COMPLETE PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL TREATISES of ANSELM of CANTERBURY

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ON BEHALF OF THE FOOL

by

GAUNILO

What Someone,[1] on Behalf of the Fool,[2]
Replies to These [Arguments].

[1] To one who doubts whether there exists or denies that there exists some such nature than which nothing greater can be thought, the claim is made that the existence of this nature is proved from two considerations: first, from the fact that the very one who doubts or denies [the existence of] this [nature] already has this [nature] in his understanding when, upon hearing it spoken of, he understands what is said; and, secondly, from the fact that, necessarily, what he understands exists not only in his understanding but also in reality. This [second consideration] is [allegedly] established by the following reasoning:

> To exist also in reality is greater than to exist solely in the understanding. Now, if this thing existed solely in the understanding, then whatever existed also in reality would be greater than it. Thus, the greater than all [others] would be less great than some [other] and would not be greater than all [others]—something which, surely, is contradictory. Therefore, it is necessary that the greater than all [others], having already been proved to exist in the understanding, exist not only in the understanding but also in reality. For otherwise it could not be greater than all [others].

When [these claims are made, the doubter or denier, i.e., the Fool,] can perhaps make the replies [which follow].

[2] Regarding the fact that this thing is said to exist in my understanding simply because I understand what is said, [I ask]: could I not similarly be said to have in my understanding—because if someone were to speak of them I would understand whatever he said—all manner of false [i.e., unreal] things that in no way exist in themselves? But suppose it to be evident that this thing [than which nothing greater can be thought] is such that it cannot exist in thought in the same way as even all manner of false and doubt-

[1]Early manuscripts do not contain Gaunilo's name. Gaunilo was a monk at the Abbey of Marmoutier (France), located three kilometers from the city of Tours.
[2]Psalms 13:1 & 52:1 (14:1 & 53:1).

fully real things do. And [suppose that], accordingly, I am not said to think this thing of which I have heard (or to have it in thought) but [am said] to understand it (and to have it in the understanding) since I could not think it except by understanding (i.e., by comprehending with cognitive certainty) that it exists in reality. But if this were so, then (to begin with) there would no longer be a difference here between first having the thing in the understanding and subsequently understanding the thing to exist—as happens in the case of a painting, which first is in the painter's mind and then later is an actual product. Secondly, it could scarcely at all be plausible that when this thing is spoken of and heard of, it could not be thought not to exist in the way that even God can [be thought] not to exist. For if [this thing] cannot [be thought not to exist], why was your entire disputation enjoined against one who doubts or denies that there is any such nature [as this]? Lastly, the claim "This [being] is such that as soon as it is thought of, it cannot but be apprehended with sure understanding of its indubitable existence" would have to be proved to me by means of an indubitable consideration, not by means of the [consideration] that this thing is already in my understanding when I understand what I have heard. [For] I still maintain that in my understanding there could likewise be whatever other dubiously real and even false things are spoken of by someone whose words I have understood. And it would be all the more true [that they are in my understanding] if I, who do not yet believe that this thing [exists], were mistakenly to believe that those things [exist], as often happens.

[3] Hence, even the example about the painter's already having in his understanding a picture which he is going to paint cannot satisfactorily cohere with your line of reasoning. For before that painting is made it exists in the painter's art. And such a thing in the art of a painter is nothing other than a part of the painter's understanding. For as St. Augustine says:

> When a craftsman is about to make a chest, he first has it in his art. The chest which is produced is not alive; but the chest which is in the art is alive because the soul of the craftsman is alive, and in it exist all these [artifacts] before they are produced.

For why are these [artifacts] alive in the living soul of the crafts-

man except because they are nothing other than his soul's certain knowledge and its understanding? But except for things which are known to pertain to the very nature of the mind, whatever true [i.e., real] thing, when heard of or thought of, is apprehended by the understanding: without doubt that true thing is other than the understanding by which it is apprehended. Therefore, even if it were true that there exists something than which a greater cannot be thought, nevertheless when it was heard of and understood it would not be like an as yet unproduced painting in the understanding of a painter.

[4] To this may be added a point previously alluded to: viz., that upon hearing of that [which is] greater than all [others] that can be thought (which is said to be able to be nothing other than God Himself), I cannot think of this thing (or have it in the understanding) by reference to any object known to me through species or genus—just as [in this way I] also [can] not [think of] God Himself (whom, surely, for this very reason, I can also think not to exist). For neither am I acquainted with this thing itself nor am I able to make inferences [about it] on the basis of some other similar thing; for even you maintain that it is such that there cannot be anything else similar [to it]. Now, suppose that I were to hear something being said about a man totally a stranger to me—[a man] whom I was not even sure existed. Still, by means of the specific or generic knowledge by which I know what a man is (or what men are), I would be able to think of him as well, by reference to the very thing that a man is. However, it could happen that the one who told [me about this stranger] was lying and that the man whom I thought of does not exist. Nonetheless, I would still have thought of him by reference to the true [i.e., real] thing which *any* man is (though not which *that* man is). But when I hear someone speaking of God or of something greater than all [others] I cannot have this thing [in my thought and understanding] in the way that I might have that false thing [i.e., that unreal man] in my thought and understanding. For although I can think of that [nonexistent man] by reference to a true [i.e., a real] thing known to me, I cannot at all [think of] this [supreme] thing except only with respect to the word. And with respect only to a word a true thing can scarcely or not at all be thought of. For, indeed, when one

thinks in this way [i.e., with respect to a mere word], he thinks not so much the word itself (i.e., not so much the sound of the letters or of the syllables), which assuredly is a true thing, as he does the signification of the word that is heard. Yet, [the signification is] not [thought] in the manner of one who knows what is usually signified by this word—i.e., one who thinks in accordance with the true thing, even if [it exists] in thought alone. Rather, [the signification is thought] in the manner of one who does not know that [which is usually signified by the word] but who thinks only (1) according to the movement-of-mind that is brought about by hearing this word and (2) in the fashion of one trying to represent to himself the signification of the word he has heard. (But it would be surprising if he could ever [in this manner discern] the true nature of the thing.) Therefore, it is still evident that in this way, and not at all in any other way, this thing is in my understanding when I hear and understand someone who says that there is something greater than all [others] that can be thought.

All of this [is my reply] with regard to the claim that this supreme nature already is in my understanding.

[5] But that, necessarily, [this being] exists also in reality is proved to me from the following [consideration]: unless it existed [in reality], whatever does exist in reality would be greater than it; and, accordingly, that which (assuredly) was proved to exist already in the understanding would not be greater than all [others].

To this [reasoning] I reply: If that which cannot even be thought in accordance with the true nature of anything must [nonetheless] be said to be in the understanding, then I do not deny that in this [improper] sense it is in my [understanding]. But since from this [concession] its existence also in reality cannot at all be inferred, I still will not at all concede to it that existence [in reality] until [that existence] is proved to me by an indubitable line of reasoning. Now, anyone who says, "That which is greater than all [others] exists, [for] otherwise it would not be greater than all [others]" does not pay enough attention to whom he is speaking. For I do not yet admit—indeed, I even doubt and deny—that that [which is] greater [than all others] exists at all in reality. I do not concede to it any other existence than that [existence] (if it is to be called existence) present when the mind tries to represent to it-

self a thing completely unknown, [trying to do so] in accordance with a word which it has merely heard. How, then, from the [alleged] fact that it is, patently, greater than all [others] does one prove to me that that [which is] greater [than all others] exists in reality? For I still so doubt and deny it to exist that I claim that this greater [than all others] is not even in my thought and understanding even in the way that numerous doubtfully real and uncertainly real things are. For I must first be made certain that this greater [than all others] exists somewhere in reality; only then will there be no doubt that *because* it is greater than all [others] it exists also in itself [i.e., in reality].

[6] For example, some people say that there is an island somewhere in the ocean. Some call it Lost Island because of the difficulty—or, rather, the impossibility—of finding what does not exist. They say that it abounds with inestimable plenitude of all riches and all delights—much more so than is reported of the Isles of the Blessed. Having no owner or inhabitant [it is said] to excel completely—because of the superabundant goods for the taking—all other lands in which men dwell. Now, should someone tell me that this is the case, I would easily understand what he said, wherein there is nothing difficult. But suppose he were then to add, as if it followed logically: "You can no more doubt that this island which is more excellent than all [other] lands truly exists somewhere in reality than you [can] doubt that [it] is in your understanding. And since [for it] to exist not only in the understanding but also in reality is more excellent [than for it to exist in the understanding alone], then, necessarily, it exists in reality. For if it did not exist [in reality], then whatever other land did exist in reality would be more excellent than it, and thus this [island], which has already been understood by you to be more excellent [than all other lands], would not be more excellent [than all others]." If through these [considerations] he wanted to prove to me regarding this island that it ought no longer to be doubted truly to exist, then either I would think he were jesting or I would not know whom I ought to regard as the more foolish—either myself, were I to assent thereto, or him, were he to suppose that he had proved with any degree of certainty the existence of this island. For he would first have to prove that this island's excellence is in my under-

standing only as [is the excellence of] a thing which truly and certainly exists and not at all as [is the excellence of] a thing which is false or doubtfully real.

[7] These replies the Fool might make to the [arguments] presented at the outset. And when he is next told that that [which is] greater [than all others] is such that not even conceivably is it able not to exist, and this [step], in turn, is proved from no other consideration than that otherwise [this being] would not be greater than all [others], he can point to this same reply and ask: "When, indeed, did I admit that some such thing—viz., one [which is] greater than all [others]—exists in reality, so that from this [admission] there could be proved to me that it exists so greatly also in reality that it cannot even be thought not to exist?"
Therefore, first of all one must prove by a most certain line of reasoning that there exists a nature which is higher (i.e., greater and better) than all [other] existing things, so that on the basis of this [proof] we can go on to derive all the other [characteristics] which that which is greater and better than all [others] must not fail to have. But when one says that this Supreme Thing *cannot be thought* not to exist, he might better say that it *cannot be understood* not to exist or even to be able not to exist. For in accordance with the proper meaning of this verb [viz., "to understand"], false things [i.e., unreal things] cannot be understood; but, surely, they can be thought—in the way in which the Fool thought that God does not exist. Now, I know most certainly that I too exist; yet, I also know no less certainly that [I] am able not to exist. Moreover, I understand indubitably that that [being] which is supreme, viz., God, exists and cannot fail to exist. Still, I do not know whether, during the time when I know most certainly that I exist, I can think that I do not exist. But if I can, why [can I] not also [think not to exist] whatever else I know with the same certainty [as I know my own existence]? On the other hand, if I cannot [think that I do not exist], then this [property of not being able to be thought not to exist] will no longer be a unique characteristic of God.

[8] The other parts of that treatise are argued so truthfully, so brilliantly, [so] impressively, and, indeed, abound with such great usefulness and with such great fragrance (because of an innermost

scent of devout and holy affection) that they are not at all to be despised on account of the things which in the beginning parts are rightly sensed but less cogently argued. Instead, the initial parts are to be more cogently argued—and, thus, all parts to be received with very great respect and praise.

REPLY TO GAUNILO

by

ANSELM

What the Author of That Treatise
Replies to These [Objections].

[1] Since [the one who] criticizes me, in these statements [of his, is] not that Fool against whom I spoke in my work but a certain non-foolish Catholic on behalf of the Fool, it can suffice for me to reply to the Catholic.

Now, you argue (whoever you are who claims that the Fool can make these [objections]) as follows:

> Something than which a greater cannot be thought is in the understanding in no other way than [as something] which cannot even be thought in accordance with the true nature of anything. Moreover, from the fact that it (viz., what I am calling *that than which a greater cannot be thought*) is in the understanding there does not follow that it exists also in reality—any more than there follows that Lost Island most certainly exists, from the fact that when it is described in words the one who is listening does not doubt that it is in his understanding.

But I contend that if that than which a greater cannot be thought is not understood or thought and is not in the understanding or in thought, then, surely, either (1) God is not that than which a greater cannot be thought or (2) He is not understood or thought and is not in the understanding or in thought. But I make use of your faith and conscience as a very cogent consideration [in support of] how false these [inferences] are. Therefore, that than which a greater cannot be thought is indeed understood and thought, and is in your understanding and in your thought. Hence, either [those premises] are not true by which you try to prove the opposite or from them there does not follow what you suppose you infer logically.

From the fact that something than which a greater cannot be

thought is understood there does not follow, you think, that it is in the understanding. Or if it is in the understanding, there does not follow, [you think,] that it exists in reality. But with confidence I assert that if it can be even thought to exist, it is necessary that it exist. For that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought to exist only without a beginning. Now, whatever can be thought to exist but does not exist can be thought to exist through a beginning. Thus, it is not the case that that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought to exist and yet does not exist. Therefore, if it can be thought to exist, [there follows], of necessity, [that] it exists.

Furthermore: if indeed it can be even thought, it is necessary that it exist. For no one who doubts or denies that there exists something than which a greater cannot be thought doubts or denies that if it were to exist it would neither actually nor conceivably (*nec actu nec intellectu*) be able not to exist. For otherwise [i.e., if it existed but in either respect were able not to exist] it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought. Now, as for whatever can be thought but does not exist: if it were to exist, it would actually and conceivably (*vel actu vel intellectu*) be able not to exist. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought can be even thought, it is not able not to exist.

But let us suppose that [it] does not exist even though it can be thought. Now, whatever can be thought and yet does not exist would not, if it were to exist, be that than which a greater cannot be thought. Hence, if that than which a greater cannot be thought, [assumed for the sake of the argument not to exist,] were to exist, it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought—[a consequence] which is utterly absurd. Therefore, it is false [to suppose] that something than which a greater cannot be thought does not exist even though it can be thought. Consequently, [it is] all the more [false to suppose that it does not exist] if it can be understood and can be in the understanding.

I will add a further point. As regards whatever does not exist at some given place or at some given time: without doubt, even if it does exist elsewhere or at another time, it can be thought never and nowhere to exist—even as it does not exist at that given place or at that given time. For with regard to something which did not exist yesterday but does exist today: even as it is understood not

to have existed yesterday, so it can be consistently supposed never to exist. And with regard to something which is not in this place but is in that place: even as it is not in this place, so it can be thought nowhere to exist. Likewise, if it is not the case that each of a thing's parts exist where or when its other parts exist, then all of its parts—and thus the thing as a whole—can be thought never or nowhere to exist. For even were we to say that time exists always and that the world exists everywhere, nevertheless it is not the case that time exists always as a whole or that the world exists everywhere as a whole. Now, even as it is not the case that each of the parts of time exists when the others do, so [the parts of time] can be thought never to exist. And even as it is not the case that each of the parts of the world exist where the other [parts] do, so [the parts of the world] can be consistently supposed nowhere to exist. Now, even that which is a unified composite is able to be divided in thought and is able not to exist. Therefore, with regard to whatever at some place or time does not exist as a whole: even if this thing does exist, it can be thought not to exist. But with regard to that than which a greater cannot be thought: if it exists, it cannot be thought not to exist. For otherwise, if it existed it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought—[a consequence] which is inconsistent. Therefore, it does not at all fail to exist as a whole at any time or at any place but exists as a whole always and everywhere.

Don't you think that that thing about which these [statements] are understood can to some extent be thought and understood, and to some extent can be in thought and in the understanding? For if it cannot [be thought or understood], then the foregoing [statements] cannot be understood about it. But if you say that what is not fully understood is *not* understood and is *not* in the understanding, then say [as well] that someone who cannot stand to gaze upon the most brilliant light of the sun does not see daylight, which is nothing other than the sun's light. Surely, that than which a greater cannot be thought is understood and is in the understanding at least to the extent that the foregoing [statements] are understood about it.

[2] And so, in the argument which you criticize I said that when the Fool hears the utterance "that than which a greater cannot be

thought," he understands what he hears. (Surely, if it is spoken in a language one knows, then one who does not understand [what he hears] has little or no intelligence [*intellectus*].) Next, I said that if it is understood, [what is understood] is in the understanding. (Or would what [I claim] to have been necessarily inferred to exist in reality not at all be in the understanding?) But you will say that even if it is in the understanding, there would not follow [therefrom] that it is understood. Notice, [though], that from the fact of its being understood, there does follow that [it] is in the understanding. For what is thought is thought by thinking; and with regard to what is thought by thinking: even as it is thought, so it is in [our] thinking. Similarly, what is understood is understood by the understanding; and with regard to what is understood by the understanding: even as it is understood, so it is in the understanding. What is more obvious than this?

Next, I went on to maintain that if [that than which a greater cannot be thought] were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality—something which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if it were only in the understanding, then that than which a greater cannot be thought would be that than which a greater *can* be thought. What, I ask, follows more logically? For if it were only in the understanding, could it not be thought to exist also in reality? And if it can be [thus thought], would not anyone who thinks this [i.e., thinks it to exist also in reality] think something greater than it—if it were only in the understanding? Therefore, what follows more logically than [this conclusion, viz.]: if that than which a greater *cannot* be thought were only in the understanding, it would be that than which a greater *can* be thought? But, surely, that than which a greater cannot be thought is in no respect that than which a greater can be thought. Does it not follow, therefore, that if that than which a greater cannot be thought is at a11 in the understanding, then it is not in the understanding alone? For if it were only in the understanding, it would be that than which a greater *can* be thought—[a consequence] which is inconsistent.

[3.] But according to you [my reasoning] is analogous to someone's claiming that an island in the ocean ([an island] which because of its abundance excels all [other] lands and which because

of the difficulty—or, rather, the impossibility—of finding what does not exist is called Lost Island) cannot be doubted truly to exist in reality since one readily understands when it is described in words. With confidence I reply: if besides that than which a greater cannot be thought anyone finds for me [anything else] (whether existing in reality or only in thought) to which he can apply the logic of my argument, then I will find and will make him a present of that lost island—no longer to be lost.

However, it now seems clear that that than which a greater cannot be thought is not able to be thought not to exist, seeing that it exists on such a sure basis of truth. For otherwise [i.e., if it could be *thought* not to exist], it would not at all exist. Indeed, if someone says that he thinks that this thing does not exist, I reply that when he thinks this, either he is or he is not thinking of something than which a greater cannot be thought. If he is not thinking of [it], then he is not thinking that [it] (i.e., what he is not thinking of) does not exist. And if he is thinking of [it], then, surely, he is thinking of something which cannot even be thought not to exist. For if it could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end. But this [consequence] is impossible. Therefore, anyone who thinks of this thing thinks of something which cannot even be thought not to exist. Now, anyone who thinks of this [viz., what cannot even be thought not to exist] does not think that it does not exist. Otherwise, he would be thinking what cannot be thought. Therefore, it is not the case that that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist.

[4.] As for your claim that when we say that this Supreme Thing *cannot be thought* not to exist we would perhaps do better to say that it *cannot be understood* not to exist or even to be able not to exist, [I answer]: it was necessary to say "cannot be thought." For had I said that this thing cannot be understood not to exist, then perhaps you yourself—who say that false [i.e., unreal] things cannot be "understood," in the proper sense of the word—might have objected that nothing which exists can be understood not to exist. For it is false that what exists does not exist; thus, it would not be a unique characteristic of God not to be able to be understood not to exist. On the other hand, if any of the things which most assuredly exist *can* be understood not to exist, then likewise other

certainly existing things [e.g., God] can also be understood not to exist. But, assuredly, these objections cannot be made with regard to *thinking*, if the matter is rightly considered. For even if no existing things could be *understood* not to exist, still they could all be *thought* not to exist—with the exception of that which exists supremely. Indeed, all and only things which have a beginning or an end or are composed of parts—and whatever (as I have already said) at any place or time does not exist as a whole—can be thought not to exist. But only that in which thought does not at all find a beginning or an end or a combination of parts, and only that which thought finds existing only as a whole always and everywhere, cannot be thought not to exist.

Be aware, then, that you can think that you do not exist even while knowing most certainly that [you] do exist. (I am surprised that you expressed uncertainty about this point.) For many things which we know to exist we think not to exist, and many things which we know not to exist [we think] to exist—not by judging, but by imagining, [them] to be as we think [they are]. Indeed, [both of the following statements are true:] (1) We can think that something does not exist even while knowing that [it] does exist; for we can [think, i.e., imagine] the one state and at the same time know the other. And (2) we cannot think that [something] does not exist while knowing that [it] does exist; for we cannot think [it] to exist and at the same time think [it] not to exist. Hence, if someone distinguishes in this manner these two senses of this expression ["to think"], he will discern (*intelliget*) that (2) a thing cannot be thought not to exist while known to exist and also that (1) whatever there is (except that than which a greater cannot be thought) can be thought not to exist even while it is known to exist. So, then, [in one sense] it is a unique characteristic of God not to be able to be thought not to exist and nevertheless [in another sense] many [other] things, while existing, are not able to be thought not to exist. But about the way in which God is said to be thought not to exist, I deem that enough has been stated in the treatise itself [i.e., in the *Proslogion*].

[5] It is easy even for someone of very little intelligence to detect what is wrong with the other objections which you raise against me on behalf of the Fool; and so, I thought I ought to

forego showing this. But because I hear that they do seem to some readers to avail somewhat against me, I will deal with them briefly.

For one thing, you say repeatedly that I argue as follows: "That which is greater than all [others] is in the understanding. And if it is in the understanding, it exists also in reality; for otherwise [i.e., if it did not exist in reality, that which is] greater than all [others] would not be greater than all [others]." But nowhere in all of my statements is there found such a line of reasoning. For the expression "[that which is] greater than all [others]" and the expression "that than which a greater cannot be thought" are not equally effective in proving that what is spoken of exists in reality. For if someone claims that that than which a greater cannot be thought (1) is not something really existent or (2) is able not to exist or, at least, (3) is able to be thought not to exist, he can easily be refuted. For what does not exist is able not to exist; and what is able not to exist is able to be thought not to exist. But regarding whatever *can* be thought not to exist: if it does exist, it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought; and if it does not exist, then (assuredly) if it were to exist, it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought. But regarding that than which a greater *cannot* be thought: we cannot say that if it exists it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought or that if it were to exist it would not be that than which a greater cannot be thought.

Therefore, it is evident that [that than which a greater cannot be thought] neither (1) fails to exist nor (2) is able not to exist nor (3) is able to be thought not to exist. For otherwise [i.e., were it able not to exist or able to be thought not to exist], if it exists it is not what it is said to be; and if it were to exist it would not be [what it is said to be]. But this [consequence] seems not to be able to be so easily derived regarding what is said to be greater than all [others]. For it is not obvious that that which can be thought not to exist is not [that which is] greater than all [other] existing things, as [it is obvious] that it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought. And it is not certain that if there is something greater than all [others] it is identical with that than which a greater cannot be thought (or that if it were to exist it would likewise be identical with [that than which a greater cannot be thought]), as [this inference] is certain about what is called that

than which a greater cannot be thought. For what if someone were to say that there exists something which is greater than all [other] existing things and, yet, that this thing can be thought not to exist and that something greater than it—even if [this greater being] does not exist—can be thought? Could the inference "Therefore, it is not greater than all [other] existing things" obviously be drawn in that case—just as the inference "Therefore, it is not that than which a greater cannot be thought" could very obviously be drawn in my case? Your [inference] requires a consideration other than the consideration that [that thing] is said to be greater than all [others]; but with regard to my [inference] there is no need of any other [consideration] than that [this thing] is spoken of as that than which a greater cannot be thought. Therefore, if with regard to what is said to be [that which is] greater than all [others] the proof cannot proceed in like fashion as through itself "that than which a greater cannot be thought" proves about itself, then you unjustly criticized me for having said what I did not say, since [your rendering] differs so greatly from what I said.

On the other hand, if according to another consideration it can [be proved that what is greater than all others exists], you ought not thus to have criticized me for having said something which can be proved. Now, whether it can [be proved] is easily apprehended by one who recognizes that that than which a greater cannot be thought is able [to be] this [i.e., to be that which is greater than all others]. For that than which a greater cannot be thought can only be understood to be that which alone is greater than all [others]. Therefore, just as that than which a greater cannot be thought is understood and is in the understanding and hence is affirmed to exist in reality, so what is said to be greater than all [others] is inferred to be understood and to be in the understanding and, hence, necessarily, to exist in reality. Do you see, then, the respect in which you did rightly compare me with that fool who wanted to assert the existence of Lost Island from the mere fact that its description was understood?

[6.] Now, you [also] object that all manner of false [i.e., unreal] and doubtfully real things can be understood and can be in the understanding in a way similar to the thing I was speaking of. I am surprised that here you have found fault with me—I who

aimed to prove [the existence of] what [was assumed to be] doubtfully real, and for whom it was sufficient at the outset to show that this thing was somehow understood and was somehow in the understanding, so that subsequently there could be considered whether it exists in the understanding alone, as do false things, or whether it exists also in reality, as do true things. For if false things and uncertainly real things are understood and are in the understanding in the sense that when they are spoken of the hearer understands what the speaker is signifying, then nothing prevents what I have spoken of from being understood and being in the understanding.

But how are the statements which you make consistent? [On the one hand you say] that if someone spoke of false things you would understand whatever he said. And [on the other hand] with regard to that which is present in thought but not in the manner in which false things also are, you say not that you think it or have it in thought (when you hear of it) but rather that you understand it and have it in the understanding; for [you say that] you can think it only by understanding [it]—i.e., [only] by comprehending with cognitive certainty that it exists in reality. How, I ask, are [these two statements] consistent?—viz., (1) that false things are understood and (2) that to understand is to comprehend, with cognitive certainty, that a thing exists. [This contradiction] is not my concern; you attend to it.[1] Yet, if false things are in some manner understood, and if your definition is [a definition] of a special [mode of] understanding rather than of every [mode of] understanding, then I ought not to have been criticized for having said that that than which a greater cannot be thought is understood and is in the understanding, [and for having said this] even before it was certain that this thing exists in reality.

[7] Next, it can scarcely at all be plausible, you say, that when this thing is spoken of or heard of, it cannot be thought not to exist in the way that even God [you say] can be thought not to exist. Let those who have attained even a little knowledge of disputation and argumentation reply on my behalf. For is it reasonable for someone to deny what he understands [and to do so] because it is said to be [identical with] that which he denies because

[1]See Matthew 27:4.

he does not understand? Or if ever someone denies that which to some extent he understands, and if it is identical with that which he does not at all understand, is not what is in question more easily proved about that which in some respect he understands than about that which he does not at all understand? Therefore, [on the one hand] it cannot even be plausible for someone to deny that than which a greater cannot be thought (which, when he hears of, he understands to some extent) because he denies God (in no way thinking the signification of the word "God") On the other hand, if he denies God because he does not at all understand [the signification of the word "God"], then is it not easier to prove that which in some way is understood than that which is not at all understood? Therefore, in order to prove that God exists I, not unreasonably, adduced against the Fool [the description] "that than which a greater cannot be thought." For he might not at all understand the [signification of the word "God,"] but he would to some extent understand the [description].

[8] Now, you go to so much trouble to prove that that than which a greater cannot be thought is not analogous to an as yet unproduced painting in the understanding of a painter. But there was no reason for you to do so. For I introduced the [example of a] pre-envisioned painting not because I wanted to assert that the thing I was discussing [is] analogous [thereto] but only so that I could show that in the understanding there is something which is not understood [i.e., judged] to exist [in reality].

Moreover, you maintain that upon hearing of that than which a greater cannot be thought you cannot think it (or have it in the understanding) by reference to any object known to you through species or genus. For [you claim that] you are neither acquainted with this thing itself nor able to make inferences about it on the basis of some other similar thing. Yet, the facts of the matter are clearly otherwise. For every lesser good is, insofar as it is a good, similar to a greater good. Therefore, to any rational mind it is clear that by ascending from lesser goods to greater goods, we can—on the basis of those things than which something greater can be thought—make many inferences about that than which nothing greater can be thought. Is there anyone, for example—even if he does not believe really to exist that of which he is think-

ing—who is unable to think at least the following?: that if something which has a beginning and an end is a good, then a good which although it begins does not cease is a much better [good]. And just as this [second good which has a beginning but no end] is a better [good] than that [first good], so also that [good] which has neither a beginning nor an end is a better [good] than this [second good. This third good is better than the second] even if [the third] is always moving from the past through the present toward the future. Yet, that [good] which in no way needs to be, or is compelled to be, changed or moved is far better (whether or not there exists in reality some such thing) than this [third good, which does change]. Can this [unchanging good] not be thought? Can anything greater than it be thought? Is not this [procedure the same as] making inferences—on the basis of those things than which a greater can be thought—about that than which a greater cannot be thought? Therefore, there is a way to make inferences about that than which a greater cannot be thought. In this way, then, the Fool, who does not accept sacred authority [i.e., Scripture], can easily be refuted if he denies that on the basis of other things inferences can be made about that than which a greater cannot be thought. But if a Catholic makes this denial, let him remember that "the invisible things of God (including His eternal power and divinity), being understood through those things that have been made, are clearly seen from the mundane creation."[1]

[9] Yet, even if it were true that that than which a greater cannot be thought could not be thought or understood, nonetheless it would not be false that "that than which a greater cannot be thought" can be thought and understood. Nothing prevents our saying [the word] "unsayable," even though that which is called unsayable cannot be said. Moreover, we can think [the concept] *unthinkable*, even though that which it besuits to be called unthinkable cannot be thought. By the same token, when "that than which nothing greater can be thought" is uttered, without doubt what is heard can be thought and understood, even if that thing than which a greater cannot be thought could not be thought or understood. For even if anyone were so foolish as to say that something than which a greater cannot be thought does not exist, nev-

[1]Romans 1:20.

ertheless he would not be so shameless as to say that he cannot think or understand what he is saying. Or if some such [impudent person] is found, not only is his word to be rejected but he himself is to be despised. Therefore, with regard to whoever denies the existence of something than which a greater cannot be thought: surely, he thinks and understands the denial he is making. And he cannot think or understand this denial without [thinking or understanding] its parts—one of which is "that than which a greater cannot be thought." Therefore, whoever denies this [viz., that this being exists] thinks and understands [the signification of] "that than which a greater cannot be thought." But it is evident that, likewise, "that which is not able not to exist" can be thought and understood. Now, someone who thinks this thinks of something greater than does someone who thinks of that which is able not to exist. Therefore, while "that than which a greater cannot be thought" is being thought: if that which is able not to exist is being thought of, then "that than which a greater cannot be thought" is not being thought. Now, since the same thing cannot at the same time be both thought and not thought, someone who thinks "that than which a greater cannot be thought" does not think of that which is able not to exist but rather thinks of that which is not able not to exist. Hence, it is necessarily the case that there exists that of which he thinks—because whatever is able not to exist is not that of which he is thinking.

[10] I have now showed, I believe, that in the aforementioned treatise [viz., the *Proslogion*] I proved—not by inconclusive reasoning but by very compelling reasoning—that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists in reality. And [I have showed] that this [reasoning] was not weakened by any strong objection. For the signification of this utterance [viz., "something than which a greater cannot be thought"] contains so much force that what is spoken of is, by the very fact that it is understood or thought, necessarily proved to exist in reality and to be whatever ought to be believed about the Divine Substance. For we believe about the Divine Substance whatever can in every respect be thought of as better [for something] to be than not to be. For example, it is better to be eternal than not to be eternal, better to be good than not to be good—or, rather, to be goodness itself

than not to be goodness itself. But that than which something greater cannot be thought cannot fail to be anything of this kind. Therefore, it is necessarily the case that that than which a greater cannot be thought is whatever ought to be believed about the Divine Being.

I am grateful for your kindness both in criticizing and in praising my treatise. For since you praised so lavishly those things which seem to you worthy of acceptance, it is quite evident that you criticized out of good will rather than out of malevolence the things which seemed to you untenable.