4 Anselm's Arguments

Having considered Anselm's Definition, I detect Five arguments that Anselm uses to argue for the existence of God.

4.1 Anselm's First Argument – COMPREHENSION (Proslogion Chapter 2).

It should be noted that Anselm is quoting the first part of Psalm 14 verse 1:

> The fool has said in his heart 'There is no God…'

The use of this word 'fool' is basically a quotation and not an accusation that anyone who is an atheist is stupid to be so. If Anselm thought so he would not spend his time attempting, to the best of his ability, to convince the unbeliever.

He also specifies that 'to say in one's heart' is to comprehend, so the fool does have an idea of what he is rejecting.

The argument is:

1. The claim is made that God (the <u>greater than</u>) exists.

2. The 'fool' rejects this claim.

3. But the 'fool' understands (comprehends) what he rejects.

4. There is a distinction here between
   – what the fool understands is in his understanding and
   – what the fool understands to exist.

5. This leads to a general distinction between
   – an object being in the understanding and
   – understanding an object to exist.

6. Example of this distinction: a painter
   – has a painting in his understanding before he paints
   it and
   – understands the painting exists after he has painted
   it.

7. The 'fool' is convinced the <u>greater than</u> exists in his
   understanding because he rejects it.

8. Therefore whatever is understood has existence in the
   understanding.

9. The <u>greater than</u> cannot exist in the understanding alone
   because existence in reality is greater than existence
   only in the understanding.

10. Otherwise the greater than would not be greater than.

Here Anselm is using thought as a way of getting to God.
The idea of God is developed by a thought sequence. Because
a binary relation (>) is used here, there are at least two
terms being used. This means that any sequence will be at
least two terms and at most an infinity of terms (or until
the concept built by the sequence can be taken no further).
Then the sequence is bounded or has reached a limit. Anselm
then introduces the existence of God as distinct from the
existence of the idea of God by claiming that, as existence
is greater than non-existence, the <u>greater than</u> must exist
in reality.

Hence the <u>greater than</u> exists in understanding and reality.

A re-casting of this argument is:

1. A person has the idea of God as the <u>greater than</u> in their mind.

2. The idea of God as the <u>greater than</u> exists.

3. However to be greater-than is to exist in reality as well as in the mind.

4. Therefore if God is the <u>greater than</u> he exists in reality which is greater than existing in the mind only.

The elements of this argument are

- The idea of God

- The greater than operator or relation

- An idea existing in the mind

- An object denoted by an idea existing in reality which is greater than existing in the mind.

It is important to note here that Anselm is not claiming that God exists in the mind. It is the idea of God that exists in the mind. Throughout Anselm's definition and argument, God is not a thought. God is referred to by thought. In a use similar to that of Gödel, who used numerals with a successor function as formal representation of numbers, we could use 'God' to refer to the idea of God not God per se. Anselm's argument and definition is about the idea of God and only in the final step of the argument does 'God' become God.

The mechanism of the greater than operator (>) gets us beyond the traditional criticisms such as the greatest

conceivable island. This is because one can conceive of something greater than the greatest conceivable island. If we compare God and islands then God is greater, more valuable, more interesting and more powerful than an island. In this sense we are not just pursuing the thought sequence for the greatest conceivable thought of some object, but we are thinking across objects to the greatest conceivable object of all conceivable objects. God is the object greater than any other conceivable object. 'God' is the most exalted of all our ideas. Anselm is not seeking to argue that perfection in anything implies that object's existence. In 'God' we are concerned with the greatest of all our ideas. This is separate from the greatest idea that we can have of God. We are emphasizing God's uniqueness as opposed to any other conceivable object. Once we have isolated the greatest conceivable object, which must be unique (otherwise it is not greater than any conceivable thing) then the existence-is-greater-than-non-existence argument can be applied.

The definition of the <u>greater than</u> could be expressed as follows:

1. I have a thought (about God = 'God'). This is the least term of the well-ordering of thoughts.

2. The > relation compares the thoughts of a (well-ordered) thought sequence (about 'God') of at least two terms.

3. This sequence (viewed as an infinite sequence) has a limit, which is that point at which no element of the sequence is greater.

4. This limit is not a point of the sequence because the limit of an infinite sequence is never reached from within the sequence. However, the existence of the limit is indicated by the sequence.

5. The limit thought denotes God (that is the <u>greater than</u> exists in the mind).

6. Assuming that existence is greater than non-existence, the <u>greater than</u> exists in reality.

As already noted, there can be two-step sequences as a degenerate form of the sequence motif. This can be a two-state sequence of true/not true, existing/not existing with respect to attributes for God.

4.2 Anselm's Second Argument – CONTRADICTION (Proslogion Chapter 3).

1. A thing can be thought of as existing
   and this is greater than
   a thing that can be thought of as not existing.

2. It is impossible for the <u>greater than</u>
   not to be thought not to exist,
   because

3. The <u>greater than</u> not able to be thought not to exist
   is greater than
   the <u>greater than</u> able to be thought not to exist.

4. Hence if the <u>greater than</u> can be conceived not to exist then it is not the <u>greater than</u>.

5. That would mean the <u>greater than</u> is not greater than
   – CONTRADICTION

6. Therefore the <u>greater than</u> is indeed that which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, so that it cannot be conceived not to exist.

In this argument we only require a two-term sequence. We are dealing with whether an object can be conceived not to exist. This is the usual condition for an object whose existence is not necessary. That is, it can be conceived not to exist without contradiction. But as the greatest conceivable object God cannot be conceived not to exist. It is a contradiction to assert that the greatest conceivable object does not exist. Therefore God, as the greatest conceivable thing, must exist. This is not implying that the greatest conceivable island (or anything other than God) must exist. God is the greatest conceivable object of all conceivable objects. Once we isolate the greatest conceivable object we can then speak about the existence of the greatest conceivable thing, namely God.

4.3 Anselm's Third Argument – CREATION (Proslogion Chapter 3)

This is a brief reference Anselm makes to God as the Creator.

Anselm says (Plantinga (1968), p5).

> For if a mind could conceive of a being better than Thee, the creature would rise above the Creator, and this is most absurd.

The argument can be stylized as follows

1. A person (the mind) has thoughts about a being greater than God.

2. A greater than God would infer that the creature (the created) is greater than the creator.

3. The Creator is always greater than the creature (the created).

4. It is absurd (contradictory) for the creature to be greater than the Creator.

The term Creator indicates two functions of God. One function is that God is the cause of what is (Cosmological argument) and the other function is that God is the designer of what is (Teleological argument).

The greater than is greater than any other conceivable thing because it is the first cause and designer of what is. God as Creator is logically prior to and independent of God's creation.

This Creator argument is a traditional type of Christian argument. The Creator argument can be argued against by the claim that machines can build more complex machines. However, complexity in a machine is introduced by an outside agent usually a human being. I take up this complexity argument in Chapter 13.

I have decided to use creation as the main account of existence for this thesis. This is principally because I think that attempting to explain God's existence (in terms of a conceivable, mathematical creation) is better than attempting to prove God's existence (in terms of ontological argument). I find that the work of Anselm

provides both a mathematically inspired definition and an essence-implies-existence ontological argument.

4.4 Anselm's Fourth Argument – CONTINGENCY (Prosologion Chapter 3)

1. Everything beside God can be conceived not to exist (contingent existence).

2. It belongs to God alone to exist more truly than all other beings (absolute existence).

3. Hence God exists in a higher degree than all others.

4. Whatever else that exists does not exist so truly [as God] and hence existence belongs to it in less degree.

In attempting to defend this argument I will suggest collapsing the degrees of existence. Either something exists or it does not. There appears to be no thought sequence of greater and greater existence. Therefore I suggest the following substitutions or equivalences

EXIST   ≡ 'more truly' ≡ 'higher degree' ≡ absolutely

NOT EXIST ≡ 'less truly' ≡ 'lower degree' ≡ contingently

Hence the argument becomes

1. Everything except the greater than can be conceived not to exist (hence to exist contingently).

2. It belongs to the greater than to not be able to be conceived not to exist (hence to exist absolutely).

3. Hence the greater than has absolute (not contingent) existence.

This avoids the idea of degrees of existence. Existence is univocal: either something exists or it does not. This argument looks like defining something into existence, which has been one of the main arguments against the ontological argument. If we define God as having absolute existence and we conclude therefore that God exists absolutely, we have assumed what we want to prove. However, what if we demonstrate (say, by means of acceptable mathematical ideas) that a greatest conceivable being is indeed conceivable. Can we then go from the demonstrably greatest conceivable being to the implication of its existence as part of its greatness? The issue then is not one of definition but one of demonstration. In what proceeds in this thesis, I seek to demonstrate the conceivability of a greatest being by means of mathematical concepts and procedures.

4.5 Anselm's Fifth Argument – CONCEPTION (Prosologion Chapter 3).

1. There is more than one way in which a thing is said in the heart or conceived.

2. There is a DISTINCTION between
   – an object is understood when a word signifying it is understood.
   – an object is understood when the very entity (the object) is understood.

3. God as a <u>word</u> can be conceived not to exist but God as <u>greater than</u> cannot be conceived not to exist.

4. Illustration: One may confuse fire and water as words not knowing what they mean, but never confuse them once their meanings are known.

5. No one who understands what God is can conceive of God as not existing because

6. No one who comprehends the <u>greater than</u> can conceive of the <u>greater than</u> not existing.

7. Anselm then declares that if he were unwilling to believe God did exist, he would not be able not to understand.

This suggests that to argue against the <u>greater than,</u> one must deny the conceptual power of that which is greater than. If one permits the <u>greater than</u> one cannot deny God's existence.

4.6 Comments on the Five Arguments

As already noted I am drawing a distinction between Anselm's Definition: 'God is that than which nothing greater can be thought' and Anselm's Five Arguments for his definition. The arguments illustrate the use of the definition in a certain philosophical period where arguments or beliefs concerning levels of existence, creation and perfectibility were more acceptable.

Anselm is not arguing that the <u>greater than</u> is a being in the understanding. Oppy (Oppy, p9) rephrases this argument as 'a being than which no greater can be conceived exists in the understanding'. I claim Anselm is saying that in our understanding we have the idea of the <u>greater than</u>. Orthodox Christianity does not regard God as an idea,

although we obviously have ideas about God. Anselm is
saying that, as we have ideas about God (ordered by the >
relation), we make a final existence claim when it is
claimed that, logically, according to Anselm the greater
than has to be greater than an idea.

Can this argument be used to claim the existence of a
perfectly evil being? I am claiming that Anselm's
Definition is formal. That is, Anselm's Definition can be
expressed as a formal process without reference to a
particular content. Anselm's Definition is also attribute-
free. Simplistically, if we apply 'evil' to the formal >
relation, greater and greater evil would create greater and
greater disorder. But what do we mean by 'evil'? I have to
express evil by means of accompanying concepts. Expressing
evil as a concept, or as a sequence of concepts, I will
conceptualize evil as greater and greater dis-unity, dis-
order, or destructiveness. Presumably greater and greater
destruction leads to a state of entropy and the total lack
of distinction between any objects. Ultimately there is
nothing conceivable or discernible. This is akin to the
primeval chaos. This is the nothingness (lack of any
distinction) out of which God creates. It is the
inconceivable (the null set) in which nothing exists. It
may be added, as an aside, that greater and greater good in
a person leads to greater delineation of character. Whereas
greater and greater evil in a person leads to less and less
delineation of character and the capacity for personal
intention. In a well-ordering we are looking for a least
term. However, we cannot start at the level of chaos where
nothing is discernible. We have to commence with a concept

of something. If we want to talk about God, then we must
start with a concept that generates ideas (or an idea
sequence) about God. The least term has to be the 'seed'
term that we can start to operate on. (Notice here that the
> sign is a binary relation when we are comparing ideas in
the sequence and is an operator (say GT = greater than)
when we are generating the successor terms in the
sequence.) The least term always has to be the concept we
are dealing with. The sequence cannot create the concept.
All the sequence can do is create, or distinguish,
measurable degrees of the concept (if this is conceivable).
This means that we cannot start the sequence with evil and
end up with good, or that, as is sometimes said, the
difference between good and evil is only a matter of
degree.

It is interesting to note here the nature of the 'Via
Negativa' as a comparison to Anselm's Definition. This
Negative Way is the opposite of the 'Via Affirmativa' or
the affirmative way to God. The Via Affirmativa, following
the teaching of the Pseudo-Dionysius (Copleston (1962),
p108) is where one ascends in a transcendental manner
through Goodness, Life, Wisdom and Power to the greater
vision of God. The Via Negativa is where the divine
features are removed and through drunkenness and fury one
descends by progressively denying God and qualities of
creatures until one reaches 'the super-essential Darkness'
(ibid., p110). By this removal of all images of God and
creatures (the Via Remotionis) one enters the 'Darkness of
Unknowing', where one ultimately becomes wrapped in the
unknowable. This is a mystic process whereby instead of

evil (which does not lead to God) one has the mystic state of no definition and the removal of all that refuses to contemplate God as transcendent.

Formally, Anselm's Definition specifies how to generate a sequence of at least two terms, so the actual conceptual content is not specified by the Definition. If, however, we commence a sequence with a 'seed' concept of evil we would generate concepts of greater and greater evil, just as we could develop concepts of greater and greater good. Therefore, there would be two greater thans, one evil and one good. Presumably the good greater than is greater than the evil greater than, so the good is indeed greater than.

There is not a collection of greater-than beings as the greater-than relation pushes us to uniqueness. If there were (say) two perfectly ultimate beings the requirement of ultimacy (in the limit) would require that one be greater than the other. If, however, the claim is made of two greater thans then the two greater thans are identical. The argument against two greater thans is similar to the argument in mathematics for the uniqueness of a multiplicative inverse. The argument is as follows.

Consider an Integral Domain using commutativity and cancellation. Consider the number a. A multiplicative inverse is a number b which when multiplied by a always gives 1. That is, a.b = 1. Say b is not unique, then (say) a.c = 1. That is,   a.b = 1 = a.c, giving a.b = a.c, which on canceling gives b = c, which means b and c are the same. So the multiplicative inverse is unique.

This type of argument suggests the uniqueness of the limit. A further statement of uniqueness follows:

An increasing function cannot approach two different limits at the same value. That is, if the limit of f(x) = L and the limit of f(x) = M then L = M.

Assume we have two limits for the same function, say we have a function f approaching two limits n, m.

As x approaches a, f(x) approaches n as closely as desired.

As x approaches a, f(x) approaches m as closely as desired.

This says, given small numbers ε, δ

$$\left|f(x) - n\right| < \varepsilon \text{ and } \left|f(x) - m\right| < \varepsilon \text{ as } \left|x-a\right| < \delta.$$

Choose $\varepsilon = \left|n - m\right|/2$, that is half way between n and m, with x approaching a. This gives

$$\left|f(x) - n\right| < \left|n - m\right|/2 \text{ and } \left|f(x) - m\right| < \left|n-m\right|/2.$$

Adding these two equations gives

$\left|n-m\right| > \left|f(x)-n\right| + \left|f(x)-m\right|$, which on substituting gives

$$> \left|n-m\right|/2 + \left|n-m\right|/2$$

$$> \left|n-m\right|$$

which says $\left|n-m\right| > \left|n-m\right|$ which is a contradiction. So there are not two limits for the same function at the same value. The limit as x approaches a is unique.

A more appropriate argument can be used for the uniqueness of a limit by using partially ordered sets. Anselm's Definition can be viewed as a partially ordered set. A partially ordered set is a set with a transitive relation $\leq$ such that if x$\leq$y and y$\leq$x then x=y. Such a sequence is

increasing if, whenever n>m then $u_n>u_m$, with u any term of the (thought) sequence. A partially ordered set is said to be totally ordered if, for all x, y either x≤y or y≤x. If a partially ordered set has a least upper bound it is unique. In Anselm's Definition the limit thought may be considered as the least upper bound and by this reasoning it is unique.

Similarly, with Anselm we are talking about a unique object, approached by thought, known in the limit, attested by formal reasoning. God is not a set or even the ultimate set but the being of God may be approached that way. So I claim, God is indicated or located by a particular thought process.

4.7 In Summary.

Anselm's Definition, 'God is that than which nothing greater can be thought', can be expressed as 'God is the greater than'. The initial idea of the thought sequence corresponds to the first element of a number sequence, the inclusive thought process corresponds to the greater than number sequence and the number limit corresponds to the limit thought of God.

Anselm's Definition can be understood as giving a finite or an infinite thought sequence. If we have a finite sequence of at least two terms then we have a concept, or descriptor, of God. However, the point of Anselm's Definition is that we can approach God by a sequence of ideas that express God's excellence. The sequence of ideas is not making God more complicated. What is changing is our knowledge of God. If the sequence is pushed to its limit,

then we can use conceptual techniques of infinity to locate God. The conceivable God is located by an infinite thought process.

Anselm's Arguments in summary are
1. Comprehension. The greater than has to be greater than an idea only.
2. Contradiction. Nothing can be greater than the greater than.
3. Creation. The Creator is greater than the creation.
4. Contingency. Everything besides the greater than can be thought not to exist.
5. Conception. Once conceived the greater than cannot not be conceived not to exist.

It must be pointed out that Anselm does say that existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding. I think that the definition of the greater than can be used without referring to existence in the understanding as prior to existence in reality. Anselm need not argue this way.

Can anything be done to rescue Anselm's existence-in-the-understanding argument? Yes, I believe that Anselm's Definition can be rescued as follows. Instead of introducing existence in the understanding at the beginning of the thought sequence simply push the > relation to the limit. The limit thought denotes God. This limit thought is greater than, in every respect. One of these respects is existence. Assuming that existence is greater than non-existence, the object denoted by the limit thought exists.

Gaunilo replies to such an argument with the example of the perfect island concept. Gaunilo says that he has in his mind the idea of an island of 'inestimable wealth' (Plantinga (1968), p11). Similarly Kant claims that the thought of 100 thalers in his pocket does not put 100 thalers in his pocket in fact (ibid, p62). Both are arguing that no matter how exalted the thought that thought does not, of itself, imply the existence of what it denotes. To these objections I reply.

Anselm is not arguing for any conceivable object but only for one unique object, all of whose attributes can be pushed to the limit as thought sequences. So if we push every descriptor to its limit for each conceivable object we want to consider and then examine a sequence across all objects to obtain the greatest conceivable object among conceivable objects we, presumably, have a unique object. So both Gaunilo and Kant remain in the realm of the conceivable referring to islands and thalers. Anselm's definition pushes our knowledge of God to the limit of the conceivable among conceivable beings.

Granted that thought does not give us existence, thought can lead us to a possible existent. Anselm's Definition does not argue that the being in thought becomes the being in reality as though transmogrified by an existence wish. God is approached by (not constituted by) a certain thought process. God does not exist in the understanding; rather, the idea of God exists in the understanding and the process of Anselm's Definition points us in the right direction.

At this point I should highlight the difference between an ontological argument and Anselm's definition.

Ontological arguments (of which Oppy claims there are many (Oppy (1995)) connect thought and existence. The connection between the conceivability of an object and its existence is a major philosophical issue. It appears as a major cause of alarm for Kant. Ontological arguments are often of the form perfection implies existence. However, Anselm's Definition is only about one object (namely God) not any perfectly conceivable object. No doubt, it is possible to describe many perfectly conceivable things (unicorns, islands, thaler-possession). A necessary attribute (an attribute necessary to the idea of a thing) need not be a greater than version of that attribute or object. There are greater things than islands, even perfect ones. The uniqueness of God is that God is greater-than with respect to any object, attribute or thought sequence. A Cartesian-style argument could go

1. God has every positive property. God lacks nothing.

2. Existence is a positive property (here existence is introduced).

3. Therefore God exists (here existence is implied).

This kind of argument seems to be granting what it wants to prove; it assumes existence (in 2) to get existence (in 3). That is, if God lacks nothing, God must exist. This also implies that if God lacks nothing positive, then God is everything positive, which is not Anselm's argument.

The thought of the existence of God is where we have the base for Anselm's definition which is a thought sequence governed by the > relation. Because the idea of God can be taken further than any other idea, we are lead to assert that this thought sequence uniquely indicates God. The sequence itself is not God and no thought in the sequence is God. The sequence indicates (or locates) God and God's existence is asserted on the basis of the comparisons granted by the > relation.

Any other object (island or thaler) is always a term of the thought sequence and the object, as well as its existence, is conceivable. The point of Anselm's definition is that God is not a term of the thought sequence. In fact, the thought, beyond thought, that denotes God is not a member of the sequence. Whatever thought we may use in the sequence to denote God, this thought is, by Anselm's Definition, always eclipsed by the next greater thought.

The existence of the thought of God is where we have one of Anselm's arguments for God's existence (Comprehension). That is, existence in reality is greater than existence in the understanding. This argument is not based upon a thought sequence but a greater-than existence claim, which is the claim that existence in reality is greater than existence in the mind.

The usual attack on Anselm's ontological argument occurs here. Usually it is claimed that a being in the understanding cannot become a being in reality. That is, a being in the understanding (an island, a thaler or a god) no matter how exaltedly conceived, cannot therefore claim

to exist in reality also. Although Anselm uses this
argument I am claiming that Anselm need not argue this way;
I argue that his definition can carry a different
interpretation. Anselm could argue that God does not exist
in the mind and then in reality. Rather the idea of God
exists in the mind, and after a specified thought process,
the conceivability of a greater than forces itself on the
understanding as a limit condition, so that in this unique
conceptual conclusion, existence may be claimed. This
existence claim has the force of an argument based on a
limit.

My argument is that God is conceivable, which implies
finitely describable. That is, we can say things about God
that we can understand. Understanding is not indescribable.
An understandable object is an object among other objects.
The question then is how do we know God or, at least, how
do we know God to exist? If we cannot approach the
existence of God by perception, can we approach the
existence of God by conception (thought)?

Thought is a way to express the conceivable uniqueness of
God. Thought provides conceivability as an approach to God.
The existence of God is approached by thought, which can
indicate uniqueness by pushing thought to the limit of the
conceivable, which is the inconceivable. Then God indicated
by thought, described by thought, approached by thought,
whose existence is conceivable by thought, finally claims
the recognition of existence.

If, as I have argued, we use a theory of creation, then
existence in the creation is the result of an arbitrary

(non-theoretic) creative act by a creative agent, initially by God and then by other agents (humans) within the creation. What exists is the result of an act of God. Existence is not theory-driven nor is it conforming to eternal Forms. God's existence is a relation God has with God. That which exists is in relation with other existing things. The agent within the creation brings a conceivable object into relation with the agent and so the object exists and can be related to. That is, people do things with things.

The limit position in the thought sequence not only expresses uniqueness but is consistent with the desire to assert God's existence. God, as the Creator, is pre-eminent among objects as the sole uncreated object that brings other things into existence by bringing them into relation with God.

So we use ideas about God (developed by Anselm's Definition) to approach the existence of God. God exists because God has relation with God. Because God is hidden, thought is the only way to access the existence of God. Therefore, I claim a link between thought (conceivability) and existence, so strongly denied by empiricists. This link is thought indicating existence (as based on the conceivability of creation) and not thought obtaining existence (as based on a theory-driven ontology).