

Anselm's Theory of Universals Reconsidered



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ANSELM'S THEORY OF UNIVERSALS RECONSIDERED¹

There is much disagreement as to the nature of Anselm of Canterbury's solution to the ontological problem of universals. I propose a new interpretation by introducing, first, two distinctions between different forms of realism concerning the existence of universal entities, and various ways in which these can be combined to form full-blown theories. After reconsidering some recent views of Anselm's theory of universals in the light of these distinctions, I then argue that it is of an 'Objective Idealist' (or 'Pan-realist') type. It constitutes the core of Anselm's ontology, which may be characterized as a 'five-category ontology.' The gist of his theory of universals is a three-level account of reality where the entities on different levels vary in their degree of being or existence. Anselm has recently been taken to be saying that a universal is strictly immanent to its corresponding particulars. But this interpretation seems to miss the point. His ontology is of a decidedly neo-Platonic bent. Still, Anselm takes the metaphysics of Aristotle's 'Categories' very seriously as far as it goes.



Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) was born in Aosta (Burgundy/Savoy) and spent the best part of his life as monk, head of school and abbot at Le Bec (Normandy), where his teacher Lanfranc of Pavia had set up one of Europe's leading monastic schools. He was made archbishop of Canterbury in 1093 and became a central figure in the struggle between the English bishops, the king, and the Pope for control over the Church. Generally considered to be the most eminent philosopher and theologian of the early Latin middle ages alongside John Scottus Eriugena (circa 810–877), Anselm is best known for his rationalistic philosophy of religion. As a philosopher, he has also made original contributions to logic, ethics, epistemology, the philosophy of language, the theory of agency, and metaphysics.

Anselm and the Problem of Universals

The still very-much-alive problem of universals concerns the ontological status of universal entities such as properties like 'whiteness,' and natural kinds like 'horse' or 'human being:' whether they exist as such, and if so, what they are and how they relate to other entities. Saint Anselm never explicitly addresses these questions as they stand. Nor does he pose the problem in the more elaborate terms of Porphyry and Boethius. And yet it would be rash to conclude from this that there is no theory of universals in Anselm, who would have known the problem with regard to 'genera and species' from the commentaries and translations of Boethius.² Rather, Anselm's theory of universals is implicit in his writings, above all his *Monologion*, but also in other texts.³ By 'implicit,' I do not mean that one has to read between the lines to discover it, but merely that it is not expressly presented as an attempt to resolve the 'problem of universals.'

Anselm's theory of universals is part of a larger, likewise implicit ontology that can be reconstructed through a survey of his work, as can his theory of universals. This is not to say that Anselm develops a fully fledged ontology. His metaphysics remains little more than

elementary with respect to the ontological analysis of individual substances that mattered so much to Aristotle. Ordinary qualities, be it universal qualities or quality-instances, seem to have intrigued him still less. On the other hand, Anselm displays a vivid interest in the ontological analysis of both universal substances and, though to a lesser extent, of what we may term 'perfections' or 'great-making entities;' qualities like 'good,' 'just' and especially 'true,' which according to Anselm can and, indeed, need to be assigned to God. As to universal substances, he arguably has a fully worked-out metaphysical theory.

That Anselm does not set out his view on universals in a more concise fashion may account for some of the striking divergences amongst modern scholars as to his actual stance on that subject. One thing at least is beyond dispute. Anselm's repudiation of contemporary nominalism regarding universal substances (or substantial universals, *universales substantiae*), the view that these do not exist as such, is too emphatic to be overlooked,⁴ and probably nobody has ever been bold enough to contend that Anselm was a nominalist. Most interpreters agree that he takes universal substances to exist in a way which allows us to call him a 'realist,' although even this has been contested.⁵ But as to the nature of his 'realism,' opinions differ dramatically. On the one side are those who claim Anselm to be a champion of some 'extreme' or otherwise daring sort of realism and hence of 'Platonism,' and on the other those who see in him an 'immanent' realist of an Aristotelian bent. What is more, different terminologies are being employed, making it difficult to delimit the interpreters' positions.

In the face of such inconsistencies, it has been proposed that we ought to do no less than 'forgo altogether' the use of the terms 'realism' and 'nominalism' (Hopkins, 1976, p. 58). However, the obvious reaction here seems to me a less desperate one: the terms referring to non-nominalist solutions will need to be defined, difficult as this may be. What we really should eschew, in my opinion, is the use of eponyms like 'Aristotelian' or 'Platonic' when defining them.⁶ For these are notoriously vague and historiographically controversial. Another methodological point seems important. Anselm's theory of universals, albeit not propounded in one breath, is nevertheless of one piece. It would be a hermeneutical mistake to split it in two on the basis of some preconceived (as well as anachronistic) distinction between Anselm-the-philosopher and Anselm-the-theologian. This would be wrong for two reasons. First, there is no evidence whatsoever in the *Monologion* to the effect that Anselm applies more than a single method. And secondly, theology – systematic discourse on the divine – as conceived by Anselm in most of his works and certainly in the *Monologion*, is not located above, beyond or beside philosophy. Theology, for him, as opposed to most of the scholastics, is largely and typically *philosophical* theology.

It is more than problematic, then, to hold that when Anselm speaks of the creatures' models (*exempla*) in the creator's mind, this 'is a purely theological matter irrelevant to his universals theory' (Iwakuma, 1996, p. 134). The reference here, again, is to the *Monologion*, a work that Anselm calls 'a model meditation' (*exemplum meditationis*) about 'the essence of the divine' and 'the rational basis of faith.'⁷ Its reasoning is to proceed without recourse to the authority of scripture, obeying only the *rationis necessitas* ('necessity of reason'). That is to say it has to consist entirely of *a priori* considerations that do not take anything for granted without argument, so that the 'truth' of the conclusions can be established in its 'clarity' (*Mon.*, Prologue, S I, 7: 7–10). It would be very odd to abstract from it any mention of the creator's mind and to retain what one judges to be more to the philosophical point; doing so would be a bit like purging an avowed spy novel of its references to super-powers or its love-plot to make it a 'real' spy novel. The more serious problem with such a procedure is that it strangely ignores Anselm's explanation of what is meant by a model in the creator's mind: namely, the creator's thinking a creature's 'universal essence' (*universalis essentia*),

an expression that in Anselm is close in meaning (though not strictly synonymous with) 'universal substance.' There is no reason to suppose that ontology in Anselm should not be bound up with, or even be part of, philosophical theology. We cannot understand the philosophical project of Descartes' *Meditations* without its proofs for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul; we cannot understand the political philosophy of Plato's *Republic* without its theory of the *eide* (forms); and we just cannot understand the metaphysics of Anselm's *Monologion* without its rational theology.

Before turning to Anselm himself, I will introduce, in a second part, two distinctions. The first is between different forms of realism regarding the existence of universals, and the second between various ways in which these may be combined to form full-blown theories. Anselm's theory of universals constitutes the core of his implicit ontology, which may be characterized as a *five-category ontology*. The gist of his theory of universals is a *three-level account of reality* (or 'three-level metaphysics') where the entities on different levels vary in their degree of being or existence and relate to each other as model and likeness, as exemplar and imitation. It may be shown that in developing his theory of universals within the context of this account of reality, Anselm concurs with the undisputedly Neo-Platonic '*doctrine of the three states of the universal*' (with the doctrine and not, of course, with its wording).⁸ This is all the more remarkable, as neither Boethius nor Augustine put forward this doctrine – although the then available corpus of their works provided Anselm with all the necessary resources for its re-constitution. An obvious advantage of this doctrine is that, unlike its rivals, it has no problem accounting for the universal's being wholly present in its various instances. And this is, arguably, the most difficult feat any realist theory of universals has to accomplish. There has been a recent tendency to stress the Aristotelian inheritance of Anselm's philosophy. But unless we want to say that the Neo-Platonists – and, indeed, Plato himself, if we take into account his unwritten doctrine – were not philosophers, there is little to recommend the view which takes Anselm to be 'a rational, speculative theologian,' but which restricts his being a philosopher to his more or less desultory contributions to formal logic, semantics, ontology and epistemology in the Aristotelian tradition (cf. Marenbon, 1983, pp. 95–8, 104).⁹ Rather, we may say that Anselm has incorporated elements of Aristotelian logic, semantics, ontology and epistemology, and in particular of Aristotle's methodology, into a *philosophical theology* – a philosophical theology that is as rational, as *a priori* and at least as non-hypothetical as is Aristotle's theoretical philosophy. Anselm seems to be displaying a similar attitude towards Aristotle as certain neo-Platonist philosophers (such as Porphyry) who thought Aristotle's philosophy to be a proper analysis of the world of sense-appearances, but not of its foundation in the world of intelligible realities.¹⁰ And that, of course, implies taking Aristotle's metaphysics very seriously as far as it goes.

Varieties of Realism

As stated by Porphyry, the 'problem of universals' is about 'genera and species' (Porphyry, 1998, p. 1–2). This would seem to include substantial kinds like 'animal' or 'human being' as well as non-substantial or accidental kinds like 'colour' or 'white.' Anselm does not draw on Porphyry's formulation of the problem at all; all the more reason why we ought to keep an open mind about a possible distinction between substantial universals and non-substantial universal *properties*, when considering his theory of universals. The various realist positions concerning the problem of universals in the (early) middle ages are often characterized with reference to whether they take universal entities to exist 'before,' 'in' or 'after' particular entities (*ante rem*, *in re*, *post rem*), to how they temporally and spatially relate to them. But this is not as helpful as it may seem. What we need to know if we want to settle the ontological

status of universal entities is not in the first place whether they exist ‘before,’ ‘in’ or ‘after’ some supposedly existing particular things; what we need to know above all is, what they are in themselves. There is another slightly more useful four- or rather five-fold distinction famously mentioned by Porphyry in his *Isagoge*, though I will try to provide a still more useful one.

There are, I submit, basically six different realist answers to the question of what universals are in themselves. What is more, these answers can be, and usually have been, combined with each other, yielding the distinctive positions *vis-à-vis* the ‘problem of universals.’ A single form of realism typically does not make a theory of universals, unless it emphatically excludes all other forms. Not all possible combinations make sense. I will first name the six answers, exclude a highly problematic one, and then present six combinations of them as possible solutions to the problem of universals.

It may be held that universals are:

- (1) constituents of particulars [‘Constitutive Realism’]
- (2a) concepts of the human mind [‘Ideal Conceptualist Realism’]
- (2b) thoughts-of-concepts of the human mind [‘Subjective Conceptualist Realism’]
- (3a) creative ideas of the divine mind [‘Ideal Exemplarist Realism’]
- (3b) creative thoughts of the divine mind [‘Subjective Exemplarist Realism’]
- (4) second-order entities of a different sphere [‘Objective Realism’].

Of these, the last answer, *Objective Realism*, is widely regarded as precarious. For it looks as if the universal *F*-ness, in spite of its belonging to a second order (its existing in a different sphere) is a quasi-particular featuring *F* itself. This is a conclusion of the so-called *Third Man Argument*, and it seems that it can only be reasonably evaded if one denies at least one of two initially plausible principles. The first of these principles, which has been called the ‘Self-Predication Assumption’ holds that a universal *F*-ness must itself be *F*; the second principle dubbed the ‘Non-identity Assumption’ rules out that a universal *F*-ness can be intrinsically *F*, and thus rules out that some *F* can be identical with *F*-ness.¹¹

Now, if theory (4) conceives a universal as a quasi-particular, it cannot *conclusively* explain why different particulars agree in being *F*, opening up the prospect of an infinite regress. Confronted with this problem, some *Objective Realists* have replied that they are not aiming at any conclusive explanation at all; and that hence they do not worry much about an infinite series of distinct universals lying behind the one invoked by them to explain attribute agreement.¹² But even if the regress is not a vicious one, this certainly seems awkward: indeed, it is as uneconomic as putting out a fire in an atomic plant by setting off an uncontrolled chain reaction. There is another problem with this account. It is derived from Bradley’s sceptical argument concerning the existence of relations and generally considered to be even more serious. If we take the instantiation of a universal *F*-ness to be an external relation into which a pair of objects – the second-order universal *F*-ness and some first-order particular *a* – enter, we need two higher-level relations to insure that *a* and that *F*-ness instantiate the first-level instantiation relation, and so forth *in infinitum*. This is because external relations are just another type of entity, posing similar ontological problems as properties do.

Answer (4) is often referred to as ‘extreme realism’ and associated with Plato, as if he had taught that the *eide* (forms) constitute a second, invisible world of abstract entities behind our visible one. But as Plato’s own discussion of the *Third Man Argument* should make clear, he was perfectly aware of answer (4)’s problematic nature (cf. Plato, 1963, pp.132a–3a). So

this might not have been what he had in mind, or at least not his considered view, no matter what some ancient, medieval and modern commentators have said.¹³ Although in Anselm's writings there is no trace of it, I shall occasionally come back to answer (4). This brand of realism is better known as 'Transcendental Realism,' but since the notion of transcendence implied here is not the only possible (and perhaps not the philosophically most interesting) one, as we shall see, I prefer to call it *Objective Realism*.

Answers (2a) and (2b) require some explication. For they imply, first, that a position usually referred to as 'conceptualism' and often opposed to 'realism' be regarded as a sub-species of realism ('conceptual realism') and hence as a realist position itself. This seems preferable, since in whatever relation concepts stand to things, it would be strange to call them unreal. Anselm goes so far as to say that every concept brought to mind 'is' or 'exists' in the intellect (*in intellectu est*; see *Pros.* 2, S I, 101: 1–102: 3; *Responsio editoris* 2, S I, 132: 14–21). It is a thesis of this essay that traditional distinctions of different forms of realism will not do and need to be refined if we want to understand Anselm's theory of universals and the full dimension of the problem to which it responds. Note that when it comes to whole theories of universals rather than single forms of realism, I will not call 'realism' – but 'conceptualism' – the position that mental concepts are all there is to universals; so anyone who prefers to label this latter position as some sort of 'anti-realism' is free to do so. Secondly, answers (2a) and (2b) imply a distinction that is not always made, the distinction between a concept and a concept-brought-to-mind, i.e., the thought of a concept. It is a distinction Anselm does make at times, and although it may not be very popular today, it is straightforward enough I believe. A *concept* is a real or a possible object of an intentional act, like Husserl's *noema* and Frege's entities of the 'third realm.' By contrast, the *thought of a concept* is the intentional act itself, which Husserl called *noesis* and which, together with its object, would be an entity of the 'second realm' in Frege's terminology. An actual thought of a concept, if this distinction is granted, clearly presupposes the concept itself. So it is perhaps not surprising that in everyday language the word 'concept' may refer to either of the two. A similar difference applies with respect to the divine mind as conceived by Anselm and accounts for the distinction between answers (3a) and (3b).

Now, realisms (1), (2) and (3) can combine in different ways. On the one hand, we need to see which realisms can combine amongst each other to form different conjunctions of realisms. On the other hand, we may ask *how* they can combine, that is, in what way they can relate to each other, e.g. with regard to their order of priority. For the time being, let us leave the second question aside. As to the first question, I can think of at least six initially plausible combinations of (1), (2a), (2b) and (3a/b) and will only look at these:

[1]: 'Objective Immanentism'	(1)
[2]: 'Subjective Conceptualism'	(2b)
[3]: 'Objective Conceptualism'	(1) ^ (2b)
[4]: 'Objective Exemplarism'	(1) ^ (3a/b)
[5]: 'A Posteriori Objective Idealism'	(1) ^ (2b) ^ (3a/b)
[6]: 'A Priori Objective Idealism,' or 'Pan-realism'	(1) ^ (2a) ^ (2b) ^ (3a/b)

One might be tempted to think that only the last three theories ([4], [5], [6]) are possible candidates for an early medieval solution to the problem of universals. For only these include *Exemplarist Realism* (3a/b), and authors from this period like Eriugena and Anselm typically do have a place for divine ideas in their speculative theology. However, according to the interpretation already adumbrated, their exemplarist realism might be an isolated piece, not of philosophical theology, but of theology *tout court*. In other words, it might actually not be

combined with, but only juxtaposed to, their other realism or realisms, a mere article of faith superposing the philosophical lode, giving rise to no proper conjunction of realisms at all. Three authors have recently embraced this reading with regard to Anselm: Iwakuma first put it forward, Erismann has elaborated and Marenbon briefly defended it.¹⁴ Marenbon’s earlier view of Anselm as a Neo-Platonic-theologian-*cum*-Aristotelian-philosopher has in turn been a major influence for both Iwakuma and Erismann. Given Anselm’s patent *Exemplarist Realism* (3a/b), this two-tier view of what Anselm was really engaged in is even presupposed by any attempt to evade interpreting Anselm’s theory of universals as either [4], [5], or [6]. I have already addressed some serious criticism to this view of how Anselm’s intellectual project is to be characterized; if more is needed for a refutation, it can be provided by demonstrating that all the ‘realisms’ endorsed by Anselm are part of a single coherent theory of universals. But let us first take a fresh look at some recent interpretations of Anselm’s theory of universals in the light of the two distinctions I have introduced.

When D. P. Henry, in the title of a paper, raised the question of whether Saint Anselm was ‘really a realist,’ he was thinking of realism (4), *Objective Realism* in our diction. For he takes ‘realism’ to imply – if not to mean – that universal entities exist in the same sense as particulars do, and that they are connumerable with particular entities (cf. Henry, 1963, p. 187). (Neither this nor the following diagrams should be taken to suggest that universals, as some have claimed, are literally *parts* of particulars.)

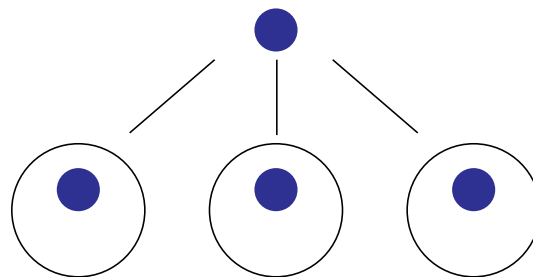


Figure 1: Objective Realism (4)

Henry finds no evidence in *De grammatico* nor in *De incarnatione verbi* to the effect that Anselm was a realist in this sense and thus defends Anselm against what he takes to be the ‘realism’ charge. By contrast, Iwakuma clearly wants to interpret Anselm’s theory of universals exclusively as a species of (1) Constitutive Realism, and hence as a species of [1] *Objective Immanentism*. For Anselm, a universal such as ‘human nature’ ‘exists only in individual human beings, never apart from them’ (Iwakuma, 1996, p. 124).

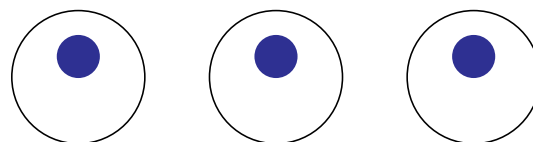


Figure 2: Constitutive Realism (1)

Anselm famously has been labelled a realist, and rightly so, believes Iwakuma, yet *Constitutive Realism* – realism (1) – is all there is to it. He does not deny that Anselm’s ‘theology is full of neo-Platonic elements’ (Iwakuma, 1996, p. 124), such as the notion of the creatures’ ‘exemplars in the creator’s mind’; but these *theologoumena*, Iwakuma seems to be saying, do not have for Anselm any relevance to universals (1996, pp. 133–4). Erismann is still more explicit in interpreting Anselm as a proponent of [1] *Objective Immanentism*. He takes him to hold that universals are strictly immanent to their corresponding particulars; and that, therefore, any universal must be ‘completely realised,’ in at least one such particular (cf.

Erismann, 2007, pp. 216–24). This is why he labels Anselm’s solution to the problem of universals ‘immanent realism.’ Erismann, too, recognizes that there is a doctrine of divine ideas in Anselm. But in the early middle ages this was ‘considered as a theological doctrine and not as a philosophical position in need of being defended or justified’ (2007, p. 212). The trouble with *Objective Immanentism* [1] is, of course, that it does not account for the universal’s being one and the same in the different particulars – unless, indeed, we are prepared to sacrifice one of our dearest metaphysical convictions: that one and the same entity may not wholly exist in different places at once.

Anselm’s Three Level-Account of Reality and Five-Category Ontology

1. The five-category ontology

There are five categories of entities in Anselm’s ontology. In this essay, I will only be able to look at the two substantial categories he recognizes, one of which is universal, the other particular. Of these, universal substances (or kinds) do not simply exist but exist on three different, inter-dependent levels of reality, whereas individual substances are confined to one of these levels only. I will attempt to give a brief account of how Anselm conceives of the relationship between universal substances on different levels of reality before focussing on the level at which individual substances exist. My conclusion will be that his theory of universal substances is a version of [6] *A Priori Objective Idealism or Pan-realism*. The next steps would be to examine the sparse evidence concerning Anselm’s view of universal properties and of property-instances and, finally, study his treatment of perfections as a ‘fifth category’ besides the four others mentioned. But this is beyond the scope of this essay.

2. The three levels of reality

Anselm’s theory of universal substances is distinct from those discussed in this section in that it situates the universal on three different levels of reality: in the rational mind of the creator (R-1), in the created universe (*rerum universitas*) (R-2), and in the mind of rational creatures (R-3). His realism (3a/b) refers to the first level of reality, his realism (1) refers to the second level of reality, and his realisms (2a) and (2b) refer to the third level of reality. Here is a first model of Anselm’s theory of universals that does not yet differentiate between realism (2a) and (2b) or (3a) and (3b):

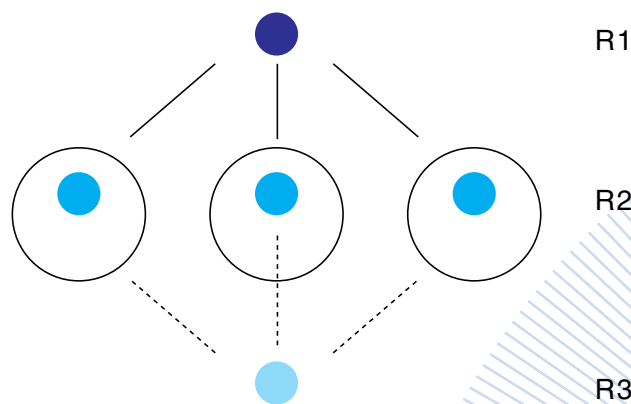


Figure 3: Anselm’s Theory of Universals: Objective Idealism

Note that when Anselm speaks of three different levels of reality, he is not claiming that there is more than one reality. Nor does he multiply the number of universals by three, which would add to the problem rather than resolve it. This is because he holds the Augustinian

theory that being or existence is not an all-or-nothing matter. For Anselm, there are different degrees of being, descending from R-1 to R-3. This move may run into many problems that cannot be dealt with here. Individual substances are confined to level R-2. Yet to each universal substance corresponds an entity on levels R-1 (in the sense of realism 3a/b), R-2 (in the sense of realism 1), and R-3 (in the sense of realism 2a, though not necessarily in the sense of realism 2b). From the sole point of view of Aristotle's *Categories*, these entities are literally identical. The idea of a human being in the mind of God is *essentially* the same as the universal constituent of an individual human being, it is essentially the same as the concept of a human being in the human mind, and since for someone who has no conception of different degrees of being there is nothing to them apart from essence; they are identical. Therefore, from an Aristotelian point of view, a concept for Anselm cannot be a 'representation' of something outside the mind (or of one of its ontological constituents) – unless, indeed, we are prepared to say that an entity can represent itself.

However, there must be, of course, at least one respect in which universal entities of the same kind *do* differ on different levels of reality. Otherwise the three levels of reality would coincide and God would be strictly immanent in the created universe, the diversity of which would be a mere appearance. This difference is not an essential, but an *existential* one: it lies in their mode or degree of being. According to Anselm, only entities on R-1 fully exist, whereas entities on R-2, let alone entities on R-3, have a much diminished degree of being (cf. the different shades of colour in Figure 3). It is this existential difference which makes Anselm say that a universal entity on R-2 is a – repeatable – 'imitation' (*imitatio*) and a 'likeness' (*similitudo*) of an entity on R-1, and that an entity on R-3 is an 'image' (*imago*) or, again, a 'likeness' of an entity on R-2. What is more, entities on R-2 not only depend on entities of R-1 for their identity, but also depend on them for their existence, diminished though it is. So the instantiation of a universal substance by an individual substance involves some very distinctive dependency on the part of the substantial-universal-in-the-particular vis-à-vis the substantial-universal-in-the-divine-mind. Perhaps the closest parallel in the physical world, as intimated by the words Anselm uses here, is the case of the same thing reflected in many mirrors at once – a Platonic theme.¹⁵ Still, the best analogy for the relation between divine ideas and created substances is not to be found in the physical world, Anselm thinks, but in the human mind.

Instantiation as conceived of here is very different from the *Objective Realist's* (4) notion of instantiation, so that we may perhaps be better advised to drop the word. It is not a matter of two essentially or accidentally different entities (one on R-1 and the other on R-2) entering into a relation with each other. Nor is it just the relation of identity between an entity and itself, for it not only implies essential identity, but also existential difference; Anselm says that 'imitation and resemblance are not in one solely, but in many' (*Mon.* 63, S I, 74: 14). Such an account of the universal-particular relation is clearly immune to Bradley's regress. For it is not an external relation into which the relata *enter*, but an internal relation in which they *stand* in virtue of their mere existence; indeed, the relation is one of different degrees of existence. Perhaps the Platonic terms 'participation' (*methexis*; of an entity on R-2 in an entity on R-1) and 'presence' (*parousia*; of an entity on R-1 in an entity on R-2) best capture the meaning of what is going on between levels R-1 and R-2 in Anselm's eyes. Nevertheless, Anselm does not use their Latin equivalents in this context – though he will do when it comes to great-making entities, which follow a different pattern.

As far as universal and individual substances are concerned, it is this *essential identity* that accounts for the creator's immanence in his creation; and it is this *existential difference* that accounts for the creator's transcendence over the created universe as conceived by Anselm.

Universals in-the-divine-mind and in-themselves seem to be identical only for someone – like Aristotle in his esoteric works – who has no conception of different modes or degrees of being. When Anselm distinguishes between ‘what’ an entity ‘is’ on R-1 and ‘what’ an entity ‘is’ on R-2 (cf. *Mon.* 34, S I, 53: 22–4), he is not using the term *quod est* in the Aristotelian sense of essence, but to indicate an existential difference. As to their essence, the two entities are the same from an Aristotelian point of view. We may also put it differently and say that Anselm is revising here the traditional notion of essence; and that he does so by inscribing an existential feature into it. This explains the frequent use of the verb *existere* and the participle *existens* by Anselm, which commentators have rarely appreciated, perhaps because he often uses *esse* synonymously with *existere*. And it seems to give us what we were looking for, a universal that (on R-1) is one and yet (on R-2) is many, being essentially the same but existentially different on both levels, transcending particulars on level R-2 without becoming a second-order particular itself. It can be entirely present in many instances at once essentially (requirement of immanence), although it is not wholly present in them existentially (requirement of transcendence). And it does not fatally enter into an external relation with its particulars. We get, then, the following result:

	Requirement of immanence	Requirement of transcendence
Objective Realism	Not met	Met
Objective Immanentism	Met	Not met
Objective Idealism	Met	Met

3. Things in themselves: universal and individual substances on the second level of reality

Let us take a closer look at least at the second level of reality (R-2), the universe of created substances (*creatae substantiae*) as they are in themselves (*in seipsis*).¹⁶ We are used to thinking of this level as ‘the reality’ we live in, though in the perspective of Anselm’s ontology the ‘really real’ entities are to be found on R-1. In one of his rare apparently Aristotelian veins outside the *De grammatico*, Anselm observes that there are two sorts of substances. These correspond to the primary and secondary substances of the Aristotelian *Categories* (I, 5):

To be sure, every substance is treated either as being universal, which is essentially common to many substances – as being-a-man is common to individual men – or else as being individual, which has a universal essence in common with other [individual substances] – as individual men have in common the fact that they are men (*Mon.* 27, S I, 45: 6–10).

It has been contended that Anselm is using ‘*substantia universalis*’ and ‘*(universalis) essentia*’ synonymously here and elsewhere,¹⁷ but the passage quoted certainly does not justify this conclusion, which is actually not quite true. It only allows the conclusion that every universal substance may also be called a ‘(universal) essence.’ To be sure, Anselm also observes that the essence (*essentia*) of any thing is ‘usually’ called its ‘substance’ (*substantia*),¹⁸ namely his universal substance. But this parlance is not, in his eyes, to the point; strictly speaking, there are many essences such as the will which are not substances:

there are many essences besides what is properly called a substance (*De casu diaboli* 8, S I, 245: 21–4).

One of the reasons why he does not consider the will a substance, might be that it is a great-making quality (since it is better to have a will than not to have a will); and such perfections, despite 'having' an essence, are not substances in Anselm's ontology, nor are ordinary qualities. So *essentia* is a more comprehensive notion than *substantia (universalis)* in that every universal substance is an essence, but not every essence a universal substance. The parlance qualified here by Anselm, according to which any essence, called *quod quid est* rather than *essentia*, can be referred to as a secondary substance, is the eleventh century logician's: it is introduced by the student and taken up by the teacher in Anselm's *De grammatico*. After pointing out the Aristotelian origin of the distinction between primary and secondary substances, the Teacher asks (*De grammatico* 10, S I, 155: 1–5):

On what grounds, therefore, can you show 'literate' (*grammaticus*) to be neither a primary nor a secondary substance?

Student: Because unlike any substance, it is in a subject; also it is asserted of many, and this is not a mark of primary substance. Further, it is neither genus nor species, nor is it predicated in respect of quiddity (*in eo quod quid*), as are secondary substances.

As the term 'secondary substance' is used here, it comprises not only kinds (genera and species), but also quiddity or essence. But this is at odds with Anselm's own metaphysics. His metaphysics has it that there are non-substantial essences. So when it comes to his philosophical theology, he insists that the contemporary logician's use of 'substance' is imprecise and thus unsatisfactory; strictly speaking, not every essence is a substance. This may have been one of the reasons why the *De grammatico* (along with Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations*) was not originally included in Ms. Bodley 271, which has recently been identified as a first attempt, supervised probably by the mature Anselm himself, to establish a canon of his works (cf. Logan, 2004, pp. 67–80). In lieu of *essentia*, Anselm often uses *natura*, especially when a universal substance (a 'natural kind') is concerned.

These terminological explorations demonstrate that it would be futile to defend a reading of Anselm as an *Immanent Objectivist* [1] on the basis of the words he uses.¹⁹ He refers to a universal substance *qua* constituent of an individual substance (to a universal substance on R-2, that is) likewise as *substantia universalis*, *universalis essentia*, *natura*, *natura communis*, *naturalis essentia*, *species* and *genus*; and some of these as well as other terms are being used by Anselm when he speaks about universal substances on the two other levels of reality (R-1 and R-3). Even if Anselm did have a specific and exclusive favourite term for universals on R-2, the level of individual substances, this would not prove that he does not also admit universals on R-1 and R-3 – just as the fact that, in Spain, walkie-talkies are referred to as 'talkie-walkies,' does not prove that there are no walkie-talkies in Spain.

A universal substance on R-2 is one of an individual substance's ontological constituents. What other ontological constituents are required to make up an individual substance? On various occasions, Anselm invariably identifies a 'collection of properties' (*collectio proprietatum*) as this second constituent.²⁰ Since individual substances of the same kind have their 'nature' in common (*natura communis*), this collection of properties must be what distinguishes one individual in a species from another, must be their 'principle of individuation.' From this 'it follows that there cannot be two members of a species which are identical in absolutely every respect and yet numerically two' (Rogers, 1997, p. 129; cf. *Inc.*, 11, S II, 29: 15–18). Anselm does not specify whether the properties in question are to be understood as property universals or as property instances (cf. Erismann, 2003, p. 63), though it is natural to suppose – and, indeed, implicit in his writings – that both are involved. Such a theory of individuation, clearly, is perfectly compatible with his three-level theory of universals. For on an obvious reading, it holds that an individual substance is made up of a combination of

substantial universals with non-substantial universals, all of which may be accommodated on all three levels of reality.

What, then, is an entity on R-2 'in itself?' Anselm calls it a mere 'imitation' (*imitationem*) of God's 'true and absolute,' his 'simple and absolute essence' (*veram simplicemque essentiam, simplicem absolutamque essentiam, Mon. 31, S I, 50: 7–10*). God, the 'highest' or 'creative' essence (*summa essentia, creans essentia*) is its 'first,' its 'principal essence' (*prima essentia, principalis essentia*).²¹ Every created essence (*creata essentia*) is contained in it. It has been contained in it even before it was created, is contained in it while it exists in individual substances on R-2, and will be even after it has decayed on R-2. Since all substantial universals for Anselm are created essences, this shows that in his view uninstantiated universals do in fact exist. Taken in itself and compared to the highest essence, the created essence – the universal on level R-2 – 'somehow is not' and 'almost does not exist', meaning that it has a much diminished degree of existence, like an image of a man when compared to a living man (*Mon. 31, S I, 49: 1–6*). To bring out the idea of different degrees of existence, Anselm repeatedly says that entities may 'exist' or 'be' more or less 'truly:'

it is certain that every created substance is more truly in the Word, that is, in the creator's understanding (*in intelligentia creatoris*) than in itself, just in proportion as the creative essence exists more truly than the created essence (*Mon. 36, S I, 55: 4–6*).

While in the logical works of Aristotle truth is exclusively attributed to propositions, Anselm calls the divine word the 'existence-truth' (*existendi veritas, Mon. 31, S I, 49: 3; 34, S I, 54: 1*). Again, Anselm calls God the 'highest truth' (*summa veritas*). The essence of an entity (*res*) is 'true' in virtue of its being identical with its corresponding universal essence in the highest truth:

Teacher: Therefore whatever is, truly is, insofar as it is what it is there [sc. in the highest truth].

Student: You can conclude absolutely that everything that is, truly is, since it is not other than what it is there.

Teacher: Therefore there is truth in the essence of everything there is, because they are what they are in the highest truth (*De veritate 7, S II, 185: 15–19*).

In the light of the *Monologion*, the expression 'what it is in the highest truth' must refer to the corresponding divine idea. So for Anselm the essence of an individual substance on level R-2 'truly is,' because it is identical with its divine idea on level R-1 – although a universal essence does not *exist* on R-2 in the same degree as it does on R-1. This recalls Plato's usage of *ta alêthê* to designate the forms. Augustine had reserved the attribution of 'true' or 'truthful' existence (*verum esse, sincerum esse*) and of truth in an emphatic sense (*sinceritas veritatis*)²² to unchangeable entities. Anselm is following his example when he refers to created entities in themselves (*in seipsis*) as *essentia mutabilis* (*Mon. 34, S I, 53: 24; cf. Mon. 28, S I, 46: 14–16*), after having pointed out that they exist less truly in themselves than in the mind of the creator.

When Anselm calls the created entities 'imitations' of the divine essence (in which all divine ideas coincide), he is not implying that all creatures imitate the highest essence in the same manner. There is a second hierarchy of being (*gradus essentiae, Mon. 31, S I, 50: 12*) or 'true existence' amongst entities on level R-2. A created essence's degree of being depends on its similarity to the highest essence. This idea can be illustrated by amending the former diagram in the following way:

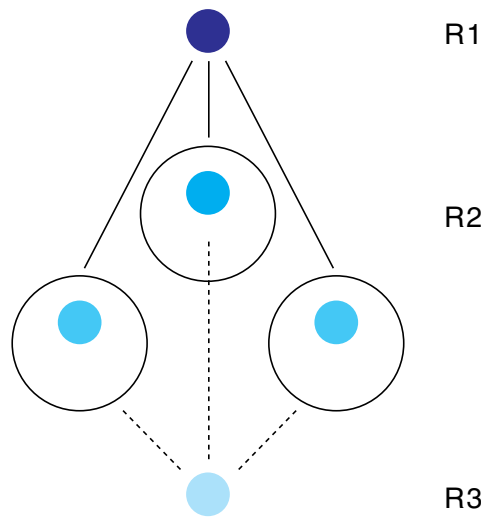


Figure 4: Anselm's Theory of Universals

Finally, let me turn briefly to level R-3. Amongst created essences, the rational mind (*mens rationalis*) is foremost, because it is most similar to the creator. Its singular resemblance to the divine is due to its self-referential and God-referential capacities. For these, Anselm observes in the wake of Augustine's *De trinitate*, are structurally analogous to the triune nature of the divine. He therefore calls our rational mind a 'true image' (*vera imago*) and a 'mirror-image' of the highest essence.²³ Indeed, if we add a mirror axis to Figure 3, we can to a certain extent depict this metaphor:

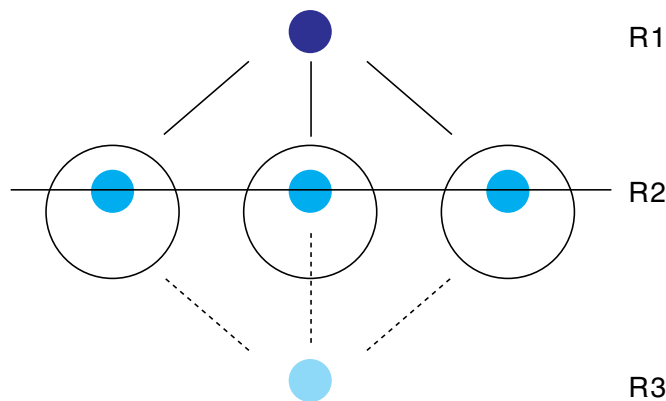


Figure 5: Anselm's Theory of Universals

This cannot be enlarged upon here. Even so, it has become clear that Anselm's theory of universals is an instance of what I have termed *Objective Idealism*. What is more, a look at Anselm's epistemology reveals that he espouses the *a priori* (or 'pan-realist') type of *Objective Idealism* [6]. But to show this is again beyond the scope of this essay.



Acknowledgement

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Notes

¹ Apart from being a piece of work in progress, the following is an abridged version of a larger study. I cannot argue my case here as carefully as I would wish, and am obliged to omit a considerable number of points which seem to me important. For my full and considered view, the reader should refer to any future works of mine on the subject. I am very grateful to Ian Logan for his comments and corrections. All references to Anselm's texts are to Anselm of Canterbury, 1984 (= S), followed by volume, page and line number; abbreviations of Anselm's writings are introduced when first cited.

² Namely from his translation of, and two commentaries on, Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and from his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*.

³ Cf. Rogers, 1997, p. 114: 'Anselm never felt the need to set out his views on the question of universals, though they can be discovered through a careful canvas of the body of his philosophical work.'

⁴ *De incarnatione verbi* (= Inc.) 1, S II, 9: 21–4: '*illi utique nostri temporis dialectici, immo dialecticae haeretici, qui non nisi flatum vocis putant universales esse substantias, et qui colorem non aliud queunt intelligere quam corpus, nec sapientiam hominis aliud quam animam.*' I say 'not as such,' because according to the view reported here by Anselm, the nominalism of his adversaries seems to have been a naturalistic rather than a nihilistic doctrine. However, their reduction of kinds to the material aspect of the corresponding words ought perhaps to be taken as mere ironic mockery, as the vulgar connotation of the term *flatus vocis* ('vocal flatulence') suggests.

⁵ Cf. Henry, 1963; see also (in large part identical) Henry, 1967; and a response: McCord Adams, 1972.

⁶ This is the other, more reasonable part of Hopkins' proposal, cf. 1976, p. 58.

⁷ *Monologion* (= *Mon.*), Prologue, S I, 7: 2–4: '*de divinitatis essentia;*' *Proslogion*, Preface, S I, 93: 2–3: '*de ratione fidei.*'

⁸ See e.g. Ammonius, 1891, *In Porphyrii Isagogen*. Busse, A. (ed.) Berlin: Reimer.

⁹ These views, though not formally revoked, are however absent in Marenbon (2006).

¹⁰ See e.g. Marenbon, 2003, p. 12.

¹¹ See Vlastos, 1954, pp. 319–49. Strictly speaking, the *Third Man Argument* presupposes still other metaphysical principles such as that every form is one; but these are very basic and usually remain unchallenged in this debate.

¹² For this and the following, see Loux, 1998, pp. 34–40.

¹³ Vlastos has claimed that Plato's presentation of the *Third Man Argument* is to be seen as a 'record of honest perplexity' (cf. section D of his 'The Third Man Argument in the Parmenides'); but this reading has since been challenged by many scholars. For still an alternative interpretation to the effect that Plato actually was a proponent of 'extreme realism' (4) but regarded the Third Man Argument as innocuous to his theory of the forms, see Bluck, 1956, pp. 29–37. Bluck argues that Plato's theory of the forms does not commit him to accepting the 'Non-identity Assumption.'

¹⁴ Cf. Iwakuma, 1996; Erismann, 2007; Marenbon, 2001, p. 75 and note 9.

¹⁵ Cf. Rogers, 1997, pp. 92–3, 122.

¹⁶ For these two expressions, see *Mon.* 36, S I, 54: 18–55: 2.

¹⁷ Cf. Enders, 2001, pp. 93–5. See also Iwakuma, 1996, p. 126: 'Anselm identifies *essentia* with *substantia*;' Rogers, 1997, p. 118: 'he seems to use universal substance and universal essence (*universalem essentiam*) interchangeably.'

¹⁸ *Mon.* 27, S I, 45: 14: '*cuiuslibet rei essentia dici solet substantia.*'

¹⁹ Cf. Iwakuma, 1996, p. 134: 'Anselm sometimes calls the exemplars *formae*, a term which has for him no relevance to universals.'

²⁰ See e.g. *Inc.* 11, S II, 29: 4–9; *Gram.* 20, S I, 166: 2–5.

²¹ *Mon.* 34, S I, 53: 24; *Mon.* 33, S I, 53: 6. Cf. Augustine, 1962, ch. I, 57.

²² Cf. Augustine, 1961, 7: 7; 1975, 9.

²³ Cf. *Mon.* 67, S I, 77: 27–78, 1. See Goebel, 2001, pp. 113–18. For Augustine, see 1959, 15: 5–9.

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