THE ONTOLOGICAL PRESUPPOSITIONS
OF THE ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

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THE MOST RECENT STAGE in the analysis of St. Anselm’s Ontological Argument is the modal-logical stage: if one wants to get clear as to what is wrong (or right) with it, one should phrase it in S5. I have misgivings about this maneuver, if it is claimed in the name of historical exegesis. While I think that the connections between the Ontological Argument and modal logic are insightful and exciting, I also think that the arguments presently offered in Anselm’s name, even though they might be better than his, are revisionary or revolutionary. What I wish to do in this paper is reactionary. I shall first set out what I take to be the argument contained in Proslogion II. I shall then point out that the argument rests on a set of assumptions which reveal a conceptual scheme different from that of the sober, twentieth century modal logician. Finally, I shall show that the assumptions in question lead to a novel criticism of Anselm’s argument, a criticism that does not require of us, for instance, that we deny that “exists” is a predicate.

Here is the crucial passage from Proslogion II:

Thus even the fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be conceived is in the understanding, since when he hears this, he understands it; and whatever is understood is in the understanding. And certainly that than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be in the understanding alone. For if it is even in the understanding alone, it can be conceived to exist in reality also, which

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* This is the prize-winning essay of the 1971 Dissertation Essay Competition.—Ed.

1 I have in mind the following articles: Robert Merrihew Adams, “The Logical Structure of Anselm’s Arguments,” The Philosophical Review, 80 (1971), 28–54; David Lewis, “Anselm and Actuality,” Nous, 4 (1970), 175–88; and an unpublished paper by Alvin Plantinga, “God and Possible Worlds.” The latter two explore the alleged connections between Anselm’s argument(s) and the “possible worlds” semantics for quantified modal logic.
is greater. Thus if that than which a greater cannot be conceived is in the understanding alone, then that than which a greater cannot be conceived is itself that than which a greater can be conceived. But surely this cannot be. Thus without doubt something than which a greater cannot be conceived exists, both in the understanding and in reality.²

I offer the following argument as a reconstruction of the passage:

(1) Whatever is understood is in the understanding.
(2) If that than which nothing greater can be conceived is understood, then that than which nothing greater can be conceived is in the understanding. (Instance of (1))

But: (3) That than which nothing greater can be conceived is understood.

Thus: (4) That than which nothing greater can be conceived is in the understanding. (From (2) and (3))

Suppose: (5) That than which nothing greater can be conceived is in the understanding only, and does not exist in reality.

(6) For whatever is in the understanding only, and does not exist in reality, something greater than it can be conceived.

(7) If that than which nothing greater can be conceived is in the understanding only, and does not exist in reality, then something greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived can be conceived. (Instance of (6))

Thus: (8) Something greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived can be conceived. (From (5) and (7))

Thus: (9) That than which nothing greater can be conceived exists in reality. (From (4), (5), and (8))

²St. Anselm, Prostlogion II, my translation. The Latin edition from which this and subsequent translations are based is S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia, edited by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, O.S.B. The edition is now reissued in two tomes at Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt by Friedrich Frommann Verlag (Günther Holzboog), 1968. The Latin text for Prostlogion II is in Tome I, Volume I, 101-02.
Note that the argument is comprised of two sub-arguments. Steps (1)–(4) purport to establish the *in intellectu* existence of that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Steps (5)–(9) purport to establish, in *reductio* fashion, the *in re* existence of that than which nothing greater can be conceived by showing that the contrary hypothesis, (5), leads to a contradiction, (8). Each sub-argument has its own characteristic axiom—(1) and (6), respectively. About (6) I shall have little to say in this paper, except to point out that it is more modest in its claims than other similar principles which have been ascribed to Anselm on occasion, *e.g.*:

For whatever is in the understanding only, everything in reality is greater than it.\(^3\)
For anything of kind \(K\), if it is in the understanding only, then there is something of kind \(K\) greater than it.\(^4\)

(1), however, is intriguing, and an exploration of (1) will lead us into the heart of Anselm’s conceptual scheme.

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Let us begin, then, by marking one feature of Anselm’s thought, the existence of which cannot be gainsaid. Anselm distinguishes between a thing’s existing *in intellectu* and its existing *in re*. Two questions are important concerning the distinction. First, exactly what is the distinction, and how does it work? Second, what is the point or purpose of the distinction? I shall consider these questions in turn.

Consider (1). Anselm regards (1) as obvious,\(^5\) but it is not

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\(^3\) Adams thinks that Anselm “would probably have assented” to this principle, although he acknowledges that the argument of *Proslogion II* does not require it. (Adams, *op. cit.*, 30.) I know of nothing in Anselm’s writings that would indicate his acceptance. But see fn. 13.


\(^5\) “Observe, then, that since it is understood, it follows that it is in the understanding. For just as that which is conceived is conceived by conception, and that which is conceived by conception, just as it is conceived is thus in conception, so that which is understood is understood by understanding, and that which is understood by understanding, just as
as innocent as it may at first appear. Anselm is indifferent as to whether it is linguistic entities or ontological entities that are understood, but it is clear that the things that are in the understanding are things, and not words or phrases. Here we begin to see part of the character of Anselm’s thought. A necessary condition for one’s understanding something is that that something be in the understanding: if it were not the case that something is in the understanding, then it would seem to follow that nothing is understood. Thus, although (1) may have the appearance of a tired truism, it is metaphysically loaded. It tells us that whenever anything is understood, that thing has a mode of being: it exists in intellectu.

For Anselm, there is no difference between a thing’s being in the understanding and its being conceived. We can express the connection in terms of two alternative principles:

(A) A thing is in the understanding if and only if it is conceived.

Or:

(A') A thing is in the understanding if and only if it can be conceived.

(A) tells us that a thing is in intellectu if and only if it is being conceived or thought of by someone, while (A') tells us that a thing is in intellectu if and only if it can be conceived, irrespective

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footnotes:

6 "But if it were true that that than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived or understood, it nevertheless would not be false that ‘that than which a greater cannot be conceived’ can be conceived and understood.” St. Anselm, Quid ad haec respondet editor ipsius libelli, in S. Anselmi ... Opera Omnia, I, I, 138 (Chapter IX).

7 This needs to be argued for, and I do so in Chapter III of my Ph.D. Dissertation, The Logic of Saint Anselm’s Ontological Argument (The University of Minnesota, 1971).
of whether anyone is in fact conceiving of it. I do not claim that Anselm ever distinguished between (A) and (A'), although, as we shall see, (A') fits nicely with another feature of Anselm’s thought.

According to (A'), the class of beings in intellectu is identical to the class of conceivable beings. The class of in re beings is a subclass of the class of in intellectu beings. An in re being is a being that actually exists. It follows, then, that one and the same being can exist both in intellectu and in re. The pattern of the argument of Proslogion II presupposes that fact: it is one and the same being which is first shown to be in the understanding and then to exist in re. These facts, along with the tendency to gloss conceivability in terms of logical possibility, make it tempting to translate the argument of Proslogion II into the language(s) of modal logic. That temptation, as I hope to show, ought to be resisted.

III

Perhaps we are now clear enough as to the distinction between beings in intellectu and beings in re to ask for the point of the distinction. Why does Anselm talk of two realms of entities? One will search in vain for a direct answer from Anselm himself. I should like to speculate on one sort of philosophical concern which may well have motivated the distinction, and for which the distinction provides one kind of answer. It is illuminating to see the distinction as an attempt to deal with the problems that beset negative existential sentences. Here is one version of a conundrum that shares its antiquity with The Way of Truth and The Sophist: suppose one alleges that Typhon does not exist. Then, if the sentence “Typhon does not exist” is true, there is no referent for “Typhon,” the subject term of the sentence. If that is so, the sentence is not about anything, and hence, it is meaningless. If, on the other hand, the subject term does have a referent—which it must have in order to be meaningful—then the sentence “Typhon does not exist” is patently false. In either case, the sentence cannot be true. It turns out to be meaningless or false. The conundrum is perfectly generalizable to all nega-

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8 See Adams, op. cit., 34.
tive existential sentences, including ones that attempt to deny the existence of species or classes of things.

Our present purpose is not to record all the different responses that have been made to the conundrum. Instead, we may note that Anselm's distinction between beings in re and beings in intellectu provides him with an answer to it. To say that Typhon does not exist is to say that Typhon does not exist in re. But, if the sentence "Typhon does not exist" is to be counted as meaningful, then its subject term must be meaningful. It is correct to say that there is an intimate connection between meaningfulness and understandability, such that if a term is meaningful, it can be understood. But in virtue of Anselm's principle (1), if "Typhon" (or Typhon) can be understood, then Typhon is in the understanding. So if the sentence "Typhon does not exist" is meaningful, Typhon must exist in intellectu. Hence, Anselm's distinction enables him to say that in the case of a meaningful and true negative existential sentence, its subject does not exist in re but does exist in intellectu. Its in intellectu existence accounts for the meaningfulness of the sentence, while its in re nonexistence accounts for the truth of the sentence.9

I shall not dwell on the difficulties that have been urged against any philosophical theory which separates out different modes of being.10 It will have to suffice here to point out that the argument of Proslogion II does presuppose a distinction of modes of being. If the distinction is indefensible, a redeployment of the argument would be required, to say the least.

IV

I want now to explore another feature of Anselm's thought, to which too little attention has been paid. Anselm distinguishes between conceiving a thing and conceiving it to exist. The distinction is presupposed in the exchange between Gaunilo and Anselm in Quid ad haec respondeat quidam pro insipiente 7 and Quid ad


haec respondeat editor ipsius libelli IV. One clear example of Anselm’s awareness, acceptance, and use of the distinction occurs in Chapter I of his reply to Gaunilo:

Moreover, you think that from the fact that something than which a greater cannot be conceived is understood, it does not follow that it is in the understanding, nor that if it is in the understanding, it therefore exists in reality. I emphatically assert that if it can even be conceived to exist, it is necessary that it exist. For that than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived to exist except without a beginning. Moreover, whatever can be conceived to exist and does not exist, can be conceived to exist through a beginning. Therefore, that than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot be conceived to exist and yet not exist. Therefore, if it can be conceived to exist, out of necessity it exists.

Furthermore, if it can even be simply conceived, then it is necessary that it exist. For no one who denies or doubts that there is something than which a greater cannot be conceived, denies or doubts that were it to exist, it could fail to exist neither in actuality nor in the understanding. For indeed otherwise it would not be that than which a greater cannot be conceived. But as to whatever can be conceived and does not exist: were it to exist, it could fail to exist either in actuality or in the understanding. Thus if it can even be conceived, that than which a greater cannot be conceived cannot fail to exist.11

This passage is a very rich one indeed: it deserves more attention than I shall presently give it. The only point relevant to our present concerns is that Anselm talks exclusively of conceiving to exist in the first paragraph, and exclusively of conceiving simpliciter in the second.

Finally, the distinction between conceiving and conceiving to exist is crucial to the success of Anselm’s argument. Recall steps (6) and (7) of our reconstructed argument. Consider some being in intellectu only, and of modest greatness—say, the first stop light in Northfield, Minnesota. (6) guarantees us that something greater than it can be conceived. (6) leaves it an open question whether some of the beings that are greater can be in intellectu only. It is also mute on the question whether the first stop light in Northfield would be greater if it existed in re. It may or it may not be, as far as we can tell from (6). Hence, (6) does not

11 St. Anselm, Quid ad haec respondeat editor ipsius libelli, in S. Anselmi . . . Opera Omnia, I, I, 130–31 (Chapter 1), italics added.
tell us that to conceive of an existent first stop light in Northfield is to conceive of something greater than the first stop light in Northfield, not conceived to exist.

Notice what happens, however, when what is conceived is the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it is claimed that that being does not exist \textit{in re}. Anselm needs to say that, in that case, something greater can be conceived, and thus generate the contradiction revealed in the consequent of (7). But what could possibly be greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived, were that than which nothing greater can be conceived not to exist? It is not clear how one might want to answer, but Anselm’s answer is immediate. “For if it is even in the understanding alone, it can be conceived to exist in reality also, which is greater.” One thing that would be greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived, were it not to exist, is that than which nothing greater can be conceived, existing \textit{in re}. Therefore, to conceive of something greater than the being than which nothing greater can be conceived, supposed not to exist, one can conceive of that same being, existing \textit{in re}. And Anselm does not provide any other instructions as to how else to conceive of something greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived, supposed not to exist. It is evident, then, that the distinction between conceiving and conceiving to exist undergirds the argument of \textit{Proslogion II}.

\textbf{V}

It is the distinction between conceiving and conceiving to exist, along with the crucial role that it plays in the argument of \textit{Proslogion II}, that makes it difficult to see how the argument readily accommodates itself to the modern apparatus of modal logic. For the accommodation to work, Anselm’s language of conceivability must translate without residue into the language of logical possibility. But the language of logical possibility, exemplified by modal logic, is insensitive to the distinction between conceiving a thing and conceiving it to exist.

Let us note first that in modal logic, the modal operators of necessity and possibility are operators on propositions. That is, it is states of affairs which are said to be possible, impossible, or necessary. However, Anselm’s distinction between conceiving
and conceiving to exist, along with his in intellectu—in re distinc-
tion, applies to beings, or things, not states of affairs. And al-
though Anselm says that there is a difference between conceiving
a thing and conceiving it to exist, there is no difference between
one’s saying that a state of affairs is logically possible and one’s
saying that it is logically possible for that state of affairs to exist.
Thus, if we attempt to tailor the argument of Proslogion II to
fit the mold of modal logic, we shall be required (a) to shift from
talk of conceivable beings, etc., to logically possible states of
affairs, etc., and (b) to obliterate the crucial distinction between
conceiving and conceiving to exist. One might regard these two
changes as desirable, on philosophical grounds, but the fact re-
ains that they are changes, and hence not faithful to Anselm’s
thought.12

VI

The Anselmian claim that there is a difference between one’s
conceiving of a thing simpliciter and one’s conceiving it to exist
is an extraordinarily difficult claim to assess. What exactly is
the relation between conceiving of a thing and conceiving a thing
to exist? Surely the following seems to be correct: it is a (logi-
cally) necessary condition for one’s conceiving of a thing as exist-
ing that the thing be conceived simpliciter. This seems to be a
conceptually necessary conditional:

If a thing is conceived as existing, then it is conceived.

To conceive of a thing as existing requires conceiving of it; if
one were not conceiving of it, then a fortiori one would not be
conceiving of it as existing.

Once the above principle is accepted, there is no difficulty
in one’s subscribing to a modalized version of it:

12 It is true that given the “possible worlds” semantics for quantified
modal logic, one can make sense of talk about possible beings; and thus
one might think that the change mentioned in (a) is not so significant as
it first appears. There is some merit to this method, I think, but even so,
(b) still holds. For no sense can be given to a distinction between some-
things’ being a possible being and its being such that it is possible that
it exist.
If a thing can be conceived to exist, then it can be conceived.

What about the converse of the modalized version? Recall that in the argument of *Proslogion* II, Anselm says "if it is even in the understanding alone, it can be conceived to exist in reality. . . ." He appears to regard the claim as unexceptionable.\(^{13}\) It is reasonable, then, to attribute the following thesis to him:

If a thing is in the understanding, then it can be conceived to exist.

But (A') allows us to infer, in conjunction with the above thesis,

If a thing can be conceived, then it can be conceived to exist.

We may now combine this result with our earlier modalized conditional to obtain

(B) A thing can be conceived if and only if it can be conceived to exist.

Hume, of course, denied that there was any distinction between conceiving a thing and conceiving it to exist:

The idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent. To reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other.

\(^{13}\) Note that Anselm can consistently maintain that everything in the understanding can be conceived to exist, and that it is not in general true that to conceive of a thing as existing is to conceive of a greater being than the same thing not conceived as existing. If he were to hold the latter doctrine, he would in effect be espousing a principle stronger than (6). Thus, I am suggesting that the passage cited above should be interpreted as a particular instance of a general principle, but that the addition of "which is greater" to it should only be applied to the case at hand, viz., that than which nothing greater can be conceived. My reason for suggesting this interpretation is due to a desire to give Anselm a charitable run for his money. If a principle significantly stronger than (6) is ascribed to him, I believe it will result in special difficulties with regard to Gaunilo's "Perfect Island" objection. But that is beyond the scope of this paper.
That idea, when conjoin’d with the idea of any object, makes no addition to it. Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent. Any idea we please to form is the idea of a being; and the idea of a being is any idea we please to form.\textsuperscript{14}

If (B) is a correct representation of Anselm’s thought, it seems to play into Hume’s (and the modal logician’s) hands, for (B) tells us that the class of things which can be conceived is extensionally equivalent to the class of things which can be conceived to exist. Hence, an attempt to analyze the difference between conceiving and conceiving to exist in terms of their respective objects is misguided.

What can the difference be? What is it to conceive of something as existing, as opposed simply to conceiving it? I shall suggest two ways of understanding the distinction. The first may well have been the model in terms of which Anselm thought, but as we shall see, it suffers from a serious incoherency. The second is a modified version of the first; and while it avoids the incoherency of the first, it, when applied to Anselm’s argument, strips the argument of most of its persuasiveness.

\textbf{VII}

According to the first model, to conceive something to exist is simply a particular case of the more general phenomenon of conceiving something to have some property or other. Suppose Jones is asked to conceive of a 1949 Hudson. Suppose then he is asked to conceive of a red 1949 Hudson. One way of representing the difference between these two requests is that in the latter case Jones is asked to append redness to the object of his earlier conception. If the object of Jones’ original conception was a yellow 1949 Hudson, he must now change the color. If he had not thought of any color at all initially, he must now make the object of his conception more determinate with respect to color. If Jones had originally conceived of a red 1949 Hudson, then he need do nothing more to fulfill the second request. Nevertheless, the two requests are different requests. By parity, the

difference between conceiving of a 1949 Hudson and conceiving of an existent 1949 Hudson is that in the latter case, one appends existence to the object of his earlier conception.  

We may call this model, for the sake of convenience, the property model of conceiving to exist. It presumes that existence is a property, and it explains the difference between conceiving and conceiving to exist in terms of the appending of the property of existence. The property model, although not entailed by the doctrine that existence is a property, might nevertheless be naturally suggested by that doctrine.

There is no conclusive evidence to the effect that Anselm subscribed to the property model of conceiving to exist. There is some indication that he did regard existence as a property, however. In Chapter I of *De casu diaboli*, Anselm says:

However, if you consider those things which exist and which are passing into nonexistence, [you will see that] God Himself does not make them not to exist. For not only does a thing exist in no other way than by His causing it, but also it cannot remain to any extent that which it was made to be, without His thus preserving it. When God Himself ceases to preserve that which He has made, it does not return to nonexistence (in which it used to be) because He Himself makes it not to exist, but rather because He ceases to make it to exist. For even when He, as if in anger, removes the existence of something by destroying it, it is not by means of that [action of His] that it does not exist. On the contrary, He takes back as His own that which He had supplied, by which act it was preserved as it was. It returns to

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15 There are two sorts of puzzles, beyond the scope of this paper, that arise with regard to conceivable beings and one's conception of them. First, what criteria might we employ to individuate them? Is the conceivable fat man in the doorway identical with, or distinct from, the conceivable bald man in the doorway? (Apologies to Willard Van Orman Quine, "On What There Is.") Or, what individuates two conceivable beings with exactly the same non-relational properties?

Second, when I change one of the properties in the object of my conception, am I now conceiving of the same thing, somewhat altered, or am I conceiving of a different thing? Apply the question to Anselm's argument. Suppose I first conceive of God *simpliciter*, and then I conceive him to exist. Am I conceiving of the same being? Anselm's argument requires an affirmative answer, and in *Proslogion III*, he argues that God cannot be conceived not to exist. It follows then that to conceive of God *simpliciter* is possible only if one does not conceive of God as not existing. Indeed, the task of *Proslogion IV* is to show that the fool of the Psalms, who denied God's existence, was not really conceiving of God at all.
A thing can pass from existence to nonexistence, and from nonexistence to existence. It had nonexistence before it was made, and when it was made, it acquired existence. If we take Anselm's mode of expression seriously, two things are strongly suggested in the above passage. The first is that a thing can in some sense be, even though it does not exist, or lacks existence. Anselm has no qualms about saying that it had nonexistence before it was made. The pronominal usage here indicates the tendency. This feature is hardly unexpected if one remembers Anselm's earlier distinction between beings in intellectu and beings in re. The second doctrine is that existence is a property which some things possess and others lack. (I shall assume for our purposes that to have nonexistence is tantamount to lacking existence.) When a thing is made, it acquires the property of existence; and when it passes back into nonexistence, it loses the property of existence.

It would carry us too far afield to consider the arguments for and against the view that existence is a property of things. It will have to do for the present to say that if the refutation of the Ontological Argument depends upon the denial of the doctrine that existence is a property, it is not at all clear that all versions of the Ontological Argument have been refuted. Moreover, my present task is to show that preoccupation with the question of whether existence is a property has distracted attention away from more serious difficulties with Anselm's version(s) of the argument.

Return for a moment to Anselm's distinction between beings in intellectu and beings in re. One way of characterizing the difference between an in intellectu being and an in re being is that those in intellectu beings not in re lack the property of existence, while those, and only those, beings in re possess the property of existence. Thus, to predicate existence of anything is to affirm that it exists in re.

Now recall that a conceived being is simply a being in intel-

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16 St. Anselm, *De casu diaboli*, in *S. Anselmi... Opera Omnia*, I, I, 234 (Chapter 1).


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*lectu* (from (A)). On the property model of conceiving to exist, to conceive of a being as existing is to add existence to an *in intellectu* being. But that is precisely what makes an *in intellectu* being an *in re* being. The upshot is disastrous. For, when the property model of conceiving to exist is conjoined to the *in intellectu—in re* distinction, Anselm can give no coherent account of the difference between a thing’s existing *in re* and its being conceived to exist. To exist *in re*, an *in intellectu* being must possess existence. To be conceived to exist, an *in intellectu* being, as the object of conception, must possess existence (just as to be conceived to be red, it must possess redness). What then, on this scheme of things, could be the difference between a thing’s actually existing and its merely being conceived to exist? The answer seems to be—none. But such a result is preposterous.

The problem is perfectly general, but we can discuss the specific case of that than which nothing greater can be conceived. It has been argued that it is essential to the argument of *Proslogion II* that that than which nothing greater can be conceived be conceived to exist. On the property model of conceiving to exist, that amounts to appending existence to that than which nothing greater can be conceived, which is at least *in intellectu*. But that would be exactly what would make that than which nothing greater can be conceived exist *in re*. In this case, the conclusion is hardly welcome, for it serves only to underscore a fundamental flaw in the conceptual scheme we have developed on Anselm’s behalf. The flaw, to repeat, is that the *in intellectu—in re* distinction, in conjunction with the property model of conceiving to exist, obliterates the obvious difference between a thing’s existing and its being conceived to exist.

**VIII**

Let us investigate one attempt to escape the quandary. Surely, it will be claimed, Anselm could not be guilty of such an egregious error. The error is due, rather, to a misinterpretation of the property model of conceiving to exist. The property model should be construed in the following fashion: to conceive of a being (which is *ipso facto in intellectu*) as existing *in re* is not tantamount to predicking existence of that being. Instead, the new property it acquires, when it is conceived to exist, is the property
of being-conceived-to-exist. Let us call this the revised property model of conceiving to exist. Once the revised property model is accepted, one can retain the in intellectu—in re distinction without generating the difficulties that the property model raises. For now we shall be able to mark the difference between an in intellectu being’s existing in re and its being conceived to exist. In the former case, it has the property of existence; in the latter, it has the property of being-conceived-to-exist (although it may also have the property of existing in re, just in case it exists in re).

If the revised property model is to lose its ad hoc flavor, it will require a general revamping of the property model. We will have to say, for example, that to conceive of a 1949 Hudson as red, the property of being-conceived-to-be-red, and not the property of being red, must be appended to the 1949 Hudson in intellectu. Perhaps one would be willing to allow that sort of general revision. It seems, however, that there are at least two difficulties involved when the revised property model of conceiving to exist is brought to bear on Anselm’s argument.

First, if one were genuinely puzzled about the distinction between conceiving of a thing and conceiving a thing to exist, and really skeptical about the legitimacy of such a distinction, he is not likely to be mollified by the present account. For the old problem reappears in a different guise. What is it for a thing to be conceived without its having the property of being-conceived-to-exist, and how does it differ from a conceived thing that does have the property of being-conceived-to-exist?

Even if we agreed to overlook this puzzle about the revised property model, a second, more serious difficulty results when the

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One may be puzzled as to how to go about appending a property to an in intellectu being. I suppose a defender of the original property model might say that all talk about “appending” can be eliminated by means of the following schema (where “x” ranges over conceivable beings and “P” over properties):

If x is conceived to be P, then x is P.

It is obvious how the original property model runs afoul of the in intellectu—in re distinction, once the schema is made explicit.

On the revised property model, the schema becomes

If x is conceived to be P, then x is (has the property) conceived-to-be-P.
model is applied to the argument of Proslogion II. Let us recall once more that the argument relies on the assumption that to conceive of that than which nothing greater can be conceived as existing in re is to conceive of something greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived, when not conceived as existing in re. If this were not accepted, there would be no reason to accept step (7) of the reconstructed argument. However, on the revised property model, the assumption translates into the following claim: that than which nothing greater can be conceived, with the property of being-conceived-to-exist, is greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived, without the property of being-conceived-to-exist.

Yet the latter claim is far from obvious. Why is there any reason to think that that than which nothing greater can be conceived is somehow greater if it has the property of being-conceived-to-exist than if it does not have that property? There seems to be no reason at all. Consider an analogous situation. Few would question that God would be greater if he were omnipotent than if he were not. Hence, few would question the assertion that to conceive of God as omnipotent would be to conceive of a greater being than to conceive of God as not being omnipotent. But suppose someone claimed that God would also be greater if he had the property of being-conceived-to-be-omnipotent than if he lacked that property. Would the addition of that property actually make God greater? It hardly seems that such a property would count as a “great-making” property. Yet that is what would follow on the revised property model. Good gas mileage might have made the 1949 Hudson a better automobile than it would have been if it had lacked good gas mileage, but being-conceived-to-have-good-gas-mileage would simply be an irrelevant property to the assessment of the merits of the 1949 Hudson. Similarly, to conceive of that than which nothing greater can be conceived as existing may be to conceive of a greater being than that than which nothing greater can be conceived, when not conceived to exist. But it does not follow that that than which nothing greater can be conceived is greater if it has the property of being-conceived-to-exist than if it does not.

We may note in passing that the argument of Proslogion III also fares ill by the revised property model. Its crucial premise
is that if that than which nothing greater can be conceived can be conceived not to exist, then something greater than it can be conceived. What would this greater something be? That than which nothing greater can be conceived, which cannot be conceived not to exist. The revised property model transforms the above claim into the following: that than which nothing greater can be conceived, which cannot lack the property of being-conceived-to-exist, is greater than that than which nothing greater can be conceived, which can lack the property of being-conceived-to-exist. Again, the result appears dubious. Although it may be true that God would be greater if he could not lack omnipotence than if he could, it seems odd to say that God would be greater if he could not lack the property of being-conceived-to-be-omnipotent than if he could lack the property of being-conceived-to-be-omnipotent. It seems, in conclusion, that the revised property model of conceiving to exist is of no help to Anselm in his effort to produce a tempting Ontological Argument.

IX

What I have tried to do in this paper is to uncover some of the presuppositions of Anselm’s thought, presuppositions which, for the most part, have been unduly neglected. The presuppositions play a role in his argument in that his argument proceeds by showing that a certain being in intellectu must also exist in re, since it can be conceived to exist in re, which is greater. Anselm is thus not arguing, for instance, that the concept of God must necessarily contain the concept of existence; for, although this sounds paradoxical, he is not talking about the concept of God at all.\(^\text{18}\) He is

\(^{18}\)Jerome Shaffer has argued convincingly that one may let existence be a part of the concept of God, so that it is a necessary truth that God exists, and yet there may still be no God! See Jerome Shaffer, “Existence, Predication, and the Ontological Argument,” Mind, 71 (1962), 307–25. To see how this is possible, consider that a concept can be viewed as a set of properties which may or may not be instantiated by any object. Shaffer’s point is that even if we allow existence to be a property, and part of the intension of the concept of God, there is still no guarantee that the concept of God has any extension, or applies to any thing. If my analysis of Anselm’s thought is correct, then Shaffer’s point is irrelevant as a criticism of the historical Anselm.
rather talking about God, that than which nothing greater can be conceived, who exists in intellectu and in re.

I have attempted to meet Anselm's argument on its own grounds, by provisionally granting him his presuppositions—viz., the in intellectu—in re distinction, the distinction between one's conceiving of a thing and one's conceiving it to exist, and the doctrine that existence is a property. Many philosophers have, of course, argued that one or more of these presuppositions is false. The problem with that line of attack is that each of the presuppositions, taken singly, is not utterly indefensible. Indeed, that fact is probably the chief contributing cause of the perennial philosophical fascination with the Ontological Argument. What I have tried to show, however, is that taken together, the presuppositions still yield no convincing proof for the existence of God.

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