An Erotic Pattern of Thinking in Anselm's *Proslogion*

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Anselm's *Proslogion* is, as he says in its Preface, *unum argumentum*, a single line of reasoning, that builds toward the following three points about God: "that God is truly," "that he is the highest good who needs no other, and that he is the one "whom all things need so that they may be and may be well."[1] Anselm's famous argument in chapters 2–4 appears to achieve the first of these objectives, and this section of the *Proslogion* has, of course, received the most attention,[2] often to the neglect of the rest of the work—a neglect that is understandable, perhaps, in light of the powerful and provocative character of the thought of God as "that than which nothing greater can be thought" on which the reasoning in those chapters is based. But this neglect has often resulted, unfortunately, in uprooting Anselm's famous argument from the context in which he deliberately placed it and, consequently, paying little heed to its role within the single line of reasoning that constitutes the whole *Proslogion*.

To be sure, there are some interpreters of Anselm who are concerned with the *Proslogion* as a whole and thus have reflected on the compli-

[1] "… *coepi mecum quærere, si forte posset inveniri unum argumentum, quod nullo alio ad se probandum quam se solo indigeret, et solum ad astruendum quia deus vere est, et quia est summum bonum nullo alio indigens, et quo omnia indigent ut sint et ut bene sint, et quæcumque de divina credimus substantia, sufficeret*" (*Proslogion*, Prooemium, 93:5–10). All references to Anselm's works cite *S. Anselmi Cantuarensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, vol. I, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Stuttgart: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1968). Page number(s) and line number(s) of this edition are provided. All translations are mine.

[2] Many such attempts, however, fail to notice that Anselm does *not* say that he intends to demonstrate that there is a God, but says that he seeks to build toward *quia deus vere*, that God is *truly*. Anselm is not trying to show simply that God exists; rather, he is trying to make clear the manifest character of God's existence and trying to straighten up his mind toward that reality. I refer the reader to M. Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), in which she offers a fairly comprehensive survey of "the conflicting interpretations of Anselm which the anachronistic presuppositions of recent scholarship have provided" (59). The basic classifications of the interpretations that she presents seem to me still to be valid.

cated issue of its unity.[3] More reflection is needed, however, in order to trace out how Anselm carries out the threefold task that he sets for himself in the Preface and, consequently, how the structure of the work aligns with that task. This essay attempts to shed light on this structure in a limited way. I do not intend to provide a full account of the unity of the *Proslogion*; rather, I intend to lay down some of the groundwork for such an account by reflecting on the *Proslogion* in light of another work, namely, Plato's *Symposium*, with a view to bringing a pattern of thinking present in the *Symposium* to bear on the *Proslogion*. Although there is no evidence that Anselm himself read the *Proslogion*, this intertextual approach is able to bring to light aspects of Anselm's thinking that reveal the rich Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition within which he was working.

When reading the *Symposium*, one can discern a pattern of thinking that consists of three "moments": a comic moment, a tragic moment, and a philosophic moment. To follow this pattern in one's inquiry is, in the terms of the *Symposium*, to practice *ta erôtica*, "erotics," the art of erotic thinking, the pattern of which I hope to clarify in the first part of this essay. Familiarity with this pattern of erotic thinking can help make sense of Anselm's single line of reasoning in the *Proslogion*, and in this paper I try to show how this is so. Hence, following my articulation of the pattern of erotic thinking in the *Symposium*, in the second part of this paper I consider chapters 6–11 of the *Proslogion*, in which Anselm unfolds his notion of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought by showing what can be said truly about God

[3] See, e.g., the following: A. Stolz, "Anselm's Theology in the *Proslogion*," in *The Many-faced Argument*, ed. J. Hick and A. McGill (New York: MacMillan, 1967), 183–206; M. Corbin, "La signification de l'unum argumentum du *Proslogion*," *Anselm Studies* 2 (1988): 201–228; G. Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1994), 97–239; T. J. Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology in the Eleventh Century*, Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 54 (Leiden, New York, Köln: E. J. Brill, 1996), 133–155; R. McMahon, *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent: Augustine, Anselm, Boethius, and Dante* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 159–210. For a helpful summary of the various accounts of the unity of the *Proslogion* that have been offered in terms of genre and argumentative style, see E. Sweeney, "Anselm's *Proslogion*: The Desire for the Word," *Saint Anselm Journal* 1 (2003): 17–31. Sweeney's own account of the built-in tension of the work and how seeing this helps one to interpret the *Proslogion* is also worth noting. Understanding what the unity of the argument is depends in part, of course, on what *argumentum* means for Anselm. For helpful reflections on this, see the following: A. Pegis, "St. Anselm and the Argument of the *Proslogion*," *Mediaeval Studies* (1966): 228–267; F. Sontag, "The Meaning of 'Argument' in Anselm's Ontological 'Proof'," *Journal of Philosophy* 64 (1967): 459–486; T. J. Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology in the Eleventh Century*, 133–145.

in accord with a principle asserted in chapter 5, namely, "that God is whatever it is better to be than not to be."[4]

The divine "attributes"[5] that Anselm treats in this section of the *Proslogion* are the following: God is able-to-sense, though not a body (chapter 6); God is all-powerful, though not able to do many things (chapter 7); God is *misericors*, merciful or "pity-hearted,"[6] and *impassibilis*, unable-to-suffer (chapter 8); God is just (chapters 9–10); and God is good (chapters 10–11). In examining these chapters, I consider not so much the attributes themselves as the order in which Anselm treats them, with a view to discerning the pattern of his thinking in moving from one to another.[7] In these chapters An-

[4] "*Tu es itaque iustus, verax, beatus, et quidquid melius est esse quam non esse*" (*Proslogion*, V, 104:14–15). Note also the very title of this chapter: "*Quod deus sit quidquid melius est esse quam non esse; et solus existens per se omnia alia faciat de nihilo*" (*Proslogion*, Capitula, 93:6–7; V, 104:9–10).

[5] I put "attributes" in quotes here to underscore the fact that, as is clear from the *Monologion*, Anselm does not think that God has features or qualities that are other than what he is, as if he were a composition of substance and accidents. There is no such composition in God. This entails, of course, that neither can there really be many such features or qualities, as the plural "attributes" suggests. Anselm's arguments for this view of God can be found in chapters 15–17 of the *Monologion*. In the *Proslogion*, Anselm articulates this view in chapter 12, which follows the chapters on which I focus here. He says: "*Sed certe quidquid es, non per aliud es quam per teipsum. Tu es igitur ipsa vita qua vivis, et sapientia qua sapis, et bonitos ipsa qua bonis et malis bonus es; et ita de similibus*" (*Proslogion*, XII, 110:6–8). For a summarizing look at the issues surrounding divine "attributes" in Anselm's thought, see S. Visser and T. Williams, *Anselm* , Great Medieval Thinkers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 95–109.

[6] Although I generally translate *misericors* as "merciful," it is important to note its more literal meaning, not only because this rendering makes clear how it is a counterpoint to God's being *impassibilis*, unable-to-suffer, but also because this rendering shows it to be something that is apparently reactive and a sort of lowering of God's power. The significance of this latter point should become clearer below.

[7] Thus I am not considering here the Dionysian pattern of thinking within Anselm's treatment of a single divine attribute; i.e., the way in which Anselm moves from the assertion of the attribute, a seeming negation of that same attribute, and then an elevated reassertion of it. This way of thinking through a single divine attribute is crucial for understanding how Anselm treats God in the *Proslogion*, of course, but it is not the focus here, although those familiar with this Dionysian pattern may see that is bears important similarities to the tragic-comic-philosophic pattern of thinking found in the *Symposium*. An insightful and detailed analysis of chapters 6–13, as well as a persuasive argument for the presence of a "ring structure" in these chapters, can be found in M. Fournier, "Ring Structure in Chapters Six to Thirteen of Anselm's *Proslogion*," *Dionysius* 27 (2009): 127–144. It would take me too far afield in this paper, however, to show how my reading of these chapters and Fournier's complement each other, although I will try to note how as I proceed. One difference

selm practices something very similar to the art of erotic thinking discussed in the *Symposium* according to its threefold comic-tragic-philosophic pattern. If such a pattern obtains in this portion of the work, moreover, one may conjecture its presence in the work as a whole, especially if the *Proslogion* is understood to be *unum argumentum*, a single line of reasoning. In the third part of this paper, then, I offer a brief reflection on the unity of the *Proslogion* in light of the pattern of Anselm's erotic thinking.

I. An erotic pattern of thinking in Plato's *Symposium*

Near the end of Plato's *Symposium* we are told that Socrates remains awake through the night conversing with the comic poet Aristophanes and the tragic poet Agathon. In this conversation Socrates "was compelling them to agree that it belongs to the same man to know how to make comedy and tragedy, and that the man who is by art a tragedian is also a comedian."[8] Unfortunately, we are not told the details of Socrates' compelling case, nor are we told how or why this issue comes up. Yet the fact that Socrates is still trying to convince Aristophanes and Agathon of these claims late into the night suggests that their accounts of Eros within the limited horizons of comedy and tragedy are fundamentally flawed or at least limited.[9] In addition, in light of Socrates' assertion that the one who is by art a tragedian is also a comedian, it appears that Agathon in particular, who is a tragedian by trade, needs to develop a comic mode of thinking in order to fulfill his art.

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between what Fournier does and what I am doing here is that whereas he is interested in "structure," as the title of his article shows, I am interested in the intellectual "movement" within that structure. These aspects of the *Proslogion* are not unrelated, of course, because every argument or line of reasoning involves both structure and movement; it is important, nonetheless, to distinguish them. I hope, moreover, my concluding reflection on the unity of the *Proslogion* clarifies this distinction to some degree.

[8] Plato, *Symposium* 223D. Translations of passages from the *Symposium* are my own, based on the Greek text in the Loeb edition: Plato, *Lysis, Symposium, Critias*, trans. W. Lamb (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). I am indebted, however, to S. Benardete's translation in *Plato's Symposium* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). Because my use of the *Symposium* here is primarily auxiliary—i.e., with a view to shedding light on the *Proslogion*—I do not focus on the work of interpreters of this dialogue, although I recommend Alan Bloom's perceptive essay "Ladder of Love" included in the volume with the Benardete translation.

[9] Following Bloom's practice in "Ladder of Love," I capitalize Eros throughout "so as always to leave open the possibility of its divinity" (S. Benardete, *Plato's Symposium*, 56n3), which remains in question throughout the dialogue.

Earlier in the dialogue we get a sense of what such a development may entail, because immediately following Agathon's speech concerning Eros, Socrates offers a criticism of it. In brief, Agathon's account of Eros is this: Eros is divine, the youngest and tenderest of the gods; Eros is also the most beautiful, supple, and harmonious of the gods; finally, Eros is replete with virtues—justice, moderation, courage, and wisdom. Thus Agathon presents Eros in accord with the highest natural, aesthetic, and moral categories; Eros is a divine being lacking in nothing. By posing a series of questions to Agathon concerning this account of Eros, Socrates makes clear that this tragedian has conceptualized Eros too narrowly in terms that bespeak only fulfillment and perfection. Agathon's account suggests, in other words, that Eros is at work only in a fulfilled state. He is at work, in other words, only in enjoyment and delight in something already had, and not in desire and movement toward something not yet had, because the latter would require that Eros be described in terms that bespeak lack and imperfection. And, indeed, tragedians like Agathon seem inclined to conceive of things chiefly according to their fulfillment and perfection, which may be why they are so adept at depicting heroes rather than common or vulgar characters.

Socrates' criticism of Agathon suggests, then, that such an account of Eros follows this tragic inclination too exclusively. With respect to Eros, in other words, Agathon has yet to develop a comic sense, which would entail seeing the presence of Eros not only in fulfillment and perfection (and thus not only in terms of what is higher and excellent), but also in lack and incompleteness (and thus also in terms of what is lower and base). Within the confines of his high-aiming tragic perspective, therefore, Agathon misses the full and deeper reality of Eros, a reality that underlies both the experience of noble delight in what is had and the experience of needy desire for what is not yet had.

Now, when it comes to thinking in the comic mode, few can surpass Aristophanes. Earlier in the *Symposium* this comic poet offers an account of Eros in terms that bespeak not fulfillment and perfection, but lack and incompleteness. His comic inclinations are on full display in the bizarre myth he tells about semi-spherical human beings who spend their lives searching for their other halves to complete themselves. As Aristophanes says, "Eros is the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole."[10] This desire impels human beings to find their soulmates—or, perhaps more accurately, their bodymates—in sometimes plainly ridiculous ways. In light of Aristophanes' comic account of Eros, therefore, the reader of the *Symposium* glimpses what may be missing in Agathon's tragic account, namely, a way of understanding

[10] Plato, *Symposium* 193A.

the presence of Eros at the lower levels of human reality, in the bodily and vulgar aspects of human life that spring from neediness and desire.

In Socrates' speech concerning Eros—which is actually a report of what Diotima taught him when he was younger—Eros is depicted in a way that overcomes this high-low, noble-base contrariety by gathering together and elevating these comic and tragic accounts of Eros. This accords, of course, with what Socrates says to Agathon, namely, that a true account of Eros must embrace both the experience of delight in what is already had and the experience of desire for what is not yet had. Socrates' philosophic mode of thinking about Eros, in other words, is intended to unite and surpass the apparently opposing poles of desire and delight by grasping the intelligible ground underlying both experiences.[11] Interestingly, Diotima herself had uncovered Eros in this philosophic way to a young Socrates who was himself tragically inclined in his conception of Eros. As Socrates recalls, "I said to [Diotima] other things nearly the same as those that Agathon said to me just now, such as that Eros is a great god and [Eros] is of beautiful things."[12] Like Agathon, the youthful and tragically-inclined Socrates had not yet developed a comic sense.

When dealing with Socrates in his younger days, Diotima's task, as she sees it, is to teach him *ta erôtica*, "erotics," the art of erotic thinking, and she does so by focusing on the nature of Eros itself. Her first move is to demote Eros in Socrates' mind from the status of a god to that of a *daimôn*, an in-between spirit who ferries between human beings and gods. She does this by narrating a myth about the birth of Eros, whose lineage suggests a genetic configuration of poverty, wherewithal, and intelligence.[13] Diotima's myth reaches its comic nadir when she describes Eros as a shoeless, homeless man who nonetheless plans to capture the beautiful and philosophizes all through life—a not-so-subtle allusion to the lifestyle of Socrates himself.

By means of this myth, then, Diotima lowers the horizon within which the young Socrates conceives of Eros. Socrates should not, however, relinquish his tragic conception of Eros altogether, since this would result in an overly comic account such as the one Aristophanes offers. Diotima suggests this in the myth itself when she says that the penniless Eros is not wrapped up in bodily needs, but is planning to capture the beautiful and philosophizes all through life.[14] Indeed, preserving a tragic inclination is crucial to the pattern of thinking that informs erotic inquiry. As Socrates said to

[11] Cf. M.-D. Philippe, *De l'amour* (Paris: Mame, 1993), 41: "*Mais la conscience de l'amour n'est pas l'amour: c'est peut-être la plus profonde point de départ de la recherché philosophique de l'amour. Et toute erreur au point de départ a d'immenses consequences.*"

[12] Plato, *Symposium* 201E.

[13] Plato, *Symposium* 203B–C.

[14] Plato, *Symposium* 203D.

his poetic friends, "the man who is by art a tragedian is also a comedian."[15] The tragedian, who is inclined toward a higher horizon in which things are understood according to their fulfillment and perfection, needs to develop a comic sense in order to surpass in a philosophic manner the limited horizons of both comic and tragic modes of thinking.

In her philosophic account of Eros, therefore, Diotima must somehow retain Socrates' tragic conception of it. She does so by relating Eros to the beautiful. She does this, however, not in an Aristophanic fashion according to which Eros needs what is beautiful because it is incomplete in a bodily way, that is, in the manner of something half looking for another half to make it whole. Eros is to be understood, rather, according to a formal or universal wholeness. In other words, even if Eros is understood as being (in need) *of* something else, it nonetheless must be understood as a configuration of being that possesses its own intelligible wholeness. Hence Diotima asserts that as a whole Eros is "of the good's being one's own always";[16] or, put more technically, Eros as a whole has as its "object" a formality understood itself as a whole, namely, the good's being one's own always.[17] By conceiving of Eros as a relative reality, this account preserves the comic insight of neediness, and yet by making it relative to having the good always, it preserves the higher conception of the tragic account. In her philosophic account of Eros, therefore, Diotima makes a discursive move to a deeper conceptual plane that encompasses and surpasses the limited comic and tragic descriptions of Eros.[18] To make such a move—a move to a deeper, philosophic dimension

[15] Plato, *Symposium* 223D.

[16] Plato, *Symposium* 206A.

[17] I have simplified things a bit here for the sake of this paper. Diotima actually gets Socrates to move step-by-step to the conclusion that "Eros is of the good's being one's own always," which is in accord with the criticism Socrates leveled against Agathon earlier in the dialogue. Diotima, moreover, makes a seemingly unjustified move from the beautiful to the good in this part of the text, but pondering and articulating the significance of that move is the work of another day.

[18] For one imaginatively and mathematically inclined, a geometrical example may help to clarify what is meant here by a philosophic ascent or a move to a deeper conceptual plane. First, imagine yourself sitting down looking at a line at eye level, a line with two clear endpoints. Next, imagine yourself getting up, and after reaching a new perspective and looking down, you recognize that those endpoints of the line are actually points on the circumference of a circle—in fact, the endpoints of the diameter. The reason why the endpoints seemed to you only to belong to a line in a single dimension and not to a plane figure in two dimensions is because you yourself were in the plane of sight in which the circle itself was lying. What was needed was a movement to a different plane of sight from which that line is seen as what it really is, namely, the arc of a circle. To achieve on the level of sensation or imagination this recognition of what the line really was is similar to moving from the lower comic and

of thought that unites the lower and higher perspectives of comic and tragic thinking—is to practice the art of erotic thinking. The fruit of such thinking is the apprehension of a formal or universal whole articulated in such a way as to do justice to the various—and even apparently contradictory—phenomena of the reality one is trying to grasp.

After presenting this initial philosophic account of Eros, Diotima next considers the *ergon*, the work, of Eros, that is, how Eros actually manifests itself in reality. The work of Eros, she says, is "bearing forth [or: birthing] in beauty" (*tokos in kalô*). Diotima spells out this work of Eros in a step-by-step fashion by describing how one can climb the ladder of Eros by seeing its works on diverse levels. This ascending movement begins at the level of animal sexual activity and ultimately achieves the philosophic beholding of the beautiful itself.[19] For the purposes of this paper, it is enough to note that the ascent starts on the lowest rung of the ladder with a work of Eros at which the youthful and tragically-minded Socrates probably blushed. For Diotima first describes bearing forth or birthing in a way that includes not only the female's birthing of an offspring, but also the male's emission in the presence of the beautiful female.[20] The point of departure, then, is Eros in its lowest manifestations; that is, its clearest and most bodily manifestations in heterosexual intercourse and its results.[21] This implies that a full conception of the work of Eros does not leap immediately to higher realities such as the forms. No, it entails a downward, comic movement toward what is lower in order to do justice to the full depth of its reality.

Such, then, is the comic-tragic-philosophic pattern of erotic thinking laid out in the *Symposium*, a pattern that allows one to think through to its depths and articulate a reality whose phenomena apparently contradict one another. Allow me to summarize the moments in this pattern of thinking prior to turning to Anselm's *Proslogion*. Erotic thinking is initiated and sustained by a tragic inclination, that is, an inclination to understand the reality in question according to its fulfillment and perfection and in terms of what is higher and excellent; this is the underlying inclination that establishes the

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the higher tragic conceptions of something to a deeper, philosophic conception of it.

[19] The adjective "animal" here should be read as including human beings. In other words, at this point Diotima is referring to any sort of heterosexual intercourse, and it is important that human beings are familiar with this level of bearing forth in beauty so as to have the "lowest" experiential basis for the ascent.

[20] Plato, *Symposium* 206D.

[21] At the very beginning of her description of the ascent, Diotima says to the young Socrates, who is confused by the articulation of the work of Eros as bearing forth in beauty, "I will say something clearer [*saphesteron*]" (206C). Cf. Aristotle, *Physics*, I.1, 184a16–18.

fundamental trajectory of the entire inquiry. This tragic inclination, however, is tempered and expanded by a downward, comic movement, a descent to the lowest rungs of the ladder and a description of the reality in question in terms that entail neediness or bodiliness. Next, having coupled a higher conception with a lower one, the inquirer is disposed for the philosophic moment and movement, which results in apprehending the reality in a way that gathers together and deepens the tragic and comic descriptions. By means of such higher-lower-deeper thinking, one ultimately achieves a universal or formal account that does justice to the comic and tragic accounts that articulate the apparently contradictory phenomena in which the reality appears to us. Thereby the tragedian achieves the fullness of his art by developing a comic sense and exercising the full philosophic art of erotic thinking.

II. Anselm's erotic thinking in Chapters 6–11 of the *Proslogion*

In light of this pattern of erotic thinking presented in the *Symposium*, we turn now to Anselm's treatment of divine attributes in chapters 6–11 of the *Proslogion*. As I indicated above, in this portion of the work Anselm unfolds the notion of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought by determining certain true things we can say about God. The divine attributes that Anselm covers in these chapters are, in order, the following: able-to-sense (though not a body); all-powerful (though not able to do all things), merciful and unable-to-suffer, just, and good. At first sight this list is puzzling. Why does Anselm treat these divine attributes? And why does he treat them in this order? In the text itself, Anselm provides no explicit answers to such questions. For the purpose of this paper, the second of these questions is more relevant, although answering it may help us address the first as well. To understand the order of Anselm's treatment, then, we need to discern the pattern of Anselm's line of reasoning in these chapters. I hope to show how one can begin to make sense of Anselm's order of treatment here in light of the comic-tragic-philosophic pattern of erotic thinking presented in the *Symposium*, which may also shed light on the pattern of thinking present in the *Proslogion* as a whole.

The first thing to note is that Anselm's thinking throughout the *Proslogion* is informed by a fundamentally tragic inclination.[22] This is evident not only in the thought of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought, but also in the principle articulated in Chapter 5 that serves to unfold this thought, namely, that God is whatever it is better to be than not to

[22] A helpful exploration of this aspect of the *Proslogion* can be found in C. Viola, "La dialectique de la grandeur: Une interpretation du *Proslogion*," *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 37 (1970): 23–55.

be.[23] In this principle Anselm exhibits an underlying aspiration to understand God in surpassing terms, in terms that bespeak fulfillment and perfection.[24] Yet it is precisely because of Anselm's clear tragic inclinations exhibited in chapter 5 that the state goal of chapter 6 appears startling, namely, showing "in what way God is able-to-sense [*sensibilis*], although he is not a body."[25] After Anselm articulates the thought of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought and lays down the principle that God is whatever it is better to be than not to be, we are poised to think immediately about God in accord with higher notions, such as being all-powerful or just. Instead, we are asked first to consider God as able-to-sense.

According to the pattern of erotic thinking outlined in the *Symposium*, however, the downward movement in chapter 6 makes sense. Recall that Diotima spells out the work of Eros to the youthful and tragically-minded Socrates by first stepping down to the lowest rung on the ladder—to instinctive animal sexuality—with a view to arriving at a full and deeper conception of Eros. In a similar fashion Anselm, who sets the fundamental trajectory of

[23] See note 4 above.

[24] One can see similarities here between Anselm's approach to God and the one articulated by Augustine early on in *De doctrina Christiana*, Book I, VII.7 (PL 34, 22), which is also informed by a "tragic inclination": "*Nam cum ille unus cogitatur deorum Deus, ab his etiam qui alios et suspicantur et vocant et colunt deos sive in coelo sive in terra, ita cogitatur, ut aliquid quo nihil melius sit atque sublimius illa cogitatio conetur attingere …. Omnes tamen certatim pro excellentia Dei dimicant; nec quisquam inveniri potest qui hoc Deum credat esse quo melius aliquid est. Itaque hoc omnes Deum consentiunt esse, quod caeteris rebus omnibus anteponunt.*" Although here I point to *De doctrina Christiana*, on the whole echoes of Augustine in the *Proslogion* point more toward the influence of the *Confessions*, although it is not practicable to point to the various allusions in this paper. (Schmitt points out many of them in the notes of the *Proslogion* in the *Opera Omnia*.) In *Understanding the Medieval Meditative Ascent*, McMahon points to structural similarities in the *Confessions* and the *Proslogion* from a literary perspective, while R. Southern convincingly shows how Augustine influences not only Anselm's thought, but also his "style" or mode of expression (see *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 71–87). For a more general examination of Augustine's influence on Anselm, see G. Matthews, "Anselm, Augustine, and Platonism," in *A Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. B. Davies and B. Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 61–83.

[25] "*Quomodo sit sensibilis, cum non sit corpus*" (*Proslogion*, Capitula [95:8]; VI [104:19]). It is clear from what is said in chapter 6 that Anselm intends *sensibilis* as "able-to-sense" rather than as "able-to-be-sensed." Later in the work Anselm does think about God as "able-to-be-sensed," as is indicated by the title of chapter 17: "*Quod in deo sit harmonia, odor, sapor, lenitas, pulchritudo, suo ineffabili modo*" (*Proslogion*, Capitula, 96:1–2; XVII, 113:6–7). For a detailed logical analysis of chapter 6, see Fournier, "Ring Structure in Chapters Six to Thirteen of Anselm's *Proslogion*," 130–137.

the work by exploring the elevating thought of God as that than which nothing greater can be thought in chapters 2–4, subsequently asks us to ponder how God is able-to-sense, with a view to showing fully and more deeply how God is better with respect to whole of things. Pondering this helps us understand how God's being better embraces all the ways things are better at every level of existence, including the way an animal that can sense is better than a rock or a plant that cannot.

Anselm thus begins to unfold God's surpassing mode of existence in terms that at first glance seem unfitting to God insofar as they seem to entail neediness and bodiliness, such as being able-to-sense.[26] Yet when explaining this divine attribute, Anselm preserves the tragic trajectory of his thinking about God. He writes:

> But if there is not sensing unless there is knowing or unless it is toward knowing, … then whatever [God] knows in some way he is not inappropriately said to sense in some way. Therefore, Lord, although you are not a body, yet truly you are able-to-sense in the highest way—in that manner in which you know all things in the highest way, not in the manner in which an animal knows by a bodily sense.[27]

But if Anselm thus qualifies what it means to say that God is able-to-sense, why does he want to assert it in the first place? One reason is, as I suggested above, to impel the reader downward in his thinking about God so that he can comprehend the full and deep "betterness" of God according to all the ways of being better at every level of existence.[28] Another reason

[26] Undoubtedly Anselm is comfortable with this downward movement because of his belief in the Incarnation, which makes the notion of a God being able-to-sense more accessible. In fact, the Incarnation seems to me to be a hidden influence throughout the *Proslogion*, but especially in the early chapters (including, one could argue, in the famous argument in chapters 2–4). After all, as Anselm indicates in chapter 1, he is seeking God's face (*Proslogion*, I, 98:6). What I am saying here bears more on the rhetorical aspect of Anselm's dealing with God as *sensibilis* at this point in the work. Logically speaking, Fournier analysis shows that the argument in chapter 6 is valid when one sees that Anselm expands the initial notion of *sentire* in order to include intellectual perception ("Ring Structure in Chapters Six to Thirteen of Anselm's *Proslogion*," 130–137).

[27] "*Sed si sentire non nisi cognoscere aut non nisi ad cognoscendum est, … non inconvenienter dicitur aliquo modo sentire, quidquid aliquo modo cognoscit. Ergo domine, quamvis non sis corpus, vere tamen eo modo summe sensibilis es, quo summe omnia cognoscis, non quo animal corporeo sensu cognoscit*" (*Proslogion*, VI, 105:1–6).

[28] I see this reason as fitting with Fournier's analysis of chapter 6, in which he shows that Anselm has in mind a broad sense of *sentire* (like Augustine's broad sense of *percipere*). Fournier writes: "Anselm does not say that God can be said, not unsuit-

is that thinking of God as able-to-sense allows for a more meaningful and truer conception of God's knowing than would be possible if one were to begin immediately with God as, say, intellectual or able-to-understand. Being able-to-sense implies, for example, intimacy and particularity in knowing in a manner that being able-to-understand does not, since understanding usually implies ideas and abstractions. Hence by asserting God as able-to-sense and yet qualifying it by saying that God does not know by means of a bodily organ, Anselm paves the way for an insight into God's intimate knowledge of particulars without violating God's surpassing character as that than which nothing greater can be thought.

Next, in chapter 7, Anselm couples the downward, comic movement of chapter 6 with an upward, tragic one by showing "in what way God is all-powerful, although he cannot do many things."[29] Indeed, is there any divine attribute of God that, at least on the face of it, appears higher and thus more tragic than all-powerfulness? It is an attribute that seems to put God altogether beyond limitation and intelligibility. As a consequence, divine all-powerfulness easily evokes fear in the heart of us restricted, rational creatures. Yet Anselm begins his consideration of God as all-powerful with a counterpoint or an apparent qualification by asking how God can be all-powerful if he cannot do all things.[30] The things he cannot do, Anselm says, include being corrupted, lying, and making what is true false. These apparent exceptions, it turns out, actually highlight just how powerful God is, because the things that he cannot do and that others can do are actually things that result from weakness and a lack of power rather than from the active strength of real power. Anselm's conclusion to chapter 7, then, is fitting: "Therefore, Lord God, you are more truly all-powerful, because you can do nothing through lack of power, and nothing can do anything against you."[31]

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ably, to be *sensibilis*, because God knows. Rather, Anselm says that truly (*vere*) God is *summe sensibilis*. The implication is that not only do animals know *minime* compared to God, but they also perceive *minime* …. Anselm ranks the two modes of perception in virtue of the earlier assertion that *spiritus* is better than *corpus*. Thus incorporeal perception is superior to corporeal perception. What is important for my argument is that in distinguishing between two modes of perceiving, Anselm has made God and animals the extremes of a continuum" ("Ring Structure in Chapters Six to Thirteen of Anselm's *Proslogion*," 135–136).

[29] "*Quomodo sit omnipotens, cum multa non possit*" (*Proslogion*, Capitula, 95:9; VII, 105:8).

[30] This is clear from the chapter's title as well as the question with which the chapter opens: "*Sed et omnipotens quomodo es, si omnia non potes*?" (*Proslogion*, VII [105:9]).

[31] "*Ergo domine deus, inde verius es omnipotens, quia nihil potes per impotentiam, et nihil potest contra te*" (*Proslogion*, VII, 105:27–106:2).

In the middle of chapter 7, moreover, Anselm articulates a distinction that not only helps us think more clearly about God as all-powerful, but also provides a hint for understanding the mode of thinking about God in which Anselm is engaged in this portion of the work. After arguing that the things that some things can do and that God cannot do actually manifest a lack of power and not real power, Anselm suggests another way of considering the word "can" in this context:

> Or, "can" is said in some other kind of speaking, just as many things are said improperly, such as when we put "being" for "non-being" and "doing" for that which is a "not doing" or a "doing nothing." For often we say to one who denies that a certain thing is, "So it is as you say it to be," when it would seem to be said more properly, "So it is not as you say it not to be." Again, we say, "He sits as he does," or, "He rests as he does," although sitting is not doing something and resting is doing nothing.[32]

By calling our attention to this improper "other kind of speaking," Anselm indicates an often unnoticed and yet noteworthy ability of human reason and speech to make a philosophic move without being aware of it, namely, to say "being" or "doing" with reference to both of two things that appear to be polar opposites. We routinely speak in this manner when we name sitting, resting, and other non-activities as well as running, exercising, and other activities, as "doings." Indeed, keeping in mind the *Symposium*, one might say that the focused and logically qualified development of this "other kind of speaking" is at the heart of erotic thinking, inasmuch as the erotic thinker consciously makes an intellectual movement to surpass apparently contradictory accounts of some intelligible reality by offering a formal or universal account of it—a philosophic account—that gathers together and deepens the insights contained in both.

Subsequently, in chapter 8, Anselm appears to make precisely such a move when he articulates "in what way God is merciful [*misericors*, "pity-hearted"] and unable-to-suffer [*impassibilis*]."[33] The two attributes that Anselm has presented up to this point, God as able-to-sense and all-powerful, may appear to be opposed to one another. Being able-to-sense implies passivity on God's part, while being all-powerful (according to Anselm's account

[32] "*… sive [posse dicitur] aliquo alio genere loquendi, sicut multa improprie dicuntur. Ut cum ponimus 'esse' pro 'non esse', et 'facere' pro eo quod est 'non facere', aut pro 'nihil facere'. Nam saepe dicimus ei qui rem aliquam esse negat: sic est quemadmodum dicis esse, cum magis proprie videatur dici: sic non est quemadmodum dicis non esse. Item dicimus: iste sedet sicut ille facit, aut: iste quiescit sicut ille facit, cum 'sedere' sit quiddam non facere et 'quiescere' sit nihil facere*" (*Proslogion*, VII, 105:17–23).

[33] "*Quomodo sit misericors et impassibilis*" (*Proslogion*, Capitula, 95:10; VIII, 106:4).

in chapter 7) implies active strength, not passivity. The articulation in chapter 8 of God as merciful and unable-to-suffer together preserves and deepens the insights of these two previous descriptions of God.[34] Anselm writes:

> Indeed, you are merciful according to our sense, and you are not according to your own. For when you look on us pitiful ones, we sense the effect of one who is merciful; you do not sense the affect. And you are merciful, therefore, because you save the pitiful and spare those of yours who are sinners; and you are not merciful, because you are affected by none of pity's suffering-with.[35]

Anselm's articulation of God's unaffected mercy here gathers together the intimacy and particularity of God's being able-to-sense with the strength and active character of his all-powerfulness, while making clear at the same time that God's being able-to-sense does not involve passivity and that God's all-powerfulness includes the ability to spare the pitiful. In the terminology of erotics, this is a philosophic move with respect to the lower, comic notion of God as able-to-sense and the higher, tragic notion of God as all-powerful—a move to a deeper dimension of thinking about God that is summed up pithily by Anselm in the passage just quoted: "For when you look on us pitiful ones, we sense the effect of one who is merciful; you do not sense the affect."

But Anselm is not done yet. In the progress over the course of chapters 6–8, we can discern a comic-tragic-philosophic pattern of thinking, and relative to chapters 6–7, the conclusion of chapter 8 reaches a conceptual depth with respect to God's surpassing character as unaffectedly pity-hearted. Yet thinking about divine mercy seems always to raise the question of divine justice. Indeed, isn't mercy opposed to justice, in that sparing those who are sinful means not responding to them justly, that is, not giving to them what is owed?[36] Hence it looks as if there is tension between God's mercy and justice in need of resolution. In fact, Anselm opens chapter 9 with precisely this tension,[37] and it is illuminating to consider his resolution of God's mercy and justice in terms of the pattern of erotic thinking. In this

[34] See Fournier, "Ring Structure in Chapters Six to Thirteen of Anselm's Proslogion," 139–141, for an illuminating comparison of Anselm's thinking in chapter 8 with Seneca's discussion of *clementia* and *misericordia* in *De clementia*.

[35] "*Es quippe [misericors] secundum nostrum sensum, et non es secundum tuum. Etenim cum tu respicis nos miseros, nos sentimus misericordis effectum, tu non sentis affectum. Et misericors es igitur, quia miseros salvas et peccatoribus tuis parcis; et misericors non es, quia nulla miseriae compassione afficeris*" (*Proslogion*, VIII, 106:10–14).

[36] For a more detailed look at Anselm's treatment of divine mercy and divine justice in the *Proslogion*, see G. Sadler, "Mercy and Justice in St. Anselm's *Proslogion*," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80 (2006): 41–61.

[37] "*Verum malis quomodo parcis, si es totus iustus et summe iustus? Quomodo enim totus et summe iustus facit aliquid non iustum*?" (*Proslogion*, IX, 106:18–19).

pattern, God as merciful stands as the lower or comic conception, whereas God as just stands as the higher or tragic one—a categorization that at least on the level of human reactions seems fitting, inasmuch as there is something mirthful in thinking of a pity-hearted God who spares, whereas God's justice can easily terrify the human heart.

Thinking of God as merciful and thinking of him as just, however, are both limited in a similar respect, insofar as both imply a God who is reactive to human situations. Justice implies reactivity insofar as it involves rendering something that is due to another, something that has been earned and thus places God in debt. And mercy or pity-heartedness, even when purified of the bodiliness that the word implies, still seems to involve a reaction or response to a situation, which is suggested by the primary act that Anselm associates with it, the act of sparing. What is an act of sparing if not a relenting, a holding back of a just response in a given situation? In sparing, the response held back seems to be the just one, the one that would give a punishment that is owed to a person who has sinned. Hence not only do mercy and justice in God seem opposed, but also both seem to imply a limitation, namely, that God is reactive rather than fully active and in control.

In chapters 9–11, therefore, Anselm attempts to surpass the limitations of the comedy of divine mercy and the tragedy of divine justice by apprehending them both philosophically as grounded in a deeper source, namely, divine goodness. Anselm writes:

> Truly in the deepest and most secret place of your goodness hides the spring whence flows the river of your mercy. For although you are just as a whole and in the highest way, yet on that account you are also kind to those who are evil, because you are as a whole good in the highest way. For you would be less good if you were kind to none who are evil. For one who is good both to those who are good and to those who are evil is better than one who is good only to those who are good. And one who is good to those who are evil both by punishing and by sparing is better than one who is good to those who are evil only by punishing.[38]

God is both merciful and just, then, because it is better to be good in both ways than in only one or the other way. Anselm is compelled, then, to trace divine mercy and divine justice back to a single, hidden origin—divine goodness—that manifests itself both in those who are punished and those who

[38] "*Vere in altissimo et secretissimo bonitatis tuae latet fons, unde manat fluvius misericordiae tuae. Nam cum totus et summe iustus sis, tamen idcirco etiam malis benignus es, quia totus summe bonus es. Minus namque bonus esses, si nulli malo esses benignus. Melior est enim qui et bonis et malis bonus est, quam qui bonis tantum est bonus. Et melior est qui malis et puniendo et parcendo est bonus, quam qui puniendo tantum*" (*Proslogion*, IX, 107:5–11).

are spared. Moreover, the image that Anselm employs here—that goodness is like a spring from which mercy and justice flow—helps us begin to see God's exercise of mercy and justice not from a human perspective, from which we are prone to think of God as reactive or responsive to an already given situation, but from a deeper perspective, from which we can think of God as actively—not reactively—manifesting his goodness as either mercy or justice, as he sees fit.

Still, however, Anselm is bothered by the possibility that God will be considered unjust when sparing the sinner. This is because Anselm has not yet articulated how the tragic notion of God as just is preserved when we think of him comically as merciful, even when both are traced back philosophically to active divine goodness. Thus Anselm writes:

> [W]hen you punish those who are evil, it is just, because it goes together with their merits; whereas when you spare those who are evil, it is just, not because it is fitting to their merits, but because it is fitting to your goodness. For by sparing those who are evil, you are just according to yourself and not according to us, just as you are merciful according to us and not according to yourself. Wherefore, by saving us whom you might justly destroy, just as you are merciful not because you feel an affect, but because we feel an effect, so also you are just not because you render to us what is owed, but because you do what befits you as good in the highest way. And so in this way without contrariety you justly punish and you justly spare.[39]

Hence not only does Anselm resolve the tension between divine mercy and divine justice, but he also deepens the usual notion of justice, which would suggest that a God who reacts to a situation with punishment that is owed, into a notion of justice that points to the fittingness of God's acts with respect to himself as good. By means of this deeper notion of justice we are able to see how it is present both in God's punishing as well as in his sparing the sinner. Hence, having been resolved into active divine goodness, the

[39] "*Cum enim punis malos, iustum est, quia illorum meritis convenit; cum vero parcis malis, iustum est, non quia illorum meritis, sed quia bonitati tuae condecens est. Nam parcendo malis ita iustus es secundum te et non secundum nos, sicut misericors es secundum nos et non secundum te. Quoniam salvando nos quos iuste perderes, sicut misericors es non quia tu sentias affectum, sed quia nos sentimus effectum: ita iustus es non quia nobis reddas debitum, sed quia facis quod decet te summe bonum. Sic itaque sine repugnantia iuste punis et iuste parcis*" (*Proslogion*, X, 108:27–109:6).

tragic and the comic conceptions of God as merciful and just, respectively, are shown ultimately not to be opposed to one another.[40]

The notion of justice is deepened, therefore, by being gathered together with the notion of mercy into the spring of divine goodness. God is understood to be not reactive, but the very measure of justice, the good or self-diffusive God who both punishes and spares. Thus Anselm can write:

> [T]hat alone is just which you wish, and that is not just which you do not wish. So, therefore, your mercy is born from your justice, because it is just that you are good in such a way that you are good also by sparing.[41]

But this erotic move to divine goodness does not eliminate all the questions of our restless hearts. After all, God's mercy and justice hide in the deepest and most secret spring of goodness. More specifically, when it comes to God's particular application of mercy and justice, we remain at a loss. As Anselm writes:

> But if to any extent it can be grasped why you can will to save those who are evil, it certainly can be comprehended by no reason why you save these rather than those from like evils through the highest goodness and why you condemn those rather than these through the highest justice.[42]

The philosophic move to God's goodness can ease our restless hearts somewhat, and yet the resolution of the comedy of divine mercy and the tragedy of divine justice does not mean that the erotic thinker ceases either to laugh or to weep.

III. Toward understanding the unity of the *Proslogion*

In light of this interpretation of chapters 6–11 as manifesting a pattern of erotic thinking similar to that laid out in the *Symposium*, I want to reflect briefly on the unity of the Proslogion as *unum argumentum*, a single line of reasoning. For if the chapters concerning the divine attributes that I have ex-

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[40] And, it appears, the tragic conception of God—God as just—holds precedence, which shows the primacy of the tragic conception over the comic one in the pattern of erotic thinking.

[41] "*Nam id solum iustum est quod vis, et non iustum quod non vis. Sic ergo nascitur de iustitia tua misericordia tua, quia iustum est te sic esse bonum, ut et parcendo sis bonus*" (*Proslogion*, XI [109:18–20]).

[42] "*Sed si utcumque capi potest, cur malos potes velle salvare: illud certe nulla ratione comprehendi potest, cur de similibus malis hos magis salves quam illos per summam bonitatem, et illos magis damnes quam istos per summam iustitiam*" (*Proslogion*, XI, 109:21–24).

amined here embody that line of reasoning, then—by a kind of magnifying conjecture from chapters 6–11 to the *Proslogion* as a whole—one may surmise that the unity of the *Proslogion* consists in its being the exercise of a single inquisitive art with respect to God, namely, the art of erotic thinking in accord with a comic-tragic-philosophic pattern. But, one might object, doesn't an appeal to the Preface of the *Proslogion*—not to mention the famous argument in chapters 2–4 that keeps readers coming back to this work century after century—suggest that the unshaken heart of the *Proslogion* is clearly the thought of God as "that than which nothing greater can be thought"? Indeed, isn't this the thought of God offered to Anselm on the brink of despair while he was seeking for *unum argumentum* whereby he could unify the complicated chain of argumentation about God in the *Monologion*?[43] In addition, as has been compellingly argued for by Holopainen, *argumentum* for Anselm likely had a meaning derived from his reading of Boethius's logical works that points to "that than which nothing greater can be thought" as equivalent to the middle term of Anselm's reasoning about God in the *Proslogion*; hence, by a kind of synecdoche, the work's *unum argumentum* should be identified precisely as "that than which nothing greater can be thought."[44]

In reply, I would say that my suggestion here that the unity of the *Proslogion* in the exercise of the art of erotic thinking complements the position that "that than which nothing greater can be thought" is central to the work and is, in fact, the *unum argumentum*. This complementarity can be articulated as follows: the thought of God as "that than which nothing greater can be thought" is the principle or grounds underlying the reasoning about God that takes place in the *Proslogion*; but to follow this reasoning, this *unum argumentum*, to its end—that is, to think this thought of God in all its height, breadth, and depth—is to exercise of the art of erotic thinking about God. Hence "that than which nothing greater can be thought" is the engine, the dynamo, that drives the erotic thinking about God in the *Proslogion*. Indeed,

[43] With regard to Anselm's dissatisfaction with the *Monologion* and his pursuit of a single line of reasoning: "… *considerans illud esse multorum concatenatione contextum argumentorum, coepi mecum quaerere, si forte posset inveniri unum argumentum* …" (*Proslogion*, Prooemium, 93:4–6). With regard to the gift of the thought of God that Anselm was offered: "*Sed cum illam cogitationem, ne mentem meam frustra occupando ab aliis in quibus proficere possem impediret, penitus a me vellem excludere: tunc magis ac magis nolenti et defendenti se coepit cum importunitate quadam ingerere. Cum igitur quadam die vehementer eius importunitati resistendo fatigarer, in ipso cogitationum conflictu sic se obtulit quod desperaveram, ut studiose cogitationem amplecterer, quam sollicitus repellebam*" (*Proslogion*, Prooemium, 93:13–19).

[44] A compelling case that this is how Anselm understands *argumentum* in the *Proslogion* is made in Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology in the Eleventh Century*, 133–155.

not only is it the point of departure for Anselm's erotic thinking,[45] but also "that than which nothing greater can be thought"—when unfolded by Anselm's thinking it ever higher, lower, and deeper—bears fruit in thoughts of God as "something greater than can be thought"[46] and "that good that contains the pleasantness of all goods."[47]

To be sure, the suggestion in this concluding reflection about the unity of the *Proslogion* needs to be spelled out further. Among other things, one would have to spell out how the *Proslogion* as a whole hinges on the three thoughts of God articulated above, how these thoughts manifest a progressive and erotic pattern in Anselm's line of reasoning, and how these three thoughts correspond with the three points about God toward which Anselm says in the Preface he intends to build, namely, "that God is truly," "that he is the highest good who needs no other," and that he is the one "whom all things need so that they may be and may be well."[48] Drawing all these connections sufficiently is the task of another day and perhaps would require a book. I am inclined to think, though, that seeing the *unum argumentum* of the

[45] One could argue, moreover, that erotic thinking is how we are able to achieve this thought of God in the first place. This is suggested by Anselm's reply to Guanilo's objection that he is unable to think of "that than which nothing greater can be thought" because upon hearing it he neither knows it from a genus or a species, nor can he conjecture it from anything else (see *Quid ad haec respondeat quidam pro insipiente*, 4, 126:29–127:24). Anselm answers this as follows: "*Item quod dicis 'quo maius cogitari nequit' secundum rem vel ex genere tibi vel ex specie notam te cogitare auditum vel in intellectu habere non posse, quoniam nec ipsam rem nosti, nec eam ex alia simili potes conicere: palam est rem aliter sese habere. Quoniam namque omne minus bonum in tantum est simile maiori bono inquantum est bonum: patet cuilibet rationabili menti, quia de bonis minoribus ad maiora conscendendo ex iis quibus aliquid maius cogitari potest, multum possumus conicere illud quo nihil potest maius cogitari*" (*Quid ad haec respondeat editor ipsius libelli*, VIII, 137:11–18). In this passage Anselm articulates the intellectual movement that ultimately gets us to "that than which nothing greater can be thought" using two key words: *conscendendo* and *conicere*. These verbs imply that from the lower and higher degrees of goodness that we experience, we are able to make a "gathering mental ascent" or a "gathering projection" toward "that than which nothing greater can be thought"—descriptions of an intellectual movement similar to the movement of erotic thinking present in the *Symposium* and in the portion of the *Proslogion* I have examined here.

[46] "*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*" (*Proslogion*, XV, 112:14–17).

[47] "*Excita nunc, anima mea, et erige totum intellectum tuum, et cogita quantum potes, quale et quantum sit illud bonum. Si enim singula bona delectabilia sunt, cogita intente quam delectabile sit illud bonum, quod continet iucunditatem omnium bonorum; et non qualem in rebus creatis sumus experti, sed tanto differentem quanto differt creator a creatura*" (*Proslogion*, XXIV, 117:25–118:3).

[48] See note 1 above.

Proslogion as the offspring of Anselm's fertile erotic thinking about God as "that than which nothing greater can be thought" will illumine this work in no small way.

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