

Making sense of finitude

Inclusive negation and individual experience in Anselm of Canterbury

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Abstract: The following theses view Anselm's philosophy as an inclusive self-overcoming of the act of intellectual thought. In overcoming itself by its own means the intellect establishes its positive meaning and reaches a super-intellectual mode of experience. But this does not mean that intellectual endeavors are ultimately rejected. On the contrary, the positive self-overcoming of intellect can only be achieved by a firm and extensive evaluation of the very intellect that overcomes itself in the process. Thus, according to Anselm, said act is not a mere dogmatic demand, but follows a concise and comprehensible dialectical logic. Following central concepts of dialectical Idealism, we call this logic *inclusive negation*. It is grasped and depicted by our interpretation of crucial parts of the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*, which are read and reconstructed as intertwined and dependent on each other. The result of our interpretation will win over Anselm's philosophy as an attempt at exhaustively making sense of human finitude in relation to God. It is not a mere rationalistic or scholastic reconstruction of what is frequently called "ontological arguments". Such arguments play their important role but must be embedded in a wider context. In such a wider context, we will become acquainted with Anselm as an existentialist philosopher who is a fruitful dialogue partner in discussing the meaning of individuality and finitude facing the ability of human intellect to ask beyond itself.

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1. Preface: How we understand Anselm's project

Anselm of Canterbury belongs to a group of thinkers who start their venture from a seemingly scandalous claim. The existence and essence of God is supposed to be recognizable and conceptualizable through human thinking without any preceding dogmatic suppositions (cf. *Mon. Preface / Prosl. Preface*).¹ On top of that, this is not a matter of a particular talent, position, or character. If human thought finds the adequate environment and the right conditions, it will always be able to establish a rational concept of God. Yet, the term "rational concept" may not be what it seems at first glance. According to Anselm, it contains a specific dimension of super-rationality that entirely redefines the role of intellect and human thought.

The enlightening and inclusive potential of such an intellectual claim is a far-reaching issue and deserves many considerations, the most important being the possibility and logic of said act of thought. Anselm addresses this issue in his *Monologion* and its subsequent work, the *Proslogion*. He introduces a specific kind of experience that occurs to human thought as soon as it exposes itself to a concept of God. Anselm illustrates this experience through the language of logic and the central figures of Christian theology. In the end, both are synonymous in his philosophy anyway. But their

¹ All quotations of Anselm follow the translation of the *Monologion* (*Mon.*), the *Proslogion* (*Pros.*) and *Cur Deus Homo* (*CDH*) by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (2000).

synonymy rises not due to his personal piety or a certain zeitgeist of his lifetimes. Rather, he proposes that human thought directly belongs to divine revelation. Thought and intellect represent a particular mode of God's expression and manifestation. Thus, knowledge and experience become acts of revelation and divine creation in the course of Anselmian logic. Conversely, however, thought and intellect teach revelation to address and communicate itself in providing it with a concise language and structure. For, according to Anselm, we cannot simply claim that there is a knowledge of God in us by chance. Rather, the ability to think and express a certain logic is in itself an occurrence of His revelation and grace. If the act of thought were outside divine revelation and grace, we could even state that it is a sin to think. So, through involving human thought in revelation, Anselm emphasizes the intellect's holiness.

This idea does not first arise in his philosophy. He draws on a rich tradition that extends to Plato in philosophical and to the Gospel of John in theological terms, making Anselm a Johannine Platonist. Some, like Maria Xavier, also relate him to Ancient Greek Eleatism (2016: 477), many read him as an Augustinian (for a summary see e.g. Crouse, 1989 or Asiedu, 2012). In any case, the evangelist John emphasizes in his Gospel that eternal life consists in "recognizing (*ginoskosin*)" God and Jesus Christ, whom He sent (John 17:3). Hence, John places the central focus of eternal life on cognition and intellect. Now, Anselm enquires the essence and logic of such a concept of eternal life. He explores its logic and purpose. For, according to him, every human being strives, at least implicitly, for this act of cognition and therefore for the Absolute. Anselm's concern is to make this effort explicit and to clarify its logic rationally. In doing so, however, we will see that the whole concept of rationality undergoes a firm transformation.

The starting point for this endeavor is the question: what shall we make of the fact that the supposed Absolute (God) is not always already known to us? What shall we make of the situation, that we are not always already with God directly? Why is there a *creation* in the first place? For if there was not some kind of distance between creatures and the Absolute, we would never even enquire those issues. Their very occurrence as *questions* indicates that there is an essential disturbance in our relation to the Absolute.

Now, Anselm's crucial claim is that such a disturbance, negation, or deprivation intrinsically belongs to the Absolute itself. They are neither failure nor sin. Rather, it is God Himself who is to be inscribed with this very mode of deprivation. Otherwise, human thought would not be able to recognize or even address God. Anselm is all too aware of this and thus starts from a *negative experience*. His philosophy revolves around the initial experience of negation, deprivation, and the inability to know God. At the same time, he asks how such a separation between us and God can nevertheless be an act of God Himself. For if we cannot show how it is the Absolute itself that contains its own negative relation through human experience, all talk about it becomes at most subjective opinion, religious ideology, or rationalistic dogmas. Without the basic experience of what we will call the event of *inclusive negation of the intellect*, philosophers like Anselm remain either dogmatists, pietists, scholastics, or hidden atheists.

Our theses explore to what extent Anselm succeeds in his claim of *inclusive negation* and thereby in showing that the process of thought itself is inscribed in the Absolute in an initially *negative* mode. For this purpose, we will use the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* to reconstruct

Anselm's approach. In the course of this endeavor, he will emerge as a proponent of philosophical Idealism in a Platonic fashion. From this perspective, Anselm joins the ranks of Ancient and Modern Idealism alike.²

But he is not only an Idealist. By taking the step towards *inclusive negation* we will get to know him also as an *Existentialist* (cf. Sweeney, 2014). For the process of inclusive negation establishes a particular dimension of *individual experience* that can no longer be grasped solely as a rational act of thought. We call this dimension *meaning*. Such meaning is the issue of *faith*. Anselm shows that it is precisely through the radical inclusion of negation, withdrawal, inability, and otherness that human thought can be geared towards the experience of *meaning* through *faith*. For by inclusive negation the intellect performs and experiences *its own finiteness*. In doing so, the entire ontology of human thought changes and sheds light on a sphere that will never be even touched upon by a purely rationalistic concept of thought or intellect. It is the sphere of existential experience. From this point of view, Anselm can also be understood as a critic of a restrictive formal-logical rationalism. At the same time, however, his criticism is logically developed by the act of rational thought itself and is not argued from a merely ideological or dogmatic standpoint.

In other words, Anselm's philosophy can be read as an inclusive self-overcoming of the act of thought towards its own positive *meaning*. This is developed by the logic of inclusive negation. The act of thought thus becomes an event of meaningful experience. We call this very experience *existentialist*. It allows human thought to engage in its own *finitude* by establishing the dimension of its meaning through the act of inclusive negation. Thus, as finite and individual human beings, we are enabled to independently and autonomously *make sense* of our existence in facing the problem of the Absolute. Ultimately, it is the thinking human individual who engages in an intimate and meaningful relation to God. In doing so, faith and thought are united in an inseparable bond. Gavin Ortlund recently gave an extensive view of what he calls a harmony of faith and reason in Anselm's philosophy (2022: 63 ff.). The logic of this bond and its purpose for human beings is the general issue that shall now be clarified by discussing crucial parts of Anselm's *Monologion* and *Proslogion*.

2. Self and Selfhood: *Monologion*

Being an early work, the *Monologion* provides Anselm's first comprehensive consideration of the above-sketched logic of "divine being" (*Mon.* Preface). He enquires the possibility of a logically comprehensive individuation of God through human thought. Christophe Erismann has shown the extent to which this stems from the traditional Aristotelian discussion of the universality and individuality of being (2003: 58 ff., see also Goebel, 2009). However, the *Monologion's* crucial point in this approach is that whoever engages in divine affairs intellectually never merely relates to or talks about an external object. Rather, he is involved in those affairs by his very own subjectivity. The *Monologion* is concerned with showing that its own logic is an expression of the Absolute as a *self* rather than a thing or abstract entity. Ian Logan has recently highlighted this "turn to the subject" (2022: 102) within Anselmian thought.

² The term *Idealism* has various meanings in academic philosophy. We use it in the sense of Platonism as well as the transcendental and speculative Idealism of Fichte, Schelling, or Hegel.

Now, Anselm embraces this turn by the logical concept of the so-called *Per Se Ipsum* (*Through-Itself*), which is the main issue of his text from beginning to end. According to him, all being in its immeasurable diversity shares one general principle: *to be itself*. (*Mon.* 1 ff.) So, regardless of the particular entity, the attribute *to be itself* will always belong to it and essentially make up its existence. That's why the *Monologion* aims at the logic of such *selfhood*: "And there is no doubt that they exist through this one thing through which they have the fact that they exist through themselves" (*Mon.* 3). Moreover, Anselm adds that "things exist through this one thing more truly than through the many things which themselves are not able to exist without this one thing" (*ibid.*). Those two sentences express the entire logical tension of the *Monologion*. We shall now briefly examine this tension in order to understand its climactic resolution in chapter 32 of the text.

Anselm establishes *self-relation* as the genuine relation that characterizes every specific being in its specificity. Since each being stands in relation to itself, it finds itself grounded in a general principle of selfhood. Anselm repeatedly calls this the *Per Se Ipsum*. In short, the *Per Se Ipsum* is that of which everything has that it is itself. Vice versa, each and everything is itself, but in being *itself*, no being is the very *selfhood* that grounds it. For if any being were selfhood, there would no longer be any plurality in being. Every being, inasmuch as it is itself, would be that very being which fully is their selfhood. But, since being completely itself is only possible for pure *selfhood*, no other "thing" can be the general principle of everything that is itself.

Right from the start, we can see that Anselm enquires a *principium individuationis* through his concept of selfhood (cf. Erismann, 2003). Being such a principle of individuation, however, only applies to selfhood itself, which is no particular thing or object, but the Absolute that grants every other entity its being by granting it its individual selfness. The plurality of being is ensured by the fact that each is itself, but none is the selfhood in which every self is grounded. In this context, it is of great importance that Anselm ongoingly speaks of a *unum* (one) when addressing selfhood, not of a *thing*, as numerous English translations suggest. Selfhood is anything but a *thing*. It is a logical structure, a logical act even, which emerges as soon as the existence of something is aimed at –or in theological terms: as soon as something is addressed as a "creature (*creatura*)" (*Mon.* 1). God, in other words, is present in everything in its own particular way inasmuch as everything shares the universal attribute to be itself. The occurrence of selfhood manifests a dialectical tension between universality and individuality in every being. The *Monologion* aims at resolving this tension through the act of the very intellect that uncovers it in the first place.

Now, the problem is not only *how* the intellect can grasp this relation between each in *itself* and *the self* in each of them, but *why* it is the intellect that can accomplish this. Anselm has to show that human thought is capable of enduring and resolving the dialectic in every being. To achieve this, he first points out that:

all existing things other [than this one] exist through something other [than themselves]; and this one alone exists through itself. But whatever exists through something other [than itself] exists less than that which alone exists through itself and through which all other things exist. (*Mon.* 3)

The more a being is able to be by and through itself, the more it performs the very act of selfhood in which they are all grounded. This is the reason why the above quoted sentence speaks of an ability to

exist “more truly” (*verius*). For each being fulfills the ability to be itself in a genuine way. Where it fails to do so, it needs another being to guarantee its selfhood. Thus, everything is related to something else that fully brings about its selfhood. These relations build up until they reach selfhood itself. The structure of the *Per Se Ipsum* ultimately plays the role of their general principle inasmuch as they are able to engage in it. Beings (creatures) can therefore be themselves by themselves only in a limited way. Such a limitation or *finiteness*, however, also guarantees their particularity. Anselm thinks of an ontology of creation in which all creatures *are themselves* and therefore are already a complete expression and manifestation of the supreme principle. At the same time, however, every creature has a different ability to be itself *by itself*, which creates “grades” (*graduum*, *Mon.* 4) in them. They have gradually different capabilities to accomplish their own selfhood on their own. But only the *Per Se Ipsum* itself as their principle is fully itself and therefore of a completely different quality than any creature based on it (*Mon.* 6).

On these grounds, we can now grasp the climax of the dialectic of selfhood in chapter 32 of the *Monologion*. By constantly engaging in the sketched dialectical tension in every being, the “human mind (*mens humana*)” can simultaneously “understand itself and the Supreme Wisdom (*summa sapientia*)” (*Mon.* 32). It is crucial that in the case of human intellect it is *one and the same act* to understand itself and to understand the supreme. Anselm achieves this insight by interweaving *his own individual thought* in the inquiry of the Absolute. Human intellect can achieve this individuation in disputing “silently with itself, just as my mind is now doing” (*Mon.* 32). At this key moment of “just as my mind is now doing (*sicut nunc mens mea facit*)” Anselm involves himself in the process of the *Monologion* by his own individual act of thought and thus subsumes himself to its logic. He himself does not remain outside the established dialectic of selfhood and therefore becomes able to *address himself* by engaging in *selfhood* through his “mind (*mens*)”. Chapter 32 of the *Monologion* is one of many crucial occurrences of radical self-relation as the driving force in Anselm’s philosophy. Katherin Rogers (2013: 1) has highlighted the central role of this force throughout his works. Compared to other thinkers, Anselm expresses the individual integration of cognition in the Absolute with rare explicitness. And he has to do so if his project is to succeed.

The result of this intellectual step is that the Absolute does not have the character of an external entity or abstraction. It is not an ordinary object or item whose properties could merely be described or stated by the intellect. Rather, the act of the individual thinker establishes itself as an integral part of the Absolute. Thought does not take hold of the Absolute externally but is a genuine mode of its self-expression as selfhood. On top of that, this is not a private insight of the individual Anselm of Canterbury but lies in the capabilities of every thinking human being.

From this perspective, the overall project of the *Monologion* is to depict the logic of absolute individuation through the process of thought. In theological terms, this represents the doctrine of the incarnation of God and the concept of the Trinity by means of philosophical logic. Such doctrines therefore play a constant and central role in Anselm’s work, e.g. also in the *Proslogion* or in *Cur Deus homo*.

In short, Anselm’s inclusion of his own act via “as my mind is now doing” is a climax of the logic of selfhood established by the *Monologion*. In encountering himself during the logical reconstruction of selfhood, he carries out this very logic through his entire intellectual effort and

embeds his own thought in it. Vice versa, this integration shows that his intellectual effort only became possible through the principle of selfhood. For the intellect appears as yet another particular manifestation of it. But at the same time, intellect is the very manifestation that allows to intermediate the dialectical structure within selfhood. Thus, Anselm draws *himself* into the structure of the *Per Se Ipsum* and becomes its manifestation. The individual act of thought, fundamentally woven into the very logic established by it, can express its own being in the process and therefore endures and executes the tension between universality and individuality. Both the self-relation present in thought and its own gradual dependence on the *Per Se Ipsum* are connected. Human beings as a “mens humana” (*Mon.* 32, 36, 48) are essentially capable of being themselves by the mode of *intellect* and are therefore an expression of the very selfhood that is addressed by them in the act of thought.

However, this is not the whole story. For thought, in being the expression of the dialectic of selfhood, is at the same time constantly lacking selfhood. It is the constant process of manifesting, examining, and inquiring about the *Per Se Ipsum* by simultaneously experiencing its absence. For every being, also human thought, is a specific *instance* of selfhood. No being *is* selfhood. Now, *thought* experiences this lack of selfhood in a most radical manner because of its genuine act of self-involvement. No being is more itself than individual thought, but also no being is more lacking selfhood than individual thought. This initial absence is the reason why human intellect is able to raise the issue of selfhood in the first place, as Anselm does at the beginning of the *Monologion*.

We call this dialectical relation: *inclusive negation*. For it was only because thought had *not initially succeeded* in performing its own selfhood that selfhood was able to become an issue for it. No being, no matter what degree of selfhood it ever achieves, simply *is* the *Per Se Ipsum*. Anselm therefore repeatedly determines the *Per Se Ipsum* through *negations* and points to the fact that language fails in each attempt at its exhaustive expression (e.g. in *Mon.* 6). Only through this experience of a certain deprivation does the issue of selfhood arise and engage in its gradual logic of self-involvement by intellect. In this context, Anselm already states in the first chapter of the *Monologion*, that the intellect *sic secum tacitus dicat*, which means “to discuss with oneself in silence”. The term *secum* already expresses its embeddedness in the *Per Se Ipsum*, which enables Anselm to carry out his thoughts as an expression of a gradually established selfhood throughout the text. In other words, in the gradual progression of the *Monologion* human thought catches up with its own conditions. The initially negative experience of questionability, withdrawal and subjective confusion is therefore always already included in the logic of the *Per Se Ipsum*. Anselm is not only a negative Theologian, as Andrew Griffin rightly shows in his paper on the affirmative function of what he calls Anselm’s inclusive “*epeikena*” (2020: 98). Such a “beyond (*epeikena*)” revolutionizes the whole process of cognition by productively including incomprehensibility in it (*ibid.*: 126). Thought therefore engages in negativity not in a destructive, but in a creative way. Negation itself, through its inclusion in the logical process of the *Per Se Ipsum*, is transformed into the genuine inclusive relation that is ultimately reflected in Anselm’s experience of his own thinking in chapter 32.

Once again, this also relates to the theological concept of the divine Trinity in the *Monologion*. The inclusion of negation takes place in the form of the phrase “as my mind is now doing”. Such a self-involvement of individual thought experiences itself as a definitive expression and act of selfhood and therefore theologically emerges into the talk of *father* and *son* (*Mon.* 45 ff.), i.e.

makes the logic of divine incarnation conceivable. However, this logic cannot simply be stated. It is the issue of a gradual and self-involving process of cognition through inclusive negation. Step by step, thought discovers the *Per Se Ipsum* as its principle and itself as its expression. According to Anselm, this process of mediation between selfhood and self in theological terms is expressed as the “Word” –also the *Monologion*– and as the “Spirit” (*Mon.* 32). The concept of the Holy Spirit represents the *ability* to carry out and express the depicted process of cognition. At the same time, the Spirit is also the ability to lack selfhood and to initially inquire about it by engaging in the process of thought time and again. It is the same inclusive negation as Father and Son. Anselm explores this trinitarian mediation excessively in the second half of the *Monologion*. However, the logical results obtained so far in the current trail of thought suffice for the purposes of our text. They allow us to move on to the *Proslogion* now and reap what has been sown by the *Monologion*.

3. Radical inclusive negation: *Proslogion*

The *Monologion* expresses a logic of the stepwise gradual self-mediation of the Absolute. The term “express” shall indicate Anselm’s own designation of his text as an “exemplum” (*Prosl.* Preface). Thus, it is also an individual act. Now, the claim of the *Proslogion* is to perform the complex logical dynamic of the *Monologion* in one single *expression*. Thus, Anselm claims to be able to depict the *Per Se Ipsum* not only in terms of a gradual self-mediation through separate steps, but to express it in a single argument that contains the whole process of its own mediation.

Monologion and *Proslogion* follow the same project from different angles. They can never be separated from one another but depend on each other. The *Proslogion* claims to justify how the logical movement of the *Monologion* was possible in the first place, i.e. how Anselm himself was initially able to enquire selfhood. Toivo Holopainen rightly emphasizes the connection between the two texts in highlighting that “the *Proslogion* should be read as a subtle attempt to justify the kind of rational approach that Anselm had used in the *Monologion*” (2009: 590, see also Gilbert, 1984). Ian Logan also points out that the *Proslogion* represents the precondition for the application and the justification of the *Monologion* (2022: 102). This is why the title “Address” (*Proslogion*) was chosen very appropriately, since the work raises the question of how it is possible to *address something* that human thought initially lacks and encounters as *negation* in gradually grasping it. At the same time, however, it is just as crucial that this “Address” can only arise from the ventures of the *Monologion*. For it is only through the established *inclusive negation* of selfhood that lack, withdrawal, and deficiency can be recognized as essential aspects of this very selfhood. This was done by the *Monologion*. Now, because negation is already established as a part of selfhood in the *Monologion*, the *Proslogion* can address selfhood by the term *You* (*Prosl.* 3, *hoc es tu*, with an emphasis on *tu*). The change in language between the two works is an expression of their interrelated logical structure. The *Monologion* establishes the extent to which the *Proslogion* can operate with the term *You* when addressing the *Per Se Ipsum*. Conversely, the *Proslogion*’s own dialectic is that the experience of *selfhood* shall be grasped in *addressing* a certain *You*. This happens by inclusive negation.

The *Proslogion* points out that inclusive negation appears as the possibility of a *You* and thus as an experience of radical alterity or otherness, from which the process of *thought* is initiated in the

first place. John Clayton has shown this productive role of *otherness* in the *Proslogion* extensively and also highlights that the “otherness of God” must always include the “otherness of Anselm” (2006: 163), i.e. what we call a logic of individual inclusive negation. The *Proslogion* exposes itself to this experience and asks to what extent the *Per Se Ipsum* can remain something *other than itself* in order to completely grasp *itself*.

This is why Anselm initially demands that he should be taught to seek a certain *You* (*Prosl.* 1). Such a demand includes the entire trail of thought that was already introduced by the *Monologion*. Now, it is the inclusive negation of ourselves that teaches us to actively seek the Absolute, i.e. negation that essentially belongs to the very selfhood that now addresses itself as *You*. Thus, Anselm shows that in his thought he has always already relied on a concealed *Other*, which is now approached by the *Proslogion* in its very otherness. The more the self-mediating intellect involves negation, inability, lack and withdrawal the more this *You* becomes a *You* for it. Hence, John Clayton rightly points out: “Anselm’s quest has then a paradoxical outcome. The nearer he comes to understanding God, the more he sees that God is not to be understood.” (2006: 176) Otherwise, we might add, there would be no intellect at all. That is why Anselm begins the *Proslogion* by repeatedly emphasizing the negative experiences of confusion, ignorance and withdrawal (*Prosl.* Preface). These experiences are dimensions of the intellect. In constantly encountering its own negativity, being shows itself as a persistent reference to that *You*, i.e. in theological language: a relentless reference to God. Thus, the *Monologion* has reached the possibility of logically addressing such a *You*. Now, in the *Proslogion* this very *You* is established as the grounds on which the *Monologion* was possible in the first place.

Only on this dialectical basis, the notorious *Unum Argumentum* of the *Proslogion* can be tackled. First, it must be said that the *Argumentum* is by no means the so-called “proof of God’s existence” that it is often claimed to be.³ If at all, it merely claims to prove the self-mediating intellect and explores in what way God is a necessary object of such an intellect. In this context, Anselm’s famous phrase “something than which nothing greater can be thought” (*Prosl.* 2) contains the entire dynamic of the *Monologion*. Thus, the *Argumentum* is an expression of the assertion that the intellect is a medium of the Absolute by one immediate instance. It is ultimately *thought itself* that elevates itself to that which nothing can be thought greater. In terms of the *Monologion*, the *Unum Argumentum* states once again: *my intellect is executing a real act at this very moment* (cf. “as my mind is now doing”, *Mon.* 32). Anselm thus depicts the complex logic of the *Per Se Ipsum* in the form of a single argument.

Now, to state that the *Proslogion* has already achieved its result with the introduction of the *Unum Argumentum* in its second chapter, falls short of its greater findings. Clayton rightly criticizes that most editors and interpreters of Anselm “restrict their selection from the *Proslogion* to chapters 2–4, in which (we are informed) is to be found complete a proof almost uniformly called the ‘ontological argument’” (2006: 165). If we reduce the *Proslogion* to those few chapters, we will never reach its full potential. For the *Argumentum*, as an *inclusive negation*, must be capable of pointing beyond itself if it not only shall remain a formal “ontological argument”. The so-called “ontological

³ Kant’s *Critique of pure Reason* (B 620 ff.) heavily influenced this reduction of the *Argumentum*.

argument” is embedded in a greater venture. Thus, it has to *leave room for the experience of a You*, from which it can initially emerge as an argument in the first place. If it fails to do so, it will always exclude *negation* and will not be able to show to what extent its own initial lack and withdrawal led to its own emergence. In this case the *Argumentum* simply becomes a random sentence or statement that we may or may not believe.

Such a random sentence is the target of the fool who denies the existence of said *You* (i.e. of *God*) and reprimands Anselm for his lack of understanding (*Prosl.* 4). For the fool does not weave his own intellectual act into his ability to negate the *You*. The fool grasps his own speech and thought just as a “*vox significans*” (ibd.), as a “signifying voice” which attempts to speak about God as a mere object of designation from which it is already separated. But the dialectical logic and possibility of such separateness remains hidden to the fool. This is, so to say, the foolishness of the fool. Peter King (2006) provides a more detailed interpretation of Anselm’s philosophy of language, especially regarding said act of signification. However, for the purpose of our paper the difference between an inclusive (*argumentum*) and an exclusive (*vox significans*) view of language suffices.

Now, the fool’s signifying approach to language may work adequately with any object. But with the Absolute, as Anselm already addresses in the entire *Monologion*, it does not work. For, regarding the Absolute, the whole process of intellect is itself already an inclusive part of the Absolute, albeit a negative one. Otherwise –as in the case of the fool– the Absolute is not spoken of at all but will be distorted to an external object of a then impotent intellect. However, God cannot remain such an object of a merely “signifying voice” according to Anselm. On the contrary, speaking and thinking must be inscribed in Him by a self-mediating process. Otherwise, God could never be spoken of. Once again, we see how the *Monologion* and its logic of selfhood provide a crucial stepping stone for the *Argumentum*. For it is only the still misunderstood *Per Se Ipsum* from which the fool derives his ability to speak with a “*vox significans*”.

Initially, we are such fools ourselves in being separated from the Absolute by negation. The ongoing challenge is its affirmative *inclusion*. Whoever intends to make the *Argumentum* comprehensible at all must be able to make his own speaking, cognition and thinking its inherent feature. Now, such an inclusion changes everything about the *Argumentum* because it is then no longer a simple sentence or statement of a signifying voice. It enters the process of ceaselessly being greater (“*maius*”) in its very own being. In this, it performs the process of selfhood depicted by the *Monologion*. Only the fool thinks he is uttering a simple sentence about a given object.

The expression of the *Argumentum* in chapter 2 of the *Proslogion* (*credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*) accrues through the inclusion of negation. Such negation is not only reflected in the word “nothing (*nihil*)”, but also in the words “greater (*maius*)”, “think (*cogitari*)” and especially in the “You (*te*)”. When Anselm says, “we believe you are (*credimus te esse*)”, he addresses the process of inclusive negative self-mediation. This is why he also introduces the dimension of faith (*credimus*). Faith is the experience of an intellectually accomplished negation of intellect by its own means. In the words of Albert Anderson, faith as an “idea for God does not somehow pop into one’s mind independent of the language and tradition in which one is. Rather, one begins with the present possibility and then goes on to modify, correct, and construct one’s God-concept in accordance with the conditions for existence of such a being.” (1968: 171) The process of

such modification, correction and construction is the intellect. It is, so to say, the negative flip side and the inclusive potential of faith.

Regarding the fool, it is only the *vox significans* that imprisons itself either in intellect or in faith, exactly by *excluding* negation. In this way, the fool separates himself from the original self-mediating dynamic of the *You*, which he then takes only for an object of signification, instead of inscribing his own speech and thought in it. That's why the fool doesn't know anything about that inclusive negative *You*. He takes it for a mere object instead of the very process that grants him selfhood. The fool assumes that God is an object that can be talked about like any other object. In contrast to this, the intellect transforms itself into a specific experience of affirmation as it is carried out with inclusive negation. Its mode of language then is not that of a *vox significans*, but of the *Argumentum*, and its manner of experience is not that of a random object, but of an inclusive *You*. Now, the nature of this transformation is targeted by the greatest part of the *Proslogion* and will be our issue now.

4. Making sense of finitude

Anyone who reduces the *Proslogion* to its first few chapters disregards the larger context of the Anselmian project. According to Anderson, the text then becomes “hardly more than curious examples of misapplied logic” (1968: 149) and treats Anselm as “more foolish than the classical fool who says in his heart there is no God” (ibid.: 150). In contrast to such assumptions, the mature intellect of the *Argumentum*, affected by the occurrence of its *Other*, i.e. the *You*, is able to ultimately transcend itself. This is its own performance of an inclusive negation *per se ipsum*.

So, in the next step, Anselm addresses the Absolute in the way of the now established *vox significans* as a mere object throughout chapters 6 to 12. God is approached by an intellect that is already excluded from Him and becomes a mode of a mere “signifying voice” rather than inclusive negation. This is why several “compatibility problems” (Leftow, 2006: 150) seem to arise in the attributes of God. They are an expression of the fool's *vox significans*. Such problems are a manifestation of the intellect's self-alterity that takes place in the experience of the *Argumentum*. But based on this alterity, the intellect also becomes capable of repeatedly reengaging in a self-relation by summoning up the paradoxes of its own foolish voice. Hence, paradoxical logic is not the adversary but the door to inclusive negation. We have to become fools time and again to perform the *Argumentum*. From a theological point of view, this reflects the call in the Gospel of Matthew (18:3), that we shall “become like little children” in order to “enter the kingdom of heaven”. Thus, Anselm continuously appeals to the inclusive *You* with phrases like “help me to understand what I am saying” (*Prosl.* 9). His own acts of thought and speech become intangible to him. This is not a failure but the effect of inclusive negation taking hold of the intellect as an individual self. Once again this is analogous to the phrase “as my mind is doing right now” in chapter 32 the *Monologion*. But in the *Proslogion*, Anselm is not only included in his own venture, but repeatedly alienated from it. However, he does not fall behind the *Argumentum*. For he is able to address his own alienation by constantly addressing the already established *You*.

It is on these grounds that we find the culmination of the entire dialectic of Anselmian thought. In chapter 14 the intellect engages in the peak of its inclusive negation and completely *negates* itself by its own means and through the very logic that has been established by it so far. According to Jos Decorte, this “moment of crisis, however, is not the final word of the *Proslogion*, nor does it usher in a definitive despair of ever finding God” (1989: 186). For the intellect not only completes the *Argumentum* by negation but transforms its own entire mode of existence towards the very *You* it always already was based upon. Only now, the term “greater” (*maius*) gains *meaning*. Thus, according to Robert Schnepf (1998: 20), Anselm’s “*esse* does not carry the meaning of a contemporary concept of existence, but primarily is an expression of an *Ereignis* (a happening or event)”.⁴ In this *event*, being begins to differ from any other object with properties, attributes, or predicates.

At the climax of inclusive negation, the intellect negates itself by its own means and recognizes a primordial *You* in the process. But if we have now found the *You* (God) with “certain truth and true certainty” (*Prosl.* 14), Anselm bewilderedly asks: “why does my soul not experience you” (*cur non sentit*, *ibd.*)? According to him, the intellect, having reached its very peak, is now fully “restricted because of its own narrowness” (*ibd.*). This happens precisely due to the negativity with which the intellect has previously operated so successfully. And even now, success is not completely lacking. Because it is through the complete inclusion of negativity that the intellect negates itself *by itself*. The intellect is the full inclusion of negation in selfhood. Thus, the experience of a *You* arises as the principle for all previous intellectual endeavors. God shows Himself as the *You* who *integrates the intellect into himself and Himself*, instead of just being an object *mediated by the intellect*. In other words, God is omnipresent in a manifold way for a climactic intellect and therefore able to “wholly exist in a plurality” (Conn, 2011: 266), not restricting Himself to a mere intellectual existence. Hence, at the peak of his reflections, Anselm states that God is “also something greater than can be thought” (*Prosl.* 15). But it is of the utmost importance that only *the intellect* can state such a *greater than can be thought* with any meaning. The intellect is not rejected but *completed* by the negative *greater* than itself. Thus, in chapter 15, Anselm directly integrates this new *greater* to the previous one of chapter 2. Regarding the two intertwined formulas of the *Argumentum* (chapters 2 and 15), Jos Decorte rightly states that the “second moment does not intend to do the first one all over again, right back from zero. It beholds what was won during the first movement” (1989: 186). A meaningful “greater than can be thought” cannot simply be asserted or stated. Paradoxically enough, the *You* beyond thought can only emerge through the very process of thought. Regarding the two formulas of the *Argumentum*, “the first one has come to an end because intellectual analysis has exhausted the possibilities that the starting-point [...] had to offer.” (*ibd.*) It is the intellect that negates itself *inclusively* in its entire movement and thereby establishes the horizon for its own mediation through the *You*. So, again in the words of Decorte, “Anselm comes to understand the necessity of this kind of disenchantment” (*ibd.*) and that “the two formulae are logically connected” (*ibd.*: 187). Therefore, the intellect can neither be simply omitted nor simply take hold of the Absolute. Its dialectic has to be carried out again and again as a radically individualized self-mediation

⁴ The translation of Schnepf’s originally German text was done by me.

(*Monologion*) to self-negation (*Proslogion*) in order to be able to speak of the Absolute in any meaningful way. Anything else would remain, in Anselm's words, a foolish *vox significans* and not an actual form of *addressing* (*Proslogion*) God.

In other words, the intellect experiences itself as *finite* by inclusive self-negation. Thus, Anselm's philosophy is anything but an "attempt to circumvent the need for finite things" (Sultana 2011: 290). Rather, the intellect intimately associates itself with the (re-)appearing *You* in the very occurrence of its own finiteness through selfhood. It performs this act of association dialectically both on its own account as a *self* and on the greater account of something *other* than itself. In this dialectic, it also carries out the mediation between the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*.

It is once again not surprising that the theology of the Trinity follows the mediation between selfhood and otherness in the *Proslogion* (chapter 16 ff.). Logically speaking, the "greater than can be thought" of chapter 15 occurs only to an intellect radically engaging in itself via negation. It cannot merely affirm its own existence dogmatically. By negation, however, such an intellect experiences its very existence no longer being completely *its own*. It now can speak of an "ineffable manner" (*ineffabile modo*, *Prosl.* 17) in which the *You* shows and presents itself. Thus, all this is not a failure, but the lasting triumph of the intellect. It is the intellect's own productive collapse as an accomplished inclusive negation that gives the term "ineffable" any *meaning* beyond dogmatic piety. Through its dialectical act alone, the intellect can *meaningfully* speak of the countless modes of finitude. For the intellect becomes the specific mode of engaging in them by negating itself in the process. In theological terms, it has to undergo an ongoing death on the cross in order to reveal the meaningful paradox of the Trinity. Only in this manner does the intellect experience itself as an act of a *You* that is both ungraspable and has always already been grasped. By the radical development of its own finitude, the intellect can at the same time attach radical meaning to this very finitude in its various occurrences. However, without the logical process and its *individual* inclusive negativity, all this means nothing. It remains at most some overly pious attribution or the foolish dogma of a *vox significans*.

5. Concluding remarks

If the *Argumentum* is carried out in all its scandalous force, the individual thinker becomes involved as a meaningful finite being in what he himself is doing in the here and the now as an expression of the Absolute. This is, so to speak, the underlying existentialist claim in Anselm's philosophical Idealism. On the basis of logical mediation, the intellect can make its own existence burst and thus leads to the variety of meaningful encounters with the hereby established *You*. It makes sense of the manifold negations in its own finitude. Hence, the intellect completes itself to super-intellectual modes of experience through inclusive negation. Bernd Goebel and Vittorio Hoesle have highlighted such an intermediation with the super-intellectual transcendence of experience in Anselmian thought, especially with emotions. They state that in Anselm "the importance of emotional states does not endanger his rationalism, but rather enriches it" in which context they emphasize his concept of an "inevitable reason (*ratio inevitabilis*)" as the mediator for theologically meaningful emotions (2006: 206). We can add with Decorte, that only

when one has understood that God is beyond understanding one can find God and experience - in hope - part of the full joy that accompanies that finding. In this life we can only find God through understanding if we truly understand that he is unintelligible to us. This insight, however, is the fruit of a rational analysis carried out by a humble believer” (1989: 189 f.).

Such a rational analysis also reveals different modes of speech, which on Anselm’s part appear, for instance, in the form of light metaphors, the theology of the Trinity, mystical wording or his repeated account of emotions and affections. They are distinct inclusive negations of the intellect, not mere poetic metaphors. They only remain such metaphors from the viewpoint of Anselm’s fool, who never engages in his own negativity of speech. If the intellect actually engages in it, it makes God even a matter of sense-perception in a multitude of forms and essences, as Griffin points out (2020: 120). The intellect thus forms the common ground for the diversity of the various domains of experience and is, so to speak, the negative link from which individual, personal, and existential modes of thinking and speaking can understand each other. Holopainen thus highlights that the *Proslogion*’s “particular devotional exercise depends on the single argument” (2009: 598), i.e. the *Unum Argumentum*. For all particular existential devotions have in common that they are inclusive forms of the negativity of intellect. By limiting itself via the whole operation of the *Argumentum*, the intellect makes room for other ways of being and gives them meaning. In terms of the *Monologion* and its logic of graduation, the intellect is the ability to enquire about the strength, appropriateness, or capacity of any particular mode of being. Because they all are attempts to make *selfhood* (*Monologion*) tangible as the *You* (*Proslogion*). However, those attempts only make *sense* through the inclusion of the intellect, because making sense by inclusive negation *is* the intellect. Therefore, Anselm is both a logician and a mystic, i.e. an existentialist Idealist. For, on the one hand, the intellect alone cannot hold its ground in the face of the Absolute, but, on the other hand, the intellect is the gate through which any encounter with the Absolute in different existential and individual dimensions of experience becomes possible.

Hence, the term *intellectus* indicates a versatile act of being firmly rooted in inclusive-negative selfhood. It is not a concept of psychology, consciousness, or formal logic. Anselm is neither a rationalist nor a scholastic. Such attributions severely confine him to the second chapter of the *Proslogion* and undermine the factor of creating meaning in the experience of otherness and finitude, to which his thought is ultimately directed. He not only provides a rational logic of an intellectual concept of God, but a logic whose self-negation is intended to make meaningful experience accessible and communicable. However, this logic learns to fully transform and individualize itself only by inclusive negation. On this ground, it not only engages in a conversation with the Absolute as a *You*, but also with other individuals, whom it experiences as such an individual *You* full of meaning. Thus, Anselm’s thought also provides a basis for ethics and intersubjectivity. In theological terms, the intellect experiences God again and again as the manifoldness of incarnated individual human beings. This also indicates anthropological consequences of Anselm’s philosophical theology (for further reading on this matter, see Mladenov, 2017). Moreover, it allows mystical forms of experience to be associated with and counterchecked by a logical regulative and therefore offers a firm protection against dogmatism, ideologies, and bigotry. On top of that, Anselm’s philosophy of a steadfast role

of intellect within faith is an important theological dialogue partner in the face of superstition and religious presumptuousness of any kind.

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