

THE *PROSLOGION* IN RELATION TO THE *MONOLOGION*

TOIVO J. HOLOPAINEN

Department of Systematic Theology, University of Helsinki

The *Proslogion* (1077/1078) by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109) is famous for the proof of God's existence presented in its Ch. 2, known as the earliest formulation of the ontological argument. Even though Anselm's proof continues to intrigue those with a philosophical bent, it is not the ontological argument alone that makes the *Proslogion* so fascinating – the most fascinating work within the history of philosophical theology, I would say. An important part of the charm of the *Proslogion* comes from the puzzles and interpretational problems that it poses to the reader. At the root of these puzzles is the peculiar combination of argumentation and devotion that the treatise exhibits. Unlike Anselm's first treatise, the *Monologion* (1076), which is based on an explicitly rational method, the *Proslogion* is a devotional exercise in which the person who speaks attempts to elevate his or her mind to the contemplation of God in prayer. Even though one need not agree with a recent author who calls this 'the strangest and least well-fitting frame imaginable'¹ for a purely rational proof, it must be said that the combination is extraordinary and calls for explanation. It is no wonder that the nature of Anselm's endeavour in the *Proslogion* continues to be a controversial issue.²

Here, I shall sketch a new interpretation of the *Proslogion* which aims at explicating the relation between argument and devotion in it.³ I shall maintain that the *Proslogion* should be read as a subtle attempt to justify the kind of rational approach that Anselm had used in the *Monologion*, and that the combination of argumentation and devotion is designed to serve this end. I shall first offer a brief discussion of the *Monologion* and of what Anselm says about the relation of his first two treatises. The second part will focus on the 'single argument' (*unum argumentum*) which, according to the Preface to the *Proslogion*, is at the core of the argumentation in this treatise. Thirdly, I shall highlight some aspects of the devotional exercise in the *Proslogion* and the role of the single argument in it. In the last part, a historical sketch will be offered which relates the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* to conflicting views about theological method in Anselm's environment.

I

When modern commentators refer to Anselm's first treatise as background for their discussion of the *Proslogion*, they usually treat two issues, viz. Anselm's method in the *Monologion*, and Ch. 1–4 of the treatise interpreted as a series of arguments for God's existence. The first issue is clear. Because the Preface and Ch. 1 of the *Monologion* contain some explicit and emphatic remarks about the rational method to be used in the treatise, there is not much room for error about that matter. Anselm's intention is to proceed 'by

reason alone' (*M* 1, S I, 13; HR 7)⁴ and 'nothing at all in the meditation would be argued on Scriptural authority' (*M*, Preface, HR 1). The second issue is more problematic. Because the ontological argument is what interests modern readers in the *Proslogion*, it is understandable that they also look for arguments for God's existence in Anselm's first treatise – assuming that these are the 'chain of many arguments' that Anselm will mention in the Preface to the *Proslogion* (HR 88). This is unfortunate because one thus gets a distorted idea of the content of the *Monologion*. It is true that Ch. 1–4 of the treatise aim at establishing an existence claim: their burden is to prove that there is a Supreme Being. However, Anselm did not see this as an argument for God's existence but as an initial phase in an extensive argument for the Christian understanding of God. It is only in the last chapter of the *Monologion*, i.e. Ch. 80, that Anselm considers God's existence as proven (*M* 80, HR 86). Before he arrives at this conclusion, he has established to his satisfaction that the Supreme Being whose existence is proved in Ch. 1–4 has created everything else from nothing (*M* 5–14), has the properties that the Divine Essence is believed to have (*M* 15–28), consists of a Father, a Son, and their Spirit (*M* 29–63), and is the proper object of human-or-angelic love, hope and faith (*M* 66–78). Anselm's *Monologion* is a bold attempt at reconstructing the basic tenets in the Christian idea of God (and of the creation in relation to God) on a purely rational basis – leaving out the Incarnation, though, as Anselm will later remark (see next paragraph).

Fifteen years later, Anselm would refer to his first two treatises as follows:

Still, if anyone will deign to read my two short works, viz., the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* (which I wrote especially in order [to show] that what we hold by faith regarding the divine nature and its persons – excluding the topic of incarnation – can be proven by compelling reasons apart from [appeal to] the authority of Scripture) . . . (*De incarnatione verbi* 6, S II, 20; HR 279)

This remark confirms the characterisation of the nature and scope of the *Monologion* that was just presented. The remark is also important for the reason that it reveals some important aspects of how Anselm saw the relation between the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. He lets us understand that the two treatises have a common objective: they aim at showing that what Christians believe about the Divine Essence and the three Trinitarian persons can be proved by compelling reasons without appealing to the authority of Scripture. From this it follows that the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* share the same point of departure. In spite of some superficial differences, both works aim at presenting compelling reasons not based on authority. The *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* appear here as two parts of the same project with a one common objective and a common methodology.⁵

This is also the idea that one gets from the Preface to the *Proslogion*. As in the passage from the *De incarnatione verbi*, Anselm here treats the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* as a pair of works, but in addition he makes some comparisons between them and, equally important, fails to make some other comparisons. The best known of the comparisons concerns the complexity of argumentation: the *Monologion* was 'composed of a chain of many arguments' whereas the *Proslogion* aims at introducing 'a single argument' (*P*, Preface, S I, 93; HR 88 modified).⁶ As already anticipated, there is no reason to assume that the expression 'a chain of many arguments' refers to *Monologion* 1–4. It is best understood as referring to the complexity of the arguments in the *Monologion* as a whole. There are also many misunderstandings around about Anselm's single argument; I shall deal with that issue below (Part II). At this point, let us focus on a comparison Anselm fails to make. When Anselm points out a difference in the complexity of argumentation and

fails to mention a difference in the point of departure in the argumentation, the reader will assume that there is no difference regarding this latter, more fundamental issue. In other words, the Preface to the *Proslogion* induces the reader to think that the single argument will be based ‘on reason alone’ in the same way as the many arguments in the first treatise. And this is the way Anselm wanted it to be. Anselm was very conscious of methodological issues, as the remarks in the *Monologion* already show, so there is no reason to doubt that he was aware of this presupposition in the comparison related to the complexity of argumentation.

But what about the fact that the *Proslogion* is a devotional exercise? Does it not follow that the point of departure will be different? This takes us to the other important comparison between the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* that Anselm makes in the Preface to the latter work. The *Monologion* was written ‘in the role of someone who by arguing silently with himself investigates what he does not yet know’ whereas the *Proslogion* was written ‘in the role of someone endeavouring to elevate his mind toward contemplating God and seeking to understand what he believes’ (*P*, Preface, HR 87–8). That is to say, the two treatises are different in the respect that the subject matter in them is treated from a different perspective. However, the Preface to the *Proslogion* makes one think of this difference as a difference in the mode of presentation. As far as the Preface to the *Proslogion* is concerned, one could freely switch the modes of presentation in the two works or instead use some other form (say, write a dialogue). The ‘point of departure’ in the *Proslogion* is different from that in the *Monologion* in the respect that the two works were composed from a different perspective, but this does not prevent there being a common point of departure on a deeper methodological level.

II

In the Preface to the *Proslogion*, Anselm spends some time to describe his desperate quest for a single argument and how he finally discovered it to his great joy. By focussing on the *unum argumentum*, Anselm makes the reader curious and intent on learning what this argument is. If the reader pauses to reflect on what s/he has read, s/he will realise that the argument is meant to be a purely rational one and thus independent of the devotional mode of presentation that will be used in the *Proslogion*. When s/he continues reading, s/he may become bewildered, because there is not a word about ‘a single argument’ in the treatise. Anselm does not explicitly say what his single argument is, but the reader should gather it from what s/he reads. It is difficult to tell how much Anselm’s contemporaries could usually gather of it. As for our contemporaries, there are many misunderstandings around, as already mentioned. Good discussions of Anselm’s single argument are hard to find in the current literature, and the scholars who are on the right track have seldom pondered the consequences of the matter.⁷

What is the single argument, then? It may be instructive to start from what it is not. First, the single argument is not an argument for God’s existence. It is true that proving God’s existence is part of what the single argument should be able to do, but its scope is essentially larger. In the Preface, Anselm says that the single argument

would suffice by itself to demonstrate (1) that God truly [i.e., really] exists and (2) that He is the Supreme Good (needing no one else, yet needed by all [else] in order to exist and to fare well) and whatever [else] we believe about the Divine Substance. (*P*, Preface, S I, 93; HR 88)

Because the single argument should prove not only God's existence but also 'whatever we believe about the Divine Substance', it would be a mistake to assume or claim that the ontological argument for God's existence – or the inference in *Proslogion* 2 (or 2–3) analysed in some other way – is Anselm's argument. Secondly, the single argument is not a piece of text that would actually be written down somewhere in the *Proslogion*, in the way the inference about God's existence is written down in Ch. 2 (or Ch. 2–3). There simply is no piece of text in the *Proslogion* that would do the job that the single argument is supposed to do.

Instead of a piece of text on God's existence, then, we should look for something which is more general in scope and more basic in nature – some constant element that appears in various passages in the *Proslogion* and has the potential of achieving what the single argument should achieve. Several alternatives for this constant element can be suggested; I shall mention some that I find illuminating. First, the single argument could be an abstract argumentative idea, such as the ontological argument taken in the abstract. Secondly, the single argument could be an argumentative pattern which is used in a uniform manner in different passages in the *Proslogion*; the most plausible candidate for this kind of 'argument' would be the *reductio ad absurdum* in Ch. 2 and 3.⁸ Thirdly, the single argument could be the notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought', which plays a pivotal role in Anselm's reasoning.

To begin with, a quick way to get the gist of Anselm's single argument is to think of a generalisation of the ontological argument for God's existence. Think of the notion of a perfect being. On pain of contradiction, a perfect being must have all the perfections, for if it lacks any one of them, then it will not be a perfect being. But the attributes of God are perfections. Therefore, a perfect being can be proved to have all the attributes of God. In this way, the ontological argument can be used to prove 'whatever we believe about the Divine Substance'. To be sure, Anselm used neither the notion 'perfect being' nor the notion 'perfection'. Nevertheless, it can be shown that the above generalisation of the ontological argument closely corresponds to how Anselm understood his single argument to function.

Anselm's argumentation starts from the notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought', and he believed that the attributes of God are of a kind that makes their bearer greater or more excellent. In the last section of his reply to Gaunilo, *Responsio* 10, Anselm offers what appears to be a short explication of his single argument (even though he does not mention the term 'argument' here):

For the signification of this utterance [viz., 'something than which a greater cannot be thought'] contains so much force that what is spoken of is, by the very fact that it is understood or thought, necessarily proved to exist in reality and to be whatever ought to be believed about the Divine Substance. For we believe about the Divine Substance whatever can in every respect be thought of as better [for something] to be than not to be. For example, it is better to be eternal than not to be eternal, better to be good than not to be good – or, rather, to be goodness itself than not to be goodness itself. But that than which something greater cannot be thought cannot fail to be anything of this kind. Therefore, it is necessarily the case that that than which a greater cannot be thought is whatever ought to be believed about the Divine Being. (*R* 10, S I, 138–9; HR 130–1)

Gaunilo had directed his critique against Anselm's argument for God's existence in *Proslogion* 2–3, and Anselm had replied to that critique in *Responsio* 1–9. In the quoted passage, the focus is not on the argument for God's existence but on how it is possible to prove that God is 'whatever ought to be believed about the Divine Substance'. Anselm explicitly says that 'we believe about the Divine Substance whatever can in every respect be

thought of as better [for something] to be than not to be', and he explicitly says that 'that than which something greater cannot be thought cannot fail to be anything of this kind.'

It would be problematic to identify the notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' with the notion of perfect being, and Anselm's list of attributes predicable of the Divine Essence would certainly be different from any given list of 'perfections'. In spite of this, it is clear that the idea that Anselm describes in *Responsio* 10 has the same structure as the generalisation of the ontological argument sketched above. Even though Anselm does not refer to his *reductio* in the passage, it can obviously be used to establish the connection between the notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' and the divine attributes. On pain of contradiction, that than which a greater cannot be thought must be 'whatever can in every respect be thought of as better [for something] to be than not to be', for if it lacks any such attribute, then it will not be that than which a greater cannot be thought. Anselm need not mention the *reductio* here because it was all too familiar to the readers by the time they had got as far as *Responsio* 10.

In *Responsio* 10, Anselm points out a simple way of proving 'whatever we believe about the Divine Substance' in a uniform manner. The proof is based on the notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' and an abstract argumentative idea related to it, and it is possible to use a *reductio ad absurdum* to spell out the proof. Where exactly does the single argument lie here? My answer would be twofold. On one hand, the single argument does not lie anywhere exactly but consists of a notion together with an argumentative idea and a pattern of argumentation. Strictly speaking, however, the notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' should be identified as the single argument. First, Anselm says in *Responsio* 10 that his reasoning is based on the 'force' that the 'signification' of this notion contains. Secondly, in *Responsio* 5 Anselm uses the term *argumentum* to refer to the notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' (*R* 5, S I, 135; cf. HR 126). Related to this, it can be shown that this way of using the term *argumentum* has a background in early medieval dialectic.⁹ Thirdly, it is not clear that Anselm's argument for God's existence in *Proslogion* 2 can be adequately analysed as an application of the argumentative strategy explained above. Namely, this proof consists of two stages, and only the second stage is a *reductio*. However, the first stage is also based on the notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' and the force of its signification.¹⁰ Further, the *reductio ad absurdum* pattern can hardly qualify as Anselm's single argument because he omits it in *Responsio* 10 and elsewhere, which shows that its use is optional.

This analysis of the single argument is well suited to the reading of the Preface to the *Proslogion* that was presented above (Part I). First, it is clear that Anselm meant his argument as a purely rational one. The only suspicious part in the argument, from the point of view of (purported) rationality, is the set of presuppositions which the strategy assumes, saying that it is greater to be good than not good, eternal than not eternal, and so on. For Anselm, this was not a problem. In the *Monologion*, he claims that the ability to make correct value judgments belongs to the essence of rationality:

Indeed, for a rational nature to be rational is nothing other than for it to be able to discriminate what is just from what is not just, what is true from what is not true, what is good from what is not good, what is more good from what is less good. (*M* 68, S I, 78; HR 78)

Secondly, the analysis of the single argument is well suited to what was said about the different modes of presentation. One need not have much imagination to notice that the single argument can be used in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. The reason why

Anselm introduced his single argument within a devotional exercise is not that it would depend on the devotional exercise in respect of its validity or in some other way.

However, the analysis also gives rise to a new problem. In the actual text of the *Proslogion*, the single argument is used five times. In addition to Ch. 2, it is used in Ch. 3, 5, 15 and 18 to argue that God, or that than which a greater cannot be thought, ‘cannot be thought not to exist’ (*P* 3, HR 94), is ‘that which – as highest of all things, alone existing through Himself – made all other things from nothing’ (*P* 5, HR 95), is ‘something greater than can be thought’ (*P* 15, HR 103) and is absolutely one and indivisible (*P* 18, HR 104–5).¹¹ From these scattered instances of the single argument within a devotional exercise, it is very difficult indeed to get a clear view of the argument – particularly so if one does not have the Preface and the *Responsio* at one’s disposal, which was the case for the very first readers of the *Proslogion* (see Part IV below). If Anselm’s aim in the *Proslogion* was to introduce the single argument, and if there was a variety of ways available for doing it, why did Anselm choose to do it in such an opaque way? To get clarity to this issue, let us first study the devotional exercise in the *Proslogion* and then look at the historical context of this treatise.

III

In the current literature, two different attitudes toward the devotional exercise in the *Proslogion* are common. First, there are those writers who give it a polite nod and then neglect it. In contrast, there are those who venerate it and speculate about its significance for the interpretation of Anselm’s argument for God’s existence. Few attempts have been made to actually analyse the devotional exercise in the *Proslogion* from the point of view of philosophical theology.¹² I shall next offer a brief sketch of some aspects of the exercise and comment on the role of the single argument in it.¹³

In the Preface to the *Proslogion*, Anselm says that he wrote the treatise in the double role of ‘someone endeavouring to elevate his mind toward contemplating God and seeking to understand what he believes’ (HR 88). What does Anselm mean by contemplation of God, and what is the relation between contemplation and faith’s search for understanding? ‘Contemplating’ refers to some kind of mental seeing or looking at – seeing or looking at with the ‘eye of the mind’ (cf. *P* 18, HR 105). An attempt at contemplating God is, hence, an attempt at seeing God. It turns out that two kinds of contemplating God are relevant for the exercise in the *Proslogion*. By ‘contemplation of God’, we can refer to a direct vision of God, on one hand, and to an intellectual contemplation of truths about God, on the other. The two types of contemplation play a constitutive role in the devotional exercise in the *Proslogion*, from the first chapter to the last, and their role is particularly prominent in Ch. 1, 14–18 and 24–26. The latter type of contemplation, i.e., intellectual vision of truths about God, is closely related to the understanding which faith seeks.

The devotional exercise in the *Proslogion* begins with an ‘Arousal of the mind for contemplating God’ (*P* 1, chapter-title, HR 90). What kind of contemplation is it that the mind is aroused for? From the early parts of Ch. 1, one gains the impression that the contemplation that is sought is a vision of God Himself. The person who prays sets out to seek God, but s/he laments that s/he does not know how to look for Him. S/he knows that God dwells in ‘light inaccessible’ (*lux inaccessibilis*, HR 90; 1 Tim. 6:16), but s/he does not know how to approach this light so that s/he may behold God in it. As a matter of fact, the vision of God is man’s end, but the person who prays has not achieved this end: ‘I was

made for seeing You; but not yet have I done that for which I was made' (*ad te videndum factus sum - et nondum feci, propter quod factus sum*) (P 1, S I, 98; HR 91). At this point, the reader will assume that the aim of the exercise is the vision of God which is man's end.

Towards the end of Ch. 1, however, the aim is expressed much more moderately. The person who prays does not dare to strive 'to penetrate [God's] heights' (*penetrare altitudinem tuam*, S I, 100; cf. HR 93), for the reason that his or her intellect is in no way equal to it. Instead, s/he is satisfied to 'look upward toward [God's] light', even if it were 'from afar or from the deep' (HR 92), and s/he yearns 'to understand [God's] truth to some extent' (*aliquatenus intelligere veritatem tuam*; cf. HR 93). The chapter ends with the well-known lines on faith seeking understanding. Here, the aspiration of contemplating God appears to collapse into the aspiration of understanding that which is believed. The person who prays yearns to be able to contemplate God by contemplating truths about Him—truths that s/he now only believes but also wants to understand or 'see'.

In the chapters that follow, Anselm introduces and makes use of his single argument, 'that than which a greater cannot be thought'. Familiarity with this argument should give one a whole new outlook on the Divine Essence. The notion 'that than which a greater cannot be thought' can be used to prove God's existence and to establish the connection between God and His attributes (see Part II above), and the connection established is not only necessary but also evident. Therefore, the single argument allows one to 'see' some important truths about God that one has so far only believed.

In Ch. 14, Anselm returns to the theme of Ch. 1. In the first sentences, Anselm brings together this theme and the intermediate discussions in Ch. 2-13. The praying person's quest for God has resulted in the discovery of God as that than which a greater cannot be thought. What bewilders him or her, however, is that s/he does not sense (*sentire*) this being. At the same time, it is clear that the praying person has seen something of God. Therefore, Anselm is led to draw a distinction between two senses of seeing God. The soul of the praying person 'saw [God] to some extent' (*vidit te aliquatenus*), but it 'did not see [God] as [He is]' (*non vidit te sicuti es*; P 14, S I, 111; HR 102). This distinction is the key to the correct interpretation of the *Proslogion* as an attempt at contemplating God. Anselm underlines the importance of the distinction by entitling Ch. 14 as 'How and why God is both seen and not seen by those who seek Him'. The distinction corresponds to the ambiguity in *Proslogion* 1 regarding the kind of seeing God that is sought. On one hand, 'seeing God to some extent' (*vidit te aliquatenus*, P 14) corresponds to 'understanding God's truth to some extent' (*aliquatenus intelligere veritatem tuam*, P 1). The kind of seeing God that the praying person has achieved by *Proslogion* 14 consists of having an intellectual insight into some truths about God. Because of this attained insight, we can say that the praying person 'sees God to some extent' and 'understands God's truth to some extent'. On the other hand, 'seeing God as He is' (*vidit te sicuti es*, P 14) corresponds to 'seeing God in the inaccessible light' or 'penetrating God's heights' (*penetrare altitudinem tuam*, P 1). These expressions refer to a kind of vision of God which remains unachievable in the *Proslogion*.

In the middle of Ch. 14 Anselm begins a discussion, continuing till Ch. 16, which aims at explaining why the praying person cannot attain a direct vision of God 'as He is'. Anselm here makes use of the Augustinian theory of illumination, the validity of which he takes for granted. The fact that the soul has been able to see some truths about the Divine Essence shows that the soul has been able to see something of God's truth or of His light, for whatever truths the rational mind sees, it sees by means of this light. However, this light is too immense and too resplendent for the human mind; the soul's eye is dazzled by God's

brilliance and overcome by His vastness (*P* 14, HR 102–3). Consequently, Anselm argues in Ch. 15 that God is something greater than can be thought, on the ground that ‘if You were not this then something greater than You could be thought’ (*P* 15, HR 103). In Ch. 16, Anselm associates this with the inaccessible light in which God dwells. The praying person cannot see God as He is because s/he cannot ‘penetrate’ ‘the inaccessible light’ (*P* 16, HR 103–4).

This does not imply, however, that Anselm thought that every attempt at contemplating God as He is would remain frustrated forever. Man’s end is the vision of God, and the faithful will eventually achieve this end. This does not happen in this life, but in the life to come in heaven. In the last three chapters of the *Proslogion*, Ch. 24–26, Anselm offers a vivid description of the joy that the faithful will enjoy in heaven (*P* 24–26, HR 108–12).

I shall end this part with some reflections on the immediate results of the devotional exercise in the *Proslogion* and the role of the single argument in achieving them. To begin with, the exercise makes it clear that, in Anselm’s view, it is possible to contemplate God in the sense of contemplating truths about Him. Anselm’s aim is a contemplation in which the truth of the contemplated facts is clearly intuited with the eye of the mind. The single argument serves as the main vehicle for attaining this kind of contemplation in the *Proslogion*. This kind of contemplation also provides understanding (*intellectus*) in a full sense, but more modest forms of understanding (and contemplation) are also involved in the *Proslogion*.

Secondly, the *Proslogion* provides an explanation for Anselm’s conviction that the wayfarer cannot – as a rule, at least – achieve a direct vision of God during the present life. The single argument plays a role in Anselm’s argument for this view (*P* 15), even though we should not exaggerate that role.

As a third point, I would like to draw attention to the role of joy in the *Proslogion*. In the Preface to the *Proslogion*, Anselm refers to the joy that the discovery of the single argument had produced in him, and he expects it to ‘please’ the readers as well (HR 88). After Anselm has introduced the single argument in his treatment of God’s existence in Ch. 2–4, he ends by bursting into thanks for the understanding that he has achieved:

Thanks to You, good Lord, thanks to You – because what at first I believed through your giving, now by Your enlightening I understand to such an extent that [even] if I did not want to believe that You exist, I could not fail to understand [that You exist]. (*P* 4, S I, 104; HR 95)

The achieving of understanding is here presented as something joyful, and the source of that joy is the single argument. The joy of heaven, described in the last chapters (*P* 24–26), is something incomparably better, but the description of it is part of Anselm’s project of faith seeking understanding and becomes associated with it. In the *Proslogion* Anselm does not yet say that ‘the understanding which we acquire in this life is a middle-way between faith and sight’ nor that ‘the more anyone advances to understanding, the closer he comes to the actual seeing for which we all long’ (*Cur Deus homo*, *Commendatio operis*, S II, 39; HR 295), but the reader may nevertheless be induced to think of the joy of understanding as a foretaste of the joy in heaven.

IV

The preceding considerations support the following picture of the *Proslogion* and its relation to the *Monologion*. Anselm meant the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* as a pair of

works with a common objective and a common methodology. Even though the two treatises are written from two different perspectives (impersonal monologue vs. devotional address), they share the same rational point of departure. At the core of Anselm's argumentation in the *Proslogion*, there is a single argument which he understood to be strictly rational. Anselm introduced the single argument to his audience by making use of it in a devotional exercise, but the argument as such does not depend on the devotional context. Instead, one can say that the particular devotional exercise depends on the single argument, for some pieces of argument based on the single argument play an essential role in it.

This short description of the *Proslogion* in relation to the *Monologion* forms a coherent pattern. This is not yet the whole picture, however, as the puzzle pointed out earlier (at the end of Part II) indicates. If Anselm's aim in the *Proslogion* was to introduce a new strictly rational argument, why did he choose to introduce it by using it in a devotional exercise when he could have introduced it as well in a more explicit way better consonant with the argument's rational nature (say, in another *monologion* or in a dialogue)? To put it differently, why and how did the peculiar combination of argumentation and devotion that the *Proslogion* exhibits come about? Why is the *Proslogion* a *proslogion*? In the rest of this article, I shall sketch an answer to these questions. I shall maintain that Anselm tells less than the whole truth in the Preface to the *Proslogion*, and that the treatise should be read as a subtle defence of the rational method that he had been using in the *Monologion*. To achieve this, I shall offer a historical sketch which purports to locate the *Proslogion* in the context of conflicting views about theological method at the time of the composition of the treatise.

It appears that one need not go far to find a conflict about theological method, for there is the well-known episode related to the publication of the *Monologion*. After having completed the work, Anselm sent a copy of it to Lanfranc (ca. 1010–1089) – his old friend who had become Archbishop of Canterbury in the newly conquered England – in order that the latter should inspect it and suggest a title for it (*Letter 72*, S III, 193–4). The letter in which Lanfranc replied has not survived, but we can gather from Anselm's next letter (*Letter 77*, S III, 199–200) that he was dissatisfied with Anselm's method in the treatise: he insisted that there should have been references to the authoritative writings at some points of the work. As is well known, Anselm published the treatise without making the additions which Lanfranc had suggested. If the episode is told in this way, one gets the impression that there was a conflict about theological method between Anselm and Lanfranc.

If we complement the story, however, we will get a different picture. I shall develop the view that there was essentially no conflict between Anselm and Lanfranc but they worked together to avoid a conflict between Anselm and some other people. To do that, we shall have to re-evaluate some commonly accepted views.

To begin with, it is far from clear whether the characterisation of Anselm as a pupil of Lanfranc's meets the facts. For some years in the early 1060s, Anselm was Lanfranc's closest associate at Bec, but his role at the school of Bec was not so much that of a student as that of a teacher.¹⁴ Anselm had been absorbed in studies in his youth in Italy (Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi* I, 4, p. 6),¹⁵ and by the time he came into contact with Lanfranc, at the age of about 26, he already was a mature scholar. If someone wants to claim that Lanfranc taught something substantial to Anselm, s/he should produce some solid evidence for this view.

One quarter from which such evidence could be sought – and has been sought – is the treatise *De corpore et sanguine Domini* (*DCSD*),¹⁶ which Lanfranc published ca. 1063. It is often maintained that Lanfranc taught to Anselm a responsible way of using dialectic in

theology, and the *DCSD* is used to support this view. There is one fatal problem in this suggestion: it is based on a complete misunderstanding of the nature of the *DCSD*. The starting point for a correct appraisal of the *DCSD* is to acknowledge that it is a rhetorical work that does not primarily attempt to express its author's views but instead aims at creating impressions that suit the author's chosen purposes.¹⁷ Lanfranc shows no scruples in using the full arsenal of rhetorical devices in his polemical attack against Berengar, and this also applies to the passages in which he makes use of dialectic (see *DCSD* 7–8, 416D–418D). These passages aim at creating the impression that Lanfranc refutes Berengar's central arguments conclusively, even though he does not actually ever confront them. The use of dialectic in the *DCSD* is through and through sophistic. What is more, it is problematic to use the *DCSD* as evidence for any kind of influence from Lanfranc to Anselm, because the direction of the influence could be the opposite. Because Anselm was Lanfranc's closest associate, it is most likely that he was involved in the composition of the *DCSD*, but it was rhetorically expedient to present it as Lanfranc's work. Be that as it may, if Anselm was not one of those responsible for the treatise, he was nevertheless one of those few among the contemporaries who were fully conversant with what Lanfranc was doing.

The re-evaluation of 'Lanfranc's' *DCSD* affects the interpretation of the *Proslogion* in at least two ways. First, it helps us to understand the events around the *Monologion* that form the immediate historical context for the composition of the *Proslogion*. The *DCSD* was well received among its first audience and it served as a point of reference when talking about methodological issues. Even though it is sometimes suggested that the *DCSD* served to endorse the use of dialectic in theology, this is not the main thrust of the treatise in this matter. In his polemical attack against Berengar, Lanfranc creates a sharp contrast between authority and reason, and he accuses Berengar of abandoning authority and taking refuge in dialectic. In opposition to Berengar's alleged policy, the *DCSD* recommends the use of authority arguments and strives to discredit the use of reason and dialectic in matters of faith (*DCSD* 7–8, 416D–418D; *DCSD* 17, 426D–427B). Anselm's method in the *Monologion* is the very opposite of what the *DCSD* recommends. Anselm chooses not to appeal to authority and proceeds by reason alone, and the use of dialectic also has a prominent role in the *Monologion*.¹⁸ There certainly are ingredients for a theological conflict here.

Given the rhetorical nature of the *DCSD*, it is highly understandable why Anselm turned to Lanfranc when he needed advice on the publication of the *Monologion*. Even though it would not be accurate to name the *DCSD* as the only cause of Anselm's troubles, it nevertheless seriously aggravated his difficulties, and Lanfranc was a person – most likely the only person – who could fully appreciate his situation. It was a wise choice from Anselm's part to have recourse to his old friend, and Lanfranc did not let him down. From Lanfranc's letter (which has not survived), even though it contained some criticism, Anselm could gather that Lanfranc would not obstruct the publication of the treatise and that he was willing to give his help. Lanfranc had suggested that they should meet to discuss the *Monologion*, and Anselm embraced this suggestion (*Letter 77*, S III, 200). Contrary to what the short version of the episode between Anselm and Lanfranc suggests (see above), such a meeting did take place – this is another major point regarding which the usual story needs to be complemented. Lanfranc visited the monastery of Bec at least twice during his lengthy sojourn in Normandy in September–October 1077.¹⁹ The first surviving manuscript of the *Monologion* appears to represent the state of the treatise after Lanfranc and Anselm had met, and Anselm probably did not circulate the treatise before their meeting. No record of the meeting (or meetings) has survived, but the subsequent course of

events is best understood if we assume that Anselm and Lanfranc agreed on some measures to soften the effect of the *Monologion*. First, a Preface was added to the *Monologion*. In the Preface, Anselm makes it clear that, in spite of the rational method, the substantial ideas in the treatise are consonant with the writings of Augustine (*M*, Preface, HR 2). Further, Anselm claims that the use of the rational method was not his idea but that of some brothers who had urged the writing of the treatise in the first place (HR 1). Anselm also lets us understand that only those with a thorough familiarity with Augustine's *De trinitate* are competent to evaluate the treatise (HR 2), which is also a clever rhetorical move. Secondly, it appears that in the end Lanfranc was willing to give his protection to the treatise. A new letter of dedication addressed to Lanfranc (S I, 5–6; omitted in HR) was composed to express this. It is implausible to assume that Anselm added this letter at the head of the treatise without Lanfranc's consent.²⁰ Thirdly, it is likely that Anselm also asked Lanfranc's advice regarding his plan for a new treatise he was working on in which the same rational method would be used in a different setting.²¹

The second way in which the re-evaluation of the *DCSD* affects the interpretation of the *Proslogion* is related to the role of rhetoric. Correctly interpreted, the *DCSD* makes it clear that eleventh-century authors could at best have a very conscious relation to texts and writing. The treatise gives the impression of being a spontaneous outburst, but in reality it is a carefully elaborated attempt to mislead the audience and make it react in certain ways that suit the author's chosen purposes. The *Proslogion* can also be read as a rhetorical work that intends to bring about some carefully chosen effects in the reader. There is, however, an important moral difference between the two works. The effectiveness of the *DCSD* depends on its ability to mislead the audience permanently, and therefore it can be said to represent a doubtful or bad use of rhetoric. By contrast, the effect of the *Proslogion* will be much the same even if the reader is fully conversant with what Anselm is doing.

What I want to suggest is that the *Proslogion* is a rhetorical attempt to justify the use of rational method in theology. The attempt is rhetorical, because Anselm does not say what he is doing, he uses indirect means, and the will and emotions play a central role in the attempt. The basic idea in the *Proslogion* is to make the reader deeply involved in the rational analysis of faith before s/he starts to suspect anything and to make him or her enjoy it. The devotional exercise in the *Proslogion* aims at making the reader better disposed towards the use of reason in matters of faith by producing certain intellectual, volitional and emotional effects within him or her (cf. Part III above).²² Intellectually, the attempt to contemplate God in the *Proslogion* aims to create what Anselm considers a realistic view about the power and limits of reason. In his view, it is possible to demonstrate a large number of truths about God with the aid of reason already in this life, but the vision of God 'as He is' is to be expected in the life to come as a reward promised to the faithful. Volitionally, Anselm wants to kindle in the heart of the reader a love of understanding, and for this purpose he develops the idea of 'faith seeking understanding'. Emotionally, Anselm wants to make the reader feel the joy of understanding. A central vehicle in this is his single argument, which makes it possible, Anselm believes, to intuit the rational necessity of everything that Christians believe about the Divine Essence. Together with the intellectual effect, the volitional and emotional effects create a favourable disposition toward the use of reason in matters of faith. If the love of understanding is kindled in you and you have felt the joy of understanding, you cannot consider the rational arguments that serve as vehicles for this as all bad.

The rhetorical viewpoint explains the discrepancy between the different elements in the *Proslogion* as we know it. In its original form, the *Proslogion* did not contain any preface or

division into chapters; the only commenting element in it was the title 'Faith seeking understanding'.²³ The *Proslogion* was circulated in this form for some years, and it is likely that many readers got it in their hands before the *Monologion*. In the original form of the *Proslogion*, the devotional character of the treatise is in the foreground, and only a hardened professional anti-intellectualist could be dissatisfied with its view on faith and reason. Some years later, Anselm added the Preface and the chapter titles. In the Preface, he underlines the rational, argumentative aspect in the *Proslogion* and the continuity between it and the *Monologion* (cf. Part I above). What is striking in the Preface is that it says so little about the devotional exercise in the *Proslogion*. I would say that we should view the Preface not so much as an unbiased introduction to a new text but as an attempt to make the audience see a familiar text (viz., the *Proslogion*) in a new light. The Preface to the *Proslogion* also puts the *Monologion* in a new light: because the two treatises are part of the same project, the *Monologion* can also be read as an expression of faith seeking understanding. In a third stage, the rational aspect of the *Proslogion* became further accentuated when Anselm appended to the treatise Gaunilo's critique and his own reply to it (Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi* I, 19, p. 31). Because these appendices help a great deal in the correct interpretation of the *Proslogion*, it was very fortunate for Anselm – and for us – that Gaunilo took the trouble to put his criticisms into writing (unless they were fabricated by some of Anselm's friends, which is more than merely a theoretical possibility).

Notes

1 Gene Fendt, 'The Relation of *Monologion* and *Proslogion*', *The Heythrop Journal* 46 (2005), pp. 149–66 (here p. 158). Even though the present article has been inspired by Fendt's essay, it should not be seen as a reply to it but as an attempt to see the same issues from a different perspective.

2 Of the vast secondary literature related to Anselm's *Proslogion*, I would like to mention: M. J. Charlesworth, *St. Anselm's Proslogion with a Reply on Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilo and the Author's Reply to Gaunilo*. Translated with an Introduction and Philosophical Commentary by M. J. Charlesworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); J. Hick and A. C. McGill (eds.), *The Many-Faced Argument: Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God* (New York: Macmillan, 1967); Richard Campbell, *From Belief to Understanding: A Study of Anselm's Proslogion Argument on the Existence of God* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1976); Gregory Schufreider, *Confessions of a Rational Mystic: Anselm's Early Writings* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 1994). In B. Davies and B. Leftow (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), there are several articles which are relevant: G. R. Evans, 'Anselm's Life, Works, and Immediate Influence', pp. 5–31; Marilyn McCord Adams, 'Anselm on Faith and Reason', pp. 32–60; Gareth Matthews, 'Anselm, Augustine, and Platonism', pp. 61–83; Brian Leftow, 'Anselm's Perfect-Being Theology', pp. 132–56; Brian Davies, 'Anselm and the Ontological Argument', pp. 157–78.

3 Cf. Adams, 'Anselm on Faith', pp. 34–8, 50–2.

4 In the short references included in the text, the abbreviations *M*, *P* and *R* refer to Anselm's *Monologion*, *Proslogion* and *Responsio* (= *Quid ad haec respondeat editor ipsius libelli*), respectively. For example, *M* 1 refers to Ch. 1 of the *Monologion*. For the Latin text of Anselm's writings, I have used the *Opera omnia* edition by F. S. Schmitt (6 vols., Edinburgh: Nelson, 1946–1961). For the English text, I have used the *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, tr. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (Minneapolis: Banning Press, 2000), often silently or explicitly modifying it. The abbreviation *S* refers to Schmitt's edition and the abbreviation *HR* to the translation by Hopkins and Richardson. For example, 'S I, 13; HR 7' refers to p. 13 in vol. I of Schmitt's edition and p. 7 in the English translation.

5 In regard to the theological subject matter that Anselm specifies in *De incarnatione verbi* 6, it is the *Monologion* that meets the description better. In the *Proslogion* there is only one chapter about the Trinity, viz. Ch. 23, and in it the Trinitarian nature of God is rather assumed than argued for. In the *Monologion*, Anselm uses more than a third of the work (*M* 29–63) to establish that there is a Trinitarian structure within the Supreme Being. In his joint characterisation of the two treatises, Anselm describes what they jointly establish on the basis of a common methodology.

6 Hopkins and Richardson translate *unum argumentum* as 'a single consideration' – for the reason that they find the rendering 'single argument' misleading, it would seem.

7 For a short survey of the different views on the single argument, see Toivo J. Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology in the Eleventh Century*. Studien und Texte zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 54 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 133–5.

8 P 2, S I, 101–2; HR 93–4: ‘But surely that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be only in the understanding. For if it were only in the understanding, it could be thought to exist also in reality – something which is greater [than existing only in the understanding]. Therefore, if that than which a greater cannot be thought were only in the understanding, then that than which a greater *cannot* be thought would be that than which a greater *can* be thought! But surely this [conclusion] is impossible. Hence, without doubt, something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the understanding and in reality.’ P 3, S I, 102–3; HR 94.

9 See Toivo J. Holopainen, ‘Anselm’s *Argumentum* and the Early Medieval Theory of Argument’, *Vivarium* 45 (2007), 1–29.

10 P 2, S I, 101; HR 93: ‘But surely when this very same Fool hears my words ‘something than which nothing greater can be thought’, he understands what he hears. And what he understands is in his understanding, even if he does not understand [i.e., judge] it to exist. For that a thing is in the understanding is distinct from understanding that [this] thing exists. . . . So even the Fool is convinced that something than which nothing greater can be thought is at least in his understanding; for when he hears of this [being], he understands [what he hears], and whatever is understood is in the understanding.’

11 In *Proslogion* 18, the use of the single argument is less explicit than in the other cases. Anselm argues that some consequences are ‘foreign to You, than whom nothing better can be thought’ (HR 105).

12 See Schufreider, *Confessions*, esp. pp. 97–112, 174–5, 187–230; Adams, ‘Anselm on Faith’, pp. 34–8, 50–2.

13 See also Toivo J. Holopainen, ‘Anselm’s *Proslogion* as an Attempt at Contemplating God’, in C. Viola and J. Kormos (eds.), *Rationality from Saint Augustine to Saint Anselm* (Piliscsaba, Hungary: Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 2005), pp. 185–95.

14 Cf. Evans, ‘Anselm’s Life’, pp. 5–6: ‘Lanfranc, like Anselm, was an educated and able Italian. . . . Anselm was apparently soon involved by Lanfranc in the teaching, for he must have been a useful acquisition to the little school.’

15 Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (Vita Anselmi)*, ed. and tr. R. W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

16 Lanfranc of Canterbury, *De corpore et sanguine Domini (DCSD)*, ed. J.-P. Migne. Patrologia Latina 150 (Paris, 1880), coll. 407–42. The text needs to be amended with the aid of collations published in Jean de Montclos, *Lanfranc et Bérenger: La controverse eucharistique du XIe siècle*. Spicilegium Sacrum Lovaniense 37 (Leuven 1971), pp. 540–5.

17 For the rhetorical nature of the *DCSD*, see Margaret Gibson, *Lanfranc of Bec* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), pp. 84–7; Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology*, pp. 59–67; Toivo J. Holopainen, ‘Logic and Theology in the Eleventh Century: Anselm and Lanfranc’s Heritage’, in G. E. M. Gasper and H. Kohlenberger (eds.), *Anselm and Abelard: Investigations and Juxtapositions* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2006), pp. 1–16.

18 For the use of dialectic in the *Monologion*, see Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology*, pp. 124–6, 129–32.

19 H. E. J. Cowdrey, *Lanfranc: Scholar, Monk, and Archbishop* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 207, 211. I was not aware of Lanfranc’s visits to Bec when writing Holopainen, ‘Logic and Theology’.

20 Cf. Cowdrey, *Lanfranc*, p. 211: ‘While there is no certainty, it is likely that a further letter of Anselm to Lanfranc about the book is to be associated with Lanfranc’s visits to Bec. It was not included in any collection of Anselm’s letters, but was preserved at the head of some manuscripts of the *Monologion*. . . . These features of the letter are pointers to further consideration, perhaps after face-to-face talks between Anselm and Lanfranc at Bec. If this were so, the most likely outcome that can be envisaged is that Lanfranc, perhaps in deference to the wishes and needs of a new generation of monks at Bec, conceded a *nilhil obstat* to a suitably amended text without giving positive approval.’ Against Richard Southern, Cowdrey argues that the personal relations of Lanfranc and Anselm did not suffer in the affair (*ibid.*, pp. 208–11). My view differs from Cowdrey’s in that I would like to see Lanfranc as positively helping Anselm, even though he had to be cautious in doing so. In the background is the difference in the evaluation of the *DCSD*: Cowdrey does not question the sincerity of the *DCSD* (see *ibid.*, pp. 38–45, 59–74) – and therefore he cannot take into account the possibility that Anselm might have been involved in the composition of it.

21 See also Cowdrey, *Lanfranc*, p. 211 (also footnote 31).

22 Cf. Adams, ‘Anselm on Faith’, pp. 34–8, 50–2. Adams emphasises the connection between the intellectual, volitional and emotional aspects in the *Proslogion* and says that Anselm’s understanding of the human inquiry is ‘wholistic’ (*ibid.*, p. 52). Without denying that Adams has a point, I have emphasised above the independence of the intellectual core in the *Proslogion* from the volitional and emotional aspects of the treatise. I also want to suggest that the holistic nature of the exercise in the *Proslogion* can – partly, at least – have a mundane explanation: the art of rhetoric is based on a holistic view of human communication. Anselm also shows great rhetorical skill in the other prayers that he wrote.

23 See P, Preface, S I, 94; HR 89 as well as the critical apparatus in S I, 93, 95 and 97 (*Priores recensioni*).