



St. Anselm [1033-1109 AD]

ANSELM'S ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

The argument is given below in its original form (translated by Jonathan Barnes).

From the *Proslogion*

Therefore, Lord, who grant understanding to faith, grant me that, in so far as you know it beneficial, I understand that you are as we believe and you are that which we believe. Now we believe that you are something than which nothing greater can be imagined.

Then is there no such nature, since the fool has said in his heart: God is not? But certainly this same fool, when he hears this very thing that I am saying - something than which nothing greater can be imagined - understands what he hears; and what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand that it is. For it is one thing for a thing to be in the understanding and another to understand that a thing is.

For when a painter imagines beforehand what he is going to make, he has in his understanding what he has not yet made but he does not yet understand that it is. But when he has already painted it, he both has in his understanding what he has already painted and understands that it is. Therefore even the fool is bound to agree that there is at least in the understanding something than which nothing greater can be imagined, because when he hears this he understands it, and whatever is understood is in the understanding.

And certainly that than which a greater cannot be imagined cannot be in the understanding alone. For if it is at least in the understanding alone, it can be imagined to be in reality too, which is greater. Therefore if that than which a greater cannot be imagined is in the understanding alone, that very thing than which a greater cannot be imagined is something than which a greater can be imagined. But certainly this cannot be. There exists, therefore, beyond doubt something than which a greater cannot be imagined, both in the understanding and in reality.