Notes on Anselm's Argument

Chapter 2

"God" means "that than which nothing greater can be conceived or thought"

1. I understand the term "God". (Equivalent to saying, in Descartes' terminology, that I have the idea of something than which nothing greater can be conceived.)
2. Whatever I understand exists in the understanding. (This is equivalent in Descartes' terminology to saying that if I have an idea, then whatever the idea "represents" exists in the understanding.)
3. God exists in my understanding.
4. It is greater to exist both in the understanding and in reality than to exist in the understanding alone. (This is equivalent, in Descartes' terminology, to saying that something which has both real (mind-independent) and objective (mind-dependent) existence has "more reality" than something which has only objective existence.)
   This seems imprecise. What Anselm probably meant was that something existing both in the understanding and in reality is greater than the same thing would be, assuming that it existed in the understanding alone.
5. Suppose God exists in the understanding alone.
6. Then it would be possible to conceive of a greater, namely a being exactly like God except that instead of existing only in the understanding, it existed also in reality.
7. But then God would not be that than which a greater cannot be conceived, since it would be possible to conceive of a greater.
8. But then God would not be God, an impossibility.
9. Hence, God exists not only in the understanding, but in reality also.

Chapter 3

(Previous propositions remain in effect.)
1. Suppose God can be conceived not to exist.
2. Then it would be possible to conceive of a greater, namely a being exactly like God except that instead of being able to be conceived not to exist, it was unable to be conceived not to exist.
3. But then God would not be that than which a greater cannot be conceived, since it would be possible to conceive of a greater.
4. But then God would not be God, an impossibility.
5. Hence, God is unable to be conceived not to exist.

Gaunilo's Counterexample

"The Lost Island" means "that island than which no greater island can be conceived or thought"

1. I understand the term "The Lost Island".
2. Whatever I understand exists in the understanding.
3. The Lost Island exists in my understanding.
4. It is greater to exist both in the understanding and in reality than to exist in the understanding alone.
5. Suppose The Lost Island exists in the understanding alone.
6. Then it would be possible to conceive of a greater, namely a being exactly like The Lost Island except that instead of existing only in the understanding, it existed also in reality.
7. But then The Lost Island would not be that island than which a greater island cannot be conceived, since it would be possible to conceive of a greater.
8. But then The Lost Island would not be The Lost Island, an impossibility.
9. Hence, The Lost Island exists not only in the understanding, but in reality also.