

Brentano's Account of Anselm's Proof of Immortality in *Monologion* 68-69

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In his lectures on medieval philosophy, the German philosopher Franz Brentano (1838-1917) noted that Anselm had proposed a "peculiar" proof of immortality. This proof caught Brentano's attention because it is what he would call a "psychological" proof, that is to say, it rests on facts about our mental or psychic activities. Anselm tells us, roughly, that the purpose of our existence is to love God (a psychological activity, in Brentano's terms), and that God would not will that our activity of loving him should cease, therefore our souls are immortal. There is an interesting play between Anselm's claim that the soul amet summam essentiam (loves the supreme being) and Brentano's report that Anselm says the love of God is the soul's hoechste Bestimmung (highest determination). Perhaps it is Brentano's peculiar interpretation of Anselm's argument for immortality that turns an activity of the soul into a defining property of the soul. In any event, Brentano is right that Anselm's proof of immortality in the Monologion is remarkable, and apparently it has gone largely unnoticed and unstudied so far.

In his lectures on medieval philosophy, the German philosopher Franz Brentano (1838-1917) noted that Anselm had proposed a "peculiar" proof of immortality.¹ This proof caught Brentano's attention because it is what he would call a "psychological" proof, that is to say, it rests on facts about our mental or psychic activities. Anselm tells us, roughly, that the purpose of our existence is to love God (a psychological activity, in Brentano's terms) and that God would not will that our activity of loving him should cease, therefore our souls are immortal. It is interesting to explore various aspects of this peculiar proof, both from the point of view of Anselm's philosophy and from the point of view of Brentano's interpretation of the proof. In particular, there is an interesting play between Anselm's claim that the soul *amet summam essentiam* (loves the supreme being),² and Brentano's report that Anselm says the love of God is the soul's *hoechste Bestimmung* (highest determination). Perhaps it is Brentano's peculiar interpretation of Anselm's argument for immortality that turns an activity of the soul into a defining property of the soul. In any event, Brentano is right that Anselm's proof of immortality in the *Monologion* is remarkable, and apparently it has gone largely unnoticed and unstudied so far. I shall try to show that it deserves our attention.

Before beginning this discussion, however, it will be useful to recall one of the more fascinating questions that comes to us from Greek philosophy via the middle ages, namely, the question whether the human soul is a quality of the human body, or whether the human soul is an

¹ Brentano, *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, Ed. and Intro. Klaus Hedwig (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1980), pp.18-19.

² Anselm, *Monologion*, chapter 69. Quotations from the *Monologion* are taken from three sources: 1) from the Latin text and 2) from the English text, as they appear in Jasper Hopkins, *A New Interpretive Translation of St. Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986); and 3) from the English text as it appears in *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, Trans. S.N. Deane, Intro. Charles Hartshorne (LaSalle: Open Court, 1966).

independent part of the human being. If the former applies, then the human soul is said to be quality or “form” of the human body, and only the whole human **person** is said to be *hoc aliquid* (τοδε τι, this particular thing), a physical body with a certain quality. If the latter applies, then the **soul**, too, the form of the human body, is said to be *hoc aliquid*, a being in its own right, in this case a substantial form. The work of Anselm far precedes that of Thomas Aquinas, the philosopher who presents these two possibilities in especially clear detail.³ The work of Brentano was done centuries later, of course, than that of either Anselm or Aquinas. In the discussion that follows here, however, ideas from all three of these philosophers will be developed. Therefore, if this is not an impossibility, our purpose will be to catch a glimpse of the truth about the human soul rather than to understand the history of philosophy.

I. The Tension Between Person as *hoc aliquid* and Soul as Substantial Form

First we shall take a quick look at the difference between the whole human person as *hoc aliquid*, on the one hand, and the soul as substantial form on the other. I say, “quick,” because whole books could be written about this, and in effect have been ever since the appearance in ancient times of Aristotle’s *de Anima*. Because the Greek conception of soul, *psyche* (ψυχη), was rooted in biology, it was natural to think of soul as the animating principle of living things, as a special quality of some physical bodies, namely, of those that are alive. Thus in Aristotle, the nutritive soul of plants, the sensitive soul of animals (which contains and builds upon the nutritive soul), and the intellectual soul of humans (which contains and builds upon the nutritive soul and the sensitive soul) are all what we would now call biological phenomena. They are biological phenomena in the Aristotelian category of quality, which is to say they are “said of” a substance.⁴ Considered by itself, the soul would be in the category of substance only if substance were considered purely as “form” (εἶδος), which is to say that the soul does not exist independently of matter in our experience, and so what is “said of” it, for instance that it knows, is more properly said of the animal or human being as a whole.⁵ The substance that is a living being or a human person is a composite, for Aristotle, of form and matter, and quantities, qualities, relations and so forth are attributed to this composite. Among these is the quality of being ensouled. Thus the concept of soul is captured by Aristotle in the well known phrase, “the first actuality of a natural organized being.”⁶

³ See *The Commentary of St. Thomas Aquinas on Aristotle’s Treatise on the Soul*, Trans. R.A. Kocourek (College of St. Thomas: St. Paul, Minnesota, 1946), especially Book II, Lessons I—III, and Book III, Lesson VII, as well as *Summa Theologiae* I, Question 75, article 2, reply objection 1.

⁴ See Aristotle, *Categories*, various translations. The ten categories of Aristotle are substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, affection. Our question essentially comes down to the issue whether the human soul is to be assigned to the category of substance or not.

⁵ The question of how the soul is to be understood as substantial in Aristotle is a contentious one. According to Hugh Lawson-Tancred, it is a mistake, which he attributes to Jonathan Barnes, to hold that Aristotle considered the intellectual soul to be an attribute rather than a substance in its own right. See *Aristotle: De Anima (On the Soul)*, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1986), pp.48-75. Lawson-Tancred cites J. Barnes, “Aristotle’s Concept of Mind,” in Barnes, J., Schofield, M., and Sorabji, R., *Articles on Aristotle*, Vol.4 (London 1979).

⁶ See Aristotle, *de Anima*, various translations, Bk. II, ch. 1. In explaining what he means by this, Aristotle says by way of analogy, “If the eye was an animal, then sight would be its soul.”

There is a hint in Aristotle that the intellectual soul might be capable of independent, substantial existence apart from the form/matter composite which is the human person of our experience.⁷ Famously, however, this independence is of a type that poses difficulties concerning the individuality and completeness of the being that would thus exist independently.

Thomas Aquinas followed Aristotle's analysis of soul as quality of a living thing, calling it *forma corporis* and the resulting individual *hoc aliquid*, i.e., this particular type of living thing. But Aquinas went further than Aristotle had gone in exploring the potentially independent existence of this special quality which is the intellectual soul of a human being.⁸ Concerning this he made two points which will be important for our discussion: 1) the intellectual soul, because it is capable of knowing all physical things must itself not be qualified by any material nature; and 2) because the intellectual soul has its own proper activity (i.e., of knowing physical things), therefore it must be a substance in its own right, a subsistent form.⁹ Putting these ideas together, we have a concept of the human intellectual soul as both immaterial and subsistent. But it remains true for Aquinas (as for Aristotle and Augustine) that strictly speaking the soul alone is not the man. The soul is not a hypostasis or person.¹⁰

Immateriality and immortality of the soul are important concepts necessary for understanding the arguments of Anselm and Brentano. Admittedly, as noted earlier, this is not a historical necessity so much as a conceptual one. This background will help us to understand Anselm's discussion of the rational creature (*rationalis creatura*) in the *Monologion* even if not all of the distinctions we have made so far were known to or made by him.

II. Anselm's Argument in *Monologion* 68-69

Let us first consider the vocabulary employed by Anselm in discussing immortality, and then turn to the argument he presents. In chapters 66 through 69 of the *Monologion*, Anselm uses the following expressions:

1. mind (*mens*)
2. rational mind (*mens rationalis*)
3. rational creature (*creatura rationalis*)
4. rational nature (*natura rationalis*)
5. human soul (*anima humana*)

It is important to know that these terms all have broad and concrete connotations in Anselm's Latin that would not necessarily be captured by their English equivalents in our post-Cartesian age. According to Pierre Michaud-Quantin, for instance, Anselm's term '*mens*' can designate

⁷ *Ibid.* Bk. I., ch. 1 Nevertheless, it is the *man* who is said to know, rather than merely the intellect.

⁸ It may be objected that I exaggerate the difference between Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas on this point. This is partly because there are disagreements among scholars concerning what each of these philosophers meant, but also perhaps partly because I wish to illuminate another difference—that between Anselm and Brentano—and the difference between Aristotle and Aquinas is useful for this purpose.

⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q.75, art.2, and Richard J. Connell, "The '*Intus Apparens*' and the Immateriality of the Intellect," *The New Scholasticism*, XXXII, 2 April 1958, pp.151-186.

¹⁰ *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q.75, art.4, reply objection 2.

the spirit, or reason, or the whole personality.¹¹ The English ‘mind’ or ‘spirit’ is now too thin to designate the whole personality, but those of us old enough to remember the liturgical response, “And with thy spirit,” though perhaps tempted to complain about the loss of beautiful language, should realize that, “And also with you,” is a good translation into modern English. Mind—spirit—person: antique ordinary usage treats these as having equivalent reference, rather than as making separate reference to distinct parts of a human being.

Likewise, ‘reason’ in Anselm is an inclusive term. ‘*Ratio*’ may substitute for ‘*spiritus*’ or ‘*mens*.’¹² Reason—spirit—mind; again these are, though not necessarily, quite possibly equivalent. In adjectival form, ‘reason’ becomes ‘rational,’ and in the proof of chapters 68-69 Anselm refers repeatedly to the “rational creature,” by extension the “spiritual” or “mental” creature, the one who turns out to be immortal. Later, in chapter 78, Anselm identifies the individual of rational nature as a “person,” and Maurice Nedoncelle rightly notes that this is to accept the Boethian definition of ‘person,’ though with a slight modification: a person is an individual having rational nature or rational essence, for Anselm hesitates to say that every person is a substance.¹³ Rational creature—mind—person; these expressions appear to be equivalent for Anselm with respect to human beings. Finally, Anselm tells us that the human *soul* is a rational creature.¹⁴ And this is important to bear in mind as we turn our attention to his proof of immortality.

In chapter 68, Anselm defines rationality as, “the ability to distinguish the just from the not-just, the true from the not-true, the good from the not-good, the greater good from the lesser.”¹⁵ This ability would be entirely pointless, however, unless it were “in accordance with the judgment of true discernment.”¹⁶ Therefore the purpose of being rational must be to love to a greater or lesser degree those things respectively that are inherently lovable to a greater or lesser degree. But God, the highest essence or supreme being (*summa essentia*), the highest good, is

¹¹ Pierre Michaud-Quantin, “Notes sur le vocabulaire psychologique de Saint Anselm,” in *Spicilegium Beccense I: Congres International du IX Centenaire de l'arrivee D'Anselme au Bec* (Paris, 1959) pp.23-30, especially p.27-29. “. . . ce que cherche a exprimer St Anselme, c'est cette realite si pleine—et si difficile a definir—que represente toute la personnalite, toute l'intimite aussi, de l'homme.” (“. . . what St. Anselm means to express is that reality—so obvious and so difficult to define—which represents the whole personality, as well as the whole intimacy, of the man. . .” My translation.) This has reference to Anselm’s use of the term ‘*mens*’ in his correspondence. See also, Gillian Evans, “‘Interior Homo’: Two Great Monastic Scholars on the Soul: St. Anselm and Ailred of Rievaulx,” *Studia monastica*, Vol.19, no.1, (1977), pp.57-73.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.25.

¹³ According to Boethius, “a person is a substance of a rational nature.” See Maurice Nedoncelle, “La notion de personne dans l’oeuvre de Saint Anselm,” in *Spicilegium Beccense I*, pp.31-43, especially p.32-33. The passage in *Monologion* 78 reads as follows: “*Persona non dicitur nisi de individua rationali natura; et substantia principaliter dicitur de individuis quae maxime in pluralitate consistunt. Individua namque substant, id est subjacent accidentibus, et ideo magis proprie substantiae nomen suscipiunt.*” Deane translates: “. . . the word *person* is applied only to an individual, rational nature; and the word *substance* is ordinarily applied to individual beings, which especially subsist in plurality.” (In Deane’s translation, this is to be found in chapter 78, p.143, but the same passage in Hopkins’ translation is to be found in chapter 79, p.209.)

¹⁴ *Monologion*, chapter 69.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, chapter 68, Deane translation, p.133.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the most lovable of all. Thus the rational creature exists for the purpose of loving God above all things.

In chapter 69, Anselm points out that the human soul is in fact such a rational creature, existing for the purpose of loving God above all things. Therefore it exists either to love God eternally, or else either voluntarily or involuntarily to cease loving God at some time. Supposing, however, that the human soul was created by God, then to deny that it can love God eternally would be to affirm that God might put an end to its love of him. God would not do that, though, since, “he himself loves every nature that loves him.”¹⁷ But to affirm that the human soul can love God eternally is to affirm that it is immortal, since it can love eternally only if it also lives eternally. Therefore the human soul is immortal, and not only immortal but also blessed and happy so long as it fulfills its purpose in loving God.

The soul’s immortality, in Anselm’s analysis, is a function not of the immateriality of the soul nor of the subsistence of the intellect, but rather simply of the nature of the rational creature, the human person, as one made to love God. Moreover, love is an emotional attachment involving the will; Anselm preserves Augustine’s psychological trinity of memory, intellect, and will.¹⁸ Recent work in neurology has also shown, in case we had forgotten, that reasoning is ineffectual without emotional investment in the things one reasons about.¹⁹ Thus Spinoza’s *amor dei intellectualis*, intellectual love of God,²⁰ and even Kant’s “love of neighbor” in the non-inclinal sense,²¹ are inconceivable, I think, except as activities of the whole rational creature. I love God and my neighbor, even if I do so with my mind or intellect, not simply by *thinking* that I should love them, but also by affectively affirming the good in them. Thus Anselm’s proof of immortality would appear to apply to the rational creature or human person, not merely to an intellectual part of the rational creature or human person, or at any rate, not merely to the intellectual part in the narrow sense associated with immateriality.

III. Brentano’s Account of Anselm’s Proof

In his *History of Medieval Philosophy*,²² Brentano says, “[We find in the] *Monologion* a peculiar proof of immortality [based on the fact that] the love of God is our highest faculty.” This proof

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, chapter 69, Deane translation, p.134.

¹⁸ See Augustine, *On the Trinity*, various translations, Book X. See also, Wayne Hankey, “The Place of the Psychological Image of the Trinity in the Arguments of Augustine’s *de Trinitate*, Anselm’s *Monologion*, and Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*,” *Dionysius*, Vol.3 (1979), pp.99-110. Hankey considers the Platonistic elements in Aquinas to have been overlooked and the Aristotelian elements in Anselm to have been overestimated by other scholars.

¹⁹ See his account of the case of Phineas Gage in Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain* (New York: Avon Books, 1994). See also *The Feeling of What Happens: Body and Emotion in the Making of Consciousness* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), and *Looking for Spinoza: Joy, Sorrow, and the Feeling Brain* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 2003).

²⁰ Spinoza, *Ethics*, various translations, Part Five, Proposition XXXIII.

²¹ Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, various translations, First Section.

²² *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, cited above, pp.18-19. “[Wir finden im] *Monologion* einen eigentemlichen Unsterblichkeitsbeweis, [der davon ausgeht, dass] die Liebe Gottes unsere hoechste Bestimmung

is peculiar or strange (*eigentuemlich*) to Brentano apparently because it is what he would call a psychological proof rather than a metaphysical one. He notes that Anselm follows Augustine, and that neither of them had fully worked out the ontological status of the soul. “Like the Fathers of the Church,” Brentano tells us, “Anselm had no idea of the soul as *forma corporis* (form of the body).” And Brentano goes so far as to attribute to Anselm the thesis that the soul is “entirely spiritual (*ganz geistig*).”

Thus Brentano’s interpretation of Anselm’s proof is fashioned from his own viewpoint as a philosopher well versed in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, also influenced by Descartes, and ultimately convinced of the immateriality, not just of the intellect, but of the entire human soul. Brentano’s own proof of the immortality of the soul makes use of its immateriality as a premise,²³ clearly on the assumption that the mental and the physical are quite different. Moreover the strangeness of Anselm’s proof, as it struck Brentano, seems to have been taken by him as a sign that Anselm’s proof is really about something else, for he concludes his brief account of it by saying, “We immediately see [the transition to] ethics; the love of God is the mark of the just. . .” Anselm does indeed tell us in chapter 72 that all human souls are immortal, the souls of those who love God destined to be eternally blessed and the souls of those who do not love God to be eternally miserable. So the transition to ethics is clear enough.

But is Brentano right to pass fairly quickly over the proof of immortality in *Monologion* 69? Is it really based, as he suggests, on the immateriality of the soul? Or is Brentano’s interpretation rather a consequence, partly of his own philosophical preoccupations, partly of his own terminology?

When Brentano tells us that Anselm takes the love of God to be our highest “faculty,” and when he says that the love of God is the “mark” of the just, he actually uses the same word in German, *die Bestimmung*, which in Brentano’s usage most typically means a defining property. I have translated the term differently in the different contexts, for the sake of clarity and fairness, but not without the suspicion that Brentano may have meant “defining property” in both cases. The love of God is the highest defining property of the soul; the love of God is the defining property of the just. The love of God can easily be seen to be definitive in both cases, from Brentano’s point of view.²⁴ But could this have been what Anselm meant?

ist.” My translations throughout. Passages in square brackets have been added by the German editor to fill out Brentano’s sketchy notes.

²³ See *On the Existence of God: Lectures Given at the Universities of Wuerzburg and Vienna (1868-1891)*, Ed. and Trans. Susan F. Krantz (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), pp.330-337. For Brentano this subject is part of theodicy. See also, *The Theory of Categories*, Trans. Chisholm and Guterman (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), p.208.

²⁴ In his introduction to *Geschichte der mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, Klaus Hedwig points out that Brentano’s account of the medieval philosophers is more valuable for what it tells us about Brentano’s interests than for what it explains about theirs. See p.xv.

IV. Anselm's *summam essentiam* and Brentano's *hoechste Bestimmung*

Anselm's Latin in the relevant passages lacks any equivalent of Brentano's "*hoechste Bestimmung*." It also lacks any equivalent of the English "purpose," for what he says, literally, is just that the rational creature is "made for this, that it love the Supreme Being,"²⁵ or he says that it, "can do nothing as excellent as remembering, understanding, and loving the Supreme Good."²⁶ In light of our earlier discussions, this means that the human being, the rational creature as a whole, is made to love God, the highest being, the greatest good, not that such love is somehow the soul's specific difference or defining property, as interesting as that Brentanian idea may be.

To distinguish between the soul and the rest of the person for the purpose of proving immortality is a project that belongs to a philosophical outlook different from Anselm's, as far as I can tell. In Thomas Aquinas we find a proof of immortality based on the immateriality of the intellect, which in turn is based on the nature of the objects known by the intellect, as noted earlier. In order to comprehend such proofs, a concept of the soul as *hoc aliquid* is required, that is to say, the soul must be a substantial part of the person, and not just a quality of a living being which makes it a living being of a certain (intellectual) kind. Brentano even thought that the Aristotelian and Thomistic "semi-materialism," as he called it, would not do the trick, and so he opted for a concept of the soul as wholly immaterial, a mental substance. As elsewhere, Anselm is more charming, and perhaps more profound, than this.

The philosophical outlook that comes to us from Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Brentano is distinctly scientific and objective. Aristotle's account of the human intellect is biological, Aquinas's proof of immortality is based on the objects of knowledge, and Brentano's thought that immateriality is required for immortality is almost a purely logical idea.²⁷ By contrast Anselm's explanation is far more personal.

Anselm emphasizes that our love of God involves memory and understanding as well as love. Partly this is an echo of the Augustinian psychological trinity—memory, understanding, will; but the claim is also consistent with Anselm's holistic sense of the human person. His *mens* or mind is multi-dimensional, not specifically restricted, as in Aquinas's account of the intellectual soul, to something having an operation independent of the physical body. Anselm's rational creature remembers and understands and loves as a mirror (*speculum*) and true image of the Supreme Being which "exists as an ineffable trinity of self-remembrance, understanding, and love."²⁸ Thus the mind, rational creature, person who is proved by Anselm to be immortal is also recognizable to any ordinary believer as the person he or she actually is. The same cannot be

²⁵ " . . . *ad hoc esse factam ut Summam Essentiam amet. . .*"

²⁶ " . . . *nil tam praecipuum posse quam reminisci et intelligere et amare summum bonum. . .*"

²⁷ Even identity through time requires that the soul be immaterial, according to Brentano, because otherwise it would be vulnerable to the vicissitudes of metabolism and not identical with itself in the strict sense over time. On the necessity of parts to the wholes of which they are parts, see for instance, *The Theory of Categories*, p.56.

²⁸ *Monologion*, Hopkins translation, chapter 67.

said for the highly sophisticated Aristotelian/Thomistic *forma corporis* as *hoc aliquid* and substantial form.²⁹

Though Brentano implicitly criticized Anselm's strange proof for lacking that sophistication, it seems to me that he was also attracted to it because it is a proof, so to speak, "from the inside." It is a subjectively-based proof, not in the pejorative sense of lacking universal validity, but in the phenomenological sense of being based on inner experience. Brentano notes Anselm's philosophical kinship with Augustine, and Augustine is notoriously "proto-phenomenological," for instance, in his well known analysis of time from the *Confessions*.³⁰ Brentano himself was torn between the objectivist model of the Aristotelians and the nascent subjectivist model of his own "descriptive psychology" which ultimately developed into the phenomenology of his student Husserl. On the cusp of these two paradigms, perhaps he saw a value in Anselm's strange proof; certainly he incorporated Anselm's definition of rationality into his ethics.³¹

As for immortality, there is much to be said for the simplicity of Anselm's proof and for the wholeness of the rational creature who lives forever. If we are individuals made by God to love the true and the good, then we have every reason to hope that our own individuality will not cease to be. Even the ancient Egyptians understood the next life as a personal immortality and not an abstraction or a metaphysical technicality, though like Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas they were also interested in distinguishing several parts of the human person.³² Such analysis has its place, and can lend support to the optimistic view, but not everyone who cares about the next life will be equally fascinated with those details. May all of us, though, as Anselm promises, "at some time live happily—truly free from death itself and every other form of distress."³³

²⁹ Gillian Evans notes that in *De Incarnatione Verbi*, "Anselm suggests. . .for purposes of discussion we should regard the soul as possessing 'a kind of substance': *anima pro specie substantiae accipitur*. The device recalls his use of the term *quasi-aliquid* in the *De Casu Diaboli*." (Evans, p.68) It seems to me that saying the soul may be "*quasi-aliquid*," or "a kind of substance," would not be the same as developing a full theory of the soul as substantial form. Evans seems to agree, pointing out that Anselm's line of thought concerning the soul became somewhat of an evolutionary dead-end in the course of the history of medieval philosophy, yielding to the more dominant influence of Abelard and later, by implication, of Aquinas. (pp.72-73)

³⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, various translations, Book XI, chapter XX. Time turns out to be a function of memory and expectation, rather than as it is in Aristotle, the "measure of motion." See Aristotle *Physics*, various translations, Book IV, chapter 11.

³¹ See Brentano, *The Origin of Our Knowledge of Right and Wrong*, Trans. Chisholm and Schneewind (New York: Humanities Press, 1969), especially p.18.

³² See E.A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Ideas of the Afterlife* (London: Kegan Paul, 1899; reprinted New York: Dover, 1995), especially chapter five. Several parts of the person each play a necessary role in assuring an individual's existence in the afterlife.

³³ *Monologion*, Hopkins translation, chapter 69.