

# Anselm Review

*God as a Being than which none  
greater can be thought*

# ***GOD AND PERFECTION:***

# Anselm's God

- Before we can debate the existence of God, we must have a precise concept of the kind of being we are debating about.
- For Anselm, when we talk about “God,” we are talking about a “being-than-which-none-greater-can-be-conceived.”
- – I.e., a fully perfect being that lacks nothing.

# “Greatness”

- There is a long history of discussion (among philosophers and theologians) about what it means for one being to be more or less “great” or “perfect” than another.
- For Anselm, existence is a “greatness making” property.
  - If a thing lacks existence, it lacks something, and so isn’t as great or as perfect as we could imagine.

# Anselm's Argument (in a nutshell)

- Claim: A being than-which-none-greater-can-be-thought *must* exist, because denying its existence involves a contradiction.
- Reasoning: To say that a being than-which-none-greater-can-be-thought exists *only* in the understanding is to say that *it* would be greater if it existed in reality as well. If so, then it (i.e., a being than-which-none-greater-can-be-thought) is a being that-than-which-a-greater-*can*-be-thought. And this is a contradiction, which is impossible.
  - I.e., it is *impossible* that this being *not* exist.

***GAUNILO'S CHALLENGE:***

# Gaunilo's Claim

- If Anselm's argument works for a *being* than-which-none-greater-can-be-conceived, it must also work for an *island* than-which-none-greater-can-be-conceived.
- But it does *not* work for an island ....
  - Clearly, there is no existing island that we can't imagine being greater.
- So the argument does not work for "God" either.

# Gaunilo's Strategy:

- Gaunilo, like Anselm, believes in God. But he argues that Anselm's attempt to prove this fails.
- Gaunilo can't say exactly *where* Anselm's argument goes wrong.
- He reasons that *if* Anselm's argument succeeded, it would also prove the existence of many other things, things we know do not in fact exist.
  - And if it does not work in the other cases, it cannot work in the case of God.