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"Whoever understands this . . .": On translating the *Proslogion*

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Abstract

In this paper I seek to address the question of the interpretation and translation of the *Proslogion* and to understand why the text of this major work is repeatedly mistranslated. Having identified the various strands in the interpretative tradition and taken as my paradigm case an analysis of a passage from *Proslogion*, 4, I suggest that the reason for the errors to be found in the various attempts at translating this passage is to be found in the fact that the translators are influenced by the interpretative tradition and translate in accordance with it, even when this leads to 'obvious' mistranslation. I ask whether there can be a definitive interpretation and translation of the *Proslogion*, and answer this question in the negative, primarily because important elements of Anselm's thought are not available to us. Nevertheless, I suggest that it is possible to avoid errors of interpretation and translation by remaining within the constraints of the text. Finally, I attempt to lay some ground rules for those readers who are interested in an accurate reading of the *Proslogion*.

Keywords

Anselm, Proslogion, ontological argument, translation, interpretation

Introduction

An interesting feature of the most recent English edition of Anselm's works[1] is that it contains new translations of all the major works, except for the *Proslogion*.[2] The fact that a new translation of the

[1] B. Davies & G.R. Evans (Edd.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, Oxford/New York 1998. My own translation of the Proslogion will appear in I. Logan, *Reading Anselm's Proslogion: The history of Anselm's argument and its significance today*, Ashgate (forthcoming).

[2] The translation used is taken from M.J. Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion*, Oxford 1965. In this earlier work Charlesworth provides an influential commentary, which appears

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Proslogion was not commissioned for this edition might be taken to imply that there is no requirement for another translation, that there already exists an authoritative translation, providing English-speaking students with what they need to understand the argument of the *Proslogion*. The aim of this paper is to reflect on whether this is the case. To pursue this aim I will (i) review briefly some of the main strands of the interpretative tradition with particular reference to 20th and 21st Century developments; (ii) look at some of the effects of interpretation on the translation of the *Proslogion*, taking as a paradigm case a few lines from *Proslogion*, 4 (and suggesting how this passage should be translated); (iii) discuss whether there can be a definitive interpretation of the *Proslogion*, and consequently a definitive translation; and, in conclusion, (iv) suggest some ground rules for those who seek an accurate reading of the text.

In the introduction to his article on the argument of the *Proslogion*, Étienne Gilson offered as an excuse for yet another interpretation, "*l'impossibilité de resister à la tentation*."[3] The temptation has clearly been too much for others as well. And, in the unending stream of translations and interpretations of the text of the *Proslogion,* no single approach can claim universal acceptance. Moreover, it has become more and more difficult to judge the extent to which the "multifaceted collection of arguments"[4] actually stems from Anselm. In this hermeneutic cacophony, students are particularly dependent on the guidance of their teachers and the translations they use. A brief overview of some of the main approaches to interpreting Anselm shows how confusing the situation is.

(i) Overview of the interpretative tradition

We can divide the interpreters of the *Proslogion* into a number of overlapping camps: (1) those interested in it as an instance of one or more ontological arguments; (2) those who make the same kind of objection to the argument of the *Proslogion* as Gaunilo; (3) those who argue that the *Proslogion* is a theological work which does not seek to deliver a philosophical proof; (4) those who seek to defend

to run out of steam as he progresses through the *Proslogion*. Thus, there is no comment on chapter 14 and the final eleven chapters merit nine lines. Yet, for H. de Lubac, chapter 14 is of key significance. See H. de Lubac, '"Seigneur, je cherche ton visage": Sur le chapitre xive du Proslogion de saint Anselme' in *Archives de Philosophie*, 39 (1976) 201–225, 407–425. Charlesworth's attitude is, I think, symptomatic of a commonly held, but mistaken, view that only certain parts of the *Proslogion* are relevant to understanding Anselm's argument.

[3] E. Gilson, 'Sens et nature de l'argument de saint Anselme' in *Archive d'Histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 9 (1934) 5–51, p. 5.

[4] E.J. Butterworth, *The identity of Anselm's Proslogion argument for the existence of God with the Via quarta of Thomas Aquinas*, Lampeter 1990, p. 55.

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an improved version of Anselm's argument; and (5) those for whom the *Proslogion* is simply the starting point of their own arguments or proofs.

(1) It is generally agreed that Anselm's philosophical fame is based on three chapters of the *Proslogion*, i.e. chapters 2 to 4. The historian, R.W. Southern, pointed out that the rest of the text "has been, from the point of view of Anselm's own thought, unduly neglected".[5] This is particularly true of those who classify the argument of the *Proslogion* as 'ontological'. These 'ontologisers' constitute the most broadly based and influential group of interpreters. They have transferred to Anselm's argument Kant's 'ontological' label, originally applied to the arguments of Cartesian and Wolffian rationalism.[6] The result has been that the thoroughly unanselmian arguments of a later epoch continually determine the reading of the *Proslogion* and the concentration on chapters 2 to 4. In so far as Anselm's philosophical fame is based on one or more ontological arguments found in *Proslogion* 2 to 4, it is based on a misunderstanding. Small wonder, then, that there is little effort made to understand the text of the *Proslogion* as a whole. And yet, Anselm gives a clue as to the unitary character of the text by referring to the argument presented there as *unum argumentum*.[7]

A classic case of the predisposition to misunderstand is to be found in Hans Küng's book, *Does God Exist?*. Having linked together the names of Anselm, Descartes, Leibniz and Wolff, Küng characterises the 'ontological proof' thus:[8]

> This starts out from the idea of God (innate in every human being) as the most perfect and necessary being. Then, without recourse to empirical experience (= *a priori*), the conclusion is drawn that this Being exists, since existence is simply involved in its perfection and necessity.

This may or may not be an adequate account of ontological proofs. It has virtually nothing to do with Anselm's argument. In fact, Küng like the other members of this group are not really interpreters of Anselm at all. They generally give no indication of being acquainted with the work of Anselm other than at second hand. They are interested in certain arguments concerning the existence of God. To this group Anselm's meaning is unimportant. Thus, one of the more

[5] See Eadmer, *The Life of St. Anselm*, edited and translated by R.W. Southern, Oxford 1972, p. 29 n. 3. It should be noted that this 20th Century position marks an advance on previous centuries, in which a few lines from chapter 2 were deemed to sufficient to indicate Anselm's meaning.

[6] There is more to be said about Kant's use of the term 'ontological'. See my paper, 'Whatever happened to Kant's ontological argument?' in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 74 (2007) 346–363.

[7] *Proslogion*, Preface.

[8] H. Küng, *Does God Exist?: An Answer for Today*, London 1980, p. 531.

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recent commentators, Graham Oppy, in a wide-ranging survey of English language discussions of the ontological arguments, states openly with reference to the *Proslogion*: "I am not interested in pursuing these tiresome exegetical questions."[9] However, Oppy does not leave it there, but goes on to make assertions about Anselm's position, which are dependent on exegesis.[10]

(2) The followers of Gaunilo are found in all the categories. They, like Gaunilo, misunderstand or distort Anselm's argument. They choose to replace the formula, 'that than which a greater cannot be thought', by another phrase, such as *aliquid omnibus maius* (something greater than everything),[11] which they take to be synonymous with Anselm's formula. Anselm had informed Gaunilo, the first to misunderstand him in this way, that such language did not convey what was meant by 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'.[12] There appears to be little excuse for later writers, such as Küng, who repeat the error. Yet, even a sympathetic interpreter such as T. Morris, is able to say: "The Anselmian conception of God is that of a greatest possible, or maximally perfect, being."[13] Although Anselm's conception of God contains this idea, it is not identical with it, for God is greater than any greatest being I can possibly think: "*Ergo domine non solum es quo maius cogitari nequit, sed es quiddam maius quam cogitari possit*." (*Proslogion*, 15) [My translation: "Therefore, Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are [also] something greater than can be thought."]

The characteristic feature of the followers of Gaunilo is that they do not understand the uniqueness of Anselm's argument. They see little problem in rewording it, so that it no longer concerns 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'. This particular phrase is at the heart of the argument. They do not grasp that an argument concerning 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' does not work for 'that than which a greater can be thought'. This is why, for Anselm, Gaunilo's objection, based on the Lost Island, misses the point.

(3) The theologisers include Stolz and Barth. They seek to rescue Anselm from the grip of philosophers and to reinforce their anti−philosophical viewpoint. Stolz seizes on the prayerful nature of the *Proslogion* as an indication that it is a work of mystical theology and thus not an argument intended to convince. He writes: "Nothing is more absurd than to see a philosopher in the author of

[9] G. Oppy, *Ontological arguments and belief in God*, Cambridge 1995, p. 8.
[10] See Oppy, pp. 8–20.
[11] Gaunilo, *Pro Insipiente*, 4.
[12] Anselm, Responsio, 5: *"nusquam in omnibus dictis meis invenitur talis probatio."*
[13] T.V. Morris, *Anselmian Explorations: Essays in Philosophical Theology*, Notre Dame, 1987, p. 12.

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the *Proslogion*."[14] Stolz argues that there are two styles of writing to be found in Anselm, the doctrinal/dialectical and the prayerful, and concludes that since the former do not contain prayers, then the *Proslogion* must belong to the second group. Consequently it does not involve the dialectic of a philosophical proof of God's existence. Stolz's understanding of the structure and purpose of this work arises out of his belief that it does not contain a philosophical proof. It allows him to overlook the glaringly obvious, that Anselm clearly states he wishes to prove God's existence. It is a sobering thought that an otherwise serious reading of the text can overlook this fact.

Barth too overlooks the obvious, omitting Anselm's reference to the proof–nature of the argument when he quotes the relevant passage from the Preface of the *Proslogion*. He writes:[15]

> the Prologue of the book had described how the author had long sought and, after many a digression, eventually found *unum argumentum . . . ad adstruendum, quia Deus vere est et quia est summum bonum*. Now this argumentum must not be identified with the proof which is worked out in *Prosl. 2–4* but rather it is one technical element which Anselm has made use of in both parts of the book.

The passage Barth quotes should read:

> *unum argumentum quod nullo alio ad se probandum quam se solo indigeret, & solum ad astruendum quia deus vere est et quia est summum bonum nullo alio indigens, & quo omnia indigent ut sint & ut bene sint, & quaecunque de divina credimus substantia, sufficeret."* [My translation: "one argument . . . that would need no other to prove itself than itself alone, and would suffice alone to establish that God truly exists and that He is the highest good requiring no other and which all things need that they might exist and that they might exist rightly, and whatever we believe about the divine substance.][16]

Once we are aware of this, it is surprising to read:[17] "What is set out in *Prosl* 2–4 is first described as a 'proof' (*probare, probatio*) by Anselm's opponent Gaunilo" and "[Anselm's] own particular description of what he is doing is not *probare* at all but *intelligere*". According to Barth, the argumentum should not be identified with the proof of chapters 2 to 4. This is correct. But Anselm's *argumentum* is meant to be a proof in a way that cannot be accommodated by Barth's interpretation. The 'proof' of chapters 2 to 4 is

[14] A. Stolz, 'Anselm's Theology in the Proslogion' in J. Hick & A. McGill, ed., *The Many-Faced Argument: Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God*, London/Melbourne 1968, 183–206, p. 188.

[15] K. Barth, Anselm: *Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's proof of the existence of God in the context of his theological scheme*, London 1960, p. 13.

[16] Anselm, *Proslogion*, Preface.

[17] Barth, p. 14.

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not the *argumentum*, but according to Anselm the *argumentum* is a proof.

More recently, D. Hogg has argued that it "is somewhat unfair to Anselm to assume he is offering a proof here. After all, proving so many different things by one single argument, by five little words, seems just a bit ambitious."[18] Hogg seeks support for this position in the view that the verb *probare* is not always to be taken as referring to proof, but is "commonly used to mean to probe, to search, to test or to prod".[19] There is some truth in this as a general comment on the meaning of *probare*, although it is important to note that to refer to something as *probatus* does not simply mean that it has been probed or tested, but that it has also been found not wanting. More to the point, Anselm's use of the verb, *probare*, throughout his writings carries the clear meaning of 'to prove'.[20]

Thus in *Responsio*, 1, he writes:

> *Quare aut vera non sunt quibus contra conaris probare, aut ex eis non consequitur quod te consequenter opinaris concludere.*
> [My translation: "Therefore, those [statements] by which you try to prove the contrary are either not true, or what you suppose you conclude logically does not follow from them."]

And again, in Reponsio, 6, he writes:

> *miror quid hic sensisti contra me dubium probare volentem, cui primum hoc sat erat, ut quolibet modo illud intelligi et esse in intellectu ostenderem, ...*
> [My translation: "I am amazed that you have judged against me here, as I wanted to prove something [that was] in doubt, for which [purpose] it was enough at first that I should show that it is understood and exists in the understanding in some way, ..."]

In both cases, the literal translation of *probare* as 'to prove' conveys most successfully Anselm's meaning. In the *Proslogion*, Anselm is setting out to prove the existence of the God of Catholic belief. He really is that ambitious.

(4) A diverse group consists of those who would defend versions of Anselm's argument in some form. These are generally philosophers with their own philosophical programme. Hartshorne, for instance, is concerned with 'process' philosophy and theology. He criticises the failure to read Anselm – "the extraordinarily poor scholarship,

[18] D.S. Hogg, *Anselm of Canterbury: The Beauty of Theology*, Aldershot 2004, p. 91.
[19] Hogg, p. 91.
[20] For confirmation of this point, in addition to the usage in the *Responsio*, see *De Grammatico*, 3, 8 & 9; *De Veritate*, 13; *De Casu Diaboli*, 11; *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 11; *Cur Deus Homo*, I, 2, 7, 18 & II, 13; *De Conceptu Virginali*, 24 & 26; *De Processione*, 9; *De Concordia*, III, 1 & 6.

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in which great scholars have indulged."[21] It is his view that there are two arguments in the *Proslogion*: a weaker one in chapter 2, and a stronger one in chapter 3. He writes that *Proslogion* 2 "is but a blundering preamble or unlucky false start in the development of the Proof".[22] These assertions, which overlook the significance of Anselm's commitment to *unum argumentum*, would suggest that Anselm did not understand what he was doing. In fact, much of the more recent scholarship has addressed these different 'ontological' arguments to be found in Anselm. The contributions of Hartshorne and other philosophers, such as Malcolm[23] and Plantinga,[24] who seek to set Anselm straight, are not directly relevant to Anselm scholarship, though they may be interesting in their own right.

(5) The final group is represented by those who use Anselm to develop their own positions. This is true in a sense of all of Anselm's interpreters. M. Blondel, in the late 19th and early 20th Century, was particularly interested in the argument of the *Proslogion*.[25] However, his work, if viewed as an interpretation of Anselm, fails. It is not Anselmian, because it departs too far from the text and thought of Anselm. Blondel and the other French-speaking reflexive philosophers recognised a similarity between the argument of the *Proslogion* and their own arguments, but did not develop their arguments fully in relation to the text of the *Proslogion*. In his summary of such arguments, A. Forest writes: "the reflexive proof is authorised by St. Anselm, rather than in agreement with him".[26]

The appeal to Anselm as an authority explains much of what has gone wrong with Anselm scholarship. Whatever the motives of these and other scholars in using Anselm as a channel through which to pass their own ideas, and as interesting as these ideas may be in their own right, they have done a disservice to students of Anselm. It seems impossible for the student to glimpse the real Anselm in the muddied waters of secondary sources.

I have tried to indicate, if only very briefly, that the history of the interpretation of Anselm's argument is littered with contributions from those who have not seen the obvious in the text. Thus, B. Hendley sees a response to the rational non-believer where Anselm claims to be responding to the catholic, rather than to the atheist, in the

[21] C. Hartshorne, 'What did Anselm Discover?' in Hick & McGill, 321–333, p. 321.

[22] C. Hartshorne, *Anselm's Discovery: A Re-examination of the Ontological Proof for God's Existence,* La Salle 1965, p. 14.

[23] N. Malcolm, 'Anselm's Ontological Arguments' in Hick & McGill, 301–320.

[24] A. Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, London 1975.

[25] M. Blondel, *L'Action*, Paris 1893; *La Pensée*, Paris 1934; *L'Être et les êtres*, Paris 1935.

[26] A. Forest, 'St. Anselm's Argument in Reflexive Philosophy' in Hick & McGill, 275–300, p. 300.

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Responsio to Gaunilo. He argues that we need to understand Anselm's purpose and the audience he is addressing in order to evaluate his argument, stating:[27] "To do so we must first turn to the text." Yet, he fails to see what is there in the text: "*sufficere mihi potest respondere catholico*." [My translation: "may it suffice for me to reply to the Catholic."][28] So, clearly, asking people to look at the text is no guarantee of progress.

(ii) The effect of interpretation on the translation of the *Proslogion*

It would be impossible to undertake a wholesale review of the history of the relation of translation and interpretation with reference to the *Proslogion* in this short paper. I will therefore take as a paradigm case a passage from *Proslogion* 4, "*Quod qui bene intelligit . . . .*"

There is in my view good cause for taking this particular passage as significant. It is a summary of the discussion contained in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of the *Proslogion* – those chapters, which have been the focus of attention of interpreters. The phrase, "whoever understands this properly", is a clue to the significance of this summary. It tells us in a nutshell what Anselm has been doing in chapters 2 to 4.[29] As such, we can expect different interpretations of what Anselm has been doing in these chapters to have an impact on the translator's reading of this passage. In fact, when we look at the original and compare it with the translations, we find a remarkable set of variations.[30] The text in question (with my translation) is as follows:[31]

> Step 1: *Deus enim est id quo maius cogitari non potest.*
> For God is that than which a greater cannot be thought.
>
> Step 2: *Quod qui bene intelligit, utique intelligit id ipsum sic esse, ut nec cogitatione queat non esse.*
> Who(ever) understands this [i.e. that than which a greater cannot be thought] properly, understands at least that this same thing exists in such a way that not even in thought can it not exist.
>
> Step 3: *Qui ergo intelligit sic esse deum, nequit eum non esse cogitare.*
> Translation 1: Therefore, who[ever] understands that God exists in such

[27] Brian Hendley, 'Anselm's *Proslogion* Argument' in *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, Vol 13/2 Berlin/New York 1981, pp. 838–846. Even Hartshorne for all his strictures about failures to read the text, focuses on chapters 2 & 3 to the detriment of a reading of the whole text of the *Proslogion.* See *Anselm's Discovery*, *passim.*

[28] Anselm, *Responsio*.

[29] Thus, Campbell entitles it "Conclusions re-asserted". See R. Campbell, *From belief to understanding: A study of Anselm's* Proslogion *argument on the existence of God*, Canberra 1976, p. 9.

[30] Even more remarkable perhaps is the failure of some to even note the existence of *Proslogion* 4 and consequently the summary in their 'interpretations' of Anselm.

[31] Anselm, *Proslogion*, 4.

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> a way [as 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'], cannot think that He does not exist.
> Translation 2: Whoever therefore understands that God is such [i.e. such a thing as 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'] cannot think that He does not exist.

The translations of Ward,[32] of McGill,[33] of Hopkins and Richardson,[34] of Fairweather[35] and of Shannon[36] introduce God into the second step, translating the neuter '*id ipsum*' by 'God' or 'he'. This makes a tautology of Anselm's reasoning: God cannot conceivably [in thought] not exist; therefore God cannot be thought not to exist. '*Id ipsum*' is translated by '*il*' in the French translation of Koyré,[37] and by '*er*' in the German translation of Schrimpf.[38] Michel Corbin on the other hand translates '*id ipsum*' as '*cela même*', but is still forced to use '*il*' to refer to what it is that cannot be thought in step 2.[39] The translation of Thomas Williams, which seeks to be literal within the constraints of contemporary English idiom, translates '*id ipsum*' as 'this being', rather than 'this same being'.[40] Both are acceptable in English idiom but the latter is more literal. Williams in fact loses some of the clarity of the argument, because he unnecessarily avoids being literal.

In all the English translations there is a blurring of the issue brought about by the literal translation of '*quod*' as 'this' in Step 2. In the Latin, the referent of '*quod*' is clearly '*id quo maius cogitari non potest*'. In the English translations, the referent of 'this' appears to be the statement 'God is that than which a greater cannot be thought', leaving the second step entirely ambiguous. Any translation that attempts to present Anselm's text as clearly as possible must make clear the antecedent of '*quod*', but in doing so will need to move away from literal translation.

Further confusion arises from the treatment of the word, '*sic*', in our passage. S. N. Deane translates the first occurrence as 'so truly', rather than as 'so' or 'in such a way'.[41] Similarly, Dom Pouchet

[32] B. Ward, *The Prayers and Meditations of St Anselm*, London 1973, p. 246.
[33] Hick & McGill, p. 8.
[34] J. Hopkins & H. Richardson, *Anselm of Canterbury*, Vol. 1, London 1974, p. 95. Hopkins later repudiated his earlier translation of the *Proslogion*. See below.
[35] E.R. Fairweather, *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, London 1956, p. 75.
[36] W. Shannon, *Anselm: The Joy of Faith*, New York 1999, p. 108.
[37] A. Koyré, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, Paris 1954, p. 17.
[38] G. Schrimp, *Anselm von Canterbury* Proslogion II-IV: *Gottesbeweis oder Widerlegung des Toren?,* Frankfurt am Main, 1994, p. 70.
[39] M. Corbin, *Prière et Raison de la Foi*, Paris 1992, p. 50
[40] T. Williams, *Anselm: Monologion and Proslogion*, Indianapolis/Cambridge 1996, p.101
[41] S.N. Deane, *St Anselm: Basic Writings*, 2nd edition, La Salle 1962, p. 10.

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translates '*sic*' as '*si réellement*'.[42] Charlesworth translates the first instance of '*sic*' as 'so' and the second instance as 'in such a way'.[43] Dom Schmitt translates the first instance of '*sic*' as '*so*' and the second instance as '*auf diese Weise*'.[44] These different translations of '*sic*' are unnecessary. Furthermore, the use of 'so' here carries connotations of the superlative (see Deane and Pouchet), which distracts from Anselm's meaning.

Hopkins looks closely at the usage of '*sic*' in this passage.[45] He criticizes both Campbell[46] and Schufreider[47] for failing to appreciate that, although '*sic*' is being used adverbially in its first occurrence in our passage, it is used adjectivally in its other occurrence (since it is not correlated with an '*ut*'). He argues that, in English, the final sentence should read as follows:

> "Therefore, anyone who understands that God is such cannot think that he does not exist" (which is the same as my Translation 2);

and not (as Schufreider translates it),

> "Thus whoever understands that God exists in such a way cannot think of Him as not existing" (which is similar to my Translation 1).

In fact, Schufreider amends his translation to take account of the criticism of Hopkins.[48] Hopkins' reasons for translating as he does appear plausible. However, there are many possible adverbial uses of '*sic*', which do not require that it be 'correlated' with '*ut*', and here it is perfectly reasonable to translate '*sic*' as "in such a way", with the meaning of "in the manner just specified" (or "in the same way" – see my Translation 1). The meaning of this passage can only be resolved, if one understands its role as a summary of Anselm's argument so far, i.e. as an interim report on progress. One can get this right whether one follows Hopkins or Campbell and Schufreider in translating '*sic*'.

It takes Anselm the remainder of the *Proslogion* to establish Step 1, the identity of God with 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'. This explains why Anselm does not leave the argument at this point. Step 3 should be understood as a conditional statement. *If* one

[42] J.-R. Pouchet, *Saint Anselme: Un croyant cherche à comprendre*, Paris 1970, p.123.

[43] Charlesworth, p. 121; Davies & Evans, p. 89.

[44] F.S. Schmitt, *Anselm von Canterbury: Proslogion: Untersuchungen*, Stuttgart/Bad Canstatt 1962, p. 89.

[45] J. Hopkins, *A New, Interpretive Translation of St. Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion*, Minneapolis 1986,

[46] Hopkins, pp. 5f. See Campbell, *From belief to understanding*.

[47] Hopkins, 22f. See G. Schufreider, *An Introduction to Anselm's Argument*, Philadelphia 1978.

[48] See G. Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic: Anselm Early Writings,* 1994, p.236 n.55 & p. 329.

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understands that God is such a being or exists in the same way as such a being, *then* one understands that God cannot be thought not to exist. The point then is to establish the identity, which allows this conclusion to follow. This whole process is misunderstood if one introduces God into Step 2. The lack of rigour exhibited by translators of this passage is understandable, once we realise that their translations create no problems for the tradition of interpretation, because according to this tradition Anselm's argument is already complete by the time he reaches the end of chapter 4. Such translators have reinforced the position of the interpreters, who have looked for and found confirmation of their views in the place where their views have determined what is to be found.

Given the weight that Hopkins places on the translation and interpretation of the word, '*sic*', it is interesting to note his criticism of Schmitt for concluding that Anselm, in writing the *Proslogion*, "weighed each word exactly".[49] In fact, an important hermeneutic principle underlies Schmitt's approach: that, in translating a work such as Anselm's, to be imprecise or free in translation is to do a disservice to the ideas being articulated there. Hopkins misses the point, in referring to Schmitt's position as a conclusion.[50] The basis of Schmitt's approach is a spirit of empathy, and he is operating with the concomitant methodological assumption here. As Nida points out: "Even if the translator possesses all the necessary technical knowledge, he is not really competent unless he is also a truly empathetic spirit."[51] This empathy makes a practical difference to the outcome of the translator's work. It is best expressed in the words of Karl Rahner:

> The author adheres to the heuristic principles that when dealing with a great philosopher . . . a really *philosophical* sense is to be found in his statements (which of course does not mean an objectively correct sense), and that when this attempt does not succeed, the presumption is that the interpreter has failed . . . .[52]

So it is that even the translation of an apparently straightforward term such as '*unum argumentum*' becomes problematical, if one does not want to take Anselm's claim as philosophically serious. It *is* possible to discern 'one argument' from which all that Anselm says of God follows. The argument is the proof that God and 'that than which

[49] Hopkins, p. viii. It should be noted that Hopkins also criticises Campbell for construing charitably (p. 15) and Anscombe for being "too sympathetic" (p. 33).

[50] Hopkins, p. viii.

[51] E.A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating*, Leiden 1964, p. 151.

[52] K. Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, London/Sydney 1968, p. li. The roots of the moral, spiritual dimension of this intellectual heuristic principle are to be found in Rahner's Ignatian spirituality. In fact, virtually the same statement can be found in the *Spiritual Exercises*, s. 22. Rahner is in his usual, astute way promoting the virtue of humility here.

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a greater cannot be thought' are to be identified.[53] Establishing the existence of 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' is the cornerstone of establishing this identity. (Otherwise, Anselm would not be addressing his argument to the God in whom he believes.) It is in this sense alone that it is possible to agree with Barth that *Proslogion* 2 to 4 represents the '*Haupttext*'.[54] Nevertheless, chapters 2 to 4 are not to be identified with the *unum argumentum*. Hopkins takes Anscombe to task for misunderstanding what the *unum argumentum* is, and for assuming that it refers to a very short single argument in *Proslogion* 2.[55] However, Hopkins appears to commit the error he ascribes to Anscombe, that a single argument must be short, taking the view that, since Anselm's argument is not short, it is not a single argument. Thus, he does not translate *unum argumentum* as 'single argument', but as 'single consideration'. And yet, in the very same sentence, he translates the same noun as 'argument'.[56]

(iii) Can there be a definitive interpretation or translation of the *Proslogion*?

Anselm is medieval, and so, of course, he predates modern philosophy and theology. However, it is important to note that he also predates all the other major medieval philosophers and theologians. He knew less about classical thought than his successors did or we do. His written works derive from middle age, although he had been a student and teacher from a young age. We do not see the development of his thought. Thus, we do not fully understand his relation to Augustine, even though the influence of Augustine is visible throughout his writings.[57] McIntyre writes that Anselm's relation to Augustine "is too complex to merit for him the title of Augustinian".[58] Whilst De Lubac suggests[59] that there is a significant difference between Anselm and Augustine in their view of the "*intelligence de la foi*". For Augustine it is "*une étape sur la voie qui conduit de la foi obscure à la vision*". For Anselm, understanding does not bring with it the vision of God,

[53] That Anselm takes the whole of the *Proslogion* to establish the identity of 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' and God is an insight, the significance of which I will address in a forthcoming paper on Anselm's argument and the leibnizian principle of the identity of indiscernibles.

[54] Barth, p. 8.

[55] Hopkins, p. 33.

[56] *ibid*., p. 215.

[57] See, in particular, his comment in the Prologue to the *Monologion*, that it should be judged according to Augustine's *De Trinitate*.

[58] J. McIntyre, 'Cur deus-homo: the axis of the argument' in H. Kohlenberger *et al*. (Edd.), *Sola Ratione*, Stuttgart/Bad Canstatt 1970 111–118, p. 111.

[59] de Lubac, pp. 214–216.

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nor bring him any nearer to it. Dom Schmitt argues[60] that Anselm de-platonises Augustine. And Heinzmann states[61] that Anselm's anthropology is "*spezifisch christlich und nicht neuplatonisch*".

My view is that we *can* refer to Anselm as an Augustinian. The problem is what we mean by that. We may be misled if we think that Anselm followed anyone in anything except in his own particular way. Anselm is driven by the exigencies of dialectic within the parameters of Catholic teaching. He is not opposed to dialectic, but to the 'heretics of dialectic'.[62] The parameters and the conceptual vocabulary are set by the Church, Scripture and the Church Fathers, especially Augustine, but Anselm gets to the conclusion and employs the vocabulary in his own way. It is possible to argue that, perhaps because of his own originality, Anselm is in the process of breaking away from Augustinianism (understood as employing the assumptions and method, as well as the conclusions, of Augustine). He certainly marks a step in that direction.

In comparing the argument of Anselm in *Monologion*, 1, with that of Augustine in *De Trinitate*, VIII, III, 4, Katherin Rogers indicates the difficulties faced by someone who wants to show (as she seeks to) that Anselm "is a powerful spokesman for the persuasive system which is Augustinian Neoplatonism".[63] She writes:[64] "There are indubitable parallels between Anselm's argument and Augustine's . . . . Augustine speaks explicitly of participation, so it is reasonable to suppose that Anselm adopted the doctrine." In fact, it is interesting how Anselm appears to have stripped his vocabulary of such language. And, on the few occasions he uses it, a Neoplatonic interpretation is not required to understand Anselm's meaning.[65]

Our understanding of Anselm is coloured by the fact that, in a sense, we know too much about philosophy and theology before and after Anselm's time and not enough about Anselm's own philosophical and theological experience. It is possible to surmise something about the books Anselm read prior to writing the *Proslogion*, from his writings and from later, 12th Century library catalogues at

[60] F.S. Schmitt, 'Anselm und der (Neu-)Platonismus' in F.S. Schmitt, H. Kohlenberger *et al*. (Edd.), *Analecta Anselmiana: Untersuchungen über Person und Werk Anselms von Canterbury*, Volumes I-VI, Frankfurt 1969–1976, I, 39–71, p. 39.

[61] R. Heinzmann, 'Veritas humanae naturae: Ein Beitrag zur anthropologie Anselms von Canterbury' in L. Scheffczyk *et al*. (Edd.), *Wahrheit und Verkündigung: Michael Schmaus zum 70. Geburtstag*, Paderborn 1967, 779–798, p. 787.

[62] See *De Incarnatione Verbi, 1: "dialecticae haeretici"*.

[63] K.A. Rogers, *The Neoplatonic Metaphysics and Epistemology of Anselm of Canterbury*, Lewiston/Queenston/ Lampeter 1997, p. 253.

[64] Rogers, p. 99.

[65] See *Monologion*, 16 & 25; *De Grammatico*, 16; *De Veritate*, 2; and *Cur Deus Homo*, II, 19.

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Bec.[66] But even when we can identify a possible source we are unable to be sure what Anselm made of it, how he assimilated it and how it worked out into his own 'system'. Anselm is then a difficult thinker for us, because he operates in a world that is more closed to us than we assume.[67] No interpretation or translation can be definitive, because we do not have the required level of access to Anselm.

(iv) Conclusion: some ground rules

Does all this matter? Yes, if we are interested in what *Anselm* was getting at in the *Proslogion*. Of course, it is legitimate to use Anselm to develop one's own ideas, and the above is not intended to suggest that so much effort has been in vain. However, if we claim to be making a contribution to Anselmian scholarship, then the rules that govern our reading of the text must be stricter than those that apply to readers for whom the accuracy of interpretation is secondary. For, although there may be no definitive interpretation or translation of the *Proslogion*, it is possible to avoid errors of interpretation and translation by remaining within the constraints of the text. We can draw some guidance from the above discussion to assist us in remaining within these constraints. To this end, and in conclusion, the following are offered as a minimal set of ground rules for the reading of Anselm, with which it is hoped any serious reader of Anselm would agree.

1 Read the (whole of the) *Proslogion*, before you decide that you understand what Anselm is saying there. It is a rare student who manages this feat. In order to support the reading of the entire text, teachers should avoid the almost universally adopted practice of producing handouts containing just chapters 2 to 4 of the *Proslogion*.

2 Assume that there is a single argument in the *Proslogion*, and that this notion is important to the understanding of Anselm's meaning in the *Proslogion*. But, do not assume that *Proslogion* 2 to 4 is the *unum argumentum*. It is certainly possible to discuss these chapters apart from the rest of the text, but this is because posterity (starting with Gaunilo) has produced a particular set of issues quite independently of Anselm's intentions. I suspect Anselm's otherwise

[66] For these catalogues, see G. Becker, *Catalogi bibliotecharum antiqui*, Bonn 1885, pp. 199–202 & 257–266. G. Gasper, *Anselm of Canterbury and his Theological Inheritance*, Aldershot 2004, pp. 206–209, attempts to identify the books in the library at Bec in the eleventh century.

[67] Thus, we do not even know why Anselm changed the title of his work to *Proslogion*. He refused to explain this to Hugh of Lyons, in the name of brevity. See *Epistolarum liber primus,* 109; *Opera Omnia*, III, pp. 241f.

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praiseworthy decision to insist on the inclusion of Gaunilo's response in the manuscripts of the *Proslogion* along with his *Responsio* is partly to blame for this failure to address the whole of the text.[68]

3 Avoid anachronism. Place Anselm in his historical context. This means in practice accepting that he probably did not put forward an ontological argument, interesting as the subsequent debate may have been. Forming one's view of *Anselm's* argument by engaging with practitioners of later arguments and debates is likely to lead the reader astray.

4 Do not assume that Anselm was an Augustinian or a Platonist or the father of scholasticism or a rationalist or a mystic or a philosopher or a theologian in any sense that has accrued to these terms since Anselm's time. And do not base your reading on any such assumption.

5 Do not use a translation unless you have to. If you must, then use several, preferably in more than one language. This will provide an insight into the variety of ways the text can be understood or even misunderstood. And when you do translate, translate literally, unless it really is impossible to do so. As we have seen, even an apparently innocuous freedom in translation carries the risk of distorting the meaning of the text.

6 Finally, follow Rahner's heuristic principle. Assume there is a philosophical sense in what Anselm writes, and be open to the possibility that a failure to make sense of what he writes may indicate a failure in the reading of the text.

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[68] See Eadmer, *The Life of Saint Anselm*, p. 31. We part company here from Davies & Evans, who state that Anselm's *Responsio* "is, effectively, a commentary on the *Proslogion* from its author" (p. xiv). Anselm makes it clear at the beginning of the *Responsio* that he is addressing the Catholic, who accepts God's existence, whereas in the *Proslogion* he addressed the fool, who denied God's existence. The important 'canonical' Anselm manuscript in Oxford, Ms Bodley 271, places an excerpt from the *Proslogion*, called the *Sumptum* (chapters 2 to 4), before Gaunilo's *Pro Insipiente*. Gaunilo's work is introduced with these words: "*Quid ad haec respondeat quidam pro insipiente*." This indicates that he was replying to the *Sumptum*, not to the *Proslogion*. For the importance of this manuscript, see my article, 'Ms Bodley 271 – Establishing the Anselmian Canon?' in *The Saint Anselm Journal*, 2.1 (Fall 2004) 67–80.

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