

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Anselm of Canterbury's Ontological Proof for the Existence of God, from a Theological and Philosophical Standpoint

Eduard SABLON LEIVA, *Kiev, Ukraine*
Translation: Kenneth Sears

«Theological Reflections»
2014. Vol. #15. Pp. 195-208.
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Introduction

The matter of God's *existence* has always been a pressing object of theological and philosophical research. Countless thinkers and "doctors" throughout the ages have pondered the same questions: does God exist, and is there any way of proving or verifying it? If God exists, what is the mechanism for confirming the fact? Is there a way, consonant with faith, for human reason to apprehend the reality of the existence of God?

The inherent complexity here is that the question of God's existence is not susceptible to any of the "hard sciences." Mathematical evidence—assuming it is accurate—is difficult, sometimes impossible, to argue with.^[1] The same may be said of scientific experiment, so far as outcomes may be verified or repeated under precise conditions. The case is entirely different, however, with the existence, and very concept, of God, inasmuch as "no one has ever seen God" (1 John 4:12). The concept "God" lies outside—or above—physics, pertaining of course to the metaphysical realm. We can conclude, therefore, that the existence of God is impossible to prove by scientific method. At the same time it must be pointed out that the scientific method will no more succeed in disproving God's existence than in proving it. Any scientist who would attempt to refute the existence of God is venturing beyond the province of science (in the strict sense) and beginning to dabble in philosophy. A genuine sci-



Eduard Sablon Leiva was born in 1988. He graduated from Zaporozhye Bible College and Seminary in 2009 with a bachelor's degree in theology. He studied at Zaporozhye National Technical University (2011–2014) and at present is studying at both Irpen Biblical Seminary, in the Master of Divinity program, and at National Pedagogical Dragomanov University (Kiev) in the department of philosophy. His academic interests lie in the areas of historical and systematic theology and ancient and medieval philosophy. Eduard is married and has two children.

^[1] William Raeper, Linda Smith, *Путешествие по миру мысли. Введение в историю философии* (A Journey through the World of Thought: An Introduction to the History of Philosophy), 2nd ed. (Kiev: Svet na vostoce, 2006), p. 33.

entist cannot afford to do that because he knows not all processes and phenomena may be accounted for strictly by scientific method, and yet they are real. No matter who it is investigating this matter, their epistemology will play the key role in the process. And there are really only two possible bases in this regard: either “I believe in order that I may understand”, or “I believe what I can understand.”^[2]

One of the information sources concerning God is Holy Scripture. There, we find no arguments adduced for the existence of God; rather, His existence is assumed to be self-evident. According to H. C. Thiessen, in the Bible God’s existence is deemed “taken for granted.”^[3]

If God’s existence cannot be scientifically proven, it may nevertheless be affirmed by sound argument. Theology customarily employs the so-called traditional logical arguments for the existence of God, i.e., the cosmological, teleological, ontological, and others. It must be understood, though, that these arguments do not *prove*^[4] but *indicate* the existence of God.^[5] The present article will examine one of these traditional arguments for the existence of God: Anselm of Canterbury’s ontological proof.^[6] The object of this research is the consideration of the proof’s strengths and weakness from a theological and philosophical point of view *in order to* determine its value for us today. The immediate relevance of this work is to the fact that the question of God’s existence remains unsettled to great numbers of those exploring it in our day. Many still say, “There is no God” (Ps. 13:1). Moreover, just as in Anselm’s time, so in ours his argument attracts a whirl of dispute and contention.^[7] For this reason it will be essential to go on a historico-philosophical “dig” in search of the Proof’s genesis, the better to avail ourselves of the legacy of medieval scholasticism and dialectic, one that has not, even in our day, been exhausted.

1. Anselm of Canterbury and his proof

For some thinkers, their epistemological foundation and starting point was faith. The epistemology of St. Augustine, for example, led to the following declaration: *crede ut intelligas* (Latin—Believe, in order to understand). Later, Anselm of Canterbury adhered to like *a priori* tenets: *credo ut intelligam* (Latin—I believe in order to under-

^[2] Stanley J. Grenz, Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), p. 17.

^[3] Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), p. 27.

^[4] Even though this “proof” or “argument” may not be called a proof in the strict sense of the word from either a scientific or philosophical standpoint, in the present article Anselm of Canterbury’s idea concerning the existence of God will conditionally be referred to in terms of the generally received and recognized categories associated with it, viz., “proof” and “argument.”

^[5] Sergei Lepin, “Онтологический аргумент бытия Бога: опыт историко-философской реконструкции” (The Ontological Argument for the

Existence of God: an experiment in historico-philosophical reconstruction), <http://minds.by/academy/trudy/3/tr3_4.html>, June 2013.

^[6] The Ontological Argument, and in particular its strengths and weaknesses, will be here examined strictly in correspondence to Anselm of Canterbury’s framing of it. I make a point of specifying this here because varieties of the Ontological Argument with diverse notional biases have been formulated by other thinkers both before and after Anselm.

^[7] Aleksandr Arenkov, “Онтологический аргумент бытия Божия в интерпретации С.Л. Франка” (The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God as interpreted by S.L. Frank), <<http://www.bogoslov.ru/text/423502.html>>, June 2013.

stand) and *fides quaerens intellectum* (Latin—faith seeking understanding). Anselm likewise adhered to such an *a priori* premise. In his work *Proslogion* (the original name was *Faith Seeking Understanding*) Anselm writes: “For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe,—that unless I believed, I should not understand.”^[8] His theological premise was later adopted by Friedrich Schleiermacher, who expressed it in his theological motto: *fides praecedit intellectum* (faith precedes understanding).^[9] According to Anthony Thistleton, Karl Barth called the work that he dedicated to Anselm (“Anselm of Canterbury: Fides Quaerens Intellectum”) the “main key” to his “church dogmatics.”^[10]

It is common to consider Anselm the author of the formula known as the “ontological proof of the existence of God,” in spite of the fact that he was not the only one who attempted the formulation of such an idea.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033 – 1109) was a medieval theologian, the outstanding forerunner of scholasticism^[11] and the founder of medieval systematics.^[12] He was a Benedictine monk as well.^[13] He became, successively, prior at Bec (1063 – 1078), then abbot of Bec (1078 – 1093) and, finally, Archbishop of Canterbury (1093 – 1109).^[14] In the opinion of Philip Schaff, Anselm was the Church’s most original thinker since the time of Augustine.^[15] It is well-known that even during Anselm’s life he was being dubbed the “second Augustine.”^[16] According to William Raeper and Linda Smith, Anselm was the first genuinely great theologian of the Middle Ages.^[17] With his dialectical-deductive method including inductive elements (known as “Perfect Being Theology” or the “method of thinking about God”) he made a huge contribution to religious thought.^[18]

Anselm became widely known thanks to his renowned “ontological [from Greek ὄντος — being; that which exists; and λόγος — word, teaching, science] proof of the existence of God.” In his work *Proslogion* he devotes the second chapter to the question of God’s existence to counter what “the fool has said in his heart: there is no God”^[19] (Ps. 13:1). Anselm considered this argument sufficient to convince the

[8] Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury and Sidney Norton Deane, *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix, In Behalf of the Fool, by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo* (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), p. 7.

[9] Philip Schaff, David S. Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols. (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1980) Vol. 5: *Medieval Christianity. 1049-1294 A.D.*, p. 465.

[10] Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), p. 190.

[11] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols., 2nd ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2010), Vol. 1: *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, pp. 369-371.

[12] Adolf von Harnack *History of Dogma*, 7 vols. (London: Williams & Norgate, 1899) Vol. 6, pp. 23-44.

[13] Raeper and Smith, *A Journey Through the*

World of Thought, p. 36.

[14] Tony Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, rev. ed. of: *Harper’s Concise Book of Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), p.105.

[15] Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, p. 464.

[16] L.V. Blinnikov. Ансельм Кентерберийский // Краткий словарь философских персоналий (Anselm of Canterbury//A Short Dictionary of Philosophical Figures), <http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Philos/FilosPers/11.php>, June 2013.

[17] Raeper and Smith, *A Journey Through the World of Thought*, p. 36. (A similar view is maintained by Tony Lane, *A Concise History of Christian Thought*, p.105).

[18] Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishers 1997), p. 35.

[19] Saint Anselm, *Proslogium*, p. 8.

“fool” of God’s existence.^[20] Then in the third chapter he writes of how “God cannot be conceived not to exist.”^[21] Thus Anselm formulated the so-called “ontological proof of God’s existence,” which has been utilized right up to our times in systematic theology as one of the traditional logical proofs for the existence of God:

And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God.

So truly, therefore, dost thou exist, O Lord, my God, that thou canst not be conceived not to exist; and rightly.^[22]

Raeper and Smith have concisely expressed this argument as follows (*English translation from Russian version of Raeper and Smith’s work*):

- a) God is the Greatest Being we are capable of conceiving of;
- b) what exists in reality is greater than whatever exists only in thought;
- c) therefore God exists in reality.^[23]

Anselm of Canterbury is generally accepted as the source of two formulations of the ontological proof, the second of which arose in the course of a dispute between Anselm and a monk by the name of Gaunilo.^[24] Norman L. Geisler reconstructs the second formulation in contemporary guise as follows:

- 1) God is, by definition, a Necessary Being.
- 2) It is logically necessary to affirm what is necessary to the concept of a Necessary Being.
- 3) Existence is logically necessary to the concept of a Necessary Being.
- 4) Therefore, a Necessary Being (= God) necessarily exists.^[25]

So, if the first formula is based on the idea of a perfect Being, greater than which nothing can be conceived, then the second is based on His necessity, from which flows His being.

^[20] Raeper and Smith, *A Journey Through the World of Thought*, p. 37.

^[21] Saint Anselm, *Proslogium*, p. 8.

^[22] *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

^[23] Raeper and Smith, *A Journey Through the World*

of Thought, p. 36.

^[24] Norman L. Geisler, “Ontological Argument” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), p. 554.

^[25] *Ibid.*, p. 555.

Not even Anselm called this idea an ontological argument. The idea came to him during prayerful meditation on God's existence, and so by rights it should be called "the proof from prayer."^[26] So it was later called, as an ontological proof, by Immanuel Kant, as he considered it to represent an "illegitimate transition from thought to being (*ontos*)."^[27] According to Adolf von Harnack, one of Anselm's aims was to demonstrate the following (*English translation from Russian version*):

...the compatibility of mysticism (*meditatio*) and reason, of authoritarian faith and *ratio* ("I believe that I might understand", on the one hand; on the other: "it is logically imperative that everything Catholic faith teaches us to believe about Christ be understandable")...^[28]

Thanks to Anselm of Canterbury, the Church regained former vitality and monasteries again assumed their role as legislators of science and culture.^[29] He even managed to align and integrate faith and reason, theology and philosophy.^[30] On the one hand, Anselm was convinced that the content of the Christian faith could be apprehended solely by means of revelation; on the other, he accorded due place to reason which, in its turn, strives to understand what the person has believed.^[31] At a time when many assumed that Christian teaching might be grasped exclusively by faith, Anselm advocated the integral function of Reason in Christianity and to Philosophy he conferred a place of honor within Theology.^[32]

It must, however, be noted that this idea is not proper purely to Anselm, as it is to be found in one form or other among Plato, Plotinus,^[33] and Aurelius Augustine.^[34] Thus it is clear that Anselm availed himself of rationalistic proofs as well as Neo-Platonic-Augustinian principles.^[35] This idea was later asserted under various guises by Rene Descartes, Samuel Clark, Benedict Spinoza and others.

2. Opposition to Anselm and his proof

However great a contribution to both theology and philosophical thought Anselm's ontological proof may constitute, it has evoked extensive criticism and been the catalyst for much debate. Of systematic theology's traditional logical arguments for the existence of God, it is arguably the most controversial. In Paul Enns' opinion, it is the least significant of all the logical arguments for God's existence that he examined in his textbook on systematic theology.^[36] The contemporary American philosopher Alvin Plantinga suggests that few "have been brought to belief in God by means of this argument."^[37] Among the ontological argument's opponents and critics are numbered not only those of later ages but Anselm's contemporaries as well,

^[26] *Ibid.*, p. 554.

^[27] *Ibid.*

^[28] *Harnack, History of Dogma*, pp. 23-44. (История догматов // Общая история европейской культуры. СПб., 1911. — Т. 6. Ч. 2. Кн. 2. — Гл. 7. § 63, <http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/dogmatika/Garnak6.php>, June 2013).

^[29] Raeper and Smith, p. 36.

^[30] *Ibid.*

^[31] *Ibid.*

^[32] *Ibid.*

^[33] Lepin, "The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God: An Experiment in Historico-philosophical Reconstruction," <http://minds.by/academy/trudy/3/tr3_4.html>, June 2013.

^[34] Raeper and Smith, *A Journey Through the World of Thought*, p. 35.

^[35] *Harnack, History of Dogma*, pp. 23-44.

^[36] Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p.184.

^[37] Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 2002), p. 85.

in particular the monk Gaunilo who objected to it in his polemical work under the sarcastic title *Liber pro insipiente* (“In defense of the fool”).^[38] As for later overt critics the following thinkers should be noted: Thomas Aquinas, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant. In Paul Tillich’s opinion, the whole matter of the disputes whirling around Anselm’s proof comes down to this:

It is a remarkable fact that, over many centuries, the leading theologians and philosophers have in nearly equal proportions divided into those who oppose the arguments for God’s existence and those who defend them. Yet neither side in the conflict has managed to achieve decisive victory. The only way to explain this is that each group has aimed to refute something altogether *other* than what the opposite group is defending. What has divided them isn’t even remotely a conflict over one and the same issue. They have been warring over *different* things dressed up in the *same terms*. Those who have been disputing the arguments for the existence of God have been criticizing their argumentational form, while those who have been defending them have been defending their implicit import.^[39]

In point of fact, all criticism, “ancient” or modern, of Anselm’s proof boils down (as noted above) to his having made, in the eyes of his opponents, an unjustifiable leap from the *idea* of God to His *existence*, omitting to incorporate any uniting link in his concept. Such complaints ignore, however, the likelihood that Anselm was not even aiming to furnish anyone with a strictly scientific-apologetical proof but wished to demonstrate the natural harmony between faith and reason in the context of meditative prayer. To Anselm, the existence of God was anterior to all else and unassailable, yet in his methodology he diverged from the Christian worldview. According to the view of the Russian philosopher and religious thinker

S. L. Frank, the ontological proof actually amounts not so much to a *proof* as much as a cognitive path to the contemplation of God’s being.^[40] He felt that the critics of the Proof made hay of its “not altogether felicitous formulation (more properly, the inauspiciousness of one of its formulations) by Anselm.”^[41]

3. Analysis of the proof and the opposition to Anselm

This section will briefly examine the strengths and weaknesses of the ontological argument, as Anselm of Canterbury framed it, from the theological and philosophical points of view. Additionally, we will look at the positions of well-known theologians and philosophers regarding the Proof.

3.1. Theological analysis

In examining the Ontological Proof it would be well first to conduct a theological analysis of the position and of the opposition to Anselm. We must then properly assess how Anselm’s Proof accords with and functions within Theology.

[38] Lepin, “The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God: An experiment in Historico-philosophical Reconstruction,” <http://minds.by/academy/trudy/3/tr3_4.html>, June 2013.

[39] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago Press, 1973) Vol. 1, pp. 204-208.

[40] S. L. Frank, *Онтологическое доказательство бытия Божия // По ту сторону правого и левого (The Ontological Proof for the Existence of God: Beyond the Right and the Left)*, 1972, pp. 109–151. <http://lib.ru/HRISTIAN/FRANK_S_L/bytie.txt_with-big-pictures.html>, June 2013.

3.1.1. *The strengths of Anselm's Ontological Proof from the theological point of view*

First of all, the Proof harmonizes with the content of Sacred Scripture, in which the idea of the existence of a perfect Being, i.e., the God of the Bible, is underlined as obvious fact (Gen. 1:1; Ex. 8:10; Is. 48:11-13). According to the Epistle to the Romans 1:18- 22, even the unbeliever can have some apprehension of God. This notion is especially stressed in the text by the Greek word ἐφανερώσειν, employed in the gnomic aorist^[42] (v. 19), conveying that the information concerning God's existence *always* manifests and is *always* evident.^[43] All the same, knowledge *about* God is adduced in this text as being *a posteriori* rather than *a priori*, as the matter in view in the given context is *acquired*, not innate, knowledge.

Millard Erickson considers man to be “incurably religious.”^[44] John Calvin, in his *Institutes*, asserted that “there exists in the human minds and indeed by natural instinct, some sense of Deity ...since God himself, to prevent any man from pretending ignorance, has endued all men with some idea of his Godhead, the memory of which he constantly renews and occasionally enlarges, that all to a man being aware that there is a God, and that he is their Maker, may be condemned by their own conscience when they neither worship him nor consecrate their lives to his service.^[45] Calvin's opinion on the innate perception of God accords with Anselm's, which Thomas Aquinas strove to refute. Anselm and Calvin did not, however, argue for this view on the basis of Holy Scripture, as that would be a rather intricate endeavor. What may be said here is that Anselm's Proof accords with Scripture in its apprehension of God. As for the matter of an innate God-apprehension in man, that remains to be proved.

Secondly, this argument may be a kind of external testimony to God's existence for the believer. On this point Grudem maintains that the traditional logical arguments, including the ontological, have a certain value for believers as well: “...for believers, they can provide further intellectual evidence for something they have already been persuaded of from their own inner sense of God and from the testimony of Scripture.”^[46] Floyd H. Barackman is of a similar opinion, averring that, for believers, the Proof “affirm[s] that God is infinite and perfect.”^[47] Thus, for the believer—for whom the reality of God is beyond doubt—the ontological argument may to some extent prove a testimony or confirmation—from-without as to His existence, in tandem with the inner assurances of the Holy Spirit.

^[41] Ibid.

^[42] According to Daniel B. Wallace, not all experts acknowledge the existence of such a grammatical category in the New Testament (for example, Moule, *Idiom Book*, pp.12-13; *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics – Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software, 1999; 2002], pp. 562).

^[43] Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1998), p. 316.

^[44] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), p. 18.

^[45] John Calvin, Henry Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: 3 vols (Electronic ed., Garland: Galaxie Software, 1999), Vol. 1, p. 1.

^[46] Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, Grand Rapids: Inter-Varsity Press; Zondervan Pub. House, 1994), p. 144.

^[47] Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology: Examining the Great Doctrines of the Faith*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1998), p. 41.

In the third place, Anselm's Ontological Proof may be applied to both apologetic (2 Cor. 10:4) and kerygmatic aims. Grudem sees the primary value of the traditional arguments for God's existence, including the ontological, in that they "overcome some of the intellectual objections of unbelievers."^[48] Anselm's Argument points out the general or "generally accessible" revelation of God while *not* eclipsing the place and role of special revelation. Moreover, the Argument demonstrates the rationality, the *reasonableness* of faith, in its biblical connotation.

3.1.2. The weaknesses of Anselm's Ontological Proof, from a theological standpoint

In the first place it should be stated that the Ontological Argument may suffice to make an unbeliever—or in Anselm's terms, "the fool"—believe in God's existence, yet fail to bring him to saving faith. God's existence is a "generally accessible" revelation *from* God Himself and *about* God Himself. Intellectually convincing a person of the existence of God, however, does not suffice to actually *convert* him. Saving faith is required for true conversion, and that proceeds from God Himself (Acts 3:16; Phil 1:29).^[49] In this connection it should be remarked again that, with his Argument, Anselm *never* excluded the function of revelation and faith, which proceed from God, in the matter of Man's salvation. Accordingly, it would be better in this respect not to speak of a "weakness" in Anselm's Argument, but of a *limitation*.

It is essential to understand, furthermore, that from a theological perspective the very *word/concept* "God" involves the highest mode of existence—self-existence.^[50] In other words, hypothetically speaking, He would not be God if He were not the perfect and sovereign Being. Of a *necessity*, God's perfection entails His uniqueness—the exclusivity of His "kind"—while His sovereignty underscores His self-being, the existence that He draws from within Himself. Tillich has this to say on the matter:

God does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence or existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny him. The method of arguing through a conclusion also contradicts the idea of God. Every argument derives conclusions from something that is given about something that is sought. In arguments for the existence of God the world is given and God is sought. Some characteristics of the world make the conclusion «God» necessary. God is derived from the world. This does not mean that God is dependent on the world.^[51]

What, in other words, Tillich is saying is that God's being in no way admits of "proof" on *man's* part, inasmuch as it is *intrinsically* a property/trait of the Godhead. Hence any attempt whatsoever to prove His existence is patently doomed to end in absurdity. Thomas Aquinas maintained that here we confront an instance in which the "predicate" is one and the same with the "subject", i.e., the very concept of God

^[48] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 144.

^[49] A similar view is maintained by Grudem as well (p.144).

^[50] This objection may also be directed at the weaknesses of the Ontological Argument from a philosophical point of view, as well.

^[51] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 204-208.

includes His existence also,^[52] so that the assertion “God exists” turns out, from a theological perspective, to be a tautology. God once appeared to Moses and introduced Himself as: “I AM” (Gen. 3:14). This personal name of God יהוה is His Self-expression and Self-revelation. His existence is inherent in His name. Archpriest Sergei Lepin writes:

To be God means to genuinely (necessarily) exist. These divinely-revealed proclamations of the Name of God point out a kind of obviousness that is self-elucidating in its metaphysical context. The question of being or existing is one, before all else, of Jehovah. The name of God is already, in its way, a kind of theophany.^[53]

The upshot of which is that no necessity *exists* of proving the *existence* of God; indeed, *any* attempt to prove God's being will collide with both *theological* and just-plain-*logical* problems. Such problems arise, however, more from Anselm's insufficiently precise formulations (at least, some of them, as noted above) than from any theological or logical errors—a contention prompted by the following observations: first, Anselm himself made no effort in his work *Proslogion* at proving God's existence by any sort of scientific-philosophical method. Actually, the fruits of his meditative prayer—which is what all of this boils down to—merely indicate or confirm what was to Anselm the obvious fact of God's existence. His Proof is *a priori*: the existence of God is self-predicating. Tillich's view is that the ontological argument skirts wrack and ruin namely by maintaining its limited status as an *argument*.^[54]

Secondly, Anselm never strictly isolated God's “being,” His “essence,” from His “existence.”^[55] On the contrary, into his definition of “God” he inserted the notion “God exists,”^[56] which is much the same as asserting “Man is a living being,” so that the component “‘living being’ is included in the definition of man.”^[57] To Anselm, God's existence can be *only* a necessity, which may be *argued*, but *not* a “possibility” that requires proving. Tillich posits that the scholastics (of whom Anselm was one) were not really pondering the matter of God's “existence” *per se* but rather (*translated from Russian version*) “the reality, the validity, the truth of the idea of God, an idea which did not carry the connotation of something or someone who might or might not exist.”^[58]

Finally, it should be stated explicitly that misunderstandings or perceived contradictions regarding the issue under discussion in this section arise on account of the inexactitude of certain formulations by Anselm of Canterbury. In other words, one of the weaknesses of Anselm's Argument is that its very ambiguity/impreciseness *gives rise* to theological/logical dilemma and perplexity.

[52] Saint Thomas Aquinas and Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *Summa Theologica* (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), I q.2 a.1 resp.

[53] Lepin, “The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God: An Experiment in Historico-philosophical Reconstruction,” <http://minds.by/academy/trudy/3/tr3_4.html>, June 2013.

[54] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 204-208.

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] Raeper and Smith, *A Journey Through the World of Thought*, p. 37.

[57] Thomas Aquinas, *STh.*, I q.2 a.1 resp.

[58] Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 204-208 (Систематическая теология: Т.1-2. М.; СПб.: Университетская книга, 2000. — (Книга света). С.202, <<http://www.klex.ru/288>>, июнь 2013).

3.2. Philosophical analysis

In this section we necessarily move on to an analysis of the Argument from a philosophical point of view, which will include a brief review of some of the fundamental philosophical objections to Anselm's Proof.

3.2.1. *The strengths of Anselm's Ontological Proof from the standpoint of philosophy*

From the standpoint of philosophy and history, Anselm's Argument represents a substantial contribution to medieval thought. Even though it met with instant criticism, its significance and place in medieval scholasticism and dialectics can hardly be overstated. In face of the fact that the prevailing supposition of his day was that Christian faith had nothing in common with Reason (as discussed above), Anselm attempted to demonstrate their natural, intrinsic connection. Though his Argument reached beyond the ambit of biblical theology, it was admitted into systematic theology and apologetics, for which "*philosophia est ancilla theologiae*" (Latin—"Philosophy is the servant of Theology"). To Philosophy, in particular medieval, religious Philosophy, the Argument thus represented (as it continues to do) a *specific value* as the attempt to identify/establish faith's rational basis. At the same time Anselm was attempting to demonstrate a definite connection and interaction between Theology and Philosophy. No matter how many scientists or philosophers reject and try to refute Anselm's Argument, it refuses to retreat into oblivion, retaining its adherents right up to our day.^[59]

3.2.2 *The weaknesses of Anselm's Ontological Proof from a philosophical standpoint*

A traditional objection to the Ontological Argument is that of Thomas Aquinas. It cannot be said of Aquinas that he categorically rejected and disputed Anselm's Argument as did, for instance, Kant, but to Aquinas the Argument appeared unconvincing.^[60] In spite of his objections, in the *Summa Theologica* Aquinas advances "five ways" of proving the existence of God, the fourth of which strongly echoes one of the forms of Anselm's Proof.^[61] Aquinas's first objection goes as follows: "It is possible that far from all who hear the word 'God' understand that the word denotes that of which nothing greater may be conceived; after all, some believe that God is corporeal."^[62] That is, Aquinas assumes that not all people rightly apprehend God, since many might imagine Him as finite, perhaps as great indeed but not as the all-transcendent Being. This could be said of the ancient Greeks, among whom polytheism flourished and who imagined the gods as higher beings possessed of vulnerable, lustful natures. Moreover the Greeks had their demigods, i.e., the gods' human children who possessed superhuman powers. Others may conceptualize God

^[59] For instance, among its best known proponents over the past fifty years are such philosophers as Norman Malcolm (1911 – 1990) and Charles Hartshorne (1897 – 2000).

^[60] Geisler, "Ontological Argument" in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p. 555.

^[61] Thomas Aquinas, *STh.*, I q.2 a.3 resp.

^[62] *Ibid.*, I q.2 a.1 ad 2.

as some kind of impersonal force or higher mind or idea, etc. Plato's idea of God reflected a limited Theism,^[63] to him, God was not an infinite but a finite Being.^[64]

According to Geisler three different conceptions of God have been drawn from the Ontological Argument and a fourth may plausibly be drawn from it as well.^[65] Descartes and Leibniz adduced a theistic God, Spinoza a pantheistic one, and Hartshorne arrived at a pantheistic God.^[66] The argument has been made that the gods of polytheism could be adduced on the basis of the Ontological Proof as well.^[67]

And so, Aquinas's objection points out that *not every person* will imagine God as the One of Whom nothing greater can be perceived or imagined (countering Anselm's premise), since people often conceptualize God in an altogether limited, distorted fashion—such conceptualization *itself* being intrinsically in conflict with the *very idea* of God.^[68] It follows, then, that proceeding from the very same Ontological Argument one might arrive at an utterly unbiblical "God".

Aquinas's next objection may be expressed in this way: *even if* every single person were to possess a true and logically coherent notion of God, that fact would not prove that God exists in *actuality*.^[69] Unfalsifiable speculation about God cannot therefore prove or guarantee His existential unfalsifiability!^[70] In other words, according to the conception of God, He is the perfect and necessary Being, although the idea of the perfect Being may turn out *not* to correspond to the reality of His existence, even if His existence is logically possible and unfalsifiable. But if God exists, then His existence is logically *necessary*, as He Himself represents *the* inextricable "component" of the *very idea*: "God." *Again* "in other words," God is the "Necessary Being"—on the condition, however, that is ontologically real. This is the kind of counter-argument advanced by Kant, who even more categorically stated, "the conception of an absolutely necessary being is a mere idea, the objective reality of which is far from being established by the mere fact that it is a need of reason."^[71]

One of the weaknesses in Anselm's Proof may, therefore, be put this way: it provides no clear avenue, no segue, from an *idea* of God to His ontology. Arguably, Anselm overlooked some intermediate factor that, to Philosophy, constitutes an indispensable link in the chain.

Aquinas's objections continue:

From effects not proportionate to the cause no perfect knowledge of that cause can be obtained. Yet from every effect the existence of the cause can be clearly demonstrated, and so we can demonstrate the existence of God from His effects; though from them we cannot perfectly know God as He is in His essence.^[72]

What Aquinas's third objection comes to, in essence, is that God's existence is not self-evident to Man and that, therefore, "it must be proven through those effects

^[63] Geisler, "Plato" in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p. 595.

^[64] *Ibid.*

^[65] Geisler, "Ontological Argument" in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p. 564.

^[66] *Ibid.*

^[67] *Ibid.*

^[68] This objection may also be directed at the weaknesses of the Ontological Argument from a

theological standpoint.

^[69] Thomas Aquinas, *STh.*, I q.2 a.1 ad 2.

^[70] Philip A. Gottschalk, "Foundations for Theology: Lectures" (Zaporozhye: Zaporozhye Bible College and Seminary, Spring 2012).

^[71] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. by Marcus Weigelt (London: Penguin Classics, 2007), p. 500.

^[72] Thomas Aquinas, *STh.*, I q.2 a.2 ad 3.

that are accessible to our knowledge.”^[73] That is, a person *may* perceive God thanks to specific effects or revelations of God. In Romans 1:18-20, as mentioned above, the emphasis is on the idea of the knowledge of God, in particular the knowledge of His existence, which Man may receive “via the consideration of creatures” (v. 20). Similarly, Psalm 19 has the God-created heavens proclaiming His glory. To Aquinas the way of the knowledge of God is an *a posteriori* one, as Man cannot intuit God,^[74] which *means* that the existence of the invisible God is self-evident *only interiorly to itself* and not to Man.^[75] Man may discover God’s existence *via* His visible manifestations and acts, i.e., cosmologically or by the enlightening of cosmological argument. It seems that Thomas Aquinas’s position is more squarely founded on Sacred Scripture than that of Anselm of Canterbury. Moreover, Aquinas proceeded by way of cause-and-effect argument, which rests on not only firmer biblical but logical grounds.

An abundance of other criticism was added to Aquinas’s objections—that of the monk Gaunilo, of Pierre Gassendi, of Immanuel Kant and others. Their criticism was intrinsically flawed, however, as they frequently were dissertating on God as they might on any other matter or subject, such as a triangle (Kant),^[76] a hundred talers (Kant),^[77] a perfect island (Gaulino),^[78] Pegasus (Gassendi),^[79] etc.. That is to say, they relegated God to the level of all other concepts and subjects which might as easily *not* exist as exist. Consequently, to secular rationalists and philosophers the concept and reality of God appear not only *not* unique (*sui generis*), but by no means necessary or even plausible.

4. Applying the Ontological Argument in our day

While Anselm’s Ontological Argument admits of certain failings from both a theological and a philosophical standpoint, it maintains its claim to a certain value right up to our day. Within its compass we encounter the paramount idea of the *perfect and necessary Being*, Who corresponds to the God of the Bible. Yet, in light of the fact that the Argument evokes no small amount of protestation, some, formerly zealous for the Argument, have seen fit to reassess its formulation and fine-tune it, with an eye towards the likely logical objections of its opponents.^[80] Among those who have undertaken the task are thinkers like Rene Descartes, Gottfried Leibniz, Benedict Spinoza, Charles Hartshorne, Norman Malcolm *et alia*. The latter two enjoyed notable achievement in devising new formulations of the Ontological Argument,^[81] formulations that are valuable even today in conversation with intellectuals or Anselm’s “fools.” It must be borne in mind, however, that in *any* case the Ontologi-

^[73] Ibid.

^[74] Ibid.

^[75] Ibid.

^[76] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 500-507.

^[77] Ibid.

^[78] Saint Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury and Sidney Norton Deane, *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix, In Behalf of the Fool, by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo* (Bellingham: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), p. 150.

^[79] Geisler, “Ontological Argument” in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, p. 556.

^[80] Lepin, “The Ontological Argument for the Existence of God: An Experiment in Historico-philosophical Reconstruction,” <http://minds.by/academy/trudy/3/tr3_4.html>, June 2013.

^[81] Graham Oppy, “Ontological Arguments” in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (first published Thu Feb 8, 1996; substantive revision Fri Jul 15, 2011)*, <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-arguments/>>, May 2014.

cal Argument, together with *all* the traditional logical arguments for God's existence, is vulnerable to certain objections. Each of the traditional arguments possesses its strengths *and* its weaknesses.

When conversing with unbelievers, it is vital to understand that no sort of "proof," including the ontological, can engender saving faith in them. Furthermore, however hopefully we may resort to the Ontological Argument, we *cannot* forget it is *only* an "argument" and nothing more. Every extra-biblical logical proof is vulnerable to refutation. In the matter of preaching, the role of the Holy Spirit must always be attended to—that it is He Who will work in the hearers by means of God's Word. If the Ontological Argument *points* to God's existence, it is the Holy Spirit, through Scripture, Who *reveals* His existence to the human heart. The realization of such revelation depends on more than mere assent to the notion of God's existence; it involves *faith* in Him and worshipful surrender. The Ontological Argument, therefore, may play an important part in the preaching of the Gospel—but it is one that ought neither be underestimated nor overestimated.

Conclusion

It is worthwhile to study the Ontological Argument for the existence of God, as Anselm of Canterbury framed it, even in our day, particularly as the whirl of contention and debate around it has ceased in neither theological nor philosophical circles. Despite the fact that some scholars reject the Argument or consider it useless (for instance, Kant), others discern timeless worth in it (for instance, Descartes and Grudem).

With his Proof Anselm made a signal contribution to the development of medieval theology. Yet he was not the only one ever to try his hand at framing such an argument and the tradition remains open to all comers even now.

It would be undiscerning to pronounce the study of Anselm's Argument "concluded" in our day.^[82] All the same, this much may be asserted with confidence: Anselm's Argument is a *good* argument for the existence of God; at the same time, it is neither ideal nor irrefutable. It may be *used* in Theology and Philosophy today, but within parameters strictly delineated for it by logic and, above all, by the Holy Scriptures.

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^[82] On this point Plantinga asserts that he does not believe "any philosopher has ever given a cogent and conclusive refutation of the ontological argument in its various forms" (*God, Freedom, and Evil* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 2002], p. 86).

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