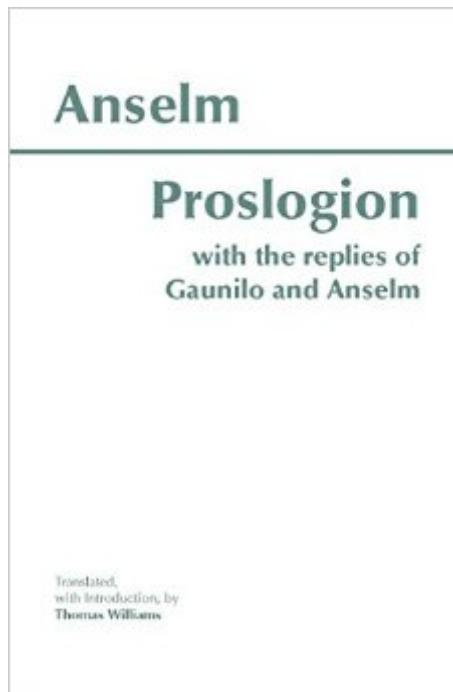


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# Proslogion, With The Replies Of Gaunilo And Anselm



## Synopsis

Thomas Williams' edition offers an Introduction well suited for use in an introductory philosophy course, as well as his own preeminent translation of the text.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) was a medieval philosopher, theologian, prior of Bec, and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109. This volume includes the Proslogion, Gaunilo's reply to the ontological argument, and Anselm's reply to Gaunilo's reply. Anselm is known by the motto "faith seeking understanding." The Proslogion contains Anselm's famous ontological argument. The ontological argument is as follows. Premise I: God is by definition that than which no greater can exist meaning that God is the most perfect object, the most perfect being that can be thought about. Secondly, it is understood that it is greater to exist in reality and the mind than to exist only in the mind. If you tell the fool who does not believe in God to think about the concept of that than which no greater can exist, that concept exists in his mind. Even the fool cannot doubt that the concept exists in his mind since he had heard it and understood it and "whatever is understood is in the mind" (pg 150). Premise II: Anselm states that that which exists in both the mind and in reality is greater than that which exists only in thought. God by definition is that than which no greater can exist and if it does not exist in reality it contradicts itself. Conclusion: God exists. The rest of the Proslogion applies this "proof" to other attributes of God. Gaunilo's primary objection to Anselm's ontological argument takes the form of an island. Premise I: Imagine the perfect island, the island

that no greater than be thought. Premise II: The Island of that than which no greater can be thought plus existence is greater than the island in the mind. Conclusion: Thus, the perfect island of that which no greater can be thought exists in reality. But we know that that island surely cannot exist in reality.

I got around to reading this after I finished Descartes Meditation on First Philosophy. I started it because it seems that a very similar proof for God was used (and about 500 years earlier) so I wanted to see the original in its context. The proof presented here, later called the ontological argument, basically says that one can imagine a being which none greater can exist, for this being to be imagined then he must exist because something which does exist is greater than something which doesn't, this being is God and hence God does exist. At least that was my understanding of it. I don't really find much weight in the argument but it was pretty influential, obviously with Descartes and others using it again later. To my surprise though, the proof takes up a single one paragraph long chapter in this short work and really isn't very prominent. The majority of the work is Anselm mostly praising God and it reads in a semi devotional fashion. Anselm goes on about God's mercy with how he is good both to the just and the wicked, this is evident by how the wicked can also prosper the same as the just (I guess this changes when the wicked are cast into hell??) This is followed up by a reply of a certain individual named Gaunilo, who speaks on the behalf of the fool. He tells a story in an almost mocking tone about imagine a perfect island which is greater than any other, and regardless if anyone has ever stepped foot on the island or seen it, it must exist because if it didn't then it wouldn't be greater than any island which do in fact exist. The last part of the short book is Anselm's reply to this, but it was mostly lost on me, I'd have to read it again but his word plays got a little hard to follow and by then I was tired of the whole ontological argument.

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