

## A FORMALIZATION OF "NOTHING"

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Unlike most contemporary analytic philosophers Anselm took seriously the idea that the word "nothing" may function, not only as a syncategorematic quantifier, but also as a *nominal* expression. Thus in *Monologion*<sup>1</sup> 19, he is concerned lest his assertion that nothing existed before God be taken to imply that some thing, namely that which is referred to by the word "nothing", existed before God. In *De Casu Diaboli*<sup>2</sup> 11 Anselm provides a comprehensive discussion of the question of whether "nothing" may function in this nominal way. He reaches the conclusion that in one of its senses the word "nothing" refers to a state of affairs—the state consisting of the absence of every thing.

Desmond P. Henry, in his book *The Logic of St. Anselm*,<sup>3</sup> gives an interesting interpretation of Anselm's remarks on the nominal "nothing" in *De Casu Diaboli* 11. I shall devote this paper to a discussion of Henry's view; first, expounding it; second, criticizing it; and third, suggesting a way to improve it.

Let us assume, with Henry, that there is a use of the word "nothing" which is not susceptible to analysis in terms of quantifiers, and furthermore that this use is exemplified in Anselm's statements: "Nothing is nothing", "It is not true that nothing is something", and "Nothing is not-something". According to Henry there is a counterpart to this nominal use of "nothing" in Leśniewski's Ontology. He holds that the symbol " $\wedge$ " of Ontology is to be interpreted as "nothing" in just this nominal sense, and that this possibility of finding a logic in which there is a symbol which is interpreted as the nominal "nothing" provides a means of endowing Anselm's discourse with sense. We shall now examine these claims.

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1. Translated by S. N. Deane, Open Court Pub. Co., La Salle, Ill. (1903).

2. In *Truth, Freedom and Evil; Three Philosophical Dialogues*. Edited and translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson, Harper and Row, New York (1967).

3. D. P. Henry, *The Logic of St. Anselm*, Clarendon Press, Oxford (1967).