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# THE MODAL UNITY OF ANSELM'S *PROSLOGION*<sup>1</sup>

Gary Mar

Anselm claimed that his *Proslogion* was a "single argument" sufficient to prove "that God truly exists," that God is "the supreme good requiring nothing else," as well as to prove "whatever we believe regarding the divine Being." In this paper we show how Anselm's argument in the *Proslogion* and in his *Reply to Gaunilo* can be reconstructed as a single argument. A logically elegant result is that the various stages of Anselm's argument are validated by standard axioms from contemporary modal logic.

Anselm's prayerful meditation on the meaning of faith in the *Proslogion* was an attempt to find "one single argument ... that by itself would suffice to prove that God really exists, that He is the supreme good needing no other and is He whom all things have need of for their being and well-being, and also to prove whatever we believe about the Divine Being."<sup>2</sup> Most contemporary philosophers, however, have narrowly focused on *Proslogion II*, and have consequently ignored Anselm's emphasis on a *single* argument in his work.<sup>3</sup> In this paper I attempt to provide a logical map of Anselm's argument as a whole. I will not dwell on the assumptions about existence and predication in *Proslogion II*, nor will I defend the soundness or cogency of that argument. Instead, I shall attempt to exhibit the logical relations among the stages of Anselm's broader "single argument" as it is progressively developed in *Proslogion I, II, III* and the remaining chapters of the *Proslogion*, and as it is elaborated upon in Anselm's *Reply to Gaunilo*.

I will show that these multiple passages reflect a single logically unified modal argument, a multi-faceted argument that reflects the beauty of a single gem. Anselm's claim of a single argument is vindicated by showing that the conclusions of the various subsidiary arguments serve as the premises of a more comprehensive, unified, and sustained argument. Many philosophers have misconstrued Anselm's project as one of conjuring the existence of God from the definition of God as a perfect being. My view, in contrast, is that Anselm was not trying to "define" God into existence but rather he was constructing, through the eyes of faith, a theology of God conceived of as a perfect being. A logically elegant result of our reconstruction is that the facets of Anselm's argument are validated by standard modal axioms drawn from contemporary modal logic.



## I

According to Anselm, the *Proslogion* was written "...from the point of view of someone trying to raise his mind to the contemplation of God, and seeking to understand what he believes."<sup>4</sup> Anselm apparently wished to lead the sincere seeker to see the truth of the theism of faith and Scripture:

Enter the inner chamber of thy mind; shut out all thoughts save that of God, and such as can aid thee in seeking him; close thy door and seek him. Speak now, my whole heart! Speak now to God, saying, I seek thy face; thy face, Lord, will I seek (*Psalms xxvii. 8*). And come thou now, O Lord my God, teach my heart where and how it may seek thee, where and how it may find thee.

Lord, if thou are not here, where shall I seek thee, being absent? But if thou art everywhere, why do I not see thee present? Truly thou dwellest in unapproachable light. But where is unapproachable light, or how shall I come to it? Or who shall lead me to that light and into it, that I may see thee in it? Again, by what marks, under what form, shall I seek thee? I have never seen thee, O Lord, my God; I do not know thy form.<sup>5</sup>

Anselm's argument proceeds by drawing logical and theological implications from a definition of God as a being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.<sup>6</sup> There are at least three initially plausible positions with regard to the conceivability of Anselm's God so defined. *Notional theism* is the view that the existence of a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is at least conceptually possible. *Notional atheism* denies this. The notional atheist is not making the modest claim (with which the notional theist can agree) that no human mind can adequately conceive of God. Rather, the notional atheist is making the stronger positivistic claim that the very concept of a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is somehow conceptually incoherent or impossible. *Notional agnosticism* holds the thesis of symmetric conceivability: it is conceivable that a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists but it is also conceivable that no such being exists. Using '<c>' to stand for conceptual possibility or conceivability, we may symbolize these three initial positions as follows:

<i>Notional Theism:</i>	<c>G	It is conceptually possible that God exists.
<i>Notional Atheism:</i>	~<c>G	It is conceptually impossible that God exists.
<i>Notional Agnosticism:</i>	<c>G $\wedge$ <c>~G	It is conceptually possible that God exists, and It is conceptually possible that God does not exist.

Our reconstruction of Anselm's argument will employ only propositional modal logic. The sentence letter 'G' abbreviates the proposition that 'God exists,' which in turn, is a stylistic abbreviation of the

Anselmian locution ‘a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists.’ Some authors have claimed, on the basis of their reading of Anselm’s remarks on modal predication, that Anselm could not propound the possibility of God’s existing within his ontological argument without begging the question.<sup>7</sup> These issues can be set aside for present purposes since our reconstruction is in propositional, and not in predicate, modal logic. Any charitable reading of Anselm’s propositional modal logic, however, would not entail the acceptance of the trivializing axiom that whatever is conceivably true must be actually true.

In *Chapter IX* of his *Reply to Gaunilo*, Anselm offers a series of refutations of notional atheism:

Whoever, then, denies the existence of a being than which a greater cannot be conceived, at least understands and conceives of the denial which he makes. But this denial he cannot understand or conceive of without its component terms; and a term of this statement is *a being than which a greater cannot be conceived*. Whoever, then, makes this denial, understands and conceives of that than which a greater is inconceivable.<sup>8</sup>

Here Anselm claims that the Fool, in the very act of asserting the negative existential that God does not exist, presupposes the conceivability of God.<sup>9</sup>

The Fool of Scripture (*Ps. 14, Ps. 53*) denies God because he is “corrupt and [his] ways are vile.” Even if the Fool claims not to have any knowledge of God at all, the question remains whether he honestly lacks this knowledge or whether he is repressing the knowledge he has. Scripture assures us that “...what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them (*Rom. 1:19, NIV*).”<sup>10</sup> Anselm’s first attempt to refute notional atheism stakes its case on this truth of scripture: “Now my strongest argument that this [i.e., *notional atheism*] is false is to appeal to your faith and to your conscience.”<sup>11</sup> The verse following *Romans 1:19*, in fact, provides the basis for another of Anselm’s attacks on notional atheism in *Chapter VIII* of his *Reply to Gaunilo*. In *Romans 1:20 (NIV)* we read: “...since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.”

If the Fool, for moral reasons, cannot get to the point where he can think the thought Anselm is proposing, Anselm proposes a way for the Fool to educate himself to recognize that he does have some grasp of God. Anselm argues that the visible goods provide us with a ladder, as it were, that allows us to conceive of ultimate goodness in the form of a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought:

For since everything that is less good is similar in so far as it is good to that which is more good, it is evident to every rational mind that, mounting from the less good to the more good we can from those things than which something greater can be thought conjecture a great deal about that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-

thought.... There is, then, a way by which one can form an idea of 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.' In this way, therefore, the Fool who does not accept the sacred authority [of Revelation] can easily be refuted if he denies that he can form an idea from other things of 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.'<sup>12</sup>

In the end, however, the *Proslogion* is addressed to sincere seekers. No one can truly seek what he believes to be logically incoherent. Let us assume, therefore, that Anselm's Fool is at least willing to abandon the disingenuous claim of notional atheism.

Suppose next that the Fool decides to stake out his position on the supposedly "neutral" ground of *notional agnosticism*. Recall this view maintains the thesis of symmetric conceivability: it is conceivable that a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists but then again it is also conceivable such a being does not exist. How does the notional agnostic fare?

## II

Robert M. Adams [1971] discovered a modal ontological argument in *Chapter I* of Anselm's *Reply to Gaunilo*:

For no one who denies or doubts that there is something-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, denies or doubts that, if it were to exist, it would not be capable of not-existing either actually or in the mind—other-wise it would not be that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought.<sup>13</sup>

Adams paraphrases this pivotal premise as follows:

(Even) if it is false that G, (still) if it were true that G, it would not be possible that not-G.

Adam's paraphrase is *counterfactual* in form; nevertheless, he symbolizes the premise as an *implication*. If we follow Adams, we may symbolize this premise as  $[c](G \rightarrow \sim \langle c \rangle \sim G)$ . Following Anselm, we can symbolize the counterfactual as  $(G \Box \rightarrow \sim \Diamond \sim G)$ . Using the rules of modal negation and interchange of equivalents, these premises are logically equivalent to  $[c](G \rightarrow [c]G)$  and  $(G \Box \rightarrow [c]G)$ , respectively. The former states that it is conceptually necessary that if God exists then God's existence is conceptually necessary; the latter states that if it were the case that God exists, then it would be necessary that God exists.

Adams used the Brouwersche system of modal logic to demonstrate that the former premise, together with the minimal premise of notional theism, validly implies that God exists. A parallel result can also be demonstrated for the counterfactual formulation. The Brouwersche system contains the characteristic axiom (**B**)  $\varphi \rightarrow \Box \Diamond \varphi$ .<sup>14</sup> Stated in terms of conceivability, (**B**) expresses the modal intuition that the actual state of affairs must at least be conceivable even if any other conceivable states of affairs had been actual

instead. For ease of exposition, we will use the Brouwersche axiom in an equivalent logically dual form:  $(B\Diamond) \Diamond \Box \phi \rightarrow \phi$  in giving a natural deduction version of Adam's reconstruction of Anselm's modal argument:<sup>15</sup>

1.	<b>Show</b> G	9, Direct Derivation
2.	[c](G $\rightarrow$ [c]G)	Premise
3.	$\langle c \rangle$ G	Premise
4.	<b>Show</b> $\langle c \rangle$ [c]G	7, Strict Derivation
5.	G	Assume (Possibility Derivation)
6.	G $\rightarrow$ [c]G	2, Strict Importation (T)
7.	[c]G	5, 6, Modus Ponens
8.	$\langle c \rangle$ [c]G $\rightarrow$ G	Axiom (B $\Diamond$ )
9.	G	4, 8, Modus Ponens

To validate the more faithful counterfactual form of Anselm's argument, we supplement our logic with the inference rule of counterfactual possibility elimination:

(CFPE) From  $(\phi \Box \rightarrow \psi)$  and  $\Diamond \phi$ , to infer  $\Diamond \psi$ .

Eliminating lines (5)-(7) from the above derivation, we can obtain line (4) directly by CFPE. Anselm's derivation of philosophical theism from notional theism can, therefore, be validated within the Brouwersche system of modal logic.<sup>16</sup>

Must the Fool capitulate in the face of Adams' modal reconstruction of Anselm's argument? No, the Fool can mount an *atheistic* version of the above modal argument from the premise that it is conceivable that God does *not* exist:  $\langle c \rangle \sim G$ . The notional agnostic, it will be remembered, holds a thesis of symmetrical conceivability: it is both conceivable that God exists and that God does not. From the second possibility, the Fool points out, we could have constructed an *atheological* argument instead.

The Fool's atheological ontological argument is, in fact, conceptually simpler because it does not require axiom (B). All that is required is the weaker axiom (T), which is valid in all normal systems of modal logic:

(T)  $\Box \phi \rightarrow \phi$ .

This axiom is captured in our system of natural deduction by the rule of necessity instantiation:

(NI) From  $\Box \phi$  to infer  $\phi$ .

Axiom (T) expresses the modal intuition that any conceptually necessary state of affairs is also actual.<sup>17</sup>

The Fool's atheological argument begins with Anselm's conceptual

truth and the notional agnostic’s claim that the non-existence of God is also conceptually possible:

1.	<b>Show</b> $\sim G$	6, Direct Derivation
2.	$[c](G \rightarrow [c]G)$	Premise
3.	$\langle c \rangle \sim G$	Premise
4.	$G \rightarrow [c]G$	2, Necessity Instantiation
5.	$\sim [c]G$	3, Modal Negation
6.	$\sim G$	4, 5, Modus Tollens

Using a symmetrical conceivability premise, we can obtain the atheistic conclusion that God does not exist. The Fool, therefore, might attempt to adopt the “neutral” ground of notional agnosticism claiming an ultimate stalemate of symmetrically acceptable modal intuitions.

But Anselm has an obvious reply. Anselm can accept the Fool’s reasoning as modally impeccable. Anselm continues, moreover, to maintain that his former argument is modally impeccable as well. Combining these two branches of the argument, we have constructed a *reductio ad absurdum* of notional agnosticism. In this way, the two arguments do not produce a conceptual stalemate, but instead provide a decisive refutation of notional agnosticism. Indeed, the denial of the refutation of notional atheism is logically equivalent by DeMorgan’s law and laws of modal negation to  $[c]\sim G \vee [c]G$ , which states that God’s existence is either conceptually impossible or conceptually necessary. The discovery that notional atheism is logically inconsistent given Anselm’s premise is somewhat less surprising when we observe that Anselm’s pivotal premise states, in effect, that if God exists at all then God’s existence must be conceptually necessary.

Anselm’s argument thus far can be seen as leading the Fool from the darkness of atheism to the dusk of notional agnosticism. Anselm has shown notional agnosticism to be conceptually contradictory given an Anselmian conception of God who exists necessarily if at all. It is, of course, open for the notional agnostic to abandon his position and retreat even further into agnosticism. He might weaken his claim to the disjunction of notional theism and notional atheism, or he might decide to become a meta-notional agnostic who claims that he does not even know whether it is conceptually possible that God exists or whether it is conceptually possible that God does not. Anselm would, no doubt, question whether this sophisticated modal agnosticism is an honest expression of doubt or merely a hasty retreat from the deliverances of reason.

Let us assume that the Fool is willing to concede the minimal assumption of notional theism—that it is at least conceivable that a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists. The stage has now been set for the argument of *Proslogion II*. *Proslogion II* records Anselm’s discovery which came as a revelation to him one night. Anselm’s biographer described Anselm’s revelation in this way:

Behold, one night during Matins, the grace of God shone in his [Anselm's] heart and the matter became clear to his understanding, filling his whole heart with immense joy and jubilation.<sup>18</sup>

What was the occasion of Anselm's jubilation?

### III

It was Anselm's discovery of his famous 'ontological argument' of *Proslogion II*.<sup>19</sup> As R. E. Allen has noted, the isolated argument of *Proslogion II* has itself either been regarded as a gem—or a paste—whose worth can be judged apart from its context. I have been suggesting, to the contrary, that focusing narrowly on *Proslogion II*—against Anselm's own admonitions—forces us to overlook the multi-faceted unity of Anselm's argument.

Recall that the proof contained in *Proslogion II* purports to show that it is conceptually necessary that if a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought exists in the understanding, then such a being must be conceived to exist in reality, namely, that  $[c](<c>G \rightarrow G)$ . This particular facet of Anselm's gem has been the focus of most contemporary logical scrutiny. Since the *Proslogion II* argument appears to depend on dubious doctrines about existence and predication, the Kantian question of whether 'being' is a predicate, and so forth, has been the focus of an intense philosophical debate. Anselm, however, makes no use of these controversial doctrines in *Chapter I* of his *Reply to Gaunilo*. Evidently he did not regard those assumptions as essential to his argument.

The argument in *Chapter I* of Anselm's *Reply* goes like this:

But, whatever can be thought as existing and does not actually exist, could, if it were to exist, possibly not exist either actually or in the mind. For this reason, if it can merely be thought, 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought' cannot not exist.<sup>20</sup>

Earlier in this chapter Anselm gives an argument for the same conclusion on the basis of the impossibility of God's beginning to exist in time:

...if it [i.e., a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought] can be thought it is necessary that it exists. For 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought' cannot be thought save as being without a beginning. But whatever can be thought as existing and does not actually exist can be thought as having a beginning of its existence. Consequently, 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought' cannot be thought as existing and not yet actually exist. If, therefore, it can be thought as existing, it exists of necessity.<sup>21</sup>

Here premises regarding the impossibility of God's temporal beginnings appear in addition to those of the later argument. How could Anselm have



regarded these as essentially the same argument?

One way to understand Anselm's claim of a "single argument," I think, is as follows. Despite differences in content, these arguments can be shown to be instances of the same argument *schema*. The central premise of this argument schema is:

But as to whatever can be conceived, but does not exist—if there were such a being, its non-existence, either in reality or in the understanding, would be possible.<sup>22</sup>

Anselm appears to be claiming that there are conceptually necessary truths of the form: if God's existence is conceivable but God does not exist, then it is conceivable that  $\sim\pi$ , where  $\sim\pi$  is to be replaced by a sentence stating that 'God is non-existent' or that God is in some other way contingent, imperfect, or lacking in goodness. This premise can be symbolized schematically as follows:

$$[c](\langle c \rangle G \wedge \sim G \rightarrow \langle c \rangle \sim \pi) .$$

The next premise of the argument is that God, as a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, could not conceivably be contingent or imperfect or lacking goodness, namely,  $[c]\pi$ . Can we construct a valid modal argument from these premises leading to Anselm's conclusion that it is conceptually necessary that if it is conceivable that God exists, then God exists?<sup>23</sup>

We can construct such an argument provided we have the modal axiom characteristic of (S4)  $\Box\phi \rightarrow \Box\Box\phi$ . Axiom (S4), when applied to conceptual truths, expresses the intuition that conceptual necessity is itself a matter of conceptual necessity. The (S4) axiom is valid in modal structures in which the accessibility relation is transitive. Transitivity would, of course, fail for notions of conceivability that are relative to possible worlds or to persons. These relative notions of conceivability, however, are certainly not Anselm's. Anselm's understanding of the traditional doctrines of God's omnipresence (as expressed in *Psalm 139*, for example) can be interpreted so as to exclude relative notions of this kind.<sup>24</sup>

We intend to use the (S4) axiom to validate Anselm's claim of the necessity of his derivation of philosophical theism from notional theism. One fact that supports the appropriateness of (S4) for this purpose is that (S4) is often adopted as an axiom in provability modal logics. In fact, (S4) is derivable from the basic axiom of modal provability logics known as Löb's axiom.<sup>25</sup> Anselm's conclusion can now be derived in the (S4) system of modal logic. Recall that the strict importation rule for (S4) is repetition applied to statements of the form ' $\Box\phi$ '.

1.	<del>Show</del> [c](<c>G → G)	4, Direct Derivation
2.	[c](<c>G ∧ ~G → <c>~π)	Premise
3.	[c] π	Premise
4.	<del>Show</del> [c](<c>G → G)	5, Strict Derivation
5.	<del>Show</del> <c>G → G	7, Conditional Derivation
6.	<c>G	Assume (CD)
7.	<del>Show</del> G	12, 13, Indirect Derivation
8.	~G	Assume (ID)
9.	<c>G ∧ ~G	6, 8, Adjunction
10.	<c>G ∧ ~G → <c>~π	2, Strict Importation (T)
11.	<c>~π	9, 10, Modus Ponens
12.	~[c] π	11, Modal Negation
13.	[c] π	3, Strict Importation (S4)

Using axiom (S4), we have demonstrated that it is conceptually necessary that if notional theism is true then philosophical theism is also true. Anselm was right: we can derive philosophical theism from the minimal premise of notional theism.

#### IV

Commentators have noted that the transition from the argument of *Proslogion II* to that of *Proslogion III* involves the transition from God's *existence* to God's *necessary existence*: a transition from *philosophical theism* to what we shall call *modal theism*. Anselm wants to demonstrate not only that God exists but that it is not even conceivable that God does not exist.<sup>26</sup> The key passage is this:

And certainly this being so truly exists that it cannot be even thought not to exist. For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be thought not to exist....

And You, Lord our God, are this being.... In fact, everything else there is, except You alone, can be thought of as not existing. You alone, then, of all things most truly exist and therefore of all things possess existence to the highest degree....<sup>27</sup>

Anselm's demonstration of modal theism is the demonstration that the existence of God is conceptually necessary, or in Anselm's own words, that God cannot be conceived not to exist: ~<c>~G. Anselm underscores the key premise that:

... something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist....<sup>28</sup>

which we may symbolize as  $\langle c \rangle \sim \langle c \rangle \sim G$ . Ignoring for the moment the logical details of this argument,<sup>29</sup> let's focus on the abstract pattern of Anselm's inference. Anselm infers that it is necessary that God exists from the premise that it is possible that it is necessary that God exists. Expressing this inference as a conditional, we have

$\langle c \rangle \sim \langle c \rangle \sim G \rightarrow \sim \langle c \rangle \sim G$ . We can then simplify this conditional using the laws of modal negation to obtain:

$$\langle c \rangle [c]G \rightarrow [c]G ,$$

which, intriguingly, is the logical dual for the characteristic modal axiom for (S5)  $\Diamond \phi \rightarrow \Box \Diamond \phi$ . Therefore, axiom (S5), at least when applied to the proposition that God exists, turns out to be precisely what is logically required to derive the modal theism of *Proslogion III* from the derivation of philosophical theism of *Proslogion II*. The (S5) axiom turns out to be valid in modal structures in which the relation of accessibility is an equivalence relation. The strict importation rule for (S5) is simply repetition applied to sentences of the form ' $\Diamond \phi$ '.

1.	<del>Show</del> [c]G	12, Direct Derivation
2.	$\langle c \rangle G$	Premise ( <i>notional theism</i> )
3.	[c]( $\langle c \rangle G \rightarrow G$ )	Premise ( <i>Proslogion II</i> )
4.	<del>Show</del> [c] $\langle c \rangle G$	2, Strict Derivation
5.	$\langle c \rangle G$	2, Strict Importation for (S5)
6.	<del>Show</del> [c] $\langle c \rangle G \rightarrow [c]G$	8, Conditional Derivation
7.	[c] $\langle c \rangle G$	Assume (CD)
8.	<del>Show</del> [c]G	11, Strict Derivation
9.	$\langle c \rangle G$	7, Strict Importation (T)
10.	$\langle c \rangle G \rightarrow G$	3, Strict Importation (T)
11.	G	10, 9, Modus Ponens
12.	[c]G	6, 4, Modus Ponens

Therefore, modal theism follows in (S5) from the conceptual necessity of the logical derivation of philosophical theism from notional thesis, the conclusion of the argument contained in *Proslogion II*.<sup>30</sup>

## V

Having derived modal theism in *Proslogion III*, Anselm's derivations of the divine perfections in *Chapters V-XXVI* of the *Proslogion* are immediate consequences of conceptual truths of the form  $[c](G \leftrightarrow \pi)$ , where  $\pi$  is replaced by various statements expressing God's perfections.

1.	<del>Show</del> $[c]\pi$	4, Direct Derivation
2.	$[c](G \leftrightarrow \pi)$	Premise
3.	$[c]G$	Premise ( <i>Proslogion III</i> )
4.	<del>Show</del> $[c]\pi$	7, Strict Derivation
5.	$G \leftrightarrow \pi$	2, Strict Importation (T)
6.	$G$	3, Strict Importation (T)
7.	$\pi$	5, Biconditional/Conditional, 6, Modus Ponens

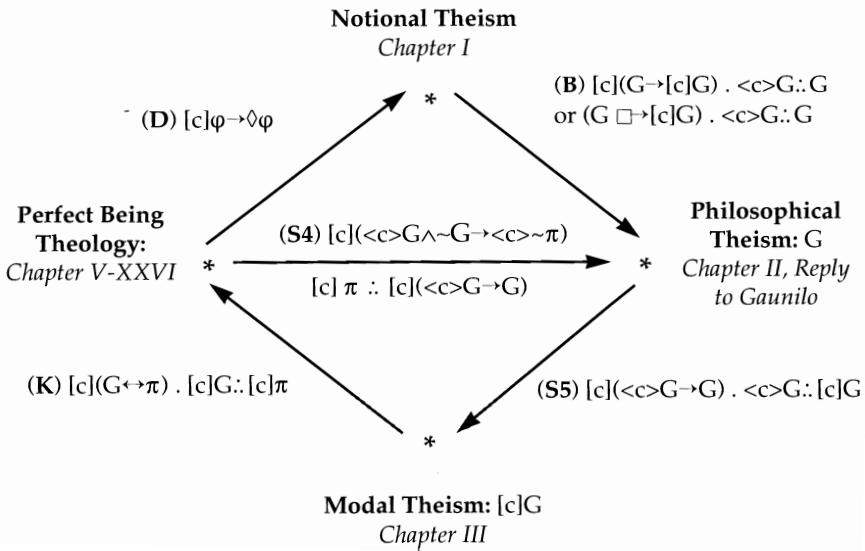
Notice that since necessity instantiation is used exclusively as a strict importation rule, the above derivation would be valid in a modal system having only the modal axiom (K).

Anselm's strategy circumvents certain modern atheistic challenges to the coherence of theism. These atheistic challenges assume that the question of the coherence of theism is prior to the question of theism on the grounds that no amount of evidence can establish that an incoherent state of affairs obtains. These atheistic arguments proceed by attacking various formulations of traditional divine attributes such as omnipotence or omniscience. Anselm's strategy avoids challenges of this sort by not committing itself to any specific philosophical proposal for understanding these divine attributes.

Instead, Anselm begins with a very minimal conception of divinity as a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought. Anselm then argues that certain divine perfections—whether or not we understand them properly and whether or not we can find adequate philosophical explications of them—are consequences of this conception. In so doing, Anselm rather than providing his own philosophical definitions of the divine attributes, relies on God's revelation in Scripture. In the case of a believer who is seeking to understand, Anselm can rely on the work of the Holy Spirit to provide the seeker with a full assurance of the truths of faith (*Rom. 8:14-15, 1 Jn. 2:20, 26-7; 3:24; 4:13; 5:7-10*). "I do not endeavor, O Lord, to penetrate thy sublimity, for in no wise do I compare my understanding with that; but I long to understand in some degree thy truth, which my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe, that unless I believe, I should not understand..."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Anselm is ever mindful that philosophical illumination has also been revealed by God's grace: "I thank thee, gracious Lord, I thank thee; because what I formerly believed by thy bounty, I now

so understand by thine illumination...."<sup>32</sup>

To summarize, our logical investigation has revealed a modal unity to Anselm's argument. The stages of reasoning form a multi-faceted argument that leads from notional theism to philosophical theism, from philosophical theism to modal theism, and from modal theism to the theology of perfection as seen through the eyes of faith and Scripture. A logically elegant result is that the facets of this gem are validated by standard modal axioms. The attempt to derive philosophical theism from notional theism is the project of *Proslogion II*. This stage of Anselm's argument is validated by the modal axiom **(B)** of the Browsersche system. In *Chapter I* of his *Reply to Gaunilo*, Anselm gives another demonstration that philosophical theism follows from notional theism assuming the necessity of divine perfections. This argument can be validated using the modal axiom characteristic of **(S4)**. The *Proslogion III* argument for modal theism, in turn, is validated using the modal axiom characteristic of **(S5)** and the conceptual necessity of the previous derivations of philosophical theism from notional theism. The theology of perfection contained in *Chapters V-XXVI* of the *Proslogion* can then be derived from modal theism and the modal axiom **(K)** which is valid in all normal modal systems. In the diagram below, we summarize the stages of Anselm's argument together with their supporting modal axioms. The diagram takes the form of a diamond. This diamond is completed by the characteristic axiom of deontic modal logic, namely, **(D)**  $[c]\varphi \rightarrow \diamond\varphi$ , which licenses the deduction of the starting premise of the notional theism of *Proslogion I* from the modal theism derived in *Proslogion III* and employed in *Chapter V-XXXVI*.



The arrows in the above diagram represent logical implications, and the annotations in bold indicate the validating modal axiom for the various facets of Anselm's argument. Anselm's own joyful prayer alludes to the metaphor of a gem:

"How great is that light in which everything true sparkles and which shines for the thinking mind! How vast is the truth in which there is only truth and outside of which there is only nothingness and the false. And how immeasurable the truth which in one glance sees everything that has been made; and sees by whom and through whom, and how all these things were made from nothing. What purity is there, what simplicity, what certitude and light-someness is there? Surely it is more than can be understood by a creature."<sup>33</sup>

How much does Anselm's argument prove? Anselm's argument has been misconstrued as an attempt to prove the metaphysical fact of God's ontological necessity from God's mere conceivability by "defining" a being into existence.<sup>34</sup> In this paper we have instead viewed Anselm's argument, as he himself claimed, as a sustained meditation upon God as a-being-than-which-none-greater-can-be-conceived. Anselm was able to progressively deduce an ever richer set of philosophical and theological conclusions from his conception of God as a perfect being. Such a God, for example, must be conceived not only as existing but also as having necessary existence. Anselm encourages the philosophical pilgrim to meditate on the knowledge of God he already possesses (*Rom. 1:19*) and Anselm's argument leads the pilgrim far beyond the minimal conception of divinity envisaged by the notional theist. From the assumption of the conceivability of God as a-being-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, Anselm demonstrates not only that God exists and necessarily exists, but that God is perfect in every conceivable way. This perfection, understood in light of Scripture, entails that God is eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent, perfectly good and just, absolute, and necessarily self-existent.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps it was Anselm's hope that the pilgrim, captivated by the interplay of light reflected among the various facets of his argument, would be drawn to contemplate more deeply the source of this light itself. Anselm's argument provides a path for the pilgrim to escape from the utter darkness of atheism and the conceptual confusions of notional agnosticism and in so doing to behold a theological vision of the perfection of God as revealed in light of Scripture. What I have tried to show is that Anselm was right in regarding this path as essentially the path of a single argument.

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#### NOTES

1. I wish to thank Patrick Grim, William Mann, Lee Miller, Nicholas Rescher, Edward Wierenga, and two anonymous referees for helpful com-

ments. I also wish to thank Sean Kirkland for assistance in checking the references, JoAnne Young for editorial assistance, and Charles Kephart for calling my attention to a book of essays celebrating the Saint Anselm College Centennial. An earlier version of this paper was read at the Eastern Regional Meeting of the Society of Christian Philosophers in April, 1994.

2. Preface to the *Proslogion*, lines 7-12, quoted from *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, translated with an introduction and philosophical commentary by M. J. Charlesworth (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), p. 103.

3. The philosophical tradition deriving from Kant focuses on the doctrines of existence and predication in *Proslogion II*. The modal tradition beginning with Norman Malcolm's observation ["Anselm's Ontological Arguments," *Philosophical Review*, 69 (1960)] that *Proslogion III* contains an argument for God's necessary existence. Robert M. Adams ["The Logical Structure of Anselm's Arguments," *The Philosophical Review*, vol. LXXX, no. 1 (Jan.) 1971, pp. 28-54, which is reprinted in Robert M. Adams *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987)] discerned a valid modal argument in *Chapter I* of Anselm's *Reply to Gaunilo*, and Alvin Plantinga [*The Nature of Necessity* (New York: Oxford University Press (1974)] went on to propose his own version of a modal ontological argument which could be validated within (S5). Returning to an earlier tradition, Paul Oppenheimer and Edward Zalta ["On the Logic of the Ontological Argument," in James Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5, *Philosophy of Religion* (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview (1991), pp. 509-529] in their exposition of *Proslogion II*, claim that the argument turns on the logic of definite descriptions and does not contain any essential modal inferences. They attempt to validate the argument using a free logic in which definite descriptions need not denote. In contrast, the work here tries to map out Anselm's entire meditation as a 'single argument.'

4. Preface to the *Proslogion*, lines 27-29, translation by Benedicta Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 238.

5. *Proslogion*, Chapter 1, lines 8-29, translation by S. N. Deane, *Basic Writings: Proslogium, Monologium, Cur Deus Homo and Gaunilo's In Behalf of the Fool* (La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 1962), pp. 3-4.

6. R. W. Southern in *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 129, points out that the verbal formulation which Anselm arrived at can be found in Seneca's *Quaestiones Naturales*. Ermanno Bencivenga in *Logic and Other Nonsense: The Case of Anselm and His God* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 97, observes the "suggestive resemblance between [Anselm's definition of God] and contemporary diagonal arguments for impossibility results (nondenumerability, undecidability, and the like." Some contemporary atheistic 'Cantorian' arguments trade on this resemblance. For a refutation of such arguments see my "Why 'Cantorian' Arguments Against the Existence of God Do Not Work", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. XXXIII, no. 4 (Dec. 1993), pp. 429-442.

7. Eileen F. Serene, in "Anselm's Modal Conceptions" [in Simo Knuuttilla, ed., *Reforging the Great Chain of Being* (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1981), p. 14], for example, argues that "Anselm could not assert to the premise 'God possibly exists' in its 'proper' sense without assuming his conclusion that God actually exists." Her argument is based on some of Anselm's remarks in his defense of free will. Serene claims that "a fully 'proper' attribution of possibility signifies that an actual subject has an inherent capacity." In other words, Serene claims that Anselm must have understood the claim 'the existence of God is conceivable' as the claim 'God has the property of conceivably existing', which is question-begging rather than as the neutral claim that 'it is conceivable that

God exists', which is all that is required by our modal reconstruction.

8. *Proslogion*, Chapter 9 of Anselm's Reply to Gaunilo (Deanne translation, *op. cit.*, p. 169).

9. This refutation is too quick. Suppose, for example, that one wishes to deny there is a greatest conceivable prime number. One can formulate the conclusion of Euclid's famous proof of the infinity of the primes (*Elements IX, 20*) like this: "there is no prime number than which a greater cannot be thought." In asserting this negative existential, one is surely not committed to the assumption that it is conceivable that there is a greatest prime number or that it is conceivable that some particular prime could have been the greatest conceivable prime. Moreover, it is important to distinguish between the false mathematical claim that it is conceivable that there is a greatest prime number (i.e., it is conceivable that there are a finite number of primes) from the epistemological claim that there is a greatest conceivable prime (i.e., that our ability to conceive of primes is finite).

10. A more detailed analysis of the argument must distinguish among several senses of conceivability. R. W. Southern [1991, *op. cit.*, p. 131], for example, distinguishes among *cogitatio*, which is based on the meaning of words in the definition of God, *intellectus*, which is based on the knowledge of God's essences, and *sapientia*, which is the contemplative knowledge of God, which is the "chief joy of eternity."

11. *Proslogion*, Chapter 1 of Anselm's Reply to Gaunilo (Charlesworth translation, *op. cit.*, p. 169 [brackets mine]).

12. *Proslogion*, Chapter 8 of Anselm's Reply to Gaunilo (Charlesworth translation, *op. cit.*, p. 187).

13. *Proslogion*, Chapter 1 of Anselm's Reply to Gaunilo (Charlesworth translation, *op. cit.*, p. 171).

14. This axiom was named after the Dutch intuitionist mathematician L. E. J. Brouwer by Carl Becker who noticed the axiom's similarity to the intuitionistically valid form of double negation when expressed in the equivalent form: (B)  $\varphi \rightarrow \sim \diamond \sim \diamond \varphi$ .

15. Here we employ the natural deduction system of modal logic set forth in Nathan Salmon's "Modal Logic Kalish-and-Montague Style" [manuscript 1994]. Salmon supplements the system of natural deduction in Kalish, Montague and Mar, *Logic: Techniques of Formal Reasoning (Second Edition)* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, 1980) with two forms of strict derivation and characteristic strict importation rules for standard systems of propositional modal logic. The first form of strict derivation is a  $\Box$ -introduction rule and has restrictions analogous to universal derivation (see Kalish, Montague, and Mar, *ibid.*, p. 143). The second form of strict derivation is a combination  $\diamond$ -elimination and  $\diamond$ -introduction rule and has restrictions analogous to existential instantiation and existential generalization (see Kalish, Montague, and Mar, *ibid.*, pp. 140-141). The various systems of modal logic are then characterized by their strict importation rules. The T-importation rule is NI.

(NI) From  $\Box \varphi$  to infer  $\varphi$ .

The B-importation rule is PG.

(PG) From  $\varphi$  to infer  $\diamond \varphi$ .

The S4-importation rule of repetition applied to sentences of the form ' $\Box \varphi$ '. The S5-importation rule is the rule of repetition applied to sentences of the form ' $\diamond \varphi$ '. NI is an admissible strict importation rule in **B**, **S4**, and **S5**. Having NI as a



strict importation rule for strict derivations builds into our system of natural deduction the effect of axiom **(K)**, which is named after Kripke and which is valid in all normal modal systems:

$$\mathbf{(K)} \quad \Box(\varphi \rightarrow \psi) \rightarrow (\Box\varphi \rightarrow \Box\psi) .$$

Expressed in terms of conceptual necessity, this axiom expresses the intuition that only conceptually necessary truths are conceptually implied by conceptually necessary truths.

16. The stronger conclusion of modal theism can also be derived in the Brouwersche system using axiom **(T)** and modus ponens. In the counterfactual form of the argument, modal theism follows from the rule of modus ponens for counterfactuals. The derivation given here, however, makes it clear that philosophical theism would still be derivable in the system with axioms **(K)** and **(B)** but not **(T)**. The corresponding conditional for this argument, namely,  $\Box(G \rightarrow \Box G) \wedge \Diamond G \rightarrow G$ , is valid in Kripke frames in which the accessibility relation  $R$  is symmetric. Johann van Benthem in his "Correspondence Theory" in Dov Gabbay and Franz Guenther (eds.), *Handbook of Philosophical Logic*, vol. 2 (Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1984), pp. 192-193 shows that this conditional holds when  $R$  has the "finite return" property, that is, "from any  $R$ -successor  $y$  of  $x$ , one may return to  $x$  by way of some finite chain of  $R$ -successors." Benthem also proves (p. 176) that the addition of the McKinsey axiom **(M)** to the set consisting of **(T)** and **(B)** results in a modal collapse; that is, the following set of modal axioms

$$\mathbf{(T)} \quad \Box\varphi \rightarrow \varphi$$

$$\mathbf{(B)} \quad \Box(\varphi \rightarrow \Box\varphi) \wedge \Box\varphi \rightarrow \varphi$$

$$\mathbf{(M)} \quad \Box\Diamond\varphi \rightarrow \Diamond\Box\varphi$$

are valid in a modal frame if and only if the following is valid:

$$\Box\varphi \leftrightarrow \varphi .$$

The addition of the McKinsey axiom, however, is implausible in this Anselmian context.

17. Jonathan Barnes [*The Ontological Argument* (London: Macmillan, 1972), p. 107] rejects the **(T)** axiom as valid for Anselm's notion of necessity. Barnes claims that Anselm holds that "God necessarily exists" means "nothing has the power to bring it about that God fails to exist." Serene [1981, *op. cit.*, p. 146] takes issue with Barnes claiming that the passage upon which Barnes stakes his interpretation is a "comparatively rhetorical interlude" and that Anselm has other ways of explaining necessary existence as a perfection. The problem of taking passages in which Anselm's ideas are loosely expressed as definitive for technical usage is addressed in Jasper Hopkins, *A New Translation of St. Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), p. ix.

18. R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 128.

19. R. W. Southern [*Saint Anselm and His Biographer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 57] speculates that the *Proslogion* "was written in a state of philosophical excitement which (it is probably safe to say) had never before been experienced so intensely in any Benedictine monastery, and was

probably never again to be repeated in Benedictine history."

20. *Proslogion*, Chapter 1 of Anselm's Reply to Gaunilo (Charlesworth translation, *op. cit.*, p. 171).

21. *Proslogion*, Chapter 1 of Anselm's Reply to Gaunilo (Charlesworth translation, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-171). Here the Deane translation (p. 154) "Therefore, if such a being can be conceived to exist, necessarily it does exist" supports a reading which asserts the necessity of the *consequence* rather than the necessity of the *consequent*.

22. Deane translation, *op. cit.*, p. 155.

23. Gödel's form of the ontological argument reaches the conclusion that God exists from the notion of God as having all positive properties. See Howard Sobel's "Gödel's Ontological Proof," in J. J. Thomson, ed., *On Being and Saying: Essays for Richard Cartwright* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987) and C. Anthony Anderson's "Some Emendations of Gödel's Ontological Proof," *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 7, no. 3 (July 1990), pp. 291-303.

24. Here I am indebted to William Mann for discussion. See also Edward Wierenga's "Anselm on Omniscience," *The New Scholasticism*, vol. 62, no. 1 (Winter 1988), pp. 30-41, and Serene, *op. cit.*, for further discussion.

25. See van Benthem, *op. cit.*, p. 177 for a discussion of Löb's axiom:

$$(W) \quad \Box(\Box\phi \rightarrow \phi) \rightarrow \Box\phi .$$

This axiom is valid if and only if the accessibility relation terminates in a finite number of steps (alternatively, if the converse of the accessibility relation is well-founded). It turns out, however, that axiom (S4) is derivable from (W), which is evidence for the appropriateness of (S4) under a provability interpretation.

26. This is pointed out, for example, in Karl Barth's "*Proslogion III: The Special Existence of God*" reprinted in Hick and McGill (eds.), *The Many-Faced Argument* (London, 1967), pp. 135-161, Richard La Croix's *Proslogion II and III: A Third Interpretation of Anselm's Argument*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), and Southern [1991], *op. cit.*

27. Charlesworth translation, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

28. Charlesworth translation, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

29. The first premise of Anselm's argument is  $\langle c \rangle \sim \langle c \rangle \sim G$ , that is, it is conceptually possible that God's existence is necessary. Next Anselm argues (Charlesworth translation, *op. cit.*, p. 119):

Hence, if that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought not to exist, then that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought is not the same as that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought, which is absurd.

Using 'f' to abbreviate the contradiction Anselm had in mind, this premise can be symbolized  $\langle c \rangle \sim \langle c \rangle \sim G \rightarrow (\langle c \rangle \sim G \rightarrow f)$ . Then Anselm's conclusion that it is conceptually necessary that God exists follows from (1) and (2) by modus ponens and the definition of ' $\sim \phi$ ' as ' $\phi \rightarrow f$ '.

30. Anselm's version of the argument therefore avoids objections that can be raised against Plantinga's form of the ontological argument which interprets the modalities of (S5) as metaphysical. See Plantinga's comments in Tomberlin, James E. and Peter van Inwagen (eds.), *Profiles: Alvin Plantinga*, Tomberlin and van Inwagen (eds.), Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1985, and Peter van Inwagen, "Ontological Arguments," *Noûs*, vol. 11, 1977.

31. Here again we use the more prayerful language of the Deane translation, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

32. Deane translation, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

33. *Proslogion*, Ch. XIV, translation by Thomas A. Losoncy, "Did Anselm Encounter a Detour on the Way to God?" in Berthold, ed., *Faith Seeking Understanding: Learning in the Catholic Tradition, Selected Papers from the Symposium and Convocation Celebrating the Saint Anselm College Centennial* (Manchester, NH: St. Anselm Press, 1991, p. 132). This corresponds to Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, pp. 135-137.

34. Southern [1991, *op. cit.*, p. 130] for example, clearly expresses the difficulty with this view of Anselm's project:

If this argument [*Proslogion II*] is sound, we can go a step further. The argument has forced an intelligent listener to agree that God exists both in the mind and outside the mind. But many other things exist both in the mind and outside the mind: for instance, the pen I am holding exists both in my mind and outside my mind. It exists *in re* and *in mente*; but it does not necessarily exist *in re* because it exists *in mente*.

For a good criticism of ontological arguments construed as producing proofs of God's existence or necessary existence see Peter van Inwagen, "Necessary Being: The Ontological Argument," Chapter 5 of *Metaphysics* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993).

35. What Anselm claims to demonstrate about God falls into three broad categories. Firstly, there are the properties of non-contingency: God is the eternal (*Ch. XIII, XX*), omnipresent (*Ch. XIII*), transcendent (*Ch. XX*), and self-existent whom "all things need ... for their being and their well-being" (*Ch. XXII*). Secondly, God has the traditional divine attributes of perfection. God is "omnipotent, although there are many things of which he is not capable" (*Ch. VII*), "compassionate and passionless" (*Ch. VIII*), and "supremely just" in both sparing the wicked and punishing them (*Ch. IX and X*). "All the ways of God are compassion and truth" (*Ch. XI*). God has divine simplicity: "God is life, wisdom, eternity, and every true good.... In God wisdom, eternity, etc., are not parts, but one, and the very whole which God is, or the unity itself, not even in concept divisible" (*Ch. XVIII*). Thirdly, Anselm even seeks to prove revealed truths of Scripture such as that God "is equally Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (*Ch. XXIII*) and the source of all joy (*Ch. XXVI*).