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Indici di Giuliana MUSOTTO



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John A. Demetracopoulos

The Stoic Background to the Universality of Anselm's Definition of "God" in *Proslogion* 2: Boethius' *Second Commentary* on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* ad 16a7-11

1. A survey of the research into the sources of Anselm's definition of God

According to the research thus far carried out, the principal sources of Anselm's definition of God as *aliquid quo majus cogitari non possit* in the first lines of *Proslogion*, ch. 2¹ are two major Christian thinkers, i.e. Augustine and Boethius. In addition, some specific passages from Seneca, Cicero and Horace are generally deemed as Anselm's complementary or, at least, possible sources. Let us survey the relevant evidence in detail² along with some new small pieces of evidence.

1.1. Christian sources

1.1.1. Augustine

At least two Augustinian passages describe God as *majus omnibus*. In the *De diversis quaestionibus LXXXIII*, 50 Anselm could find the following parenthetical statement: *Nihil enim Deo melius*.³ A similar passing statement is found in *Sermo CXXXII*, 2: *Sed tu quem times, major est omnibus*.⁴ And in the *De libero arbitrio* II, 6, 14, 54 it is argued at length that God is *quo est nullus superior*.⁵

¹ F. S. SCHMITT (Ed.), *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia. Tomus I*, Romae-Edinburghi 1938 (repr. Stuttgart/Bad Cannstatt 1968), p. 101,5. All references to Anselm's writings are to this edition.

² As far as I know, the fullest list of the antecedents to Anselm's definition of "God" has been offered by C. VIOLA, *Origine et portée de la formule dialectique du Proslogion de Saint Anselme: de l'«argument ontologique» à l'«argument mégalogique»*, in «Rivista di Filosofia Neo-scolastica» 83/3 (1992), pp. 339-384, esp. pp. 347-361. A survey of the ancient (both Greek and Roman) ideas that take precedence to Anselm's definition of God is also offered by W. RÖD (*Der Gott der reinen Vernunft. Die Auseinandersetzung um den ontologischen Gottesbeweis von Anselm bis Hegel*, München 1992, pp. 38-44).

³ A. MUTZENBECHER (Ed.), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus. De octo Dulcitii quaestionibus* (CSEL, 44A), Turnholti 1975, p. 77, 2.

⁴ PL 38, 736.

⁵ W. M. GREEN (Ed.), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini opera. Pars II,2. Contra Academicos, De beata vita, De ordine, De magistro, De libero arbitrio* (CCSL, 29), Turnholti 1970, p. 246,30-32 (=ed. F. DE CAPITANI, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini De libero arbitrio libri tres. Prolegomena, textus, Italica interpretatio, commentarius, indices, Vita e*

Further, several Augustinian passages offer a description of God as a being greater than which nobody can conceive of. the *De moribus Ecclesiae et de moribus Manichaeorum* I,11,24 reads: *Summum bonum omnino, et quo esse aut cogitari melius nihil possit, aut intelligendus aut credendus Deus est, si blasphemis carere cogitamus.*⁶ Likewise, in *Sermo XXI*, 2 one reads: *Putas quis est Deus? Putas qualis est Deus?[...] Quidquid cogitatione comprehenderis, non est. Si enim ipse esset, comprehendi non posset.*⁷

Further, in the *Confessiones* VII,4,6 Augustine addresses God in these words: *Neque enim ulla anima umquam potuit poteritve cogitare aliquid quod sit te melius, qui summum et optimum bonum es.*⁸ Since the context of this definition of God is an allocution to Him, it may be suggested that this passage gave Anselm the idea of using this definition in a similar context.⁹

Closer to Anselm's *Proslogion*, ch. 2 is the following passage from Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* I, 7, 7, 1-13:

Nam cum ille unus cogitatur "deorum Deus" (Ps. 49,1; 135,2), ab his etiam qui alios et suspicantur et vocant et colunt deos sive in coelo sive in terra, ita cogitatur, ut aliquid quo nihil melius sit atque sublimius illa cogitatio conetur attingere [...] Omnes tamen certatim pro excellentia Dei dimicant; nec quisquam inveniri potest qui hoc Deum credat esse, quo melius aliquid est. Itaque hoc omnes Deum consentiunt esse, quod caeteris rebus omnibus anteponunt.¹⁰

Augustine stresses the universality of conceiving God as *aliquid quo nihil melius est*, in the sense that no adherent to whatever religion on earth would raise any objection to it. The distance – if any – from this to Anselm's comment on his own definition of "God" that *certe ipse idem "insipiens"* (Ps. 13,1; 52,1), *cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: «aliquid quo majus nihil cogitari potest», intelligit quod audit*¹¹ is easy to bridge.

That Anselm had read not only the *Confessiones* and the *De doctrina Christiana* but also the rest of Augustine's texts containing the definition of "God" under discussion, lies beyond doubt.¹²

pensiero, Milano 1994, p. 308).

⁶ J. B. BAUER (Ed.), *S. Aurelii Augustini De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum* (CSEL, 90), Vindobonae 1992, p. 109, 5-7.

⁷ PL 38: 143 (passage noted by C. VIOLA, *Origine*, cit., (*supra*, n. 2), p. 350).

⁸ M. SKUTELLA, *S. Aurelii Augustini Confessionum libri XIII* ("Teubner"), eds. H. Juergens-W. Schaub, Stutgardiae-Lipsiae 1996, pp. 128,27-129,2.

⁹ «Ergo Domine [...] da mihi [...]» (*Ibid.*, p. 101,3).

¹⁰ I. MARTIN (Ed.), *Sancti Aurelii Augustini opera. Pars IV,1* (CSEL, 32), Turnholti 1962, p. 10. F. VAN FLETEREN, *Augustine's Influence on Anselm's Proslogion*, in: D. E. LUSCOMBE-G. R. EVANS (Eds.), *Anselm, Aosta, Bec and Canterbury. Papers in Commemoration of the 900th Anniversary of Anselm's Enthronement as Archbishop, 25 September 1093*, Sheffield 1996, pp. 56-69, esp. p. 64) has plausibly suggested that Anselm's definition is particularly close to the passages from the *De doctrina Christiana* and the *De moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae et de moribus Manichaeorum*. I am inclined to think that the former is the direct source of Anselm's definition. Yet I think that this has to do only with the verbal form of the definition; for, as I shall argue, Anselm was well aware of the universality of the definition of God he used as the basis of his argument as well as of the Stoic recognition of this universality.

¹¹ *Proslogion*, 2 (p. 101, 7-8).

¹² On the extent to which Anselm knew Augustine's *œuvre* see R. W. SOUTHERN, *St. Anselm: a Portrait in a Landscape*, Cambridge U. P. 1990, pp. 57-58; J. HOPKINS, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm*, Minneapolis, 1972, pp. 16-28; F. VAN FLETEREN, *Traces of Augustine's De Trinitate XIII in Anselm's Cur Deus homo*, in: P. GILBERT-H.

In addition, as has been suggested by C. Viola,¹³ a manual of Logic commonly ascribed to Augustine during the Early Middle Ages, the *De dialectica* (or *Principia dialecticae*), ch. 5, contains a passing description of God which is similar to that of *Proslogion* 2. Some manuscripts of this text must have read: “*Deus*” est quod neque corpus est neque animal est neque sensus est neque intellectus est neque aliquid quod excogitari potest.¹⁴

This passage is nowadays deemed not as belonging to the text but just a gloss. This, however, would not impede Anselm from reading it as part of the text itself. What would prevent us from positively stating that this was in principle possible¹⁵ is that this passage is absent from all the manuscripts thus far examined.¹⁶ Still, the printed passage in the Maurine edition¹⁷ must go back to some manuscripts; and some similar glosses in two manuscripts date from the 9th and 10th centuries.¹⁸

Last but not least, C. Viola¹⁹ has also drawn attention to the first *quaestio* of the pseudo-Augustinian *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti*, where to the question *quid est Deus* the following answer is offered: *Hoc est, quod nulla attingit opinio. Plus est enim quam quidquid dici poterit aut cogitari [...] Quia enim supra omnia est, necesse est ut omnium mentes excedat.*²⁰

This passage, apart from containing both the *majus omnium* and the *quo majus cogitari non possit*, concludes the latter from the former.²¹

1.1.2. Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*

Some (if not all) of these Augustinian passages inspired, in all probability, Boethius' following statements in the *Consolatio philosophiae* III, pr. 10, §§ 7; 15:

KOHLBERGER-E. SALMANN (Eds.), *Cur Deus homo. Atti del Congresso Anselmiano Internazionale, Roma, 21-23 maggio 1998*, Rome 1999, pp. 165-178 (esp. p. 166); ID., *Augustine's Influence*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 10) *in toto*.

¹³ C. VIOLA, *Origine*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 2), pp. 358-361. ID., *Expérience et métaphysique chez saint Anselme, Quaestio 4*, (2004) 63-90, esp. p. 82, note 34; I. SCIUTO, *Anselmo. Proslogion. Gaunilone. Difesa dell'insipiente. Risposta di Anselmo a Gaunilone. Introduzione, traduzione, note e apparati*, Milano 1996, pp. 31-32.

¹⁴ PL 32, 1410. B. DARRELL JACKSON-J. PINBORG, *Augustine. De Dialectica. Translated With an Introduction and Notes by B. Darrell Jackson from the Text Newly Edited by J. Pinborg*, Dordrecht/Boston 1975, p. 125, note 2.

¹⁵ As stated by C. VIOLA, *Origine*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 2), p. 360.

¹⁶ B. DARRELL JACKSON-J. PINBORG, *Augustine*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 14).

¹⁷ Reproduced in PL 32 (*Supra*, n. 14).

¹⁸ B. DARRELL JACKSON-J. PINBORG, *Augustine*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 14), pp. 10; 125, note 2. M. GIBSON, *Lanfranc of Bec*, Oxford 1978, p. 43; I. SCIUTO, *Anselmo. Proslogion*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 14), p. 28, parallels the definition of God in the *Proslogion* with a phrase from the pseudo-Augustinian *Paraphrasis Themistianae* of Aristotle's *Categories*, ch. 5 (ed. L. MINIO-PALUELLO, *Aristoteles Latinus I 1-5. Categoriae vel Praedicamenta*, Bruges/Paris 1961, p. 134,19), which refers to the Category of “substance”: [...] οὐσίαν [...] *an, extra quam nec inveniri aliquid nec cogitari potest*. Yet stating that “substance” embraces all the beings one can conceive of has absolutely nothing to do with God and His definition (C. VIOLA, *Origine*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 2), pp. 358-359).

¹⁹ C. VIOLA, *Origine*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 2), p. 361.

²⁰ PL 35, 2213-2214.

²¹ That is why, in spite of the fact that Anselm clearly distinguishes between these two descriptions of God (*Reply to Gaunilo* 5; pp. 134,27-136,2), I do not present the texts which contain the former definition separately from those containing the latter. Anselm knew of some passages of both classes, and the passages he knew were just as sufficient to inspire his reflection on the definition of God offered in the *Proslogion*.

Deum rerum omnium principem bonum esse communis humanorum conceptio probat animorum. Nam cum nihil Deo melius excogitari queat, id quo melius nihil est, bonum esse quis dubitet? [...]

Quare quod a summo bono diversum est sui natura, id summum bonum non est: quod nefas est de Deo cogitare, quo nihil constat esse praestantius.²²

That Anselm had read and used Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae* is beyond any doubt.²³

1.1.3. Lanfranc of Bec

Finally, as I. Sciuto has suggested,²⁴ Anselm no doubt knew of his mentor Lanfranc's passing description of God as *id quod rebus omnibus incomparabiliter majus est* in the opening chapter of his famous *De corpore et sanguine Domini*.²⁵ The intimate relationship between Lanfranc and Anselm is by itself enough to assure us of Anselm's acquaintance with this writing. Further, the fact that Anselm had used in his *Cur Deus homo* the *De corporis et sanguinis Christi veritate in Eucharistia* of Lanfranc's disciple Guitmundus Aversanus shows that Anselm was somewhat interested in the so-called 'Eucharistic quarrel' of his time.²⁶ This finding points to the same direction as the fact that a close friend of Anselm, Gilbert Crispin, was involved in this quarrel.²⁷

1.2. Heathen sources

Apart from these Christian (or pseudo-Christian) pieces, several passages from some heathen ancient Latin authors available in the 11th century have been suggested as potential sources of Anselm's definition of God.

1.2.1. Cicero

For instance, it has been pointed out²⁸ that Cicero's *De natura deorum* II, 7, 18-8, 20 is very close to Anselm's definition of God: *Atqui certe nihil omnium rerum melius est*

²² C. MORESCHINI (Ed.), *Boethius. De consolatione philosophiae. Opuscula theologica. Editio altera*, Teubner, Monachii-Lipsiae 2005, pp. 81-82.

²³ Apart from the remarks of J. HOPKINS, *A Companion*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 12), pp. 29-30; T. GRZESIK, *What Anselm Owes to Boethius and Why He May Be Regarded as the Initiator of the Boethian Age*, in: P. GILBERT et al. (Eds.), *Cur Deus homo*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 12), pp. 179-190, esp. pp. 182-184. How much Boethius' *Consolatio* was read and used by major as well as minor authors of the Early Middle Ages can be seen from a surprising borrowing from it by Eadmer (R. W. SOUTHERN, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, by Eadmer. Edited with an Introduction, Notes and Translation*, Oxford 1979, p. 30, note 1).

²⁴ I. SCIUTO, *Anselmo. Proslogion*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 13), p. 73, note 25.

²⁵ PL 150, 409B.

²⁶ G. D'ONOFRIO, *Anselmo e i «teologi moderni»*, in: P. GILBERT et al. (Eds.), *Cur Deus homo*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 12), pp. 87-146, esp. pp. 126-130.

²⁷ G. R. EVANS, *Gilbert Crispin on the Eucharist. A Monastic Postscript to Lanfranc and Berengar*, in «Journal of Theological Studies» 31/1 (N.S.) (1980), pp. 28-43.

²⁸ L. GELINAS, *The Stoic Argument Ex Gradibus Entium*, in «Phronesis» 51/1 (2006), pp. 49-73, esp. p. 55.

*mundo, nihil praestabilius, nihil pulchrius, nec solum nihil est, sed ne cogitari quidem quicquam melius potest [...].*²⁹

Likewise, one can follow C. Viola's suggestion³⁰ to discern this definition in I, 19, 51, too: *Et quaerere a nobis Balbe soletis quae vita deorum sit quaeque ab is degatur aetas. ea videlicet qua nihil beatius nihil omnibus bonis affluentius cogitari potest.*³¹

In a *Catalogus librorum Abbatiae Beccensis circa saeculum duodecimum* Cicero's *De natura deorum* is included.³²

1.2.2. Seneca

Such a stress on the magnitude of God (Stoically identified with the entire world) occurs also in Seneca's *Naturales quaestiones* I, praef., ll. 101-103, § 13: *Quid est Deus? Mens universi. Quid est Deus? Quod vides totum et quod non vides totum. Sic demum magnitudo illi sua redditur, qua nihil majus cogitari potest, si solus est omnia.*³³

That Anselm could in principle have known this text is indicated by the fact that two manuscripts of the *Naturales quaestiones* were extant in the library of the monastery of Bec in the 12th century.³⁴

²⁹ O. PLASBERG, *M. Tulli Ciceronis scripta quae manserunt omnia. Fasc. 45: De natura deorum*, ed. W. Ax, Teubner, Stuttgartiae 1980, p. 56,18-21). See also II, 31, 79-80 (cit., pp. 80,25-81,8).

³⁰ C. VIOLA, *Origine*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 2), p. 347.

³¹ O. PLASBERG, *M. Tulli*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 29), p. 21,5-7. I subscribe to F. DE CAPITANI's reservation (*Sancti Aurelii*, cit., (*supra*, n. 5), p. 124, note 304) against the suggestion of O. DU ROY, *L'intelligence de la foi en la Trinité selon saint Augustin. Génèse de sa théologie trinitaire jusqu'en 391*, Paris 1966, p. 245, note 5; that Cicero's *Tusculanae disputationes* I, 26, 65: «Quid est enim memoria rerum et verborum? Quid porro inventio? Profecto id, quo ne in Deo quidem quicquam maius intellegi potest»; M. POHLENZ (Ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis scripta quae manserunt omnia. Fasc. 44: Tusculanae disputationes*, Teubner, Stuttgartiae 1986, p. 249,24-26; may have been the source of Augustine's description of God as *quo est nullus superior* (*De libero arbitrio* II, 6, 14, 54; (ed.) W. M. GREEN, *Sancti Aurelii*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 5), p. 246,30-32 = (ed.) F. DE CAPITANI, cit., p. 308).

³² PL 150, 781A. Evidence that Anselm had used the *De natura deorum* is offered in § 4 (pp. 16-18).

³³ (Ed.) H. M. HINE, *L. Annaei Senecae Naturalium quaestionum libri*, Teubner, Stuttgartiae/Lipsiae 1996, p. 7 (parallel noted by F. S. SCHMITT, p. 102 ad loc.).

³⁴ G. BECKER, *Catalogi bibliothecarum antiqui*, Bonn 1885, pp. 202, n. 104; 266, n. 136 (cited by R.W. SOUTHERN, *St. Anselm and His Biographer. A Study of Monastic Life and Thought 1050 - c. 1130*, Cambridge U. P., 1963, p. 59; see also R. W. SOUTHERN, *St. Anselm: a Portrait*, cit., (*supra*, n. 12), p. 129; *Catalogus librorum Abbatiae Beccensis circa saeculum duodecimum*; PL 150, 778B. A detailed examination of Anselm's texts may reveal more Stoic sources than one might at first sight expect. E.g., Anselm's statement that «et natura te docet, ut conservo tuo, id est homo homini, facias, quod tibi ab illo vis fieri» (Mt. 7,12) (*Cur Deus homo*, cit., I, 20; F. S. SCHMITT (Ed.), *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia. Tomus II*, Romae 1940 (repr. Edinburghi 1946), p. 87, 15-17) accords with Seneca's general statement (*Naturales quaestiones* II,59,2; H. M. HINE (Ed.), *L. Annaei*, cit., (*supra*, n. 33), pp. 104-105) that «omnibus rebus omnibusque sermonibus» (either on the «occulta naturae» or on the «divina») aliquid salutare miscendum est» and coincides, even verbally, with Seneca's *De clementia* II, 6, 1-2 («[Sapiens] [...] ut homo homini ex communi dabit [...]»); E. MALASPINA (Ed.), *L. Annaei Senecae De clementia libri duo. Prolegomeni, testo critico e commento*, Torino 2001, pp. 185-186 and Cicero's *De officiis* III, 6, 26-27 («Atque etiam si hoc natura praescribit, ut homo homini, quicumque sit, ob eam ipsam causam, quod is homo sit, consultum velit, necesse est secundum eandem naturam omnium utilitatem esse communem [...]»); M. TESTARD (Ed.), *Cicéron. Les devoirs. Livres II et III. Texte établi et traduit*, Paris 1984, pp. 83-84). True, this idea occurs also in Augustine's *Sermones de Scripturis* XC,7; PL 38, 563-564) and *Epistola* CLIII,5,14 (PL 33, 659) as well as in (ps.-) Augustine's *Sermones ad fratres in*

Further, F. De Capitani³⁵ drew attention to the subsequent fragment from a lost writing of Seneca preserved and highly praised by Lactantius in his *Divinae institutiones* VI,24,11-14, a work which was in principle available in the 11th century:³⁶

Exhortationes suas Seneca mirabili sententia terminavit. «Magnum – inquit –, nescio quid, majusque quam cogitari potest, numen est, cui vivendo operam damus. Huic nos approbemus. Nam nihil prodest inclusam esse conscientiam: patemus Deo».³⁷

1.2.3. Horace

Horace's *Carmina* IV, 2, 37-40 contains the same idea expressed almost verbatim³⁸. There Caesar Augustus is praised by means of the subsequent words: [...] *quo nihil majus meliusve terris fata donavere bonique divi nec dabunt, quamvis redeant in aurum tempora priscum*.³⁹

«In Anselm's correspondence there is convincing evidence that he was familiar with, and could use in a casual way, the works of Horace» as well as of other Classical Latin poets, such as Virgil, Lucan, and Persius. Most of Anselm's quotations from Classical Latin poets «are not common tags, but imply a ready familiarity with poets».⁴⁰

2. Some other possible Patristic sources

2.1. Lactantius

To these already known passages from ancient Christian Latin literature I would add Lactantius' *De ira Dei* III,3 and XXIV, 6:

i) [...] *divinam potestatem, qua nihil est majus, nihil melius [...]*

eremo commorantes 17 (PL 40, 1263); still, in these texts this doctrine is ascribed to Seneca, who is described as a close friend of the Apostles. On Seneca and Augustine, S. C. BYERS, *Augustine and the Cognitive Cause of Stoic "Preliminary Passions"*, in «Journal of the History of Philosophy» 41/4 (2003), pp. 433-448, esp. p. 434, note 5. For a survey of the Stoic affinities of Augustine's ethics see M. COLISH, *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages, Vol. II: Stoicism in Christian Latin Thought through the Sixth Century*, Leiden 1985, pp. 159-169; 207-225; 232-234.

³⁵ F. DE CAPITANI, *Sancti Aurelii*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 5), p. 84, note 240.

³⁶ In late 10th century this work was available to Gerbert of Reims; and few decades after Anselm's death, «William of Malmesbury made a concerted effort to assemble as many passages as he could find from the work into a single text» (M. S. KEMPSHALL, *De Re Publica*, 1.39 in *Medieval and Renaissance Political Thought*, in: J.G.F. POWELL-J.A. NORTH (Eds.), *Cicero's Republic* (Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies of the University of London. Supplement, 76), London 2001, pp. 99-135, esp. 99-100.

³⁷ S. BRANDT-G. LAUBMANN (Eds.), *L. Caeli Firmiani Lactantii opera. Pars I* (CSEL, XIX,1) Lipsiae 1880, p. 573 (= ed. F. HAASE, *Lucii Annaei Senecae fragmenta*, Teubner, Lipsiae 1878, fr. 24).

³⁸ These pagan passages on the definition of God, along with Plotinus, may have been Augustine's sources, too (F. DE CAPITANI, *Sancti Aurelii*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 5), pp. 123-124; 205).

³⁹ D.R. SHACKLETON BAILEY (Ed.), *Q. Horati Flacci opera*, Teubner, Stuttgartiae-Lipsiae 1995, p. 113.

⁴⁰ R. W. SOUTHERN, *St. Anselm and*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 34), p. 17. See also F. BERTINI, *Aspetti letterari nell'opera di Anselmo: le citazioni dei classici latini nelle Epistole*, in «Rivista di Storia della Filosofia» (N. S.) 48 (1993), pp. 457-465.

ii) Quid enim Deo aut potentia majus est aut ratione perfectius aut claritate luculentius?⁴¹

Although Lactantius, because of the scope of his argument, confines his statement to a concrete divine property, i.e. power, no reader would presumably deny that, for Lactantius, superiority characterises God's being in general.

Further, in XXII, 2, 10-11 Lactantius takes the recognition of the existence of "God the highest" as equivalent to the notion of religion as such: *In sola enim religione, id est in Dei summi notione, sapientia est.*⁴²

This, as we will see (§ 3.1; pp. 8-9), stands very close to Boethius' connection of the concept of the «most eminent nature» with the universal «cultura» of God.

2.2. Gregorius Nazianzenus Latinus

Furthermore, this conception of God occurs in some texts of Greek Patristic literature, too⁴³ Anselm could in principle have read such a text, translated into Latin by Rufinus, i.e. Gregory Nazianzen's *Oratio VI* (= *De pace I*), 12, 17-18: *Nihil tam bonum, nihil tam praeclarum, nihil tam excelsum quam substantia ac natura Dei*⁴⁴ (κάλλιστον μὲν τῶν ὄτων καὶ ὑψηλότατον Θεός).⁴⁵ *Oration VI* was available, for example, in the library of the monastery of Pomposa (near Ferrara) as early as in 1093⁴⁶ as well as in Canterbury from the 12th century onwards and is contained in no less than twelve older codices (dating from 8th to 11th century) in various places of Europe.⁴⁷

3. Boethius' *Second Commentary* on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione*, ad 16a7-11

3.1. The passage

On the basis of Augustine's, Boethius', Seneca's and Horace's passages it has often (and quite plausibly) been argued that Anselm was aware of the universality of the acceptance of this definition:

The premise corresponds to a definition of God found in Christian texts [...] and in secular works [...] So Anselm's purpose was perhaps to recommend the faith to non-Christians from a

⁴¹ C. INGREMEAU (Ed.), *Lactance. La colère de Dieu. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, commentaire et index* (Sources chrétiennes, 289), Paris 1982, pp. 98; 210.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁴³ J. A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Philosophy and Faith. The Rational Demonstrability of Christian Dogmas in Gregory of Nyssa or Fides Deprecans Intellectum* (in Modern Greek, with an English Summary), Athens 1996, p. 102, note 20.

⁴⁴ A. ENGELBRECHT (Ed.), *Tyranni Rufini opera. Pars I: Orationum Gregorii Nazianzeni novem interpretatio* (CSEL, 46A), Wien 1910, p. 222,12-13.

⁴⁵ M.-A. CALVET-SEBASTI (Ed.), *Grégoire de Nazianze. Discours 6-12. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes* (Sources chrétiennes, 405), Paris 1995, p. 152 (= PG 35, 737B).

⁴⁶ PL 150, 1350A («De continentia et unitate monachorum»).

⁴⁷ A. ENGELBRECHT (Ed.), *Tyranni*, cit., (*supra*, n. 44), p. XXXIX.

premise stated by Christian and non-Christian authors alike.⁴⁸

A strong piece of evidence for this is a passage which, to my knowledge, has thus far passed unnoticed (probably because it does not form part of a treatise of philosophical theology) – a passage from Boethius' 2nd *Commentary* (lib. I, cap. 1) on Aristotle's *De interpretatione*. There, a refutation of Aspasius' (ca. 100 – ca. 150) narrow interpretation of Aristotle's sentence that *eaedem apud omnes passiones animi sunt* (16a6-7)⁴⁹ is offered:

In hoc vero Aspasius permolestus est. Ait enim:

qui fieri potest, ut "eaedem apud omnes" "animae passiones" sint (16a6-7), cum tam diversa sententia de justo ac bono sit?

Arbitratur Aristotelem "passiones animae" non de rebus incorporalibus, sed de his tantum quae sensibus capi possunt "passiones animae"⁵⁰ dixisse. Quod perfalsum est. Neque enim umquam "intellexisse" dicitur, qui fallitur; et fortasse quidem "passionem animi habuisse" dicitur, quicumque id quod est bonum non eodem modo quo est, sed aliter arbitratur, 'intellexisse' vero non dicitur. Aristoteles autem cum de "similitudine" (16a7) loquitur, de "intellectu" (16a10) pronuntiat. Neque enim fieri potest, ut qui quod bonum est malum esse arbitratur, boni "similitudinem" mente conceperit. Neque enim "intellexit" rem subjectam. Sed quae sunt justa ac bona ad positionem omnia naturamve referuntur. Et si de justo ac bono ita loquitur, ut de eo quod "civile jus" aut "civilis injuria" dicitur, recte non "eaedem sunt passiones animae" (16a6-7), quoniam civile jus et civile bonum positione est, non natura. Naturale vero bonum atque justum "apud omnes" gentes "idem est" (16a6-7). Et de "Deo" quoque idem: cujus quamvis diversa cultura sit, "idem" (16a6-7) tamen cujusdam eminentissimae naturae est "intellectus" (16a10).⁵¹

3.2. Anselm's acquaintance with Boethius' *Commentary*

3.2.1. The evidence from the *Monologion*

Did Anselm pay any attention to this passage? In the course of the development of his doctrine of the psychological images of the Holy Trinity in *Monologion*, 10,⁵² Anselm tries to explain how the second person of the Trinity can be regarded as the *locutio* or *verbum* or *signum* of the first taken as *mens*. He distinguishes between three kinds of signs, i.e. of

⁴⁸ S. GERSH, *John Scottus Eriugena and Anselm of Canterbury*; ch. 6 of: J. MARENBNON (ed.), *Routledge History of Philosophy. Vol. III: Medieval Philosophy*, London/New York, 1998, pp. 120-149, esp. p. 134.

⁴⁹ L. MINIO-PALUELLO (Ed.), *Aristoteles Latinus. II,1. De interpretatione vel Periermenias. Translatio Boethii*, Bruges-Paris 1965, p. 5,4-9.

⁵⁰ In all probability, of the two occurrences of the phrase «passiones animae» one is a mere «reduplicatio».

⁵¹ C. MEISER (Ed.), *Anicii Manlii Severini Boetii Commentarii in librum Aristotelis Περὶ ἑρμηνείας. Pars posterior secundam editionem et indices continens*, Teubner, Lipsiae 1880, pp. 41,11-42,6. (partial translation in: R. SORABJI, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 AD. A Sourcebook. Vol. 3. Logic and Metaphysics*, London 2004, p. 206).

⁵² F. S. SCHMITT (Ed.), pp. 24,27-25,25. As J. HOPKINS has pointed out (*A New, Interpretive Translation of St. Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion. Edited and Translated*, Minneapolis 1987, p. 320, notes 22 and 23), this tripartite distinction derives, in all probability, from Augustine's *De Trinitate*. This suggestion was made as early as 1934 by L. BANDINI, *Sant'Anselmo d'Aosta. Monologion. Introduzione, traduzione e note*, Firenze 1931, p. 33, nn. 1 and 2.

means of referring to a thing (*res*): *i*) the sensible, oral or written (that is language); *ii*) the same signs thought of tacitly (*intima locutio*), and *iii*) the non-lingual representation of a thing in our mind, either in the form of “*imago*” (e. g., the *figura* of a singular man) or in the elaborated form of *ratio* or *universalis essentia* (e.g., the definition of *homo* as «animal rationale mortale»). And he deems the third sort of signs as superior to the rest, because these signs *naturalia [1] sunt et apud omnes gentes eadem [2]* and hence are absolutely sufficient to carry out their very task as “signs”. Anselm’s reference to the natural character of the third class of “signs” is a clear citation from Boethius’ translation of Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* 1, 16a6-8.⁵³ F. S. Schmitt, in his *apparatus fontium* to ch. 10,⁵⁴ plausibly adds a reference to Boethius’ *First Commentary* on the *De interpretatione*, lib. I, cap. 1 (*De signis*).⁵⁵ Although the specific passage⁵⁶ he points out as Anselm’s source does not exhibit any mark of similarity not reducible to the *De interpretatione* itself, it is obvious that Anselm’s *naturalia sunt et apud omnes gentes eadem* is a loan from Boethius: [...] *Intellectus et res eadem apud omnes quamlibet diversissimas gentes [2] invenies [...] Naturalis [1] apud omnes [2] homines est animi conceptio atque animi passio*, which occurs in the same chapter.⁵⁷

Further, with regard to the source of Anselm’s definition of “*homo*”, F.S. Schmitt⁵⁸ points out Boethius’ *First Commentary* on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*; and J. Hopkins⁵⁹ adds some other Boethian texts as well as some Augustinian ones where this *locus communis* is contained. Still, in none of them does this definition occur in the context of a treatment of *signs*; instead, this is the case with Boethius’ *Second Commentary* on the *De interpretatione*, lib. I, cap. 1 (*De signis*).⁶⁰ This renders it plausible that Anselm read both the *prima* and the *secunda editio* of this *Commentary*; and this, in turn, implies that he took at least a glance at the passage cited above from the *secunda editio*. To this it should be added that the phrase *naturale[...] apud omnes gentes*, which is used by Anselm, occurs in the passage from the *secunda editio* cited above (§ 3. 1; p. 9).

In addition, the Boethian passage just cited contains a *nomen divinum*, i.e. *eminentissima natura*, which occurs four times in an Anselmian text written just a couple of years before the *Proslogion* and is closely related with it, i.e. the *Monologion*:

- i) [...] sic supereminet aliis, ut nec par habeat nec praestantius [...]
- ii) [...] Cum igitur naturarum aliae aliis negari non possint meliores, nihilominus persuadet ratio aliquam in eis sic supereminere, ut non habeat se superiorem [...]
- iii) [...] de re tam singulariter eminent [...]

⁵³ L. MINIO-PALUELLO (Ed.), *Aristoteles Latinus. II,1*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 49), p. 5).

⁵⁴ F. S. SCHMITT (Ed.), p. 25, ad ll. 11-12.

⁵⁵ C. MEISER (Ed.), *Anicii Manlii Severini Boetii Commentarii in librum Aristotelis Περὶ ἑρμηνείας. Pars prior versionem continuam et primam editionem continens*, Teubner, Lipsiae 1877, pp. 37,22-38,8. This suggestion was made as early as 1931 by E. BIANCHI, *Sant’Anselmo d’Aosta. Monologio*, Siena 1931, p. 30, note 1.

⁵⁶ «Intellectus autem et res nullus posuit, sed naturaliter sunt. Neque enim quod apud Romanos equus est apud barbaros cervus, sed apud diversas gentes eadem rerum natura est» (C. MEISER, cit., pp. 37,29-38,2).

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 38, 13-14; 39, 24-40,1.

⁵⁸ F. S. SCHMITT, p. 25, ad l. 9.

⁵⁹ J. HOPKINS, *A New*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 52), p. 320, note 21.

⁶⁰ C. MEISER, *Anicii*, cit., (*supra*, n. 55), p. 41,3-5.

iv) [...] quod supereminet in omnibus naturis.⁶¹

This implies that Anselm may have noticed the theological aspect of Boethius' passage and regarded it as being of some import for him.

3.2.2. The affinity between *Monologion* and *Proslogion* in regard to the doctrine of the formation of concepts

Further, Boethius insists –in a clearly Platonico-Stoic way– that *intelligere* can have as its object only truth (*neque enim umquam intellexisse dicitur, qui fallitur*) and that a false statement should, strictly speaking, rather be called *arbitrari*, which represents a lower level of *passio animi*.⁶² Likewise, in *Proslogion*, 4, Anselm distinguishes between (*bene*) *intelligere* (that is adequately comprehending a thing) and (*vocem*) *cogitare* (i.e. forming just a rough sense of what is going on with regard to something)⁶³ in a way that, as F. S. Schmitt has pointed out,⁶⁴ echoes Anselm's earlier exposition of this distinction in *Monologion*, ch. 10,⁶⁵ where, as we saw (§ 3.2.1; p. 10), Anselm drew upon Boethius' *prima* and *secunda editio* of his *Commentary* on the *De interpretatione*, where the definition of God cited in the above (§ 3.1; p. 9) is produced as an example of Aristotelian *intellectus*. This set of cross-references leaves no room for doubt that Anselm had seriously taken into account Boethius' *Commentaries* when writing not only the *Monologion* but also the *Proslogion*.

Let me also add that Boethius' *Commentary*, in contrast to the numerous texts by both Christian and heathen authors listed above (§ 1, pp. 1-8), was a Logical one and was, therefore, at least in Anselm's eyes, by its very nature more qualified to be trusted as a source of a definition (that is of an accurate description of the *intellectus*) of a word. Of the remaining writings that contain the definition under discussion, there is only one written in the sense of offering a direct definition of God, that by Seneca. But its tenor is so rhetorical (*Quid est Deus? [...] Quid est Deus?*) that it could not compete with either the passage from Boethius' *Commentary* under discussion or even the Augustinian occurrences of this definition or the expression of this definition in Boethius' *Consolatio philosophiae*. In addition, as G. R. Evans has suggested, Anselm, in his attempts to reach safe conclusions as to how this or that term must be defined, «relies heavily on Boethius' example», particularly on Boethius' two *Commentaries* on the *De interpretatione*.⁶⁶ Anselm, therefore, would not have failed to notice Boethius' implicit definition of the *intellectus* of "Go" in

⁶¹ *Monologion*, 1; 4; 33; 70 (pp. 15,9-10; 17,4; 53,2; 80,20). C. VIOLA, *La dialectique de la grandeur. Une interprétation du Proslogion*, in «Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale» 37 (1970), pp. 23-55, esp. p. 27.

⁶² J. MARENBNON, *Boethius*, Oxford U. P., 2003, p. 36; T. SHIMIZU, *Words and Concepts in Anselm and Abelard*, in: J. BIARD (Ed.), *Langage, sciences, philosophie au XII^e siècle*, Paris 1999, pp. 177-197, esp. p. 186; J. MAGEE, *Boethius on Signification and Mind*, Leiden-New York-København-Köln 1989, pp. 73-74; H. CHADWICK, *Boethius. The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy*, Oxford 1981, pp. 155-156 (incidentally, I would not share Magee's critique of Chadwick as far as Boethius' passage under discussion is concerned).

⁶³ F. S. SCHMITT, pp. 103, 18-104, 4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103, ad ll. 18-19.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 24,27-25,22.

⁶⁶ G. R. EVANS, *St. Anselm's Definitions*, in «Archivum Latinitatis Medii Aevi» 41 (1979) 91-100, esp. p. 100.

the second of these *Commentaries*.

3.2.3. Anselm's *Proslogion*, 2 and Boethius' *Quomodo substantiae bonae sint*

Anselm's dependence on the passage from Boethius' *Commentary* on the *De Interpretatione* cited above (§ 3. 1; pp. 8-9) becomes even more probable in view of an interesting parallel between Anselm's *Proslogion*, 2 and Boethius' *Quomodo substantiae bonae sint*, which was suggested by C. E. Viola.⁶⁷ Commenting upon Anselm's starting-point that *certe ipse idem "insipiens", cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: «aliquid quo majus cogitari nihil cogitari potest», intelligit quod audit*,⁶⁸ Viola thinks it quite probable that Anselm had in mind Boethius' definition of the *communis animi conceptio* as *enuntiatio, quam quisque probat auditam*.⁶⁹ I think this suggestion is quite plausible, for the additional reason that, a few lines later in the text, Boethius states explicitly what he states implicitly in the last lines of the passage from his *Commentary* on the *De interpretatione*. He says that, to judge from the various religions which exist all over the world, all people, both learned and unlearned, even the «savage races» included, have in their minds (*animus*) the concept of the «first good» as well as the firm belief that this good exists:

Amoveamus igitur primi boni praesentiam paulisper ex animo, quod esse quidem constat, idque ex omnium doctorum indoctorumque sententia, barbararum quoque gentium religionibus cognosci potest.⁷⁰

What only lacks here is the statement that this “good” is called “God”; but we are entitled to think that this is implicitly present in Boethius' reference to the religious phenomenon and its universal core, i.e. the concept of God and the belief in His existence. Besides, this passage was rightly paralleled by A. Tisserand⁷¹ with *Consolatio philosophiae* III, pr. 10, 7, where a description of God as *id quo melius nihil est* occurs (*supra*, § 1. 1. 2, p. 4).

3.2.4. The Stoic identity of the universality of Boethius' description of God and its aptitude for Anselm's argument

Let us come back to Boethius' *Commentary* on the *De Interpretatione* (§ 3. 1; pp. 8-9). According to Boethius' information, Aspasius appealed to the discrepancy between the

⁶⁷ C. E. VIOLA, *Anselmo d'Aosta. Fede e ricerca dell'intelligenza*, Milano 2000, p. 67. On Anselm's knowledge of the Boethian tractates see: M. GIBSON, *The Opuscula Sacra in the Middle Ages*, in: M. GIBSON (ed.), *Boethius. His Life, Thought and Influence*, Oxford 1981, pp. 214-234; C. J. MEWS, *St. Anselm and Roscelin. Some New Texts and Their Implications. I: The De Incarnatione Verbi and the Disputatio inter Christianum et Gentilem*, in «Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge» 58 (1991), pp. 55-98, esp. 61-62; J. A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Aristotle's Categories and the "Nomina Divina" according to Anselm of Canterbury* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis; in Modern Greek), University of Athens 2001, pp. 160-164.

⁶⁸ *Proslogion*, 2 (p. 101,7-8).

⁶⁹ 17-18 (axiom I), C. MORESCHINI, *Boethius*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 22), p. 187.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 82-86. (*Supra*, n. 22), p. 190.

⁷¹ A. TISSERAND, *Boèce. Traités théologiques. Présentation, traductions, chronologie, bibliographie et notes*, Paris 2000, p. 216, note 5.

various ways this or that man or nation forms abstract concepts such as “just” and “good”, in order to establish that Aristotle, when stating that «the impressions are the same for the entire mankind», was referring only to the sensible beings. Boethius refutes this interpretation by introducing a distinction between “true” and “false impressions”, in the sense that the former are real representations of the things they stand for, whereas the latter are inaccurate *similitudines* of them. Boethius qualifies that a man who takes “bad” for “good” has, of course, a *passio animi* (in the sense that an impression on his soul is caused by this or that state of things), but a *passio* that does not allow for speaking of *intelligere*, namely, really grasping the *res subjecta*. An accurate *similitudo* of a *res* must be sought beyond the various conventional (*ad positionem*) approaches of it and formed according to its very nature (*ad naturam*). To make this clear, Boethius sets forth a well-known Stoic instance of *prolepsis* (natural preconception). He distinguishes between «positive law», which is created to secure the *civile bonum* and is instantiated in almost innumerable different ways by the various nations in the world, and “natural law”, which is not created but is innate in all and, at last resort, is identical with God himself. The most characteristic description of this Stoic doctrine occurs in Cicero’s *De re publica*, III,22,33:

Est quidem vera lex recta ratio naturae congruens, diffusa in omnes, constans, sempiterna, quae vocet ad officium jubendo, vetando a fraude deterreat [...] Huic legi nec obrogari fas est neque derogari ex hac aliquid, licet neque tota abrogari potest, nec vero aut per senatum aut per populum solvi hac lege possumus, neque est quaerendus explanator aut interpret ejus alius, nec erit alia lex Romae, alia Athenis, alia nunc, alia posthac, sed et omnes gentes et omni tempore una lex et sempiterna et immutabilis continebit, unusque erit communis quasi magister et imperator omnium Deus, ille legis hujus inventor, disceptator, lator [...].⁷²

This passage from Cicero’s work was preserved in Lactantius’ *Divinae institutiones* (VI,8,7-9).⁷³

One can also see a subscription to this Stoic doctrine in Augustine’s *De libero arbitrio* I, 6, 14, 42-15, 51:

Illa lex quae “summa ratio” nominatur, cui semper obtemperandum est [...] per quam [...] illa, quam “temporalem” vocandam diximus, recte fertur recteque mutatur, potestne cuiquam intelligenti non incommutabilis aeternaque videri? [...] Video hanc aeternam esse atque incommutabilem legem. Simul etiam te videre arbitror in illa temporali nihil esse justum atque legitimum quod non ex hac aeterna sibi homines derivaverint.⁷⁴

In this context, Augustine states also Boethius’ emphatically expressed conviction that a

⁷² K. ZIEGLER (Ed.), *M. Tulli Ciceronis scripta quae manserunt omnia. Fasc. 39: De re publica*, Teubner, Stuttgart-Lipsiae 1992, pp. 96,26-97,13 (= I. AB ARNIM, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta. Vol. III: Chrysippi fragmenta moralia. Fragmenta successorum Chrysippi*, Lipsiae 1903, p. 80,20-30, fr. 325). An echo of this passage occurs in LACTANTIUS’ *De ira Dei*, XIX, 9 («[...] Deus [...] ipse est[...] legis suae disceptator et iudex»; C. INGREMEAU, *Lactance*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 41), p. 190). CICERO’S, *De legibus*, II,4,8-10; G. DE PLINVAL (Ed.), *Cicéron. Traité de lois. Texte établi et traduit*, Paris 1968, pp. 41-43 = I. AB ARNIM, cit., p. 78,12-24, fr. 316).

⁷³ S. BRANDT-G. LAUBMANN, *L. Caeli*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 37), pp. 508, 8-509, 10.

⁷⁴ W. M. GREEN, *Sancti Aurelii*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 5), pp. 219-220 (= F. DE CAPITANI, *Sancti Aurelii*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 5), p. 254). On the Stoic origins of this Augustinian idea see F. DE CAPITANI, cit., pp. 100-102, note 275; 194-195; 199-200; M. COLISH (*Supra*, n. 34).

wrong conception of a thing is not a conception at all: *Num istas leges "injustas" vel potius nullas dicere audebimus? Nam mihi lex esse non videtur, quae justa non fuerit.*⁷⁵

Both in Cicero's and Augustine's writing, «eternal law» is identified with God; likewise, Boethius produces the example of "God" immediately after the example of «natural law».⁷⁶ Boethius, therefore, standing obviously on Stoic grounds, and intending to defeat Aspasius' interpretation of Aristotle's *intellectus*, found it just as natural to add the example of "God". God was identified by the Stoics with the «natural law» he had just referred to; thus, it was quite normal for him to adjunct this example to the previous one. Besides, "God" would serve perfectly his aim; for, as this word denotes the most spiritual being of all, it stood as the most suitable example for him to show that the *intellectus* mirror not only sensible but also incorporeal beings. So Boethius argued that "God", which obviously refers to a non-sensible being, although it is conceived by different nations in different senses and thus worshipped in different ways, is nevertheless substantially (i. e. in regard to the core of its content) the same.

Apart from this, Anselm's text has something peculiarly in common with Boethius' *Commentary*. Let us recall the first lines of *Proslogion*, ch. 2: *Ergo, Domine [...], da mihi, ut [...] intelligam, "quia es", sicut "credimus" (Hebr. 11,6), et hoc es, quod credimus. Et quidem credimus te esse aliquid quo nihil majus cogitari possit.* Anselm states that he purports to show two things; *i*) that God exists and *ii*) that He possesses the qualities ascribed to Him especially by Christians. This distinction corresponds to the two parts of *Proslogion*, namely, ch. 2-4, which establish God's existence (*[...] quia es [...]*),⁷⁷ and ch. 5-26, which show God's being (*Quid igitur es, Domine Deus [...]? etc.*).⁷⁸ To achieve the former, Anselm understood that he had to offer a definition of the word "God" that designates the being whose existence he wanted to prove. He also understood that this definition should be such as to be acceptable for everybody. Interestingly enough, both features are easily discernible in the Boethian passage from the *Commentary* on the *De Interpretatione*.

So, if we take for granted that Anselm knew both of some of the Christian and pagan cases of the *majus omnibus* and *quo majus cogitari nequit* (§§ 1 and 2; pp. 1-8) along with Boethius' statement of the universality of this definition (§ 3.1; p. 9), we can presume that the set of the former passages would appear for him just as a patent verification of the latter. In other words, Boethius' description of God would seem to him as a recapitulation of the various pagan and Christian passages. This may have encouraged him to use this definition as the axiomatic basis of his famous argument for the existence of God. To put it as clearly as possible, Anselm was convinced that, in contrast with his argument as a whole, his definition of God in *Proslogion*, ch. 2 was not actually "his".⁷⁹ And he was perfectly

⁷⁵ *De libero arbitrio* I,5,11,33 (W. M. GREEN, cit., p. 217 = F. DE CAPITANI, cit., p. 248).

⁷⁶ That Anselm's definition of God is akin to a crucial aspect of the Stoic conception of God is implicitly suggested by W. RÖD (*Supra*, n. 2), who rightly ascribes to Stoicism an important place amongst the forerunners of Anselm's definition.

⁷⁷ *Proslogion*, 2 (p. 101, 4).

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 5 (p. 104, 11).

⁷⁹ Contrary, e. g., to P. GILBERT's statement that «la dénomination anselmienne de Dieu [...] est en réalité une création anselmienne» (*Le "Proslogion" de S. Anselme. Silence de Dieu et joie de l'homme*, Rome 1990, p. 67).

happy about this. For, to him, the force of this definition consisted exactly in its being absolutely unoriginal and, therefore, universally accepted — so much so that it could easily be subscribed to, even by an atheist, that is even by someone who would look indifferently upon the religiously-committed persons and realise that any such person would, if asked, naturally define the object of his cult in these terms.⁸⁰ In other words, Anselm, in using this definition as the starting-point of his argument, subscribed to Boethius' Neoplatonic-Stoic reading of Aristotle's *intellectus*/"nomata"⁸¹ as concepts and notions shared by nature by all the members of *omnes gentes*, either literate or illiterate, belonging either to this or that religion, living in any time, past, present or future, regardless of one's accepting the content of the concept of "God" as corresponding to an extra-mental reality or not. This is, in the last resort, the reason why the way Anselm introduced this definition in the *Proslogion* does not testify to any concern about establishing its legitimacy; natural concepts shared by all (the *naturalia*, which *apud omnes gentes sunt eadem*)⁸² do not stand in need of any justification at all.

4. Anselm's awareness of the Stoic identity of his definition of "God" in *Proslogion*, 2

Was Anselm aware of the fact that, in using Boethius, he was drawing upon Stoic epistemology? I am inclined to think that Anselm was at least aware of the Stoic provenance of his definition of "God". Indeed, in Cicero's *De natura deorum*,⁸³ where the Anselmian definition of God occurs (see § 1. 2. 1; p. 5), it is clearly stated that in the dialogue Balbus' *persona* sets forth the theological views of the Stoics. Further, as we have seen (§ 2.1; p. 7), in Lactantius' *De ira Dei* God's superiority to all beings is not only stated but also explicitly ascribed to the Stoics: *Stoici et alii nonnulli [...] Ita enim [Deus] demum et "communis omnium pater" et "optimus vere maximusque" dici poterit, quod expetit divina caelestisque natura.*⁸⁴

⁸⁰ The necessity as well as the universality of some sort of belief in God is also stated in CICERO's, *De natura deorum*, II, 2, 5-6 (O. PLASBERG, *M. Tulli*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 29), p. 50,18-30). See also I, 2, 3-4 (cit., pp. 2, 28-3,2), which is close to PLUTARCH's, *Adversus Colotem*, 30, 1125D-E (M. POHLENZ, *Plutarchi Moralia. Vol. VI, fasc. 2*, ed. R. Westman, Teubner, Lipsiae 1959, p. 211,12-20).

⁸¹ Boethius' refutation of Aspasius' interpretation of Aristotle's "intellectus" "seems to come from Porphyry" (R. SORABJI, *The Philosophy*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 51), p. 206) (contrary to H. CHADWICK's suggestion (*Boethius*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 62), p. 207) that Boethius was based on Alexander of Aphrodisias; for it is obvious, at least to me, that Boethius' reproduction of Alexander's lost *Commentary* on the *De Interpretatione* ends just at 41, 13). Porphyry's lost *Commentary* on the *De Interpretatione* was, according to Boethius, full of Stoic material, up to the point of exaggeration (C. MEISER, *Anicii*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 52), p. 71,13-18 = A. SMITH, *Porphyrii philosophi fragmenta. Fragmenta Arabica D. WASSERSTEIN interpretante*, Teubner, Stuttgartiae-Lipsiae 1993, fr. 87F, p. 83). One might notice in this context the Stoic affinities of Porphyry's distinction between «divine law» and «positive law», whose features coincide almost fully and literally with those presented by Boethius in the passage quoted in § 3.1, p. 000 (PORPHYRY's, *Epistula ad Marcellam*, 25-26; W. POTSCHER (Ed.), *Porphyrios. Pros Markellan*, Leiden 1969, pp. 34-35; on the Stoic tenor of this Porphyrean passage see F. DE CAPITANI, *Sancti Aurelii*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 5), p. 102, note 175; 208-209).

⁸² *Monologion*, 10 (p. 25,12).

⁸³ I,6,15 (O. PLASBERG, *M. Tulli*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 29), p. 7,7-10).

⁸⁴ *De ira Dei* V, 1; 6 (C. INGREMEAU, *Lactance*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 41), p. 104).

So Anselm could in principle have been informed that his “quo majus cogitari nequit” was a Stoic idea accepted by many others. Moreover, I think there is strong evidence for Anselm’s acquaintance with Cicero’s *De natura deorum*. In *Monologion* 15 as well as in *Proslogion* 5, Anselm expounds his well-known idea that God is whatever is better for a being to be than not to be:

- i) *Monologion*, 15: Equidem si quis singula diligenter intueatur: quidquid est praeter relativa, aut tale est, ut ipsum omnino melius sit quam non ipsum, aut tale ut non ipsum in aliquo melius sit quam ipsum [...] Melius quidem est omnino aliquid quam non ipsum, ut “sapiens” quam “non ipsum sapiens”, id est: melius est “sapiens” quam “non sapiens”. Quamvis enim “justus non sapiens” melior videatur quam “non justus sapiens”, non tamen est melius simpliciter “non sapiens” quam “sapiens”. Omne quippe “non sapiens” simpliciter, inquantum “non sapiens” est, minus est quam “sapiens”; quia omne “non sapiens” melius esset, si esset “sapiens”. Similiter omnino melius est “verum” quam non ipsum, id est quam “non verum”; et “justum” quam “non justum”; et vivit quam non vivit [...] Cum igitur quidquid aliud est, si singula dispiciantur, aut sit melius quam non ipsum, aut non ipsum in aliquo sit melius quam ipsum: sicut nefas est putare quod substantia summae naturae sit aliquid, quo melius sit aliquomodo non ipsum, sic necesse est ut sit quidquid omnino melius est quam non ipsum. Illa enim sola est qua penitus nihil est melius, et quae melior est omnibus quae non sunt quod ipsa est. Non est igitur corpus, vel aliquid eorum, quae corporei sensus discernunt. Quippe his omnibus melius est aliquid, quod non est quod ipsa sunt. Mens enim rationalis, quae nullo corporeo sensu quid vel qualis vel quanta sit percipitur: quanto minor esset, si esset aliquid eorum quae corporeis sensibus subjacent, tanto major est, quam quodlibet eorum. Penitus enim ipsa summa essentia tacenda est esse aliquid eorum quibus est aliquid, quod non est, quod ipsa sunt superius; et est omnino, sicut ratio docet, dicenda quodlibet eorum, quibus est omne quod non est quod ipsa sunt, inferius. Quare necesse est eam esse viventem, sapientem, potentem et omnipotentem, veram, justam, beatam, aeternam, et quidquid similiter absolute melius quam non ipsum.⁸⁵
- ii) *Proslogion*, 5 (Quod Deus sit quidquid melius est esse quam non esse). Quid igitur es, Domine meus, quo nil majus valet cogitari? [...] Tu es [...] justus, verax, beatus, et quidquid melius est esse quam non esse. Melius namque est esse justum quam non justum, beatum quam non beatum⁸⁶.

This line of argument is no more than a development of an argument of Zeno of Citium reproduced by Balbus in Cicero’s *De natura deorum* II,7,18 immediately after the description of *Deus-mundus* as the best conceivable being cited above (§ 1.2.1, p. 5): [...] *Et si ratione et sapientia nihil est melius, necesse est haec inesse in eo quod optimum esse concedimus*.⁸⁷

And just a few paragraphs later (II,8,20-21), Balbus reproduces an argument of Zeno, which he describes as “concise”:

«Quod ratione utitur id melius est quam id quod ratione non utitur; nihil autem mundo melius; ratione igitur mundus utitur». Similiter effici potest sapientem esse mundum, similiter beatum, similiter aeternum; omnia enim haec meliora sunt quam ea quae sunt his carentia, nec mundo quicquam melius. Ex quo efficietur esse mundum deum.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ F. S. SCHMITT, pp. 28,26-29,31.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104, 8-17.

⁸⁷ O. PLASBERG, *M. Tulli*, cit., (*supra*, n. 29), p. 56,21-23.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57, 9-20. *De natura deorum*, III,9,22 (cit., p. 122,10-13). Let it be noted that in the *Proslogion*, this argument is produced in ch. 5, that is immediately after the argument for the existence of God built upon the “quo

Anselm's argument is quite close to (not to say identical with) Zeno's. They both start from a concept of God taken for granted; they both conclude the absolute (not relative) qualities of God from the maxim that God must be what is for a being absolutely better to possess than not to possess; and they both conclude with the same qualities (except for some exclusively Christian ones, such as *verax*; I Cor. 1,9; 10,13). The concise but all-embracing way Anselm formulates his argument in *Proslogion* 5 (passage *ii*), where he shows all the absolute divine qualities with one strike, is strikingly close to the second version of Zeno's argument.⁸⁹

The same, I think, holds true for the third⁹⁰ proof of the existence of God in *Monologion* (ch. 4), which is *ex gradibus entium*:

Si quis intendat rerum naturas [1], velit nolit sentit non eas omnes contineri una dignitatis paritate, sed quasdam earum distingui graduum [3] imparitate. Qui enim dubitat quod in natura sua ligno {4} melior sic equus {5}, et equo praestantior homo [6], is profecto non est dicendus homo. Cum igitur naturarum [1] aliae aliis negari non possint meliores, nihilominus persuadet ratio aliquam in eis sic supereminere, ut non habeat se superiorem.

Si enim hujusmodi graduum [3] distinctio sic est infinita, ut nullus ibi sit gradus [3] superior quo superior alius non inveniatur, ad hoc ratio deducitur, ut ipsarum multitudo naturarum nullo fine claudatur. Hoc autem nemo non putat absurdum, nisi qui nimis est absurdus. Est igitur ex necessitate [2] aliqua natura, quae sic est alicui vel aliquibus superior, ut nulla sit cui ordinetur inferior.⁹¹

Let us see Cicero's report (*De natura deorum* II,12,33-13,35) of Cleanthes' argument for the existence of God:

[...] Si a primis incohatisque naturis [1] ad ultimas perfectasque volumus procedere, ad deorum naturam perveniamus necesse est [2]. Prima enim animadvertimus a natura sustineri ea quae gignantur e terra {3}, quibus natura nihil tribuit amplius quam ut ea alendo atque augendo tueretur. Bestiis {4} autem sensum et motum dedit et cum quodam adpetitu accessum ad res salutare a pestiferis recessum. Hoc homini [6] amplius, quod addidit rationem, qua regerentur animi adpetitus [...] Quartus autem est gradus [3] et altissimus eorum qui natura boni sapientesque gignuntur, quibus a principio innascitur ratio recta constansque, quae supra hominem putanda est deoque tribuenda id est mundo, in quo necesse est perfectam illam atque absolutam inesse rationem.

Neque enim dici potest in ulla rerum institutione non esse aliquid extremum atque perfectum. Ut enim in vite ut in pecude, nisi quae vis obstitit, videmus naturam suo quodam itinere ad ultimum pervenire, atque ut pictura et fabrica ceteraeque artes habent quendam absoluti operis effectum,

majus cogitari non possit", which in the *De natura deorum* occurs just a few paragraphs earlier in the text. Obviously enough, Anselm, following a Stoic pattern, first shows (on the basis of a Stoic *prolepsis* but in an original, non-Stoic, way) the existence of God and then deduces His qualities.

⁸⁹ True, contrary to Zeno, who seems to identify God with the world, Anselm, a Christian Platonist, shows that God is not corporeal. (This qualification also holds true for Cleanthes' argument cited below.) But, as Boethius had implicitly warned (§ 3.1; pp. 8-9), the core of a right concept of something is indued with various opinions by this or that man or nation and thus often appears deformed. So, Anselm might well think that Zeno had rightly conceived of the principle that God must be whatever it is for a being better to be than not to be but had failed to elaborate the correct list of the positive qualities.

⁹⁰ I think that ch. 2 does not offer an argument different from that of ch. 1 (J. A. DEMETRACOPOULOS, *Aristotle's Categories*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 67), p. 101, note 286).

⁹¹ F. S. SCHMITT, cit., pp. 16,31-17,10.

sic in omni natura ac multo etiam magis necesse est absolvi ali quid ac perfici. Etenim ceteris naturis [1] multa externa quo minus perficiantur possunt obsistere, universam autem naturam nulla res potest impedire propterea quod omnis naturas [1] ipsa cohibet et continet. Quocirca necesse est esse [2] quartum illum et altissimum gradum [3] quo nulla vis possit accedere.⁹²

Anselm rests here on his well-known Augustinian-Neoplatonic ground, on which he built his arguments for the existence of God in ch. 1-3. Instead of using the Neoplatonic concepts of gradation of *bonitas* and *esse* as well as of participation, and leaving aside the equally Neoplatonic triad «esse - vivere - intelligere», which was used by Augustine in the *De libero arbitrio* (II, 3, 7-15,39) as a tool for establishing the existence of God, Anselm omits the grade of inanimate nature and refers to a scale that comprises plants, animals and man, which he explicitly calls *gradus naturarum*, as Cleanthes does; the only difference from Cleanthes' argument is that Anselm refers to the first and the second ones not by name but by means of two examples ("tree" and "horse"). And then they both warn against the absurdity of a *recessus ad infinitum*. True, contrary to Cleanthes, who argues at length for the impossibility for such a *recessus*, Anselm refrains from showing its absurdity.

This may be due to the pantheist implications of Cleanthes' argument. Still, Anselm states this impossibility in such an absolute way ([...] *nimis est absurdus*) that he seems to have had in mind a long series of reasons for doing so. Further, even so, we might say Anselm did not avoid a dose of pantheism, if we take into account that he speaks of God not as a being standing out of the scale of nature but as a member of it ([...] *in eis [sc. naturis] [...]*).⁹³

Now, as far as I know, Cicero's *De natura deorum* is the only Latin source where Zeno's argument⁹⁴ and Cleanthes' argument⁹⁵ are reported; so I cannot help thinking it almost certain⁹⁶ that Anselm relied directly on Cicero.⁹⁷

⁹² O. PLASBERG, *M. Tulli*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 29), pp. 61, 25-62, 20.

⁹³ F. S. SCHMITT, cit., p. 17, 4.

⁹⁴ I. AB ARNIM, *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, Vol. I, Lipsiae 1905 (repr. 1968), p. 33,1-3 (fr. 111).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 120, 18 (fr. 529).

⁹⁶ *Contra*, e.g., A. LANTRUA (*Anselmo d'Aosta e il suo "Monologio"*, Firenze 1934, p. 100, note 112), who regards Anselm's argument Aristotelian in spirit, as well as practically all the commentators on *Monologion* 4 who have passed over the question of the sources of this chapter in silence.

⁹⁷ Even the famous Anselmian project of rendering the content of faith understandable both to believers and non-believers (*fides quaerens intellectum*) is laid down by the *persona* of the pontifex Cotta in CICERO's, *De natura deorum*: «[...] Opiniones, quas a majoribus accepimus de dis immortalibus [...] defenderem. Ego vero eas defendam semper semperque defendi, nec me ex ea opinione, quam a majoribus accepi de cultu deorum immortalium, ullius umquam oratio aut docti aut indocti movebit [...] A te enim philosopho *rationem* [1a] accipere debeo *religionis* [1b], majoribus autem nostris etiam nulla *ratione* [1a] reddita credere [...] Sic adgredior [...] ad hanc disputationem, *quasi nihil umquam* [2a] *audierim* [2b] *de dis immortalibus* [2c] nihil cogitaverim [...] Tu auctoritates contemnens, *ratione* [1a] pugnans [...]» (III, 2, 5-3, 10; O. PLASBERG, *M. Tulli*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 29), pp. 119,11-121,10). This is pretty close to Anselm's well-known programmatic declaration in the Preface to the *Cur Deus homo*: «Ac tandem remoto Christo, *quasi numquam aliquid* [2a] fuerit *de illo* [2c], probat *rationibus* [1a] necessariis [...] Similiter *quasi nihil* [2a] *sciatur* [2b] *de Christo* [2c], monstratur non minus *aperta ratione* et veritate [...]» (F. S. SCHMITT, *S. Anselmi*, cit., *Tomus II* (*Supra*, n. 34), p. 42,11-15; *Monologion*, Prol.; p. 7, 7-10). Cf. the provisional title of the *Monologion*: «Exemplum meditandi de *ratione* [1a] *fidei* [1a]» (*Proslogion*, Prooem.; p. 94, 6-7). Cotta («etiam [...] credere») takes literal antecedence even to Boso's qualification that «idem [...] sic puto me tenere, ut etiamsi nulla possum quod credo ratione comprehendere, nihil tamen sit quod ab ejus firmitate me valeat evellere» (*Cur Deus homo* I, 1; F. S. SCHMITT, *S. Anselmi*, cit., *Tomus II* (*Supra*, n. 35), p.

5. Conclusion: the tenor of the *ratio Anselmi*

From the above a conclusion might be inferred very close to C. Viola's point on the essence of the *ratio Anselmi*.⁹⁸ Contrary to what is sometimes held,⁹⁹ and for all the obviously apologetic character of this argument¹⁰⁰ (or rather because of this character), its inventor really meant it to be of universal validity,¹⁰¹ or, to put it in modern terms, to be, at least as far as Anselm's declared intention is concerned, philosophical. For all the various Late Medieval and Modern challenges on whether this definition is actually shared by every member of humanity or not, one must recognize that, from a historical point of view, Anselm was quite entitled to assume the universality of the Stoic definition of God as granted.

48,19-21); and they both combine this qualification with a desire to discover the rational basis of their religious beliefs. The way Anselm and Cotta express their rational approach to religion is very close to what Lanfranc described as the "bad" theological method of Berengar: «Relictis [Anselm's "remoto"] sacris auctoritatibus, ad dialecticam confugium facis» (*De corpore et sanguine Domini*, 7; PL 150, 416D-417B). If Lanfranc was aware of the pagan affinities of Anselm's method detected here (and this is possible, since he was able to know what his endowed spiritual child was reading in the library of Bec), it is quite understandable why he repudiated the method of the *Monologion* (Anselm's, *Epistola 77 in toto*; F. S. SCHMITT, *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi opera omnia. Vol. III*, Edinburgi 1946, pp. 199-200).

⁹⁸ C. VIOLA, *Origine*, cit., (*Supra*, n. 2), pp. 356-357; 384.

⁹⁹ See, e.g., B. DAVIES, *Anselm and the Ontological Argument*, in: B. DAVIES-B. LEFTOW (Eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, Cambridge U. P. 2004, pp. 157-178, esp. p. 174.

¹⁰⁰ See, e.g., F. S. SCHMITT, *Anselm von Canterbury. Proslogion. Untersuchungen. Lateinisch-deutsche Ausgabe*, Stuttgart -Bad Cannstatt 1961 (1984), pp. 35-52.

¹⁰¹ See, e.g., K. FLASCH, *Einführung in die Philosophie des Mittelalters*, Darmstadt 1989, pp. 54-56 (contrary, e.g., to the surprising statement by A. DE LIBERA, *La philosophie médiévale*, Paris 1995, p. 303: «Il va de soi que la preuve anselmienne n'est pas vraiment destinée à convaincre l'insensé»).