

## Anselm and Dualism Reconsidered

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### Abstract

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Anselm dealt, in his time, with several objections to his argument for the existence of God. These historical objections gave him a glimpse of criticisms that would emerge later than the Middle Ages. However not all the criticism was in the reach of Anselm's foresight? For instance, he could have not foreseen the demonological argument, which emerged from 20<sup>th</sup> century criticism, and which was proposed by some atheist thinkers to show that the anselmian argument allows one to prove the existence of anything, even if it is the existence of an evil than which nothing worse can be thought. Yet, both arguments, the anselmian one and its symmetrical counterpart, stand for a dualistic view of the world, because both are combined with a conception of good and evil, that Anselm would certainly reject. Therefore to support dualism would cause great unpleasantness for Anselm, if he had foreseen, in the long run, such a consequence of his unique argument.

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Nine centuries after St. Anselm's death, during which his most celebrated argument would rise to tradition in the shape of commentaries, of congeneric and alternative arguments as well as refutations, what is there left to say about such an admirable production of western speculative thought? Surely all has been said, and any intent at originality is but pure illusion or sheer presumption. Such is the weight of the history of philosophy in our civilizational era; at least regarding the most inevitable and persistent motives of human thought. But is this weight such an oppressing burden, that it condemns us either to repeat or want to forget? Would it be preferable not to have it? Would it be preferable that all libraries had burnt to shreds and, as if through the purification of fire, the innocence of thought rescued for the benefit of all forthcoming generations? But would that innocence be more of a virtue, than it is an illusion? We think it would be more of an illusion, than it is a virtue: the illusion of oblivion to which one devotes the already-thought. We know it for a fact: our cultivated memory of the already-thought allows us to repeat, and only to repeat; and yet, it is our belief that there are uncountable possible combinations of the repeatable, something which should not be neglected when undertaking a re-appropriation of the great motives of thought. It is this very philosophical belief that encourages us to rethink the legacy of Anselm's argument.

Bearing in mind the problematic underlying the tradition of this argument – alongside the classic problem of the relation between essence and existence, as well as the consideration of the argument's apriorism (inevitable in its post-Kantian receptions) – one question in particular draws our attention, namely: whether it is possible to unfold Anselm's argument into a double argument in favour of divine dualism. This question is, of course, posited taking into account the debate around Anselm's argument in the 20<sup>th</sup> century – an epoch which witnessed an intense development in the studies of the history of philosophy, not to mention a remarkable rebirth of medieval philosophy. Countless were the revisitations of Anselm's argument in the academic world.

Among those revisitations, however, we have chosen the one which addresses us the most radically: the academic hypothesis of construing an argument rigorously symmetrical to Anselm's argument for the existence of something absolutely evil, conceivable as an eternal and divine principle of evil.

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The combination between Anselm's argument and its symmetric would once again stimulate a Manichaist world view. It is this hypothesis of the symmetrical argument we herein wish to dispute, thus proceeding according to the model of exposition and argumentation inspired by the scholastic *quaestio*.

### Dualism into question again

Therefore, in the way of an article of a disputed question, we ask:

**If** Anselm's argument impedes the construction of another structurally identical argument in favour of the real and necessary existence of some insuperably thinkable evil.

**It seems that** Anselm's argument does not impede the construction of another structurally identical argument in favour of the real and necessary existence of some insuperably thinkable evil, as is the "demonological argument", formulated by Michael Tooley in the light of Anselm's argument<sup>2</sup>.

1. First of all: just as, in the dominion of goods, it is possible to think an insuperably thinkable good, corresponding to Anselm's concept of God as something greater than which nothing can be thought<sup>3</sup>: so too in the dominion of evils (where we cannot walk an infinite path in search of greater evils) it is possible to think an insuperably thinkable evil, an evil which is lesser than no other evil and is, as such, greater than all other thinkable evils.

2. Moreover, an insuperably thinkable evil cannot possibly be a fiction of the mind. Were it a fiction of the mind, and it would exist in the mind only. However, were it to exist in the mind only, and its existence would also be thinkable in reality, which is greater<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, that which exists in the mind and in reality is greater than that which exists solely in the mind. For instance, an evil in intention and in action is greater than this very evil solely in intention. Therefore, were an insuperably thinkable evil to exist in the mind only, and it would be no insuperably thinkable evil whatsoever, which would be a contradiction. Thus, an insuperably thinkable evil exists not only in the mind, but also in reality.

3. Moreover, an insuperably thinkable evil exists in such a necessary manner, that it is absolutely impossible to doubt its existence. In truth, it is possible to think that something exists in such a manner rendering its non-existence unthinkable; which is greater than something which exists in a manner rendering its inexistence thinkable<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup>Within the scope of Michael Tooley's and Alvin Plantinga's debate on Anselm's argument: «If, for example, we use the expressions 'the Devil' and 'maximally evil' in such a way that it is analytically true that x is the Devil if and only if x is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly evil, and that x is maximally evil if and only if x exists in every possible world, and is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly evil in every world, we can construct a precisely parallel argument to show that the Devil necessarily exists. And from this it follows that God does not exist. For even if it is not logically impossible, as some have contended, for there to be two distinct, co-existing beings, both of whom are omnipotent, it is impossible for there to be two distinct, omnipotent, co-existent beings which are such that it is not necessarily the case that their wills coincide. And this will certainly be so if one being is perfectly good, and the other perfectly evil. – Not surprisingly, Plantinga prefers the ontological argument to the demonological one. But as he offers no argument in support of this preference, it is difficult not to view it as logically arbitrary.» Michael Tooley, "Plantinga's Defense of Ontological Argument", *Mind*, Vol. XC (July 1981) nr.359, p.425. – A similar argument in another article of the time, but parallel only to the reasoning in *Proslogion 2*: «But, counters the Fool, does not this method of proof generalize to so many areas that its validity becomes dubious? For he can also say in his heart: There is no being than which no more evil can be conceived. So there is, if only in his mind, something than which no more evil can be conceived. But something more evil than it could be conceived, if it existed only in his mind, namely something as evil, but also really existing. So that than which no more evil can be conceived does not exist only in the mind of the Fool, but also in reality. This Satan, that than which no more evil can be conceived, really exists.» Stephen Read, "Reflections on Anselm and Gaunilo", *International Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. XXI (December 1981) nr. 4, p.437.

<sup>3</sup> «Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit.» Anselmus, *Proslogion* (Pr.) 2, in F. S. Schmitt (Ed.), *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt, 1968, I, p. 101, 4-5. Now, something insuperably thinkable coincides with an insuperably thinkable good, as Anselm himself confirms in his replica to Gaunilo's criticism: (cf. *Id.*, *Quid ad haec respondeat editor ipsius libelli* (Resp.) [8.] (Schmitt: I, 137, 14 28).

<sup>4</sup>A symmetrical reasoning to Anselm's: «Et certe id quo maius cogitari nequit, non potest esse in solo intellectu. Si enim vel in solo intellectu est, potest cogitari esse et in re, quod maius est.» *Id.*, Pr. 2 (Schmitt: I, p.101, 15-17).

<sup>5</sup>«Nam potest cogitari esse aliquid, quod non possit cogitari non esse; quod maius est quam quod non esse cogitari potest.» *Id.*, Pr. 3 (Schmitt: I, p.102, 6-8).

Accordingly, an evil whose inexistence is unthinkable is greater an evil than another one whose inexistence is thinkable. Since the inexistence of something is thinkable by means of a beginning or an end, then an evil whose inexistence is thinkable is an evil which begins or ends. On the contrary, an evil whose inexistence is unthinkable can neither begin nor end. Now, an evil which neither begins nor ends is surely greater than an evil which begins or ends. Therefore, were an insuperably thinkable evil to exist in a manner rendering its non-existence thinkable, and it would not be an insuperably thinkable evil as such, which would be a contradiction. An insuperably thinkable evil thus exists in a manner so necessary, that it is impossible to doubt it.

4. Moreover, an insuperably thinkable evil is far from being something insuperably thinkable in the scope of a certain gender or species, as is the case of Gaunilo's lost island. This and any other analogous examples allow us to caricature Anselm's argument, but they fail to satisfy the condition of necessary existence; for anything insuperably perfect in its gender cannot but exist contingently, thus rendering its inexistence thinkable by means of its divisibility and spatial-temporal limits. Instead, an insuperably thinkable evil not only does not fit into a certain gender, but it is diametrically opposed to an insuperably thinkable good, which coincides with Anselm's concept of God as something insuperably thinkable. Just as Anselm's concept of God is thinkable within a process departing from lesser goods in search of greater goods, so does the concept of an insuperably thinkable evil conform to a process departing from lesser evils towards greater evils. And just as Anselm's concept of God is consistent but with real and necessary existence – in accordance to the judgments of the order of existence intervening in the argument of *Proslogion* –, so is the concept of an insuperably thinkable evil consistent but with real and necessary existence, due to the same judgments. And, furthermore, just as Anselm's concept of God must be referred to something super-spatial-temporal in order to be conceived with the necessary existence incumbent to it, so must the opposite concept of an insuperably thinkable evil be something super-spatial-temporal in order to exist necessarily, thus rendering its inexistence unthinkable. And yet, something super-spatial-temporal (which exists necessarily) is more omnipresent than time and the world; for none of these is wholly, indivisibly present in each of its parts, thus rendering it possible to think the inexistence of the whole world in any of its parts or, likewise, the inexistence of the totality of time in any of its parts<sup>6</sup>. Only the attribute of an indefectible omnipresence is truly consistent with the necessary modality of existence – that modality whose negation is unthinkable (which, in turn, is a way of expressing its indefectibility). Therefore, Anselm's argument not only deduces the necessary existence of an omnipresent, insuperably thinkable good, but it does not impede a similar deduction of the necessary existence of an omnipresent, insuperably thinkable evil. It is thus possible to rationally conclude the necessary existence of two omnipresent, yet mutually opposed absolutes.

**Against** this, nonetheless, stand the traditional arguments against dualism; for the anti-dualist plight emerges as one of the dominant tendencies in the history of western thought. The following examples illustrate one such tendency.

Anselm himself, whose thought is not dualist, allows us to construe an anti-dualist argument based upon elements of *Monologion's* third way (which produces evidence in favour of a supreme existent<sup>7</sup>) and *Proslogion's* only way (which speaks in favour of the necessary existence of something insuperably thinkable). Were two contrary absolutes to exist necessarily, and both of them would share the strength of existing necessarily. Where would this common strength come from? Either from something extrinsic, by means of which both existed necessarily; or reciprocally, from one another, so that each of the two absolutes would not exist necessarily but for the sake of the other.

Were both to exist necessarily by means of something extrinsic, and none of them would consist of something insuperably thinkable, rather both would be thinkable absolutes, surmountable by the extrinsic cause of common necessary existence – which is a contradiction. Or, which is the same: both would be relative, not absolute.

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<sup>6</sup>«Nam et si dicatur tempus semper esse et mundus ubique, non tamen illud totum semper aut ista totus est ubique. Et sicut singulae partes temporis non sunt quando aliaesunt, ita possunt nunquam esse cogitari. Et singulae mundi partes, sicut non sunt, ubi aliaesunt, ita subintelligi possunt nusquam esse. Sed et quod partibus coniunctum est, cogitatione dissolvi et non esse potest. Quare quidquid aliquid ubi aliquid totum non est: etiam si est, potest cogitari non esse.» Id., Resp. [4.] (Schmitt: I, p.131, 25-32).

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Id., *Monologion* (Mon.) 3 (Schmitt: I, pp.15-16).

On the other hand, were both to exist necessarily by means of the other, and each of them would be the cause of the necessary existence of the other, which, in light of the principle of asymmetry of the relation *per aliquid* – according to which no effect may cause its cause and no cause may be caused by its effect<sup>8</sup> –, is impossible. Therefore, were both contrary absolutes to exist necessarily, and their common necessary existence would still lack a rational explanation.

John Duns Scotus, in his turn, promptly excludes dualism by arguing in favour of the necessary existence of a first principle. According to him, were the first principle to exist contingently, and it would be possible for something impossible with it to exist. Since the first principle is the uncausable good, then something impossible with it would have to be something comparable to it in terms of independence and power, as is the uncausable evil. Both being uncausable and impossible, however, none of them would exist by means of the other; rather both would have to exist in an original and simultaneous manner – which cannot be, for both are impossible amongst themselves. Therefore, the uncausable good cannot exist contingently; rather it must exist necessarily, so that something impossible with it – as is the uncausable evil – cannot exist<sup>9</sup>.

John Duns Scotus, still regarding necessary existence, therefore argues in favour of the unicity of the first principle: were two first principles to exist necessarily, and both would fall under a common gender: the gender of things which exist necessarily; but species falling under the same gender do not all possess the same degree of perfection, which means that two first principles belonging to the gender of the necessarily existent would not exist with the same degree of necessity, rather one would exist more necessarily than the other. Therefore, were two principles to exist necessarily, and they would not exist in an equally necessary manner<sup>10</sup>.

Meanwhile, by inferring God's unicity from his infinite perfection, Thomas Aquinas also formulates the hypothesis of there being more than one God; were there two gods, they would have to be mutually different, in which case a property might belong to one and not to the other, which would signify a deprivation. That is, the two gods would differ from one another by means of a deprivation, which means they would not be equally perfect, rather one would be more perfect than the other. Therefore, there could not possibly be two gods with the same degree of supreme perfection<sup>11</sup>.

In the scope of the prime efforts towards a rational self-dilucidation of Christianity, Justin argues in favour of the unicity of the uncreated, thereby displaying his difficulty in rationally explaining the difference between two uncreated beings. For, if the explanation requires one to find a substantial cause for the difference, then one would incur an infinite search of causes for differences: starting by the cause of the difference between the two uncreated beings, moving on to the causes of differences between the cause discovered and each of the uncreated beings, and so forth<sup>12</sup>. In a word, difference requires explanation, which renders it unoriginal; but not that which is unique.

<sup>8</sup>«Ut veroplura per se invicemsint, nullapatitur ratio, quoniamirrationabiliscogitatio est, ut aliquaessit per illud, cuidat esse.» Id., Mon. 3 (Schmitt: I, p.16, 10-12).

<sup>9</sup>The reference to the uncausable good and evil was included by ourselves in this modified version of Scotus' argument, which is based on the following text:«Quinta conclusio: incausabileest ex se necesseesse. Probat: quia excludendoomnem causam aliam a se, intrinsecametextrinsecam, respectu sui esse, ex se estimpossibile non esse. Probatio: nihilpotest non esse, nisialiquidsiincompossibile positive velprivativepossit esse, quia saltem alteriumcontradictoriumest semper verum. Nihil impossibile incausabili potest – positive vel privative – esse, quia vel ex se vel ab alio: non primo modo, quia tunc esset sic ex se – ex quarta – et ita impossibilia simul essent; et pari ratione neutrum esset, quia concedis per illud impossibile illud incausabile non esse, et ita sequitur e converso.» Ioannes Duns Scotus, Tractatus de Primo Principio (TPP), c.3, n.34 (Ed. Kluxen, Madrid, 1989, p.86). To be noted that Scotus does not argue in favour of the necessary existence of the first principle without having argued in favour of its possibility as an efficient cause [Secundaconclusio: cf. TPP, c.3, n.27], of its uncausability [Tertiaconclusio: cf. TPP, c.3, n.32] and of its existence per se [Quartaconclusio: cf. TPP, c.3, n.33].

<sup>10</sup>«Duaenaturaesubeodemcommuni non habentgradumaequalem. Probat: per differentiasdividentessgenus; si suntinaequales, ergo et esse uniuseritperfectius esse alterius; nullum esse perfectiusiponecesse esse exse.» Id., TPP, c.3, n.35.

<sup>11</sup>«Si ergo essentplures dii, oporteret eosdifferre. Aliquid ergo conveniret uni, quod non alteri. Et si hoc essetprivatio, non essetsimpliciterperfectus: si autem hoc esse perfectio, alteriorumdeesset. Impossibile est ergo esse pluresDeos.» Thomas de Aquino, SummaTheologiae I, q.11, a.3, resp.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. Justin of Rome, Dialogue with Trypho 5.

This and no other must have been the ground orientation of the ancient Greek philosophers, who conceived the origin of things from the perspective of a unique principle, instead of several principles, as Thomas Aquinas recognizes<sup>13</sup>.

Beside the arguments in defense of monotheism, stand the classic solutions for the problem of evil, which do not permit evil to be compared to its contrary by denying evil's status of substance or cause and reducing it to an effect or state; be it as ignorance (Plato); be it as a disorder of the soul, as opposed to the balance of virtue (Aristotle), composed of the supremacy of passion over reason (stoicism) and consented by free will (Augustine); be it as an effect of multiple causes, as opposed to the effect proceeding from the unique cause, Good (Pseudo-Dionysius); be it as a lack of perseverance towards the natural desire for justice (Anselm) or as an error while choosing the path towards happiness (Thomas Aquinas); etc.

Indeed, Anselm himself is part of the tradition which refuses a substantial evil. In conformity with Anselm's culture and the concept of God in *Proslogion*, as something greater than which nothing can be thought, evil may be pertinently conceived as something lesser than which nothing can be thought: such is Anselm's concept of evil, which Alessandro Ghisalberti formulates against the possibility of thinking a malign God, by resorting to a symmetrical replica of the argument in *Proslogion*<sup>14</sup>.

In a word, united against the conception of two contrary and omnipresent absolutes – the insuperably thinkable good and evil – stand both the arguments in favour of monotheism and the classic solutions of the problem of evil, which reduce evil to an insignificant contrary of good.

To this, **I answer** by stating that Anselm's argument cannot, on its own, impede the construction of another structurally identical argument for the real and necessary existence of an insuperably thinkable evil; and this, regardless of the arguments in favour of divine unicity (excluding polytheism and, with it, divine dualism) and the weight of anti-dualist tradition (which Anselm integrates, and which reduces evil to a lesser term). On the one hand, divine unicity is hard to prove in the eyes of those who question it, as William of Ockham himself recognizes<sup>15</sup>; monotheism, in its turn, is not irrefutable. On the other hand, Anselm's argument does not, on its own, contain a lessening notion of evil; without that same notion, as a matter of fact, it would be impossible to understand one such argument. It is undeniable that, in the light of the author's philosophy, the understanding of the argument in *Proslogion* is always pertinent, representing an unavoidable point of reference to all interpretations; and, from this point of view – that is, within the context of the author's philosophy and in a manner articulated with Anselm's notion of evil –, the possibility of a symmetric of the argument in *Proslogion* makes no sense whatsoever. Truth be said, however, this argument is no longer only Anselm's, for it gradually became common patrimony of western thought. Indeed, throughout the centuries Anselm's argument has summoned many illustrious interpreters, but not specialists in Anselm's philosophy.

<sup>13</sup>«Unde antiqui philosophi, quasi ab ipsa coacta veritate, ponentes principium infinitum, posuerunt unum tantum principium.» Thomas de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae* I, q.11, a.3, resp.

<sup>14</sup>«Per superare equivoci di questo tipo è sufficiente, a mio avviso, prendere in considerazione il nome anselmiano di Dio ("ciò di cui non si può pensare nulla di più grande"; "maggiore di quanto si possa pensare") ed esaminarlo in funzione della nozione di "male" (a tal proposito può risultare utile ricercare la definizione anselmiana del male. Si nota subito come per Anselmo, il quale segue la concezione tradizionale, il male sia considerato un difetto, una mancanza, un'imperfezione, qualcosa di nocivo. Dunque, pensare ad un essere sommamente malvagio, un male insuperabilmente pensabile (un I.Q.M. malvagio), significherebbe postulare la pensabilità di una imperfezione somma. Trattandosi dell'imperfezione, della carenza di positivo (credo legittimo assumere perfetto come sinonimo di positivo, e perciò imperfetto come non positivo, ossia negativo), non sarebbe il pensiero di "ciò di cui non si può pensare nulla di più grande (nell'ordine della malvagità)", bensì equivarrebbe a "ciò di cui non si può pensare nulla di più piccolo, di minore".» Alessandro Ghisalberti, "Riflessioni Critiche sulla Lezione di Maria Leonor L.O. Xavier, A Questão do Argumento Anselmiano", *Philosophica* 37 (Lisboa, 2011), p.279.

<sup>15</sup>«Quantum ad secundum articulum [scilicet na ens primum sit praecise unum (supra, p.337, in.18)] dico quod est tantum unum ens simpliciter primum, quamvis contra protervientes sit difficile hoc probare.» Guillelmus de Ockham, In *Librum Primum Sententiarum Ordinatio* I, d.2, q.10 (Ed. de Stephanus Brown e Gedeone Gál, in *Guillelmi de Ockham Opera Theologica* II, St. Bonaventure, N. Y., 1970, p.356, in.14).

Insofar, the argument in *Proslogion* has often been subject to an interpretation bearing no connection with other sectors of Anselm's philosophy, such as his position on evil. Precisely this would enable Michael Tooley to construe the "demonological argument" in the light of Anselm's argument.

At first glance, this reversed contrary of Anselm's argument, invented by contemporary philosophy, seemed to us but a provocative montage – executed in a somewhat perverse and light manner – of an anthological piece of western philosophical tradition. But, upon a closer look, the case proves to be serious. The "demonological argument's" aim is to refute Anselm's argument by showing that the same reasoning may be used to defend a malign God (Devil), endowed with attributes of omniscience and omnipotence analogous to those of the good God. We searched for a way to deconstruct the "demonological argument" while attempting to leave Anselm's argument untouched, but only in vain: that argument cannot be thought without this one, thus rendering it unavoidable to think this one along with that one. Anselm's argument does, indeed, contain the possibility of a symmetrical double.

However, the possibility of a symmetrical double does not refute Anselm's argument as if the latter's purpose were to prove the existence of any insuperable entity within its gender, as is Gaunilo's lost island. Instead, the reasoning in Anselm's argument allows us to conclude the necessary existence both of an insuperably thinkable good and an insuperably thinkable evil, but not of any insuperable in its gender. Indeed, good and evil are not great genders of things. Good is a universal which transcends the greatest genders, as the medieval scholastics in general have recognized. Evil, in its turn, is thought of in diversity and extension analogous to those of good, focusing mainly on the quantity, variety and graveness of the atrocities perpetrated in well documented wars of a recent past and actuality. In a world of communication as ours, it is no longer possible to reduce evil to a lesser term. Therefore, good and evil equally share our thinkable universe. One may, therefore, conceive the real and necessary existence of something evil, greater than which nothing can be thought, in the light of the same judgments of the order of existence which justify the real and necessary existence of something good, greater than which nothing can be thought. Such judgments are in no way apodictic principles, rather are, at least, admissible reasons. Therefore, both Anselm's argument and its symmetrical double are sustainable for the same admissible reasons. To labour on the grounds of the barely admissible: such is, perhaps, the specific condition of the rational constructs of philosophy – just as Aristotle had admonished when presenting the most complex questions, such as those which the dialectics debate on the grounds of probable premises<sup>16</sup>.

However, considering that both have the same plausible support basis, the "demonological argument" is not an argument against Anselm's argument, rather both constitute a twofold argument defensible in favour of dualism. Anselm's argument may affect atheism, but it is unable to eliminate dualism – or, to refer to the system of thought which best embodies a dualist world view, Manichaeism. Such is, in the long run, the greatest danger of Anselm's argument. But would it be preferable that Anselm had not formulated an argument against atheism which, at the same time, indirectly renders Manichaeism viable? According to our initial page, we would then have lost a remarkable portion of the history of western thought – even if atheism is preferable to Manichaeism.

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* III, 995 b 5-25.