

ANSELM AND THE 14TH CENTURY CRITICISM. METAMORPHOSIS OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT IN THE LATE SCHOLASTIC TRADITION*

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ABSTRACT. *Anselm and the 14th Century Criticism. Metamorphosis of the Ontological Argument in the Late Scholastic Tradition.* The harsh debates that occurred in the late 13th century and early 14th century between Augustinians, Thomists and Scotists forced them to verify the orthodoxy of their own theses by comparing them to patristic sources. Anselm of Canterbury is one of the most reliable sources, according to some texts of the 14th century. The new theory of knowledge provides the opportunity of an elaborated analysis of the ontological argument by means of the new logical tools. But regardless of how the ontological argument will be refurbished, one thing persists: the ontological argument is used as a tool in proving the existence of God and getting an undoubted knowledge about this fact.

Keywords: *Anselm of Canterbury, Gregory of Rimini, Thomas Bradwardine, ontological argument, 14th century criticism, late scholasticism.*

Anselm's reception and influence over the Late Middle Ages, has not yet been systematically analyzed, nor may we state that this area has been explored, except indirectly, accidentally and fractionally (to a certain extent).¹

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¹ In a brief exposition of the transformation of the English scholasticism after 1330, William J. Courtenay called to mind the new interest related in the ontological argument among the commentators on the *Sentences (Schools and scholars*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1987, p. 343–346). The same issue of the ontological argument is addressed by Zénon Kaluza in his

It is true that medieval thinkers, particularly those who held a position in the European universities of the 14th century, have only left a few commentaries on the Anselmian opus.² Nevertheless, the role played by the Anselmian works in fashioning, affirming and sustaining someone's own philosophical and theological views on the world is neither negligible nor insignificant. On the contrary, it is quite defining that one of the main traits of the 14th century Commentary on the *Sentences* is the frequent quoting from the pre 1200 theologians, as compared to quoting from philosophers. In the Middle Ages, commentaries on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* were a compulsory task for achieving the title of doctor in theology, which empowered them when it came to circulating ideas. Therefore, the fact that Anselm, following Augustine, is the second most quoted authority of the Commentary of the *Sentences*, places him on a privileged position of authority. Therefore, understanding the theoretical developments of thought that emerge in the 14th century, such as the so-called *terminism*, the concept of the sign, the new theories of signification, establishing the role that the theories of signification play in the new development of logic and the theory of language, the new theories of knowledge, that is understanding the extended phenomenon of the 14th century that Damasius Trapp calls *logico-critical attitude* is to be considered as closely connected to the retrieval and new reading of the Anselmian writings.³

I have divided the present study into two sections. In the first one, I will be dealing with the topic of authority. I will be examining the way in which authorities are used in the scholastic exercises and will rely on a text of the second half of the 14th century, so as to reveal the architecture or composition of the authority, as imagined in this century, and the position of Anselm in this structure. In the second

study on *Deum non esse* issue ("Le problème du Deum non esse chez Étienne de Chaumont, Nicolas Aston et Thomas Bradwardin", in Zénon Kaluza, *Études doctrinales sur le XIV^e siècle*, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 2013, p. 37–51.). A comprehensive investigation on the ontological argument in the context of propositional analysis of the 14th century is included in Julius R. Weinberg, *Ockham, Descartes, and Hume*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1977, p. 3–21. A number of studies deal with the importance of the so-called *regula Anselmi*, a logico-theological tool which was used in the Trinitarian theology of the 14th century, in the controversy about the intra-Trinitarian personal distinction. Cf. John T. Slotemaker, "The Development of Anselm's Trinitarian Theology", in *Anselm of Canterbury and His Legacy*, ed. Giles Gasper, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Toronto, 2012, p. 203–219; Russell L. Friedman, *Intellectual Traditions at the Medieval University*, vol. 1, Brill, Boston, 2013.

² The English Carmelite Baconthorp has commentaries on the following Anselmian writings: *De incarnatione Verbi* and *Cur Deus homo?*, Cf. Bartholomaeus M. Xiberta, *De scriptoribus scholasticis saeculi XIV ex ordine Carmelitarum*, Bureau de la Revue, Louvain, 1931, p. 189.

³ Damasius Trapp, *Augustinian Theology of the 14th Century: Notes on Editions, Marginalia, Opinions and Book-lore*, Augustiniana 6, 1956, p. 149, 230; <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/semiotics-medieval/>.

section, I will be handling the issue itself, the metamorphosis of the ontological argument and will be referring to the way in which the scholastic exercise manages to make use of the authorities and the way in which the use of the sources in these exercises have affected the shape of the Anselmian argument and have corrupted the intention with which it has been formed.

1. The issue of *auctoritas* is a common ground of the Middle Ages. Augustine, who is an inexhaustible source of inspiration for medieval scholastics, also elaborates on this topic, for instance, *The Letters with Jerome*, 82, 1⁴. In this extract, the question of *auctoritas* is connected with the truth. Authority is understood as a carrier and warrantor of the truth and is limited to the canonical books of the Scripture. Anselm, when in the prologue to his *Monologion* mentions that he is going to provide a series of arguments that would edify faith without relying on the authority of the Scripture, to a certain extent broadens the meaning of *auctoritas*, in the sense that reason itself will end up circumscribed to *auctoritas*, as a warrantor of truth.⁵

From here onwards, the meaning of *auctoritas* will develop towards the signifying of the outcome of reason. For instance, when Bonaventure discusses the issue of authority in the prologue to his commentary on the Lombard's *Sentences*, he will describe it in close connection with the activity of reason.⁶ Whoever uses

⁴ Augustine, *Letter* 82.1.3 in ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland Teske, *The works of Saint Augustine*, Letters 1–99, New City Press, New York, 2001, p. 315–316: “On such terms we might amuse ourselves without fear of offending each other in the field of Scripture, but I might well wonder if the amusement was not at my expense. For I confess to your Charity that I have learned to yield this respect and honor only to the canonical books of Scripture: of these alone do I most firmly believe that the authors were completely free from error. And if in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth, I do not hesitate to suppose that either the manuscript is faulty, or the translator has not caught the meaning of what was said, or I myself have failed to understand it. As to all other writings, in reading them, however great the superiority of the authors to myself in sanctity and learning, I do not accept their teaching as true on the mere ground of the opinion being held by them.”

⁵ Anselm, *Monologion*, trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, The Arthur J. Banning Press, Minneapolis, 2000, p. 1: “For the writing of this meditation they prescribed – in accordance more with their own wishes than with the ease of the task or with my ability – the following format: that nothing at all in the meditation would be argued on Scriptural authority, but that in unembellished style and by unsophisticated arguments and with uncomplicated disputation rational necessity would tersely prove to be the case, whatever the conclusion resulting from the distinct inquiries would declare. [...] after frequently re-examining this treatise, I have not been able to find that I said in it anything inconsistent with the writings of the Catholic Fathers – especially with Blessed Augustine’s writings.”

⁶ Bonaventure, *In librum primum Sententiarum*, Prooemium, q.4, conclusio (ed. Quaracchi, vol. 1, p. 14sq.): “. quadruplex est modus faciendi librum. Aliquis enim scribit alienam materiam nihil addendo, vel mutando; et iste mere dicitur scriptor. Aliquis scribit aliena addendo, sed non de suo: et iste compiler dicitur. Aliquis scribit et aliena, et sua; sed aliena tanquam principalia, et sua tanquam annexa ad evidentiam; et iste dicitur commentator. Aliquis scribit et sua, et aliena; sed sua tanquam principalia, aliena tanquam annexa ad confirmationem: et talis debet dici auctor.”

their faculty of reason as they approach a written text is an *auctor*. Therefore, engaged with the results of reason recorded in written, the compiler, the commentator, the author of a text are all *auctores* based on the use of reason while compiling, commenting or writing that text. The only one who engaged with a text is not invested with the function of an *auctor* is the scribe. With this in mind, the significance of the term '*auctoritas*' is enlarged to such an extent that any text, whether or not its thesis supports or opposes the teaching of the Scriptures, is invested with a heightened authority; the authority of reason contests the authority of the Scripture, the truth obtained through exercising reason tends to equal the revealed truth. For this reason, redefining the term '*auctoritas*' is needed, so that the authoritative eminence of the Scripture regarding knowledge and reasoning would be restored.

Starting with Thomas Aquinas, we witness a ranking of authorities based on the principle of the pre-eminence authority of Scripture. In *Summa*, q.1, art.8 this hierarchy that includes Scripture, Church fathers, philosophers, is described.⁷

The 14th century inherits this hierarchical structure of authority and enriches it. But the ranking criterion is no longer a positive one, that of the truth, but a negative one, that of the lack of error. We can find this model in Peter of Alliaco's *Tractatus contra Johannem de Montesono*.⁸ At the bottom of the pyramid

⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Prima pars,

<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/1001.htm#article8, q.1, a.8, ad.2>: "This doctrine is especially based upon arguments from authority, inasmuch as its principles are obtained by revelation: thus we ought to believe on the authority of those to whom the revelation has been made. Nor does this take away from the dignity of this doctrine, for although the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, yet the argument from authority based on divine revelation is the strongest. But sacred doctrine makes use even of human reason, not, indeed, to prove faith (for thereby the merit of faith would come to an end), but to make clear other things that are put forward in this doctrine. Since therefore grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should minister to faith as the natural bent of the will ministers to charity. Hence the Apostle says: *Bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ* (2 Corinthians 10:5). Hence sacred doctrine makes use also of the authority of philosophers in those questions in which they were able to know the truth by natural reason, as Paul quotes a saying of Aratus: *As some also of your own poets said: For we are also His offspring* (Acts 17:28). Nevertheless, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities as extrinsic and probable arguments; but properly uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures as an incontrovertible proof, and the authority of the doctors of the Church as one that may properly be used, yet merely as probable. For our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to other doctors."

⁸ Peter of Alliaco, *Tractatus contra Johannem de Montesono* in Charles Du Plessis d'Argentré, c. II *Collectio iudiciorum*, Paris, 1728, 121b: "Sextum exemplum potest poni de quibusdam Doctoribus, qui non sunt Sancti canonizati, sicut *venerabilis Anselmus Cantuariensis Archiepiscopus*, *venerabilis Hugo de Sancto Victore*, et quidam alii, quorum dicta vel scripta in aliquibus reperiuntur erronea, et

we find the useful and probable doctrines that contain in fact errors and false opinions. They are followed by doctrines of faith purified from error and heresy, but containing a different kind of false opinions. Finally, we have the doctrines that are entirely free from error and falsehood, i.e. true. These three levels are the result of the conjunction of the well-known *Decretum Gelasium* and the Thomist doctrine of the three *loci ex auctoritate*.⁹

Peter of Alliaco's text exposes the junctures of this hierarchy as follows: in the uppermost point he puts the Scripture; second place is occupied by greater reliable doctrines than others – yet these doctrines are not without erroneous content; therefore, a magister who does not enjoy a high reputation can criticize a magister that surpasses him in fame (in this way may be explained the legitimate criticism made by Paul to Peter, or Augustine's criticism to Saint Cyprian, or the case of minor doctors who criticize Thomas). On the same secondary level are placed the canonized doctors as well, whose status, however, is not an indicator of his doctrinal value. Here is placed Anselm, who is not a canonized doctor, but whose doctrine is true, even if not entirely free from error, and he is compared to Saint Cyprian, canonized saint who fell however in error. Anselm's authentic doctrine should not be criticized in schools, but only glossed and explained.¹⁰ Lastly, there are the secular authorities: philosophers and their commentators. A simple enumeration of those authorities based on the criteria proposed by Peter of Alliaco can be represented in the following manner: the Scripture, *Decretum Gelasium*, Church fathers, Anselm, Hugo of Saint Victor, Peter Lombard, canonized commentators on the *Sentences*, minor doctors, philosophers and their commentators.¹¹

tamen eorum doctrina non minus videtur esse authentica, quam doctrina S. Thomae, cum ipsi communiter in actibus Scholasticis allegentur auctoritative, nec soleant negari, sed eorum dicta reverenter glossari et exponi. Quod tamen Scholastici nondum consueverunt facere de dictis S. Thomae. Et ideo praesumptuosum videtur eius doctrinam supra illos et alios Doctores sic extollere, quod non liceat credere aut asserere ipsum in fide errare, sicut alii erraverunt."

⁹ See above n. 7; For a broader analysis of Peter of Alliaco's text on the degrees of authority, see: Zénon Kaluza, "Auteur et plagiaire: quelques remarques", in *What is Philosophy*, ed. Jan A. Aertsen et al., W. De Gruyter, Berlin – New York, 1998, p. 312–314.

¹⁰ Peter of Alliaco, *Tractatus contra Johannem de Montesono* in Charles Du Plessis d'Argentré, c. II Collectio iudiciorum (Paris, 1728) 121b: "Sextum exemplum potest poni de quibusdam Doctoribus, qui non sunt Sancti canonizati, sicut venerabilis Anselmus Cantuariensis Archiepiscopus, venerabilis Hugo de Sancto Victore, et quidam alii, quorum dicta vel scripta in aliquibus reperiuntur erronea, et tamen eorum doctrina non minus videtur esse authentica, quam doctrina S. Thomae, cum ipsi communiter in actibus Scholasticis allegentur auctoritative, nec soleant negari, sed eorum dicta reverenter glossari et exponi. Quod tamen Scholastici nondum consueverunt facere de dictis S. Thomae. Et ideo praesumptuosum videtur eius doctrinam supra illos et alios Doctores sic extollere, quod non liceat credere aut asserere ipsum in fide errare, sicut alii erraverunt."

¹¹ Cf. Peter of Alliaco, *Tractatus contra Johannem de Montesono* in Charles Du Plessis d'Argentré, c. II Collectio iudiciorum, Paris, 1724, p. 115–122.

2. The ontological argument occurs for the first time in association with Anselm's name and with the note in *Proslogion* in *Summa Halensis*, Q. 1.¹² This *quaestio* discusses the necessity of divine essence and is divided in two chapters. The first one is ratiocinating that the divine essence exists with necessity, and the second one defends the idea that it is impossible to think that God does not exist. The fact that the divine essence exists from necessity is argued by relying on the three authorities: Anselm, Richard of Saint Victor and John of Damascus. There are displayed five reasons that substantiate the existence of God derived from five different concepts, that of being, causality, truth, good, and preeminence.

In *De trinitate*, book I, c.6, Richard notices that any being exists or can exist only in time or from eternity and have its existence from itself or from another. From the conjunction of the two modes of existence, Richard concludes that there are three ways of existence that enclose every being: 1) from eternity and from itself; 2) from eternity, but not from itself; 3) neither from eternity, nor from itself. A fourth way of existence, from eternity, but not from itself, is impossible. This is the first way of objectively reasoning the necessary existence of God.¹³

According to John of Damascus, *De fide Orthodoxa*, book I, c.3, whatever exists has or has not a cause, which is equivalent to to be or not to be created. All that is created is changeable, i.e. undergoes a transition from non-being to being. This conversion is possible only if there is an eternal and immutable agent who produce it. Therefore, the causal process call for the necessary existence of a first cause.¹⁴

The third and fourth ways of proving the necessary existence of God are excerpted from Anselm's *De veritate* and *Proslogion*. The first of these two ways refers to the necessity of the existence of the eternal truth, which has neither a beginning nor an end, and from which any affirmative proposition receives its truth or false value. The second way makes use of the ontological argument: the supreme good or „that than which no greater/good can be conceived” exists not only in the mind when it is conceived, but in reality, too; because to exist in reality is a greater good than to exist only in the mind.

The fifth way, from eminence, regards the matter of the degrees of being drawn from Anselm's *Monologion* and Richard's *De trinitate*. The gradualness of perfection perceivable in the great chain of being compels us to assume the existence of a super-eminent nature, otherwise the endless degrees of being would involve an absurd infinite regress. This nature is no other than God.

¹² Alexander of Hales, *Summa Theologica*, Quaracchi, Collegii St. Bonaventurae, Florence, 1930, vol. I, Inq.1, Tract.1, q.1. It is believed that *Summa Halensis* is a collective work of many early Franciscans. It is named after Alexander of Hales because he oversaw its co-authorship.

¹³ Richard of S. Victore, *De trinitate*, lib. I, c.6 (PL 196, 893).

¹⁴ John of Damascus, *De fide Orthodoxa*, ed. E.M. Buytaert, Versions of Burgundio and Cerbanus. St. Bonaventure, Franciscan Institute, New-York, 1955, lib. I, c.3, 2.

In the second chapter, the author of *Summa* asks two questions: 1) whether it is necessarily known that it cannot be thought that the divine essence does not exist; 2) whether it is specific to the divine essence that it cannot be thought as not existing. The two questions consider two possible methods of knowledge: there is a major difference between what the summist calls knowledge of the knower and knowledge pertaining to the object of knowledge. In the first chapter, the summist formulates another distinction: the knowledge of the knower is distinguished in actual cognition and habitual cognition. Through habitual cognition, that is an innate ability or a *habitus* through which the knowledge of God is impressed upon us, man cannot ignore the divine reality. Again, the actual cognition consists in a double motion: in accordance with the part of 'higher reason' and the innate *habitus* we can contemplate the divine being, and according to the part of 'lower reason' we contemplate the creation. If through the second motion, because of our corrupted mind by sin, we cannot know that God exists, notwithstanding, by means of the first motion – which had to provide us with the knowledge of what is (quid) God, and to know what is God in himself is impossible for all human beings – we have at least the knowledge of his existence.

In the second article, where the exclusive authority used is Anselm, the summist argues that, despite the fact that the human being knows out of necessity that God exists, someone can assert that God does not exist. But such an affirmation is possible only in terms of knowledge of the knower, and never in terms of knowledge pertaining to the known object. The denial of God's existence is admitted solely as a figment, as an evident false and fabricated idea.

Two things are of note in this brief analysis. Firstly, it should be noted that the argument stated by Anselm in his *Proslogion* is explicitly and deliberately placed here into a background of provability of God's necessary existence, inappropriate context to the Anselm's argument and aim¹⁵. Secondly, it is significant to see that the summist correlates the epistemology developed in the second chapter with the ontology from the first chapter, and this correlation is thought to be the warrant of acquiring an indubitable knowledge of God's existence.

The 14th century presents an inverted image of the Franciscan paradigm from *Summa Halensis*, but it still keeps from there the argument purpose, scilicet its employment in proving the necessary existence of God. Concerning the demonstrable character of God's existence, the 14th century commentators of the

¹⁵ Lydia Schumacher, *The Halensian 'Five Ways' to Prove God's Existence: A Neglected Landmark in the History of Natural Theology*, conference paper, 2015; Lydia Schumacher, *The lost Legacy of Anselm's Argument: Re-thinking the purpose of proofs for the existence of God*, *Modern Theology* 27:1 January, 2011.

Sentences take as the starting point of debates the epistemology. They approach this issue by asking questions like *whether we can know God naturally*;¹⁶ or *whether the concept by which we know God is a common notion*;¹⁷ or *whether the sentence 'God is' is known per se*;¹⁸ or *whether the sentence 'God is' can be known by the traveler (viator) through demonstration*¹⁹. Hence, the ontological argument occurs, after 1330, in a twofold context: the particular one, that of logical theory and propositional analysis, and the universal one, that of the exploitation of epistemology in clarifying the scientific nature of Theology.²⁰

Gregory of Rimini is an Augustinian, one of the greatest scholastic theologians of 14th century, who lectured on the *Sentences* in Paris during 1343-1344. In his *Lectura* on the *Senteneces*, distinctions 42-44, q.3, Rimini debates on the ontological argument against Monachus Niger, an oxonian commentator of the *Sentences* about 1336.²¹ As Monachus states, anyone who understands the proposition 'a greater than God cannot exist' can understand the first part of the sentence, which is the logical subject: 'a greater than God'. Consequently, the logical subject 'a greater than God' may be conceived, despite the fact that nothing greater than God can be conceived. Hence it follows the proposition 'a greater can be thought than that than which no greater can be thought'. The same result is obtained when the predication of existence is added. The derived proposition is a complex and self-contradictory one: 'a greater can exist than that than which no

¹⁶ Cf. Gregory of Rimini, *Lectura super primum et secundum Sententiarum: Super primum*, tom. I, ed. A. Trapp et al., Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York, 1981, dist. 1, q.4, p. 412-425; Peter of Attarabia, *In primum Sententiarum scriptum*, ed. P. S. Azcona, Madrid, 1974, pars secunda, q.3-4, p. 201sqq.

¹⁷ Cf. Wodeham, *Lectura Secunda in Librum Primum Sententiarum*, vol. 3, ed. Rega Wood and Gedeon Gál, St. Bonaventure, New York, 1990, p. 34-35; Gerard of Siena, *In primum Sententiarum*, dist. 3, q.1.

¹⁸ Cf. Duns Scotus, *Commentaria oxoniensia ad IV libros magistri Sententiarum*, ed. M.F. Garcia. Imprint Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi) prope Florentiam: ex typographia Collegii s. Bonaventurae, 1912-1914, Ordinatio I, dist. 2, q.1 et 2, sectio I.; Gregory of Rimini, 2011, dist. 2, q.1, additio 3, p. 275. sqq.; James of Eltville, *Commentarius in Sententias Petri Lombardi*, lib. I, q. 6, dist. 2 et 3. For the stage of Romanian edition of James of Eltville's commentary under the aegis of Monica Brinzei's University of Cluj-Napoca research program see <http://www.jacobusdealtavilla.ro/>.

¹⁹ Altavilla, *Commentarius in Sententias Petri Lombardi*, lib. I, q. 6, dist. 2 et 3.

²⁰ Cf. William J. Courtenay, *Schools and scholars*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1987, p. 343-346; Paul Vignaux, "La preuve ontologique chez Jean de Ripa (I Sent. Dist. II, qu.I)", in *Die Wirkungsgeschichte Anselms von Canterbury, Akten der ersten Internationalen Anselm-Tagung*, Bad Wimpfen – 13. September bis 16. September 1970, Frankfurt am Main, 1975 (Analecta Anselmiana, t. 4/2), p. 173-194.

²¹ Gregory of Rimini, *Lectura super primum et secundum Sententiarum: Super primum*, tom. III, ed. A. Trapp et al., Walter de Gruyter, Berlin and New York, 1984, Lib. I, dist. 42-44, q. 3, a. 3, p. 432-438.

greater can exist'. In order that the synthetic character of this proposition be seen it can be re-written as a disjunctive proposition: 'God exists or a greater than God exists'. Recalling the initial argument it can be observed that the Anselmian argument denies exactly the possibility that something greater than God can exist. Thence, the second part of the disjunctive proposition is false, and the first one is true.

Rimini's criticism is grounded on the scholastic referential theory. Rimini aims not only at avoiding a common error of reason, which Kant, much later, will lay down in sharp words, error insinuated into the Monachus Niger's argument; but aims even at rethinking the ontological argument itself; thus an openly criticism of Anselm. The ratiocination is progressive. At a first stage, the Anselmian argument is rejected in its entirety, Rimini reproaching the claim of provability of the Anselmian argument that occurs in *Proslogion's* prologue. If the Anselmian *modus operandi* is accepted as cogent and well founded, then, following the same line of reasoning, the proof of the existence of any universal may be submitted.²² Through the second stage, Rimini is preparing the ground for rejecting the argument made by Monachus Niger. Rimini's proposal is to modify the taxis of the Anselmian argument. For the argument to fit Anselm's purpose, the word '*maius*' must be placed in a sequential position of the expression '*potest cogitari*'. The meaning of the word '*maius*' is different depending on the position it holds in the argument. The ontological argument, as composed by Anselm – *quo maius cogitari non potest* –, misses the Anselm's mind itself. The original seat of the word '*maius*' generates the implication of a comparison between beings, things pertaining to the same onto-logical order. But the essence of the ontological argument is not consisting in the impossibility of conceiving or understanding things imagined against reality, such as a fly greater than an elephant, which can be conceived regardless of the existence or non-existence of such a thing. The intent of the argument is to facilitate a comparison between possible and real so as to indicate that that which is possible is better or greater if the real existence is added to it. This type of comparison is realizable only by postposition of '*maius*' in regard to '*potest cogitari*'.²³

²² Gregory of Rimini, 1984, Lib. I, dist. 42–44, q. 3, a. 3, p. 432: "Primum patet, quoniam, si ille esset bonum modus arguendi, similiter posset probari quod est aliqua albedo qua maius non potest aliquid cogitari. Patet arguendo in forma sua sic: Albedo qua non potest aliquid maius cogitari est in intellectu, et non solo intellectu; ergo est in re. Consequentia patet ut sua. Et prima pars antecedentis probatur, quia audiens hoc, quod dico 'albedo qua non potest aliquid maius cogitari', intelligit quod audit, et quod intelligit, in intellectu eius est etc. Secunda etiam pars similiter suae probatur, quia, si est in solo intellectu, potest cogitari esse in re – quod maius est –, et sic albedine qua maius cogitari non potest aliquid maius cogitari potest."

²³ Gregory of Rimini, 1984, Lib. I, dist. 42–44, q. 3, a. 3, p. 432–433: "Unus secundum quod ly '*maius*' potest intelligi praecedere totum illud '*potest cogitari*'; alius quod potest sequi. Et haec bene

The third stage of Rimini's criticism brings to the fore, as previously mentioned, the referential theory (*suppositio*). Rimini's proposal regarding the displacing of '*maius*' after verbal construction '*potest cogitari*' makes sense and has strength only in synchrony with this theory. It argues that a term or a sign stands in a propositional context for the thing that is made known through it; the substantive terms have the capacity to stand for something. Thus, when a substantive term is used in a complex structure, i.e. a proposition, the term not only signifies, but also refers to (for example, the term '*stone*' can refer to all its significates, actual or possible stone).²⁴ The term that refers to a possible significate is called by Rimini a term that signifies in a material manner (*supponit materialiter*), and that which refers to an actual significate is called a term that signifies in a significative and personal manner (*supponit significative et personaliter*).²⁵ What Rimini understands by term that signifies in a material manner is a meaningful sound (*vox*), a saying. Reconsidered in this framework, the ontological argument is understood as follows: the utterance (*vox*) '*quo maius cogitari non potest*' exists in the intellect, but not only in the intellect; therefore, exists in reality (*est in re*). Understood as such, the argument is logically valid, because the task of utterance is the reification of the mental language. On the other hand, if the subject of the first assumption is understood as referring in a significative and personal manner the argument is formal nonvalid and redundant. To signify something *segnificative et personaliter* is equal with the act of pointing out (*accusatio*) towards a being already existing in reality. The Anselmian error is dual: firstly, no being (*ex: stone*) can exist in the intellect; secondly, trying to prove the existence of a thing that can be indicated directly is redundant. However, there is a class of terms escaping this functionality. Terms such as the universal negative *nihil*, or the particular negative *non aliquid*

different, sicut patet in exemplo: Supposito quod impossibile sit aliquam formicam esse maiorem elephante, haec est vera 'nulla formica maior elephante potest cogitari', patet, quia sua contradictoria est falsa, scilicet haec 'aliqua formica maior elephante potest cogitari', nullam enim singularem habet veram, sed quaelibet est falsa propter falsam implicationem a parte subiecti, sive demonstretur formica existens sive non existens, et tamen, si ly 'maior' postponatur sic 'nulla formica potest cogitari maior elephante', ipsa est falsa, nihil enim prohibet aliquam, immo certe quamlibet formicam quemquam cogitare esse maiorem elephante. [...] Tunc ad probationem Anselmi, cum dicitur 'aliquid quo maius non potest cogitari est in intellectu, et non solum in intellectu; ergo est in re', patet, quia, si debeat esse ad propositum, oportet quod ly 'maius' intelligitur sequi ly 'potest cogitari', quia in illo sensu negatur antecedens primum, et tunc distingo antecedens huius consequentiae Anselmi..."

²⁴ The referential theory broadly and briefly considered here (terms signify things) arouses fervent debates between commentators of the *Sentences* (William of Ockham, Adam of Wodeham, Peter of Alliaco), but not only between them (see, for example, Peter of Spain), debates which result in very different and nuanced theses which have their place in a separate study.

²⁵ Gregory of Rimini, 1984, Lib. I, dist. 42–44, q. 3, a. 3, p. 433–434.

subsume this class. Anselm himself established this distinction and circumscribed the term *nihil* in the category of terms that signify things and being in a destructive way (cf. Anselm, *De casu Diaboli*, c.11). The term 'a greater than God', from Monachus Niger's argument, is a logically equivalent of the subject from the Anselmian argument 'that than which no greater can be conceived', and its function in the argument is to delineate a class of non-being, that is to signify the *omne quod est* in a destructive manner.

Returning to Monachus Niger's proof, as we have already seen, Rimini disapproves the illicit transition from a predication, in antecedent, with a subject that signifies in material manner (*vox*), towards a consequent with a subject that signifies in a significative and personal way (*aliquid*). Moreover, Rimini finds that the ontological argument, as it was thought by Anselm and as it was expounded by Monachus Niger – a greater than God –, does not signify anything, but it serves to delineate and to universalize a negative situation established by the predicate of assertion in the first assumption – 'a greater than God cannot exist'. Thusly, the logical subject is understood by Rimini as an equipollent of the logical predicate, thereby obtaining a tautology: what cannot exist cannot exist.

Bradwardine, another Augustinian theologian from the 14th century, approaches the issue from a different perspective. In his case, epistemology and ontology conjoin and serve each other. The existence of God can be proven only by a dialectical blend of the principles of the two fields. Chapter I of the *De causa Dei* gives us the premises of Bradwardine's project. The first one reproduces the definition of God stated in Gaunilo's criticism to Anselm: God is absolutely good and perfect, so nothing better or more perfect can exist. This premise is supported by appealing to authorities: Anselm, Trismegistus, Aristotle, Boethius, Richard of Saint Victor.²⁶ The second one says that there is no infinite causal process among beings, but that in every genus there must be a first cause.²⁷

The reasoning evolves as an interaction between possible and impossible based on the Aristotelian definition of possible.²⁸ The consequence is the shift from the logical possibility to the real necessity. From the way in which God is understood

²⁶ Thomas Bradwardine, *De causa Dei contra Pelagium et de virtute causarum*, ed. Anna Lukács, V & R unipress in Göttingen, 2013, Lib. I, cap. 1, p. 63–64.

²⁷ Thomas Bradwardine, 2013, Lib. I, cap. 1, p. 64.

²⁸ Aristotel, *De interpretatione*, 12, 21 b; Thomas Bradwardine, 2013, Lib. I, cap. 1, p. 64–67: "Summatur quoque 'possibile' ad communem modum loquendi, vel si oporteat maxime absolute, pro illo videlicet, quod per se et formaliter simpliciter contradictionem seu repugnantiam non includit: Ex quo scilicet posito et admissio pro possibili absolute secundum speciem obligationum, quae positio nominatur, nusquam in consequentia bona et formali simpliciter, sequitur impossibile absolute, quod scilicet per se et formaliter simpliciter contradictionem includit. Omnis namque repugnantia contradictionem importat et parit."

in the first premise, Bradwardine infers that the true proposition 'God can exist' becomes a true declarative proposition 'God exists', and the last one becomes a true necessary proposition 'God necessarily exists'.²⁹ In this way, God is understood as the first simple (*incomplexe*) ontological principle, and the proposition 'God exists' is accounted as the first true proposition and this truth precedes any other truth in the ontological order. By derivation, the proposition 'God does not exist' is the first false proposition.³⁰

As a conclusion I will return to Anselm's *Proslogion* and to the context in which the ontological argument emerged. In the prologue, Anselm calls on God, in a prayer in which he confesses his inability or powerlessness in knowing him, and he requests God to restore in him his image effaced by sin. Anselm does not try to obtain an incontestable knowledge of God's existence nor try to retrieve an innate knowledge of God's existence, but he wants to establish an ontological identity between God and the supreme good so that he can shed a new light on and reshape the things from the world starting from God. It is about restoring the world order in the light of faith, i.e. a redefinition and a reevaluation of things as God has designed them to be. In this regard, the ontological argument is the point where the world conversion takes place, the moment in which man reacquires the ability to think the world in the categories of faith. So, what the 14th century inherits and develops is, in fact, a Franciscan construct, essentially different from the Anselmian one.

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²⁹ Problems on the resumption of the ontological argument (when and where it occurs for the first time in the 14th century) are discussed in Zénon Kaluza, "Le problème du Deum non esse chez Étienne de Chaumont, Nicolas Aston et Thomas Bradwardin", in *Études doctrinales sur le XIV^e siècle*, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 2013, p. 37–51.

³⁰ Thomæ Bradwardini Archiepiscopi olim Cantuariensis, *De causa Dei, contra Pelagium, et De virtute causarum*, ad suos Mertonenses, libri tres: iussu reverendiss. Georgii Abbot Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi; opera et studio Dr. Henrici Savillii, Colegij Mertonensis in Academia Oxoniensi custodis, ex scriptis codicibus nunc primum editi, 1618, Lib. I, cap. 1; <http://showcases.exist-db.org/exist/apps/eebo/works/A16626.xml?root=1.2.3.1.6&odd=teisimple.odd>.

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