse* ».²⁸ This apparently obvious distinction succinctly recapitulates the quintessence of the preceding argument. Once again, what is striking is the close similarity of the two formulations, as though, by a slight rearrangement of the same words, one and the same phenomenon were differentiating itself from itself. In my view, the decisive

²⁵ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.13

²⁶ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9.

²⁷ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 138.9–11

²⁸ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9–10.

question for the interpretation of this sentence – and here the hermeneutical maxim formulated at the outset again becomes relevant – is *who* is making this distinction and from whose perspective it is made; more precisely, to which instance it properly belongs. Is it merely a distinction imposed from without (even if by Anselm himself), one which obviously makes sense to everyone in some way? Or does the sentence articulate a distinction that arises within the very act of understanding (or thinking) under discussion and is immediately evident to that understanding itself? Suppose, then, that the strongest interpretation is correct: namely, that the distinction between *rem esse in intellectu* and *intelligere rem esse* belongs to thought in such a way that thought consists in nothing else than this very act of distinguishing. If so, a further step in the proof would thereby be achieved. Anselm would have shown that, with respect to thought itself, the distinction between *esse in intellectu* and the *esse* of a *res* is a self-distinction internal to thought insofar as it is *intelligere*.

The example of the painter, that follows and substantiates the quoted sentence, confirms precisely this reading.²⁹ At first glance, it appears trivial, but its purpose is to demonstrate (empirically, as it were) that the distinction between the mere idea in the painter's mind (*esse in intellectu*) and its realisation (*facere*) is entangled: the two aspects are distinguished only in relation to each other, so that the distinction is possible only through this relation. Importantly, this distinction occurs within the painter's « mind » (« praecogitat », « habet in intellectu »)³⁰, i.e., as an insight of his thinking.

Returning to this illustrative and justificatory example – « aliud est rem esse in intellectu, aliud intelligere rem esse » – we may now say: in thinking itself, the being of the thought-of is distinguished, for the sake of thought, from the thought of being as such (*rem esse*), that is, in contrast to what is merely thought. Thinking, as such, distinguishes the thought-being (*esse in intellectu*) from the own being of the thought thing (*rem esse*) – and it does so understandably (*intelligere*).

Thus, what Anselm seeks to demonstrate to the fool and to the attentive reader, by appealing to an insight into thinking itself, is therefore the following. In thinking, the separation of thought-as-act from the thought-as-object – or that of the merely thought from the thing to be thought (the thing itself) – occurs through thinking itself.

²⁹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.10–13: « Nam cum pictor praecogitat quae facturus est, habet quidem in intellectu, sed nondum intelligit esse quod nondum fecit ». In a similar vein, Augustine had already distinguished the visibly crafted chest (*arca*) from the idea of the chest that pre-exists in the mind of its maker. Cf. AUGUSTINUS HIPONENSIS, *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*, ed. RADBODUS WILLEMS, Brepols, Turnhout 1954 (CC, SL, 36), 1, § 17.

³⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.11.

I regard this as Anselm's « original insight », which alone allows us to recognize the intellectual meaning of the *maius* formula. It consists in the fact that, in thinking something, thought inevitably distinguishes its thought of this something (viz., the thought) from the thought-something as such (viz., the thing to be thought). It is not difficult to see that, in this basic insight, the two sentences of Anselm under discussion belong together. It can be schematized as the constitutive self-distinction of thinking concerning:

P_1 « quod intelligit, in intellectu eius est [...] intelligat illud esse ».³¹

P_2 « aliud enim est rem esse in intellectu, aliud intelligere rem esse ».³²

$T = (I \rightarrow R_1 \dots) \dots \rightarrow R_2$

In the relationship between P_1 and P_2 , Anselm articulates – this is my thesis – the concept of thinking that is decisive for his proof ('quod' here means a *res*, insofar as it is *in intellectu*, and 'res' denotes the object of thought, as thinking of something, insofar as it is always twofold for thought: as a thought-*res* and as a *res* to be thought – or as thought and thing itself).

Thinking (T) is therefore the relation of an act of understanding (*intelligere*, I) to a thing understood (*res*, R) in such a way that the relation of this *res* to the *intelligere* (i.e., R_1 , *rem esse in intellectu*) is distinguished from this *res* itself, its own being in general (R_2 , *rem esse*). By thinking R_2 , the thought simultaneously reflects on this thinking that R_1 is not R_2 , and in doing so thinks R_2 as itself (as distinct from R_1). The understanding of the thing itself (*intelligere rem esse*, R_2) is only possible in the thinking of its thought (*esse in intellectu*, R_1) and, at the same time, in the rejection of it as a mere thought: $R_1 \dots \rightarrow R_2$

If the sentence P_2 is to be understood as a constitutive self-distinction of thinking or thought, then two assumptions must be clarified in order to grasp its meaning.

A_1) The sentence P_2 must refer to a double *intelligere*. To think *aliud est rem esse in intellectu* is itself an *intelligere*, so that it should be read as: *aliud₁ est intelligere, rem esse in intellectu; aliud₂ intelligere, rem esse*.

A_2) The distinction and classification of the *aliud₁...* *aliud₂* is itself an *intelligere*, or rather, it is thought itself. In that the *intelligere rem esse in intellectu* (*aliud₁*), as *intelligere*, distinguishes the other *rem esse* (*aliud₂*) from itself. In and through this distinction, thought is determined as thought.

With these two assumptions, it is said that 'to think that *aliud₁* (« rem esse in intellectu ») and *aliud₂* (« rem esse »)' is essentially thinking itself.³³ To think

³¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.8-9.

³² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.10.

intelligere rem esse as a difference (*aliud quid*) presupposes thinking *intelligere rem esse in intellectu* as something specific (cf. later: « solo »). Only because and insofar as it is recognized that « *rem esse in intellectu* » does not mean that *rem esse* – or rather that « *rem esse in intellectu* » only (« solo ») means *esse in intellectu* – can the insight that *rem esse* is distinguished from this as *something else*. It is only in the self-knowledge that *rem (solo) esse in intellectu*, that a knowledge of the object – that *rem esse* (viz., *aliud*) – becomes possible, just as the latter is possible only in the conceptual distinction from the former.

This also means that the inner difference in thinking ($I \rightarrow R_1$: *in intellectu esse*) is repeated in the outer ($I \rightarrow R_2$: *intelligere rem esse*), which in turn presupposes the former. Thinking is this distinguishing of the inner and outer distinctions from each other as their (mutually determining) relation to each other.

In short: to think a thought about something means to carry out the distinction within the thought itself, namely that the thought, as something thought, is not the thing to be thought that it is thinking. Thought as thinking refers to something else, which it thinks-of within itself as distinct from itself.

As Wolfgang Cramer so aptly put it: « Dismissing thinking is <still> thinking ».³⁴ Anselm's *maius*-formula is closely related to this fundamental feat of thought, which is 'to bracket oneself' in favor of the thing itself. Because thinking as thinking is at the same time the ability to think 'even more' or 'even further', it can always think of something « greater » than its own thoughts and can, for example, also think of that beyond which nothing greater can be thought.³⁵ Thinking, as such, is therefore at the same time the ability to think about being able not to think any further; that is to say, thinking can think even of its own inability to think. That is why thought is capable of transcending every thought that has been thought, or rather, it precedes its objects of thought as such in order to be with the thing to be thought. Thinking is – in the strict sense – only possible as the self-distinction of its object of thought as 'thought' from itself as that which is to be thought. Thinking essentially distinguishes its thought from the thought to be thought.

³³ This seems to me to have been overlooked by ADOLF SCHURR, *Die Begründung der Philosophie durch Anselm von Canterbury. Eine Erörterung des ontologischen Gottesbeweises*, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1966, p. 79, with the result that he misinterprets the relationship between *aliud*₁ and *aliud*₂. Because he does not take into account the parallelism revealed by P₁ and P₂, the phrase *in intellectu* becomes an arbitrary addition. Schurr overlooks the fact that the two become distinguishable from each other precisely because of this parallelism. Instead of a « transcendental-constitutive meaning » (ibid., p. 75), one must speak of the dialectic of the self-distinction of thought.

³⁴ WOLFGANG CRAMER, *Grundlegung einer Theorie des Geistes*, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1965, p. 63.

³⁵ For Anselm, however, this does not entail that thought, *qua* act of thinking, is itself a constant *maius*. Such a purely formal interpretation fails to account for the essential intentionality or object-directedness of thought.

II.3. In my opinion, these considerations reveal the core of Anselm's proof in chapter 2. Only against this background does it become plausible how the distinction between « being only in the mind (*esse in solo intellectu*) »³⁶ and « also being in reality (*esse et in re*) »³⁷ can be introduced in Anselm's line of thought and what, consequently, the meaning of *maius* is in thinking.

By withdrawing its thought of something as « merely (*solo*) » a thought from the other-to-be-thought (which is *not* « only » given in thought), the thought itself regards the thing thought not merely as a thought (*in solo intellectu*), but the real thing itself (*res, esse in re*). In this idea of 'only' (*in solo intellectu* or « mere thought »), the '*maius*' (*et in re; quod maius est*) is already presupposed. Through this constitutive self-distinction, thinking is at once within itself and outside itself, or more precisely: it is within itself (as withdrawing itself) while at the same time being outside itself, at the thing. Or conversely: it is only in relation to the other of itself (the thing to be thought) that it is at the same time within itself (distinguishing itself as a conceived thought).³⁸

It is only from this point that the *maius* in Anselm acquires its significance for thinking itself and in its execution. In that thinking distinguishes its thoughts as « only » its own from the thing to be thought, in order to relate precisely in this way to itself – that is, in this withdrawal into itself and self-critical presence to oneself, thinking is precisely beyond itself – the thing itself is always « greater » to it than its thinking reference to it. It is only because thinking itself can

³⁶ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16.

³⁷ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17; see also p. 102.03

³⁸ At this point, my interpretation comes closest to the suggestions advanced by Korsch. He characterizes the 'self-enhancement' of thinking associated with the *maius*-formula as follows: « that it is not only the thinking of itself, but also of its other or the other of itself [...]. It thinks what it thinks, in difference and at the same time in relation to itself; in difference, it emerges that what is thought is more than its thought; in relatedness, it expresses that even that which transcends consciousness is only such in relation to consciousness » (KORSCH, « *Intellectus fidei. Ontologischer Gottesbeweis und theologische Methode in Karl Barths Anselmbuch* », p. 144). I likewise concur with Korsch's more general formulation that « thinking is assured of itself precisely when its own possibilities open up the possibilities of the other » (*ibid.*, p. 128), which aptly captures the basic thrust of my reading of Anselm's argument. Yet Korsch's proposal becomes fully convincing only when this structure is not merely posited as a thesis but reconstructed as something that necessarily presents itself in the very act of thinking. This, I contend, is precisely what the movement of Anselm's argument invites us to undertake. For that reason, Korsch's subsequent application of these insights to the idea of God remains somewhat schematic (*cf. ibid.*, p. 144). His appeal to a « transcendence of consciousness » (and related notions) risks relocating the problem to the level of a general theory of knowledge, thereby obscuring the specific logical movement at stake in Anselm's text. The brief references to chapter 3 of the *Proslogion* accordingly remain rather abstract. Thus, for example, the notion of a « capacity of consciousness for negation » (*ibid.*) appears as an externally introduced category rather than as a determination emerging from the immanent development of the argument itself.

distinguish a 'merely thought' thought from the 'real thing' to be thought about that, in every act of thinking, it is referred to a *maius*, which is beyond it as (mere) thought.

An *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* can only be conceived by thought because, as 'mere' thought, it must always and already differ from its object (as the « greater ») in order to be thought at all. Only he who can think *in solo intellectu* can also think *a quo nihil maius*, and that means: only he thinks at all.³⁹

III The Proof from Thinking

The above provides the prerequisites for interpreting the final paragraph of chapter 2, which now explicitly provides the proof of existence for what has already been demonstrated as « *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* » and as being (*est*) « in intellectu ». ⁴⁰ In order to understand Anselm's sentences, we must once again recall the guiding interpretative perspective here – which will later also be explicitly identified as the only appropriate one to be demonstrated – according to which the proof is the very act of thinking about thinking.

III.1. Already for the first sentence, which anticipates the result of the proof,⁴¹ this means that the formulation « *non potest esse* » can and must be understood in the sense of: « *non potest cogitari esse* » (sc. *in solo intellectu*). For this

³⁹ As Dieter Henrich has argued against the separation of thinking and being (in Thomism): thinking cannot be asserted unilaterally and radically against the objectivity of the thought – as is the case, for example, in skeptical objections – unless every factual statement is to become meaningless; cf. DIETER HENRICH, *Der ontologische Gottesbeweis*, Mohr – Siebeck, Tübingen 1967, p. 8.

⁴⁰ Wolfgang Röd has characterized Anselm's argument as non-*a priori*: it implies « reference to a subject who thinks the central concept of the argument and thus has it in his intellect » (RÖD, *Der Gott der reinen Vernunft*, p. 31); in this sense, I speak here of « experience » in thinking. Jos Lensink describes Anselm's type of proof as speculative. Cf. JOS LENSINK, « Im Spiegel des Absoluten. Kritische Erwägungen zum ontologischen Gottesbeweis », in HANS HEINZ HOLZ (ed.), *Strukturen der Dialektik*, Meiner, Hamburg 1992 (= *Dialektik. Enzyklopädische Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Wissenschaft*, 82 [1992]), p. 75–90, and quotes Hegel on Anselm: « With regard to the concept, however, a genuine proof would require not merely that the transition proceed in a rational manner, but that it be demonstrated from the very nature of thought itself that thought, taken in its own immanence, negates itself, and that therein lies the determination of being itself – or, what is the same, that thought determines itself as being » (GEORG WILHELM FRIEDRICH HEGEL, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie*, II, in Id., *Werke in 20 Bänden*, ed. by EVA MOLDENHAUER, KARL MARCUS MICHEL, Bd. 19, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1971, p. 558). Following on from this, Philipp Marheineke understood *thinking about God* as his proof and saw in it the « true side of the ontological argument » (PHILIPP MARHEINEKE, *Die Grundlehren der christlichen Dogmatik als Wissenschaft* [Zweite, völlig neu ausgearbeitete Auflage], Duncker und Humblot, Berlin ²1827, p. 96 f., § 164).

⁴¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16.

formulation is obviously equivalent to the one that appears explicitly in the second sentence: « potest cogitari esse » (sc. *et in re*).⁴² The second sentence states that what is « in solo intellectu est » can at the same time be thought of as existing « et in re ».⁴³ Provided that the proof is derived from thinking as such, such ‘capability’ cannot be just one possibility among others; rather, it must be grounded in a necessity for thought, so that we are talking about a necessity of thinking of the *esse et in re*. The condition for (thinking of) *in solo intellectu esse* is that « potest cogitari esse *et in re* ».⁴⁴ The self-reflection of thought as mere thinking (*in solo intellectu*) – or of the thought as such – is only possible on the condition that it is possible to think something that is not merely thought. In this respect, the possibility of thinking anything *et in re* is a necessary condition for thinking *in solo intellectu*.

For the possibility of thinking something *et in re* is necessary (and in fact inevitably realized) in order for thinking to be able to distinguish what is thought (as merely such) from that which is to be thought.⁴⁵ Anselm thus makes use of something like the basic axiom of thinking, according to which, if something is thought that has a being only in the intellect, something must necessarily be (able to be) thought that has a being not only in the intellect but also *in re*. This follows necessarily if, in the third sentence, one combines the assumption: « Si... est in solo intellectu »⁴⁶ with the possibility asserted as essential in relation to it: « est quo maius cogitari potest ».⁴⁷ Consequently, one cannot conceive of *in solo intellectu esse* in any other way than that one can necessarily also think of something greater (*maius*) beyond it – which is precisely what *esse et in re* represents. For Anselm, thinking means that no « merely (*solo*) » can be thought in isolation, without the « also (*et*) » through which it goes beyond its limitation.⁴⁸ Thinking can only attribute something to itself (as merely thought) by simultaneously referring to something that it does not merely attribute to itself. Thinking is, in its very essence, this movement of self-distinction.

⁴² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17. This is also supported by the phrase that appears in the third sentence, second half: « quo maius nihil cogitari potest » (p. 102.1).

⁴³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16 f..

⁴⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.16 f..

⁴⁵ Gillian Evans accordingly summarized Anselm’s *unum argumentum* in the following fundamental formula: « that, for whatever ‘a’ we can imagine, God is ‘a + x’ ». See GILLIAN ROSEMARY EVANS, *Anselm and Talking about God*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1978, p. 46.

⁴⁶ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.18.

⁴⁷ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.1.

⁴⁸ In a certain parallel to this, Anselm pointed out in his *Responsio* to the *Liber apologeticus* (i.e. *Quid ad haec respondet quidam pro insipiente*) that even the negation of something still includes the thought of that which is negated: « Quisquis igitur negat aliquid esse quo maius nequeat cogitari: utique intelligit et cogitat negationem quam facit. Quam negationem intelligere aut cogitare non potest sine partibus eius. Pars autem eius est quo maius cogitari non potest » (ibid. p. 138.15–18).

In this context, Anselm's only explicit statement on the meaning of '*maius*' is also worth noting. Being able to think necessarily « *esse et in re* » is the very thought of which Anselm says here: « *quod maius est* ». ⁴⁹ It is only from this context of usage that the decisive clarification regarding the *maius* – which is absolutely essential for understanding the entire proof – can be derived. In light of everything that has been said so far, the meaning of the *maius* – in accordance with the schematic formula mentioned above – is that thinking is only truly thinking when it relates what it thinks to the thing to be thought, in such a way that it distinguishes its thought from the thing itself $I \rightarrow (I \rightarrow R_1 \neq \rightarrow R_2)$. It withdraws (in the form of the thought) from the thing to be thought in order to think its own reality. Only from a *maius* understood in this way (viz., greater than it thinks) can it think anything at all. By distinguishing the thing to be thought as *maius* from its being thought as such, it *thinks* first and foremost what it thinks. As the thought of thinking attains truth by distinguishing what it thinks – as *solo in intellectu* – from its *esse et in re*, while simultaneously relating it to the latter, thinking is fulfilled within the horizon of the *maius*. Only in view of that possibility – namely, of being, as thinking, beyond itself as (mere) thinking – is thinking wholly at one with itself, and thus is it self-reflexive. ⁵⁰

« *Maius* » does not originate from an external, additive perspective (*et... et*), but refers to the self-transcendence experienced (i.e. conceived) in thinking itself – a self-transcendence necessary for thought as such. By thinking something and thereby distinguishing itself as the thinking of the something (thought) from the something itself that it is thinking, thinking comes fully into its own by being more than mere thought.

In this respect, the *maius* refers to the highest thought of thinking as such, which is constitutive of it. At the same time, it is clear that this is not a *maximum* but – relative to the thinking of a particular thing – the 'more' of the *esse et in re* of that thing, which is distinguished from its mere being thought. Because the ground of thought, which is announced in the *maius*, keeps it in motion by forcing it to go beyond itself (viz., beyond its thoughts) time and again, it always asserts itself in thinking only as that *maius*, and not as a conclusive thought of anything highest (*maximum*).

⁴⁹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17.

⁵⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.10–13. The example of the painter, in the third paragraph of the second chapter, provided only an empirical illustration of thought's self-reflexivity; only at this point is that structure thematised within thought itself and as such. Because thought is genuinely at home with itself only insofar as it is outside itself, Kant's language of a « going out (*Herausgehen*) » cannot be absolved of a certain reifying tendency. Nor does Mackie's claim that a contradiction arises in the notion of a *mere* object of consciousness (MACKIE, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 54–55) recognize that being-in-itself is such only insofar as it is a being-beyond-itself.

III.2. The third sentence: « Si ergo... »⁵¹ formulates a hypothetical train of thought, and in it the proof is to be found. This only happens if it is understood correctly. This understanding, which aligns with the proof, must therefore first be safeguarded against a common misunderstanding, which concerns in particular the contradiction formulated in the second half of the sentence: « id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest, est [viz. if it is thought to remain *in solo intellectu*], quo maius cogitari potest ».

This is not about a supposed contradiction between the 'concept' of *aliquid* (as « id quo maius cogitari nequit ») and its actual conception (as « in solo intellectu »). In that case, Anselm would have merely deduced the contradiction here, but would not have demonstrated the right of the thought *quo maius cogitari nequit* itself within thought; the argument would already have been presupposed, but not established through argumentation. Rather, one must understand at this point as follows: « id ipsum quo maius cogitari non potest » expresses or, better, 'conceptualizes' precisely what results from the experience of thinking when attempting to think it *in solo intellectu*. It thereby proves for thinking itself that this is only possible within the horizon of the presupposition that the following always already holds: *maius cogitari potest*.⁵²

In short, the contradiction in question does not mean that one has not thought what one ought to think (according to the formula); rather, it means that one has not realized that one has already made use of and is thinking exactly what the formula states (viz., gives cause to think) when one attempts to think it *in solo intellectu*.

Only if this is the case is the « certe » of the fourth proposition⁵³ not analytical and trivial, but meaningful. It refers to the evidence of this insight for the thinking that recognizes and sees through itself in this step of the argument, i.e. the plausibility of the proof.

III.3. From what is contained in the third proposition, the fifth and last proposition merely draws the conclusion recognized in the very thought of that contradiction, with the self-certainty of thinking itself (« ergo procul dubio »): « Existit... aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet, et in intellectu et in re ».⁵⁴

'*Existere*' is the term newly introduced here by Anselm for the specific and true being of the *aliquid*. Its meaning is further defined by its *esse* both in thought and reality: *et in intellectu et in re*.

⁵¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17–102.1.

⁵² The reader should note that the formula is here extended beyond the immediate context of Anselm's original formulation.

⁵³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.1.

⁵⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.2 f..

It follows from this, and must be noted in the face of a seemingly insurmountable prejudice or misunderstanding, that the « existence » proven here is by no means merely an *esse in re* (i.e. 'objective existence', concrete reality, etc.).⁵⁵ From the fact that, according to Anselm's statement in the second sentence, it is « maius » to be able to conceive that something is not merely thought (« in solo intellectu »),⁵⁶ it does not follow that it would be *maius* if something were conceived as existing *solo in re*.⁵⁷ Rather, anything that is only « in re » cannot be the *maius* precisely because it may also be thought as non-existent, which – according to chapter 3 – must be excluded from that of which it is impossible to conceive anything greater, viz., *quo maius cogitari nequit*, in that its non-existence cannot even be conceivable (« nec cogitari possit non esse »).⁵⁸ On the other hand, the « greater » being *in re* is not an arbitrary possibility entertained by thought; rather, it constitutes the very condition under which thought realizes itself.⁵⁹

Similarly, it should be noted that Anselm's argument demonstrates that the *aliquid* also exists *in intellectu*, or that it only exists in truth (*vere esse*), in that it is

⁵⁵ Dalferth is also quite right, see DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 83, note 119: « Existence need not be equated with *esse in re* [...] in the case of God, who is himself the highest truth [*De veritate*, cap. 1, in ANSELMUS, *Opera omnia*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, p. 176 f.], <so that> the phrases 'God's being' and 'God's existence' may be used interchangeably ». In his careful logical considerations – ROBERT SCHNEPF, « Sein als Ereignis. Zu einigen Voraussetzungen des Gottesbeweises bei Anselm von Canterbury », *Patristica et Mediaevalia*, 19 (1998), p. 3–22 – Schnepf rightly emphasizes that Anselm's concept of « being » or « existence » (of God) cannot be plausibly derived either from its modern interpretations as an « existential quantifier » or from that as a predicate (ibid., p. 8 f., 20, 22). Whether Schnepf himself does justice to Anselm's specific use of '*existere*' (*et... et*) seems questionable to me, because the introduction of the category « event (*Ereignis*) » (p. 11, 17, 20, 21) is not sufficient, at least as long as its relation to « thinking (*intelligere*) » remains unclarified. Here, it might be useful to consider the adverbially modified 'existential statements' in Anselm, to which Schnepf draws attention (ibid., p. 13 f.). Subsequently, while Schnepf recognizes the particular illuminating power of the greater-than relation (ibid., p. 9, 11, 15), he interprets it (a) from a later passage in the *Proslogion* that is no longer part of the proof (p. 16 f.), and (b) nevertheless arrives at an only formal and essentially quantitative definition of *maius* (p. 17, 18: « unconditional »); here too, the relation to *thought as such* remains unconsidered, however agreeable many critical remarks may otherwise be. The casual reference to the « transcendent God » may also be significant in this regard (ibid., p. 17, note 51: « Anselm's proof of God is not a proof of an all-encompassing immanent whole; it is, rather, a proof of the transcendent God »).

⁵⁶ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.17.

⁵⁷ Cf. « *Quidquid non esse potest, non est quod cogitat* » (ANSELMUS, *Responsio*, p. 138, 26–27).

⁵⁸ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.6.

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Röd, who renders the formula *quo maius cogitari non potest* as « the unsurpassable (*das Unüberbietbare*) » (RÖD, *Der Gott der reinen Vernunft*, p. 33 f.), thus emphasizes that it is not a matter of identifying something that exists in an abstract, objective sense, but rather of the actual process of thinking itself (cf. p. 32). At the same time, this entails the insight that « it is conceivable that the unsurpassable possesses reality » (p. 33).

in intellectu as it is *in re*, and *in re* as it is *in intellectu*. The simultaneity of both (*et... et*) is, for thought, precisely their distinction in their inseparable relation to each other. The fact that the *aliquid* truly exists solely as « *et in intellectu* » is particularly significant in view of the fact that it is explicitly identified with God, in chapter 3.⁶⁰ For Anselm, God is not merely an objective thought, for such a thought refers to something that exists and may or may not exist. The *Proslogion* therefore by no means proves anything like the unrelated 'objective' existence of a supreme being called God. Rather, Anselm's work is concerned with the experience of God's existence in thought for thought's sake.⁶¹

The *et... et*, which is proven for the existence of the *aliquid*, corresponds to the self-transcendence of thought (identified as the meaning of the *maius*-formula), or rather its self-distinction in the doubling of its thought as thought-of-thing and thing-to-be-thought (R_1, R_2). 'Existere' denotes true being or truthfulness as the ground of thought, which is the condition of possibility for the thinking distinction between merely being in thought (the thought only as such) and the thought-of being. From this relation to truth, in which all thinking is grounded, arises the necessity of the possibility of thinking a *maius* beyond which no further 'more', viz., *maius*, may be thought.

The *existere* of the conclusion of the final sentence of chapter 2 summarises, in technical terms, what has been experienced in thinking in the second and third sentences of this paragraph, and refers to the trans-objective presence of the relation to truth that is constitutive of thought. The existence of the *aliquid*, understood in this way, is the « highest thought » of any thinking (in the sense set out above in relation to the second sentence) as the thought of the ground of thinking.

It is easy to see that this thought cannot be superseded by any particular thought, since it is precisely the condition of that thought's 'thinkability' and truth – and thus also the condition of the actual determination – as to whether a single, particular thought is merely thought (*solo in intellectu*) or also existing in reality (*et in re*). A « highest thought » understood in this way cannot be superseded as a supposedly « mere » thought in itself,⁶² since it is precisely the condition for the possibility of formulating such an objection (see *infra* for more details) against every thought as such. In this highest thought of its own, thinking grasps itself, and from it, it is able to reflect upon itself. It is the very

⁶⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.3: « Et hoc es tu, domine deus noster ».

⁶¹ Since the *maius* is not about a greater concept, but rather about a greater (viz., more intensive) act of thinking, one could also interpret the meaning of '*et... et*' to mean that, for Anselm, the 'existing' God is not anything that can be instantiated.

⁶² As has been attempted again and again in endless variations since Gaunilo. Mackie also shares Gaunilo's objection of 'merely thought', cf. MACKIE, *The Miracle of Theism*, p. 53 f.; see *infra*, section VI.1.

thought that all thinking as such must already presuppose in order to be thinking at all; that is, in order to be able to think itself as thinking.

That is why the reality of God (*esse et in intellectu et in re*) is not a mere thought, for God guarantees the reality of thinking itself (which, as mere thinking, distinguishes itself from itself). Only because God is (also) *in re*, as the ground of truth for all *in re*-being of thoughts, does thinking know itself to be real in itself and, thereby, is real thinking. In its «highest thought», thinking becomes reality to itself, as reality-related thinking.

IV. *The Necessary Thought* (Proslogion, Chapter 3)

It is important briefly to indicate the consequences that arise from the interpretation of chapter 2 for an understanding of the following chapter.

Chapter 3 aims to prove that the truth of *aliquid quo maius cogitari non valet*, as existing *et in intellectu et in re*, is such (« sic vere est ») that its non-existence cannot even be conceived (« nec cogitari possit non esse »).⁶³ Anselm argues that to be able to conceive an *aliquid* whose non-existence cannot even be conceived (« quod non possit cogitari non esse »)⁶⁴ is « greater (*maius*) » than one whose non-existence can be conceived (« quam quod non esse cogitari potest »).⁶⁵

The *aliquid* whose (possible) existence can be conceived is the *res*, as opposed to the mere thought of it (*in solo intellectu*). However, the possibility of conceiving it is understood by thought as its necessity. For only by conceiving thinking as such can thought distinguish itself (i.e., its own conception) from it. Where thought recognizes this, it thinks the unthinkable as its own condition, i.e., that under whose presupposition alone it can withdraw, think differently, and reflect upon its own 'ability'. That which cannot be thought away or thought of as non-existent (« quod non possit cogitari non esse ») is the necessity of a *res* as such, in relation to which thinking determines itself as thinking. In thinking what cannot be thought away, thought thinks its own possibility.

This means: only if something can be thought which, as non-being, cannot be thought, can anything be thought as such; that is, in this way can the distinction between *in solo intellectu* and *in re* be made. Only in this way can thinking think its ability to think away (what is merely thought), that is, itself, in distinction from the thing itself that is to be thought.

Chapter 3 shows, building upon Chapter 2, that the possibility of distinguishing *in solo intellectu* from *in re* is only conceivable under the necessary precondition of their unity; that is, under the precondition of something that, because it is *et in intellectu et in re*, cannot at all be dismissed as merely *in intellectu*.

⁶³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.6.

⁶⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.7.

⁶⁵ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.8.

This necessary thought – necessary so that thinking can grasp itself as thinking, and thus always also as the possibility of ‘mere thinking’ – is the thought of what is necessary for thinking, of what cannot be thought away. That which can be conceived as existing (« potest cogitari esse ») already presupposes that which cannot be conceived as non-existing (« quod non possit cogitari non esse »), i.e., the necessary.⁶⁶

The question to be posed to the text is therefore: Why is it « greater » to be able to think of that which cannot be thought away, or rather, whose non-existence cannot even be conceived? And we should answer this from the perspective of thought. When thinking thinks its inability to be and to do otherwise, it does not (merely) think of one possibility among others (*potest cogitari*), but rather that in which it is at once present in itself and in the thing itself, i.e., *et in intellectu et in re*. Only in this way does it conceive of itself as true thought. In the ability to think that which cannot be thought as non-existent (*Nicht-Wegzudenkend*), thinking becomes aware of its own necessity. For this is the very possibility by which it realizes itself as true thinking and is thus necessary for itself.

That something which cannot be thought away can nevertheless be thought constitutes a « greater » thought for thinking. As the possibility of thinking beyond everything that has been thought, or of mentally dismissing every determinate thought, it is a greater thought only if it is precisely the thought beyond which thinking, *qua* thinking, cannot go without negating itself as thinking – otherwise, it would be merely another contingent possibility, one that could in turn be superseded. That is why it is precisely the thought of the « quo maius nequit cogitari ».⁶⁷

The ability to think of that thought (i.e., ‘the indissmissible’) is « greater » only if it is a ‘must’ for thinking. Therefore, what Anselm says in his response to Gaunilo applies precisely to this thought: « If it can be thought at all that it is, then it is necessary (*si vel cogitari potest esse, necesse est illud esse*) ».⁶⁸ At least it can

⁶⁶ BONAVENTURA, *Sent.* I, d. 7, a. 1, q. 2, in DOCTOR SERAPHICUS S. BONAVENTURA, *Commentaria in quatuor libros Sententiarum Magistri Petri Lombardi*, in: ID., *Opera Omnia iussu et auctoritate P. Bernardini a Portu Romatino*, ed. PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura, Ex typographia Collegii S. Bonaventurae, Quaracchi 1882, p. 135 f.. Lensink draws attention to a (limited) parallel in Moses Mendelssohn’s presentation of the ontological proof. Mendelssohn concedes that ‘existence’ is not a property of things but rather « the position of all properties of a thing », yet he simultaneously maintains that, whereas the contingent can be conceived apart from such positing, the necessary cannot. See LENSINK, « Im Spiegel des Absoluten », p. 90, note 31; cf. MOSES MENDELSSOHN, « Beweisgründe a priori vom Daseyn eines allervollkommensten, nothwendigen, unabhängigen Wesens », in ID., *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe*, Band 3, 2: *Schriften zur Philosophie und Ästhetik*, ed. LEO STRAUSS, Frommann-Holzboog, Stuttgart 1973, p. 152.

⁶⁷ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.8-9.

⁶⁸ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 131.1-2.

be thought (« potest cogitari esse aliquid... ») that which, as non-being, cannot even be conceived (« quod non possit cogitari non esse »).⁶⁹ But to be able to conceive the necessary means to have to think it, since it cannot only be thought as 'merely thinkable'. Rather, it can be conceived precisely because thinking is necessary in itself and can also conceive of that. The necessity of the existence of the indissmissible is a condition for the possibility of its being thought, if it is to be thought at all – just as *esse et in re* is a condition for the possibility of thinking something as *in solo intellectu*.

If thinking can think a thought that cannot be superseded at all, it can think it only as the thought that it must think. It is the necessary thought (of thought, thinking of itself) that it thinks as the prerequisite for all non-necessary, overtakable thoughts. Since thinking is possible only on the condition that there is something that cannot be conceived as non-existent – that is, that what is conceived cannot also be thought as dismissible (« quod non esse cogitari potest »), this necessarily presupposed thought is « greater » than any other and is therefore the thought of that beyond which nothing greater (*viz.*, a greater thing) can be conceived.

Therefore, it would also be a self-contradiction of thought as such if it did not (or did not have to) think of that beyond which nothing greater can be thought, and whose non-existence cannot even be thought. The phrase « quod convenire non potest »⁷⁰ refers to the self-consistency of thought, insofar as it is thought and thinks of itself as such. The indissmissible thought, *id quo maius nequit cogitari*, is thus the thought with which (or in which) thinking necessarily thinks itself (or thinks along with itself, 'co-thinks') whenever it thinks anything at all. The thinking of this thought is at the same time thought's reflection upon itself as thinking. Its non-existence cannot even be conceived (« nec cogitari possit non esse »),⁷¹ since otherwise nothing at all would be thought. The impossibility of even merely conceiving the non-being of *aliquid* is the impossibility of thinking the absolute non-being of thought.

Being so true (« sic vere ») that its negating is impossible even in thought, and that its existence is true both in the mind and in reality, *et in intellectu et in re*, applies only to the condition under which thinking alone is genuinely thinking. Thinking cannot even conceivably eliminate from thought the possibility of this truth (or the truth of this thought) without ceasing to be thinking, i.e. without falling into the self-contradiction of negating itself as thinking through the very act of thinking.

⁶⁹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.7.

⁷⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.10.

⁷¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 102.6.

This truth belongs solely to the concept of God (« sic... vere est..., ut nec cogitari possit non esse »).⁷² Since God is truth itself (« deum veritatem esse credimus »),⁷³ God alone possesses being « most truly (*verissime*) » and « most fully (*maxime*) ».⁷⁴ Insofar as thinking, in God, conceives the necessary ground of its own truthfulness, the thought apprehends with God the non-transcendability of truth itself⁷⁵ as the necessary prerequisite of every true thought (« quidquid... est, vere est, inquantum est hoc quod ibi [*scil. in summa veritate*] est »).⁷⁶ To want to think the non-existence of the truth of thinking would be similarly self-contradictory (« valde absurdum »)⁷⁷ as the attempt of the creature (i.e., the created mind) to outrun its Creator in thought, i.e. the very instance whose unattainable precedence is the prerequisite for the creature's own existence and for this very attempt.

In this sense, chapter 3 proves the necessity of the concept of God, whose true existence had been proven in chapter 2. However, by proving the impossibility of negating this concept even in thought, Anselm's insight into the necessity of the concept of God (or the necessity of God's existence) is at the same time an insight into the necessity of our thinking about the concept of God, or an insight into why we have to think of it as necessary and necessarily existing.⁷⁸

Against this background, the status of the *inspiens* is clarified at the end of chapter 3. Whereas in chapter 2 he could still be considered convinced (« convincitur ») by rational insight to the extent that he must admit the *aliquid* « esse vel in intellectu », ⁷⁹ the fact of his denial of God shows that he has recognized neither the existence nor the necessity of this *aliquid*. Anselm attributes this here to an inconsistency in the understanding of what is thought *in solo intellectu*, i.e. to an inconsistency in the thinking of one's own thinking and its necessary conditions: it is precisely in this that he is « stultus » and « inspiens », in that he denies what « tam in promptu sit rationali menti ».⁸⁰

⁷² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.1 f..

⁷³ ANSELMUS, *De veritate*, ed. SCHMITT, p. 176.4.

⁷⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.8. See also chap. 14, p. 111 f.. Cf. ANSELM STOLZ, « Vere esse im 'Proslogion' des hl. Anselm », *Scholastik: Vierteljahresschrift für Theologie und Philosophie*, 9 (1934), p. 400–409.

⁷⁵ Everything that exists apart from God can be thought of as not existing: « quidquid est aliud praeter te solum, potest cogitari non esse » (chap. 3, p. 103.6 f.).

⁷⁶ ANSELMUS, *De veritate*, p. 185.15. See also chap. 11, p. 191.19 f..

⁷⁷ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.6

⁷⁸ God is not simply the unsurpassable *maius*, but the necessity of the *maius* per se. Nothing greater can be conceived beyond Him: not only a) because He grounds the very conceivability of anything greater *in re*, but also b) because, as this ground itself, He is always already thought (*et in intellectu*).

⁷⁹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.13 f..

⁸⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.10.

The *insipiens* is therefore judged as such solely on the basis of the internal consistency and consequence of this thought within itself and not by any external standard. He is – understood from the point of view of thinking – truly *stultus*, i.e. a false thinker and someone who does not understand himself in his own thought (*insipiens*); but according to Anselm, he is also necessarily a denier of God's existence. The Bible quotation from Psalm 14:1,⁸¹ repeated at the end, is – against the backdrop of Anselm's argument – strictly vindicated in such a way that the fool denies God's existence precisely because, and only insofar as, he is a «fool (*insipiens*)». His being an *insipiens* coincides with denying God's existence.

V. The Word 'God' (« vox significans »; Chapter 4)

Having thus established the connection between the denial of God and the self-deception of thought, Anselm takes up the task in chapter 4 of explaining the possibility of the *insipiens*' speech in even greater detail – specifically, 'how' (« quomodo ») it operates – within the context of the argument. For Anselm must also be able to explain the *insipiens*' standpoint as a mistaken one (as a self-misunderstanding of thought) within the framework of his own solution. If Anselm's argument could not make intelligible 'how', under the conditions of thought, the denial of God could arise at all, he would, as it were, have proved too much.⁸²

In order to fulfil this theoretical requirement, Anselm therefore adopts the position of the *insipiens* from Psalm 14, 1 as strongly as possible and considers his *dicere in corde* to be real thinking: « idem sit dicere in corde et cogitare ».⁸³ If this is the case, then the *insipiens* is tasked with clarifying, to the extent possible, the misunderstanding of thinking regarding itself, as formulated in the first paragraph of chapter 4: How could he in fact think what, in truth, he could not think, or: How could he not have thought what he did somehow think?⁸⁴

These aporetic questions are based on a contradiction, since the fool – as the first sentence of the second paragraph puts it – both really thought it (« quia vere et cogitavit »)⁸⁵ – since he said it in his heart (and was therefore somehow able to think it) – and he did not say it in his heart (« et non dixit in corde »)⁸⁶ – since he was unable to think it (and therefore, in truth, he did not think it). If both are

⁸¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.9 f..

⁸² The fact that Anselm is aware of the possibility of this thought of the denier of God as a possibility in thought underlines once again how fundamentally he is oriented towards thinking itself.

⁸³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.15–16.

⁸⁴ Cf. ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.14–15.

⁸⁵ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.16.

⁸⁶ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.17.

equally possible (« quod si vere... »)⁸⁷ and the contradiction is to be resolved, then only on the condition that the assumed identity of *dicere in corde* and *cogitare* does not apply absolutely: « non uno tantum modo dicitur aliquid in corde vel cogitatur ».⁸⁸

This means that Anselm, at the same time, posits unity and difference between saying⁸⁹ and thinking («idem», « non uno tantum modo ») in such a way that the possibility of the fool's opinion becomes intelligible from their difference, or rather as a one-sided clinging to unity. Precisely because the unity of thinking and speaking exists only in their distinction – or, more precisely, as this difference – the one-sided approach of the *insipiens* becomes possible.

The following sentence explains this possibility of dissolving the connection between speaking (about something) and thinking (of something) within thought: « Aliter enim cogitatur res, cum vox eam significans cogitatur, aliter [sc. cogitatur] cum id ipsum quod res est intelligitur ».⁹⁰ From this, we can see that *cogitare* itself has two aspects: as mere *cogitare* (i.e., « dicere in corde ») and as *intelligere*. Thinking is structured by a self-difference between the thinking intention directed merely at the vox (the *dicere* only as *dicere*, viz., *cogitare* according to the unity of *dicere in corde* and *cogitare*) and the thinking intention directed at the *res ipsa* (*intelligere* in accordance with the « non uno modo »). Within *cogitare* itself, (mere) *cogitare* and *intelligere* relate to one another like vox and *id ipsum quod res est*, i.e. like what is merely thought (as such) and that which is to be thought. The quoted sentence thus takes up, in parallel formulation, the key sentence from chapter 2: « Aliud [...] est rem esse in intellectu, aliud intelligere rem esse ».⁹¹ The term vox is the linguistic representative of the thought *esse in intellectu* (or *in solo intellectu*), and « id ipsum quod res est » is the thought of *rem esse* (or of *intelligere et in re esse*).

The fact that Anselm's 'original insight', as formulated in the sentence in chapter 2, also applies to the relationship between vox *significans* and *res ipsa* (*significata*) is already foreshadowed in chapter 2 itself by the remark that the fool hears (« audit ») the *maius*-formula and understands what he hears (« intelligit quod audit »).⁹² What is heard corresponds, in thought, to the vox (*significans*). Accordingly, the vox as mere vox can only be conceived at all in a differentiating relation to, or by setting itself apart from, the presupposed *res ipsa* – just as the merely conceived being of the *res* is in relation to its own being to be conceived. It is only because thinking (*cogitare*) is always already *intelligere* that it can

⁸⁷ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.16.

⁸⁸ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.17 f..

⁸⁹ Since it is connected to a vox (see below), it cannot be limited to the *dicere in corde*.

⁹⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.18 f..

⁹¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.9 f..

⁹² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.8.

withdraw as mere *cogitare* (a *vox* as such) before the thing to be thought (*id ipsum quod res est*) – just as it can only grasp itself as mere thinking (*solo in intellectu*) when it is thinking of the *et in re*.

Thinking (*cogitare*) therefore exists in this irreducible duality of (mere) *cogitare* (« *dicere in corde* », *vox*) and *intelligere* (*rem esse*) as the one act of thinking.

Anselm understood that it is precisely because of the truth-relatedness of thinking that this duality inevitably arises in every definition of thought. This is the case, for example, when we speak of ‘thought as such’: it is inevitably characterized by the ambiguity of expressing what is thought merely as thinking ‘as such’ (*solo in intellectu*) as well as the thing to be thought itself as given to (mere) thinking (*intelligere rem esse*), i.e. the ambiguity of merely thought and reality-related thought: the thought only as thought or as something thinking.

Since God possesses such power with respect to the truth-relatedness of thought to itself that only thinking in this way is truly thinking, the formal possibility stated by Anselm in the third proposition (« *illo modo* ») – namely, the possibility of thinking God’s non-existence *qua cogitare*, that is, as mere thinking as such – is realizable only on the assumption that it remains impossible to think « *isto modo* » (i.e., *qua intelligere rem esse*).⁹³

The impossibility asserted in the fourth proposition – namely, that for one who truly understands what God is (« *intelligens quod deus est* »), it is impossible to conceive of His non-existence at all (« *cogitare quia deus non est* »)⁹⁴ – is therefore also an impossibility for thought as such, insofar as thought has become transparent to itself and to its own presupposition: « *nullus intelligens id quod cogitare est, potest cogitare quia cogitatum non est* »! This correspondence between the thought of God and thought’s self-understanding holds because « *id quod cogitare est* » is already implied in the formula *id quo maius cogitari non potest*. This ‘rule of thinking’, in turn, gives rise to the thought of what God is: « *Deus enim est id quo maius cogitari non potest* » (5th proposition).⁹⁵

However, that impossibility – of conceiving God’s non-existence while fully understanding the concept of God – not only leaves the possibility open, but also explains it in the first place, i.e., that thought can (abstractly) grasp itself one-sidedly as mere thought and (correspondingly) can entertain mere words in thought (« *licet haec verba [sc. quia Deus non est] dicat in corde* »).⁹⁶ However, this happens abstractly, i.e. by severing the constitutive connection between *cogitare* and *cogitatum* or *vox* and (*extranea*) *significatio* (viz., « *id ipsum quod res*

⁹³ Cf. ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.20.

⁹⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.21.

⁹⁵ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.2.

⁹⁶ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.1.

est »).⁹⁷ Precisely because, for Anselm, just as a true thought exists *et in intellectu et in re*, so too a *vox* is a *vox* only as *vox significans*, that it is conceivable to think of it as a mere *vox*, i.e. without *significatio* or with a different one (« aut sine ulla aut cum aliqua extranea significatione »).⁹⁸

That God – as Anselm’s fifth proposition once again explicitly states – « est id quo maius cogitari non potest »⁹⁹ (and as such exists *et in intellectu et in re*) means that He functions not only as a rule governing the truthfulness of thought but also a ‘rule of thought’ for thinking the meaningfulness of a *vox*. A mere meaningless *vox* (*sine ulla significatione*) is not « id quo maius cogitari non potest », since it can only *be thought of* at all on the condition that it is connected to a meaning. Therefore, a *vox significans* is *maius*, and to think of the inseparable relation of a *vox* (or the « verba » about God) to *significatio* is that « quo maius cogitari nequit » – especially in the case of the thought of God.

In this context, the phrase in the sixth sentence, « Quod qui bene intelligit... »,¹⁰⁰ must necessarily also be understood in relation to the relationship between *vox* and *significatio* (or *res ipsa*), precisely because it must be understood in relation to the identity of God with the *quo maius cogitari non potest*. The ‘foolish’ denier of God is such precisely because of this lack of *bene intelligere*, i.e. of a true self-understanding of thought in his own thinking.

Since God, as the « quo maius cogitari non potest », cannot be dismissed or reduced to a mere *vox* without human thought misunderstanding itself (i.e., *non bene intelligit*), the impossibility of conceiving of anything greater than God is the necessity of His being (« ipsum sic esse »)¹⁰¹ in such a way that He cannot even occur in thought as non-being (« ut nec cogitatione queat non esse »).¹⁰² That God, as non-being, cannot even be conceived – precisely because He is the *quo maius nequit cogitari* – has already been proven in chapter 3. Here it is emphasised that He cannot occur in true thinking in this way – but only in purely formal thinking as such (cf. 3rd sentence: « illo modo ») – because without being the truth (*sic esse*), He cannot even be *cogitatio* itself. Precisely because He is necessary for thought as truth, *cogitatio* is more than ‘just’ *cogitatio*.

If God cannot even *be* in thought, then he can even less be *conceived* as non-being « in thought (*nec cogitatione*) ». Consequently, He certainly cannot be thought of as non-being « in reality (*in re*) », that is, as non-existent. This conclusion only proves, once again, that thinking necessarily differs within itself:

⁹⁷ In this respect, Dalferth’s questioning of the « referential applicability » of Anselm’s formula does not seem convincing to me (cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 91, note 161 and p. 92, note 164).

⁹⁸ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.1 f..

⁹⁹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.2.

¹⁰⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.2 f..

¹⁰¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.3.

¹⁰² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.3 f..

as merely « in thought (*nec cogitatione*) », i.e. positing a hypothetical possibility, and as thinking the real (« *id ipsum quod res est* »); or rather, *cogitare* is the self-distinction between *cogitare* and *intelligere*.

This is precisely what the seventh and final sentence of the second paragraph of chapter 4 reiterates. The insight (*intelligere*): « *sic esse deum* »¹⁰³ means that « *sic vere* » is the idea of thinking according to which thought distinguishes itself from itself, or rather from its necessity, and is perfected as thought through the recognition of its truth-bearing power. Not being able to think that what is « *verissime* », namely God, does not exist, means precisely that one is always unable not to think.

If one reflects on the connection between the fifth proposition and the seventh, namely on the correspondence between « *Deus est id quod maius cogitari non potest* »¹⁰⁴ and « *sic esse deum, [ut]*¹⁰⁵ *nequit eum non esse cogitare* »,¹⁰⁶ this brings to light the following: God's peculiar being is revealed in thinking or being thought, and thus stands in a relationship of correspondence with it. God's being, as such, still determines the thinking related to Him; or rather, His being already entails the peculiar way in which He is thought: the 'that' (i.e., that He exists) is essentially connected with a 'how' (i.e., of being thought),¹⁰⁷ and with the 'how' of thinking about Him (i.e., as *id quo maius cogitari non potest*) also gives rise to the 'that' of his existence.¹⁰⁸ For Anselm has proven that God's (« *sic vere* ») *esse* is nothing other than his *existere* (i.e., *et in intellectu et in re*).

From this follows – as the concluding sentence of chapter 4 explicitly states – the inescapability of the idea of God for self-aware thought in general: « *ut... non possim non intelligere [viz., te]* ». ¹⁰⁹ For Anselm's proof has shown that even if he wanted to distance himself abstractly from his belief in God (« *si te esse nolim*

¹⁰³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.4.

¹⁰⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.2.

¹⁰⁵ Inserted in accordance with the sixth sentence (second half: ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.3) and chapter 3, first sentence of the second (p. 103.3).

¹⁰⁶ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.4.

¹⁰⁷ Jan Rohls has, in my opinion erroneously, placed the proof of the 'that' prior to the demonstration of the 'how' (cf. JAN ROHLS, *Theologie und Metaphysik. Der ontologische Gottesbeweis und seine Kritiker*, G. Mohn, Gütersloh 1987, p. 42).

¹⁰⁸ Dalferth is also correct in this regard; see DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 84. The fact that « God's existence cannot be recognized through a specific proof, but can only be recognized incidentally in the endeavor to understand the peculiar nature of His existence » (ibid.) holds precisely because of the inextricable connection with the self-awareness of thought as thought (cf. *esse in intellectu*). 'Existence', precisely, cannot be abstractly thematized or proven as mere *esse in re*. The remarks against a 'proof of God' therefore seem somewhat artificial (ibid., p. 83 note 123; p. 98 and 104).

¹⁰⁹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.6 f..

credere »)¹¹⁰ – although he actually knows that this is impossible: « quia nisi credidero, non intelligam »¹¹¹ – he could only do so at the price of losing, along with the inner rationality of faith, the rationality of his thinking as well; and that would mean renouncing thought while still thinking. Hence, the realization through thought of God's inevitable self-revelation in thought as such (« te... non possim non intelligere ») is central to the implementation of the *Proslogion's* argumentative programme: « intelligere veritatem tuam, quam credit et amat cor meum ».¹¹² Only because of the experience of God in thought itself can it be said: « credo ut intelligam ».¹¹³

VI. God in Thought

Anselm demonstrates and proves, on the basis of thinking, that thinking necessarily entails an experience of God, and he demonstrates this precisely through thought's self-experience as thought. In this respect, one might say that what Kant called the 'ontological' proof of God is actually a noological variant of the 'cosmological' proof, relating solely to thinking itself instead of to the thinking of the contingent world. It proceeds from the experience of thought itself – and not, for example, from *a priori* concepts – and in this way it could still (as a variant of the cosmological proof) be accorded the primacy that Kant assigns to it as an ontological proof, namely that it is the condition for all other cosmological arguments.¹¹⁴

We speak here of 'experience' because, as has been shown, in the act of thinking, thought is aware of itself as a spontaneous activity in which truth itself proves to be powerful. Thinking, as independent thinking, is at the same time experience, insofar as it becomes aware of its own conditions of exercise and its internal necessity by being thinking and only thinking. The fact that it can only realize itself as thinking in the self-realization of truth as thinking allows thinking to become experienceable as relating to God. Precisely as thinking of itself, it is also the experience of God.

VI.1. To experience God in thought means to experience, within thought itself, the inescapable relation of thought to truth: God as truth itself, which has power over our thinking.¹¹⁵ If God is experienced in thought as the unconditional

¹¹⁰ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.6

¹¹¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 100.19 (quotation taken from Isaiah 7, 9).

¹¹² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 100.17 f..

¹¹³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 100.17 f..

¹¹⁴ Cf. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 635.

¹¹⁵ Anselm's argument shows how God is close to thought as thought, that is to say, how God, who is Himself the truth, is truth for thought. See Augustine, « ipsa veritas Deus est »; cf. ID., *De libero*

relation of thought to truth – from which alone thought consists – then Anselm's argument articulates the thinking experience of the 'creatureliness' of thought itself.¹¹⁶

For the necessary insight: « *non solo in intellectu, sed etiam in re* » contains the setting and transgressing of a boundary for thinking (viz., *maius*). Thinking experiences a limit within itself, i.e., initially as a limit (viz., *solo*) and at the same time beyond it (i.e., as thinking; and therefore 'within itself'); i.e., thinking thinks itself only by simultaneously thinking its Other (viz., *etiam in re*). Thinking repels itself; while thinking, it is not merely thinking. This self-limitation of thinking (in that, as thinking, it is at the same time the withdrawal from the thought, the letting-be of the Other as its truth) is the way in which it is aware of its relation to and dependence on something *quo maius cogitari nequit*, i.e. of its created nature. The fact that there is nothing better for thought to conceive than the Creator (« *aliquid melius te* »)¹¹⁷ corresponds, in the self-experience of thought, to the fact that it is the *aliquid* « *quo maius cogitari non potest* ».

And precisely because, in the conception of *quo nihil maius*, thought limits itself and acts as a creature, Anselm ultimately demonstrates – from this God presented as the Creator (cf. chap. 3) – « *quod maior sit quam cogitari possit* »,¹¹⁸ and proves this precisely from the fact that something of this 'kind' can be thought and that it must apply to God if He is « that than which nothing greater can be conceived (*quo maius cogitari nequit*) ». It is in the tension and interconnection between the two statements: « *quo maius cogitari nequit* » and « *maius quam cogitari possit* »,¹¹⁹ that the meaning of «experience of God in thought» is revealed. For they articulate both the truth-referential nature of thought as a created act, over which truth itself holds sway, and, at the same time, God as truth – that is, as the ground of thinking itself, transcending every particular act of thought. God is « *maior... quam cogitari possit* », because it has been shown that He must already determine thought (viz., in its self-distinction) in order for it to come about as thought at all. That which enables thought to

arbitrio, ed. WILLIAM McALLEN GREEN, Brepols, Turnhout 1970 (CC, SL, 29) II, 15, line 4. For a theological appropriation of this state of affairs – namely, the compulsion of thought towards truth for its own sake and the capacity for truth of thought, which is in principle related to something outside itself – one may, for instance, refer to Althaus, who sees in this a miracle in which God manifests Himself to humankind (PAUL ALTHAUS, *Die christliche Wahrheit: Lehrbuch der Dogmatik*, G. Mohn Gütersloh 1958, p. 80; see, in general, § 9: « Gott in der Wahrheitsbeziehung des Geistes » [God in the Truth Relationship of the Spirit], p. 79 f. and § 8: « Der Selbsterweis Gottes an das theoretische Denken » [God's Self-Revelation to Theoretical Thinking] (proofs of God), p. 76 ff.).

¹¹⁶ Cf. ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, chap. 3, p. 102-103, and DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 100 and note 208.

¹¹⁷ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.5.

¹¹⁸ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 112.13-14.

¹¹⁹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 112.15.

think in the first place is «greater» than anything that thought can possibly conceive (including thought itself) and is therefore even greater than can be conceived, even when it is conceived.¹²⁰ Anselm's entire proof is subject to this self-limitation before the unthinkable truth of God, insofar as, according to chapter 1, he does not claim to « penetrare altitudinem tuam », ¹²¹ but only to « aliquatenus intelligere veritatem tuam »¹²² and, according to chapter 2, only insofar as he asks for the « intellectus fidei quantum scis expedire ». ¹²³

At this point, at the very latest, the old objection arises as to whether the concept of God introduced via the logic of *non solo in intellectu, sed etiam in re* is not «merely» the concept of thought thinking about itself – that is, of the fact that it must always think of both, albeit as distinct from one another. This implies that Anselm proves only the 'idea' of a necessary existing being or a necessary existing thought, but not its 'reality'.

However, this objection merely repeats the situation of a dualism between thinking and being (*intelligere* and *res*), which Anselm is precisely seeking to overcome; in other words, it simply presupposes this dualism in opposition to Anselm's argument. The demonstration that thought, in itself, necessarily refers to its other in order to distinguish itself from it as 'mere' thinking cannot itself be reduced to a mere state of being thought, for it is precisely this possibility that is ruled out by the concept of such a relationship (as the distinguishing relation through which thought is, in the first place, thought at all).¹²⁴ In proving that, in order to think, we necessarily presuppose a unity of thinking and being in itself, and in making the distinction between being thought and being without ourselves, Anselm shows that it is precisely not the merely 'thought' relationship between thought and being that is thought, but rather this relationship as being

¹²⁰ In this respect, the *maior ... quam cogitari possit* from chapter 15 also applies to what Anselm describes in the *Monologion* as a consideration (*consideratio*) that « rationabiliter comprehendit incomprehensibile esse » (ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, chap. 64, p. 75.11), i.e. *docta ignorantia*.

¹²¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 100.15-16.

¹²² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 100.17.

¹²³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 101.3-4.

¹²⁴ Stolzenberg makes a relevant and comparable remark on the analogous case of an objection to Hermann Cohen's thesis of the «identity of thinking and being». This objection is that Cohen's original 'positing' of being – which is to be attributed to thought – is merely one characteristic of thought and, precisely because it is only one characteristic of thought, does not at all capture the true essence of anything. In response to this objection, Stolzenberg rightly argues – and in clear proximity to Anselm's argument – that « it is pointless to place this relationship under the restriction of its mere being thought, for this very thing is ruled out by this relationship. It is not, as it were, the merely conceived relationship between thought and being, but this relationship itself; and within it, the mere fact of being thought – as a moment of its content – is not only not contained, but is implicitly, indeed, sublated » (JÜRGEN STOLZENBERG, *Ursprung und System. Probleme der Begründung systematischer Philosophie im Werk Hermann Cohens, Paul Natorps und beim frühen Martin Heidegger*, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen 1995, p. 57).

related in the difference itself; that is to say, mere thought is posited as a moment within thought only insofar as it is negated: 'posited as sublated'.

The fact that – to put it more generally – « the thought of existence » is not yet « the existence of the thought itself », ¹²⁵ does not apply in the case of Anselm's proof. For it follows from this that the «existence» of the thought is itself the thought in which thinking distinguishes its thought as something (merely) thought from the thought of the « existence of the thought itself ».

One could also say that Anselm advocates the truth-relatedness or truth-capacity of a necessary thought. Necessary thought, or the thinking of necessity, is however no longer subject to the alternative of «merely subjective» thought and «objective» being. It is precisely the indirect apagogical method of his proof (as *reductio ad absurdum*, in which the truth of Anselm's proposition is inferred from the contradiction inherent in its negation) that reveals the necessary conditions of thought even in the very act of contesting Anselm's proposition (in the sense of that objection). That is to say: this proof shows precisely that the restriction to a 'mere' (that which exists in thought in the sense of the « fool ») is itself conceivable only under the condition of the *maius*, or rather that the reduction to mere thought already presupposes, in thought, the transcending of thought (thought as such).

In this sense, the thought of God as the thought of the (critical) self-distinction of thinking (which grasps its own finitude) from its infinite truth is indeed the highest thought of thinking, because thinking exists (and can remain) only in the thinking of this thought. However, because thought is thought, its highest thought cannot be something that has actually been thought, but at most the highest conceivable (*summum cogitabile*), as John Duns Scotus correctly understood from Anselm. ¹²⁶ It is in this thought alone that thinking achieves self-transparency, so that, starting precisely from Anselm, Ludwig Feuerbach's statement is strangely confirmed: « Only where you think God do you, strictly speaking, think at all ». ¹²⁷

In thinking this highest thought or conceivable thing (*quo nihil maius cogitari possit*), thinking experiences that it itself (as *intellectus*) is not or is not true

¹²⁵ Thus Emanuel Hirsch on the occasion of his Kant lecture, in EMANUEL HIRSCH, *Geschichte der neueren evangelischen Theologie, im Zusammenhang mit den allgemeinen Bewegungen des europäischen Denkens*, vol. IV, Gerd Mohn, Gütersloh 1964³, p. 295.

¹²⁶ JOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Tractatus de primo principio*, cap. 4, prop. 9, in Id., *Abhandlung über das erste Prinzip*, ed. WOLFGANG KLUXEN, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1974, p. 104–107; see the explanation by Kluxen at p. 233.

¹²⁷ LUDWIG FEUERBACH, *Das Wesen des Christentums*, in Id., *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. WILHELM BOLIN, FRIEDRICH JODL, vol. VI, Frommann – Holzboog, Stuttgart – Bad Cannstadt 1960², p. 45. See, on that, EBERHARD JÜNGEL, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt: zur Begründung der Theologie des Gekreuzigten im Streit zwischen Theismus und Atheismus*, J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), Tübingen 1977, p. 188–194 (on Anselm, p. 192).

without a *res* that it thinks (the thought). The idea of the inseparability of *intellectus* and *res* in this sense is the true idea of thinking about itself. To think the existence of God *et in intellectu et in re* therefore means to think the ultimate 'reality' of thought itself and is therefore its necessary and highest thought.

VI.2. God proves Himself to be God for thought in that He proves Himself to be *quo nihil maius cogitari possit*, and that He proves Himself in this way within thought itself. This can be summarised by saying that, in the *Proslogion*, Anselm « seeks a correspondence to God in thought »¹²⁸ and – as Dalferth in particular has shown – proves that all the postulates that Anselm sets up for his argument are also fundamental characteristics of his conception of God himself.

This is already evident from the *Prooemium*, according to which (a) the argument sought, like God himself, should be one (« *unum argumentum* »),¹²⁹ corresponding to the unity of thought.¹³⁰ (b) The argument must be self-sufficient (« *se solo indigeret* »),¹³¹ that is, it must be able to be founded and proven by itself, just as God is founded in Himself.¹³² (c) The argument must therefore not require any other argument for its proof, just as God – as Anselm expressly emphasizes – as the *summum bonum* requires no other (« *nullo alio indigens* »),¹³³ so as to be equally self-sufficient.¹³⁴ (d) Anselm's argument must, by its very nature, lead to the realization of God's true existence (« *solum ad astruendum quia deus vere est* »),¹³⁵ just as it is characteristic of God that He reveals Himself on His own accord to human understanding. This means that the very act of thinking the argument, purely as such, simultaneously releases an awareness of God's existence.

Dalferth has summarized these connections in the following sentence: « Anselm thus demands a concept of God which reveals itself as God's concept precisely because it is distinguished by the same fundamental characteristics as God Himself ». ¹³⁶ This correspondence – that Anselm's idea of God is distinguished by the same fundamental characteristics as God himself – can, in

¹²⁸ DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 76; cf. p. 74.

¹²⁹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.6.

¹³⁰ Hence, the formula *aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit* is already Anselm's one and only argument, insofar as it can be understood as the law governing the exercise of thought.

¹³¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.7.

¹³² That is to say, the argument must be developed from thinking itself in the process of thinking – as has been attempted here.

¹³³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.8. See also chap. 22, p. 117.2.

¹³⁴ This implies that the argument can be developed exclusively through thought's self-application. Postulates (b) and (c) explicitly justify the hermeneutic reconstruction of the proof presented here, insofar as they locate the argument within the thinking of thought, i.e., within thought's self-knowledge.

¹³⁵ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.7

¹³⁶ DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 76.

my view, be understood from the fact that, in Anselm's sense, thought is only thought at all insofar as it is God's thought. Anselm's argument consists precisely in demonstrating this. As shown above, it demonstrates that thought comes into its own by conceiving, in God, the ground of its own constitutive relation to truth. Just as thought-in-itself distinguishes itself from its ground and is thought precisely in this self-distinction,¹³⁷ so too the reconstructed unity of correspondence between God and the thought is safeguarded, against the danger of a « deification of the idea of God »¹³⁸ invoked by Dalferth, precisely because this unity is at the same time already the 'difference' between the notion of God and God Himself, as well as that between God and thought in general.¹³⁹

The correspondence of God in thought, as Anselm's characteristic argument suggests we should conceive it, enables thought's complete self-comprehension (or self-penetration), since it is at the same time the self-limitation of thought in view of its foundation in God (that in which « nothing greater can be conceived »). By becoming aware, through thought itself, of its limit in that which it necessarily conceives as *id quo nihil maius*, the act of thinking establishes itself as thought, or rather finds itself thereby grounded. Only by being, at the same time, more than itself is thought truly thought. Its truth – in God as its condition – is at the same time its distinction from itself as mere thought. Thought is perfectly self-contained in that it is, at its limit, the ground of its existence as thought; Feuerbach already hinted at this. This means: thought is sufficient in that it is so *self-sufficient* that it perceives itself as not self-sufficient, but as relating to its ground in that which is distinguished from it – to which, in order to be thought, it is nevertheless related – while remaining irretrievably different (*maior!*), thought realizes itself as thought through this self-grasp. In self-distinction, it is one with itself; in realizing its groundedness, it is sufficient unto itself and is wholly at home with itself, in that it is not merely *at home* with itself. Since its 'self-grounding' consists in thinking its own self-limitation,¹⁴⁰ thought comes to itself precisely by thinking its highest thought.

VI.3. However, according to Anselm – and this is precisely what his proof shows – the awakening of thought as thought is only true as the fulfillment of God in the highest thought. For the correspondence between the idea of God and God Himself – which the argument necessitated to characterize through theomorphic postulates (see above § I-IV) – depends on God's bringing Himself to knowledge in thought through the form of the argument. Anselm writes the argument of the

¹³⁷ See the remarks above on createdness (and being a creature).

¹³⁸ DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 76.

¹³⁹ DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 78 and 81.

¹⁴⁰ On the 'self-justifiability' of the *unum argumentum*, cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 77.

Proslogion, as the *Prooemium* again states, « in the role of one who undertakes to raise his mind to the contemplation of God (*sub persona conantis erigere mentem suam ad contemplandum deum*) »;¹⁴¹ yet chapter 1 in particular states on several occasions that God Himself must enlighten this mind (« illumina nos, ostende nobis te ipsum. Restitue te nobis »),¹⁴² that is to say, raise it up to Himself so that it may even hope to understand what it believes (« quaerentis intelligere quod credit »).¹⁴³ The « Preface (*prooemium*) » testifies to how that longed-for but elusive *cogitatio* imposed itself upon him of its own accord – and even against Anselm's resistance (« se coepit cum importunitate quadam ingerere [...] sic se obtulit »).¹⁴⁴ That is to say, Anselm describes the 'conception' of his argument in the style of an encounter with divine self-manifestation (viz., Revelation). The argument, the *ratio Anselmi*, is thus the conceptual counterpart of the experience of God's Self-attestation in thought as the fundamental condition of thought.¹⁴⁵

According to Anselm's argument, God manifests Himself in thought simply by proving Himself through Himself.¹⁴⁶ The old saying that God is known only from God – i.e., on the basis of his self-manifestation – not only applies to Anselm's method *sola ratione*, but is in fact the most fundamental instance of any *sola ratione* approach. Accordingly, Anselm does not simply identify God in our thought with his *unum argumentum* (i.e., the formula « quo nihil maius cogitari possit »); rather, it must be said fundamentally that God identifies Himself for us in our thinking¹⁴⁷ or, as one might also put it, God is not identified externally with what the argument asserts (cf. chap. 3: « Et hoc es tu, domine deus noster »),¹⁴⁸ but through the argument God convinces us of Himself.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.21–94.1. This is reminiscent of Hegel's interpretation of the proofs of God's existence as the 'elevation' (*Erhebung*) of the human mind to the idea of God.

¹⁴² ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 99.18 f..

¹⁴³ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 94.1 f. The motif of *fides quaerens intellectum* goes back to Augustine: « Ergo intellige, ut credas; crede, ut intelligas » (AUGUSTINUS EPISCOPUS, *Sermo* XLIII, 7; PL 38, col. 258), and especially: « Intellectus enim merces est fidei. Ergo noli quaerere intelligere ut credas, sed crede ut intelligas; quoniam 'nisi credideritis, non intelligetis' [Isaiah 7:9] » (Id., *In Evangelium Ioannis tractatus* XXIX, 6; PL 35, col. 1630).

¹⁴⁴ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 93.16–18.

¹⁴⁵ On this experiential background, cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 72.

¹⁴⁶ Pannenberg emphasizes this, with reference to Hegel, in relation to the 'ontological proof' (WOLFHART PANNENBERG, *Systematische Theologie*, vol. I, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, Göttingen 1988, p. 107, note 108). On the self-limitation of reason that this implies, cf. also JÜNGEL, *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, p. 197 f..

¹⁴⁷ « De se per se ipsum probat » (ANSELMUS, *Responsio*, p. 135.21 f.). Cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 105.

¹⁴⁸ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 103.3.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 101 and LENSINK, « Im Spiegel des Absoluten », p. 77 and 83.

In this respect, the term *illuminatio* (enlightenment) used by Anselm¹⁵⁰ also retains the rational meaning that God's self-presentation (to thought) is at the same time the self-unlocking of thought as thought (according to its ground and its truth). Insofar as God allows Himself to be experienced in thought, God leaves thought to itself in genuine independence. God's presence in thought establishes true thinking as such. Hence, the request for enlightenment quoted above, prior to the formulation of the argument (chap. 1), corresponds to the concluding acknowledgement for the insight granted through enlightenment (« sic intelligo te illuminante »),¹⁵¹ which follows the argument's very completion (chap. 4). It is evident that, in these contexts, Anselm's embedding of his strictly rational argument in *prayer* should be rendered intelligible.¹⁵² It should, however, have become clear that the experience of God in thought articulated by the argument does nothing other than rationally explicate the intellectual implications of prayer (as one seeking God's presence).¹⁵³

VII. Theological Conclusion

Anselm has shown that it is already the distinctive power (*vis*) of the word 'God' that brings thought back to itself.¹⁵⁴ It is precisely this power that is also at work

¹⁵⁰ On truth and light, see ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, chap. 14.

¹⁵¹ ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, p. 104.6.

¹⁵² For more details, see DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 64 and 73; on *illuminatio*, p. 66.

¹⁵³ Cf. DALFERTH, « *Fides quaerens intellectum* », p. 101 and 105.

¹⁵⁴ At the end of his *Responsio* to Gaunilo, Anselm emphatically reiterates that understanding his decisive formula – or, rather, its meaning – is sufficient to prove the existence of that which is greater than anything that can be conceived: « Tantam enim vim huius prolationis in se continet significatio, ut hoc ipsum quod dicitur, ex necessitate eo ipso quod intelligitur vel cogitatur, et re vera probetur existere et id ipsum esse quidquid de divina substantia oportet credere » (ANSELMUS, *Responsio*, p. 138.30-139.3; cf. ROHLS, *Theologie und Metaphysik*, p. 52 and 56). In that the *significatio* of the articulated formula (« hoc ipsum quod dicitur ») immediately compels an understanding of the existence of that which it expresses (« eo ipso »), this *vis* corresponds to the necessity (« ex necessitate ») whereby, in the thinking insight into that (« quod intelligitur vel cogitatur »), one finds oneself already convinced of the 'existence' of God (« et revera probetur existere »). Therefore, this *necessitas* is actually God's self-evidence in the thinking of the formula, and the *vis* of its meaning is precisely the « vis existendi per se », which, according to the *Monologion*, belongs to the *Unum* alone (ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, chap. 3, p. 16.7). In this way, Anselm was able, from the very outset, to claim that the *vis* of the expression *quo maius cogitari non possit* was the *vis* of the word 'God': « Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid, quo nihil maius cogitari possit » (ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, chap. 2, p. 101.4 f.). And this is precisely what makes it plausible that here, in the *responsio*, by recognizing the existence of the *aliquid*, Anselm can also consider it as proven that this refers to the existence of God: « et id ipsum esse quidquid de divina substantia oportet credere » (ibid., p. 139, 2 f.). That is to say, the formula, once understood, immediately brings to light the existence of God (viz., the *significatio* of the word 'God'). It is precisely this *vis* that defines the understanding of what is stated in the formula as a thinking act. Therefore, the proof (the *ratio Anselmi*) is thought's self-knowledge,

in the Word of God and, consequently, also in faith. The power of faith is the power of the Word of God, and theology thinks within this power.

Martin Luther said of this power of faith that it is « inestimable and infinite », indeed that it shares in divine omnipotence (« fides sit res omnipotens »).¹⁵⁵ And it is precisely by virtue of such *virtus* that faith accomplishes, in an unsurpassable measure, what Anselm demonstrated for thought. For, according to Luther, faith attributes to God a glory (*gloria*) « beyond which nothing greater can be conceived or spoken of Him » – in Luther's own words: « qua nihil maius ei tribui potest ».¹⁵⁶

insofar as thought necessarily follows the rule of *quo nihil maius cogitari possit* in order to think and to be itself. In doing so, thinking realizes that what is stated by this formula is powerful within it – or effective within it – as its condition of truth, namely as the *vis* of *necessitas*.

¹⁵⁵ See MARTIN LUTHER, *Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. XL, Erste Abteilung, *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius ex praelectione D. Martini Lutheri collectus* [1535], Hermann Böhlhaus, Weimar 1911, p. 360.19-20: « Qui Rhetor est, exaggeret hunc locum, et videbit, quod fides sit res omnipotens quoque virtus eius sit inaestimabilis et infinita ».

¹⁵⁶ LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. XI, p. 360.21.

Appendix:

NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF ANSELM'S FORMULATION « QUO NIHIL MAIUS... »

a. Among possible biblical antecedents of Anselm's formula, Psalm 40:6 stands out: « There is none comparable to you (*non est qui similis sit tibi*) ».¹⁵⁷ This corresponds to Sir 43:30: « Even if we praise everything highly, [...] he is still *much higher than* all his works » (« *viel höher als* alle seine Werke », according to Luther's translation).¹⁵⁸ That is why God's « greatness » (μεγαλοσύνη, *magnitudo*) is unfathomable (Ps 145:3), and since his power is of « exceeding greatness » (Eph 1:19: ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος, *supereminens magnitudo*), God is « greater than all gods » (Ex 18:11; Ps 86:8 *et al.*). This is always implied when it is often said that God is great (cf. I Chr. 16:25; Job 36:26; Ps 48:2; 86:10; 96:4; Isa 10:6; Sir 46:6, etc.).¹⁵⁹

Thus, in the New Testament, it can be said that « God the Father is greater than all » (John 10:29: πάντων μεϊζόν ἐστιν, *maius omnibus est*) and therefore also « greater » than our hearts (1 John 3:20: μεϊζον, *maior*). God himself can swear only by himself, since there is « no one greater than he » (Heb 6:13: οὐδενός [...] μεϊζονος; *neminem maiorem*).

b. Long before Anselm, antiquity already produced formulations bearing a striking family resemblance to his famous coinage.

Among philosophers, Aristotle states that « the greater good is always the more choiceworthy » (ἀγαθῶν δὲ τὸ μεϊζον αἰρετώτερον αἰεί).¹⁶⁰ Likewise, Epicurus speaks of « some nature so excellent that nothing can be better than it (*necesse sit praestantem esse aliquam naturam, qua nihil sit melius*) ».¹⁶¹ The Stoics took this up in Chrysippus's phrase: « qua nihil potest esse praestantius ».¹⁶² Seneca

¹⁵⁷ אֵין עֶרֶךְ אֵלֶיךָ. LXX-Ps 36:6: τίς ὁμοιωθήσεται σοι; V: *non est qui similis sit tibi*. Cf. Ps 71:19; Isa 40:25; Jer 10:6; Bar 3:36 *et al.* Kant speaks similarly of the sublime; see below, section g.

¹⁵⁸ κύριον ὑψώσατε καθ' ὅσον ἂν δύνασθε, ὑπερέχει γὰρ καὶ ἔτι. V. 28 says: μέγας παρὰ πάντων.

¹⁵⁹ God is « great » in honour and glory (Ps 138:5 and 150:2).

¹⁶⁰ ARISTOTELES, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 7, 1097b19 f.

¹⁶¹ *Epicurea*, ed. HERMANN USENER, Teubner, Leipzig 1887, p. 240 [Fr. 358]. The sentence is found in CICERO, *De natura deorum* 2, 46 (MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, *Scripta quae manserunt omnia*, Fasc. 45, ed. OTTO PLASBERG, WILHELM AX, Teubner, Stuttgart 1961, p. 66). In this work, the divinity of the cosmos is also referred to (in the Stoic tradition) as « nihil excellentius » (*ibid.* 2, 7.18-8.21). On « melius » in Anselm, cf. ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, ch. 2, ed. SCHMITT p. 15.20: « quod tanto maius tanto melius est aut dignius ». In ANSELMUS, *Proslogion*, « melius » (probably in Augustine's footsteps, see below) first appears in ch. 5, p. 104. In Cusanus, « melius » is found in *De principio*, ed. GABRIEL, vol. II, p. 242: « quo melius cogitari nequit ».

¹⁶² *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, ed. HANS FRIEDRICH AUGUST VON ARNIM, vol. II: *Chrysippi fragmenta logica et physica*, Teubner, Leipzig 1903, p. 302 [Fr. 1012]. This phrase is repeated by Boethius in

may also have been an important witness to Anselm's ingenious formulation: « Quid est deus? Mens universi. Quid est deus? Quod vides totum et quod non vides totum. Sic demum magnitudo illi sua redditur, *quo nihil maius cogitari potest*, si solus est omnia, si opus et intra et extra tenet ». ¹⁶³

Anselm might also have been inspired by Roman poets in his formulation. Horace, for example, tells of the ancient « father » who precedes gods and men: « Unde nihil maius generatur ipso ». ¹⁶⁴ Ovid formulates a similar rhetorical question: « quid Iove maius habemus? » ¹⁶⁵

c. From Patristic theology, reference should be made to Gregory of Nyssa; According to him, reflection on God « cannot cease in its search for what is ever greater » (*Homilies on The Song of Songs*, XII: τὸ ἀεὶ ζητοῦντα τὸ πλεῖον [...] μὴ ἴστασθαι). ¹⁶⁶ However, the decisive inspiration for Anselm is likely to be found in Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octaginta tribus*, q. 28, we read: « Nihil autem maius est voluntate dei ». ¹⁶⁷ *Confessiones* VII, 4 provides an insightful clarification: « quia voluntas tua non est maior quam potentia tua ». ¹⁶⁸ « Esset autem maior, si te ipso tu ipse maior esses ». ¹⁶⁹ From this, Anselm was able to conclude: If God himself cannot be greater than himself, then nothing else can be either! ¹⁷⁰

Anselm also found the same pattern expressed with *melius* rather than *maius* in Augustine. The Bishop of Hippo writes in *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de*

reference to *the summum bonum*; cf. *De consolatione philosophiae* III, 10, 15: « quo nihil constat esse praestantius ».

¹⁶³ SENECA THE YOUNGER, *Natural Questions*, Books I–III, ed. THOMAS H. CORCORAN, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1971 (Loeb Classical Library, 450), p. 11. It sounds as if one could hear Cusanus speaking here!

¹⁶⁴ HORACE, *Odes* I, 12, v. 17 (HORACE, *Odes and Epodes*, ed. NIAL R. RUDD, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2004 [Loeb Classical Library 33], p. 46). See the linguistically similar phrase: « possis nihil urbe Roma / Visere maius » (*Carmen saeculare*, in QUINTUS HORATIUS FLACCUS, *Epodi*, ed. DAVID ROY SHACKLETON BAILEY, Teubner, Stuttgart 1995 [3rd edition], v. 9, p. 135).

¹⁶⁵ OVIDIUS, *Metamorphoses* II, 62: Cf. also: « ne quicquam mundus Iove maius haberet » (XI, 224). Cf. OVID, *Metamorphoses*, 2 vols., ed. FRANK JUSTUS MILLER, GEORGE PATRICK GOOLD, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1916, vol. I, p. 64 and vol. II, p. 136.

¹⁶⁶ GREGORIUS NYSSENUS, *Opera*, vol. VI, *In Canticum Canticorum*, ed. HERMANN LANGERBECK, Brill, Leiden 1960, p. 352.16 f..

¹⁶⁷ AUGUSTINUS HIPPOENESIS, *De diversis quaestionibus octaginta tribus*, ed. ALMUT MUTZENBECHER, Brepols, Turnhout 1975 (Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina, 44A), p. 35.4.

¹⁶⁸ AUGUSTINUS HIPPOENESIS, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, ed. LUC VERHEIJEN, Brepols, Turnhout 1981 (CC, SL, 27), VII, 4, line 15. See also the following line [16]: « voluntas enim et potentia dei deus ipse est ».

¹⁶⁹ AUGUSTINUS HIPPOENESIS, *Confessionum libri tredecim*, VII, 4, line 16.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. AUGUSTINUS HIPPOENESIS, *De libero arbitrio*, ed. WILLIAM MCALLEN GREEN, Brepols, Turnhout 1970 (CC, SL, 29), II, 6, the formulation: « quo nihil superius esse constiterit », II, 6, line 48. Cf. *ibid.*, II, 15, line 1: « si adhuc nihil esset superius ».

moribus Manichaeorum II, 11, 24: « quo esse aut cogitari melius nihil possit ».¹⁷¹ And Anselm's way of thinking and speaking is particularly close to a passage in *De doctrina christiana* I, 15: « Nam cum ille unus cogitur deorum deus [...] ita cogitatur ut aliquid quo nihil sit melius atque sublimius illa cogitatio conetur attingere ».¹⁷² Finally, in *Conf.* VII, 4, Augustine affirms, very much in Anselm's spirit: « Neque enim ulla anima umquam potuit [...] cogitare aliquid, quod sit te melius, qui summum et optimum bonum es ».¹⁷³

A later echo of this idea may be found in Boethius: « nam cum nihil deo melius excogitari queat, id quo nihil melius est, bonum esse quis dubitet? » – For since nothing better than God can be conceived, who could doubt that what is such that nothing better can exist is good?¹⁷⁴

d. Chronologically, several passages in Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo* echo the formula of the *Proslogion*. In chapter 13, one reads that nothing is greater or better than God: « deo nihil maius aut melius ».¹⁷⁵ Already in chapter 12, God is described as: « ita sit benignus, ut nihil benignius cogitari queat ».¹⁷⁶

For the medieval tradition, Bernard of Clairvaux may also be cited: « quid est Deus? Quo melius nihil cogitari potest »¹⁷⁷ – for what is there like God? Than whom nothing better can be conceived.

e. The subsequent history of Scholasticism offers abundant evidence for the enduring reception and adaptation of Anselm's formula. Bonaventura writes about God that nothing can be conceived beyond it that is better: « nihil potest

¹⁷¹ AUGUSTINUS HIPPONENSIS, *De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*, ed. JOHANNES BAPTIST BAUER, Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Vienna 1992 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 90), p. 109.1.

¹⁷² AUGUSTINE, *De Doctrina Christiana*, ed. ROGER PHILIP HYWEL GREEN, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1995, p. 18. This line of thought is developed further in the subsequent paragraph: « Nec quisquam inveniri potest qui hoc deum credat esse quo est aliquid melius » (ibid.).

¹⁷³ AUGUSTINUS HIPPONENSIS, *Confessionum*, VII, 4 line 3.

¹⁷⁴ BOETHIUS, *Philosophiae consolatio*, ed. LUDWIG BIELER, Brepols, Turnhout 1984 (CC, SL, 94), III, prosa 10, 7, p. 53.22 f..

¹⁷⁵ ANSELMUS, *Opera omnia*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. II, p. 46*. Of God's mercy it is said: « ut nec maior nec iustitior cogitari possit » (ibid., chap. 20, p. 152*).

¹⁷⁶ ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, in Id., *Opera omnia*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. III, p. 42. Cf. also chap. 13, which contains a similar formulation in terms of syntax: « Nihil autem iniustius toleratur, quam quo nihil est minus tolerandum » (ibid., p. 44). The formulation is also found: « ut illis nihil sit maius aliud » (p. 17.21 f.) or, for example, in, ed. chap. 4, p. 17.21 f.: « ut illis nihil sit maius aliud » and similar.

¹⁷⁷ BERNARDUS CLAREVALLENSIS, *De consideratione libri quinque ad Eugenium papam*, VII, 15, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, ed. JEAN LECLERCQ, HENRI ROCHAIS, vol. III, Editiones cistercienses, Rome 1963, p. 437–438.

cogitari ultra ipsum melius, nobilius nec dignius ac per hoc nihil maius », ¹⁷⁸ since « impossibile est ipsum cogitari non esse ». ¹⁷⁹ Chapter 6, § 2 of the *Itinerarium* offers a strikingly Anselmian formulation, describing the *optimum*, or supreme being (« quod simpliciter est »), as that than which nothing better can be conceived: « quo nihil melius cogitari potest ». ¹⁸⁰

Thomas Aquinas is well known to quote Anselm's dictum – without mentioning its author – as evidence for the view that « ut Deus sit per se notum »: ¹⁸¹ « significatur enim hoc nomine id quo maius significari non potest ». ¹⁸² He then objects: « ille qui audit hoc nomen 'Deus', non intelligit significari aliquid quo maius cogitari non possit » – after all, some have gone so far as to think that « Deum esse corpus ». ¹⁸³ The Dominican master also reiterates Gaunilo's objection: even if someone associates Anselm's meaning with the immediate understanding (*intelligere*) of the divine name, it does not follow that one thereby understands « quod significatur per nomen, esse in rerum natura ». At this stage, what is signified remains « in apprehensione intellectus tantum » and has not yet been shown to exist in reality, « in re ». ¹⁸⁴ A factually consistent critique of Anselm's argumentation – once again, his name is not mentioned – can also be found in *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 10 and 11. ¹⁸⁵

The pseudo-Hermetic *Liber XXIV philosophorum* (c. 1210) likewise deserves mention. Its fifth thesis states: « Deus est, quo nihil melius excogitari potest ». ¹⁸⁶ The ensuing commentary unfolds the implications of this definition through the interconnected notions of *perfectio*, *bonum* and *unum*.

¹⁷⁸ BONAVENTURA, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, 5, par. 7, in Id., *Opera omnia*, vol. V, ed. PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura, Ex typographia Collegii S. Bonaventura, Quaracchi 1891, p. 295 f.; and Peter Lombard's *Sententiae* likewise preserves a few echos of the formula (e.g., BONAVENTURA, *In I librum Sententiarum*, d. 37, pars 2, a. 1, q. 3, concl.; *In III librum Sent.*, d. 14, a. 1, q. 2, concl.).

¹⁷⁹ BONAVENTURA, *Itinerarium*, cap. 5, par. 6, line 19.

¹⁸⁰ BONAVENTURA, *Itinerarium*, cap. 6, par. 2, line 1. Cf. Id., *Commentaria in quattuor libros Sententiarum*, I, d. 8, a. 1, q. 2.

¹⁸¹ Of course, whatever may already be notum is brought to light in Anselm only through his analysis of the very act of conceiving this thought (see above).

¹⁸² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1, arg. 2.

¹⁸³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1, *ad secundum*. However, one might note that the view that God is a body can scarcely be regarded as a serious conceptual alternative to Anselm's definition.

¹⁸⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 2, a. 1. Anselm himself had already sought to display the impossibility of this *tantum*: in his account, what is understood as *id quo maius cogitari non potest* cannot remain merely « in apprehensione intellectus ». Aquinas's appeal to those who deny God's existence likewise seems misplaced, since Anselm's argument proceeds precisely from the standpoint of the « insipiens », who denies that God exists.

¹⁸⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa contra Gentiles*, I, 10, n. 2 and 11, n. 2.

¹⁸⁶ *Liber viginti quattuor philosophorum*, ed. FRANÇOISE HUDRY, Brepols, Turnhout 1997 (CC, Continuatio Mediaevalis, 143A), Sententia 5, line 1.

This brief thirteenth century section may be concluded with two further references. In *Sermo XXIX*, Meister Eckhart invokes Anselm as the first witness for the claim « Deus unus est » (according to Gal 3:20 and Deut 6:4): « deus est, quo nihil melius excogitari potest ».¹⁸⁷ John Duns Scotus, for his part, engages more extensively with the « ratio Anselmi de summo cogitabili »¹⁸⁸ in greater conceptual detail. In his *Tractatus de primo principio*, 79, the *Doctor Subtilis* performs a conceptual « colouring » (« potest colorari illa ratio ») of the correctly quoted Anselmian formula « Deus est quo maius cogitari non potest » and it does so by emphasizing the internal consistency as a condition of the argument.¹⁸⁹

f. Turning to the early Renaissance, Marsilio Ficino offers a curious adaptation of Anselm's formula. Conceiving God as the *summus opifex*, he applies Anselm's characterization not to the idea of God, but to the divine act of creation itself: « quo maius effici nequit ».¹⁹⁰

The pattern appears already in the works of Nicholas of Cusa, already cited above. This begins as early as *De docta ignorantia* I, 2 (1440): « Maximum autem hoc dico, quo nihil maius esse potest ».¹⁹¹ It recurs repeatedly in later works, for example in *De visione Dei* I (1453), where God is described as: « summitas ipsa omnis perfectionis et maior quam cogitari possit ».¹⁹² In the same treatise (cap. 18), the loving Trinitarian unity of Father and Son is described as « quo maior esse nequit ».¹⁹³ Finally, in *De non-aliud* IV (1461/62), Anselm's insight appears as a universally acknowledged theological principle: « Omnes enim theologici Deum

¹⁸⁷ MEISTER ECKHART, *Lateinische Werke*, vol. IV, ed. ERNST BENZ, BRUNO DECKER, JOSEF KOCH, Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1956, p. 263.5. The wording of the quotation is evidently dependent upon the *Liber XXIV philosophorum*, a dependence subsequently confirmed by the passages from Augustine, Bernard, and Seneca cited above.

¹⁸⁸ Of course, Anselm does not have in mind a single, definitive 'highest' thought. Can one really maintain, with Scotus, that in this « cogitabili summo summe quiescit intellectus »? Anselm's own account seems rather to point toward an inexhaustible movement of thought, not to its final repose in a supreme concept.

¹⁸⁹ JOHANNES DUNS SCOTUS, *Tractatus de primo principio* ed. KLUXEN, p. 104. A further 'recolouring' occurs in the idea of a « perfectius cogitabile » or « visibile » (ibid., p. 106). On the reception and development of the *ratio Anselmi* in Scotus's other writings (e.g., *Ordinatio*, I, d. 2, pars 1, q. 2, which lays no claim to *coloratio*), see HARTMUT GRABST, « Johannes Duns Scotus' Rezeption des Anselmianischen Arguments », *Bochumer Philosophisches Jahrbuch für Antike und Mittelalter*, 2 (1997), p. 105-125.

¹⁹⁰ MARSILIO FICINO, *De Christiana religione*, ch. 16, ed. GUIDO BARTOLUCCI, Edizioni della Normale, Pisa 2019, p. 199.10.

¹⁹¹ NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, ed. LEO GABRIEL, vol. I, Herder, Vienna 1964, p. 198. In Anselm's case, of course, one cannot speak of « maximum »; see above in the main text.

¹⁹² NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. III, Herder, Vienna 1967, p. 98.

¹⁹³ NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. III, p. 178.

viderunt, quid maius esse quam concipi possest ».¹⁹⁴ In one of his last works, *De venatione sapientiae* XXVI (1462/63), Cusanus explicitly affirms the truth of Anselm's claim that « Deum esse maius quam concipi possit ».¹⁹⁵ Indeed, he had already stated as much in the *Apologia* (1449), composed in defense of the *Docta ignorantia*: only the ignorant could maintain that God is anything other than « id, quo maius concipi nequit ».¹⁹⁶

Cusanus, however, appropriated the *maius*-formula in a way that goes well beyond Anselm's intentions. In *De Beryllo* VII, with unmistakable reference to Anselm, he writes that God can be speculatively apprehended « per maximum, quo nihil maius esse potest, pariter et minimum, quo nihil minus esse potest ».¹⁹⁷ Here, Anselm's *ratio* is transformed in accordance with Cusanus's doctrine of the *coincidentia oppositorum*. Of the *maximum*, to which nothing can be opposed, Cusanus accordingly states: « secum simul coincidit minimum ».¹⁹⁸

More surprisingly, traces of this line of thought may also be found in Martin Luther, who was acquainted with Nicholas of Cusa and appears to have been influenced by him in some of his more speculative reflections.¹⁹⁹ Some of Luther's statements remain relatively general, as when he writes: « that godhood is something greater than all other things ».²⁰⁰ Yet Anselm's formula also reappears in a more explicit form: « cum solus deus sit id, quo maius dici non potest ».²⁰¹ In his theologically significant late work *On the Supper of Christ: Confession* (1528), Luther writes, in terms that clearly recall Cusanus:

¹⁹⁴ NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. II, Herder, Vienna 1966, p. 454.

¹⁹⁵ NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. I, p. 120. Gabriel's footnote to this passage notes: « This idea is essential to Cusanus's philosophy, since it is he who gives him the 'regula doctae ignorantiae' ».

¹⁹⁶ NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. I, p. 534.

¹⁹⁷ NIKOLAUS VON KUES, *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. III, p. 8. He formulates a similar idea in « Propositiones » on *De non-aliud*: God as the non-other is « ipsius maximi maximum et ipsius minimi minimum » (ibid., vol. II, p. 562).

¹⁹⁸ CUSANUS, *De docta ignorantia*, II, in Id., *Philosophisch-Theologische Schriften*, vol. I, p. 198. Just as the maximum is the « absolutum unum est, quod est omnia », so too is the minimum that coincides with it: « quare et in omnibus ». For a more detailed explanation, cf. ibid.; the passage has already been quoted above.

¹⁹⁹ This may have been conveyed by Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples.

²⁰⁰ MARTIN LUTHER, *Werke*, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. XIX, *Schriften* 1526, Hermann Böhlhaus, Weimar 1897, p. 205.29-30: « dass die gottheit etwas grösseres sey für allen andern dingen ».

²⁰¹ LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. I, *Schriften, Predigten, Disputationen* 1512/18, Hermann Böhlhaus, Weimar 1883, p. 590.5-6. In addition, there is the phrase quoted above, from 2. *Galatervorlesung*, in LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. XL, Hermann Böhlhaus, Weimar 1911, p. 360.20 f..

That God [...] is [...] a supernatural, unfathomable being / who is wholly and completely in every grain / and yet is in all and above all and outside all creatures [...] *Nothing is so small / God is yet smaller; nothing is so great / God is yet greater* [...]. It is an ineffable being, above and beyond everything that one can name or think.²⁰²

Here one can discern, unmistakably, at least an indirect continuation of Anselm's thought, mediated through Nicholas of Cusa.²⁰³

g. This brief survey of the sources and reception of Anselm of Canterbury's celebrated formula may be concluded with two modern examples that can plausibly be read as traces of its enduring influence.

In §25 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant characterizes the *sublime* as a « greatness that is only equal to itself »²⁰⁴ and, correspondingly, as « that which is great beyond all comparison ».²⁰⁵

An even more explicit reminiscence occurs in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Referring to what he calls the « oldest (Anselmian) formulation of the ontological proof », he writes: « The highest, above which there is nothing, *quo maius non datur*, is God » before proceeding to expound the argument and compare it with the Cartesian proof.²⁰⁶

²⁰² « Das Gott [...] sey [...] ein ubernatürlich unerforschlich wesen / das zu gleich ynn eym iglichen körnlin gantz und gar / und dennoch ynn allen und uber allen und ausser allen Creaturen sey [...] *Nichts ist so klein / Gott ist noch kleiner, Nichts ist so gros / Gott ist noch grösser* [...]. Ist ein unaussprechlich wesen uber und ausser allem das man nennen oder dencken kann » (MARTIN LUTHER, *Werke in Auswahl*, ed. OTTO CLEMEN, vol. III, de Gruyter, Berlin 1959, p. 404.26–38).

²⁰³ Luther was familiar with Anselm's life and writings (cf. LUTHER, *Werke, Tischreden*, vol. V, Hermann Böhlau, Weimar 1919, n° 6415, p. 650; Luther's marginal notes on Anselm's *Opuscula* survive (cf. LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. IX, *Schriften und Predigten 1509/21* [Nachträge und Ergänzungen zu Bd. 1–6, 8, 9], Hermann Böhlau, Weimar 1893, p. 104–114), and brief, generally approving references occur elsewhere). The sentence « *Quando Deus loquitur, non frustra loquitur* » (LUTHER, *Werke*, vol. XXXIX, Zweite Abteilung, Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, Weimar 1932, p. 199.9) may even directly derive from ANSELMUS, *Monologion*, in Id., *Opera omnia*, ed. SCHMITT, vol. I, p. 33 f..

²⁰⁴ « Größe, die bloß sich selber gleich ist »; cf. IMMANUEL KANT, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, in *Kants Werke*, Akademie-Textausgabe, vol. V, de Gruyter, Berlin 1968, p. 250.7–8.

²⁰⁵ « Das, was über alle Vergleichung groß ist » (KANT, *Kritik der Urtheilskraft*, p. 248.9 f.). Kant's following statements echo both Luther and Pascal: « That nothing in nature can be given, however great it may be judged by us, which cannot be considered in another relationship, degraded to the infinitely small, and conversely, nothing so small that it cannot be expanded in comparison [...] to the size of the world (*daß nichts in der Natur gegeben werden könne, so groß als es auch von uns beurtheilt werde, was nicht in einem anderen Verhältnisse betrachtet, bis zum Unendlich-Kleinen abgewürdigt werden könnte, und umgekehrt nichts so klein, was sich nicht in Vergleichung [...] bis zu einer Weltgröße erweitern ließe*) » (ibid., p. 250.14–19).

²⁰⁶ FRIEDRICH WILHELM JOSEPH SCHELLING, *Philosophie der Offenbarung*, in Id., *Ausgewählte Werke in zehn Bänden* [Reprint of the 1859–1860 Cotta Edition], Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1966, vol. II [= 1st part of *The Philosophy of Revelation*], p. 157: « Das Höchste, worüber nichts ist,

Finally, to cite a more recent – perhaps only coincidental – echo in this long history of reception, Anneliese Maier reformulates the motif as follows: « infinitum est quo nihil est maius ».²⁰⁷ In this concise expression, Anselm's insight and Cusanus's metaphysics appear once again to converge.

quo maius non datur, ist Gott ». See also vol. III, p. 27, 169 *et passim*. On Hegel's examination of Anselm, see RINGLEBEN, « Der sogenannte ontologische Gottesbeweis », p. 481–484.

²⁰⁷ ANNELIESE MEIER, *Ausgehendes Mittelalter. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Geistesgeschichte des 14. Jahrhunderts*, vol. II, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura: Rome 1964, p. 49. On thirteenth-century theories of the actual infinite, see now PAOLO MANCOSU, *The Wilderness of the Infinite: Robert Grosseteste, William of Auvergne, and Mathematical Infinity in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2026.