

HENRY OF GHENT ON ANSELM'S *PROSLOGION* ARGUMENT

BY ROLAND J. TESKE

In *Summa theologiae* 1a.2.1, St. Thomas Aquinas asked “whether that God exists is self-evident” and argued that it is not. His response is generally taken as a rejection of St. Anselm’s argument for the existence of God in the *Proslogion*. In his *Summa quaestionum ordinarium* (hereafter *SQO*) 22, Henry of Ghent asks as his second question: “whether that God exists is naturally self-evident to a human being,”¹ and like St. Thomas, he argues that the proposition that God exists is not self-evident. Neither Thomas nor Henry mentions the Archbishop of Canterbury in these questions, although they both use expressions that are clearly borrowed from the argument in the *Proslogion*. Moreover, both Thomas and Henry also cite in the arguments to the contrary St. John Damascene’s statement in *De fide orthodoxa* that “the knowledge that God exists is naturally implanted in all,”² as well as Aristotle’s definition from the *Posterior Analytics* of what it means for a proposition to be self-evident. Henry, however, regards the *Proslogion* argument quite favorably and examines it at length in *SQO* 30.2 in an article on the immutability of God in which he asks whether God can be thought not to exist and argues that God cannot be thought not to exist, at least if one has a proper concept of God. Hence, Henry holds both that God cannot be thought not to exist and that the proposition that God exists is not naturally self-evident to a human being, and that would seem to be contradictory or at least to require some careful distinctions.

Henry’s view of the *Proslogion* argument is not merely interesting in itself and revelatory of his metaphysical position, but also throws light on the question of whether his metaphysical argument for the existence of God, which he presents in *SQO* 22.5, is a version of the Anselmian argument — a point that is

¹ “Utrum Deus potest cogitari non esse” (Henry of Ghent, *Summa quaestionum ordinarium* 20.3 [Badius, fol. 179vK]). Since the new critical edition of Henry’s *Summa* for these questions is not complete, one has to rely on the Badius edition (Paris, 1520), which was reprinted by The Franciscan Institute, St. Bonaventure, NY, in 1953. In citing the Badius edition I give the folio number, whether it is recto or verso, and the paragraph letter, all of which are also found in my translation of the articles. See *Henry of Ghent’s Summa: The Questions on God’s Existence and Essence*, trans. Jos Decorte and Roland J. Teske, S.J., Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 5 (Leuven, 2005), and *Henry of Ghent’s Summa: The Questions on God’s Unity and Simplicity*, trans. Roland J. Teske, S.J., Dallas Medieval Texts and Translations 6 (Leuven, 2006).

² “Omnibus cognitio existendi Deum naturaliter est inserta” (John Damascene, *De fide orthodoxa* 1.2, ed. Eligius M. Buytaert, O.F.M. [St. Bonaventure, NY, 1955], 14).

disputed among students of Henry's philosophy.³ Hence, this article will first of all examine Henry's presentation of the *Proslogion* argument in *SQO* 30.2 and then return to his claim in *SQO* 22.2 that the proposition that God exists is not naturally self-evident to a human being. The final section will turn to the concept of God employed in Henry's metaphysical argument.

THE *PROSLOGION* ARGUMENT IN *SQO* 30

In *SQO* 30.3 Henry first presents three arguments that God cannot be thought not to exist and then four that he can be thought not to exist before he tackles the resolution of the question. In the first argument that God cannot be thought not to exist, Henry presents the core of the Anselmian argument: "That than which nothing greater can be thought cannot be thought not to exist. God is such a being. Therefore, and so on."⁴ Henry claims that the minor premise is evident from the meaning of the term "God" and that the major premise is evident "because that which cannot be thought not to exist is necessarily better than that which can be thought

³ Jean Paulus clearly held that Henry's metaphysical argument is a version of the so-called ontological argument in his article, "Henri de Gand et l'argument ontologique," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen âge* 10 (1935–36): 265–323, esp. 318. Raymond Macken, on the other hand, claims that the metaphysical argument is not an ontological argument in "The Metaphysical Proof for the Existence of God in the Philosophy of Henry of Ghent," *Franziskanische Studien* 68 (1986): 247–60. For further evidence of the scholarly dispute over whether Henry's metaphysical argument is a version of the Anselmian argument, see my "Henry of Ghent's Metaphysical Argument for the Existence of God," *The Modern Schoolman* 83 (2005): 19–38, in which I argued that Henry's metaphysical argument is a version of the *Proslogion* argument. Other studies on Henry's metaphysical argument include: Anton Pegis, "Toward a New Way to God: Henry of Ghent," *Mediaeval Studies* 30 (1968): 226–47; Pegis, "Toward a New Way to God: Henry of Ghent, II," *Mediaeval Studies* 31 (1969): 93–116; Pegis, "Four Mediaeval Ways to God (St. Anselm of Canterbury, St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent)," *The Monist* 54 (1970): 317–58; Pegis, "Henry of Ghent and the New Way to God, III," *Mediaeval Studies* 33 (1971): 158–79; Steven Dumont, "The *quaestio si est* and the Metaphysical Proof for the Existence of God according to Henry of Ghent and J. Duns Scotus," *Franziskanische Studien* 66 (1984): 335–67; Pasquale Porro, *Enrico di Gand: La via delle proposizioni universale* (Bari, 1990).

⁴ "id quo nihil potest cogitari maius, non potest non esse. Deus est hujusmodi. Ergo, et caetera" (*SQO* 30.2, fol. 179vK). In *Heinrich von Gent über Metaphysik als erste Wissenschaftl. Studien zu einem Metaphysikentwurf aus dem letzten Viertel des 13. Jahrhunderts* (Leiden, 2007), 323–25, Martin Pickavé discusses the relationship between the proofs of the existence of God that Henry gives and the *Proslogion* argument, but does not discuss *SQO* 30.2. He notes the curious fact that, although Henry presents a long list of arguments for the existence of God in *SQO* 22.4, he makes no mention of the *Proslogion* argument (323). Pickavé does however quote Porro who says that Henry did not seem to consider "l'argomento del *Proslogion* come una prova dell'esistenza di Dio, quanto piuttosto come un contributo alla discussione sulla natura divina" (*Enrico di Gand*, 91–92).

not to exist, as Anselm says and proves by four arguments against the fool, as is obvious to someone who takes a look."⁵ In the third argument that God can be thought not to exist, Henry again appeals to Anselm's *Proslogion*. Henry notes that Anselm quoted the words of the Psalm, "The fool says in his heart: There is no God" (Ps. 52:1), which show that it is possible to think that God does not exist. Henry argues that, "if [the fool] said this, he either said what he could think, and I have what I am after, or he could not think it. But *how could he not think what he said . . . since to say something in one's heart is the same as to think it.*"⁶ Clearly the answer to the question will require a distinction or two.

In the resolution Henry reminds his readers of a point that he has previously made in *SQO* 24.3, namely, that "the question of knowing whether God exists can be understood with regard to simple knowledge and with regard to the being of God in his nature by which he is or with regard to complex knowledge and with regard to the being of God in the soul of the thinker."⁷ That is, Henry identifies simple knowledge of the being of God with the knowledge of the being of God in his nature by which he exists, and he identifies complex knowledge of the being of God with the being of God in the soul of the thinker who forms the proposition that God exists. Henry says that in complex knowledge one can know the truth of the proposition that God exists without knowing in simple knowledge the nature of God's being. For one can, according to Henry, know that God exists from his effects without knowing the nature of God.⁸ Similarly the question about thinking that God exists can be a question about simple knowledge or about complex knowledge. Finally, Henry says that

the question about thinking that God does not exist can be about simple knowledge, that is, whether it is possible to think of some nonbeing of God that can belong to him in terms of his nature in itself, or about complex knowledge, that is, whether it is possible to think by a separation in the soul that being is removed from God or that nonbeing is present in him.⁹

⁵ "Maior evidens est quoniam quod non potest cogitari non esse, necessario melius est eo quod potest cogitari non esse, ut dicit Anselmus et probat quatuor rationibus contra insipientem, ut patet inspicienti" (*SQO* 30.2, fol. 179vK).

⁶ "Si dixit hoc, aut dixit quod cogitare potuit, et habeo propositum, aut cogitare non potuit. Sed *quomodo cogitare non potuit quod dixit . . . cum idem sit dicere in corde et cogitare*" (*SQO* 30.2, fol. 179vK). Here and elsewhere I have italicized direct quotes from the *Proslogion* to show Henry's reliance on Anselm's argument.

⁷ "quaestio de cognoscendo de Deo an sit potest esse de incomplexu et de esse Dei in natura sua qua est id quod est vel de complexu et de esse Dei in anima cogitante" (*SQO* 30.2, fol. 179vL).

⁸ For example, in *SQO* 22.4, Henry presents a series of demonstrative arguments for the existence of God from creatures.

Given these distinctions Henry states that

In the first way, [i.e., in simple knowledge] it is impossible to think that God does not exist because nothing in the nature of reality can be thought not to exist unless it is possible to think separately of the thing, insofar as it is a thing and an essence in itself, and separately of being itself, and in that way to think of the essence, while also thinking that nonbeing belongs to it or that being does not belong to it, by removing one from the other through negation, as is possible in creatures, which at one time have being and at another nonbeing, because essence and being differ in them.¹⁰

That is, because in God being and essence are absolutely the same in reality and intention, so that there is only a purely rational distinction between them, it is impossible to think that God does not exist.¹¹ For, if there were either a real or an intentional distinction between them, there would be some composition in God, and there is, of course, no composition in God, since he is absolutely simple.

But in complex or propositional knowledge there are two ways of thinking that God does not exist, as, Henry says, Anselm distinguished them in the *Proslogion*. For one can think that the word "God" does not exist, or one can think that the thing signified by the word "God" does not exist. Henry quotes Anselm as saying:

*For the thing is thought of in one way when the word signifying it is thought of, and in another way when that which the thing is is understood. In that first way, therefore, as he says, and he speaks the truth, God can be thought not to exist, but not in this latter way.*¹²

In a similar way, as Henry notes, people lacking self-control can utter the words of wise men about good morals without understanding what the words mean and do just the opposite, as Aristotle said in the *Nicomachean*

⁹ "quaestio de cogitando Deum non esse potest esse de incompleto, an, scilicet, contingit cogitare non entitatem Dei aliquam quae possit ei convenire secundum naturam eius in se, vel de complexo, an scilicet contingit cogitare per divisionem in anima esse removeri a Deo, sive non entitatem inesse in eadem" (SQO 30.2, fol. 179vL). It now seems to me that there was an extra "non" in the Latin text before "cogitando," which I had not removed from my printed translation, but have removed here.

¹⁰ "Primo modo est impossibile cogitare Deum non esse quia nihil in natura rei cogitari non esse nisi possibile est cogitare seorum ipsam rem ut res est et essentia quaedam in se et seorsum ipsum esse, unum removendo ab altero per negationem, sicut contingit in creaturis, quae quandoque habent esse, quandoque non esse, quoniam in eis different essentia et esse" (SQO 30.2, fols. 179vL–180rL).

¹¹ For the various sort of distinction in Henry's metaphysics, see my "Distinctions in the Metaphysics of Henry of Ghent," *Traditio* 61 (2006): 227–45.

¹² "Aliter enim . . . cogitatur res cum vox eam significans cogitatur. Alio modo cum idipsum quod res est intelligitur. Illo itaque modo, ut dicit, et verum dicit, potest cogitari Deus non esse, isto vero minime" (SQO 30.3, fol. 180rM).

Ethics when speaking of *akrasia*.¹³ Thus, if one does not understand what the word "God" means, one can think that God does not exist.

If, on the other hand, one thinks of the reality signified by the word "God," it is necessary to make a subdistinction, one that Anselm did not make, as Henry points out. After all, one can either assent to what one thinks or not assent to what one thinks. At this point Henry explicitly distinguishes "being outside the intellect" and "being in the intellect" and refers to the latter as "diminished being."¹⁴ Although being outside the intellect cannot admit of contraries at the same time, being in the intellect can admit of contraries at the same time. In that way it is possible to think or to entertain in thought the ideas "that God exists and that God does not exist. But one of them is thought with assent, while the other without assent."¹⁵

If one thinks with assent of the reality signified by the word "God," Henry draws a further distinction because "someone who thinks with assent either understands what is signified by the word distinctly and in particular, when it is said: 'God does not exist,' or only confusedly and in the universal."¹⁶ In the first way Henry claims that "absolutely no one can think that God does not exist, because the predicate . . . belongs to the understanding of the subject, and so someone who thinks of the subject in that way necessarily thinks of the predicate in it."¹⁷ Hence, if someone thought with assent that God does not exist after affirming that God does exist, "he would affirm and deny the same thing, assenting to both at the same time, which is impossible,"¹⁸ as Aristotle proved in book 10 of the *Metaphysics*.¹⁹ Hence, Henry concludes that "no one . . . who understands distinctly and in particular the reality that is God can think with an assertion that he does not exist, although he says the words in his heart."²⁰

¹³ See *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.3.1147a22–24.

¹⁴ See *SQO* 30.3, fol. 180rO, where Henry appeals to Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 6.4.1027 (ed. Venice, 1562–74; repr. Frankfurt, 1962, fol. 152rB), where Averroes used the expression "diminished being" for being in the soul. See Armand Maurer, "Ensis diminutum: A Note on Its Origin and Meaning," *Mediaeval Studies* 12 (1950): 216–22.

¹⁵ "Deum esse et Deum non esse. Sed unum cum assensu, alterum vero sine assensu" (*SQO* 30.3, fol. 180rO).

¹⁶ "cogitans cum assensu aut intelligit quid per vocem significatur distincte et in particulari cum dicitur: Deus non est, aut non, sed solum confuse et in generali" (*SQO* 30.3, fol. 180rP).

¹⁷ "nullus omnino potest cogitare Deum non esse, quia praedicatum, ut dictum est supra, est de intellectu subiecti, et sic cogitans subiectum necessario cogitat in ipso praedicatum" (*SQO* 30.3, fol. 180rP).

¹⁸ "idem affirmaret et negaret, assentiendo utrique simul, quod est impossibile" (*SQO* 30.3, fol. 180rP).

¹⁹ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 10.4.1055a19–24.

²⁰ "Nullus ergo intelligens rem quae Deus est, distincte et in particulari, potest cogitare cum assertione quia non est, quamquam verba dicat in corde suo" (*SQO* 30.2, fol. 180rP).

Anselm, Henry says, explains this by a comparison. Henry says, once more quoting from Anselm:

*No one who understands what fire and water are can think that fire is water in terms of reality, although he can in terms of the words. In that way, therefore, no one who understands that being which is God can think that God does not exist, although he says these words in his heart.*²¹

Then Henry notes that Anselm immediately introduces a proof for the middle term, when he says:

*For God is that than which something better cannot be thought. Someone who understands this well, certainly understands that he exists in such a way that he cannot even be thought not to exist. Someone, therefore, who, as he says, understands in that way that God exists, cannot think that he does not exist.*²²

If, however, one understands what God is confusedly and in the universal, Henry draws a further distinction. For one can mean by “thinking” either an action of the pure intellect or an action that is misled by imagination and ignorance. Someone, for example, who understands the term “God” as signifying “only a certain most noble essence of all things, without understanding at the same time that the concept of being is included in its nobility, can quite well understand by an image-filled and ignorant intellect that God does not exist.”²³ One can do this in two ways, according to Henry. For either one can think that some noble creature is God, or one can imagine something that surpasses all creatures that are seen to exist and think that it is God. Furthermore, one who thinks that something unworthy of God is true of God also implicitly thinks that God does not exist.

Hence, the resolution of the question allows for various ways in which someone may think that God does not exist, but it is clearly impossible, according to Henry, as it was according to Anselm’s argument in the *Proslogion*, to have an intellectual concept of God as a being than which no greater can be thought and to think that such a being does not exist. Admittedly, it is possible to have an incorrect concept of God and think that what one incorrectly conceives as God does not exist, and it is also possible to entertain the two propositions that God exists and that God does

²¹ “Nullus, inquit, intelligens id quod est ignis et aqua, potest cogitare ignem esse aquam secundum res, licet . . . secundum voces. Ita ergo nemo qui intelligit id ens quod est Deus, potest cogitare quia Deus non est, licet haec verba dicat in corde suo” (SQO 30.2, fol. 180rP).

²² “Deus enim est id quo melius cogitari non potest. Quod qui bene intelligit, utique intelligit id ipsum sic esse ut nec cogitare quaeat non esse. Qui ergo, (ut dicit) intelligit sic esse Deum, nequit eum non esse cogitare” (SQO 30.2, fol. 180rP).

²³ “solummodo quandam essentiam omnium nobilissimam, non cointelligendo in nobilitate eius includi rationem ipsius esse, bene potest intellectu phantastico et ignorante intelligere Deum non esse” (SQO 30.2, fol. 180rQ).

not exist, but one cannot think of both with assent at the same time. The resolution of the question, however, implies no criticism of the *Proslogion* argument and gives every reason to suppose that Henry regarded it as a valid argument.

The replies to the arguments confirm the above judgment. The first argument to the contrary argued that, just as that which does not, did not, and will not exist can be thought to exist, so that which has always existed and will always exist, namely, God, can be thought not to exist. Henry answers that "God . . . who always exists cannot be understood not to exist, because his being in no way stands as an addition to the essence, but the essence is being itself."²⁴ On the second and third arguments that claimed to show that God can be thought not to exist, Henry says that he has already said enough. The fourth argument claimed that which is known less well can be more readily thought not to exist and that God is known less well to human beings than creatures, all of which can be thought not to exist. Henry concedes that the objection is true from the side of the thinker who knows God only confusedly and in general, but denies that it is true from the side of the object thought of.

Since Henry did not concede without qualification that God cannot be thought not to exist, he also replies to the first set of arguments. To the first that God cannot be thought not to exist, he says that

it is true from the side of the thing and thinking with a pure intellect with assent — and in that way Anselm understood it, as is seen from the arguments by which he proves this in opposition to the fool. But from the side of the words and thinking of an intellect that is confused and filled with phantasms or is without assent, nothing prevents God and that than which nothing greater can be thought from being able to be thought not to exist.²⁵

Moreover, Henry says that this is what Anselm meant in the *Proslogion* when he said:

*God . . . is . . . that than which something greater cannot be thought. Someone who understands this well certainly understands that the same exists so that it cannot be thought not to exist. Someone, therefore, who understands that God exists in that way cannot think that he does not exist.*²⁶

²⁴ "Deus . . . semper existens non potest intelligi non esse, quia esse suum nullo modo se habet per additionem super essentiam, sed essentia est ipsum esse" (*SQO* 30.2, fol. 180vT).

²⁵ "est verum quantum est ex parte rei et cognitionis intellectus puri cum assensu, et sic intelligit Anselmus, ut patet ex rationibus quibus hoc probat contra insipientem. Quantum tamen est ex parte vocis et cognitionis intellectus confusi et phantastici aut sine assensu, nihil impedit quin Deus et id quo nihil maius cogitari potest, possit cogitari non esse" (*SQO* 30.2, fol. 180vY).

Henry quotes Anselm's words from the fourth chapter of the *Proslogion* in confirmation of this claim and admits that, if one does not understand him in that way, one can think that God does not exist. And he replies to the other two arguments in the same way.

What Henry says in *SQO* 30.3 clearly indicates that Henry accepted the *Proslogion* argument for the existence of God, given the further qualifications that we have just seen. But how could he do so and at the same time maintain that the proposition that God exists is not self-evident? For the answer to that question we need to turn to *SQO* 22.2.

THAT GOD EXISTS IS NOT NATURALLY SELF-EVIDENT

In *SQO* 22.2 Henry argues that the proposition that God exists is not naturally self-evident to a human being. He first gives three arguments that the proposition is naturally self-evident to a human being. He takes the first two from St. John Damascene and from Hugh of St. Victor. As we have seen, Damascene said, "The knowledge of God's existence has been naturally implanted in all."²⁷ Henry says that such knowledge is naturally self-evident and concludes that the proposition that God exists is naturally self-evident. Hugh, on the other hand, claimed that the fact that God existed "could never be utterly unknown," and Henry claims, "But that which cannot fail to be known is naturally self-evident."²⁸ The third is based on Aristotle's claim in the *Posterior Analytics* that a proposition is naturally self-evident which is immediately known when its terms are known, as is the case with the first principles.²⁹ For, "when it is known what is signified by this name 'God' and what is signified by 'exists,' it is immediately known that God exists because in God being and essence are absolutely the same."³⁰ The argument to the contrary is taken from Avicenna, who argued that whether God exists is not self-evident in metaphysics since it has to be investigated.³¹

²⁶ "Deus . . . est . . . quo maius cogitari non potest. Quod qui bene intelligit, utique intelligit idipsum sic esse ut nec cogitatione quaeat non esse. Qui ergo intelligit sic esse Deum, nequit eum non esse cogitare" (*SQO* 30.2, fol. 180vY).

²⁷ See n. 2 above.

²⁸ "Illud autem quod non potest ignorari est per se naturaliter notum" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130rP).

²⁹ See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.3.72b18–25.

³⁰ "cognito eo quod significatur hoc nomine Deus et quod significatur per est, statim cognoscitur quia Deus est, eo quod in Deo penitus sunt idem esse et essentia" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130rP).

³¹ See Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 1.1 (*Liber de philosophia prima seu scientia divina*), ed. Simone Van Riet, 2 vols. (Leuven and Leiden, 1977), 4–5.

In the resolution Henry distinguishes two ways in which it is possible to understand that God exists: "In one way in general insofar as God is understood absolutely under the term 'being' or 'good' or some other noble property that belongs to him and likewise to creatures."³² By way of example, Henry alludes to Augustine, *De trinitate* 8.3.4, when he says, paraphrasing Augustine: "Understand this good; understand that one. Understand good without qualification if you can; you shall have understood God."³³ The passage in Augustine is one of the key elements in Henry's metaphysical argument, and Henry quotes or alludes to it again and again in *SQO* 22.5. God is understood "in another way specifically under the term 'God,' that is, as some most excellent nature."³⁴ Again, Henry appeals to Augustine's *De doctrina christiana* by way of example.³⁵

In the first way Henry admits that "the knowledge of God's being is naturally implanted in us, because, when in the first concepts we understand being, one, or good in general without qualification, we understand God under a certain confusion."³⁶ In a similar way, in desiring any good, "all people . . . want to be happy and in that way they desire at least in the universal the first and highest good, which is God."³⁷ However, just as such a desire for something good does not mean that we all desire God, "so it should not be said that, on the basis of that universal knowledge, all human beings know that God exists."³⁸ Henry compares knowing that someone is a man and knowing that he is Socrates with knowing being or good without qualification and knowing that such being is God.³⁹ Hence, despite the knowledge by which we know that God exists insofar as we know that being without qualification or good without qualification exists, someone "can fail

³² "Uno modo in generali, in quantum Deus intelligitur sub nomine entis vel boni absolute vel alicuius proprietatis nobilis, quae ei convenit et similiter creaturis" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ).

³³ "Intellige hoc bonum; intellige illud. Intellige bonum simpliciter si poteris; intellexeris Deum" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ). Augustine says: "Bonum hoc et bonum illud; tolle hoc et illud, et vide ipsum bonum, si potes; ita Deum videbis" (*De trinitate* 8.3.4 [PL 42:949]).

³⁴ "Alio modo in special, ut significatur sub hoc nomine Deus, scilicet ut natura aliqua excellentissima" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ).

³⁵ See Augustine, *De doctrina christiana* 1.6.6 (PL 34:21).

³⁶ "cognitio essendi Deum naturaliter nobis inserta est, quia in primis conceptibus cum intelligimus ens, unum, aut bonum simpliciter in generali, intelligimus Deum sub quadam confusione" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ).

³⁷ "omnes . . . volunt esse beati, et in hoc volunt saltem in universali primum et summum bonum, quod Deus est" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ).

³⁸ "sic nec ex illa cognitione universali dicendum est quod omnes cognoscant Deum esse" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ).

³⁹ St. Thomas uses a similar comparison in *Summa theologiae*, 1a.2.1 ad 1 (ed. Medieval Institute of Ottawa, 5 vols. [Ottawa, 1941–45]).

to understand that God exists more in particular, that is, insofar as he is signified by this term 'God.'⁴⁰ Henry explains that

for this proposition "God exists" to be self-evident, it would be necessary that in virtue of this term "God," insofar as the deity is signified by this term, God would be understood to exist in a subject in particular and not merely in the universal insofar as he is understood to exist under the general notion of being and good.⁴¹

Henry claims that Damascene was speaking only of such a general knowledge of God's being naturally grasped by a first concept without study or investigation, in the way we grasp the first principles and not because of some innate knowledge.⁴²

Turning to the question at hand, namely, whether the proposition that God exists is self-evident, Henry says that "this question . . . is understood about complex knowledge, that is, whether it is self-evident that its predicate is present in the subject so that a human being would immediately assent by a common conception of the mind to this proposition that states that God exists."⁴³ That is, it would be necessary that, as soon as one hears the words, "God exists," one knows that truth of the proposition on account of the evident inherence of the predicate in the subject. Henry says that one can know the existence of something in three ways, namely, from a direct vision of the thing, from the nature of the thing in itself, and from its relation to some other things. Later he explains that the blessed in heaven know God by direct vision, that in this life only God can be known to exist from his nature, since only his nature includes existence, but that God can also in this life be known to exist from his relation to other things, of which he is the cause.⁴⁴

Henry notes at this point that some people make a distinction, which he claims is inapplicable to the present question, namely, one between the thing known and the act of knowing. They say "that, if we are speaking about the knowledge of God from the side of the thing to be known, we

⁴⁰ "potest homo Deum magis in particulari, scilicet, in quantum significatur hoc nomine Deus, non intelligere esse" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ).

⁴¹ "ad hoc quod propositio ista 'Deus est' esset per se nota, oporteret quod ex virtute termini huius 'Deus,' in quantum hoc termino significatur deitas, in subiecto cointelligeretur in particulari 'esse,' non solum in universali in quantum intelligitur esse sub ratione generali entis et boni, intelligendo esse ens aut bonum simpliciter" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ).

⁴² See n. 2 above for the reference to John Damascene.

⁴³ "ista quaestio . . . intelligitur de complexo, scilicet utrum sit per se notum praedicatum eius inesse subiecto, ut homo communi animi conceptione enunciationem istam qua dicitur quod Deus est, statim probat auditam" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vR).

⁴⁴ See *SQO* 22.5, fol. 134vC, where Henry develops his metaphysical argument; in the previous question he had argued that the existence of God is demonstrable from creatures.

must say that the proposition that God exists is most knowable and is naturally self-evident. . . . But if we are speaking about the knowledge of whether God exists from the side of the knower, further distinctions must be drawn."⁴⁵ Henry gives Averroes as an example of people who make such a distinction, alluding to his *Commentary on the Metaphysics 2*.⁴⁶ But the distinction is also similar to that made by St. Thomas, who said:

This proposition, insofar as it is in itself, is self-evident, because the predicate is identical with the subject. For God is his being. . . . But because we do not know concerning God what he is, it is not self-evident to us, but needs to be demonstrated through those things that are better known for us and less known in their nature, that is, through effects.⁴⁷

Henry grants "that some propositions are most knowable in their truth, insofar as it depends on the reality itself, that is, the subject and predicate."⁴⁸ But in order for a proposition to be self-evident, it is not enough that the predicate be contained in the subject; a proposition is said to be self-evident to a knower only when a knower immediately assents to it upon hearing it, not with evidence got from hard work and study. Hence, Henry concludes:

We say that a proposition is self-evident to the extent that the subject and the predicate are self-evident in the nature of the thing and, along with this, spontaneously and of themselves make themselves known to another person so that anyone immediately assents to the thing signified when he hears the words.⁴⁹

Some propositions are naturally self-evident to everyone, such as, "Every whole is greater than its part," and, "If you takes equals from equals, the things that are left are equals."⁵⁰ Other propositions are not self-evident to everyone, but only to those who have knowledge of the subject and predi-

⁴⁵ "si loquimur de notitia Dei an sit ex parte rei cognoscendae, dicendum sit quod Deum esse notissimum sit, et per se et naturaliter notum. . . . Si vero loquimur de notitia Dei an sit ex parte cognoscentis, distinguendum erit ulterius" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vR).

⁴⁶ See Averroes, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, in *Aristotelis opera cum Averrois commentaria* (n. 14 above) 8: fol. 29rBC.

⁴⁷ "haec propositio, quantum in se est, per se nota est, quia praedicatum est idem cum subiecto: Deus est enim suum esse. . . . Sed quia nos non scimus de Deo quid est, non est nobis per se nota, sed indiget demonstrari per ea quae magis nota quoad nos et minus nota quoad naturam, scilicet per effectus" (*Summa theologiae* 1a.2.1 cor.).

⁴⁸ "aliquae enunciationes notissimae sunt in sua veritate, quantum est ex ipsius rei subiectae et praedicatae" (*SQO* 22.3, fol. 130vS).

⁴⁹ "in tantum dicamus propositionem notam esse per se, in quantum subiectum et praedicatum in natura rei sunt nota per se, et cum hoc sese ultro et per se notificant alteri, ut rem significatam statim quis probet per vocem auditam" (*SQO* 22.3, fol. 130rS).

⁵⁰ "Omne totum est maius sua parte. Si ab aequalibus aequalia demas, quae relinquuntur aequalia sunt" (*SQO* 22.3, fol. 130rT).

cate. In this way the principles of particular sciences are self-evident only to those who know what is signified by the subject and predicate. Henry gives the example from the *Prior Analytics* that nothing follows from a negative major or from a particular minor.⁵¹

Now one can have knowledge of the subject and predicate of the proposition, "God exists," in the universal and indeterminate knowledge or in particular and determinate knowledge. It is possible to understand God with universal and indeterminate knowledge without understanding being at the same time. It is also possible to understand the terms of the proposition with particular and determinate knowledge by unobstructed vision, as the blessed in heaven see God. And for them, of course, the existence of God is self-evident. Finally, Henry says that "it is possible to know those terms in another way with a determinate knowledge, but without an unobstructed vision."⁵² And in this latter way, I believe, is found the sort of quidditative knowledge of God involved in Henry's metaphysical argument. For the concept of God in that argument is not something immediately given, but had "from instruction obtained on the matter through diligent study."⁵³ In the final part of this paper, then, I shall turn to the concept of God that Henry develops in his metaphysical argument.

HENRY'S METAPHYSICAL ARGUMENT AND THE *PROSLOGION*

We have seen in the first part that Henry clearly accepted the *Proslogion* argument for the existence of God as Anselm presented it in chapter three. Some modern students of the *Proslogion* distinguish between the arguments in chapter two and chapter three. Henry, however, does not draw such a distinction, although in *SQO* 30.3 he treats the argument in chapter three of the *Proslogion* rather than that in chapter two.⁵⁴ His metaphysical argument, however, developed in *SQO* 22.5, bears a closer resemblance to the

⁵¹ See Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* 1.6.28a38–39, and *SQO* 22.2, fol. 131rT.

⁵² "Alio autem modo est terminos illos cognoscere, cognitione determinata, sine tamen visione aperta" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 131rV).

⁵³ "ex instructione habita de ipsa re per studii diligentiam" (*SQO* 22.2, fol. 131rV).

⁵⁴ Richard Taylor, for example, says in his introduction to A. Plantinga's book: "Actually St. Anselm formulated what appear to be two arguments, the conclusions of which are not exactly the same. It is unfortunate that so few have realized that two distinct arguments can be made out in his writing" (*The Ontological Argument from St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*, ed. Alvin Plantinga [Garden City, NY, 1965], ix). Henry does deal with the content of the argument in the second chapter of the *Proslogion* in *SQO* 22.3, where he asks: "Utrum contingat cogitare Deum, non cogitando eum esse." See Stephen Dumont, *Henry of Ghent as a Source for John Duns Scotus's Proof for the Existence of God* (Toronto, Ph.D. diss., 1982), where he argues for the centrality of quidditative or conceptual knowledge for Henry's metaphysical argument.

argument in chapter two of the *Proslogion*, since it argues for the necessity of existence belonging to the concept of God, while the argument in *SQO* 30.3 argues for the impossibility of thinking that God does not exist. In both cases, however, it is necessary, according to Henry, to have the right concept of God.

In the second part, however, we saw that Henry maintained that the proposition that God exists is not naturally self-evident because it is not immediately known by anyone who knows the terms. And yet Henry does maintain that the predicate "exists" is contained in the subject so that it is not possible to have a distinct intellectual concept of God that does not include his existence. Such a concept of God is moreover precisely what Henry appealed to in his metaphysical argument for God's existence. How then does one acquire such a concept of God that includes his existence, but does not make the proposition that God exists self-evident?

In *SQO* 24.7 Henry distinguished between natural and rational knowledge of God. "The first is the knowledge of God conceived immediately and naturally in the first intentions of being. The second is the knowledge obtained by rational deduction."⁵⁵ The way of rational deduction is the way of all proofs for the existence of God, whether physical or metaphysical. But the metaphysical argument begins with the first intentions of being, one, good, true, and so on, which are known by way of natural knowledge, not in the sense that they are innate, but in the sense that they are prior to any reasoning.⁵⁶

In describing how the knowledge of the quiddity of God necessary for the metaphysical argument is attained, Henry begins with the knowledge of God in the first intentions, which as Avicenna said, are first impressed upon the mind.⁵⁷ He then moves through three degrees of knowledge of the divine quiddity, namely, most general, more general, and general knowledge. The first degree of knowing the divine quiddity, that is, what Henry calls most general knowledge, has three ways of knowing and involves two sorts of abstraction, as Henry explains, paraphrasing St. Augustine's words in *De trinitate* 8.3.4 about knowing the good. In the first way of knowing the good, it is possible to know the good

by understanding this particular good, and this most indistinctly from a creature. For, in saying "this good," I say two things, both that it is good

⁵⁵ "Prima est cognitio Dei cum primis intentionibus entis concepta statim et naturaliter. Secunda vero est cognitio via ratiocinativae deductionis animadversa" (*SQO* 24.7, fol. 144rF). See *SQO* 1.4 ad 3, fol. 13rI, for Henry's explanation of how the human intellect naturally acquires the first intentions and the first principles in knowing anything at all.

⁵⁶ See *SQO* 22.2, fol. 130vQ.

⁵⁷ See *SQO* 22.5, fol. 134vD, where Henry quotes from Avicenna, *Metaphysics* 1.5 (ed. Van Riet [n. 31 above]), 31.

and that it is this. That it is said to be “this” belongs to the creature; that it is said to be “good” is common to the creator and to the creature.⁵⁸

The second way of knowing the good in most general knowledge involves the first form of abstraction in which one abstracts “good” from “this good” or “that good:”

If you subtract from [this good or that good] “this” and “that,” this is the second way of understanding the good, that is, as less limited to the creature than before. And this is the analogous good common to God and the creature, and it is among the first intentions that the intellect conceives about things in itself and first, such as one and being.⁵⁹

Here we have the first of the two sorts of abstraction that Henry speaks of in our coming to a knowledge of the divine quiddity. In this first form of abstraction,

if by the intellect we abstract good from the particular good, we first consider good without qualification as it is a certain common and universal good, not as this or that particular good, but only as participated by and existing in many, that is, in this and that particular good.⁶⁰

By the second form of abstraction one moves to the third way of knowing the divine quiddity in most general knowledge. Henry explains that

if by the intellect we then abstract good from any other thing whatsoever and if we consider it as good without qualification (that is, not as this or that, nor as belonging to this or that, but as belonging to nothing at all, as the good that is the self-subsistent good of the creator alone), we come to know, secondarily, besides the participated good of the creature, the good through its essence of the creator himself.⁶¹

⁵⁸ “intelligendo hoc bonum et hoc summe indistincte a creatura. Dicendo enim hoc bonum duo dico et quia bonum et quia hoc. Quod dicitur hoc, hoc est creaturae; quod dicitur bonum, hoc est commune creatori et creaturae” (*SQO* 22.6, fol. 142vV). Henry provides a lengthy explanation of the sort of commonality between the creator and the creature, but that is another subject for another article. Henry also holds that God is what is first known (*primum cognitum*) by the human intellect in such indistinct knowledge of of the first intentions. On God as first known, see Matthias Laarmann, *Deus, primum cognitum: Die Lehre von Gott als dem Ersterkannten des menschlichen Intellekts bei Heinrich von Gent* (Münster, 1999).

⁵⁹ “A quo si subtraxeris hoc et illud, est secundus modus intelligendi bonum, scilicet, minus contractum ad creaturam quam prius, et est commune analogum ad Deum et creaturam, et est de primis intentionibus quae per se et primo concipit intellectus de rebus, ut sunt unum et ens” (*SQO* 22.6, fol. 142vV).

⁶⁰ “abstrahendo per intellectum bonum ab hoc, consideramus bonum primo simpliciter, ut est commune quoddam et universale bonum, non ut hoc neque ut illud, sed tantum ut participatum et existens in multis, scilicet, in hoc et in illo” (*SQO* 22.6, fol. 142vS).

⁶¹ “abstrahendo bonum per intellectum ab alio omnino et considerando ipsum ut bonum simpliciter, non ut hoc vel illud, neque ut huius vel illius, sed ut nullius omnino (quod est

And as one proceeds by the two forms of abstraction from this or that good to the subsistent good, one can proceed "with all the other attributes that belong in common to a creature and the creator, which can from creatures be known to be in the creator."⁶² Thus in the third way of knowing the good in the first degree, that is, in most general knowledge of the divine quiddity, one conceives the good as subsistent good.

The second degree of knowledge of the quiddity of God, that is, what Henry calls more general knowledge, involves our understanding of God in his general attributes "under a certain preeminence — insofar as he is the most excellent nature."⁶³ The second degree of knowledge employs both the way of removal and the way of eminence since it involves the removal from the divine quiddity every defect and imperfection and the consideration of it as having every nobility and perfection. Henry argues that the ways of removal and of eminence are inseparable in this second degree "because the mere removal from God of the defect of a creature does not assert anything in God."⁶⁴ Thus the second degree of the knowledge of the divine quiddity removes from it every imperfection and considers in it the highest degree of perfection.

The third degree of knowledge of the quiddity of God, that is, what Henry calls general knowledge, attains a knowledge of God's simplicity "by reducing . . . all his attributes of nobility and dignity to this one, first, most simple attribute, that is, through understanding that whatever is in him is his essence and that his essence is absolutely nothing else, either really or intentionally, than his being or existence."⁶⁵ The attributes of nobility and dignity includes one, good, true, being, and one can move through the degrees of knowledge by starting from any one of them, but in the third degree one understands that all such attributes are identical with God's being. Thus one comes to a concept of the divine quiddity that includes or is identical with God's existence. For someone who has moved through the degrees of knowledge to the third degree of knowledge of what God is, the

bonum in se subsistens solius creatoris), secundario iuxta bonum participatum creaturae, cognoscimus bonum per essentiam ipsius creatoris" (*SQO* 22.6, fol. 142vS).

⁶² "Et sicut est de bono, sic est de omnibus aliis attributis, communiter convenientibus creaturae et creatori, quae . . . possunt ex creaturis cognosci inesse creatori" (*SQO* 22.6, fol. 142vS).

⁶³ "sub quadam praeeminentia ut, scilicet, est quaedam natura excellentissima" (*SQO* 22.6, fol. 142vS).

⁶⁴ "quia remotio pura defectus creaturae a Deo nihil ponit in Deo" (*SQO* 22.6, fol. 143rY).

⁶⁵ "reducendo . . . omnia nobilitatis et dignitatis attributa eius in unum primum simplicissimum, scilicet, per intellectum quia quicquid in ipso est sit eius essentia, et quod eius essentia nihil omnino sit aliud re vel intentione quam eius esse sive existentia" (*SQO* 22.6, fol. 143rZ).

existence of God is identical with his essence. Hence, for such a person and only for such a person the proposition that God exists is self-evident because he has attained the right concept of God. But such a concept of God is one acquired by study and hard work, not something naturally and immediately known such as the concepts of whole and part or of the first intentions of being, one, good, etc., that are immediately perceived by the intellect.⁶⁶ Hence, the proposition that God exists is not naturally self-evident to everyone because it is not immediately known by anyone who knows the concepts of God and existence.

Hence, Henry has raised the requirements for a proposition to be self-evident *sans phrase*, by claiming that such a proposition is one whose truth is naturally and immediately known to anyone who knows the terms. Given that requirement of the self-evidence of a proposition, it is presupposed neither by Anselm's *Proslogion* arguments nor Henry's metaphysical argument that the proposition that God exists is self-evident, since in both cases the concept of the divine quiddity is not something immediately known by just anyone, but is known only as the result of rigorous inquiry and philosophical understanding. Hence, Henry can hold that the *Proslogion* argument is valid and that the proposition that God exists is not self-evident because the concept of God required for the *Proslogion* argument and for Henry's metaphysical argument is not something naturally known by everyone, but is acquired only by study and hard work. The article began with the puzzle about how Henry was able to maintain that the *Proslogion* argument was a valid argument for the existence of God and that the proposition that God exists is not self-evident. The article has shown how Henry made the necessary distinctions with regard to self-evidence and with regard to the Anselmian proof and claims that his metaphysical argument involves the same sort of conceptual development that is needed in the *Proslogion* argument if it is to be a valid argument for the existence of God, as Henry thought it was. Moreover, the fact that Henry did not include mention of Anselm's argument in *SQO* 22.4 can be explained if Henry's metaphysical argument is, as I have argued along with Paulus and others, a version of the ontological argument.

Marquette University

⁶⁶ Henry says that natural knowledge of God extends only to the first two levels of knowledge of the divine quiddity in the first degree. See *SQO* 24.7, fol. 144rG. Hence, the second form of abstraction and the last two degrees of knowledge of the divine quiddity are rational knowledge.