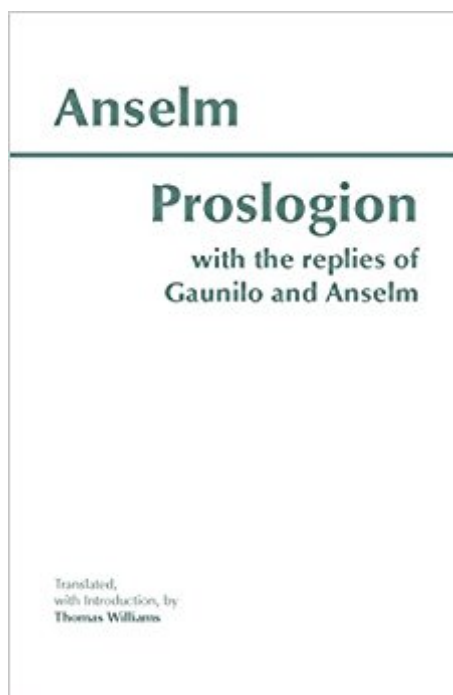


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Proslogion, With The Replies Of Gaunilo And Anselm



Synopsis

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

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Williams' translation is scrupulously faithful and accurate without being slavishly literal, and yet is lively and graceful to both the eye and the ear. --Paul Vincent Spade, Indiana University

Text: English (translation) Original Language: Latin --This text refers to the Library Binding edition.

Great

It is always a pleasure for me to read works from the distant past. His logic and insight are an exercise in thinking and help solidify one's thinking.

What I was looking for

Great quality

My daughter - in college - thinks this book is quite useful. Glad she does - as the professor gave her little choice about it as her textbook.

I got around to reading this after I finished Descartes Meditation on First Philosophy. I started it because it seems that a very similar proof for God was used (and about 500 years earlier) so I wanted to see the original in its context. The proof presented here, later called the ontological argument, basically says that one can imagine a being which none greater can exist, for this being to be imagined then he must exist because something which does exist is greater than something which doesn't, this being is God and hence God does exist. At least that was my understanding of it. I don't really find much weight in the argument but it was pretty influential, obviously with Descartes and others using it again later. To my surprise though, the proof takes up a single one paragraph long chapter in this short work and really isn't very prominent. The majority of the work is Anselm mostly praising God and it reads in a semi devotional fashion. Anselm goes on about God's mercy with how he is good both to the just and the wicked, this is evident by how the wicked can also prosper the same as the just (I guess this changes when the wicked are cast into hell??) This is followed up by a reply of a certain individual named Guanilo, who speaks on the behalf of the fool. He tells a story in an almost mocking tone about imagine a perfect island which is greater than any other, and regardless if anyone has ever stepped foot on the island or seen it, it must exist because if it didn't then it wouldn't be greater than any island which do in fact exist. The last part of the short book is Anselm's reply to this, but it was mostly lost on me, I'd have to read it again but his word plays got a little hard to follow and by then I was tired of the whole ontological argument. As for the book itself, its pretty interesting to read this middle ages philosophy and get into their mindset, and no doubt the book itself is important for historical purposes. Also the non ontological part of the Proslogion makes for an interesting saint type of devotional read.

There are few "proofs" for the existence of God that have been discussed more frequently by philosophers and theologians than Anselm's ontological argument. In it, Anselm argues that once one understands what the word "God" means--namely, as that than which nothing greater can be conceived--one must also grant God's necessary existence. This argument still tickles the fancy of philosophers in our own day. Alvin Plantinga re-formulated it in terms of modal logic, as did Charles Hartshorne before him. Anselm's Proslogion, ably translated by Thomas Williams, is the short treatise in which the argument appears in a very short chapter (Chapter 2). The book also includes a response to Anselm by the monk Gaunilo, and Anselm's very compact and sometimes confused

reply. This isn't Anselm's first stab at a demonstration of God's existence. His earlier Monologion is mainly devoted to an examination of the doctrine of the Trinity. But the first sections of the book offer a couple of other arguments. This edition of the Proslogion, like all the books published by Hackett, is inexpensive and sturdy.

Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) was a medieval philosopher, theologian, prior of Bec, and Archbishop of Canterbury from 1093 to 1109. This volume includes the Proslogion, Gaunilo's reply to the ontological argument, and Anselm's reply to Gaunilo's reply. Anselm is known by the motto "faith seeking understanding." The Proslogion contains Anselm's famous ontological argument. The ontological argument is as follows. Premise I: God is by definition that than which no greater can exist meaning that God is the most perfect object, the most perfect being that can be thought about. Secondly, it is understood that it is greater to exist in reality and the mind than to exist only in the mind. If you tell the fool who does not believe in God to think about the concept of that than which no greater can exist, that concept exists in his mind. Even the fool cannot doubt that the concept exists in his mind since he had heard it and understood it and "whatever is understood is in the mind" (pg 150). Premise II: Anselm states that that which exists in both the mind and in reality is greater than that which exists only in thought. God by definition is that than which no greater can exist and if it does not exist in reality it contradicts itself. Conclusion: God exists. The rest of the Proslogion applies this "proof" to other attributes of God. Gaunilo's primary objection to Anselm's ontological argument takes the form of an island. Premise I: Imagine the perfect island, the island that no greater than be thought. Premise II: The Island of that than which no greater can be thought plus existence is greater than the island in the mind. Conclusion: Thus, the perfect island of that than which no greater can be thought exists in reality. But we know that that island surely cannot exist in reality. Then Gaunilo shows that one can prove every highest form of any kind using his argument. Thus, man can think of the perfectly evil being in the mind and prove its existence. Anselm replies that Gaunilo application of the island is a type of form, and the perfectly evil is a type of being. While in his ontological argument he was arguing for the greatest extent of being possible, not just a form of perfection, but ultimate perfection itself. In response to the argument that the mind cannot hold truth from "the verbal formula" (pg 150) Anselm states then the mind is not actually thinking of that than which no greater cannot be thought. And if the concept of than which no greater cannot be thought can be thought to exist then it must exist "of necessity" (pg 156). Sadly, the Introduction to this work is almost too brief to be of much use besides explaining basic tenants of Anselm's Proslogion. Gaunilo's reply is practically ignored and the ramifications of Anselm's ontological

argument are not even touched on. Anselm's proof has long reaching Philosophical implications and influence. That said this volume does lay out for the diligent reader the necessary primary sources. A must buy for the those interested in Medieval History and Medieval Philosophy (and hopefully other philosophy buffs)!

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