

# Proslogion 6: ... sentire non nisi cognoscere aut non nisi ad cognoscendum est...<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Introduction

In the sixth chapter of his probably most famous and most influential work, Anselm ponders whether it is possible for God to be capable of sensory perception. The question is motivated by the apparently obvious fact that God does not possess corporality, which is evidently necessary for sensory perception to occur, because the senses dwell in a body and cognize things of material nature.<sup>2</sup> It is the first controversial question Anselm asks in connection with the nature of God in *Proslogion* (later questions concern omnipotence, grace, justice,<sup>3</sup> etc.).

Since Anselm asks the question about the possibility of sensory perception first, this study will focus on Anselm's interpretation of sensory perception as presented in his works written in Le Bec. Attention will be directed towards texts written in the second half of the 1070s, namely *Monologion* (i.e., *Exemplum meditandi de ratione fidei*) and *Proslogion* (i.e., *Fides quaerens intellectum*), including Anselm's response to the objections to some of his statements raised by the monk Gaunilo and the dialogue *De veritate*, presumably written by Anselm at the beginning of the 1080s.<sup>4</sup>

Even though the question concerning the nature of sensory perception is often examined in the context of human cognition of reality, Anselm's focal

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2 Anselmus, *Proslogion* 6. In: S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia. Vol. 1. Ed. F. S. Schmitt. Edinburgh 1946 (abbrev. *Prosl.*), p. 104.

3 *Ibid.*, 7–9, pp. 105–108.

4 For the dating of Anselm's works see e.g. Southern, R. W., *Saint Anselm. A Portrait in a Landscape*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1990, p. xxvii; or Evans, G. R., *Anselm's life, works, and immediate influence*. In: Davies, B. – Leftow, B. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2004, pp. 11–14.

point is God, or more precisely the human potential to cognize God and to comprehend the human act of faith in God. This is evinced not only by the original titles of Anselm's texts mentioned above, but also by the so called "teaching dialogues" *De veritate*, *De libertate arbitrii* and *De casu diaboli*, whose aim was, according to the author, to provide a suitable instrument for studying the Scriptures.<sup>5</sup>

Although Anselm has been labelled as one of the most systematic and rational<sup>6</sup> medieval thinkers, he was firmly set in the contemporary understanding of philosophical (rational) cognition as being fundamentally interconnected with religious (theological) experience, because the two are inseparable and relate to the same subject.<sup>7</sup> Genuine philosophy is the actual religious path to God, the right authorities are the very same thing as certainty of reason.<sup>8</sup> Anselm was not the only one who strove to connect rational truths with truths of the faith.<sup>9</sup> He endorsed Augustine's tradition of understanding the philosophical endeavour and in the *Monologion* he explicitly appeals to the African saint and reassures his readers that everything he writes is in conformity with Augustine's statements.<sup>10</sup>

5 Anselmus, *De veritate*, praef. In: S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia. Vol. 1, op. cit. (abbrev. *De ver.*), p. 173.

6 Cf. for example McIntyre, J., Premises and Conclusions in the System of St. Anselm's Theology. In: Grammont, P. (ed.), *Spicilegium Beccense I. Congrès international du IX<sup>e</sup> centenaire de l'arrivée d'Anselme au Bec*. Le Bec-Hellouin-Paris, J. Vrin 1959, pp. 95–101.

7 Cf. the very interesting book Kobusch, T., *Christliche Philosophie. Die Entdeckung der Subjektivität*. Darmstadt, WBG 2006. It is customary to stress the interconnection of Anselm's efforts to use *sola ratio* in order to uncover religious and theological truths as *ratio fidei*. There are many works on this topic, see e.g. Visser, S. – Williams, T., *Anselm*. Oxford, Oxford University Press 2009, pp. 13–25; or Grzesik, T., *A New Look at the «ratio Anselmi» of the Prosligion*. In: Majeran, R. – Zieliński, E. I. (eds.), *Święty Anzelm. Biskup i myśliciel*. Lublin, Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu 1999, pp. 225–233, and others.

8 Cf. for example Augustinus, *De vera religione* V, 8. Ed. K.-D. Daur. CCSL 32. Turnhout 1962, p. 193; Iohannes Scotus Eriugena, *De divina praedestinatione liber 1*. Ed. G. Madec. CCCM 50. Turnhout 1978, p. 5; idem, *Periphyseon I*, 66. Ed. E. Jeaneau. CCCM 50. Turnhout 1996, p. 192; Anselmus, *De concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et gratiae dei cum libero arbitrio* III, 6. In: S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia. Vol. 2. Ed. F. S. Schmitt, Edinburgh 1946, p. 272, and others. Cf. also Anselm's opinion of referring to the authorities, see e.g. Viola, C. E., Authority and Reason in Saint Anselm's Life and Thought. In: Luscombe, D. E. – Evans, G. R. (eds.), *Anselm: Aosta, Bec and Canterbury*. Sheffield, Academic Press 1996, pp. 172–208; or McCord Adams, M., Anselm on Faith and Reason. In: Davies, B. – Leftow, B. (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, op. cit., pp. 39–52.

9 Cf. for example Boethius, *Utrum Pater et Filius et Spiritus sanctus de divinitate substantialiter praedicentur*. In: idem, *Tractates. De Consolatione Philosophiae*. Ed. and transl. H. F. Stewart – E. K. Rand – S. J. Tester. Cambridge-London 1978, p. 35.

10 Cf. Anselmus, *Monologion*, prol. In: S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia. Vol. 1, op. cit. (abbrev. *Mon.*), p. 8. It is commonly held that this explicit reference to the conformity with the Church Fathers, the Scriptures, and especially with Augustine is one of the results of the apparently reserved reaction of Lanfranc to reading the *Monologion*. Anselm had been deeply interested in his opinion prior to publishing the text – cf. Anselmus, *Epistolarum liber*

The texts of the early Church Fathers undoubtedly had fundamental influence on Anselm, which is reflected not only by the Augustinian and Platonic background of his thought (albeit confronted with the Aristotelian legacy mediated especially by Boëthius), but also by his approach to questions regarding sensory perception. It may be noted in advance that the general setting of Anselm's contemplation is in principle a Platonic<sup>11</sup> approach to the status and importance of sensory perception, even though he deviates from it in certain respects.

This paper aims to interpret Anselm's occasional mentions of sensory perception in the listed works while respecting the line of thought presented by the author himself. First, the paper focuses on the question whether and how God possesses sensory perception (part 2), then on the ability of humans to cognize God by means of their senses (part 3), which is elaborated further by Anselm's interpretation of the nature of sensory perception and its truthfulness (part 4). Eventually (part 5), the paper proposes an explanation as to why Anselm paid but little attention to sensory perception and why he mostly dedicated his philosophical and intellectual efforts to different aspects of the cognitive process.

## 2. God and sensory perception (*Proslogion* 6)

Anselm solves the question whether sensory perception is possible in God (*quomodo sit sensibis*) by the same method as the one he employs for the other issues in the *Proslogion* – he presents contradictory statements, then shows one statement to be false and, by applying the law of excluded middle, confirms the other one. In this particular case, Anselm begins with the premise that God must possess all qualities that it is better to possess than not to possess, which had already been substantiated in detail in the *Monologion*.<sup>12</sup> In connection with sensory perception, Anselm presupposes in the *Proslogion* that “[...] since to be able to perceive [...] is better than not to be [...]”,<sup>13</sup> God should be able to perceive.

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*primus* 72, 77. In: S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia. Vol. 3. Ed. F. S. Schmitt, Edinburgh 1946, pp. 193–194, 199–200. For more details see for example Zanatta, F., L'autorità della ragione. Contributo all'interpretazione della lettera 77 di Anselmo d'Aosta a Lanfranco di Pavia. In: d'Onofrio, G. (ed.), *Lanfranco di Pavia e l'Europa del secolo XI*. Roma, Herder 1993, pp. 609–627.

11 Cf. Modrak, D. K., Perception and Judgment in the “Theaetetus”. *Phronesis. A Journal for Ancient Philosophy*, 26, 1981, No. 1, pp. 35–54.

12 Cf. for instance Anselmus, *Mon.* 16, p. 30–31.

13 Anselmus, *Prosl.* 6, p. 104: ... cum melius sit esse sensibilem ... quam non esse... (English translation by J. Hopkins and H. Richardson – cf. *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises*

Although we can definitely think about perception (not only in the case of God) in a more general manner than in the exclusive context of knowledge provided by sensory organs, Anselm, in this chapter, designates perception as sensory perception because he explicitly stresses that he is examining God's capacity of sensory perception (*sit esse sensibilem*) – similarly to the method he uses to deal with God's omnipotence or grace – i.e., Anselm is interested exclusively in knowledge provided by the senses (*secundum sensuum*). In respect to this delimitation, he holds that it is more appropriate that God possesses knowledge based on the senses.

On the other hand, it seems that sensory perception cannot be attributed to God because:

[...] how are You able to perceive if You are not something corporeal [...]? For if only corporeal things are able to perceive (inasmuch as the senses have to do with a body and are in a body), how are You able to perceive, since You are not something corporeal but are Supreme Spirit, which is better than what is corporeal?<sup>14</sup>

God is Supreme Spirit who is not connected to corporeal matter, whereas it seems that the senses always perceive only something corporeal and are inherently tied to a body. This implies that God cannot possess sensory perception, because His spiritual nature (much more perfect than a corporeal one) prevents Him from doing so. The fundamental contradiction then reads:

a) God possesses sensory perception, because it is better to be able to perceive by the senses than not to be and God possesses everything that it is better to possess than not to possess.

b) God does not possess sensory perception, because sensory perception is always tied to corporeal things and God is not corporeal.

Anselm devises a general characteristic of sensory perception in order to reject one of the above options:

But if perceiving is only knowing or only for the sake of knowing (for anyone who perceives knows in accordance with the characteristic capabilities of the respective senses – e.g., colors [are

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of Anselm of Canterbury. Transl. J. Hopkins – H. Richardson. Minneapolis, The Arthur J. Banning Press 2000, p. 96.)

14 Ibid.: ... *quomodo es sensibilis, si non es corpus...? Nam si sola corporea sunt sensibilia, quoniam sensus circa corpus et in corpore sunt: quomodo es sensibilis, cum non sis corpus sed summus spiritus, qui corpore melior est?* (English translation: op. cit., p. 96.)

known] through sight, flavors through taste), then whatever in some way knows is not unsuitably said in some way to perceive.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, sensory perception is (in the Platonic tradition) a specific kind of knowledge or something that eventually leads to knowledge. Perception differs from other kinds of knowledge, because it produces findings by means of sensations or the senses generally. Since perception is a kind of knowledge, it seems that a being endowed with cognitive abilities also has the ability to perceive.

Even though it is correctly supposed that sensory perception is related to something corporeal, this fact cannot be applied to God. God is truly Supreme Spirit who does not contain anything corporeal. Therefore, God cannot cognize by corporeal senses, but that does not mean that He possesses no sensory perception. On the contrary, His sensory perception is fundamentally different from the cognitive practices of other beings, humans included.<sup>16</sup> By this argumentation, Anselm explicitly exposes the second statement as false.

Thereby, since it is clear that God either has sensory perception or He does not and Anselm has already given reasons why the latter alternative is not plausible, it must hold that God possesses sensory perception. It is beyond doubt that God knows everything and He has the best cognition. And since perception is nothing other than cognition, He must necessarily possess the most perfect mode of sensory perception, even though corporeality cannot be ascribed to Him:

Therefore, O Lord, even though You are not something corporeal, truly You are supremely able to perceive in the sense that You know supremely all things [...]<sup>17</sup>

According to this chapter of the *Proslogion* at least, it is possible to say that even though God does not possess corporeal senses, He is capable of supreme sensory perception (*summus sensibilis*).

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15 Ibid., p. 105: *Sed si sentire non nisi cognoscere aut non nisi ad cognoscendum est – qui enim sentit cognoscit secundum sensuum proprietatem, ut per visum colores, per gustum saporis –: non inconvenienter dicitur aliquo modo sentire, quidquid aliquo modo cognoscit.* (English translation: op. cit., p. 96.)

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid.: *Ergo domine, quamvis non sis corpus, vere tamen eo modo summe sensibilis es, quo summe omnia cognoscis...* (English translation: op. cit., p. 96.)

### 3. Seeking God by means of sensory perception (*Proslogion* 17, *Ad Gaunilonem* 8)

In the *Proslogion*, Anselm arrived at the conclusion that God possesses sensory perception and His perception is supreme. The necessary condition of this conclusion is the assumption that the mode of God's sensory perception is completely incommensurable with the sensory perception we know in our corporeal world.

It raises the question whether humans, i.e., beings endowed with corporeal senses, can use sensory perception in their effort to find God. From a systematic point of view, it is possible to say that if such a possibility existed, at least two conditions would have to be satisfied:

1. God must be relevantly characterized by properties perceivable by the senses.
2. The human senses are (at least in some manner) able to cognize those properties or the data available to us by means of sensory perception can be of significant assistance to us in our search for God.

Anselm comments on the first condition in the seventeenth chapter of the *Proslogion*, where he laments over the darkness (*tenebrae*) and poverty (*miseria*) of his soul, which is unable to reach God because the Supreme Being remains hidden from us.<sup>18</sup> One of the causes of this poverty is the fact that God is not only “[...] that than which a greater cannot be thought [...]”<sup>19</sup> according to the key wording from the famous *unum argumentum*, but he is something much more:

Therefore, O Lord, not only are You that than which a greater cannot be thought, but You are also something greater than can be thought. For since there can be thought to exist something of this kind, if You were not this [Being] then something greater than You could be thought – [a consequence] which is impossible.<sup>20</sup>

Therefore, God is “something greater than can be thought”, He dwells in an unreachable light and even though He is ever-present, humans are not able to cognize Him.<sup>21</sup> Anselm compares this to sunlight, which allows us to

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 17, p. 113.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2, p. 101: ... *id quo maius cogitari nequit...* (English translation: op. cit., p. 93.)

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 15, p. 112: *Ergo domine, non solum es quo maius cogitari nequit, sed es quiddam maius quam cogitari possit. Quoniam namque valet cogitari esse aliquid huiusmodi: si tu non es hoc ipsum, potest cogitari aliquid maius te; quod fieri nequit.* (English translation: op. cit., p. 103.)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 16, p. 112–113.

cognize by sight, but a direct gaze into the Sun blinds us because our sight is not sufficient for such a strong glare and vivid gleam. We can make a similar statement about God that He is all around us, He even rests inside us, yet we are not able to perceive Him: “You are within me and round about me; and yet, I do not experience You.”<sup>22</sup>

Thus, God is something that cannot be cognized by humans in their sinful state despite all effort. Anselm talks in this context about the sensible properties of God which we cannot register, but which are present in God and at the same time are given by God to the creation which we are able to perceive:

For it looks in all directions but does not see Your beauty. It listens but does not hear Your harmony. It fills its nostrils but does not smell Your fragrance. It tastes but does not savor Your succulence. It feels but does not detect Your softness. For in Your ineffable manner, O Lord God, You have these [features] within You; and You have bestowed them, in their own perceptible manner, upon the things created by You.<sup>23</sup>

Humans do not see the beauty (*pulchritudo*) of God, they do not hear His harmony (*harmonia*), they do not smell His scent (*odor*), and they cannot cognize His perfect taste (*sapor*), nor can they perceive God’s smoothness (*lenitas*). Not only does Anselm connect all five senses with what can be found in God (but we are not able to find it because of our sinful nature), he also holds that these properties are possessed by God in some inexpressible manner and He granted the same properties to all the creation, which contains these properties in such manner that we can perceive them. While it would be possible to speculate about Anselm’s figural expressions in connection with predicating sensory qualities of God in this part of the *Proslogion*, it seems, nevertheless, that Anselm declares not only the presence of sensually perceivable qualities in God Himself, but also their direct correlation with the things we sensually perceive in the corporeal world around us.

It is beyond doubt that the sensually perceivable properties are present in God in an entirely different manner than we (as humans) are used to encountering in the ordinary sensually perceivable world. However, Anselm explicitly states here that God has placed the same (*ea*) properties (i.e., what is perceivable by sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch) which exist in God in

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22 Ibid., p. 113: *Intra me et circa me es, et non te sentio.* (English translation: op. cit., p. 104.)

23 Ibid., 17, p. 113: *Circumspicit enim, et non videt pulchritudinem tuam. Auscultat, et non audit harmoniam tuam. Olfacit, et non percipit odorem tuum. Gustat, et non cognoscit saporum tuum. Palpat, et non sentit lenitatem tuam. Habes enim haec, domine deus, in te tuo ineffabili modo, qui ea dedisti rebus a te creatis suo sensibili modo...* (English translation: op. cit., p. 104.)

a specific manner into the things He created. They are not diverse properties; they are the very same, although existing in a different way. Therefore, it can be inferred that Anselm would agree with the first of the conditions above concerning the necessity of sensory qualities in God (even though they are present in very specific manner). But would he agree that sensory perception can actively aid us in our search for God (i.e., the second condition above)?

It is often said that Anselm's rational search for God in the *Proslogion* is an ontological (*a priori*) argument, which begins with knowledge of the cause and deduces consequences from it (in this case it begins with conceptual knowledge of God, or existence of God in the human mind, from which His real existence should be inferred).<sup>24</sup> If this were the case, then the fundamental path to finding God would be completely independent from sensory perception and it would be necessary to state that the senses are not useful in searching for God.

However, Anselm speaks somewhat differently. Already in the *Monologion*, whose introductory chapters presented the verification procedures which should lead us to the necessity of God's existence, Anselm, while searching for God as the only good (*unum bonum*) which permits all other goods, directly appeals to the easiest (*promptissimus*) method, which begins with the world perceivable by the corporeal senses.

[...] although the good things whose very great variety we perceive by the bodily senses and distinguish by the mind's reason are so numerous, are we to believe that there is one thing through

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24 Ch. Harthstone wrote that as a result of these few lines of the second chapter of the *Proslogion* Anselm has become a philosopher who is very modern to be discussed but is not usually studied – cf. Hartshorne, Ch., Introduction. In: Saint Anselm, *Basic Writings: Proslogium / Monologium / Gaunilon's In Behalf of the Fool / Cur Deus Homo*. Transl. S. W. Deane. La Salle, Open Court 1962, p. 1. There is an inexhaustible amount of literature concerning this topic, cf. for instance Logan, I., *Reading Anselm's Proslogion. The History of Anselm's Argument and its Significance Today*. Farnham, Ashgate 2009; Goebel, B., *Anselm's Elusive Argument: Ian Logan Reading the Proslogion. The Saint Anselm Journal*, Vol. 7, Fall 2009, No. 1. Available online: <http://www.anselm.edu/Documents/Institute%20for%20Saint%20Anselm%20Studies/Fall%202009/7.1Goebel.pdf> [retrieved 15 December 2016]; Brecher, R., *Anselm's Argument: The Logic of Divine Existence*. Brookfield, Gower 1985; Plantinga, A. (ed.), *The Ontological Argument from St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers*. New York, Doubleday 1965; Ricken, F. (ed.), *Klassische Gottesbeweise in der Sicht der gegenwärtigen Logik und Wissenschaftstheorie*. Stuttgart, Kohlhammer 1998; Tichý, P., Existence and God. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68, 1979, pp. 403–420; Oppenheimer, P. E. – Zalta, E. N., On the Logic of the Ontological Argument. *Philosophical Perspectives*, 5, 1991, pp. 509–529; Anscombe, G. E. M., Why Anselm's Proof in the *Proslogion* is not an Ontological Argument. *Thoreau Quarterly*, 17, 1985, pp. 32–40; Hick, J. – McGill, A. (eds.), *The Many-Faced Argument. Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God*. Eugene, Wipf and Stock 2009, etc.



which all good things are good, or are some things good through something else?<sup>25</sup>

In the *Proslogion* itself, Anselm first declares that the main difference between the paths to God in the *Monologion* and in the *Proslogion* is that the former contains a succession of arguments providing the insight of God's existence, while in the latter Anselm tries to introduce a single argument (*unum argumentum*) which is conclusive on its own and, in addition, could be used for the same purpose (i.e., to show God as *summum bonum*, etc.).<sup>26</sup> Anselm mentions no other substantial difference.

In the first chapter of the *Proslogion*, he examines the poverty of the sinful state of the human soul longing for God, who is unreachable in the present state.<sup>27</sup> Anselm explicitly states that the soul wishes to behold God, or to see His face.<sup>28</sup> Therefore, the soul, among other things, wishes to cognize God by means of sensory perception, even though it is apparently not possible to construe these words clearly as an actual craving to relate to God by the corporeal senses – one just needs to recall the abovementioned principal difference between the presence of perceivable properties in God and in the sensory qualities of the corporeal world.

But in the most famous second chapter of the *Proslogion*<sup>29</sup> Anselm also refers to sensory perception when he introduces the fool (*insipiens*) who said in his heart that there is no God.<sup>30</sup> However, even this fool must acknowledge that he has *id quo maius cogitari nequit* in his intellect, because it is mediated to him by sensory perception:

But surely when this very same Fool hears my words “something than which nothing greater can be thought”, he understands what he hears.<sup>31</sup>

25 Anselmus, *Mon.* 1, p. 14: *Cum tam innumerabilia bona sint, quorum tam multam diversitatem et sensibus corporeis experimur et ratione mentis discernimus: estne credendum esse unum aliquid, per quod unum sint bona quaecumque bona sunt, an sunt bona alia per aliud?* (English translation: op. cit., p. 7.)

26 Anselmus, *Prosl. prooem.* p. 93.

27 Cf. for example Losoncy, T. A., Chapter 1 of St. Anselm's *Proslogion*; Its Preliminaries to Proving God's Existence as Paradigmatic for Subsequent Proofs of God's Existence. In: Zúmr, J. – Herold, V. (eds.), *The European Dimension of St. Anselm's Thinking*. Praha, Filozofický ústav AV ČR 1993, pp. 95–106.

28 Anselmus, *Prosl.* 1, pp. 99–100.

29 For a summary of its traditional interpretation see for example Visser, S. – Williams, T., *Anselm*, op. cit., p. 75–79.

30 Anselmus, *Prosl.* 2, p. 101. Cf. *Ps* 14,1; or *Ps* 53,1.

31 *Ibid.*: *Sed certe ipse idem insipiens, cum audit hoc ipsum quod dico: aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest, intelligit quod audit...* (English translation: op. cit., p. 93.)

If somebody is foolish enough not to believe in God (*id quo maius cogitari nequit*), i.e., he does not possess in his mind and in his intellect (*in intellectu*) the notion of His necessary existence, then he can gain the knowledge of something than which nothing greater can be thought by virtue of sensory perception (in this case hearing). It is highly probable that Anselm indeed used the example of auditory perception only as a literary expression of the presented thought and not as a direct reference to the importance (or even needfulness) of sensory perception. Nonetheless, even in this case he referred to the senses, which take credit for the fact that *id quo maius cogitari nequit* exists in our minds at least.

Precisely this statement, i.e., that every human being is by virtue of his intellect capable of grasping Anselm's description of the Supreme Being, was doubted by the monk Gaunilo in his polemic answer.<sup>32</sup> And we can still ponder whether it is only a coincidence that the first known critic of Anselm's reasoning in favour of God's existence calls attention to the uncertainty of sensory (auditory) sensation, which would allow even a sensory illusion to be grasped by an intellect,<sup>33</sup> and then doubts in particular that we would even be able to rationally grasp what the Supreme is, because we cannot cognize it on the basis of a concrete entity, i.e., of similarity with a comparable entity, or on the basis of knowledge of species or genus, as neither of these methods brings us closer to God.<sup>34</sup>

Anselm deals with this caveat in two ways:

1. An argument to persuade the fool who does not acknowledge the authority of the Scriptures.
2. Reference to the Scriptures.

In the first, even the fool can, on the basis of understanding what is less good (*minus bonum*), think of something that is more good (*maius bonum*), as on the basis of understanding something that has a beginning and an end (*initium et finis*) he can understand something that has a beginning but no end, but he can also use his knowledge of something that is even better (*melius*) than the latter, which is something that is completely without a beginning or an end.<sup>35</sup> Therefore:

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32 Cf. for example Losoncy, T. A., The Anselm-Gaunilo Dispute about Man's Knowledge of God's Existence: An Examination. In: Van Fleteren, F. – Schnaubelt, J. C. (eds.), *Twenty-Five Years (1969–1994) of Anselm Studies*. Anselm Studies Vol. 3. Lewiston–Queenston–Lampeter, Edwin Mellen Press 1996, pp. 161–181.

33 Gaunilo, *Quid ad haec respondeat quidam pro insipiente* 2. In: S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia. Vol. 1, op. cit., pp. 125–126. For more details concerning sensory illusions and Anselm's interpretation of them, see section IV of this paper.

34 Ibid., 4, pp. 126–127.

35 Anselmus, *Quid ad haec respondeat editor ipsius libelli* 8. In: S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia. Vol. 1, op. cit. (abbrev. *Ad Gaun.*), p. 137.

In this way, then, the Fool, who does not accept sacred authority [i.e., Scripture], can easily be refuted if he denies that on the basis of other things inferences can be made about that than which a greater cannot be thought.<sup>36</sup>

The second method by which humans can acquire a notion of something than which nothing greater can be thought from something than which something greater can be thought (i.e., things in the surrounding sensually perceivable world), is addressed to those who acknowledge that the Scriptures contain Truth. For those people, it is enough just to remember the Epistle to the Romans, where Apostle Paul writes:

[...] the invisible things of God (including His eternal power and divinity), being understood through those things that have been made, are clearly seen from the mundane creation.<sup>37</sup>

The authority of the Scripture urges us to examine the created world, explore local entities, viz. to sensually grasp the corporeal reality, compile it rationally and then try to search for the Being who created it. Anselm seems to have assumed that sensory experience is necessary even for his *unum argumentum* from the *Proslogion*, because without it Gaunilo's caveat would be relevant. However, reference to the sensually perceivable world, according to Anselm, refutes this objection.

#### 4. The truth of sensory perception and sensory illusions (*De veritate* 6)

The highly specific role of sensory perception in seeking God and the truth is elaborated further in the dialogue *De veritate*. There Anselm presents not only his definition of truth,<sup>38</sup> but also develops his conception of two truths (*duae veritates*). On the one hand, there is a natural (*naturalis*) and necessary (*necessaria*) truth, which can be characterized as doing what ought to

36 Ibid.: *Sic itaque facile refelli potest insipiens qui sacram auctoritatem non recipit, si negat, quo maius cogitari non valet<sup>4</sup> ex aliis rebus conici posse.* (English translation: op. cit., p. 129.)

37 Ibid., p. 138: ...»invisibilia« dei »a creatura mundi per ea, quae facta sunt, intellecta conspiciuntur, sempiterna quoque eius virtus et divinitas«. (English translation: op. cit., p. 129.) Cf. Rom 1,20.

38 Anselmus, *De ver.* 11, p. 191. For more details see for instance Enders, M. *Wahrheit und Notwendigkeit. Die Theorie der Wahrheit bei Anselm von Canterbury im Gesamtzusammenhang seines Denkens und unter besonderer Berücksichtigung seiner antiken Quellen* (Aristoteles, Cicero, Augustinus, Boethius). Leiden–Boston–Köln, Brill 1999; Recktenwald, E., *Das id quo maius cogitari non potest als rectitudo: Anselms Gottesbeweis in Lichte von De veritate*. In: Van Fleteren, F. – Schnaubelt, J. C. (eds.), *Twenty-Five Years (1969–1994) of Anselm Studies*, op. cit., pp. 135–159, and others.

be done (*facit quod debet*). Thus, when something does exactly what it ought to do, i.e., it is in accord with its nature, then we say that the given thing is in accord with its being, therefore it is true. In this sense, a fire is true when it burns because a fire ought to burn according to its nature. It follows that if there is a fire, it must necessarily burn. Similar conclusions can be drawn about the truth of a will which wants, etc. On the other hand, Anselm reasons about a truth which is supposed to be of an accidental (*accidentalis*) nature and consists in that what is done is done in a proper manner (*recte utitur*). It is not enough for a will to want, it must also want that what it ought to want in the present situation. According to this second conception of truth, what Anselm regards as true in this context is caused by the direction (rightness) of the will.<sup>39</sup>

An illustrative example, which is used to clarify the difference between the two truths in Anselm's dialogue, is the truth of an utterance. During the dialogue with the teacher, the pupil is reluctant to accept the thesis that even a statement claiming that something exists, even though it is not the case (e.g., *A dog is a winged fish*), can be understood as a true one. The teacher thus explains that every statement provided it expresses something, does what it ought to do because it is in its nature and it is, therefore, necessarily true, even though it does not express the truth. The pupil eventually accepts this explanation, saying: "Now for the first time I see the truth in a false statement."<sup>40</sup>

Apart from this natural truth of utterances, which is comparable to the fact that fire, if it is a real fire, must always be warm, there is also a more common manner of how a statement is understood to be true. It occurs when an utterance is used in such a way that it not only does what it ought to do, but, more importantly, when it does so while proclaiming what it ought to proclaim, thus when it is used properly. Only then does the utterance fulfil the purpose for which it was given the power to express. In such case it holds that an utterance is true when it says what really is or when it denies what really is not. Similar conclusions can be made about e.g. the truth of thought, of willing, etc.<sup>41</sup>

However, if we focus on the truth of sensory perception, the situation is, according to Anselm, different. The senses provide solely such information about the sensually perceivable reality as they were allowed to pass on,

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39 Cf. for instance Anselmus, *De ver.* 2, p. 179; or *ibid.*, 5, pp. 181–182.

40 *Ibid.*, 5, p. 183: *Nunc primum video in falsa oratione veritatem*. (English translation: *op. cit.*, p. 171.)

41 Cf. *ibid.*, 2–5, pp. 177–183, for detailed analysis, see for instance Enders, M., *Wahrheit und Notwendigkeit*, pp. 115–196.

because they “[...] report what they are able to, since they have received thus to be able [...]”<sup>42</sup>

In other words, there is always truth in the senses and sensory perception cannot transmit false data. However, this is contrary to the intuitive opinion that the senses deceive us. Anselm cites several traditionally presented sensory illusions, mostly optical ones (a straight stick submerged in water looks broken, reflections in mirrors, colour-changes of objects because of the surrounding environment – stained glass – through which we are looking at the object, etc.), but there is also a brief mention of an auditory illusion (confusion about recognizing a human voice).<sup>43</sup>

However, the teacher in the dialogue develops the theory that these errors are not made by the external or corporeal senses (*sensus exterior*), as it would appear, but in the verdict we make concerning these sensory data, i.e., it is a judgement of our soul (*iudicio animae*), which originates from the so-called inner sense (*sensus interior*) processing our sensory data.<sup>44</sup> Anselm’s comparison of the different interpretations of an optical perception made by a boy (*puer*) and by an aged person (*senex*) serves as an illustrative example. Both are looking at the same dragon with the mouth open, both see the same object, but while the aged person knows that it is a statue, i.e., the sensory perception is processed in this way in his soul by the inner sense, the boy is not capable of a similar judgement and starts to be afraid, because the differentiation between the thing (a real dragon with the mouth open) and its imitation in the form of a statue does not happen in his mind. The two have the same perception, but it produces different things in their souls.<sup>45</sup>

Anselm then deals in detail with illusory colours on objects in a similar fashion. It serves him as an instrument to express his extramission theory of sensory perception, whereby he subscribes to a broad theory regarding the activity of the sight in cognizing the surrounding world. This theory (frequent already in antiquity) has an important place in medieval thinking about the nature of sensory perception.<sup>46</sup>

42 Anselmus, *De ver.* 6, p. 184: ... qui renuntiant quod possunt, quoniam ita posse acceperunt. (English translation: op. cit., p. 173.)

43 *Ibid.*, pp. 183–184.

44 Cf. Augustinus, *De libero arbitrio* II, 3, 8. Ed. W. M. Green. CCSL 29. Turnhout 1970. Anselm does not elucidate further how this *sensus interior* is to be understood. It can be assumed that Augustine was his inspiration. Cf. for instance Evans, G. R., *Getting it Wrong: The Mediaeval Epistemology of Error*. Leiden, Brill 1998, pp. 48–51.

45 Anselmus, *De ver.* 6, p. 183.

46 See, for example, Smith, A. M., *From Sight to Light. The Passage from Ancient to Modern Optics*. Chicago–London, The University of Chicago Press 2015, pp. 29–31, 72–74 or 241. For Anselm’s possible source (Calcidius and his translation of Timaeus) cf. Somfai, A., The Eleventh-Century Shift in the Reception of Plato’s *Timaeus* and Calcidius’s *Commentary*. *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 65, 2002, p. 20.

For example, [this is the case] when sight passes through glass of its own color – i.e., glass which has no color admixed to its own – or when it passes through very clear water or through a crystal or through something having a similar color. But when sight passes through some other color (for example, through glass not of its own color [i.e., not of the natural color of glass] but to which another color is added), it receives the color which it first encounters. Thus, after sight has received one color, then depending upon the extent to which it has been modified by this color, it receives either partially or not at all whatever other color it encounters. Therefore, sight reports the color it has apprehended first, and reports it either by itself or in combination with the color it meets subsequently.<sup>47</sup>

According to Anselm, there is a visual ray originating in the organ of sight, which passes through a medium (e.g. air, water, glass, etc.) until it collides with an object which it can capture. In the case of a colour and a transparent environment, the visual perception informs us about the particular colour of a given object (e.g. a yellow leaf). Provided that the environment is coloured to a different extent, the information given to us by the visual perception will be stained or tinted according to the intensity of that colour, e.g. the very same yellow leaf, viewed through a blue glass, appears to be green. If the intensity of the blue colour of the glass is even stronger, the very same yellow leaf may appear to be blue.

Therefore, according to Anselm, sensory perception has the character of extramission<sup>48</sup> and it seems that it relates to the corporeal world of individual things and informs us about them by means of affection.<sup>49</sup> When

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47 Ibid., p. 184: *Ut cum transit per vitrum sui coloris, id est cui nullus alius admixtus est color; aut per purissimam aquam aut per crystallum aut per aliquid similem habens colorem. Cum vero transit idem visus per alium colorem, ut per vitrum non sui coloris, sed cui alius color est additus: ipsum colorem qui prius occurrit accipit. Quapropter quoniam post unum acceptum colorem, secundum quod illo affectus est, alium quicumque occurrat aut nullatenus aut minus integre suscipit: ideo illum quem prius cepit, aut solum aut cum eo qui post occurrit renuntiat.* (English translation: op. cit., p. 172.)

48 In the case of sight, Anselm states this openly also in the dialogue *On Freedom of Choice*, see Anselmus, *De libertate arbitrii* 7. In: S. Anselmi Cantuariensis archiepiscopi Opera omnia. Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 218: *Vocamus enim visum ipsum instrumentum videndi, id est radium procedentem per oculos quo sentimus lucem et quae sunt in luce...* (English translation: op. cit., p. 204: *For we call sight the instrument-for-seeing, i.e., the ray passing through the eyes, by which ray we perceive light and the objects which are in the light.*)

49 For more details see for example Külling, H., *Wahrheit als Richtigkeit. Eine Untersuchung zur Schrift De veritate von Anselm von Canterbury*. Bern, Lang 1984, pp. 142–145; or Enders, M., *Wahrheit und Notwendigkeit*, op. cit., pp. 198–205.

so-called sensory illusions occur, it is not an error of the corporeal sense itself.<sup>50</sup> If a yellow leaf appears to be green when viewed through a blue glass, or if we are informed by a visual perception that we are behind a mirror rather than in front of it, or that a straight stick half-submerged in water is broken, then the perception does exactly what it ought to do (a yellow leaf viewed through a blue glass simply looks green, etc.) and it is, therefore, true.

There is no error, until the soul makes one when it is not able to acknowledge that the conditions accompanying sensory perceptions could influence (or substantially influence) the data given to us by the corporeal senses. Falsity cannot be ascribed to the corporeal senses, because:

[...] the inner sense imputes its own failure to the outer sense.  
 [...] whatever the senses are seen to report, whether they do so as a result of their nature or of some other cause [for example, because of a tinted glass], they do what they ought. Therefore, they do what is right and true [...]<sup>51</sup>

Anselm presents sensory perception as a faculty which does that what it ought to do, does so truthfully and it is, therefore, always true. Anselm gives a similar answer to the caveat of monk Gaunilo mentioned above, viz. that if the author of the *Proslogion* refers to a sensory perception (hearing) while trying to alert to the obvious presence of *id quo maius cogitari nequit* in our intellect, then it means that our intellect also contains sensory illusions and the truth of our knowledge is not warranted. In his response, Anselm states that we indeed can have illusions in our mind, but the certainty that we are hearing somebody utter a falsehood is obvious. Therefore, we must always examine the sensual data in our mind in terms of what is true and what is not. And this is exactly what he does when he says that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists not only in a mind (e.g. as an illusion), but in reality as well.<sup>52</sup>

Provided that sensory perception is considered to be always true, as it is by Anselm in *De veritate*, then this interpretation can also reveal the reason why Anselm stressed the importance of sensory perception as an initial step in his attempts to find God so much – because sensory perception is always true and it is therefore an excellent base for further search.

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50 Cf. Smith, A. M., *From Sight to Light*, op. cit., pp. 236–237.

51 Anselmus, *De ver.* 6, p. 184–185: ...sensus interior culpam suam imputet sensui exteriori. ... quidquid renuntiare videantur, sive ex sui natura hoc faciant sive ex alia aliqua causa: hoc faciunt quod debent, et ideo rectitudinem et veritatem faciunt... (English translation: op. cit., p. 172.)

52 Anselmus, *Ad Gaun.* 6, p. 136.

## 5. Hierarchy and sensory perception (*Monologion* 31)

However, Anselm does not want to elaborate on the truthfulness of sensory perception in the dialogue *De veritate* any further, because it would not be useful for the goals he is pursuing:

I do not think that time need be spent in showing this [in any more detail], since for our purposes it would be more tedious than profitable.<sup>53</sup>

Exactly at the moment when we would expect Anselm to expand his conception of sensory perception, he completely abandons the topic. It leaves us wondering why Anselm, provided he believed that the senses are fundamental in noetic processes as indicated above, did not devote more attention to this problem in his writings.

One possible answer is that it was due to the (not only) contemporary conception of a hierarchically organized reality, which was frequently expressed in the texts of patristic authors and primarily followed the legacy of Platonic thinking. Anselm addresses this topic in several places in various parts of his writings. Anselm's answer to Gaunilo (and the very formulation of the argument in the *Proslogion*) can serve as an example which implies that, based on the knowledge of something than which something greater can be thought, it is possible to infer something than which nothing greater can be thought, which is precisely something more than we are ever able to think.

Anselm describes this successive hierarchy clearly in the *Monologion*, Chapter 31, where he deals with the question how it is possible that the transient things of this world were created according to the immutable Word of God. This Word is the highest truth (*summa veritas*) and at the same time all the created things (*res*) are more perfect (*praestantior*) according to their resemblance to this Word. In this context, Anselm states:

For this reason, perhaps – or, rather, not perhaps but certainly – every intellect judges that natures which are in any way alive excel non-living [natures], and that sentient natures excel non-sentient [natures], and that rational natures excel nonrational [ones]. For since the Supreme Nature in its own unique way not

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<sup>53</sup> Anselmus, *De ver.* 6, p. 184: *Quod ostendere quoniam laboriosum magis est quam fructuosum ad hoc quod intendimus, in hoc modo tempus insumendum non arbitror.* (English translation: *op. cit.*, p. 173.)



only exists but also lives and perceives and reasons, clearly whatever existing thing in some respect lives is more like the Supreme Nature than what does not at all live. And what in any way (be it even by a bodily sense) recognizes an object [is] more [like the Supreme Nature] than what does not at all perceive. And what is rational [is] more [like the Supreme Nature] than what has no rational capacity. By a similar consideration it is clear that some natures exist more than others or less than others. [...] Therefore, it is clear that a living substance exists more than does a non-living one, that a sentient substance exists more than does a non-sentient one, and that a rational substance exists more than does a non-rational one. So without doubt every being exists more and is more excellent to the extent that it is more like that Being which exists supremely and is supremely excellent.<sup>54</sup>

If we apply the concept of the two levels of truth from *De veritate* to the passage from the *Monologion*, then it follows that inanimate substances, as well as animated substances which are capable of sensory perception but do not possess rationality, possess only a natural and necessary truth. A fire, provided that it is a fire, burns, and a plant, provided that it lives according to its true nature, necessarily absorbs nutrients for its growth and, for example, produces seeds, and every animal as an animal is capable of using its senses to cognize the environment as it appears to it and can act according to this knowledge. The three listed levels are natural and necessarily true. The truth of human sensory perception also belongs to this sphere and, therefore, also possesses necessary truth.

However, there is an even higher level: rationality. Anselm postulates the second level of truth of the rational substances, because only with respect to them it is possible to say that the will, speech, and thought, etc. can do what they ought to do for that particular reason due to which they ought to do it. Since in a hierarchy it holds that a higher member stands for a higher perfec-

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54 Anselmus, Mon. 31, pp. 49–50: *Hinc etenim fortasse, immo non fortasse sed pro certo, hinc omnis intellectus iudicat naturas quolibet modo viventes praestare non viventibus, sentientes non sentientibus, rationales irrationalibus. Quoniam enim summa natura suo quodam singulari modo non solum est, sed et vivit et sentit et rationalis est, liquet quoniam omnium quae sunt, id quod aliquomodo vivit, magis est illi simile quam id quod nullatenus vivit; et quod modo quolibet vel corporeo sensu cognoscit aliquid, magis quam quod nihil omnino sentit; et quod rationale est, magis quam quod rationis capax non est. Quoniam vero simili ratione quaedam naturae magis minusve sint quam aliae, perspicuum est. ... Patet igitur quia magis est vivens substantia quam non vivens, et sensibilis quam non sensibilis, et rationalis quam non rationalis. Non est itaque dubium quod omnis essentia eo ipso magis est et praestantior est, quo similior est illi essentiae, quae summe est et summe praestat.* (English translation: op. cit., pp. 47–48.)

tion and is closer to God, it is not surprising that Anselm laid such emphasis on the rational context of his expositions.

## 6. Conclusion

This also explains the apparent discrepancy between the importance attributed by Anselm to sensory perception and the peripheral attention he paid to it. While he starts his seeking of God in the *Monologion* from the things of this world, which are good according to the data accessible to our senses, a similar initiatory step is missing in the *Proslogion*. This absence is explicitly amended when Anselm responds to Gaunilos' caveats, because our pursuit of knowledge begins precisely with sensory perception. Anselm focuses on the rational arguments, because rationality is closest to God in the hierarchy of the Creation and the intellect tries hard to comprehend (not only) the most perfect thing in reality and through this it simultaneously approaches this supreme entity according to its capabilities. But the human intellect requires necessarily true and indisputable input for its pursuit and this input is provided by sensory perception. This might be a reason why Anselm regarded sensory perception as a kind of knowledge (or at least as leading to a knowledge) which is always true, i.e., the senses provide us with information about the corporeal reality in the manner as the reality appears to the senses, but at the same time open the way for rationality, which occupies a higher position in the hierarchy.

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to analyse and evaluate the character and role of sense perception in the works of Anselm of Canterbury written during the relatively short period of the 1070s and 1080s, namely the *Monologion*, the *Proslogion* (including the responses to the objections raised by monk Gaunilo), and *De veritate*. First, attention is devoted to sense perception in God – whether God possesses this kind of knowledge and whether God can be said to have sensually perceivable characteristics. The subsequent parts examine sense perception in the context of human knowledge on two levels: 1. human sensory knowledge and its role in understanding God (i.e., whether the senses are useful in any way in the struggle to find God) and 2. sensory knowledge and its truthfulness (including sensory illusions). Lastly, an attempt is made to explain why Anselm paid such little attention to sensory perception, even though it seems, according to the analysed texts, that the senses played an important and irreplaceable role in his noetic endeavour.

**Keywords:** Anselm of Canterbury, senses, truth, God