

The Cambridge Companion
to
ANSELM



EDITED BY
**BRIAN DAVIES AND
BRIAN LEFTOW**

The Cambridge Companion to Anselm

Each volume of this series of companions to major philosophers contains specially commissioned essays by an international team of scholars, together with a substantial bibliography, and will serve as a reference work for students and non-specialists. One aim of the series is to dispel the intimidation such readers often feel when faced with the work of a difficult and challenging thinker.

Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Benedictine monk and the second Norman Archbishop of Canterbury, is regarded as one of the most important philosophers and theologians of the Middle Ages. The essays in this volume explore all of his major ideas, both philosophical and theological, including his teachings on faith and reason, God's existence and nature, logic, freedom, truth, ethics, and key Christian doctrines. There is also discussion of his life, the sources of his thought, and his influence on other thinkers.

New readers will find this the most convenient, accessible guide to Anselm currently available. Advanced students and specialists will find a conspectus of recent developments in the interpretation of Anselm.

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CHRONOLOGY

1033

Born in Aosta, Italy

1056–59

Leaves home and travels through Burgundy and France

1059

Arrives at the Abbey of Bec, Normandy; studies under Lanfranc

1060

Becomes a monk at Bec

1060–63

Probably working on *De Grammatico*

1063

Becomes Prior of Bec

1070–75

Produces his first *Prayers and Meditations*

1075–76

Writes the *Monologion*

1077–78

Writes the *Proslogion*

1078

Becomes Abbot of Bec

1080–86

Writes *De Veritate*, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, and *De Casu Diaboli*

1093

Becomes Archbishop of Canterbury

1094

Completes *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*

1095–98

Writes *Cur Deus Homo*

1097–1100

Away from England in France and Italy because of conflict with King William II

1100

Returns to England

1101

Completes *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*

1103–1106

Away from England again because of conflict with King Henry I; visits Bec, Chartres, Lyons, Rouen, and Jumièges

1107–1108

Completes the *De Concordia*

1109

Dies at Canterbury on 21 April

ABBREVIATIONS

Commendatio

Commendatio Operis ad Urbanum Papam

De Casu Diab.

De Casu Diaboli

De Conc.

De Concordia Praescientiae et Praedestinationis et Gratiae Dei cum Libero Arbitrio

De Conc. Virg.

De Conceptu Virginali et de Originali Peccato

De Gramm.

De Grammatico

De Inc. Verbi

Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi

De Lib. Arb.

De Libertate Arbitrii

De Proc.

De Processione Spiritus Sancti

De Ver.

De Veritate

Mon.

Monologion

Phil. Frag.

Philosophica Fragmenta

Prosl.

Proslogion

Resp. and Gaun.

Responsio ad Gaunilon

While some of the contributors to the present volume have chosen to cite texts of

Anselm by referring directly to Anselm's writings, others have given details alluding to the critical edition of Anselm (*Opera Omnia*) edited by F. S. Schmitt (listed in the bibliography). In their references "S" = "Schmitt."

Introduction

Brian Davies and Brian Leftow

Anselm of Canterbury is at once one of the best- and least-known of medieval thinkers. Two chapters of his third major work (*Proslogion* 2 and 3) are almost notorious. Commonly said to contain the first “ontological argument” for God’s existence, they are widely read and studied even at the undergraduate level, and they continue to puzzle both atheist and theist philosophers. Yet the rest of Anselm’s writings have been less subject to scrutiny. Many philosophers and students of philosophy know little about them, which is regrettable. Anselm had much more to offer about God than a single argument for His existence. And he also had much to say on a range of other topics, some of it still well worth attention.

The purpose of this book is to introduce readers to the range of Anselm’s thinking in a way that will help them to reflect on it for themselves. So, as well as including a chapter on the arguments to be found in *Proslogion* 2 and 3 ([chapter 7](#)), and one on Anselm on God in general ([chapter 6](#)), the volume includes accounts of how Anselm thought about a number of other matters. Readers who work seriously through Anselm’s writings will find that he had things to say on matters of religious epistemology, logic, the nature of truth, the reality and significance of human freedom, and the evaluation of human behaviour. In what follows, therefore, readers will find discussions of Anselm covering all these concerns. They will, in addition, find discussions of how Anselm can be situated against his intellectual background, one dominated by the Bible and the writings of St. Augustine (354–430), and of how he applied his mind to questions arising from key Christian doctrines such as the teaching that God is somehow three in one, and the claim that people are saved by virtue of Christ.

The present volume forms part of a series devoted to major philosophers, and one might wonder whether there is anything philosophical to be gained from a study of Anselm on Christian theology. Yet a sharp distinction between philosophy and theology (now-adays a rigid one with some people) would have seemed puzzling to Anselm, not to mention many of his intellectual ancestors and heirs. For Anselm, what mattered was thinking well about matters of importance. So, even when he is discussing items of Christian doctrine (as opposed to what are clearly “philosophical topics”), he aims to draw on the best he can provide in the way of right thinking. In other words, Anselm’s theology is very much that of a philosopher (taking “philosopher” to mean “someone

concerned to argue for conclusions in a cogent way”). So, unless we (surely unreasonably?) rule in advance that no discussion of Christian doctrine can be of philosophical interest, Anselm is of interest as a philosopher (on the understanding of “philosopher” just given) even as he attempts to do what might simply be described as “theology.” For he clearly had a formidable intellect, which shows itself in almost everything he wrote, as the chapters which follow indicate. He never wrote anything which one might imagine editors of contemporary philosophical journals to be happy to publish. It is, however, significant that editors of many contemporary philosophical journals happily publish articles on aspects of Anselm’s thinking.

Anselm’s life was not one of which Hollywood is likely to make a film. As Gillian Evans notes in [chapter 1](#), it was basically the life of a Benedictine monk. Born in 1033, Anselm joined the Abbey of Bec in 1060. He was only twenty-seven at the time, and he lived in a monastic context until the time of his death in 1109. As Evans also explains, however, to say this is not to imply that Anselm spent his entire life behind the walls of a cloister, nor is it to say that his thinking was bound by any walls. Even as Abbot of Bec (1078–93) Anselm had to travel on monastic business, and from 1093, when he became Archbishop of Canterbury, he was much involved in what are sometimes quaintly called “worldly affairs.” Readers of Anselm should, however, note that what we now think of as universities are very much the successors to monasteries such as those (at Bec and Canterbury) in which Anselm lived. There was nothing in Anselm’s day that seriously compares with what we mean by the word “university.” But there were places in which people treasured the literature of antiquity and thought about the questions it raised. When he first arrived at Bec, Anselm encountered a school presided over by Lanfranc (c. 1005–89), himself a notable medieval intellectual, and Anselm spent much of his monastic life teaching and discussing. He was not an academic in the modern sense, but much of his time was devoted to thoroughly academic matters. Anselm’s world was one in which people felt free to argue. Some fruits of these arguments can be found in Anselm’s writings.

In spite of their origin and their profoundly theological orientation, many of Anselm’s writings appeal to nothing other than what any thinking person might be expected to accept. Take, for example, the prologue to his *Monologion*. Here Anselm explains that he wrote the book at the instigation of some of his fellow monks, who wanted “a kind of model meditation” on things he previously said to them about “the essence of the divine.” The word “meditation” echoes the Rule of Saint Benedict, in which monks are encouraged to chew over and think about (to meditate on) texts like the Bible. So Anselm is clearly out to help his fellow monks when it comes to what they are all about simply by being monks. As he proceeds, however, he does not seem to be preaching only to the choir. His brief, he says, is to proceed on this basis:

Nothing whatsoever to be argued on the basis of the authority of Scripture, but the constraints of reason concisely to prove, and the clarity of truth clearly to show, in the plain style, with everyday arguments, and down-to-earth dialectic, the conclusions of distinct investigations.

In a letter to Anselm, Lanfranc expressed disapproval of the *Monologion* because of its lack of appeal to ecclesiastical authority, and one can easily see why Lanfranc was worried. Even though its conclusions are of theological significance, the *Monologion* is clearly out to offer philosophical rather than theological reasoning. The same can be said of much else that Anselm wrote and it would, therefore, be absurd to deny him the title “philosopher.”

During his lifetime, Anselm met intellectual opposition from at least two notable figures, Gaunilo of Marmoutiers (dates unknown) and Roscelin of Compiègne (d. 1125), and, though his “ontological argument” is exceedingly well known, it has also been much criticized. It was even rejected by no less a medieval heavyweight than Thomas Aquinas (1224/6–1274), according to whom it claims more knowledge of God’s nature than people actually have, and according to whom it also moves illicitly from what a word means to the conclusion that something exists to correspond to it (*Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 10–11; *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 2,1). Other medieval authors, however (especially those with more of a taste for Augustinian ways of thinking than Aquinas had), were happy to cite Anselm as an authority, and in the last hundred years or more he has been studied and written about with considerable admiration.

Interest in medieval ideas is now something of a growth industry, and Anselm ranks as one of the figures most worked over in this connection, especially at the hands of people with an interest in philosophy of religion. However, with the exception of R. W. Southern’s magisterial *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge, 1990), and apart from some notable works by Jasper Hopkins (for example *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm*, Minneapolis, 1972) and G. R. Evans (for example *Anselm*, London, 1989), there is little on Anselm to which students and general readers can be referred. That is the chief reason for this book. We believe that it fills a gap, and we hope that its readers will find that it does so in a useful way, one which might prompt them to further reflection on Anselm.

1 Anselm's life, works, and immediate influence

G. R. Evans

A book like this has to give a picture not only of the modern philosophical and theological interest of its subject's writings, but of the context in which he wrote. For a writer whose works have been the subject of debate for nearly a millennium, there is the additional task of seeking to convey the changing nuances of expectation with which he was read century by century. All this is of more than historical importance. To discuss in translation the thought of someone who chose his words very carefully in Latin is not necessarily to discuss exactly what he wrote. And to analyze ideas out of context is to discuss matters which, while they may be of high philosophical interest in themselves, may also not be exactly the topics or the solutions Anselm had in mind.

Anselm of Bec and Canterbury is read as a thinker in his own right and not merely as a prominent exponent of a mode of thought belonging to a particular period of medieval thought. Nevertheless, he was in a number of respects a man of his time and the thought itself was conditioned by personal and historical circumstances which need to be understood if his ideas are to be interpreted with sensitivity to what preoccupied him and what he meant to say. This chapter is biographical and historical; it seeks to provide a brief but necessary context and to encourage the reader to consider in this light the "Anselmian" complexion of the topics covered in other chapters.

THE SOURCES: FRIENDS AND WITNESSES

The evidence about Anselm's life and writings includes a body of materials unusually full for a figure of his period, and coming from sources often close to their subject. Anselm had a biographer who was Boswell to his Johnson in a way which was extremely uncommon in the confined and convention-ridden hagiographical world of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Eadmer met Anselm in 1079 when Anselm was forty-six and Eadmer probably barely twenty. They met again when Anselm came to England and entered on his period as archbishop, and from 1092/3 they were in one another's company a good deal in the community at Canterbury where Anselm did his best to recreate the life he had formerly enjoyed at Bec.

Eadmer's *Life (Vita Anselmi)* is first-hand in places, for he was living with Anselm in the same community for many of his later years. Parts of his account are drawn from

Anselm's own replies, on the occasions when Eadmer questioned him about his youth and early life with this biography in mind. Only from Anselm himself can Eadmer have obtained the description of his well-born Italian parents, the generous but spendthrift father and the conscientious mother who was careful with money.¹

In about 1100 Anselm was made aware that Eadmer was writing his *Life*. Once he had given this information some thought, he asked Eadmer to destroy what he had written. Eadmer did as he was told, but he admits that he made a copy. Nevertheless, from that point it was difficult for him, in conscience, to go on actively working on it. So the *Life* is weaker on the events towards the end of Anselm's life. After Anselm's death, when the need for a record of his miracles became more important, Eadmer's *Life* began to mutate from biography to hagiography as, with successive copyings, Eadmer added a little to the miraculous stories.

Eadmer was a historian; he wrote another book, *The History of Recent Events* (*Historia Novorum*) in which he was able to tell the story of Anselm in another mode, which he intended to be complementary to the *Life*. In its preface he explains that his contemporaries are anxious to know about the deeds of those who lived before them, desiring to be comforted and fortified by the examples they have set. The story that Eadmer has to tell begins with the Norman Conquest and the archbishopric of Lanfranc at Canterbury. Then he introduces Anselm, his spiritual "hero," a man as good as he is learned and at the same time dedicated to the contemplative life. So the *History of Recent Events* becomes something not wholly separate in its purposes from the *Life*.

Anselm became famous for his conversation and for the addresses he gave to communities of monks on his travels. Talk is of its nature evanescent, but Anselm had loyal and diligent admirers, who made an attempt to preserve a record. One of these was Eadmer himself. Another was the monk Alexander of the Canterbury community. There seems to have been a third who cannot so confidently be identified.

The chronicler William of Malmesbury (c. 1080 – c. 1143) took a keen interest in the preservation of the Anselmian literary remains,² and he records, consciously treading in the footsteps of Eadmer, a number of features of Anselm's archbishopric.³ Guibert of Nogent, who regarded Anselm as a major influence on his life, describes in his autobiography (*De Vita Sua*) how Anselm visited the monastery at Fly and how he helped him "manage his inner man" using a conventional phrase for the soul or "inner man" (*interior homo*). Gundulf, a friend and pupil of Anselm and monk of Bec who became Bishop of Rochester, is the subject of a *Life* by one of the Rochester community. It provides another significant contemporary view of Anselm and the flavour of his dealings with others. There is a description of the way Anselm would talk and

Gundulph would weep, watering with his tears the seeds Anselm was sowing.

Anselm's pleasure in finding someone able to meet him even briefly on his own ground as an equal is obvious in the delight he took in the reply to the *Proslogion* argument which he received from the monk Gaunilo of Marmoutiers. That can be seen even where there is no body of writing from the friend in question to tell us what he thought. Boso, who arrived at Bec about 1085, and eventually became its fourth abbot, was apparently one of the relatively few of his own monks who could give Anselm a good argument. He included in *On the Virgin Conception* a recognition of the way Boso had taken the lead among his friends in encouraging him to complete the *Cur Deus Homo*.⁴ The *Life* of Boso describes his arrival at Bec and the impact, both intellectual and pastoral, that Anselm had on him.⁵ When Anselm moved to England, he asked to have Boso with him, and Boso crossed the sea to join him. Anselm trusted him enough, according to the *Life*, to send him to the Council of Clermont in 1095, when he was not able to go himself. Anselm's exile found Boso returning to Bec, but on his return from his second exile, Anselm asked the Bec community if he might have Boso back to be his companion and Boso returned to England.

ANSELM'S LIFE AND WRITINGS

Eadmer's story of Anselm's life is not without its tales of the miraculous and its improving moral lessons. But it is also true biography in the sense that it preserves a great deal of what Anselm trustingly told to the enquiring Eadmer as a friend and confidant. One of the conventions of the hagiographer was the inclusion of a vision, usually the vision of the saint's mother while she was pregnant with him. Anselm evidently provided his own, genuine, vision. He told Eadmer that he had had a dream when he was a small boy. His mother had told him that God is in heaven and rules over all things and he had imagined heaven as resting on top of the mountains which surrounded his home. In his dream he was told to climb to the top of the mountain and there he found God sitting like a great king in his court. They talked and the king's steward brought him white bread to eat. When he woke, he believed he had been in heaven.⁶ Eadmer says he became a studious boy, pious and generally beloved, partly perhaps as a consequence of this vision.

The small boy became an adolescent. He lost interest in study; his mother died, and with the loss of this "anchor" he was afloat on a sea of worldly enjoyments. Eadmer describes the break-up of the family. Anselm's father became hostile. Nothing Anselm could do would please him. Anselm decided to leave home, giving up his hope of inheriting the family estate, and for three years he wandered in Burgundy.⁷ Probably he was doing what other young men of his generation did, and "sampling" the teaching on

offer from various peripatetic masters in this generation before the first glimmerings of what were to become the universities were visible. In due course, Eadmer reports, he arrived at the newly founded abbey of Bec, where Lanfranc (c. 1005–89) was famously teaching at the invitation of the founder-abbot Herluin (d. 1078),⁸ who was himself not a lettered man but a retired soldier.

At Bec an innovative kind of school had been set up by Lanfranc. Pupils were flocking to him who had no plans to become monks, but wanted a good education – itself a striking sign of the times. Lanfranc, like Anselm, was an educated and able Italian. Anselm found him lecturing on works of classical logic and rhetoric, as well as teaching the study of the Bible, and his own intellectual formation in these areas was correspondingly strengthened.

The chronicler Orderic Vitalis later described this school, leaning heavily on the account in the *Life* of Eadmer. “A great foundation of the study of the liberal arts and the study of Scripture was laid at Bec by Lanfranc and it was magnificently expanded by Anselm.” Anselm was apparently soon involved by Lanfranc in the teaching, for he must have been a useful acquisition to the little school.⁹

After he had been at Bec for a time, Anselm decided to become a monk himself. It struck him that he was leading a life of simplicity, hard work, dedication, and lack of sleep which would be very little different if he became a monk of Bec. There was some inward wrestling, described by Eadmer, who must have heard of these musings from Anselm’s own lips. To stay at Bec would mean being eclipsed as a teacher by the older and more established Lanfranc. To go to Cluny, as was then fashionable, would mean abandoning his studies; in that way he could spare himself the risk of intellectual pride by submerging himself in ritual. Then again, he could go somewhere else, and stand out as a local intellectual leader. Then he came to himself and realized that if he seriously wanted to become a monk, he should not be considering where the best career advantage might lie.¹⁰ He asked advice. He went to Lanfranc and set out his options as he saw them: to become a monk; to go into a hermitage; or to return to his home, for by now his father was dead and his inheritance of the family estates had come to him. He had an idea of living there and helping the poor. He chose the (still flourishing) community of Bec.¹¹

Having made his decision, he committed himself completely. Here we depend on Eadmer’s praise of the wholeheartedness with which he put from him all worldly interests and set about mastering the Scriptures and practicing “speculation,” the word used at the time (probably because that was the way Boethius used it), to describe theological study.¹²

Eadmer puts Anselm's theological acumen down to his spirituality. The three years he spent in prayers and spiritual exercises when he first became a monk gave him a power of seeing into divine mysteries, he says. Indeed, by Eadmer's account, he could even see through solid walls.¹³ He was remorseless in his spiritual exercises, in fasting and vigils and prayer, and untiring in his encouragement of others. This bred resentment and a dislike of him in some quarters, but Eadmer says he won round the resentful by his peaceable behavior.¹⁴

With beginners in the monastic life, Anselm could be a hard taskmaster. The young monk Osbern became his special protégé and Anselm first treated him gently and then increasingly harshly in order to strip away his childishness and make him grow up in the faith. Osbern suddenly died, just as he reached his spiritual maturity,¹⁵ and Anselm's grief is noticeable in his letters in the year after Osbern's death, as he wrote round asking for prayers to be said for his soul.¹⁶ This picture of a severe and demanding Anselm contrasts with the quite different picture of a gentle Anselm that Eadmer paints later in his *Life*. Anselm in conversation with an abbot was told about the bad behaviour of the abbot's young monks. The abbot said he beat them day and night and their behaviour did not improve at all. Anselm drew a comparison for him with the way a sapling would respond if, after it was planted, it was enclosed so tightly and remorselessly that it could not grow normally. Naturally boys would grow up twisted if they were denied freedom to develop. The boys needed encouragement and gentle persuasion.¹⁷

By now Anselm had become prior, in succession to Lanfranc, who had moved to Caen in 1063. He found his duties burdensome and a distraction and disruptive of his former tranquillity. Anselm tended to react to events rather than to seek systematically to control them. He was manifestly not naturally a good administrator. Letters to Lanfranc¹⁸ are revealing about these shortcomings, for example in the efficient handling of money. He even went to the Archbishop of Rouen to ask whether he might be allowed to return to his former simple life. He did not get his wish. He was told that it was his duty to continue with his pastoral burden and that if a higher office was offered him he ought to accept that too.¹⁹

When Lanfranc left, Anselm also took charge of the teaching at Bec. His pupils continued to be both clerics and lay students, according to Orderic Vitalis. In fact, it is probable that with the departure of Lanfranc the school ceased to take external pupils, such as the sons of the local nobility, and became a true monastic school, in which Anselm was able to foster in a leisurely way over the long term the development of the minds and souls of young and more mature monks. Under him the monks developed capacities which made them all appear to Orderic like "seeming philosophers."²⁰

After ten years of study with his pupils and on his own account, chiefly in the Bible and the works of Augustine (354–430), Anselm began to write. He is the author of a series of works of philosophical theology and also a collection of prayers and meditations and several hundred surviving letters. He was an author who did not “publish” until he was quite sure what he wanted to say and how he wanted to say it. Toward the end of his life Augustine of Hippo went through his own writings and composed the “Retractationes,” in which he admitted that there were some things he would, with hindsight, have said differently. There are no “retractions” from Anselm. Moreover, the early manuscript tradition shows that he was extremely vigilant about the copying of the treatises, apparently supervising even the punctuation.

This is important for two reasons. With any thinker who died before the invention of printing there are bound to be questions about the comparative reliability of surviving manuscript copies. Where the writings are philosophical or theological, exactness about the text is particularly important. The second reason is that the method of composition of a writer is informative when it comes to judging what he was trying to say in its contemporary context, both of external influences upon him and of the inward processes of development of his thinking.

Anselm wrote his first book, the *Monologion* (1076), as a theological meditation on the divine being which is also a work of philosophy. Anselm’s method, as he describes it, was to invite his monks to begin from what they themselves knew of the good, and to climb in their thought to higher and higher goods until they began to glimpse, not God himself, for He is ultimately beyond human comprehension, but a clearer idea of what He must be like. Eadmer has something to say about the methodology too. “Putting aside all authority of Holy Scripture,” he says, Anselm explored and discovered “what God is,” “by reason alone” (*sola ratione*). The aim was not of course to find in reasoning an alternative to the study of Scripture; it was to bring the enquirer to the realization that when he had done his reasoning he would find that he arrived where faith would also take him.²¹

In the *Monologion* this same experimental method led Anselm on to consider other aspects of the divine nature and then to examine the mystery of the Trinity. Anselm’s chief model at this early stage of his authorship remained the works of Augustine, and the *Monologion* shows repeated borrowing from Augustine’s *De Trinitate* (*On the Trinity*). Augustine thought he saw in the way that will, memory, and understanding are all present in a single person, an image of the manner in which God may be three and still one. That imagery is borrowed by Anselm.

His next book, the *Proslogion* (c. 1077–78), preserves Anselm’s single most notable long-term achievement, what Kant labelled the “ontological argument” for the existence of God (perhaps misrepresenting its thrust in his own discussion). The principle which is the foundation-stone of the *Monologion*, that God is the best and greatest of all things, perhaps prefigures the notion to be adumbrated in the *Proslogion*’s ontological argument that God is that than which nothing “greater” can be thought. But the *Monologion*, Anselm saw, consisted of “a chain of many arguments.” So he began to search for “a single argument” which would prove not only that God exists but all the other things Christians believe about Him. The answer came to him, after much distractedness, and many moments when he was almost persuaded to give up the search, in a moment of delighted insight.

Again Eadmer is illuminating. He describes the distractedness, how Anselm could not sleep, lost his appetite, and was unable to concentrate on worship, which was, to his own way of thinking, much the most worrying of his symptoms. Indeed, it made him think that the attempt to find his single elegant argument was a temptation of the Devil. Once he had so suddenly “found” it, he wrote it down on the pair of wax tablets which monks carried about attached to their girdles and which were folded face to face so that what was inscribed on the wax would not be smudged. He gave the tablets to one of the monks to take care of. But when he asked for them they had vanished. He wrote the argument down again and put the tablets safely away in the only private place a monk had, in or beside his bed. The next morning the tablets were on the floor and the wax scattered about in fragments, so that the ontological argument had to be pieced together again from the bits. This time Anselm made sure that a copy was made on parchment straight away.²² It is impossible to say how much of the argument, or of the *Proslogion* as we have it, was on the lost or broken tablets. Anselm may just have written down the starting point in [Chapter 2](#), or he may have gone on from there in this first attempt to capture what he had “discovered.”

When Anselm wrote his book containing his discovery, he put the chapters containing the argument itself and its extended development in the context of passages of devotional writing in exactly the style of his prayers and meditations, with alliteration and assonance, parallelisms and climaxes, figures of diction mirroring figures of thought. He thus encouraged his readers to approach the argument in a spirit of prayer. This is not without its importance in fixing what kind of argument it was. *Argumentum* is usually distinguished from *argumentatio* among Anselm’s contemporaries. There is a case for saying that the “argument” he believed he had discovered was a notion or principle which could be applied in a sequence of argumentation or set like a jewel in a passage of prayer.

Anselm points out that everyone – even the Fool of the Psalms (53:1), who thinks

there is no God – is able to formulate in his mind the notion of that than which nothing greater can be thought. But it is just as possible for everyone to distinguish between the “thought” of such a thing, taken simply to be an idea; and the thought of such a thing as a reality. For that than which nothing greater can be thought to exist in reality is obviously greater than for it to exist only as an idea. He says that it follows that that than which nothing greater can be thought must therefore exist in reality.

The argument did not win friends among all its readers. At Marmoutiers a monk called Gaunilo read it, and thought he had spotted a flaw. He wrote to Anselm to challenge him with the idea that the same method could be used to prove the existence of anything which was thought of as the best of its kind. Anselm was pleased; it was a clever criticism and he not only took the trouble to reply (with the argument that God is a unique special case) but also to give instructions that the exchange should always be copied with his book.²³ Nothing else is known of Gaunilo, but what he did suggests that there were monks in Anselm’s circle who could give him a good argument and that he enjoyed such intellectual exchange.

The monks of Bec needed more pedestrian teaching alongside the flight of speculation. Above all they had to master the skills they needed to study the Bible. Anselm departed from the method which was to lead during the century after his lifetime to the evolution of the *Glossa Ordinaria*, or standard commentary on the whole Bible. His was no patient progression through the text passage by passage like that of the traditional commentators; it did not rely on extracts from patristic authorities. He taught a method designed to enable the student to understand any text he was reading. He composed four little treatises which he groups together with a common preface, all taking the form of “dialogues” between “master” and “pupil.” Three of these, the books *On Truth*, *On Freedom of Choice*, *On the Fall of Satan*, analyze one or two passages of Scripture. In the last treatise the key passage is John 8:44, which describes Satan as not “standing fast in the truth.” Anselm develops the themes of truth and “rightness” (*rectitudo*) progressively through these three little treatises. The fourth, the *De Grammatico*, is solely concerned with a technical question on which the classical textbooks of grammar and logic differ: does “literate” (*grammaticus*) denote a substance or a quality?

Anselm himself is the warrant for the authenticity of the collection of prayers which he sent out to the Countess Matilda of Tuscany, with a preface explaining their purpose and the way in which he intended they should be employed. He says he wants individuals to feel free to use them as a starting point for their own prayers, beginning in the middle, or at any place which suits them best, and taking off down whatever path opens up before them, departing as necessary from the text Anselm has provided. Anselm’s devotional writings were popular and the manuscript tradition became complex and confusing, as the

compositions of his imitators (and sometimes of Augustine and *his* imitators) became confused with those of Anselm. This mesh of intertwined texts was unpicked by A. Wilmart in a series of articles which established the authenticity of the small corpus of genuine spiritual writings.²⁴

With the completion of this group of treatises and the majority of his prayers and meditations, Anselm's period of quiet happiness as a theologian and philosopher came to an end. It had already been threatened when Herluin died in 1078 and Anselm had become abbot. The dislike he had earlier felt for the administrative responsibilities which came his way as prior became stronger still. He wept and pleaded to be let off, says Eadmer, and the monks wept and pleaded too, begging him to have mercy on the monastery and undertake the duties of the office.²⁵ Eadmer emphasizes the pastoral care he gave his monks, his hospitality toward guests, and the immense importance he attached to ensuring that things were done justly.²⁶

The controversialist scholar Roscelin of Compiègne (d. c. 1125), who also attacked his fellow-controversialist Peter Abelard (1079–1142), was reported as accusing Anselm of teaching heresy about the Trinity. He wrote *On the Incarnation of the Word* (1092–94) to try to refute this calumny. But for the first time he found it impossible to write and publish a book which left his hands containing his final thoughts on a matter. This turned out to be only a first draft. Roscelin “came back” and had a good deal more to say on the subject, adding to his accusations, and during a period which for other reasons caused a great upheaval in Anselm's life, he had to write at least one further version.

This intellectually disturbing period coincided with Anselm's translation from Bec to the archbishopric of Canterbury, as Lanfranc's successor. We do not quite lose sight of Anselm in his intimate life in the community with his move to England and his subsequent translation to the see of Canterbury. Eadmer describes²⁷ how Anselm came to be in England at the crucial time when Lanfranc's successor was decided. Hugh of Chester sent for him about some lands which were to be given to the abbey of Bec. Anselm was reluctant to come, because he was aware that it would be said that he was keen to put himself in the way of being chosen as Lanfranc's successor as archbishop.

But he did come, and the monastic community of Christchurch in Canterbury received him with enthusiasm. There, Anselm fell straight away into the habits of his life at Bec. He spoke to the monks, informally, about the place of love in the religious life.²⁸ From such talks, with their use of vivid images and analogies, derived a tradition, even a literature, of Anselmian “similitudes” or analogies. The talks were evidently numerous and continued after he became archbishop, for example in the form of “similes at

mealtimes.”²⁹ Eadmer speaks of the way he brought together familiar and well-known examples from daily life with clear rational explanations so that everyone understood what he said and remembered it because of the vivid pictures.³⁰ His slightest utterance or most preliminary draft was snatched up, as he complains.³¹ Things were copied out before he had given permission, even in the case of his treatises; the more so perhaps with the informal talks he gave which everyone knew would not be repeated or worked up, and would be lost if not captured in writing.

A series of letters³² survives, expressing on the face of it Anselm’s profound resistance to elevation to the archbishopric, and his desire to remain a monk. A first indication of the undertow of a more positive, even flattered reaction, is noticeable in Letter 147,³³ to Baldric the Prior of Bec and the monks who have stayed behind there. The King, Anselm reports, is being very dilatory over the Bec business that Anselm needs him to discharge, but “he and the other barons of England show me honor and love beyond my deserts.” There follow letters to and from Bec, and a number of letters from those who knew Anselm and hoped to be able to influence him to accept this high preferment (Osbern of Canterbury [Letter 149, Letter 152]; Gundulf, Bishop of Rochester [Letter 150]; Robert, Duke of Normandy [Letter 153]; William, Archbishop of Rouen [Letter 154]). Anselm was certainly sensitive on the subject of the rumours which were circulating that he was in truth eager for the honor. In Letter 156 to Baldric and the Bec monks, he writes at great length on this point, and the subsequent correspondence with others repeatedly refers to it. These letters leave room for a little uncertainty about his own insight into his real feelings about this translation to Canterbury.

There was, however, another dimension, of which Anselm himself was probably as yet not aware. What is now known as the Investiture Contest was building to a climax. It is almost certain that Anselm, who could be surprisingly uninformed about matters of political moment in the Church’s affairs, had not yet heard that it was unacceptable for a lay ruler to perform actions such as the giving of the episcopal ring and pastoral staff to a new bishop. It was unacceptable because to do so crossed a line. A layman, however senior, could not be involved in the sacramental part of the consecration. Only the Church could carry that out, through the laying on of hands by properly consecrated bishops. To lay lords fell only the handing over of temporalities, such as the granting of the lands of the see. That, at least, was the conclusion arrived at by the Concordat of Worms in 1122.

Eadmer may have done a certain amount of revision in his accounts of the investiture of Anselm as archbishop; with hindsight he must have appreciated the issues better than Anselm himself appears to have done at the time. He says that the King himself tried to invest Anselm as archbishop with the ring and the staff. He says in the *History of Recent*

Events that “Anselm was forcibly taken to the King and received the pastoral staff from his hand.” He insists that Anselm resisted this with all his might. When the King tried to give him the ring, Anselm clenched his fist and did not consent to receive it. Eadmer makes a great deal of this reluctance of Anselm,³⁴ for subsequent developments made it necessary to emphasize this resistance of Anselm to an improper attempt by the King to invest him with ring and staff. For Eadmer’s account of all this was written after the event, and at a time when he (and presumably Anselm) had a better understanding of the issues this raised. It took the publicity surrounding the Investiture Contest of the next few years to clarify them.

At the Christmas court of 1092, as Eadmer describes it, “all the first of the realm (*regni primores*) came to court,” in the way they usually did at that season and there was active discussion of the delay in providing the realm which had lost its archiepiscopal shepherd, with a new one; there was also, Eadmer says, complaint of “unprecedented oppression” (*inaudita vexatione*). The King was encouraged to consider Anselm for the position of archbishop; he was told that Anselm was a holy man “who loves nothing but God,” and that he was not ambitious for the office. The King was sceptical. But when he fell ill near Gloucester and the situation began to seem urgent, he sent for Anselm. The bishops made a speech, telling Anselm that his consecration was God’s will and that unless he consented to it, “all Christianity in England” would perish. Anselm was enthroned as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093.

Anselm’s “encounter with the world” as Archbishop of Canterbury went far beyond the glimpse of the unpleasantness of academic rivalry he had had in his brush with Roscelin. It forced him to think about issues which he was ill-equipped both by cast of mind and by experience to discuss. “Will, power, and necessity” were themes Anselm considered extremely important to the resolving of the questions he addressed in the *Cur Deus Homo*. But that did not equip him to balance them against one another in their practical application.

Eadmer describes the loss of tranquillity, and the painful distraction from all that Anselm considered most important.³⁵ Indeed, it is hard not to suspect that Anselm was sometimes neglectful and not very competent about these intrusive secular matters.³⁶ Orderic Vitalis speaks more than once of Anselm’s being “saddened” as archbishop. He says that Anselm imitated John the Baptist and Elijah and spoke out against the wrongs he perceived to be against the law of God (*divina lex*). But, says Orderic, the King refused to be restrained for his own good by his spiritual guide (*pious monitor*) and grew angry with Anselm. When Anselm tried to gain royal support to prevent the plundering of the Church’s lands, the King hardened his heart and Anselm was grieved.³⁷ These are themes which are also to be found in Eadmer’s *Life*.

Practically speaking, Anselm had a great deal to learn about the way the world worked. From the standpoint of defining the “principles,” too, he had to come to an understanding of his task as archbishop. He aspired to be an honest steward of the high things which had (despite his protestations) been entrusted to him. Anselm’s best-developed ideas about order concerned the divine framework within which – he took it for granted – both ecclesial and secular order were contained. He treated the feudal framework of the society in which he had lived in northern France and England throughout most of his adult life as something more than a convenient image. Its structures appealed profoundly to his sense of “right order.” In his “analogies” feudal imagery is common – the “castle” from which the soul looks out and the arrows which the enemy fires at it. The ingredients of the concept of divine honor which informs the *Cur Deus Homo* are partly feudal.

The natural place for Anselm to look for models of episcopal greatness was to the literary giants of his patristic reading, especially Augustine and Gregory the Great (c. 540–604). Gregory was the pope who made Augustine’s writing accessible to a new generation and settled the basic system of biblical interpretation in the West. Gregory’s *Regula Pastoralis* is concerned with the striking of a right balance between the active and the contemplative life, and Augustine spoke more than once of himself as a bishop “with and among” his people.

Anselm had well-developed ideas about order, the *rectus ordo* of the universe. And he understood obedience. Yet despite his years as Abbot of Bec it is by no means clear that he understood the pragmatics of the exercise of authority. When it came to fighting for what he believed to be right, Anselm did not give in easily. But he had small skill in achieving the outcomes he desired, though he made efforts at diplomacy. He tried, unsuccessfully, to talk to his fellow bishops in what Anselm himself considered a straightforward spirit,³⁸ but he failed to perceive the political nuances of the situation. William of Malmesbury records that Anselm lacked their support when Anselm tried to put the King right in his errors in the treatment of the Church.³⁹

Anselm tried to get the King to cooperate with the continuation of the sequence of councils Lanfranc had held, in 1072, 1075, 1078, 1080, and 1085. He visited the King to ask for the calling of a council, pointing out that this was a mere renewal of former practice, no more. He pointed out that the custom by which kings called councils of bishops had fallen into disuse in recent years and asked for it to be revived. Yet he lacked the knowledge of canon law which Lanfranc had had at his fingertips. He approached the King in vain.

When William Rufus attempted to withhold some of the lands of the Church with which it was his royal duty to invest Anselm as archbishop, Eadmer says that Anselm told the King that he wanted to see restored to the English Church all the lands it had had in the time of Lanfranc. He also notes how Anselm offended the King by objecting to the payment of a feudal due,⁴⁰ at least at the rate at which the King proposed to set it.

This intransigence may seem startling at first sight in one who remained at heart a monk, and whose natural climate was one of obedience. He wrote to the monk Henry,⁴¹ to remind him that almost everyone is under someone's authority. This was written in the context of Henry's wish to go out from his monastery and rescue his sister from bondage. Anselm discourages him from leaving.⁴² Many of his problems with his royal lord arose from the fact that when he became archbishop, Anselm had already given his loyalty to Pope Urban II and to change it would have been, to his mind, a breach of "right order" (*rectus ordo*). So his opposition to the King was also a submission to his real lord, and a defence of the rights and properties of which he had, so reluctantly, now become steward.

So though Anselm rose to monastic and then ecclesiastical leadership, he was far from comfortable with the position that put him in. It was only perhaps in the role of teacher that he was at ease "leading" others. Those formally in obedience to him were, in reality, often allowed to exercise some leadership of their own over Anselm. He had Baldwin and Eustace as assistants.⁴³ Eadmer seems to have had a role as Anselm's adviser, even as someone whose "orders" Anselm was happy to accept.⁴⁴ After 1100 Alexander arrived to undertake a similar task and Boso was sent for.⁴⁵

Anselm seems to have continued his essentially "firefighting" approach to administration at Bec, partly because he had entered this new higher office without any realistic understanding of the personalities and the politics of the English court and also without any experience of the realities of being a bishop, let alone an archbishop. He did not lack decisiveness, but it usually took the form of an uncompromising insistence that others should conform with what seemed to him the right way. This was an impractical recipe for the handling of barons and bishops, let alone kings.

THE FIRST EXILE

The quarrel with the King took Anselm into exile. Eadmer describes his words to the monks of his Canterbury community as he left. He told them that it was a matter of honor. He must either give way to the King in breach of his honor or go to Rome and

seek the Pope's support. He said he feared for their security in his absence.⁴⁶ Although Eadmer says that the Pope was shocked and surprised at what Anselm told him of what had been going on in England,⁴⁷ the reality is likely to be that the Pope and the Curia knew far more than Anselm of what was involved and its political coloration.

It was during the course of this exile perhaps that Anselm came to realize the implications of the way he had unwittingly allowed William to try to "invest" him with the pastoral ring, in a manner which was in breach of the principle that the secular authority could play no sacramental part in the making of a bishop. When he became Archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm's understanding of theological questions had undoubtedly been stronger on the side of "faith" than on that of "order."

Yet this was the period of Anselm's mature writing, on the subjects where he was most at home, the central questions of the faith. The *Cur Deus Homo* (*Why God Became Man*) (1095–98) was written over quite an extended period. Anselm even took it with him as he journeyed into exile in Italy. Anselm's idea was to demonstrate that even if Christ were taken out of the equation altogether it would be necessary to postulate exactly what in fact happened, for only if God became man could order be restored in the universe, and divine honor "preserved." Important here is Anselm's continuing assumption that there is a rightness to things, a *rectitudo*, a divine harmony, which is divinely ordained and cannot ultimately fail. This gives an emphasis (characteristic of the period but particularly marked in Anselm) to the notion of fittingness (*convenientia*; *decentia*). For "fittingness" is powerful in his frame of reference.

The argument of the *Cur Deus Homo* begins by asking what problem was created by the fall of Adam and Eve. God could not simply forgive them, Anselm argues, because His own "honor" was diminished by what they had done. Could God Himself have intervened? But He was not the debtor here. To pay oneself a debt someone else owes is not to discharge the obligation of the other person. This patterning of "owe" and "ought" is important as an indicator that Anselm was still thinking in his earlier terms of things "having to be as they ought to be" in order for them to be "true." Could God have used an angel? But no angel was the debtor. Could God have used a human being? But human beings, who were certainly debtors, were now tainted with original sin, and incapable of doing what was needed. Logically, the only possibility was for a being who was both God and man to do what was needed, for he alone both owed the debt and was able to discharge it. And so we come back to the incarnate Christ, who proved indeed to be the only solution.

In 1098, while he was still in exile at the papal court, seeking the Pope's backing for his stand against the King of England, Anselm was called on by Pope Urban II to frame a

rebuttal of the arguments of the Greeks who were attending the Council of Bari.⁴⁸ In 1054 a schism had begun, dividing the Eastern and Western Churches. The division was mainly political, and it turned in some measure upon Greek indignation about the claims of the Bishop of Rome to primacy over the four patriarchs of the East.

There were, however, other long-running theological disagreements, and it was these which were the “presenting symptoms” of the division. The most important of these was the debate about the inclusion of the *filioque* clause in the creed. This addition, restricted to the West, had its origin in the Carolingian period. The original version of the creed had said that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father. The Western version said that he proceeds from the Father and the Son. The Greeks objected to this both because it was an addition to the creed, and because, in their view, it created two “origins” or “principles” in the Trinity: Father and Son. This was a notion heavily dependent on the Pythagorean and Neoplatonist influences of the idea that unity is metaphysically superior to plurality, particularly strong in the theology of the old Eastern half of the empire, where the direct study of texts in Greek had continued to be relatively easy.

Anselm asked for a few days to prepare his riposte. We have a polished version of it in his treatise *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* (1101), which he completed about four years later. He probably knew little or nothing of the history of the dispute, either in the eleventh century or earlier. He approached the problem straightforwardly as one susceptible to resolution by reason. His argument turns on symmetry. Only if the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son do we have a “pattern” in which each person of the Trinity has an attribute peculiar to Himself and each has an attribute which He shares with the other two. (Only the Son has a Father; only the Father has a Son; only the Spirit does not have a Spirit proceeding from Himself. But both the Father and the Spirit do not have a Father; both the Spirit and the Son do not have Son; and both the Father and the Son have a Spirit proceeding from themselves.) It is characteristic of Anselm’s way of thinking that such *convenientia* or fittingness should seem to him so persuasive.

THE NEW REIGN AND THE SECOND EXILE

Anselm was still out of England when the news was brought to him of the death of King William and the accession of his brother. As Eadmer puts it, the dispute was at an end.⁴⁹ The new King, Henry I, wanted Anselm to return to England. Henry’s letter to Anselm survives (Letter 212). The archiepiscopal blessing of his royal state he has regretfully accepted from Thomas of York. “I would have preferred to receive it from you rather than from any other,” he assures Anselm, but the danger from his enemies had made it a matter of urgency that he should be crowned.

Anselm came home, but when he tried to discuss with the new King what he had learned in exile about the proprieties of investiture, he found the King unreceptive. Henry wanted him to do him the same homage he had done to William Rufus, but Anselm, now possessed of a much clearer picture of the rights and wrongs of the matter, believed that it would be inappropriate, a breach of *rectus ordo*, for him to do so.

The reawakened disagreements between Anselm and his monarch about the relationship of the secular and the spiritual powers sent Anselm into exile again almost at once, in 1103.⁵⁰ According to Eadmer in the *Life*, he was well received in Rome by Paschal II, Urban II's successor. There was also an emissary from the King, William of Warelwast. Eadmer says that the Pope heard William's case without sympathy and sent him back to his master with a clear message that he was not to continue to practice investiture of the "spiritualities" of sees. Eadmer was now describing events which had occurred after the period when Anselm had made it plain that he did not want his life-story to be written, and he is increasingly brief.

The balance between the needs of the local see and the needs of the Church as a whole was clearest for Anselm perhaps in the context of the dispute about the English primacy. The English Church had two archbishops, of Canterbury and York. And it was beginning to be a matter of some urgency for it to be decided once and for all which was the senior. Anselm lingered a little longer in exile, to discuss with the Pope the conferring of the English primacy upon Canterbury. He was successful in obtaining what he wanted. Letter 303 preserves the gift of the primacy to Anselm, "as it is agreed it was to all your predecessors"; there is an assurance that the primacy will pass in the same way to all Anselm's successors in the office.

So now Anselm could go home. But it was not entirely Anselm's choice to return. Henry was not content to let Anselm return to England⁵¹ unless he was prepared to foreswear his loyalty to the Pope and submit himself to Henry. To underline his point, he despoiled the possessions of the see of Canterbury.⁵² Eadmer's "come home" letter in verse appeals to Anselm as the shepherd of his English flock, of Canterbury over York. Anselm's response was that he was prepared to do all that was compatible with the discharge of his office (Letter 308). Anselm did come home to England at last,⁵³ but he was now an old man and increasingly infirm,⁵⁴ often having to be carried about in a litter.

Anselm's final years were taken up with two or three main themes. He went back to the subject of free will, now linking it systematically with the "most famous question," as he calls it, of the relationship between human freedom of choice and divine foreknowledge and predestination and the action of grace. On his death bed, Anselm was

still hoping to complete a book on the origin of the soul for, as he said, if he did not, he was not sure that anyone living could do so.⁵⁵

INFLUENCE

Anselm's influence is not easy to pin down. He was clearly much loved and admired in his generation, at least by those in his small but close circle of the monks at Bec and a few others who later had the experience of living with him in community at Canterbury. In an early letter, he was asked by a monk who had a nephew whom he wanted to send to Anselm for tuition "why the reputation of Lanfranc and Guitmund flies round the world" so much more than his own.⁵⁶ This tactless inquiry was met by Anselm with a graceful refusal to take the boy on for the kind of basic grounding in Latin grammar which Anselm said he found wearisome to teach.

But this was an early inquiry. No one could have said in later years that Anselm's fame did not "fly about the world." He was well enough known to become a target for Roscelin. He became politically prominent as a result of his dispute with the kings of England and the Pope's pointed selection of Anselm at the Council of Bari as the best person to answer for the Latin position against the Greeks on the issues which were now dividing the Eastern and Western Churches.

Nevertheless, it is beyond dispute that – apart from his popular devotional writings – his works did not become and remain influential at once, although they were copied and circulated. The most probable explanation is that they were of a type which did not fit the practical teaching needs of the working schools which were going to evolve in the next generation or two into the first universities. Because of the way the arguments unfold, and their profundity, the books were not easy to lecture on or to divide up satisfactorily for quotation or extract in *florilegium* or commentary. Commentaries, textbooks, were the new fashion, not original monographs of the type Anselm produced.

A few writers of the next generation can be identified who seriously attempted to carry Anselm's thought forward. The first is Gilbert Crispin, monk of Bec and later Abbot of Westminster, whom Anselm visited there in 1086 and 1092. It has been convincingly argued that he was instrumental in triggering Anselm's interest in the *Cur Deus Homo* question.⁵⁷ He himself wrote a much-read *Disputation between a Christian and a Jew* and other theological works, less successful even in their time, and not of long-term importance.

Ralph, Prior of Rochester and later Abbot of Battle (1107–24), was probably first a

monk of Bec. It is to him that the beginnings of the enlargement of the corpus of Anselm's devotional writings into a huge mingled collection of the genuine and the spurious is probably due, for he wrote devotional pieces himself. Ralph's works circulated with Anselm's, with which it must have been natural to associate them. He also attempted dialogues in a somewhat Anselmian form, between *Nesciens* and *Sciens*, and *Inquirens* and *Respondens*.

The mysterious figure of the so-called "Honorius," traditionally known as "Augustodunensis" remains difficult to identify or to locate with confidence. It is fairly certain that he met Anselm while he was living in the community at Canterbury. He was much more ambitious and independent as a writer than were Gilbert and Ralph, who had been closer to Anselm for longer. Nevertheless, the debts are visible. His *Elucidarium* derives in part from one of Anselm's sermons, and a second work, the *Sigillum Sanctae Mariae*, is dependent on a sermon by Ralph d'Escures, who succeeded Anselm as Archbishop of Canterbury. His *Inevitabile* was revised in the light of Anselm's late work the *De Concordia* (1107–1108), or attempted "harmony" of the apparently contradictory foreknowledge, predestination, and grace of God with the freedom of choice of rational creatures.

With so few examples and so little evidence it is no easier to get a picture of the true *nature* of Anselm's theological influence than of its extent. It must have been the case that those who knew him well became conscious that he would be, in modern terms, "a hard act to follow." Anselm's influence in his own time and in the period after his death was perhaps greater, ironically, in the area of his spiritual writings than in that of his speculative theological writings. There are many manuscripts of his devotional works and a vast penumbra of spurious imitative spiritual writings attributed to him with confidence during the Middle Ages. But Anselm's influence is not readily measured by his "sales," that is, by counting the manuscript copies which were made. The ideas reappear, and philosophers and theologians have wrestled with his arguments not for their antiquarian interest but for their continuing intrinsic value and importance.

In the early 1200s, when Anselm was in his seventies, a new style of religious life became popular. There had for centuries been a rule under which the canons of cathedrals lived, while attaining a fair level of learning and playing an active pastoral role in the diocese. Now there was suddenly a demand for opportunities to live that kind of life in a community directed toward study and not requiring the intensive commitment to the contemplative life which was central to true monasticism. The Canons of St. Victor in Paris were in the vanguard of this movement, and they produced a line of leading figures, teaching and writing Victorines: Hugh (c. 1096–1141), the practical educationalist; Richard, the mystical writer (d. 1173); his contemporary Andrew, the student of the Bible who tried to explore the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.

Anselm was not only linked in the popular mind with Hugh of St. Victor as a latter-day “Father”; he also came naturally to Hugh of St. Victor’s own mind as a respected source. Hugh wrote a short work on creation known as “On the Three Days,” *De Tribus Diebus*. In it he attempts philosophical questions of the sort that Anselm had addressed in the *Monologion*. For example, it seems to him that that which is nothing cannot lend itself existence; that that which has a beginning must take its origin from something else; that in this matter of having or not having a beginning is to be found a fundamental difference between creature and creature.⁵⁸ The central theme of the *Proslogion*, that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought,⁵⁹ is there in Hugh’s assertion that no good can be more excellent (*excellentius*) than that which is the *fons et principium* of all things.⁶⁰ This is not to suggest that Hugh matches Anselm’s subtlety or engages with his thought at a comparable level. But the echoes are there and they suggest that Anselm was being read and quietly having his effect.

Anselm is also cited by other twelfth-century authors. Peter Abelard had him in mind when he discussed God’s options in the face of the fall of Adam and Eve. He goes through the possibilities at some length in his commentary on the Book of Romans.⁶¹ God could indeed have come to the same conclusion as Anselm and decided that the only solution was for His Son to become man in order to pay the debt of honor owed by humanity to its creator. But in Abelard’s opinion, the real reason for the Incarnation was to show human beings how they ought to live, by means of the example that Jesus set. The later twelfth-century Peter of Celle mentions him, though infrequently. When he was writing *De Tabernaculo*,⁶² he re-collects Anselm’s remark in *De Casu Diaboli* 5 and 6, that God made the angelic nature good; the fall came through the act of the will of a good created nature.⁶³

Anselm was not to everyone’s taste. His writings lacked that desirable easy availability for those who wished to make extracts and compile scrapbooks of quotations. His arguments are tightly woven, and brief observations cannot readily be taken out of context without losing their point. His lasting influence was on those prepared to read him and digest him and make use not of quotations but of ideas, and the twelfth-century examples already given illustrate something of the way in which that worked.

Anselm had chosen to write principally on themes which were going to prove immensely interesting in the last medieval centuries because they lay at the heart of the return to core questions of ancient philosophy and epistemology. He had done so without the sophisticated technical language evolved in late medieval Latin, but with a clarity and depth which meant that he did not “date” in those later eyes.

At the beginning of the thirteenth century there was another revolution in the religious life in the form of the founding of the two leading orders of friars, professional preachers, who took higher education so seriously that they were soon contending for the leading professorships in the new “universities” which were now emerging.

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–74), thirteenth-century thinker from one of the rival mendicant orders, that of the Dominicans, had seen the importance of discussing the classic proofs for the existence of God, for example, in the opening sections of the *Summa Theologiae*. He classifies something resembling what has since become known as the “ontological argument” quite separately from the other standard arguments for the existence of God and their variants and treats it as of special interest because it raises for him the question whether the existence of God is self-evident.⁶⁴

Once we move into this special area of the influence of the *Proslogion* argument, the trail of influence becomes clearer and altogether better trodden. A cluster of references has been identified in the thirteenth-century author William of Auxerre, whose *Summa Aurea* refers to the *Proslogion*; in Richard Fishacre (Dominican) and Alexander of Hales (Franciscan).⁶⁵ The thirteenth-century Franciscan author Duns Scotus writes in the *Ordinatio* 1, dist. 3, q. 1 on the subject of natural knowledge of God,⁶⁶ about Anselm’s observations in the *Monologion* on the Aristotelian “category” of relation when it is used in discussion of the Godhead.⁶⁷ Discussing the existence of God, he gives approving consideration to Anselm’s ontological argument, expounding it at some length.⁶⁸ As we move into the fourteenth century there are allusions in Giles of Rome, Henry of Ghent, William of Ware, Robert Holcot, John of Beverley, and John Wyclif.

Anselm’s *Proslogion* argument has proved a great survivor as a topic for serious philosophical debate. His contribution to linguistic theory and to a number of other areas of perennial philosophical inquiry remains important. His theology, too, is still found to be full of live issues. These things are testimony to the quality and durability of his thinking. But he was, in another way, at the end of an era of quiet reflective confident trust in divine leading toward the truth and at the beginning of a time of frantic and acrimonious debate in the new truly “academic” world which was opening up.

1. Eadmer, *Life of St. Anselm (Vita Anselmi)*, ed. R. W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), I.ii, 4.

2. R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 400–402 and 470–73.
3. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, ed. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (2 vols.; Oxford, 1998–99), I, para. 315 and II, paras. 333, 394, 395, 408, 413–17.
4. S II: 239.
5. *Patrologia Latina* (ed. Migne), 150.725.
6. Eadmer, *Life*, I.ii, 5.
7. *Ibid.*, I.v, 8.
8. Herluin was buried at Bec.
9. Eadmer, *Life*, I.v, 8.
10. *Ibid.*, I.v, 9.
11. *Ibid.*, I.vi, 10.
12. Boethius, *De Trinitate*, vol. II: *Theological Tractates*, ed. H. F. Stewart, E. K. Rand, and S. J. Tester (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 8.
13. Eadmer, *Life*, I.vii, 12.
14. *Ibid.*, I.ix, 15.
15. *Ibid.*, I.x, 17.
16. *Ibid.*, I.x, 19–20.

17. *Ibid.*, I.xxii, 37–38.
18. Letters 89 and 90 (S III: 215–18).
19. Eadmer, *Life*, I.iii, 21–22.
20. *Ibid.*, I.vii, 12.
21. *Ibid.*, I.xix, 29.
22. *Ibid.*, I.xix, 30–31.
23. *Ibid.*, I.xix, 31.
24. A. Wilmart, *Auteurs spirituels et textes dévots du moyen âge latin* (Paris, 1932).
25. Eadmer, *Life*, I.xxvi, 44.
26. *Ibid.*, I.xxvii–xxviii, 44–46.
27. Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, ed. M. Rule (Rolls Series; London, 1884), 28; Eadmer, *Life*, I.xxix, 48; I.i, 63.
28. Eadmer, *Life*, I.xxix, 49.
29. *Ibid.*, II.xi, 74.
30. *Ibid.*, I.xxxi, 56.
31. Preface to *Cur Deus Homo* (S I: 42.2–3).
32. The formation of Anselm’s letter-collections is a complex story which has been set out in outline by R. W. Southern (*Portrait*, 458–81). Anselm was genuinely a modest man, as the episode over the destruction of the *Life* shows; and in any case the

conventions of the day required a show of modesty. He wrote letters during his time at Bec which he seems not to have kept in any systematic way, although he remembered that he had written them and valued them enough to ask the monk Maurice to send them back to him. (The monk Maurice had gone to Canterbury with Lanfranc, and then become prior of the Bec community at Conflans. He was a trusted friend as well as a former pupil; it was to Maurice that Anselm wrote when he needed someone to prompt the dilatory Lanfranc to give him a “decision” about the publication of the *Monologion*.) In Letter 104 (S III: 237), he writes to say that he is still waiting for the copies of his letters which Maurice was supposed to be sending him. Letter 147 (S III: 294), contains another similar request to send him letters of his in the hands of those in his circle.

The letters of an archbishop are a very different matter from the letters of an abbot. It is not merely that they cover a different and wider range of subject matter. It is also that they have an importance as a diocesan or provincial record; and that they may not all be the personal compositions of their “author.” For an archbishop needs a secretary, or a series of clerks. In part, Anselm’s later letters reflect this difference of purpose.

33. S III: 293.

34. Eadmer, *Life*, II.iv, 66.

35. *Ibid.*, II.viii, 69.

36. *Ibid.*, II.xiii, 80.

37. *Historia ecclesiastica*, ed. M. Chibnall (6 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–80), vol. IV (1973), 176–78.

38. Southern, *Portrait*, 237–38.

39. Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, II, paras. 413–17.

40. Eadmer, *Life*, II.v, 67 and Eadmer, *Historia Novorum*, 43–45.

41. Letter 17 (S III: 123.15–27).

42. Letter 17 (S III: 123.15–27).
43. Southern, *Portrait*, 241.
44. *Ibid.*, 243.
45. *Ibid.*, 244–45.
46. Eadmer, *Life*, II.xxi, 93.
47. *Ibid.*, II.xxix, 106.
48. *Ibid.*, II.xxxiv, 112–13.
49. *Ibid.*, II.xlvii, 124.
50. *Ibid.*, II.1, 127–28.
51. *Ibid.*, II.lii, 130.
52. *Ibid.*, II.liv, 132.
53. *Ibid.*, II.lxi, 138.
54. *Ibid.*, II.lxiv, 140.
55. *Ibid.*, II.lxv, 142.
56. Letter 20 (S III: 126).
57. Southern, *Portrait*, 167, 192.
58. *Mon.* 4 and 6 (S I: 17.5–8 and 19.26–29); cf. Hugh of St. Victor, *De Tribus Diebus*,

ed. D. Poirel (Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis 77; Turnhout: Brepols, 2002), 44.

59. *Prosl.* 2 (S I: 101.3).

60. Hugh of St. Victor, *De Tribus Diebus*, 6–57.

61. *Commentaria in Epistolam Pauli ad Romanos*, ed. E. M. Buytaert (CCCM 11), 118–19.

62. *De tabernaculo*, ed. G. de Martel (CCCM 54; 1983), 192.

63. S I: 242–44.

64. *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 2,1; cf. 1a, 2,3 on the five “other” ways of proving the existence of God.

65. William of Auxerre, *Summa Aurea*, I.1, A. Daniels, *Quellenbeiträge und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Gottesbeweise im dreizehnten Jahrhundert* (Munster, 1909), 23–26.

66. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1, dist. 3 (Vatican, 1954), p. 25.

67. *Mon.* 15 (S I: 28.24).

68. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 1, dist. 2 (Vatican, 1950), pp. 208–209 and 214.

2 Anselm on faith and reason

Marilyn McCord Adams

INTRODUCTION

When contemporary philosophers probe the relation between faith and reason, their focus is on the *propositional* content of religious belief. They ask whether doctrinal propositions can be proved by sound arguments from premises acceptable to unbelievers, or, failing that, whether adherence to such theses can be rationally justified. Christian philosophers often see themselves as responding to pressure *from the outside to defend* the rationality of Christian faith. In the waning years of the Roman empire, St. Augustine, too, was preoccupied with defending the faith, first externally, against its pagan competitors (not only but principally the Manichaeans); then against heretics (Donatists and Pelagians) within.

St. Anselm's eleventh-century situation was different from both of these. He spent most of his life in the Benedictine Monastery at Bec. Most of his works were penned for and at the behest of his monastic brother-students. Their overarching common aim was to become persons who could see and enjoy God's face. Their intellectual pursuits were integrated into that project. Anselm's written investigations of non-theological subjects were all occasioned by the exigencies of their doctrinal inquiries. These facts about Anselm's career have left deep imprints on his philosophical theology, not least on his method. If he was eventually drawn into polemical contexts and confronted with real non-Christians, Anselm continued to see the drive to understand Christian faith by reason alone (*sola ratione*) as predominantly internal, arising not simply from his own monastic vocation, but from the natural teleology built into human nature itself.

INQUIRY, THE *VIATOR*'S VOCATION

Anselmian anthropology

Like Augustine before him, Anselm held that human nature, like every created nature, is an imperfect imitation of the supreme nature, and has an end or telos – a “that-for-which-it-was-made” and for which all of its powers were given.¹ In the *Monologion*, Anselm contends that “every rational being exists for this [purpose]: to love or refuse things to the extent that, by rational discernment, it judges them to be more or less good

or not good”² and concludes in particular that “a rational creature is made for this [purpose]: to love the Supreme Being above all [other] goods, inasmuch as It is the Highest Good.”³ Likewise, in the *Proslogion*, Anselm identifies the human end in the divine invitation to the enjoyment of seeing God’s face,⁴ which will both occupy and fully satisfy all of the soul’s powers.⁵ Again, in *Cur Deus Homo*, he speaks of rational creatures” being made, and endowed with reason and uprightness of will, for a happy enjoyment of God.⁶

Anselm recognizes two significant obstacles to our reaching this goal. (i) First and sufficient, is the ontological incommensuration between a simple, immutable, and eternal God and fleeting creatures that “scarcely exist” by comparison.⁷ This metaphysically necessary fact has the consequence that “God is a being greater than we can conceive of,”⁸ that the divine nature is permanently partially beyond our cognitive grasp,⁹ in some aspects fundamentally incomprehensible¹⁰ to us and inexpressible by human language.¹¹ (ii) Second and reparable, is the damage suffered by human nature as a result of Adam’s fall – loss of uprightness of will,¹² blindness, weakness, and lack of emotional control¹³ – which mar its image of God and hinder smooth functioning. Balancing these, are twin reasons for optimism. (iii) Humans and angels are rational natures made in God’s image, among creatures the best likeness of God, veritable mirrors of God’s face.¹⁴ Rational creatures best express this naturally impressed image when they strive unto God with all of their powers, straining to remember, to understand, and to love Him above all and for His own sake.¹⁵ On the one hand, the “organ” through which humans grasp the object for the knowledge and love of which they/we were made is the whole self;¹⁶ and it functions best when all its powers are energetically engaged in this enterprise. On the other hand, the human being thus occupied becomes a well-focused image of God, one cognitively accessible to the self who seeks the seemingly hidden divine nature. (iv) Further, God is of consistent purpose and has revealed a mysterious bias toward mercy,¹⁷ which raises hopes of divine grace for healing, cleansing, and restoring human nature from its fallen condition,¹⁸ thereby strengthening it for its work.

Ec-static inquiry

Anselm the Christian thus approaches this difficult human assignment with the hope necessary to persevere,¹⁹ and he consistently maintains that the appropriate response to the human predicament is strenuous effort to grasp what is beyond reach. In the *Monologion* he twice gives this philosophy succinct expression, first in Chapter 15, in discussing the ineffability of the supreme nature’s “natural essence”:

For although I would be surprised if among the names or words which we apply to things made from nothing, there could be found a [word] that would appropriately be predicated of the Substance which created all [other] things, *nevertheless I must try* to ascertain what end reason will direct this investigation.²⁰

Then in Chapter 43, in connection with the plurality and unity of the supreme nature:

Having now discovered so many, and such important, properties of each – [properties] by which a certain remarkable plurality, as ineffable as it is necessary, is proved to exist in supreme oneness – I find it *especially delightful to reflect more frequently upon such an impenetrable mystery*.²¹

In other words, since the subject matter is extremely difficult, indeed ineffable and impenetrable, we should reflect upon it, try to understand it, again and again!

Our problem is severe, however, because (fallen) human nature being as it is, we begin ignorant of how to inquire. Thus, in the *Proslogion*, Anselm no sooner turns aside to seek God's face than he is forced to beg, "Come now, therefore, my Lord God, teach my heart where and how to seek you, where and how it may find you."²² True, we have been endowed with powers to pursue our *telos*, but these have been damaged. And in any event, they need to be developed through extensive education. In *De Concordia* Anselm makes this point vividly with an agricultural simile:

Without any cultivation on man's part the earth produces countless herbs and trees by which human beings are not nourished or by which they are even killed. But those herbs and trees which are especially necessary to us for nourishing our lives are not produced by the earth apart from seeds and great labor and a farmer. Similarly, without learning and endeavor human hearts freely germinate, so to speak, thoughts and volitions which are not conducive to salvation or which are even harmful thereto. But without their own kind of seed and without laborious cultivation human hearts do not at all conceive and germinate those thoughts and volitions without which we do not make progress toward our soul's salvation.²³

God is the primary teacher; Anselm, through the works he has left to us, a "teacher's aid."

Many human powers need training. (a) According to *The Rule of St. Benedict*, the monastery is a school of the Lord's service, enlisting recruits under the banner of

obedience,²⁴ training *the will* up to virtues. (b) Anselm's *Prayers and Meditations* comprise exercises to train *the emotions*,²⁵ according to a dialectical pattern reaching back through Benedict to Cassian to Origen.²⁶ first the reader is stirred out of inertia into self-knowledge, which produces sorrow for sin, dread of its consequences, and anxiety over distance from God; these last in turn produce humility and issue in prayers for help, which resolve into a compunction of desire which energizes the soul's renewed search for God. Again, (c) Anselm's quartet of dialogues – *De Grammatico*, *De Veritate*, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, and *De Casu Diaboli* – are, among other things, exercises to train students in the techniques of intellectual inquiry: in logic and modalities; in the art of definition; in constructing counter-examples, analogies, and dilemmas; in drawing distinctions; in detecting instances of improper linguistic usage.

Moreover, these several powers interact and require to be coordinated. Trivially, one cannot will what one does not conceive.²⁷ More profound is Anselm's conviction – following Augustine – that where values are concerned, what you love affects what you see. Thus, (a) Anselm assumes that even the unbeliever's natural human desire for goods could motivate his *Monologion* search for the source of goods perceptible to the senses or reason, an investigation which – in Anselm's mind – successfully proves that God is the good that satisfies and that it is reasonable for every human being to commit him/herself to God in living faith. But if he is sure that the reasoning of those eighty chapters can bring unbelievers to intellectual assent to the existence of God, he also insists that they will not be able to get much further unless they join will to intellect and commit themselves to God in living faith.²⁸ Likewise, (b) the *Proslogion* alternates prayer exercises, designed to stir *the emotions and will* (in [Chapters 1](#), 14–18, and 24–26) so that the soul may seek by desiring and desire by seeking, with the hope of finding by loving and loving by finding,²⁹ with sections of *intellectual* inquiry into the being of God (Chapters 2–13 and 18–23), thereby focusing and refocusing the whole self as its investigation spirals upward toward increasingly inaccessible matters. Again, (c) the *Cur Deus Homo* is skillfully structured to rouse the soul, not only at the cognitive but also at the affective and conative levels. First, Anselm provokes Boso (and the reader) into an intellectually active posture, by presenting inadequate patristic replies to current infidel objections (1.2–10). When Anselm seizes the initiative to present his own case, Boso's emotional reactions trace the traditional prayer parabola – from mild fear through growing anxiety to despair about the possibility of salvation (1.11–24), and then up through expectant pleasure to exultant joy in grasping how human redemption is possible through the Incarnation and Passion of Christ (2.6–19).

Anselm envisions the human search for God as throughout, in all its dimensions and phases, a matter of divine–human collaboration, involving initiative on both sides. (a) God makes the first move: by creating and empowering rational creatures for beatific

intimacy with Him.³⁰ God gave uprightness of will and the ability to preserve it for its own sake;³¹ God implanted the soul with a double inclination (*affectio*) for the good,³² and God offered the gift of perseverance to everyone, stood ready to preserve creatures in such salutary orientation of will and desires.³³ God is self-determined in every way; God *is* justice and so is just through Himself (*per se*). In order that rational creatures might to some degree imitate divine self-determination with respect to justice, the acceptance of this gift of perseverance was left to their own free choice of will.³⁴ Likewise, divine consistency of purpose takes redemptive initiative in the Incarnation and Passion of Christ.³⁵ Yet, humans must ask for such benefits to be applied to their own cases.³⁶ Similarly, divine graces to repair the soul's motivational structure are meted out bit by bit,³⁷ because the very exercise of repeated seeking is therapy that focuses the soul aright. Anselm's written prayers and meditations are aids to this effort, patterns for asking God, whose themes are well summed in the first:

Almighty God, merciful Father, and my good Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner. Grant me forgiveness of my sins. Make me guard against and overcome all snares, temptations, and harmful pleasures. May I shun utterly in word and deed, whatever you forbid, and do and keep whatever you command. Let me believe and hope, love and live, according to your purpose and your will. Give me heart-piercing goodness and humility; discerning abstinence and mortification of flesh. Help me to love you and pray to you, praise you and meditate upon you. May I act and think in all things according to your will, purely, soberly, devoutly, and with a true and effective mind. Let me know your commandments, and love them, carry them out readily, and bring them into effect. Always, Lord, let me go on with humility to better things and never grow slack.

Lord, do not give me over either to my human ignorance and weakness or to my own deserts, or to anything, other than your loving dealing with me. Do you yourself in kindness dispose of me, my thoughts and actions, according to your good pleasure, so that your will may always be done by me and in me and concerning me. Deliver me from all evil, and lead me to eternal life through the Lord.³⁸

(b) In *the intellectual sphere*, too, God takes the initiative: first, by creating rational beings with intimate knowledge of Himself; then, by disclosing Himself to select human beings, and by providing Holy Scripture and ecumenical Church councils. God sends the Holy Spirit to His people in every age,³⁹ stands ready to help them understand the mysteries a little bit (*aliquatenus*) more. Yet, as with Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3:2–4), the creature must turn aside to pay attention,⁴⁰ give him/herself over to

sustained inquiry; the Christian ought to accept by asking divine aid⁴¹ and energetically seek to understand what s/he has believed.⁴²

Anselm makes this collaborative nature of *intellectual inquiry* fully explicit in his most famous work, the *Proslogion*. As to genre, it is principally a prayer-exercise for believers – neither a meditation in which the reader speaks silently with himself, nor a dialogue in which we are explicitly confronted with two speakers, but a *pros logion* or *ad loquium* in which the soul speaks directly to God. The soul begins by asking questions of,⁴³ putting puzzles to,⁴⁴ and/or begging help from God.⁴⁵ Then, God “illuminates” the soul so that it may “see,”⁴⁶ “teaches”⁴⁷ that it may understand. Anselm appeals, “Tell your servant within, in his heart”⁴⁸ that he may know. It then belongs to the soul to articulate what God has revealed, usually expressing the reasoning and the statement of results⁴⁹ in second-person address to God, and punctuating it with exclamations of thanks and praise.⁵⁰ Yet, one who prays the *Proslogion* merely acknowledges the divine–human interchange implicit in all human intellectual inquiry, recognized or not. Just as the Christian reader may meditate the *Monologion* and rehearse some of Anselm’s dialogues without thereby explicitly invoking divine aid, so the unbeliever may remain an unwitting partner, never tumbling to the presence or identity of that other Spirit who guides his/her inquiry and furnishes “his/her” “aha”-insights.

If, for Anselm, intellectual inquiry is but one of several avenues along which human beings seek goods/the Good/God, it does not follow that for him *practical reason* expels *theoretical*, or that the latter is merely *instrumentally* related to the former. Anselm neither notes nor observes this Aristotelian distinction. Rather, as one among other human powers, reason’s exercise is *partially constitutive* of the search of the whole self; the enjoyment of its present and future results, *integral constituents* of the satisfaction for which it was made. Thus, in his prefatory *Commendation* of the *Cur Deus Homo* to Pope Urban II, Anselm declares that the understanding which faith seeks and gains between birth and the grave, is a “mean” “between faith and sight”⁵¹ and a great source of consolation, joy, and delight.⁵² Moreover, Anselm’s metaphysical convictions allow him to extend these conclusions to the investigation and appreciation of other subjects – logic, natural philosophy, metaphysics, psychology, and philosophy of mind. For all creatures are imperfect *likenesses* of God,⁵³ so that His glory can be (whether explicitly or implicitly) esteemed in all His works. Likewise, all creatures are God’s handiwork; a studied appreciation of them, a (witting and unwitting) swelling of their Maker’s praise.

AUTHORITY AS TUTOR AND GUIDE

The place of authority in human inquiry generally

For Anselm, authority has a role to play in human inquiry, because often the subject matter exceeds – for whatever reason, however permanently or temporarily – the investigator’s powers. Because we (fallen) merely⁵⁴ human beings are born ignorant and develop our intellectual capacities only through long education, “right order” nearly always⁵⁵ requires that we “believe” many things not only before we are able, but in order to grow into a position to “understand.” Augustine had famously appealed to Isaiah 7:9,⁵⁶ and Anselm follows in his footsteps. In several works, Anselm insists that where examination of the existence, nature, triunity, and redemptive activity of God is concerned,

I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe, but I believe in order that I may understand. Moreover, I believe this: that “unless I believe, I will not understand.”⁵⁷

Less noted are verbal echoes in dialogues about less mysterious subjects (viz., the motivational psychology and just deserts of rational creatures),⁵⁸ where the student uses such words simply to acknowledge that he is a beginner, who is only now undertaking a systematic study of beliefs already acquired. Likewise, in *Cur Deus Homo*, Boso remarks on the general human condition: “We are very often certain about something without knowing how to prove it.”⁵⁹

Yet, Anselmian education does not aim merely at handing down packages of correct doctrine, but rather at developing the student’s skills for inquiry. Anselm’s works, mostly written at the request of his students and reflective of his pedagogical practices, consistently thrust the reader into an *active* role. We are rarely treated to a straight exposition of Anselm’s own views. Typically, he begins with assertions that seem obvious, then subjects them to questions, objections, and puzzle-generating arguments, which challenge the mind to dig deeper. One favorite technique is to present arguments for apparently contradictory conclusions, or proofs that none of the obvious answers to a question can be correct. The reader is meant, not merely to pass his/her eyes over the text, but actively to meditate the *Monologion*, to pray the *Proslogion*, to identify in the dialogue with first one speaker and then the other. Thus, whatever genre he chooses, Anselm continually seeks to limber up his readers into intellectual flexibility, by first winning their sympathies for one position and then jolting them with the attractiveness of its opposite. All of Anselm’s major treatises train the reader in argumentation, tricky modal notions, the drawing of distinctions, the deployment of analogies, and the detection of improper linguistic usage.

Anselm's "learn by doing" pedagogy is most clearly displayed in his quartet of teaching dialogues – *De Grammatico*, *De Veritate*, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, and *De Casu Diaboli* – where student–teacher relations model those of the human investigator to God. These works give special emphasis to the development of student technique. Thus, the student is not allowed to raise the initial question, only to sit back and play “yes-man” to the teacher’s answers. He is required to lay out the considerations and formulate the arguments that give rise to his puzzlement.⁶⁰ Where the teacher’s responses are concerned, his role is to be a “tough customer,” intolerant of ellipsis, vigorous in pressing objections and requesting further explanations.⁶¹ As the teacher tests the student’s proposals and arguments, so the student tests the teacher’s: by offering apparent counter-examples,⁶² constructing parallel arguments for absurd or opposing conclusions, drawing distinctions, diagnosing improper or suggesting technical linguistic usage. Moreover, Anselm’s student shoulders some of the responsibility for “putting two and two together,” by pointing out apparent incongruities between the teacher’s position, on the one hand, and scriptural passages, patristic comments, and philosophical and/or theological theses that pull in the reverse direction. In the *Cur Deus Homo* Anselm’s best pupil, Boso, puts in a stellar performance. Still representing his colleagues’ worries by raising “silly” questions involving modal confusions,⁶³ he also probes into issues that lie beyond our solid soteriological information.⁶⁴ In addition, he volunteers as mouthpiece for the infidels’ philosophical objections,⁶⁵ and in that role presses the negative case against patristic explanations, even to the point of formulating (Anselm’s) classic refutation of the Ransom Theory of the atonement.⁶⁶ At the same time, the dialogues reflect student inexperience regarding both subject matter and technique. His are the flawed arguments, the failed definition, the bogus counter-examples, not to mention the lapsed attention and memory. If the student’s questions occasion the discussion, then its overall direction, which recontextualizes issues and burrows under surface objections to expose theoretical deep-structure⁶⁷ and work a positive solution,⁶⁸ belongs to the teacher!

Anselm’s procedures reflect several further general facts about human capacity for inquiry. (i) Given a new technique, our eagerness to use it tends to outrun our judgment about how and where to apply it. Thus, in *De Libertate Arbitrii*, the student’s selection of a definition in [Chapter 1](#)⁶⁹ is decisively rejected by counter-examples in [Chapter 2](#).⁷⁰ The student’s own counter-examples are exposed as merely apparent, while his proposed addendum to the teacher’s definition is rejected as unnecessary,⁷¹ his objection from an attempted parallel definition dismissed as a silly mistake.⁷² Such failures arise from a lack of a sufficiently broad perspective, from not making important connections or keeping all of the relevant factors in mind.⁷³ (ii) Again, our negative critical facility generally exceeds our positive constructive ability. For example, in *De Libertate Arbitrii*, when the student’s positive definition of freedom of choice is quickly refuted, he retreats to the

role of questioning and evaluating the teacher's constructive attempts. Likewise, in *Cur Deus Homo*, however impressive Boso's presentation of the infidel critique, it is left to Anselm to mount the arguments for the necessity and soteriological efficacy of the Incarnation. Characteristically, the student generates destructive dilemmas, apparent contradictions, arguments for the opposite conclusion, but it is the teacher who unravels these puzzles. (iii) Further, human understanding is a process. Especially where matters are deep and difficult, we typically cannot see through all of the issues at once. Consequently, it often happens that however plausible an argument or explanation seems today, we (or someone else) may think of a refutation or discover a still better theory tomorrow. It is unsurprising to find Anselm, in the *Cur Deus Homo*, declaring the mystery of human redemption inexhaustible, so that no matter what humans may understand about it, there is still more to be learned and explored. Often ignored is his similarly cautionary remark about semantic theory at the end of *De Grammatico*: since the theory of signification was a subject of lively debate among logicians of that time, they could well be on the verge of rendering Anselm's theory of signification obsolete!⁷⁴

Overall, then, Anselm's pedagogical practice makes it clear that, for him, the point of believing authority is not to silence questions, but to enable the student to ask sensible rather than silly ones, to point inquiry in a fruitful direction, lest it come to a dead end!

Authority in philosophical theology

If reliance on authority is necessary for orienting us humans to the created world, *a fortiori* it is a "must" for the philosophical theologian who probes into things divine. Anselm himself recognizes many authorities. (a) Obviously preeminent among them is God, the Truth Itself,⁷⁵ who never deceives anyone,⁷⁶ and hence Christ, whom Anselm deemed omniscient even in His human nature.⁷⁷ Together with the Holy Spirit,⁷⁸ they are the soul's final authority and true teacher. (b) Likewise, he insists, Holy Scripture is undeniably true, and anything that contradicts it false.⁷⁹ (c) Again, in his polemical works against Roscelin and the Greeks, Anselm insists on his fidelity to the creeds⁸⁰ and deploys conciliar findings as premises in his arguments.⁸¹ (d) Anselm also recognizes the authority of the Pope to administer doctrinal correction.⁸² (e) Similarly, he pays his respects to the Church Fathers.⁸³

Moreover, in his *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*, a polemical work written against Roscelin's deviant views about Trinity and Incarnation, Anselm becomes strident in his insistence that

no Christian ought to debate whether something which the Catholic Church believes

with its heart and confesses with its mouth is false. On the contrary, by clinging constantly and unhesitatingly to this same faith, by loving it and living humbly according to it, the Christian ought to search for the reason which shows why this faith is true. If he is able to understand, then let him give thanks to God. But if he cannot, then instead of tossing it about with his horns, let him bow his head in veneration before it. For when self-confident human wisdom pits its horns against this stone, it can uproot them more quickly than it can roll the stone.⁸⁴

Does Anselm hereby cross the border from a pedagogical to an authoritarian conception of proper respect for authorities (a)–(e)? In my judgment, the answer is “no.” Even in this passage, Anselm commends faith seeking understanding as the Christian vocation. His methodological prohibition against doubting the truth of the Catholic faith rather reflects his deep appreciation of the difficulty of the subject matter; his testy tone reflects impatience with an influential churchman who was not considering how his example might lead elementary students astray. Where the deepest mysteries of the faith are concerned (and surely Trinity, Incarnation, and Human Redemption are numbered among these), even Anselm’s epistemic position is less advantageous than that of the average high-school geometry student: just as the latter will get nowhere if his “proofs” transgress the theorem that the interior angles of a triangle equal 180 degrees, even though a mathematical genius might invent a new branch of geometry thereby; so, Anselm believes, we humans will never make theological progress by denying Scripture, creeds, or conciliar pronouncements, or by rejecting the institutional correction of the Church. Just as the best of Anselm’s student interlocutors, for all of their intellectual skill, insight, and initiative, have not outgrown their need for his guidance, so not even theological stars such as Anselm will ever graduate from the tutelage of authority.

Indeed, Anselm repeats in this polemical context the doctrine outlined in the *Monologion* and taken for granted in the *Proslogion*: namely, that where such advanced topics are concerned, intellectual expertise does not suffice for progress. Rather the focus of the whole self is important, the coordination of intellectual effort with disciplined exercise of the soul’s other powers is necessary. Thus, in *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*, Anselm describes the requisite wholistic preparation as involving (i) faith, (ii) humble obedience to Divine precepts, and (iii) discipline to resist carnal passions.⁸⁵ The soul who trains will and emotions as well as reason will be capable of a closer approach, a clearer view; the knowledge thus gained will contrast with that acquired through a merely intellectual route, as first hand “experience” to hearsay.⁸⁶ By contrast, those who refuse to begin with faith and who controvert or doubt the deliverances of the Fathers are like “bats and owls, who see the sky only at night” and yet “dispute about the midday rays of the sun with eagles”; they will descend into all sorts of errors.⁸⁷ Likewise, those who persistently refuse the discipline of will and emotions may even lose what little

understanding they possessed.⁸⁸ At the close of the chapter, Anselm reemphasizes the pedagogical concern behind such dire warnings:

I have said these things in order that no one should presume to discuss the highest questions of faith before he is ready; or, if he should presume to do so, in order that no difficulty or impossibility of understanding should be able to shake him from the truth to which he has held by faith.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, Anselm's working posture toward (a)–(e) is more complex than these *ex professo* endorsements would suggest.

Scripture

Anselm's view of Scripture is bivalent. First and foremost, it is a tutor, meditation on which and obedience to which “forms” the soul, expresses the image of God impressed upon it. Without such education, the soul is, as just noted, in no position to tackle deep mysteries or to second-guess patristic explanations of them.

It is vain for someone to try to reply: “I have understood more than all my teachers” (Ps. 119:99), when he does not dare to add: “for Thy testimonies are my meditation” (Ps. 119:99). And he speaks untruthfully if he says, “I understand more than the ancients,” when he is unaware that this text goes on: “for I have sought Thy commandments” (Ps. 119:100).⁹⁰

On the other hand, Anselm the mature monk and theologian consistently treats Scripture verses as “phenomena to be saved” by his theological theories. Queries about the meaning of verses are the point of departure in *De Veritate* and *De Casu Diaboli*.⁹¹ In the *Monologion* and *Proslogion*, as well as the dialogues, the evolving theory is repeatedly checked for congruence with Scripture. Yet, fit is often achieved by treating the literal wording of the biblical text as a case of improper linguistic usage – a strategy offered as a methodological tip to the student in *De Casu Diaboli*:

TEACHER:

Be Careful not at all to think – when we read Scripture, or when in accordance with Scripture we say, that God causes evil or causes not-being – that I am denying the basis for what is said or am finding fault with its being said. *But we ought not to cling to the verbal impropriety concealing the truth as much as we ought to attend to the true propriety hidden beneath*

*the many types of expression.*⁹²

Not that Anselm engages in cynical, or even fanciful (in the manner of some patristic allegory), explaining away of apparently recalcitrant passages. Rather, he takes for granted a harmonization of Scripture regulated by creeds and conciliar pronouncements, and within those parameters offers the sensible renderings of one whose steeping in Scripture has left him with a devout appreciation of it.

Writing about the controversy between Latin and Greek churches over the *filioque* clause, Anselm eschews another sort of clinging to *the words* of Scripture at the expense of intended meaning: to the Greek objection that Scripture nowhere *explicitly* states that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Son, with its accompanying theological rule that we ought not “to assert on our own opinion, or authority, that which is nowhere stated in Scripture,” Anselm responds with counter-examples that overturn the rule:

where in the Prophets, in the Gospels, or in the Apostles do we read in just so many words that the one God exists in three persons, or that the one God is a Trinity, or that God is from God? Nor do we encounter the words “person” and “trinity” in that Creed in which the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Son is also not set forth. Nevertheless, *since these things clearly follow from those things which we do read*, we steadfastly believe them in our hearts and confess them with our mouths. Therefore, *we ought to receive with certainty not only whatever we read in Holy Scriptures but also whatever follows from Scripture by rational necessity – as long as there is no reason against it.*⁹³

Scriptural statements, like the sometimes cryptic initial formulations of the teacher in Anselm’s dialogues, require explanations, which unfold their deep-structure meanings. Theological theory is in no small part intended to do this job. To be sure, Anselm would grant, the genuine logical consequences of correctly interpreted scriptural claims must be true. Yet, just as caution is always necessary in moving from the direct to the implicit meanings of a speaker, so Anselm is cautious here about inferences from Scripture. Just as the student is able to generate independent, apparently sound arguments for opposing conclusions, without being able to penetrate to the resolution of the apparent contradiction; so the most spiritually mature and intellectually advanced of human beings might go astray in extrapolating the implications of Holy Writ. Thus, Anselm stipulates, as a safeguard, that not only must the further assertions seem to follow, but also that no other (equally good) reasons can be cited against them.

Authority and the “threat” of novelty

Anselm's theological community thought that the limitations of human reason in relation to God were so great as to generate a serious presumption against novelty, whether of content or theological method. The preferred genre was lecture-commentary on the Bible or patristic authors. Anselm shows himself sensitive to such worries but unwilling to be bound by them. (i) On the one hand, Anselm submitted his first treatise, the *Monologion*, to Lanfranc, his former ecclesiastical superior, for criticism. On the other hand, the latter's objection to Anselm's method – of bracketing the authority of Scripture and the Fathers, and attempting to establish Christian beliefs about the being, nature, and triunity of God by reason alone – brought neither alteration nor withdrawal from publication, but only the addition of an explanatory prologue, in which Anselm defends the utility of his method, while assuring the reader that this content is not new (being prefigured in Augustine's *De Trinitate*).⁹⁴ (ii) Likewise, if Anselm concedes, in the opening chapter of *Cur Deus Homo*, that what ought to be said about human redemption can be sufficiently gleaned from the Fathers,⁹⁵ he spends roughly half of the first book (Chapters 3) allowing the dialogue to display the inadequacy of patristic solutions to (past and current) infidel objections, thereby reinforcing his justification for a new investigation.⁹⁶ (iii) Again, in *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*, Anselm ventures to justify the sixth-century addition of the *filioque* clause to the Nicene Creed by the Latin Church. He argues, on the one hand, that it is implicit in Scripture and not contradicted by other considerations, and on the other, that its insertion was a necessary response to a new context of misunderstandings. New historical contexts raise different puzzles, which call in turn for further explicit developments of doctrine.⁹⁷

In sum, where the dichotomy of tradition and novelty is concerned, Anselm finds that human limitations cut both ways. On the one hand, fruitful inquiry into the mysteries of Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption requires the spiritual formation of all human dimensions under the tutelage of Scripture. No one should expect to discover any new insights about these topics, apart from prior careful preparation of mind, will, and emotions. On the other hand, these subjects are so profound, that human inquiry will never exhaust them.⁹⁸ Since it is a human duty that faith should seek understanding,⁹⁹ and since the Holy Spirit is promised to Christians in every age, the well-prepared and persistent can hope for fresh discoveries.¹⁰⁰ For Anselm, it is criterial that the latter will never contradict Scripture or the creeds, but at most elaborate their meanings and implications. For the most part, new investigations will not oppose, but rather expose the theoretical underpinnings of patristic claims.

Yet, the mature Anselm was willing to venture novelties of content as well as method. Not only does he supplant the Ransom Theory of the ancients with his classic formulation of the satisfaction-theory. He also moves into speculative areas – for

example, whether or not God's first choice includes humans or only angels in the created population of heaven,¹⁰¹ and how God took a sinless human nature from Adam's race.¹⁰² Thus, for all his genuine humility, Anselm did not engage in false modesty, and was willing, by implication, to present himself as wiser than *some* of his teachers! In the words of Benedicta Ward, "Anselm . . . writes as being himself one of the Fathers."¹⁰³

None of this means that Anselm was insincere or equivocal in identifying Scripture, Church dogma, or the Fathers as authorities (*auctoritates*). Rather Anselm is a pioneer-representative of a methodological translation that came to full flower in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century universities, moving from the lecture (*lectio*), which focused on the assimilation and exegesis of texts, to the methods of question and disputation, which used apparently conflicting authorities to focus theological questions that were pursued by the methods of dialectical and "determined" by the authority of the teacher.¹⁰⁴

Ecclesiastical personages

Certainly, Anselm recognized, submitted to, and defended the authority of the Bishop of Rome, in both the political and intellectual spheres. As noted above, he submits *Cur Deus Homo* to the Pope, and uses the *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi* and *De Processione Spiritus Sancti* to lay his arguments against Roscelin and the Greeks before the Pope. Likewise, before "publishing" the *Monologion*, he sent it to Lanfranc, his former teacher and religious superior at Bec. In theory, Anselm's general estimate of human capacities makes him adopt a posture of openness to correction from all and sundry. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful to what degree he really expected legitimate philosophico-theological correction from his contemporaries. As already noted, he did not alter or withhold the *Monologion* from "publication," despite Lafranc's objections. *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi* and *De Processione Spiritus Sancti* seem written to instruct the reader as much as to *inform* him of the orthodoxy of Anselm's actual views. The closing paragraph of *Cur Deus Homo* affirms Anselm's receptiveness to *reasonable* correction,¹⁰⁵ but at the beginning he claims to have achieved an "elegant" solution;¹⁰⁶ even at controversial points his arguments impose a burden of rebuttal on those who disagree.¹⁰⁷

THE POWER TO CONVINCE

Anselm's strategy in addressing his various audiences is straightforward: to begin with common premises and proceed by valid arguments to his desired conclusions.¹⁰⁸

Varying the database

What counts as a “common” assumption is a function both of intended audience and announced purpose. (1) In the *Monologion*, Anselm addresses two audiences. The first is constituted by his monastic student-brothers who requested that he proceed by rational necessity¹⁰⁹ without appeal to scriptural authority. The second is made up of unbelievers whom Anselm hopes to persuade by reason alone¹¹⁰ on the basis of premises they already accept, (a) that God exists, (b) that God is both the source of all goods and Himself the Good that satisfies, and (c) that the rational thing for human beings to do is commit themselves to God in living faith. (2) Although the *Proslogion* is a prayer-exercise for believers, one of Anselm’s aims in the sections devoted to intellectual striving (Chapters 2–13, 17–23) is to achieve a theoretical advance over the *Monologion*, by finding simpler proofs for a subset of its results: (a) that God truly exists, (b) that all things need Him for their being and well-being, and (c) other Christian beliefs about the divine substance (as opposed to triunity).¹¹¹ Comments in his *Reply to Gaunilo* make evident Anselm’s assumption that such *Proslogion* arguments inherit the *Monologion*’s accessibility to unbelievers as well.¹¹² (3) *Cur Deus Homo* appears, in the beginning, to aim at a general audience, but to narrow its focus at Chapter 10 to those (perhaps certain Jews and Moslems, as well as Christians) who accept certain biblical claims about God and some theses about angelology.¹¹³ Clearly bracketed are “all beliefs about Christ,” because it is the necessity and soteriological efficacy of the Incarnation and Passion that are to be proved by necessary (i.e. cogent) reasons.¹¹⁴ (4) In *De Processione Spiritus Sancti*, Anselm’s aim is to inform and instruct Latin, while persuading Greek Christians that the *filioque* clause belongs in the Nicene Creed. Accordingly, he takes for granted the many points of agreement between the two churches, and brackets Latin adherence to the *filioque*, in order to prove the latter from the former.¹¹⁵ (5) *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi* looks to a Latin Christian audience, and addresses itself to the confusions of those puzzled by the same questions (about Trinity and Incarnation) that led Roscelin (at least temporarily) astray.¹¹⁶ (6) Anselm’s quartet of teaching dialogues are student-exercises for an entirely Christian school, whose purpose is as much (or more) technique development as content mastery.¹¹⁷ *De Grammatico* focuses entirely on issues of semantics, and involves no doctrinal premises. Anselm introduces the other three – *De Veritate*, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, and *De Casu Diaboli* – as concerned with “the study of Holy Scripture.”¹¹⁸ And to some extent, their topics do involve the clarification of Scripture, or how one Christian belief fits together with another. Consequently, little or no attention is paid to whether unbelievers would accept the premises of Anselm’s explanations. All the same, their results – definitions of truth, justice, freedom of choice, and a theory of created motivational psychology – are clearly among those Anselm would commend to unbelievers of whatever kind, and could equally find support among the beliefs that Christians and non-Christians share.

Confidence in the conclusions

On Anselm's understanding of human capacity for inquiry, it follows that our readiness to be convinced by an argument should depend not only on our willingness to accept the premises and apparent validity of the inference, but also on the difficulty of the subject matter. (i) Thus, he claims to have established conclusions about the existence and independence of God and the dependence of creatures, with such firmness that even if he did not wish to believe them, he would be forced to do so.¹¹⁹ (ii) As to the divine nature, because of its simplicity and eternity, the surface-level expressive power of our language is not geared to it, so that technical usage has to be devised.¹²⁰ Where God's triunity is concerned, our linguistic and conceptual apparatus are even less well suited to their task; and while analogies can rationalize a scheme of usage, sufficient for us to be confident *that* God is three-in-one, our intellectual powers cannot penetrate to *how* God is three-in-one, or *what three* God is.¹²¹ (iii) Again, because the goodness of God is an inexhaustible mystery, our apparently sound arguments about what perfect goodness would do are especially liable to being overturned. For example, reason seems to dictate "good for good, evil for evil" and thus to rule out sparing the wicked.¹²² But scriptural and doctrinal claims of divine mercy, provoke faith seeking understanding to dig deeper, to the realization that propriety of retribution can be considered both from the side of the agent's desert and from the side of the nature of the one who responds: the propriety of sparing the wicked could stem from the latter.¹²³ Similarly, Anselm remarks, angels before the fall could not be sure that God would punish sin, because they could not see far enough into His goodness to rule out the possibility that divine mercy would simply forgive it without satisfaction.¹²⁴ Once again, retrospective authority steers Anselm away from that thesis, but the notion that it would be unfitting for perfect justice not to demand satisfaction for maximally indecent acts is commended as reasonable in its own right.¹²⁵ If further reflection is apt to show some of our calculations to be wrong, it is bound to expose even our deepest reflections as superficial and for that reason distorting.

The priority of faith?

We have seen how Anselm does not think a human being can come to a vision of God through intellectual inquiry alone, separate from discipline of will and emotions. Moreover, Anselm firmly contends that the human end (the *that-for-which-humans-were-made* or *-came-to-be*) gives rise to a human duty to follow "right order": to believe in order to understand, not to try to understand in order to believe.¹²⁶ In the *Proslogion*, he appears to go further, asserting of the effort to "understand" God "a little bit," "unless I believe, I will not understand."¹²⁷ Does Anselm, after all or at least sometimes, assert the absolute priority of faith over understanding, such that an unbeliever cannot come to *know* the truth of any tenets of the Christian faith through rational arguments?¹²⁸

Not necessarily. Perhaps this priority claim is to be understood in terms of Anselm's customary division of roles, between the teacher – whose job it is to take the broader view, to direct the inquiry, distinguishing good questions from bad ones, and to articulate the insights that resolve the difficulties – and the student – whose task it is to raise questions and objections, to follow along, remember, digest, and query what the teacher says. Anselm, the teacher, writes the *Monologion*, pioneering the territory with his own seeking; he is the explorer-discoverer *par excellence*. Anselm widens his classroom to include (hypothetical?) unbelievers alongside committed monks. The book is written with pedagogical consideration, so that both halves of his audience can track and (with repetition) digest the reasoning; but neither is in a position at the outset to assume the teacher's role. Again, however active his dialogue-students, none of them is sufficiently well developed to take over and guide the inquiry to a successful conclusion. Likewise, no matter how brilliant the senior human collaborator, s/he remains a “teacher's aid,” metaphysically incapable of taking the class all by her/himself. “Unless I believe, I will not understand” is a biblical quotation, which comes as part of a prayer-exercise to put the soul in a posture of humility before the divine partner. Thus, Anselm's point may be that prior faith, which makes this collaboration explicit, is required for this senior human role.

If so, is not his claim falsified by the existence of academic experts who are not at the same time Christian believers? Moreover, should not Anselm have known better? Even if Anselm had few or no personal encounters with any among his contemporaries, he surely knew *of* and read a little Aristotle (probably the *Categories* and *De Interpretatione*), and he had arguably played the student to Priscian's teacher and profited from the latter's works.¹²⁹

Maybe, but maybe not entirely. Remember, Anselm's own goals are extremely high – preeminently, to see God's face; in the meantime, to understand “a little bit” about God's being and well-being, His nature, triunity, and goodness. Further, like Augustine before him, Anselm takes the latter goals to be the crown and completion of any intellectual inquiry, because any study into creatures is implicitly a study of divine being and goodness. Wherever one begins, faith will eventually be required to see the investigation through to the end.

Moreover, Anselm's understanding of human insight as progressive, its clarity eventually demanding the focus of all human powers, is compatible with a highly flexible position. If human beings are multidimensional, almost everyone suffers from “lop-sided” development. Anselm worries, on the other hand, lest the monastic curriculum exercise will and emotions without developing the intellect; on the other, lest the ignorant and unbelieving think a merely intellectual approach to God will suffice. Implicitly, his

appropriation of pagan insights recognizes the possibility of disciplining all three human faculties up to a point of considerable skill outside the context of faith. Just as in the former cases the lagging dimensions will have, sooner or later, to “catch up” and coordinate with gains along with others; so pagan expertise will have to be transplanted in the soil of faith. As with some Church Fathers, including the philosophical theologian Clement of Alexandria and Augustine himself, many former understandings will survive, but with new coloration; others will prove wrong-headed and wither away. Naturally, how much the new context affects the truth-values of propositions depends on the field in question (e.g., less for mathematics than for value claims, as Anselm’s discussion of justice and mercy makes clear), but even where these remain unaltered the significance of such claims will be transformed.

ANSELM’S STANCE, CONTRASTING POSTURES

We have seen that Anselm’s method in philosophical theology is shaped by five fundamental factors:

1. his appreciation of the ontological incommensuration between God and creatures;
2. his commitment to the infallible authority of Scripture as interpreted through the creeds and conciliar pronouncements;
3. his conviction that humans are made in God’s image;
4. his conception of inquiry as essentially a divine–human collaboration;
5. his understanding of human inquiry as wholistic and developmental.

Interestingly, (1) is emphasized more by contemporary theology (from existentialists to feminists to John Hick’s *An Interpretation of Religion* ¹³⁰) than by analytic philosophy of religion, and used to support a kind of theological scepticism, about human capacity to discover any truth about what God essentially is. Such scepticism is not usually taken as reason to abolish non-negative “God-talk,” but rather seen as grounds for reductive construals (e.g. for treating it as metaphor, myth, or ideology) and/or a license for reconstruction. By contrast, some conservative evangelicals or traditional Catholics, who join Anselm in (2), use (1) to rationalize a passive acceptance of authority of the Bible and/or the Church. ¹³¹

Like the second group, Anselm is no theological skeptic, because (2) he finds in authority compass and astrolabe, tutor and guide. If, with the first group, he agrees that human language must be stretched to talk about God – so that terms are used analogically of the divine essence, in some sense metaphorically of God’s triunity – Anselm continues to insist that such statements express non-mythological, literal truth, that they are true by correspondence with the very being of God. Yet, at the center of

Anselm's Christian pedagogy is his insistence on human duty to *interact* with authority, by seeking understanding; his confidence that we can always make some progress in discovering *the truth* about God is grounded in (3)–(5).

Many conservative evangelicals and traditional Catholics have found congenial Anselm's notion of theological development – that while one begins with the infallible authority of Scripture, new conflicts and confusions warrant new explanations, which make explicit what was implicit in the already given. Such was also the methodology of the Oxford Movement (of the 1830s–40s) within the Church of England, where it still commands the allegiance of many Anglo-Catholics today. This position involves the patristic idea that God has somehow insulated the texts of Scripture and conciliar pronouncements from the errors to which all human inquiry about God is otherwise so prone because of (1), the ontological incommensuration between God and creatures.

For many (myself included), the results of the historico-critical study of the Bible have rendered this last assumption (and hence [2]) untenable, exposing as they appear to do how deeply the human collaborators have shaped the text. Such studies underscore the validity of (1), while construing (5) not only individually but collectively: the ontological and epistemical gap between God and humans is so great that it took generations for the human race to work up to a plausible approximation of the right idea. On this reworking of Anselmian themes, Scripture and creeds remain authoritative, not as infallible dictates, but as tutors to which one submits for spiritual formation and from whom the philosophical theologian or Christian philosopher should never depart lightly or in haste. Yet, just as the interactive study of authority has led many to “find” theological development within the Bible itself; so we might expect with Anselm that – since (3) God made us in His image and (4) gives the Holy Spirit in every age – further progress toward the truth about God might be made in our day as well. If some understandings seem to be “outgrown” in the Bible (e.g. that God might be jealous of human achievements in building skyscrapers in Genesis 11:1–9), so – with all due caution – we are not entitled to dismiss *a priori* all contradictions of Scripture as *ipso facto* mistaken.¹³² If this estimate of the Bible erodes security about our sense of intellectual direction, it spawns greater optimism about the divine collaborator's willingness to be patient with dull-witted and silly students, as about His pedagogical resourcefulness in redeeming our errors.

NOTES

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1. *Mon.* 31 (S I: 49–50); 68–69 (S I: 78–84); *De Ver.* 2 (S I: 178–79); 4 (S I: 180–88); 7 (S I: 185.6–186.4).
2. *Mon.* 68 (S I: 78.25–79.1).
3. *Mon.* 68 (S I: 79.2–3).
4. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 98.14–15). Likewise, Anselm speaks of Adam’s losing the “happiness for which he was made” (S I: 98.18).
5. Cf. *Prosl.* 24–26 (S I: 117.25–122.2).
6. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.1 (S I: 97.4–98.5).
7. *Mon.* 28 (S I: 46.8–16.29).
8. *Prosl.* 15 (S I: 112.14–17).
9. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 98.3–5); 9 (S I: 107.4–27); 14 (S I: 111.22–112.11); 16 (S I: 112.19–113.4); *Cur Deus Homo* 1.2 (S II: 50.3–13).
10. *Mon.* 36 (S I: 54.15–18); 66 (S I: 74.30–75.16).
11. *Mon.* 15 (S I: 28.3–17, 13, 16, 25); 28 (S I: 46.20); *Prosl.* 17 (S I: 113.13).
12. *De Lib. Arb.* 3–4 (S I: 212.19–214.12); cf. *De Casu Diab.* 12–17 (S I: 251.22–262.19); *De Conc. Virg.* 1–2 (S II: 140.3–142.10); *De Conc.* 3.1–6 (S II: 263.4–73.6).
13. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 98.16–99.14); 18 (S I: 113.18–114.13).
14. *Mon.* 65–67 (S I: 75.19–78.1).
15. *Mon.* 67–68 (S I: 78.1–79.9).

16. *Prosl.* 26 (S I: 121.22–122.2).

17. Anselm consistently sounds this theme in the prayers, and it is a key premise in his *Cur Deus Homo* argument for the necessity of the Incarnation. His works are riddled with prayers for divine aid in his theological inquiries as well as thanksgiving for help received. Cf. *Prosl.* 2 (S I: 101.1–2); 9 (S I: 108.8–10); 14 (S I: 111.23–112.11); 18 (S I: 114.8–13). *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 49.3–6); 1.2 (S II: 50.3–6); 1.16 (S II: 74.10–19); 1.25 (S II: 95.1–96.20); 2.16 (S II: 117.18–20); 2.22 (S II: 113.13–15).

18. Cf. *De Conc.* 3.6–8 (S II: 271.20–276.5).

19. *Mon.* 75 (S I: 83.10–13).

20. *Mon.* 15 (S I: 28.5–8). Translation from Jasper Hopkins, *A New Interpretative Translation of St. Anselm's Monologion and Proslogion* (Minneapolis, MN: Arthur J. Banning Press, 1986), 93.

21. *Mon.* 43 (S I: 59.15–17). Italics mine; translation, Hopkins, 157.

22. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 98.1–3).

23. *De Conc.* 3.6 (S II: 270.14–21). Translation from *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. II, edited and translated by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (New York: Mellen Press, 1976), 206.

24. *The Rule of St. Benedict*, Prologue; in *Western Asceticism*, ed. Owen Chadwick (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 291–93.

25. *Orationes sive Meditationes*, Prologus (S III: 3.2–4).

26. See Benedicta Ward, “Introduction,” *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 44–51.

27. *De Conc.* 3.6 (S II: 270.28).

28. *Mon.* 78 (S I: 84.16–85.9).

29. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 100.10–11).
30. *Mon.* 68 (S I: 78.25–79.5); *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 98.14–15.18); *Cur Deus Homo* 2.1 (S II: 97.4–98.5).
31. *De Lib. Arb.* 3–4 (S I: 210.28–214.12); *De Conc.* 1.6 (S II: 256.14–257.18); 3.13 (S II: 285.7–287.21).
32. *De Casu Diab.* 12–14 (S I: 251.22–259.4); *De Conc.* 3.11–13 (S II: 278.27–287.21).
33. *De Casu Diab.* 1–3 (S I: 233.6–240.13).
34. *De Casu Diab.* 12–14 (S I: 251.22–259.4); 17 (S I: 263.5–32); *De Conc.* 3.12–13 (S II: 284.22–287.21).
35. *Cur Deus Homo*, *passim*.
36. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.16 (S II: 118.5–20).
37. *De Conc.* 3.6 (S II: 272.28–273.6); 38–9 (S II: 274.19–278.10).
38. *Orationes sive Meditationes*, A. *Orationes*, 1 (S III: 5.3–6.17); trans. Ward, *Prayers and Meditations*, 91–92.
39. *Commendatio* (S II: 40.5–7).
40. Cf. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 97.4–10).
41. As Anselm repeatedly does in his works: cf. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 97.4–100.19); 14–18 (S I: 111.8–115.4); and *passim*. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 49.3–6); 1.2 (S II: 50.3–6); 1.25 (S II: 95.1–96.20); 2.17 (S II: 126.5–19). *De Concordia* (S II: 245.3–5); 3.14 (S II: 288.11–19). Cf. *De Conc. Virg.* 29 (S II: 173.4–7); and *De Proc.* 16 (S II: 219.27–28).
42. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 48.16–18); *Commendatio* (S II: 40.10–12).

43. *Prosl.* 2 (S I: 101.4–7); 6 (S I: 104.20–25); 7 (S I: 105.9–11); 8 (S I: 106.5–8); 9 (S I: 106.18–107.3); 10 (S I: 108.23–25); 11 (S I: 109.10–24); 18 (S I: 114.14–18); 19 (S I: 115.7–9); 20 (S I: 115.18–20).
44. *Prosl.* 13 (S I: 110.12–19).
45. *Prosl.* 2 (S I: 101.1–2); 9 (S I: 108.8–10); 14 (S I: 111.23–112.11); 18 (S I: 114.8–13).
46. *Prosl.* 4 (S I: 104.5–7); 14 (S I: 111.22–23; 112.5–6, 9–11; 112.27–113.1).
47. *Prosl.* 9 (S I: 108.11).
48. *Prosl.* 26 (S I: 121.4–6; cf. I: 120.23–26); and 14 (S I: 111.22–23).
49. Conclusions addressed to God: *Prosl.* 3 (S I: 102.3–9); 6 (S I: 105.4–6); 7 (S I: 105.27–106.2); 8 (S I: 106.9–14); 11 (S I: 110.1–3); 12 (S I: 110.6–8); 17 (S I: 113.8–15); 22 (S I: 116.15–117.2); 23 (S I: 117.6–16).
50. *Prosl.* 4 (S I: 103.5–7); cf. the “shores” of prayer and praise in [Chapters 1](#), 14–18, 24–26. In the few passages lacking explicit address, what precedes and follows makes the context of continuing prayer clear. Cf. *Prosl.* 2 (S I: 101.7–102.3); 3 (S I: 102.6–103.2); 21 (S I: 116.6–12); 3 (S I: 102.9–11); 23 (S I: 117.16–22).
51. *Commendatio* (S II: 40.10–12).
52. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 47.8–9). Cf. *Commendatio* (S II: 39.4–6). Also *Prosl.* 26 (S I: 120.23–122.2).
53. *Mon.* 31 (S I: 49.1–50.13); 36 (S I: 54.18–55.6). Cf. *De Ver.* 7 (S I: 185.6–186.4).
54. Anselm exempts Christ’s human nature from the necessity for such education; he contends that it was omniscient, because no purpose would be served by the divine Word’s assuming our ignorance, in addition to our ability to die. See *Cur Deus Homo* 2.13 (S II: 112.16–113.18).

55. Here I make allowances for prodigies such as Mozart, who seem to require much less education.

56. For example, in *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.11; *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* 74, 6.

57. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 100.18–19). Cf. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 47.8–9; 48.16–18); *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 9.5–8).

58. For example, in response to the teacher's contention that sin does not take away freedom of choice but only the occasion to use it, the student replies, "I believe, but I desire to understand" (*De Lib. Arb.* 3; S I: 211.1). Again, regarding the claim that fallen angels would not be condemned if they were not guilty, the student declares, "I am certain, even if I do not see it" (*De Casu Diab.* 2; S I: 235.27; cf. 14; S I: 240.22–23). Likewise, to the contention that the good angels were able to sin before the evil ones fell, the student responds, "I think so, but I wish to comprehend it by reason" (*De Casu Diab.* 5; S I: 242.28).

59. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.13 (S II: 113.17–18).

60. *De Gramm.* 1–2 (S I: 145.4–146.26); 3 (S I: 147.21–148.6); *De Ver.* 1 (S I: 176); *De Lib. Arb.* 1 (S I: 207.4–10); 2 (S I: 209.13–26); *De Casu Diab.* 2 (S I: 235.20–236.9); 7 (S I: 244.11–245.18); 10 (S I: 247.6–28); 21 (S I: 266.15–267.19).

61. See *De Lib. Arb.* 1 (S I: 208.1–13); 2 (S I: 209.27–210.21); 3 (S I: 210.25–211.1); 5 (S I: 214.5–17.24–26); 6 (S I: 217.10–22); 8 (S I: 220.12–16); 10 (S I: 222.20); 11 (S I: 222.26–233.2); 13 (S I: 225.4–9).

62. The student offers linguistic (*De Lib. Arb.* 5; S I: 214.24–26) and experiential (6; S I: 217.20–25) counter-evidence to the teacher's claim that the will cannot be overcome by temptation. Likewise, he wonders whether God is a counter-example to the teacher's claim that no alien force can coerce an upright will to sin (*De Lib. Arb.* 8; S I: 220.12–16).

63. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.25 (S II: 95.15–22).

64. For example, he asks whether humans were part of God's original creative plan, or

whether we were made only to fill up the number of fallen angels (*Cur Deus Homo* 1.16; S II: 74.14 and 1.18; S II: 84.3); how God was able to take a sinless human nature from Adam's race (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.16; S II: 116.16–24, 117.18–22); and whether Christ's death was not necessary, on the assumption that Mary was cleansed by it in advance (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.16; S II: 120.2–11).

65. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.3 (S II: 50.16–22).

66. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.7 (S II: 55.13–59.5).

67. For example, in *De Veritate*, when the student appeals to Aristotelian–Boethian correspondence as an account of truth of statement, the teacher denies it is definitional, but then allows it to stand as a statement of truth-conditions within the teacher's teleological account of what truth is. Again, in *De Libertate Arbitrii*, the teacher rejects the student's proposal – “power to sin and power not to sin” – as definitional of free choice, but allows it to stand as a *de facto* necessary condition of imputability.

68. The teacher offers the final definitions in *De Veritate* (11–12; S I: 191.3–196.25) and *De Libertate Arbitrii* (3; S I: 211.5–212.23 and 14; S I: 226.3–21). Likewise, in *De Grammatico*, it is the teacher who supplies the key distinction between signification and appellation, which renders consistent the conclusion that *grammaticus* is both substance and quality. *A fortiori*, in *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm is the one who advances both the negative case – that human redemption is impossible without an Incarnation (in 1.11–22; S II: 68.3–96.4) – and the positive account of how a God-man saves us (in 2.25; S II: 97.4–133.11).

69. *De Lib. Arb.* 1 (S I: 207.4–10).

70. *De Lib. Arb.* 3 (S I: 211.5–212.23).

71. *De Lib. Arb.* 13 (S I: 225.4–28).

72. *De Lib. Arb.* 12 (S I: 223.26–224.30).

73. Cf. *De Lib. Arb.* 21 (S I: 224.26–30).

74. *De Gramm.* 21 (S I: 168.7–12).

75. *Mon.* 18 (S I: 33.11–22); cf. *De Ver.* 1 (S I: 176.4–19); 13 (S I: 196.28–199.29).
76. *Meditatio* 3 (S III: 85.32–34); cf. *Epistola* 56 (S III: 171.15–16).
77. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.13 (S II: 215.14–19).
78. *De Proc.* 16 (S II: 219.23–29).
79. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.18 (S II: 82.8–10); cf. *De Conc* 3.6 (S II: 272.4–7).
80. *Epistola* 136 (S III: 280.16–26); *De Inc. Verbi, Prior Recensio*, sec. 4 (S I: 283.11–15).
81. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 5.1–14; 11.15–17; 13.4–21; 15.19–20; 16.3–5; 20.16–19; 22.14–16; 24.9–10; 28.71–75; 29.29–30). *De Processione Spiritus Sancti* (S II: 177.5–19; 178.13–15; 181.13–14; 185.16–25; 188.1–4; 190.30–32; 194.12–20; 200.3–5; 205.18–21; 206.8–11; 207.26–29; 210.21–34; 211.1–3; 212.25–27; 218.22–23).
82. See *Commendatio* 2 (S II: 41.1–5). Cf. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 3.7–4.4).
83. See his apology in *Monologion*, Prologus (S I: 8.8–20). Likewise, his concession that the Fathers had already adequately covered the subject matter of *Cur Deus Homo* (11 S; II: 48.9–10).
84. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S I: 6.10–7.6). Translation in *Anselm of Canterbury. Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption: Theological Treatises*, ed. and trans. by Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 8.
85. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 8.7–19).
86. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 9.5–8).
87. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S I: 7.6–8.6).
88. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 9.9–19).

89. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 10.14–17).
90. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 9.1–4).
91. *De Casu Diab.* 1 (S I: 233.6–7).
92. *De Casu Diab.* 1 (S I: 235.8–12). Translation in *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. II, ed. and trans. Hopkins and Richardson, 133. Italics mine.
93. *De Proc.* 11 (S II: 209.9–16. Cf. S II: 208.1–11). Translation in *Anselm of Canterbury: Trinity, Incarnation, and Redemption*, ed. and trans. Hopkins and Richardson, 120–21; cf. 118–19. Italics mine.
94. Cf. *Epistola ad Lanfrancum archiepiscopum* (S I: 5.2–6.14); and Prologus (S I: 7.2–8.26).
95. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 58.9–10).
96. Thus Martin Grabmann overestimates Anselm's adherence to patristic authority in his monumental study, *Die Geschichte der Scholastischen Methoden*, vol. I (5th edn.; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1956 [first published in 1909]), 258–339; esp. 267–69, 289.
97. *De Proc.* 13–14 (S II: 211.6–215.26).
98. *Commendatio* (S II: 40.4–5).
99. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 48.16–18).
100. *Commendatio* (S II: 40.5–7).
101. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.18 (S II: 82.5–16).
102. Anselm offers one explanation in *Cur Deus Homo* 2.16 (S II: 116.16–122.21), and devotes the whole of *De Conceptu Virginali et Originali Peccato* to the formulation of another.

103. Ward, *Prayers and Meditations*, 49.
104. For helpful discussions of this methodological evolution which, however, curiously omit Anselm's place in the story, cf. Bernardo C. Bazan, *Les Questions Disputées, Principalement dans les Facultés de Théologie, de Droit et de Médecine*, part I (Turnhout: Brepols, 1985), 15–149; and Stephen F. Brown, “Key Terms in Medieval Theological Vocabulary,” in *Civiciama: études sur le vocabulaire intellectuel du moyen âge*, vol. III: *Méthodes et instruments du travail intellectuel au moyen âge: études sur le vocabulaire* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 82–96.
105. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.22 (S II: 133.12–13).
106. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 48.6–9).
107. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.18 (S II: 83.28–29).
108. Anselm gives crisp acknowledgment to this procedure in *De Proc.* 1 (S II: 177.15–17).
109. *Mon.* Prologus (S I: 7.10).
110. *Mon.* Prologus (S I: 7.10).
111. *Prosl.* Prooemium (S I: 93.4–10).
112. *Responsio editoris* (S I: 130.3–4); cf. sec. 7 (S I: 137.3–5); sec. 10 (S I: 138–39).
113. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.10 (S II: 67.1–20).
114. *Cur Deus Homo*, Praefatio (S II: 42.8–43.3); cf. 1 (S I: 48.2–5).
115. *De Proc.* 1 (S II: 177.3–17).
116. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 5.22–6.4).

117. Anselm makes this explicit at the end of *De Gramm.* 21 (S I: 168.8–12).
118. *Praefatio* (S I: 173.2–3).
119. *Prosl.* 4 (S I: 104.5–7).
120. *Mon.* 15 (S I: 3–7); cf. 16–25, *passim*.
121. *Mon.* 64 (S I: 74.30–75.16).
122. *Prosl.* 9–11 (S I: 106–11).
123. *Prosl.* 10 (S I: 108–109).
124. *De Casu Diab.* 23 (S I: 270.4–18).
125. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.11–13 (S I: 68.3–71.26).
126. See *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1 (S II: 47.8–9; 48.16–17). Cf. *De Inc. Verbi* 1 (S II: 6.10–17.6; S II: 8.7–19; S II: 9.5–8).
127. *Prosl.* 1 (S I: 100.18–19).
128. Victor Roberts, in his concern that Anselm should insist on prior faith as an epistemological necessity, mistakenly insists that “[n]ever in any of his writings does Anselm speak of bringing” the unbeliever “to conversion by a process of reasoning” (in “The Relation of Faith and Reason in St. Anselm of Canterbury,” *The American Benedictine Review* 25 (1974): 494–512, esp. 511–12).
129. Cf. Desmond Paul Henry, *The Logic of St. Anselm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), sec. 3, 64–67.
130. John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: MacMillan Press, 1989).

131. Cf. Avery Dulles, S. J., *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1983).

132. The great Anglican theologian Charles Gore outlined such a position in his influential essay “The Holy Spirit and Inspiration,” *Lux Mundi* (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1890), 313–62. Gore’s focus in this essay was on the impact of higher criticism on the Old Testament, and he was reluctant to follow his logic through to the New Testament, especially where the events mentioned in the creeds were concerned. Cf. Arthur Michael Ramsey, *An Era in Anglican Theology: From Gore to Temple* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1960).

3 Anselm, Augustine, and Platonism

Gareth B. Matthews

INTRODUCTION

When Anselm completed his *Monologion*, he submitted it to his teacher, Lanfranc, for his approval.¹ Although we do not have the text of Lanfranc's reply, it seems to have called for Anselm to give appropriate sources for his assertions. In response to Lanfranc's criticism, Anselm sought to justify himself this way:

It was my intention throughout this disputation to assert nothing which could not be immediately defended either from canonical *Dicta* or from the words of St. Augustine. And however often I look over what I have written, I cannot see that I have asserted anything that is not to be found there. Indeed, no reasoning of my own, however conclusive, would have persuaded me to have been the first to presume to say those things which you have copied from my work, nor several other things besides, if St. Augustine had not already proved them in the great discussions in his *De trinitate*.²

The deference to Augustine that Anselm expresses in this passage seems, in a way, quite fitting. After all, Anselm gives evidence throughout his own writing, and not just in the *Monologion*, of a detailed knowledge and a deep understanding of Augustine, especially of his *De Trinitate*. Although Anselm does not explicitly acknowledge his indebtedness to Augustine in his other works, he does so in his Preface to the *Monologion*:

In the course of frequent rereadings of this treatise I have been unable to find anything which is inconsistent with the writings of the Catholic Fathers, and in particular with those of the Blessed Augustine. If, then, someone thinks that I have said here anything which is either too modern, or which departs from the truth, I would ask them not to denounce me as an arrogant modernizer or a maintainer of falsehood. Rather I ask that they first make a careful and thorough reading of the books *On the Trinity* of the aforementioned learned Augustine and then judge my little treatise on the basis of them.³

Anselm seems to have used Augustine, not only as a doctrinal authority, but also as a model for his own literary style. R. W. Southern has offered convincing evidence that the very cadences of Anselm's syntax, and not just the conclusions he reaches, give homage to Augustine.⁴

Yet there is a way in which Anselm's expressed deference to Augustine seems excessive. Anselm is a systematic thinker; Augustine is not. Even within the styles of academic philosophy, Anselm has a distinctive way of proceeding. In any case, he is important to us today, not perhaps so much for the novelty of his conclusions, at least not in philosophical theology, as for the fresh and rigorous way in which he reaches them.

I shall begin this account of Anselm, Augustine, and Platonism with a reconstruction of an argument for the existence of God that Augustine offers in Book 2 of his *On Free Choice of the Will* (*De Libero Arbitrio*). We do not know whether Anselm actually read this particular work. But Augustine's proof offers a convenient summary of some of his most important ideas. It can serve as a useful basis for comparing his thought with that of Anselm.

After discussing some central points of comparison between these two thinkers, I shall move on to consider two additional topics central to the philosophy of religion, namely, the Divine Nature, and the Problem of God's Foreknowledge and Human Free Will. I shall conclude with some comments about how Anselm fits into the Platonic tradition more generally, a tradition to which Anselm and Augustine both clearly belong.

AUGUSTINE'S PROOF OF GOD IN *ON FREE CHOICE OF THE WILL*

If Anselm's remarkable ontological argument has any significant precedent in the history of philosophy, it is perhaps the argument Augustine presents in Book 2 of his dialogue, *On Free Choice of the Will*. Reflecting on the similarities, some superficial, some deeper, between these two arguments may help us appreciate the fact that Anselm belongs to what we may call the Augustinian tradition in philosophy. Placing him in that tradition should not be allowed, however, to detract from his striking originality.

Augustine, in his dialogue, asks his interlocutor, Evodius, whether he is certain that God exists (2.2.5.12). Evodius answers that he accepts this by faith, not by reason. Augustine then asks Evodius what he would say to a fool who had said in his heart,

echoing a verse from the Psalms, “There is no God.”

Evodius responds to Augustine’s challenge by suggesting an appeal to the evidence of the Scriptures. But Augustine is not satisfied with this response. Why then, he asks, should we not simply accept the authority of the scriptural writers on other matters, rather than engage in our own philosophical investigation. Evodius replies, “We want to know and understand (*nosse et intellegere*) what we believe” (2.2.5.16).

Augustine compliments Evodius on his having grasped the nature of their joint project, which is to come to understand what they hold by faith. Appealing to the “Old Latin” text of Isaiah 7:9, “Unless you have believed, you shall not understand,” as well as to the admonition of Jesus, “Seek and you shall find” (John 17:3), Augustine reaffirms their purpose of seeking to understand what they believe.

The first item on their agenda, Augustine says, is to answer this question: “How is it evident (*manifestum*) that God exists?” (2.3.7.20). Augustine seems to be looking for a proof of the existence of God.

After listing two additional items in the search they are about to undertake, Augustine suggests they begin their inquiry with the question, “Do you yourself exist?” He continues: “Are you perhaps afraid that you might be deceived by this questioning? But if you did not exist, you could in no way be deceived.”

The reader might be led by this move to expect that Augustine would try to develop a proof of God’s existence based on the foundational certainty of one’s own existence. But he does not do that. Instead Augustine gets Evodius to agree that it would not be clear to him that he existed unless he were alive and also understood that he is alive. That move leads Augustine to introduce a scale of being, with inanimate things at the bottom of the scale, living beings higher up, and, among living beings, those with understanding higher than those that, even though they have perception, lack understanding.

Although it may not be immediately obvious to the reader, Augustine’s aim in introducing the idea of a scale of being is to be able to specify God as a being who is so high up on such a scale that there is nothing higher. At the bottom of the scale Augustine places a stone, which is his example of an inanimate being. Above such inanimate things he places beasts, which are living things that lack understanding. Above the beasts he places human beings, who are both alive and have understanding (2.3.7.22–23).

A little later on, at 2.6.13.52, Augustine develops a parallel hierarchy of natures, or

souls. In this parallel hierarchy he places on the bottom rung the (i) nature of a stone; the (ii) soul of a beast comes on the next level, and, finally, the (iii) rational soul or mind of a human being on the third level. Augustine asks Evodius whether, if they found something superior to our reason, he would agree that the entity they had found is God. Evodius says that being better (*melius*) than the best thing in him would be, just by itself, insufficient to guarantee that this being is God; to be God, he says, an entity would have to be something to whom nothing is superior (*quo est nullus superior* – 2.6.14.54). Thus we have the following definition of “God”:

(D) x is God = if x is superior to the human mind (or rational soul) and nothing is superior to x.

With this definition secured, Augustine begins a long discussion of truth that culminates in the conclusion that truth is superior to our minds:

And so it is clear beyond any doubt that this one truth, by which people become wise, and which makes them judges, not of it, but of other things, is better than our minds.

Now you had conceded that if I proved the existence of something higher than our minds, you would admit that it was God, as long as there was nothing higher still. I accepted this concession, and said that it would be enough if I proved that there is something higher than our minds. For if there is something more excellent than the truth, then that is God; if not, the truth itself is God. So in either case you cannot deny that God exists . . .

(*On Free Choice* 2.14.38.152–15.39.153)⁵

Regimenting Augustine’s argument somewhat, we could put it in this form:

- (1) Anything that is more excellent than our minds and to which nothing is superior is God. [from Definition (D) above]
- (2) Truth is more excellent than our minds.

Therefore,

- (3) Either truth is God or something superior to truth is God.

Therefore,

(4) God exists.⁶

COMPARISONS BETWEEN AUGUSTINE AND ANSELM

Faith in search of understanding

Anselm, like Augustine before him, conceives his search for a proof of God's existence as faith seeking understanding (*fides quaerens intellectum*). Thus he tells us in the Preface to his *Proslogion* that he had first titled that work, "Faith Seeking Understanding." And he ends [Chapter 1](#) with these very Augustinian words:

For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand. For this also I believe, that, unless I believed, I would not understand.⁷

Moreover, he begins the next chapter (Chapter 2) with this sentence:

And so, Lord, you who give understanding to faith, give me, so far as you know it to be profitable, to understand that you exist as we believe [that you do] and that you are what we believe [you to be].

I have already quoted a passage from Augustine's *On Free Choice of the Will* in which Augustine and his interlocutor express the idea of faith seeking understanding. But that idea can be found throughout Augustine's writings – not only in major treatises, but also in letters, sermons, and biblical commentaries. Somewhat ironically, Augustine's admonitions to believe so that we may understand are almost always coupled with the quotation of Isaiah 7:9, the old Latin text of which reads, "Unless you have believed you will not understand" (*nisi crederitis, non intelligetis*). Modern translations, based on a better Hebrew text, read this way: "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established," which fails to make Augustine's point.

An obvious question to ask is whether one might gain faith through developing one's understanding, as well as gain understanding by developing one's faith. Augustine, in one of his sermons (43.3.4), acknowledges, what is in any case obvious, that his hearers

could not believe that what he was saying is true unless they understood his words. But it is one of the central claims of his philosophical theology that, at least in matters of religious or spiritual significance, faith must precede understanding. Thus in his *Tractate* 29 on the Gospel of John, he writes, “If you have not understood, I say, ‘Believe!’ for understanding is the reward of faith.” He adds, “Therefore do not seek to understand that you may believe, but believe that you may understand” (*ergo noli quaerere intelligere ut credas, sed crede ut intelligas*).

Anselm expresses the idea of faith seeking understanding, not only in his *Proslogion*, but in other treatises as well, but perhaps nowhere more eloquently than in this passage from his *On the Incarnation of the Word*:

And so it happens that when beginners foolishly try to ascend intellectually to those things that first need the ladder of faith (as Scripture says: “Unless you have believed, you will not understand” [Isaiah 7:9]), they sink into many kinds of errors by reason of the deficiency of their intellect. For they evidently do not have the strength of faith who, since they cannot understand the things they believe, argue against the same faith’s truth confirmed by the holy Fathers. This is as if bats and owls, who see the heavens only at night, should argue about the midday rays of the sun with eagles, who gaze on the sun itself with undeflected vision.

(*De Inc. Verbi* 1, Regan trans.)

Responding to the atheist

Another point of similarity between Augustine and Anselm is something that seems to be in tension with the idea that faith needs to precede understanding. Augustine directs his argument at an atheist, the “Fool” of the Psalms, who says in his heart that there is no God. Anselm does the same in his *Proslogion*, [Chapter 2](#). How can this be, when each philosopher says that his reasoning begins with faith in search of understanding?

Certainly atheism cannot succeed in denying what faith believes unless the atheist shares with the believer an understanding of what it *would be* for something to be God. This point is explicit in Anselm, who says that, even for the Fool, *something than which nothing greater can be conceived* must be at least something in the understanding. “But certainly this very same Fool,” Anselm writes, “when he hears this thing that I say (*something than which nothing greater can be conceived*) understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding.”

As for Augustine, he mitigates the apparent tension between saying that his proof is directed at an atheist and characterizing his reasoning as faith seeking understanding by making his Fool an *inquiring* atheist. “If any fool who has said in his heart, ‘There is no God,’ should say this to you and not want to believe with you what you believe but [rather] to know whether your belief is true,” Augustine writes, “would you leave the man in the lurch, or would you think he should be persuaded of what you firmly believe, especially if he were not to argue stubbornly, but wanted eagerly to know?” (2.2.5.13).

On the other hand, Augustine, unlike Anselm, does nothing to assure us that it is truly God that the Fool has in mind when he utters his words, “There is no God.” More specifically, he does nothing to assure us that the Fool would accept the definition of “God” that Evodius later offers.

Understanding in search of faith?

Several of Augustine’s earliest writings do not, in fact, begin with the assumption of faith, even when their conclusion seems to be clearly a matter of religious importance. Thus, for example, Augustine’s little treatise *On the Immortality of the Soul* presents arguments very much in the style of Plato for the immortality of the soul. In fact, there are clear parallels in it to Plato’s dialogue *Phaedo*. And yet, presumably, the work is meant to have religious significance.

Augustine’s early dialogue *The Teacher* offers philosophical arguments for the conclusion that no human teacher ever teaches anyone anything. It is only by an inner illumination, he tries to show, that we come to know what anything is. Augustine adds that illumination comes when we learn from Christ, the Inner Teacher (11.38). Here again, it seems, understanding is meant to support faith.

By the time of his ordination in 391, however, Augustine seems to have settled on the clear priority of faith, even in matters one might otherwise have thought open to general philosophical investigation. Thus, just before he begins his proof of the existence of God in Book 2 of *On Free Choice of the Will*, he writes: “For what is believed without being known cannot be said to have been found, and no one can become fit for finding God unless he shall have believed first what he afterward will have known” (2.2.5.18).

Even though Anselm also begins with faith, he seems, in contrast to Augustine, prepared to aim argumentation at unbelievers in the hope of at least preparing them for faith. Thus, after writing the moving account of faith in search of understanding quoted above from [Chapter 2](#) of his *Incarnation of the Word*, Anselm writes this in [Chapter 6](#):

But assuredly the holy Fathers (and especially blessed Augustine), following the apostles and evangelists, have argued with irrefutable reasoning that God is three persons and, yet, one unique, individual, and simple nature. Still, if anyone will deign to read my two short works, namely, 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 proved by compelling reasonings apart from the authority of Scripture) . . . (Hopkins/Richardson trans.)

The claim to have proved “by compelling reasons apart from the authority of Scripture” that God is three persons is certainly not a claim that Augustine makes in his *De Trinitate*. Nor would attempting to do that be congenial to what Augustine undertakes there. His project in the early part of that work is to establish the scriptural credentials of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Then in the last half of the work he tries to *make sense* of the idea that God is three-in-one, not prove it by “irrefutable reasoning.”

Skepticism and the cogito

As we saw above in the account of Augustine’s proof in *De Libero Arbitrio*, Augustine has Evodius begin his reconstruction of what is evident to him by reminding him that, most obviously, he exists. After all, he could not be deceived about this, since he could not be deceived about anything without existing. This is a move we moderns associate with Descartes, but it is also a move Augustine makes several times in his writings.

Augustine does not, however, try to show that doubting or denying that God exists is similarly self-defeating. This is what Anselm does. Having secured the agreement of the Fool to his definition of “God,” Anselm then reduces the Fool’s claim to absurdity, in fact, to the philosopher’s favorite kind of absurdity, self-contradiction. Anselm’s use of the Fool’s skepticism in his argument to prove God’s existence is thus a dramatization of that form of indirect proof known in logic as “reduction to absurdity” (*reductio ad absurdum*).

Anselm, in fact, shows no particular interest in addressing the threat of philosophical skepticism. By contrast, skepticism is, for Augustine, both a philosophical and an existential issue. In his *Confessions*, at 5.10.19, he describes a period of his life in which he was strongly attracted to skepticism. What he found attractive was the skepticism of the “New Academy,” to which he devotes his earliest extant work, *Against the Academicians* (*Contra Academicos*).

In his *De Trinitate* (at 15.12.21) Augustine uses a *cogito*-like argument to refute the global or universal skepticism of the “Academicians” of the New Academy. And in his *City of God* he uses this anti-skeptical reasoning (including the famous line, *si fallor sum* – “If I am mistaken, I am”) to support an image of the divine Trinity:

We resemble the divine Trinity in that we exist, we know that we exist, and we are glad of this existence and this knowledge. In those three things there is no plausible deception to trouble us.

(*City of God* 11.26)

Anselm gives no indication of being interested in this aspect of Augustine’s thought. Thus when Gaunilo, in his reply to the *Proslogion*, “On Behalf of the Fool” (*Pro Insipiente*), uses the, to him, inconceivability of his own non-existence as a possible parallel to the Anselmian claim in *Proslogion* 3 that God (that is, something than which nothing greater cannot be conceived) cannot be conceived not to exist, Anselm is quite dismissive. Here is Gaunilo:

Whether, however, I might be able to think that I do not exist, so long as I know most certainly that I do exist, I do not know. But if I can, why [can I] not [conceive the non-existence] of whatever else I know with the same certainty? If, however, I cannot [do that], it will no longer be only God [whose non-existence I cannot conceive].

(*Pro Insipiente* 7)

Here is Anselm’s reply:

Know, then, that you can conceive that you do not exist while you know most certainly [that you] exist. I am surprised that you have said you did not know [this]. For we conceive that many things do not exist which we know to exist and many things to exist which we know not to exist. We conceive [them], not by considering [them] to exist, but by imagining [them] to exist in this way.

And indeed we can conceive something not to exist at the same time as we know it to be, because we can at the same time [imagine] the one and know the other. Also

we cannot conceive to exist and not to exist at the same time because we cannot conceive [something] to exist and, at the same time, not to exist. If then one distinguishes these two senses of this pronouncement one will understand that nothing, as long as it is known to be is conceived not to be, and nothing whatever is, except that than which nothing greater can be conceived, even when it is known to be can be conceived not to be.

(Liber Apologeticus 4)

Anselm here supposes that, except for something than which nothing greater can be conceived (that is, God), each thing that exists can be conceived (imagined) not to exist. Consequently, recognizing that I might have failed to exist, there is a way in which I can both (i) know that I exist and (ii) conceive (imagine) my nonexistence. What I cannot (coherently) do, Anselm adds, is assign to myself (or anything else) both existence and nonexistence.

In a way, this reply to Gaunilo is perfectly sensible. What is surprising is not so much what Anselm says as what he fails to say. The claim,

(A1) I can be conceived [by someone] not to exist

is problematic. To make sense of (A1) we would have to make sense of the idea that I might be merely a character in a work of pure fiction, or otherwise just a figment of someone's imagination. But much more problematic is this assertion:

(A2) I can conceive myself not to exist

which is, philosophically, just about as problematic as any assertion could be. It is surprising that a philosopher of Anselm's acumen and sophistication would not give any indication that he recognizes this fact.

Proslogion 2 gives us some reason to think Anselm might have supposed that any claim of the form

(B1) ϕ does not exist

can be understood to mean

(B2) Although ϕ exists in the understanding, ϕ does not exist in reality.

Anselm uses this translation schema to trap the Fool in contradiction. But, clearly, such a translation for

(C1) I do not exist

namely,

(C2) Although I exist in the understanding, I do not exist in reality

is philosophically just as troubling as the original. If “I” in (C1) is a genuine referring expression,⁸ then it is hard to understand how (C1) could be used to make a coherent assertion. But if (C1) is baffling, then so is (C2).

Without going any further into the fascinating problems of self-reference and self-identification, problems that have occupied a number of philosophers in recent decades, we can note that there is a nest of issues here that interested Augustine enormously, but, apparently, not Anselm. The larger point is that, whereas skepticism and how one might use skepticism against itself to generate knowledge is a significant feature of Augustine’s thought, skepticism seems not to have gripped Anselm.

THE DIVINE NATURE

Attribute generation

Having established in the *Proslogion*, that something than which nothing greater can be conceived, that is God, exists in reality ([Chapter 2](#)) and cannot be conceived not to exist ([Chapter 3](#)), Anselm turns in [Chapter 5](#) and later chapters to consider other divine attributes. For each candidate, including the attributes of being supremely good, just, truthful, blessed, and so on, he asks whether that attribute should be assigned to God. In each case he concludes that whatever lacks the attribute in question would be “less than what could be conceived” (*minus est quam quod cogitari possit*), and so the attribute does indeed belong to God. Anselm’s formula thus gives him a decision procedure for determining which are the divine attributes.

A problem with this procedure is, of course, that having one attribute traditionally

assigned to God, say, justice, might turn out to be inconsistent with having another, say, mercy. Anselm tries to deal with this problem in [Chapter 9](#).

Augustine never proceeds in such a systematic way to identify the divine attributes. But, in single cases, he does supply similar reasoning. One of the most significant of these is also one that anticipates Anselm's ontological argument in other ways. It is this brief passage from Augustine's *Confessions*:

I had already discovered that the incorruptible is better than the corruptible, and so I confessed that whatever you are, you are incorruptible. For neither has any soul ever been able, nor will any ever be able, to conceive something that is better than you, who are the supreme and highest good. Since it is more true and certain that the incorruptible is superior to the corruptible, as I had already concluded, had it been the case that you are not incorruptible I could in thought have attained something better than my God.

(*Confessions* 7.4.6)

The most tantalizing expression in this passage is the phrase, "For neither has any soul ever been able, nor will any ever be able, to conceive something that is better than you" (*neque enim ulla anima umquam potuit poterit cogitare aliquid quod sit te melius*). With this phrase Augustine comes very, very close to Anselm's "something than which nothing greater can be conceived" (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest*).⁹ Moreover, Augustine, like Anselm, uses his formula to determine whether this candidate attribute, corruptibility, belongs to God. What Augustine does not do is to use his formula to establish the full nature of God.

The Trinity

In the last half of his great work on the Trinity, Augustine presents psychological analogies for the three-in-oneness of God. His idea is that when God is said in the Bible to make human beings in His image,¹⁰ it is, in particular, the human mind (*mens*) that presents images of the three-in-oneness of God. Here is one of Augustine's several psychological or mental analogies to God:

And so there is a certain image of the Trinity: the mind itself, knowledge, which is its offspring, and love as a third; these three are one and one substance. Nor is the offspring less, while the mind knows itself as much as it is; nor is the love less,

while the mind loves itself as much as it knows and as much as it is.

(*De Trinitate* 9.12.18)

Anselm, as he himself admits, was clearly influenced by Augustine's *De Trinitate*. He, too, speaks of the mind as the image of God (*Monologion* 67). And he seeks to illuminate the Christian doctrine of the Trinity by psychological or mental analogies, as in this passage:

Well, the supreme wisdom is undeniably conscious of itself. It would be most appropriate, therefore, to understand the Father in terms of consciousness and the son in terms of word. Words, after all, seem to be born from consciousness.

This can be seen more clearly in the case of the human mind. While the human mind does not always think about itself, it is always conscious of itself. So, at the moment when it does think about itself, its word must be born from its consciousness.

(*Mon.* 48, Harrison trans.)

Divine simplicity

One of the most difficult conceptions in Augustine's philosophical theology is his notion that God's essence or nature is perfectly simple. Augustine gives the rationale for this doctrine in the following passage from his work on the Trinity:

But God is not great by a greatness that is not that which He Himself is – as if God were, so to speak, a partaker in greatness when He is great. For in that case greatness would be greater than God. But there cannot be anything greater than God. Therefore, He is great by that greatness which is identical with Himself.

(*De Trinitate* 5.10.11)

This idea of the divine simplicity in Augustine covers not only the attribute of greatness but all the divine attributes. God is essentially each of His attributes, and each

one of them is identical with each of the others, as well as with God.

Anselm expresses the same idea in several passages, for example, in this one from his *Monologion*:

The supreme nature is what it is – good, great, existing – through itself and nothing else. And, if so, then what is more necessarily and clearly the case than that the supreme nature is justice itself? . . .

(*Mon.* 16, Harrison trans.)

Indeed, as Anselm goes on to argue, God, the supreme nature, is not only justice, but supreme justice, supreme life, supreme goodness, supreme power, and so on, and, moreover, each one of these attributes is identical with God.

THE PROBLEM OF FOREKNOWLEDGE AND FREE WILL

It was Augustine who framed, for all later philosophy, the problem about how human free will could be compatible with God's complete foreknowledge of all that has happened and will ever happen. He does this in Book 3 of his treatise, *On Free Choice of the Will*. This problem was hardly a discovery of Augustine's. As he makes clear in Book 5, [Chapter 2](#), of his *City of God*, he himself took the problem from Cicero. But it is not Cicero whom later medieval philosophers or modern philosophers read on this topic, but Augustine.

Since Augustine's discussion of this problem in *Free Choice of the Will* takes the form of a dialogue, it is sometimes difficult to be sure exactly what solution to any given problem Augustine himself means to opt for, or whether, in any given case, he means to settle on a single solution at all.

The Guarantor Solution

One solution Augustine presents we may call the "Guarantor Solution." "Our will would not be a will," Augustine says,

unless it were in our power. Therefore, because it is in our power, it is free . . . Nor can it be a will if it is not in our power. Therefore, God also has foreknowledge of our power. So the power is not taken from me by His foreknowledge, but because

of His foreknowledge, the power to will will more certainly be present in me . . .

(3.3.8.33–35)

According to this reasoning, we can understand God's foreknowledge to guarantee our free action. For, necessarily, if God foreknows that we will voluntarily do something sometime in the future, we will, in fact, do it voluntarily, and so freely. Far from being incompatible with human free will, God's foreknowledge can guarantee its freedom.

The Guarantor Solution is also to be found in this passage from Anselm:

And whatever God foreknows shall necessarily happen in the way in which it is foreknown. So it is necessary that it shall happen freely, and there is therefore no conflict whatsoever between a foreknowledge which entails a necessary occurrence and a free exercise of an uncoerced will. For it is both necessary that God foreknows what shall come to be and that God foreknows that something shall freely come to be.

(*De Conc.* 1.1, Bermingham trans.)

The Divine-Case Solution

A second solution to the problem of foreknowledge and free will we may call the "Divine-Case Solution." Augustine asks Evodius whether God foresees what He Himself will do. "Certainly if I say that God has foreknowledge of my deeds," Evodius answers, "I should say with even greater confidence that He has foreknowledge of His own acts, and foresees with complete certainty what He will do" (3.3.6.23). Augustine then points out that the same reasoning from God's foreknowledge that leads us to rule out human free will should lead to the conclusion that His own future acts will not be done voluntarily, but by necessity. However, if the Divine Case is to be rejected, then, it seems, the human case should be rejected as well.

The Divine-Case Solution is also to be found in Anselm. In fact, it is developed there in an admirably clear and effective way. "Now if God's knowledge and foreknowledge of itself enforces necessity upon all things He knows or foreknows," Anselm writes,

then He Himself neither wills nor causes anything freely but necessarily, whether

from the aspect of eternity or any conceivable time. If this conclusion is absurd even to suppose, we ought not to think that everything which God knows or foreknows to happen or not to happen thereby happens or does not happen by necessity. Therefore nothing precludes God's knowing or foreknowing that something is caused in our wills or actions or is about to happen through our free will.

(*De Conc.* 1.4, Bermingham trans.)

The Eternality Solution

One might have expected Augustine to use the Divine Case to draw the same conclusion as Anselm draws. But he does not. Instead he has his dialogue character, Evodius, point out that nothing ever happens *within God*, since everything there is eternal (3.3.6.24). Thus there is in God no such thing as His knowing beforehand what He will choose to do, not because He is ignorant of what He will choose but because in Him there is no “beforehand.” If, however, there is no “beforehand” in God, then, strictly speaking, God does not know before Adam sins that Adam will sin.

Neither Augustine nor Evodius, however, draws this conclusion in *On Free Choice*. Instead, they go on talking about God's foreknowledge. But Evodius's self-correction, that is, his withdrawal of his own claim that God sees beforehand what He will do, introduces the idea of God's eternal present, which Augustine describes eloquently in this passage from Book 11 of the *City of God*:

It is not in our fashion that God looks forward to what is future or looks directly at what is present or looks back on what is past, but in some other mode far and away different from our way of thinking. Indeed, He does not go from this to that by a change in thought but He sees altogether, unchangeably, in such a way that those things which come to be temporally – not only future things that are not yet, but also present things that are already and past things that are no longer – he comprehends them all in a firm and eternal present.

(11.21)

We can call the idea that there is no problem of foreknowledge and free will because there really is no *foreknowledge* in God the “Eternality Solution.” One might well wonder, however, how effective this solution would really be. The idea of foreknowledge

is especially troubling for free will, since it seems to “lock in” all future actions and leave no room for free choice. Yet the idea that an omniscient being knows *timelessly* what we will do also seems to “lock in” our (to us) future actions in a way that is at least as threatening to free will as genuine foreknowledge. Apparently that is Anselm’s assessment. Thus, in the passage quoted above, he writes of God’s knowledge “whether we speak according to the unchangeable present of eternity . . . or whether we speak according to the realm of time . . .” His idea seems to be that, if God’s foreknowledge that I will commit a sin tomorrow did rule out my doing so freely (of course, Anselm thinks it does not), so would God’s timeless knowledge that I will commit the evil deed.

The Modal-Placement Solution

A fourth solution to the problem of foreknowledge and free will is what we might call the “Modal-Placement Solution.” From

- (1) Necessarily, if God foreknows that Adam will sin, Adam will sin

this does *not* follow:

- (2) If God foreknows Adam will sin, Adam will necessarily sin.

Moreover, from (1), together with

- (3) God foreknows that Adam will sin

we may validly infer

- (4) Adam will sin

but not

- (5) Adam will necessarily sin.

If then the claim of necessity, as in (1), governs the *connection* between God’s foreknowledge and the occurrence of what God foreknows will happen (what later medieval philosophers, including Thomas Aquinas,¹¹ call “necessity *de dicto*”) God’s foreknowledge will not preclude the possibility that, among the things God foreknows are free actions of human agents. On the other hand, if God is omniscient and all the things God foreknows will happen are themselves necessary events, as in (2) – what is later called “necessity *de re*” – God’s foreknowledge will rule out human free will.

Boethius seems to have been the first to mark this distinction clearly;¹² but Augustine comes close. He asks Evodius whether, if he foreknew that someone was going to sin, it would be necessary that he sin. Evodius answers that it would be necessary (3.4.9.38). Here Evodius seems to be relying on the assumption that all objects of foreknowledge are necessary events, things that have to happen, as in (2) above.

Augustine's reply, "You do not compel someone to sin whom you foreknow will sin, although without doubt, he will sin" (3.4.9.39), suggests a distinction between the necessity of the conditional (*de dicto* necessity), as in (1) above, and the necessity of the consequent (*de re* necessity), as in (2) above. But Augustine does not express himself that way.

Anselm, however – even without using the *de dicto/de re* terminology – offers an ideally succinct and clear statement of the Modal-Placement Solution, for example in this passage:

Therefore, when we say that what God foreknows is going to happen is necessarily going to happen, we are not always asserting that it is going to happen by necessity but simply that it is necessary that what is going to happen is going to happen.

(*De Conc.* 1.3, Bermingham trans.)

PLATONISM MORE GENERALLY

Both Augustine and Anselm belong to the great Platonic tradition in Western philosophy. Augustine, in Book 7 of his *Confessions*, asserts that, through the mediation of a "proud" acquaintance, God brought to his attention "some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin" (7.9.13). As he tells his life story, these Platonists, actually Neoplatonists, played a significant role in opening up for him the possibility of conversion to Christianity.

Although Augustine seems to have received his Plato second-hand, from Neoplatonists and from Cicero, he reveres Plato above all other philosophers. He discusses Plato and Platonism at great length in Book 8 of his *City of God*. In [Chapter 5](#) he remarks that no philosophers have "come closer to us" than the Platonists.

We cannot be sure that Anselm actually read any Platonic dialogues either.¹³ But he knew the works of Augustine so well that he may have become familiar with Platonic reasoning through the various accounts that Augustine and later medieval authors present.

Platonic forms in the mind of God

Perhaps the most obviously Platonic passage in Augustine is Question 46 from his *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, which includes this section:

[T]he ideas (*ideae*) are certain principal forms (*formae*) or reasons (*rationes*) of things, fixed and unchangeable, which are not themselves formed and, being thus eternal and existing always in the same state, are contained in the Divine Intelligence. And although they themselves neither come into being nor perish, nevertheless, it is in accordance with them that everything which can come into being and perish and everything which does come into being and perish is said to be formed.

(*De Diversis Quaestionibus* 46.2)

The idea that the Forms are located in the mind of God can, perhaps, be linked with Plato's suggestion, in his dialogue, *Timaeus*, that the creator looks to the eternal Forms as paradigms, or patterns, after which to create the material world (*Timaeus* 28a–29d). Anselm picks up that idea in the following passage:

But I seem to see something which demands that we distinguish carefully the sense in which it is possible to say that created things were nothing before being created. For a maker makes something rationally if, and only if, there is already something there in his reasoning – as a sort of exemplar. (Or perhaps terms like “form,” “likeness,” or “rule” are more appropriate.) The following then is clear: before all things existed, the manner, features and fact of their future existence already existed, in the reasoning of the supreme nature. On the one hand, then, before being made, what was made was, clearly, nothing, inasmuch as it then was not what it now is, and inasmuch as there was nothing out of which it was made. Yet on the other hand, it was not nothing as far as the reason of the maker was concerned.

(*Mon.* 9, Harrison trans.)

Although Anselm's idea that the divine creator used forms as paradigms in creating the world is Platonic, his acceptance of the Jewish and Christian idea that God created the world *from nothing* is not.

The Good itself as ultimate cause

Plato suggests in several places that he views the Good Itself as the ultimate cause of all there is. Here is one such passage: "Therefore, you should also say that not only do the objects of knowledge owe their being known to the good, but their being is also due to it, although the good is not being, but superior to it in rank and power" (*Republic* 509b, Grube trans.). Nevertheless, Plato seems to have been frustrated over his inability to explain how everything is for the good (see, for example, *Phaedo* 99b–d).

Anselm seeks to establish the ultimacy of the Good in a genuinely Platonic way. Thus he writes:

And who would doubt that that through which all things are good is a great good?

Because, then, it is that through which every good thing is good, it is good through itself. It therefore follows that all the other good things are good through something other than what they themselves are, while this thing alone is good through itself. But nothing that is good through something other than itself is equal to or greater than that good which is good through itself. The one thing, therefore, that is good through itself is the one thing that is supremely good . . . But what is supremely good is also supremely great. There is therefore one thing that is supremely good and supremely great, and this is of all the things that exist, the supreme.

(*Mon.* 1, Harrison trans.)

Evil as privation

Obviously any philosophical theologian who claims that God is Goodness Itself, as well as the cause of all that exists, faces a fundamental problem over the existence of evil. In one place Plato seems to be trying to solve the problem by simply retracting the assumption that God is the cause of everything. "Therefore, since a god is good," Socrates is made to say in Book 2 of the *Republic*, "he is not, as most people claim, the cause of everything that happens to human beings but of only a few things, for good things are fewer than bad ones in our lives. He alone is responsible for the good things,

but we must find some other cause for the bad ones, not a god” (*Republic* 379c, Grube trans.).

This solution seems inconsistent with Socrates’ teaching at the end of Book 6 of the *Republic* that the Good Itself is the ultimate cause of all there is. In any case, the solution in Book 2, as it stands, is not a solution that either Augustine or Anselm can accept. One solution they both propose is more properly Neoplatonic than Platonic. It is to say that evil is a privation. Here is Augustine’s most famous statement of that view:

It was obvious to me that things which are liable to corruption are good. If they were the supreme goods, or if they were not good at all, they could not be corrupted. For if they were supreme goods, they would be incorruptible. If there were no good in them, there would be nothing capable of being corrupted . . . If they were to exist and to be immune from corruption, they would be superior because they would be permanently incorruptible. What could be more absurd than to say that by losing all good, things are made better? So then, if they are deprived of all good, they will be nothing at all. Therefore as long as they exist, they are good. Accordingly, whatever things exist are good, and the evil into whose origins I was inquiring is not a substance . . .

(*Confessions* 7.12.18)

Here is one of many passages in Anselm on evil as a privation, specifically an evil will as a privation:

As long as the will originally given to a rational nature [was] simultaneously oriented to its rectitude by the same act with which God gives it . . . it was just. But when it distanced itself from what it ought and turned against it, it did not remain in the original rectitude in which it was created.

And when it abandoned it, it lost something great, and acquired in exchange only the privation of justice we call injustice and that has no positive being.

(*On the Fall of the Devil* 9, McInerny trans.)

CONCLUSION

As the comparisons above should make clear, there can be no serious doubt that Anselm studied the writings of Augustine carefully or that he was deeply influenced by Augustine's thought. Although he was an Augustinian philosopher, he was also a thinker of great originality. The clarity and rigor of his thought make him much more of a philosopher's philosopher than Augustine ever even aspired to be.

Both Augustine and Anselm were also, in a broad sense, Platonist philosophers, but not, apparently, from a study of Plato himself. Indeed, both philosophers seem to have absorbed Platonic ideas and doctrines only through intermediaries. Still, even at many removes from Plato himself, the Platonic stamp on each of them is difficult to miss.

NOTES

1. "Letter to Archbishop Lanfranc," *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, edited with an introduction by Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3–4 (hereafter *Major Works*).
2. R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 71–72. Southern's section, "The Influence of St. Augustine" (71–87), is worth reading in its entirety.
3. *Major Works*, 6.
4. Southern, *Portrait*, 73–77.
5. Thomas Williams's translation, in Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 58.
6. This argument is, of course, open to many objections. For example, Augustine has not ruled out the possibility of there being two or more entities, each superior to truth, but each such that nothing is superior to it. Nor has he here tried to make plausible the idea that God might simply be truth.
7. Translations from Anselm's *Proslogion* and further translations from Augustine, except for those from his *De Trinitate*, are my own. Translations from Augustine's *De*

Trinitate are from Augustine, *On the Trinity, Books 8–15*, trans. S. McKenna, ed. G. B. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Translations of other Anselm texts besides the *Proslogion* and the exchange with Gaunilo, come either from *Major Works*, with individual translators cited, or from *Complete Philosophical Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury*, trans. J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (Minneapolis, MN: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000), cited as “Hopkins/Richardson.”

8. For the claim that it is not, see G. E. M. Anscombe, “The First Person,” *Mind and Language*, ed. S. Guttenplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 45–65.

9. A less close, but perhaps still significant, parallel is to be found in Book 1, [Chapter 7](#), of Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*, which begins this way: “For when that one God of gods is conceived, even by those who form an idea of, invoke, and worship other gods, either in heaven or on earth, He is thus conceived as something than which nothing is better or more sublime.”

10. Actually the relevant biblical verse has the divine speaker using plural forms, which suits Augustine’s Trinity project perfectly. “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image . . .’” (Genesis 1:26).

11. *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 14, 13 ad 3.

12. See his *Consolation of Philosophy* 5.6.

13. See Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 30.

4 Anselm's philosophy of language

Peter King

INTRODUCTION

Anselm makes full use of the stock-in-trade of all philosophers: he identifies ambiguities and distinguishes various senses of words; he sometimes appeals to and sometimes rejects ordinary usage; he insists, often dogmatically, that some expressions are proper and others improper, and tries to legislate usage; he coins new words; he complains about how grammar and grammatical form can be misleading. No special theory of language need be behind such activities.¹ Yet Anselm did have a general semantic theory that not only licensed these activities but also enabled him to address particular questions in the philosophy of language – how words are linked to the world, whether meaningful language has to be denotative, what makes true statements true, and the like. His philosophical dialogue *De Grammatico* is entirely devoted to the philosophy of language, as are parts of *De Veritate* and his *Philosophical Fragments*. Even the *Monologion* contains extensive discussion of semantic issues. Anselm says virtually nothing about formal logic, but he takes up issues in the philosophy of language in nearly everything he wrote.

This chapter will proceed as follows: the first section will give an overview of Anselm's account of signification, which is the foundation of his semantics; the second section will look at the semantics of names (or more precisely referring expressions) and at Anselm's distinction between signification and appellation, as well as at the different kinds of signification; the third section will examine verbs and their peculiar semantic features, and the last will cover statements and their truth.²

THE THEORY OF SIGNIFICATION

Anselm subscribes to the Augustinian view of language as a system of *signs*.³ This general category covers linguistic items, such as utterances, inscriptions, gestures, and at least some acts of thought; it also covers nonlinguistic items, such as icons, statues, smoke (a sign of fire), and even human actions, which Anselm says are signs that the agent thinks the action should be done (*De Ver.* 9; S I: 189). There is no limit in principle to the sort of object that can be a sign. What makes an object a sign is that it has “signification”: on the one hand, it has the semantic relation of *signifying*, which is what

a sign does and roughly approximates our notion of meaning; on the other hand, it has a *significate*, which is the item or items signified by the sign.⁴ Therefore, a sign signifies its significate. The name “Socrates” is a sign, for example, since it signifies – is the name of – its bearer, the concrete individual Socrates, who is thereby its significate. Anselm recognizes three types of signs: (a) sensible signs, that is, signs that can be perceived by the senses, including spoken and written words; (b) the mental conception of such sensible signs, such as when I imagine the shapes of the letters that make up an inscription or the sounds of an utterance; (c) non-sensible signs, such as the concepts and mental images by which I think of things directly (*Mon.* 10; S I: 24–25).⁵ Anselm clearly thinks that (a) and (c) count as languages, and he treats them as such; he explicitly calls the linguistic elements of each “words” no matter whether they are spoken, written, or thought (*ibidem*). They differ in that spoken and written languages have conventional elements, whereas “mental language” is a nonconventional and purely natural language. The details of Anselm’s account of the semantic relation of “signifying” differ depending on what kind of language is in question.

For spoken and written language, and indeed sensible signs generally, Anselm adopts the traditional account of signifying: a sign signifies something if it gives rise to an understanding of that thing.⁶ Hence signifying is initially a causal relation, since the tokening of a sensible sign brings about an understanding of something. Anselm recognizes two difficulties with the traditional account. First, it seems not to be able to distinguish signifying from mere psychological association. Anselm declares that we can distinguish them, though he does not say how.⁷ Second, it does not specify whether we are interested in the speaker or the hearer, in the writer or the reader. Anselm suggests that we can distinguish “words” according to the people who have them (*Mon.* 62; S I: 72), and the obvious generalization of this reply is to say that there is no fact of the matter: the speaker and the hearer may take the same utterance to have different meanings, that is, associate it with different concepts, and this is quite different from it not having any meaning at all. But it is open to Anselm to say that since he is concerned with a conventional causal link, what matters is what understanding the tokening of a given sign usually brings about; this will be its core meaning, the root of ordinary usage.

For mental language, Anselm has to modify the traditional account of signifying, since the tokening of an element of mental language does not give rise to an understanding – rather, it *is* an (act of) understanding. He does so in the obvious way, taking an understanding to signify that of which it is an understanding. For conventional (spoken and written) languages, signifying is a matter of causing a concept, which is then naturally tied to something; for mental language, the semantic relation of signifying can simply be identified with the intentionality of the relevant mental act. Hence conventional languages are parasitic on the natural and universal language of thought; Anselm tells us that “all

other words were devised on account of these natural [mental] words” (*Mon.* 10; *S I:* 25). Mental language functions as the semantics for spoken and written language. But to explain the semantics of mental language, Anselm has to explain how an understanding of something is of that thing rather than another. He distinguishes two ways in which we think about things: (a) through mental images, especially fitting when the thing in question is a physical object; (b) through a “rational conception,”⁸ such as when we think of humans as rational mortal animals.⁹ In both cases, Anselm says that the thought of something is “like” the thing of which it is the thought, and indeed that such a thought is a “likeness” (*similitudo*) of that thing. He declares that “all the words by which we ‘say’ any given things in the mind, that is, think them, are likenesses and images (*similitudines et imagines*) of the things of which they are the words” (*Mon.* 31; *S I:* 48). This claim is plausible for (a), but seems not to work well for (b). The definition or formula of something need not be “like” that thing in any way, other than being the definition of it; to insist that it is only detracts from the intuitive plausibility of thinking that mental images *are* “like” that of which they are the images.

Anselm’s way out of this difficulty is as follows. He takes the analysis of the mental “word” in thinking to carry over to the case of the divine Word, through which all things are created, which in no way uses mere likenesses. To (a) and (b) Anselm thus adds (c): thinking of something by grasping its very essence.¹⁰ Hence (a)–(c) should be understood as describing a range of increasingly adequate ways of thinking about something. Now (c) is clearly beyond human reach. And Anselm, like Augustine, maintains that (b) is very nearly out of human reach as well. As a matter of psychological fact, Anselm holds, human beings have a hard time thinking without recourse to mental images, even when they are inappropriate (as when we try to think about incorporeal things). Hence most or all human thought is contaminated with imagination. It is tempting to think that Anselm therefore holds that all thought resembles its object because it involves mental images. But the temptation has to be resisted. On the one hand, it would leave us with no way of understanding (c), or even reasonably pure instances of (b), and an explanation of intentionality that does not apply to these cases is unacceptable. On the other hand, richly detailed mental images resemble their subjects more than less detailed images, all the way up to nearly image-free definitions, but Anselm holds that the latter are more accurate (hence more “like”) their subjects than the former. This last point gives us the clue to Anselm’s way out. He is clear that (a) and (b) are not the things about which we think, but are merely the means by which we think of them. We do not typically think of mental images any more than we do the shape of letters or the sound of syllables rather than the words they make up, or, for that matter, think of definitions as such rather than the natures they capture. Instead, thinking of something is a matter of having that very thing in mind – Anselm encourages us to speak of the thing as “existing in the understanding” – and hence is nonrepresentational.¹¹ Yet to get something into the mind, that is, to think of it at all, we use a variety of more or less accurate means, ranging from

mental images to rational conceptions. Hence likeness is a matter of accuracy, not pictorial resemblance, in the means we use to conceive of something. Mental intentionality is recast as the real presence of the object in the understanding.

Thus Anselm's general semantic theory is an account of signs, and how they signify their significates by (literally) bringing them to mind. The philosophy of mind that underwrites his account of mental language is not without problems, of course, but we can set them aside to focus on issues directly relevant to the philosophy of language. Now Anselm follows Aristotle's lead in the *De Interpretatione*, recognizing three basic categories of language: the name (*nomen*), which covers common nouns, proper names, noun-phrases or referring expressions generally, pronouns, demonstratives, adjectives, and perhaps even adverbs, all of which may occur in simple or compound form, and which signifies things; the verb (*verbum*), which necessarily includes tense ("time") and may be transitive or intransitive, formulated with or without the copula, and which signifies actions broadly speaking; and the statement (*enuntiatio*), composed of name and verb, which manages to say something, and which, unlike the name, the verb, or non-sentential combinations of names and verbs, signifies truth or falsity.

The most obvious difficulty Anselm's semantic theory faces is that it seems overly thin, since it provides only a single relation, "signifying," to explain the rich variety of semantic phenomena: reference for names, functionality or "unsaturatedness" for verbs, truth for statements. Yet he never abandons the theory, and he develops its resources in subtle and nuanced ways that give it far more flexibility than it might have seemed to possess, as we shall see.

NAMES

Of the three linguistic categories, Anselm's theory of signification most straightforwardly applies to names. Just as a statue of Socrates signifies Socrates by bringing him to mind upon encountering his statue, so too the name "Socrates" signifies Socrates by bringing him to mind upon hearing or reading his name, that is, by bringing it about that Socrates exists in the understanding. Whether the account can be extended to other kinds of names is unclear; I will consider that shortly. Now it might be thought that there is a problem even in this paradigm case, since it seems as though names, or at least proper names, have to be denotative, since Socrates has to exist in order to exist in the understanding. Hence empty names will not signify anything at all, that is, they will be simply meaningless, which is false.¹² Fortunately, Anselm is not guilty of this confusion. In the middle of the ontological argument he draws a clear distinction between thinking of something and thinking that it exists, such that the former does not entail the latter.¹³ It may be that we have to encounter Socrates to have an understanding of him (*Mon.* 62; S

I: 72), and therefore that he must have existed in reality at some time; but as long as we have the relevant understanding, we can think of Socrates whether he exists or not, and further think of him that he exists or not. Hence proper names are denotative, but they need not actually denote in order to signify (in Anselm's sense).¹⁴ The metaphysical fact that things may come into being and pass away is compatible with the semantic fact that such things may be signified by proper names.

Yet even if transitory objects do not pose a problem for Anselm's semantics, similar worries crop up in the case of three other kinds of names, worries that Anselm finds much harder to explain: (a) privative names, such as "blind" or "evil" or "injustice," that apparently signify a missing feature or quality; (b) so-called "infinite" names, such as "nonhuman," that signify through negating something; and (c) names that are necessarily empty, in particular the name "nothing," which paradoxically seems to signify something only by not signifying anything. The root difficulty is that (a)–(c) seem to lack significates, since each in its own way involves absence, rather than the presence of something.¹⁵ This is hard to explain with only one semantic relation to go around.

Anselm found (a)–(c) perplexing, and returned to them many times, apparently not satisfied with his attempts to solve them. Take (c), for instance: Anselm discusses whether "nothing" signifies anything in *Monologion* 8 and 19, *De Casu Diaboli* 11, and *Philosophical Fragments* 42. In *De Casu Diaboli* 11 he presents the difficulty as a parallel to the case of "evil" (treated in *De Casu Diab.* 10).¹⁶ "If there is not something that is signified by the name 'nothing,' it does not signify anything; but if it does not signify anything, it is not a name – yet surely it is a name" (S I: 247). In his response to the dilemma, Anselm begins by proposing that "nothing" has the same signification as the infinite name "non-something," that is, taking away everything that is something, indicating that it is not to be included in the understanding. So far so good; Anselm says as much in *Monologion* 19 (S I: 34). But here he recognizes a difficulty with this quantificational approach, namely that infinite names work by signifying the very thing that is to be excluded, so that "non-X" for example signifies X, just as the finite name "X" does – hardly an acceptable result, even if we add that somehow it also does not signify X (*De Casu Diab.* 11; S I: 249). Anselm therefore jettisons the quantificational approach and advances a different argument (*alia ratio*: S I: 250). He now proposes that "nothing" and "evil" function grammatically (*secundum formam*) like ordinary names, and so appear to signify something,¹⁷ whereas in reality (*secundum rem*) there is nothing they signify, in much the same way as "to fear" is an active verb but applies in reality to a feeling engendered in, rather than initiated by, the subject. Now Anselm is surely correct that such names are of a piece with referring expressions despite the fact that they do not refer to any thing, but that merely dodges the question of what their significate is. At some point Anselm floats the suggestion that "nothing" signifies the

absence of anything (*eo carere quod est aliquid*), taking it not as an infinite name but as a privative like “blindness” (S I: 250) – surely the right way to go. He did not follow up his own suggestion, perhaps because it would lead him to deny that a sign’s significate need be anything like a thing at all, which seems to deprive his Augustinian semantics of its intuitive plausibility.¹⁸

For all the difficulties (a)–(c) pose, and for all the theological weight that rides on correctly understanding them, with respect to semantics they are borderline cases, perhaps exceptions. Most names are straightforwardly denotative, after all, whether what they signify actually exists or not. Let us turn, then, to Anselm’s semantic analysis of names in general.

In the midst of explaining the metaphysical details of the Incarnation, Anselm offers a limited sketch of the semantics of noun phrases (*De Inc. Verbi* 11; S II: 29):

When “man” is uttered, only the nature that is common to all men is signified. But when we say “this man” or “that man” demonstratively, or we use the proper name “Jesus,” we designate a person, who has along with the nature a collection of distinctive properties by means of which (a) the common [nature] *man* becomes singular, and (b) is distinguished from other singulars. For when he [= Jesus] is so designated, not any given man is understood, but the one whom the angel announced . . . It is impossible for the same collection of distinctive properties to belong to different persons, or that they be predicated of one another; the same collection of distinctive properties does not belong to Peter and to Paul, and Peter is not called Paul nor Paul Peter.

Common names, at least those that are natural-kind terms, signify common natures;¹⁹ I will take this claim up shortly. For now, let us focus on the other class of terms. Proper names and demonstratives, at least when applied to humans, designate persons – apart from theological complications, which partly explain Anselm’s use of “designate” here, we can say that they signify concrete individuals of some kind.²⁰ Such concrete individuals have a collection of “distinctive properties” (*proprietaes*) that make them singulars of a given kind, and set them apart from other singulars of the same kind; these collections are unique to the individuals who have them. Now, Anselm’s account raises many metaphysical issues, such as the ontological status of the common nature, whether collections of distinctive properties are logically or merely contingently unique, how the common nature becomes singular, and so on. However, we are concerned with semantics, not metaphysics or theology; what does his account tell us about proper names and demonstrative referring expressions?

Anselm's remarks about the collection of distinctive properties make it clear that he thinks that they are, or at least can be, part of the signification of the proper name.²¹ Given that the understanding associated with a proper name is of an individual, it is plausible to think, as Anselm does, that the understanding thus includes some feature or features that distinguish that individual from all others – why it is an understanding of this person rather than that one. Distinctive properties serve the purpose admirably, since, as Anselm tells us, they accomplish the metaphysical tasks of (a) making the individual to be individual, and (b) making the individual distinct from other individuals of the same kind. Hence an understanding that includes distinctive properties will therefore be singular by its nature.²² A term is thus semantically singular if it reflects an instance of “singular thought” (to use the contemporary expression).

Anselm returns to the semantics of common names in his *De Grammatico*, a work explicitly devoted to the philosophy of language. The issue under investigation in that work is not the semantics of common names, however, but roughly what we would call the semantics of adjectives. More precisely, Anselm is concerned with the signification of terms known as “denominatives.”²³ Denominative terms have a dual grammatical role. On the one hand, they occur as attributive adjectives in combination with a noun they modify. On the other hand, they occur as stand-alone nouns. Grammarians now identify such words as adjectives that can have a substantive use via nominalization, but that begs the question Anselm takes up in the *De Grammatico*, namely whether denominatives signify a quality (like adjectives) or a substance (like nouns). For example, the word “brave” might be used to describe one of Socrates' character-traits in the combination “brave Socrates” or on its own while occurring as a predicate adjective, as in “Socrates is brave”; it might also refer to a group of people, having the function of a common name, when it occurs substantively, as in “The brave deserve the fruits of victory.” In English we have to say “the brave” rather than “brave,” but in Latin the selfsame term would be used in attributive/predicative contexts and in substantive contexts. Anselm's example, taken from Aristotle, is the denominative term *grammaticus*, which seems to signify (a) grammatical knowledge, when it occurs attributively or predicatively, and (b) someone with such knowledge, the grammarian, when it occurs substantively. Given the exceptional difficulties in translating this term consistently and reasonably, I will silently modify Anselm's examples to discuss “brave” instead.²⁴ Given the presumption that it is one and the same term in different contexts, and given that we cannot easily appeal to the distinct contexts to separate out the senses of the term, this poses an extraordinarily difficult puzzle for Anselm to untangle.

In the end, Anselm opts for the view that denominative terms signify qualities rather than substances. But to reach this conclusion he develops a trio of subtle semantic distinctions at some length (*De Gramm.* 12; S I: 156–57):

- (1) signification versus appellation;
- (2) signification *per se* versus signification *per aliud*;
- (3) signifying things that are unified versus signifying things that are not unified.

Each of these calls for further comment.

Regarding (1): Anselm's definition of appellation is unhelpfully circular: "Now I say that name is appellative of some thing by which the thing itself is so-called (*appellatur*) in accordance with ordinary usage" (*De Gramm.* 12; S I: 157): roughly, "A" appellates S if calling S "A" is acceptable ordinary usage.²⁵ Anselm offers examples: "man" appellates man, "brave" appellates humans (the brave ones), "white" appellates the white horse of the two animals in the stable (a white horse and a black ox).²⁶ Now, it is tempting to read Anselm as describing the semantic relation of reference here.²⁷ There are two good reasons not to do so. First, reference links a word to an object, its referent, either as part of or as determined by its sense, or independently as the only word–world connection available. But Anselm has a perfectly good word–world connection in signification, which links words to their significates; appellation is used to allow for linking words to objects that may or may not be their significates, and hence should no more be seen as reference than signification itself. Second, reference is a semantic property of terms, whereas Anselm clearly means appellation to be a feature that terms have in their use, that is, a pragmatic feature linking a sign to an object, perhaps not its significate, on an occasion of use. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition that on such occasions the use of the term be acceptable by competent speakers. Beyond that, context seems to be all that matters; any term could, in principle, appellate any object.

Regarding (2): signification as described heretofore is what Anselm now calls "signification *per se*," which he tells us is signification in the strict or proper sense (*De Gramm.* 15; S I: 161), to be contrasted with signification *per aliud*. The latter is a variety of signification, and hence conforms to the general analysis in which signifying is a matter of bringing something to mind. But what a term signifies *per aliud* is not what it ordinarily brings to mind, that is, its *per se* significate; instead, it brings something else to mind through some further feature, a feature not included in the term's proper signification, such as additional knowledge. Anselm draws the distinction in *De Grammatico* 14 (S I: 161) with the example of the barn animals mentioned in the discussion of (1) above. If someone is given a stick and told to hit the animal, he will not know which is meant, but if he asks and is told "the white one" – the Latin is only "*albus*" – then by "white" he would understand that the horse is meant rather than the ox, and hence "white" brings to his mind the horse, despite being no part of the proper signification of "white" (which is the quality *whiteness*). Presumably anything brought to mind by a term that is not strictly part of its proper signification is thereby signified *per*

aliud, at least if the connection is not merely associative.²⁸

Furthermore, this distinction applies to all names and verbs, since any of them can bring something else to mind through additional knowledge or belief (*De Gramm.* 15; S I: 161).

Regarding (3): Anselm explains signifying *ut unum* (“as one”) in *De Grammatico* 20 as a matter of the kinds of unity the signified elements may have.²⁹ He describes three fundamental types of unity there (S I: 666): (a) the composition of parts belonging to the same category, as when soul and body combine to make up an animal, presumably in hylomorphic fashion; (b) the agreement of a genus with differentia, whether one or many, as in the unity *rational animate body* produced by successively adding the differentiae *animateness* and *rationality* to the genus *body*; (c) the species combined with the collection of distinctive properties, producing an individual such as Plato. The several elements of (a)–(c) are signified, or brought to mind, as making up a genuine unity. This contrasts with so-called “accidental unities” such as *music* and *man* (which together make up a musical man), “featherless biped” (lacking the unity of definition), disaggregated parts, and the like.³⁰ Now there are presumably many distinctions we could draw among the significates of words; (3) is special in that it seems to be Anselm’s way of getting at the distinctive unity of signification some terms have. Unlike terms that signify a mere plurality of things, these special terms signify things that are unified, and furthermore signifies them to be so unified.

With these distinctions (1)–(3) in place, Anselm can describe the semantics of denominative terms with subtle precision. He begins by noting how the distinctions apply in the case of common names, to illuminate denominatives by contrast. In *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi* 11, cited above, we saw that common names signify common natures. Here in *De Grammatico* 12 (S I: 156–57) Anselm tells us that “man” signifies *per se* and as a unity “those things out of which *man* is made as a whole,” that is, the common nature *man*,³¹ and furthermore appellates the same, that is, can be used in ordinary discourse to talk about the species – and presumably its members as well, though not as the individuals they are (which would require proper names instead).

Denominatives are more complex. Anselm begins his analysis in *De Grammatico* 12 by arguing that a term like “brave” signifies brav-ery *per se*. Now it is clear that bravery is at least part of the significative content of “brave,” since hearing the word brings the quality to mind. (If it did not, then it would not be a word involving anything brave at all.) However, “brave” does not bring bravery to mind in the way that “bravery” does; Anselm takes “bravery” to function as a common name and hence to conform to the analysis of “man” just given. Hence “brave” and “bravery” both signify bravery *per se*,

but the latter signifies it as a unity composed of its genus and specific differentiae, whereas the former does not. Now, does “brave” include anything further in its signification *per se*? It seems like it does: the notion that the quality of bravery is possessed by something, namely by brave men. But Anselm argues against this suggestion at length in *De Grammatico* 13. If “brave” signified the brave man *per se*, he notes, then several unacceptable consequences follow: *brave man* would be a species of *man*, since it would signify only men but not all of them; likewise it would be impossible for there to be a brave non-man, although this is at least an intelligible possibility; it would be redundant rather than informative to call someone a “brave man” (rather than just a “brave”). Furthermore, “brave man” would lead to an infinite regress, because since “brave” would signify the brave man *per se*, “brave man” would mean the same as “brave man man,” which in turn would mean the same as “brave man man man,” and so on.³² Hence “brave” does not signify anything further *per se*.

Still, there is something to the notion that “brave” involves brave men, or at least things that are brave, in a way in which “bravery” does not. Anselm accommodates this intuition by claiming that “brave” signifies brave men *per aliud*, and appellates them as well. Working through the example of the white horse in *De Grammatico* 14, he reasons as follows. When we hear “brave” we think of bravery (its signification *per se*), and furthermore we often also think of men in whom bravery is found – not because that is part of the meaning of the word, but because the thought of bravery prompts us to think of those in whom it is found, even though this metaphysical fact is outside the semantic purview of “brave”; hence “brave” brings men to mind, though indirectly, which is to say that it signifies men *per aliud*.³³ Familiarity has endorsed the usage, so that we often use “brave” to speak of men rather than of bravery, although this is, strictly speaking, an extended sense of the term. That is to say, “brave” appellates men. Hence in the case of denominatives, unlike common names, appellation goes hand-in-hand with signification *per aliud*.

To sum up: denominatives signify *per se*, as do their corresponding common names, but while the latter also signify as a unity and appellate what they signify *per se*, the former signify *per aliud* and appellate the subjects of what they signify *per se*. To the question with which the *De Grammatico* begins, namely whether denominatives signify substance or quality, this is Anselm’s subtle and nuanced reply.

There is one last topic to take up with respect to names: how they can change or shift their signification in different contexts. In *Monologion*. 1 (S I: 14), Anselm notes that “good” can systematically vary its meaning depending on the words with which it is combined. A horse is called “good” because it is strong and swift, but a strong and swift thief is not likewise called good. This curious linguistic fact is elevated into a principle

when applied to God: names like “present (in a place)” acquire “different understandings” when applied to God and to creatures “due to the dissimilarity of the things” (*Mon.* 22; S I: 40). By the time he reaches *Monologion* 65, Anselm has expanded this into the foundation of his account of God’s ineffability: God is so “vastly beyond” anything else that the names we apply have only a thin connection with their ordinary usage (*tenuem significationem*, S I: 76). Instead, when I hear the names I can hardly help but think of the creatures they signify, even though I know full well that God transcends them. Now the semantics underlying this process are not entirely clear, but we can take it as a reflection on how we are not always completely aware of the boundaries of our concepts with which we think about things. They may appear to be sharp-edged, as when we think about wolves by calling wolfhood to mind. But even here we might wonder whether werewolves are signified through our understanding – they are, after all, quite different from ordinary wolves. Since semantics is founded on psychology, meaning is prey to all the sins of thought, and Anselm takes that to include cases in which we do not have any clear idea of how our understanding might get hold of something, just the conviction that it does. So it is in the case of God.

VERBS

Anselm follows Aristotle in taking the distinctive feature of verbs to be that they have tense – or, since Anselm has no separate word for verbal tense, that they are words that somehow involve time. Aristotle, in Boethius’s translation, said that the way the verb involves time is that it *consignifies* time (*De Interpretatione* 3 [16b6]), a remark that flummoxed many philosophers since it seems to add a new and ill-understood dimension to signification. Anselm apparently did not find consignification useful. In all his writings, he only speaks once of consignification: at the end of *De Grammatico* 13, he argues that if denominatives signified their subjects as well as their qualities, then “belonging-to-today” (*hodiernum*) would not be a name but a verb, since “it signifies something with time” and hence “is an expression consignifying time” (S I: 159). The expressions are treated as equivalent, and there is no need to introduce a new semantic relation of consignification. The full technical apparatus of signification, as described above, carries over to verbs.

All verbs signify something with time, even the copula: “was” (*fuit*) and “will-be” (*erit*) signify past and future respectively (*Mon.* 21; S I: 38). This causes a problem in describing God, who is nontemporal, or more exactly lives in an eternal present. Adverbs change their signification; “always” (*semper*), for instance, normally designates the whole of time, but when applied to God is more properly understood to signify eternity (*Mon.* 24; S I: 42).³⁴ For that matter, Anselm explains, the Apostle Paul often writes about God using verbs of past tense precisely because there is no tense properly signifying the

eternal present (*De Conc.* 1.5; S II: 254); nor is God properly said either to foreknow, to predestine, or the like, since these verbs involve temporal location as well as tense (*ibid.*; see also *De Conc.* 2.2; S II: 261). Apart from these remarks, Anselm has nothing special to say about either how verbs signify something with time, or about the several kinds of time (tense) they exemplify. Yet there seems to be a more serious omission.

Considering the care Anselm lavishes on the semantics of denominatives, or on how to understand “nothing,” it may come as a surprise that he never systematically analyzes predication, or that he says little about it except when he is talking about matters such as relative predication in the Trinity (*Mon.* 15–17). After all, what justifies separating the semantics of verbs from that of names, in the eyes of contemporary philosophers of language, is that verbs have “unsaturatedness”: they combine with names to produce statements. If verbs are no more than names, albeit with the special feature of involving time in their signification, how do they produce statements in combination with nontemporal names? Names added to names result in no more than lists, or at best longer noun-phrases. If the Aristotelian tradition in the philosophy of language has nothing more to say about verbs than that they have tense, it is not worth our attention. Or so the charge runs.

Anselm’s reply to this charge is compelling, I think, although it is easy to miss, since it is not so much argued for explicitly as it is built into his very approach to the philosophy of language and its underlying metaphysics. As a first approximation, his reply runs like this. The different linguistic categories, *name* and *verb*, pick out different fundamental constituents of the world: broadly speaking, the former signify agents and the latter actions; their predicative conjunction combines an agent with an action, to signify (or fail to signify) a particular event in the world. The semantic feature of “unsaturatedness” corresponds to the metaphysical dependence of actions on agents, of deeds on their doers. Statements, at least true statements, manage to identify the two aspects found in any particular event, namely who is doing something and what is being done.

Such is Anselm’s reply to the charge of negligence lodged earlier. Its doctrines pervade his writings, usually without being explicitly proclaimed or defended; they color all his work while staying largely out of the spotlight. Yet occasionally they take their turn on the stage. Anselm’s most explicit remarks about certain parts of his reply are found, surprisingly, in his uncompleted *Philosophical Fragments*. I will concentrate here on how verbs signify actions, broadly speaking, and how they effect predicative conjunctions.

Anselm begins his investigations into the verb with his remark that “the verb ‘to do’ (*facere*) is typically used as a proxy for any finite or infinite verb, no matter what its

signification.”³⁵ Proof of this is found in the fact that we can ask sensibly of anyone “What is she doing?” and be given any verb whatsoever as an appropriate reply: “reading” or “writing,” for instance; these verbs paradigmatically signify actions. But the same point holds, Anselm argues, for verbs that do not conform to the paradigm. Verbs that signify not actions but “endurings,” that is, verbs that signify things that happen to their subjects rather than things their subjects do,³⁶ also count as “actions” for Anselm’s purposes: “being struck” or “being scared” count as proper replies. So too for verbs that pick out states of the subject, such as “sitting” or “being in church.” Thus all verbs signify “doings” in a suitably broad sense.³⁷ For all that, Anselm thinks that the sense of *facere* is not stretched so far as to be empty, even while covering such disparate cases. He describes six ways in which it is used in ordinary discourse (*Phil. Frag.* 28–34); since it is the most generic verb available, other verbs will inherit some of these usages as well, though which ones depend on the verb in question (*Phil. Frag.* 34–35). The classification, as Anselm notes, is complex and intricate (*Phil. Frag.* 28), but there is no need to go through its details here; it is sufficient for our purposes to note that Anselm finds enough content in “to do” to distinguish several senses, and even to construct a logical Square of Opposition for them.³⁸ The general explanation behind the classification, Anselm tells us, is that the subject of which a verb is predicated is said to do or to cause³⁹ what is signified by that verb; every cause “does” that of which it is the cause (*Phil. Frag.* 26). If Socrates sits, he is the cause of the sitting that takes place, which is what is signified by the verb “sits.” Therefore, all verbs, broadly speaking, signify what their subjects “do.”

With this background, we can now turn to Anselm’s account of predicative conjunction. Later in the *Philosophical Fragments* he is analyzing how causes can cause things to be as well as not to be, and in the course of his discussion he offers a compact and lucid description of predication (*Phil. Frag.* 41–42).⁴⁰

When we refer to the Sun [by the name “Sun”] we are speaking of some thing, but it is not yet signified to be a cause. Likewise, when I say “shines” I am speaking of something, but I do not yet signify it to be the effect of anything. But when I say “The sun shines” the Sun is the cause and shining the effect, and each is something and exists, since the Sun has its own being and it makes (*facit*) the light to exist.

Thus “Sun” signifies some thing, namely the actual Sun; “shines” signifies something, namely *shining*; when combined, the former is signified to be the cause of the latter – the linguistic act of predication is underwritten by the underlying causal relations among the significates of the terms.⁴¹ “Causal relations” in Anselm’s broad sense, of course; the same analysis applies to simple existential statements, which are not causal in any

ordinary fashion: in the statement “Socrates exists” (*Socrates est*) Socrates is the cause that existence (*esse*) is said of him.⁴² We may summarize his account as follows. Names and verbs signify subjects and actions (broadly speaking); when combined, the name also signifies its significate as a cause, namely a cause of that effect, and the verb also signifies its significate as an effect, namely an effect of that cause.

This description of Anselm’s account raises two questions. First, where did the name and the verb acquire their additional significations of their significates as cause and as effect, respectively? Second, even if we grant that predicative force is underwritten by causal relations, how does a string of words acquire that predicative force?

One strategy for answering these questions would be to hold that statements, unlike names and verbs, have their own peculiar semantic properties, and to see it as part of the function of subject-position (say) to signify the causal role of whatever the name in isolation signifies. Predicative force would be built into the nature of statements as a distinct category of linguistic utterance, and therefore not reducible to semantic properties of names or verbs.

Yet, however congenial we may find this strategy, it is not the one Anselm pursues. Instead he follows the path laid down by his general semantics and tries to explain the properties of statements solely by the linguistic elements that occur in statements. Insofar as a name signifies something, it signifies it as a (potential) cause; that is part of what it is to be signified as a thing, since that is part of what it is to be a thing itself, namely to be able to perform actions, broadly speaking. Likewise, verbs signify their actions as (potential) effects, for similar reasons – the actions that are signified are at least potentially the actions of some agent, again broadly speaking. So much for the first question raised above.

As for the second question, Anselm thinks of predicative force as a feature of the verb. On this score he is again following Aristotle, who tells us that someone who hears a verb in isolation is in a state of suspension, waiting to hear more (*De Interpretatione* 3 [16b21–22]). Verbs, unlike names, have a kind of free-floating dependence that is only discharged in combination with a name. (It reflects the metaphysical dependence that actions have on agents, and the relative independence of agents from actions.) This linguistic dependence is part of the signification of every verb.⁴³ Strings of names do not make statements, since names do not have predicative force. Strings of verbs likewise do not make statements, since their predicative force needs a name in order to be discharged. The only combination that works is a name and a verb, and it works because of the signification of the verb. In short, a verb is a statement waiting to happen.

STATEMENTS

Anselm speaks at times of expressions (*orationes*) and sentences (*propositiones*), but his preferred way of speaking is to talk about statements (*enuntiationes*). This term is as elastic in Latin as its translation is in English. “Statement” can mean the actual utterance, or what is said by the actual utterance; at a pinch it even serves for our modern notion of a proposition, namely an abstract entity that is the (timeless) bearer of truth and falsity. Anselm happily leaves his usage vague for the most part. But when precision is called for, he usually takes it to mean the utterance. So it is when he turns to the distinctive semantic feature of statements, their possession of truth-value.⁴⁴

Just as Anselm’s theory of meaning applies to more than words, so too his theory of truth applies to more than statements. In the *De Veritate* Anselm puts forward an account that recognizes a wide variety of things to be capable of truth – statements, thoughts, volitions, actions, the senses, even the very being of things. Truth, for Anselm, is a normative notion: something is true when it is as it ought to be. Thus truth is in the end a matter of correctness (*rectitudo*), the correctness appropriate in each instance (*De Ver.* 11; S I: 191). Anselm links his theory of truth to his theological concerns as well, in his analysis of sin and in his identification of God as Truth. Despite Anselm’s wider concerns, I will only consider truth from the semantic point of view.

Anselm discusses the truth of statements in *De Veritate* 2, as a way of beginning his general inquiry into truth, since truth and falsity are usually taken to be features of statements. The student declares that statements are true “when it is as [the statement] says,” a claim that holds for both affirmations and denials (S I: 177). But as the teacher correctly notes, this does not explain what the truth of the statement consists in; its truth-conditions are not its truth, but at best might be the cause of its truth. If truth is a property of statements, Anselm reasons, we have to identify it as something in the statement itself. Three candidates are proposed: (a) the utterance of the statement; (b) its signification; (c) something in the definition of “statement.” Yet none of (a)–(c) will do, because each of these features is present and can remain unchanged whether the statement is true or false. What then is truth, over and above truth-conditions?

One modern answer – that truth consists in the correspondence of the statement to reality, or more generally that truth is satisfaction – will not do for Anselm, since correspondence is not a property of a statement, but the relation between the statement, or, better, what the statement says, and the world. The fact that “Snow is white” corresponds to a state of the world is not a property of the statement, but is at best a relational fact about it as regards the world.

Anselm's answer is that the truth of a true statement consists in its doing what statements should do, namely, signify the world the way it is for affirmations; *mutatis mutandis* for denials. If we consider the matter carefully, there are five elements at play in Anselm's analysis:

- (T1) Snow is white.
- (T2) "Snow is white" ought to signify that snow is white.
- (T3) "Snow is white" (successfully) signifies that snow is white.
- (T4) "Snow is white" ought to signify the world the way it is.
- (T5) "Snow is white" (successfully) signifies the world the way it is.

Suppose that snow is white, as (T1) declares. Then the statement "Snow is white" has a complex relation to that state of affairs. As (T2) says, the statement "Snow is white" is designed to express the claim that snow is white. More precisely, it "has undertaken to signify" (*accepit significare*) that snow is white. We normally use those words to express that sense. Something could go wrong; we might be talking to someone who did not understand what we were saying. But whether we are successful or not, a tokening of the expression "Snow is white" is meant to signify that snow is white. If we are in fact successful, then (T3) holds in addition to (T2).⁴⁵ Likewise, Anselm thinks, it is part of what it is to be an affirmative statement to try to say how things are, or, more precisely, to signify the world the way it is. In contemporary parlance, the difference between (T2) and (T4) is that the former simply expresses a propositional content, whereas the latter expresses a propositional content that corresponds to the facts.⁴⁶ Statements not only (try to) say things, they (try to) say things that match up with the world. Again, statements may succeed or fail in this aim; hence the distinction between (T4) and (T5). If (T1)–(T5) hold, we have succeeded in saying something true.

There turn out to be not one but two truths operative in (T1)–(T5): the correctness embodied in (T3) and (T5). The statement "Snow is white" does what it should do when it succeeds in signifying that snow is white; it also does what it should do when it succeeds in signifying that snow is white in the circumstances that snow really is white. The latter is the closest to our contemporary notion of truth for statements, but Anselm insists that the former is a kind of truth too (he calls it "the truth of signification"), and indeed can hold even if the world changes – that is, (T3) can hold even when (T5) fails (S I: 179).

On Anselm's analysis, then, the truth of a statement consists in its doing both of the things it ought. For (T5) to hold, of course, both (T3) and (T1) have to hold; hence the truth involved in (T5) depends on there being the appropriate correspondence between what is said and the world. But truth does not consist in correspondence, even if it depends on it; truth consists in correctness, and as such is a property of tokened sentences.

This conclusion holds only for such sentence-tokens, though; Anselm is quite clear that the truths expressed by true sentences are in fact eternal. He offers a pair of arguments to that end in *Monologion* 18 (S I: 33).⁴⁷

First, the truth "Something was going to exist" never began to be true, since if it is ever true it has always been true; nor will the truth "Something was past" ever cease to be true, since if it is ever true it will always be true. Yet neither of these statements can be true apart from truth. Hence truth has no beginning or end, and is therefore eternal. Second, if truth were to have a beginning or an end, then before it began it was true that it was not, and likewise after it ends it will be true that it will not be; this is an evident absurdity. Anselm here is trying to link his theory of semantic truth with his more general theological view that God, who is eternal, is Truth; since his ontology already contains an eternal being, he adds nothing by having eternal truths, and therefore (in some sense) eternal truth-bearers distinct from statements. But the details of his account depend on his views in the philosophy of religion rather than the philosophy of language, so we will not explore them here.

NOTES

1. Likewise, these activities do not require that Anselm had in mind a distinction between technical and nontechnical uses of language, much less that he was committed to the former. Desmond Paul Henry has argued that Anselm was in fact so committed, and that in his philosophical works he was trying to create a technical logical vocabulary that could be part of a system of formal logic, struggling against the confines of ordinary Latin usage. See: Desmond Henry, *The "De grammatico" of St. Anselm: The Theory of Paronymy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964); Desmond Henry, *The Logic of St. Anselm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967); Desmond Henry, *Commentary on "De Grammatico": The Historical-logical Dimensions of a Dialogue of St. Anselm* (Dordrecht: Reidel Press, 1974). But for skepticism about Henry's thesis, see Marilyn McCord Adams, "Re-reading *De grammatico*, or, Anselm's Introduction to Aristotle's *Categories*," *Documenti e studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale* 11

(2000), and John Marenbon, “Some Semantic Problems in Anselm’s *De Grammatico*,” in M. W. Herren, C. J. McDonagh, and R. G. Arthur (eds.), *Latin Culture in the Eleventh Century* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002).

2. In what follows, citations to texts of Anselm refer by volume and page number to F. S. Schmitt, *Anselm Opera Omnia* (cited in the biblio-graphy at the end of this volume). The exception to this rule is for references to the *Philosophical Fragments*, for which page numbers are given to F. S. Schmitt, *Ein neues unvollendetes Werk des LI. Anselm von Canterbury*, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters*, vol. III (1936). All translations from Anselm are my own.

3. See especially Augustine’s *De Magistro* and *De Doctrina Christiana*.

4. Anselm regularly calls the significate of a sign its signification (*significatio*), an unfortunate habit since the term is ambiguous between (a) the property possessed by the sign in virtue of its activity of signifying, and (b) the significate of the sign. Anselm’s intent is usually clear from context, and I will silently disambiguate his usage when it is called for.

5. Anselm is clearly following Aristotle in *De Interpretatione* 1 (16a3–8) for (a) and (c), but his addition of (b) is original. Gaunilo also mentions something like (b) in *Pro Insipiente* 4, to dismiss it in favor of (c) as the usual case (S I: 127).

6. The traditional account is derived from the passage from Aristotle referred to in the preceding note, supplemented with his remark in *De Interpretatione* 3 (16b20–22) that “he who speaks gives rise to an understanding” – understood as translated into Latin, and commented on, by Boethius (for the importance of this proviso, see Norman Kretzmann, “Boethius on Spoken Sound Significant by Convention,” in John Corcoran (ed.), *Ancient Logic and Its Modern Interpretations* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1975)). The relation was expressed with several verbs: *constituere*, *generare*, *manifestare*, *exprimere*. Somewhat surprisingly, Anselm refers to the traditional account only a few times: *De Gramm.* 11 (S I: 160); *De Casu Diab.* 11 (S I: 249) by implication; and *Phil. Frag.* 43 when correctly distinguishing *constituere intellectum* from *constituere aliquid in intellectu* (a distinction that sometimes got away from him). Yet there is no question about his adoption of it; his writings are shot through with the assumption that spoken and written words get their meaning from the concepts with which they are associated.

7. See *De Gramm.* 14 (S I: 160): “Even if body or surface should come to mind [on hearing ‘white’], which happens because I am accustomed to whiteness being in them,

the name ‘white’ does not signify either of them.”

8. That is, *rationis intellectu*, a formula Anselm takes to be parallel to *per rationem* (*Mon.* 10; S I: 25). In translation the phrase “rational conception” splits the difference between the senses “definition” and “(the faculty of) reason.”

9. *Mon.* 10 (S I: 25). Also he mentions (a) and (b) as alternative ways of thinking about things in *Mon.* 33 (S I: 52).

10. This is the burden of *Mon.* 31 (S I: 49–50). Anselm develops the systematic parallel between human thinking/saying and the divine Word from *Mon.* 10 onwards, as a *leitmotif* of his whole work.

11. See, for instance, *Resp. ad Gaun.* 2 (S I: 132): “If [something] is understood, it follows that it exists in the understanding; for just as what is thought is thought by means of a thought, and what is thought by a thought thereby exists in the thought as it is thought, so too what is understood is understood by means of an understanding, and what is understood by an understanding thereby exists in the understanding as it is understood – what could be clearer than that?” This principle is important for the ontological argument of *Prosl.* 2.

12. This is the error Gilbert Ryle ridicules as part of the “‘Fido’-Fido Theory of Meaning”: if the meaning of a name is identified with its bearer, the nonexistence of the bearer necessarily renders the name meaningless.

13. *Prosl.* 2 (S I: 101). See Peter King, “Anselm’s Intentional Argument,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 1 (1984) for an analysis of Anselm’s example of the artist, and how the ontological argument depends on these semantic principles.

14. Whether this line of reasoning is ultimately satisfactory is not clear. When Socrates exists, we seem to be thinking of him; when he fails to exist, we may still think of him, but it cannot be given the transparent referential reading it had while he existed. Anselm dodges the question by insisting on the identity of the thinking-of-Socrates with Socrates, when he exists; we still may have a thinking-of-Socrates when Socrates no longer exists – there just will not be anything in the world to which the thinking is now identical. The success of this dodge depends on whether Anselm can plausibly avoid hypostasizing thought-contents by refusing to draw a distinction among thinking, the intentional object of thought, and that to which the object corresponds.

15. Augustine faced the same difficulty: *De Magistro* 2.3. Contemporary philosophers of language treat (a)–(c) as posing the same kind of puzzle as non-denoting terms, such as “Socrates” after his death, and solve them all by drawing a distinction between two semantic relations, namely *sense* and *reference*. Such names lack reference, perhaps necessarily, but that does not prevent them from having perfectly good senses, even senses that are negative, privative, or necessarily empty. The fact that Anselm returns again and again to (a)–(c) is to my mind good grounds for thinking he did *not* draw our distinction between sense and reference. See the discussion of appellation in *De Gramm.* 12 below.

16. Anselm clearly sees the connections among (a)–(c). In addition to the parallel noted here, he treats them all of a piece in *Phil. Frag.* 42 *loc. cit.*; *De Conc. Virg.* 5 treats (a) and (c) together; *De Casu Diab.* 10–26 is devoted to the question how we can be afraid of evil if it is nothing; and so on.

17. Anselm initially puts the point unfortunately, saying that “nothing” and “evil” signify “a quasi-something” (*quasi aliquid*). He does better later, saying that they signify “as though there were something” (*quasi sint aliquid*): see S I: 250–51.

18. In a slogan: a sign signifies something, but not necessarily some thing. Anselm’s ready acceptance of non-denoting terms already hints at this direction. But what are these non-thing “somethings” that can be the significates of words? Anselm can be forgiven his reluctance to start down this path.

19. Anselm, like other medieval philosophers, takes semantics to be firmly grounded on metaphysics, so probably would not allow this claim to be generalized to (say) artifact-kinds, such as “teacup,” much less to general referring phrases, such as “books and hats in my office.”

20. Anselm reiterates these claims about proper names and demonstrative expressions in *De Gramm.* 20 (S I: 166) and *De Conc. Virg.* 1 (S II: 140). Again, his claims do not obviously generalize to other singular referring expressions, or even to demonstratives combined with other terms (such as “this pile of bricks”). But given the underlying metaphysics Anselm would probably admit the same considerations to apply *mutatis mutandis* to names of individual substances.

21. Anselm’s initial remark does not decide the issue, since it could be read as maintaining that proper names signify persons in respect of their distinctive properties, or that they merely signify persons, who are, incidentally, made singular through a collection

of distinctive properties. (Anselm's Latin inclines to the latter reading, if anything, since he writes *personam quae habet* rather than *habeat*.) His mention of what is understood when Jesus is named is definitive, however.

22. Strictly speaking, this is too fast. An understanding that includes distinctive properties will as a matter of fact pick out only a single individual, but that alone does not suffice to make an expression semantically singular. For the latter, we need to be assured that the expression could only apply to a single thing, and Anselm's discussion, while suggestive, does not go quite so far.

23. Anselm is here following Aristotle (*Categories* 1 [1a12–15]), and the associated discussion in Boethius's commentary (*On Aristotle's Categories* 167D–168D). Once again, it is not clear that Anselm would permit generalizing his account to all adnominal phrases.

24. Anselm carries out much of his discussion in the material mode, asking whether a denominative, that is, what is signified by a denominative term, is a quality or a substance. I will use the formal mode, since Anselm apparently regards the two as purely intertranslatable.

25. Anselm writes *quo res ipsa usu loquendi appellatur*, which is usually read by commentators as meaning that S is ordinarily called "A." But that reading does not fit Anselm's horse-example (discussed below); "white" is not a name for horses in common speech. In context, however, it would be understood correctly and not flagged as a deviant or bizarre usage – a running concern in *De Grammatico* – hence the interpretation of "*usus loquendi*" given here.

26. See *De Gramm.* 14–15 (S I: 161) for Anselm's claim that "white" appellates the horse in this context.

27. Many commentators have succumbed to the temptation: see for instance Henry, *Commentary* on "*De Grammatico*," 211–14; Wolfgang Gombocz, "Anselm über Sinn und Bedeutung," in *Anselm Studies* 1 (1983): 135; Marilyn McCord Adams, "Re-reading *De grammatico*." John Marenbon, "Some Semantic Problems in Anselm's *De Grammatico*," 10, voices skepticism, rightly in my opinion.

28. Anselm rejects mere psychological association because the associated items are not brought to mind through something else (the literal meaning of "*per aliud*"); they are just

extraneous occurrences, stray thoughts. See *De Gramm.* 14 (S I: 160).

29. Hence the translation “as unified”: see Adams, “Re-reading *De grammatico*”: 86.

30. Whether Anselm would sanction the extension of (3) to artificial wholes as well as natural wholes is an open question. Certainly a house with floor, walls, and ceiling in good order differs from a mere heap of house-parts, and the difference seems to be precisely that the parts are appropriately unified in the former case but not in the latter; “house” picks out not merely house-parts but house-parts *ut unum*, that is, properly arranged.

31. Anselm describes *substance* as the principal element in *man*, and remarks that we must also take into account all the differentiae running down the Porphyrean Tree. He does not explicitly say in this passage that he is concerned with the common name as opposed to speaking of “(a) man” – the lack of articles in Latin leave the question open – but it is clear from the surrounding discussion that this is his concern. See also the end of *De Gramm.* 19 (S I: 165).

32. The same regress can be motivated against the more general proposals that “brave” signifies *per se* either (a) something brave; (b) having-bravery; (c) something-having-bravery. See *De Gramm.* 20–21 (S I: 165–68). Technically the difficulty here is a *nugatio*, of the sort Aristotle famously describes regarding the meaning of “snub” as snub-nosed.

33. Since “brave” signifies men only *per aliud*, it cannot signify bravery and men as a unified whole; hence it can at best represent them as an accidental unity, which is what in fact a brave man is (metaphysically speaking).

34. This is an instance of a general truth for Anselm, namely that words systematically change their signification when applied to God.

35. *Phil. Frag.* 25; see also *De Ver.* 5 (S I: 182).

36. Again, see also *De Ver.* 5 (S I: 182). Anselm notes that the grammatical distinction between active and passive voice usually matches the distinction between verbs that signify actions and those that signify endurings, though not always: *De Ver.* 8 (S I: 187).

37. This sense encompasses at least items in the category of Action (actions properly so-called), Passion (“endurings”), and State, and perhaps items in the category of Relation and Position too. Combined with the copula, of course, items in all the nine dependent categories could be verbally linked to substances, but Anselm does not mention this possibility.

38. For further details of Anselm’s account in the *Philosophical Fragments*, see E. F. Serene, “Anselm’s Philosophical Fragments” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1974); Douglas Walton, “Logical Form and Agency,” *Philosophical Studies* 29 (1976); Douglas Walton, “Anselm and the Logical Syntax of Agency,” *Franciscan Studies* 14 (1976); and K. Segerberg, “Getting Started: Beginnings in the Logic of Action,” in G. Corsi et al. (eds.), *Atti del Convegno internazionale di storia della logica* (Bologna: CLUEB, 1989).

39. The verb *facere* has the several senses “to do,” “to make,” “to cause,” “to bring about”; no single English translation can do it justice. Note that it is one and the same verb in question, though.

40. Anselm offers a similar account for “Man is an animal” (*Homo est animal*) in *Phil. Frag.* 27, but the case of the sun is more perspicuous (and does not involve difficulties with Latin’s lack of articles).

41. Anselm’s remarks at the end of the passage about the Sun and the shining each having their own being are part of his analysis of causal contexts at this point, and not strictly part of the account of predication. Statements need not postulate the existence of the things they involve. Good thing, too, since Anselm immediately turns to cases in which one thing causes another not to be.

42. Adapted from the discussion in *Phil. Frag.* 27, where Anselm says literally: “Hence what is conceived is the cause that being (*esse*) is said of it.”

43. The official account of verbs, as noted above, declares that their distinctive feature is that they signify time. It is not clear how this explains their predicative force. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that actions, even in Anselm’s broad sense, are events that take place in time. But Anselm does not supply any explanation.

44. Anselm sometimes talks sloppily of statements signifying truth or falsity. If we took him literally, statements would be names of these properties, which they clearly are not.

Instead, this phrase must be shorthand for the success of some statements at signifying the world the way it is; see his account of truth described below.

45. Modern discussions bypass Anselm's (T2) and (T3) by specifying the language as part of the Tarski schema, since we are impatient about fixing meanings.

46. Near the end of *De Ver.* 2, Anselm makes some misleading remarks in which he suggests that (T2) and (T3) are somehow "natural" and "unchangeable" whereas (T4) and (T5) are "accidental" and depend on the occasion of their use. The only sense in which the former are "natural" is by fixing the language and the conventions for signification, and the only sense in which the latter depend on their use is that they may or may not be true depending on how the world is when the statement is uttered.

47. See also *De Ver.* 10 (S I: 190).

5 Anselm on modality

Simo Knuuttila

My aim is to discuss Anselm of Canterbury's use of basic modal terms (necessity, possibility, impossibility) and his interpretation of the meaning of these and some related notions. I will first sketch modal conceptions in philosophical and theological traditions with which Anselm was familiar, and then take a look at some eleventh-century modal controversies entered in Peter Damian's *On Divine Omnipotence* and also discussed by Anselm. The third section deals with Anselm's views against the general historical background, and the last section is about his attempt to sketch the semantics of modal terms.

MODALITIES IN ANSELM'S SOURCES

The main line of the history of modal theories in ancient and medieval times can be described as follows. There are four originally Aristotelian ways of understanding the meaning of modal terms in ancient philosophy: the "statistical" or "temporal frequency interpretation" of modality, the conception of possibility as a potency, the conception of diachronic modalities (antecedent necessities and possibilities), and the idea of possibility as noncontradictoriness. I will explain below how these modal paradigms occur in Boethius (c. 480–523), whose works made them known to early medieval thinkers. Ancient conceptions did not include the view that the meaning of modal terms should be spelled out by considering simultaneous alternative states of affairs. This new idea was introduced into Western thought in early medieval discussions influenced by Augustine's (354–430) theological conception of God as acting by choice between possible alternatives. Ancient habits of thinking continued to play an important role in scholasticism, however, and the systematic significance of the new conception was not fully realized before the extensive discussions by John Duns Scotus, William Ockham, John Buridan, and some other fourteenth-century thinkers. Many scholars have paid attention to the similarities between these late-medieval theories and the contemporary possible-worlds semantics for modal logic.¹

One of Boethius's Aristotelian modal paradigms is that of possibility as potency or power (*potestas*, *potentia*). Some potencies are never unrealized; they are unchangeably and therefore necessarily actualized. When potencies are not actualized, their ends are

said to exist potentially.² Necessarily actual potencies leave no room for the potencies of their contraries, since they could not be realized.³ Other potencies do not exclude contrary potencies. They are not always and universally actualized, but as potency-types even these must show their genuineness through actualization.⁴ Boethius thought that natural events typically take place so that active and passive potencies interact and these interactions are determined by chains of causes which force the events to take place, though there are also chance events in nature and voluntary acts are not necessitated by external things.⁵

The Aristotelian frequency interpretation is another Boethian conception of necessity and possibility. According to its temporal version, to be possible is to be actual at some time and, consequently, what always is, is by necessity, and what never is, is impossible.⁶ If the state of affairs asserted by a temporally unqualified present-tense-type sentence (“p now”) is always actual (or non-actual), the sentence is true (or false) whenever it is uttered and therefore necessarily true (or false). A sentence is possibly true only if what is asserted is not always non-actual.⁷ Boethius calls the necessity by which a sitting Socrates sits when he sits temporal necessity or conditional necessity. Things which are actual at a certain moment are conditionally necessary because of their immutability at that moment of time, though many of these are changeable and contingent when treated without a temporal qualification.⁸ The unchangeability of present things was the common background of the ancient axiom of the necessity of the present. It was not merely the logical necessity of the temporally definite disjunction “p or not p.” Boethius argues that since Socrates cannot be sitting and not sitting at the same time, he cannot be not sitting at the time when he is sitting.⁹

In explaining how the necessity of what is actual is compatible with indeterminism Boethius builds on Alexander of Aphrodisias’ remarks on diachronic modalities, that is, the possibilities and necessities of events before their occurrences. All contingent events are associated with antecedent prospective alternative possibilities, for example it is possible in the morning that I will be far away in the evening, though this is no longer possible in the evening if I did not travel. An antecedent alternative possibility remains possible until the causes of its opposite will be fixed. After this it ceases to be a possibility. These ideas were associated with chance events and free choices in the criticism of the Stoic doctrine of universal determinism.¹⁰ Boethius did not develop a theory of simultaneous or synchronic possibilities which would remain intact even when diachronic possibilities have vanished. On the contrary, he insisted that only what is actual at a certain time is possible at that time with respect to that time.

In *Philosophiae Consolatio* 5.4.19 Boethius writes: “I do not think that anybody

would say that those things which are happening now were not going to happen before they happened.” Boethius seems to think here that propositions about future contingents are true, if what is maintained by them will happen. In other places he associates the truth of these propositions with the qualifications “mutably” and “indeterminately.” The meaning of these terms is not wholly clear.¹¹ Boethius’s discussions influenced the standard scholastic theory according to which future contingent propositions are true or false, since only true propositions can be foreknown and revealed in prophecies, but they are true or false in an indeterminate manner in the sense that the occurrences of contingent events are not yet determined in the chains of causes. To know the truth-values of future contingent propositions does not belong to human epistemic possibilities.¹² Boethius seems to think that God as an atemporal being can know contingent things through an immediate vision; all times are present to Him (*Phil. Cons.* 5.6.25–31). Some medieval authors interpreted the distinction between simple and conditional necessity, which Boethius applied to foreknowledge in this context, as a distinction between two ways of how the notion of necessity can be associated with a consequence: either a consequence is necessary or the consequent is necessary. “What God knows necessarily takes place” can be read in accordance with the simple necessity of consequence as “Necessarily: if God knows that *p*, then *p*,” which is true, or in accordance with conditional necessity as “If God knows that *p*, then necessarily *p*,” which is deterministic and false. It is not clear whether this is what Boethius meant.¹³

While early medieval thinkers could find detailed discussions of philosophical modal theories in Boethius’s works, Augustine’s doctrine of creation made them aware of other kinds of modal ideas. According to Augustine, God simultaneously created the first things and the seminal reasons of later things out of nothing. The creation was based on an eternal free act of God’s perfectly good will, and took place through His omnipotence. God created time in creating movement in the universe. Time depends on movement, and since God is unmoving, there is no time before creation. Augustine argues for a sharp distinction between time and mutability on the one hand and timelessness and immutability on the other.¹⁴ In Augustine’s trinitarian theology, the Son is a perfect image of the Father and, as the Word, the seat of the ideas of finite beings which in a less perfect manner can imitate the highest being. The ideas refer to possible actualization in the domain of mutability.¹⁵ So the possibilities have an ontological foundation in God’s essence. This was the dominating metaphysical conception until Duns Scotus departed from it by introducing the idea of the primary domain of logical possibility.¹⁶ Augustine was familiar with the Neoplatonic thought that the power of being proceeds from the One without leaving any genuine level of being unrealized, but he stressed that the world is not necessary and that lots of possibilities remain unrealized.¹⁷ In *De Civitate Dei* 12.19, Augustine criticizes the ancient doctrines which claimed that the only permissible notion of infinity is that of potential infinity. He argued that an infinite series of numbers actually

exists in God's mind, and God could create an infinite number of individuals and know each of them simultaneously. Most of these possibilities remain unrealized.

Augustine regards God's omnipotence as an executive power with respect to His free choice which is conceptually preceded by knowledge about alternative possibilities. God could have done other things, but did not want to.¹⁸ Augustine's remarks on various possible histories remained sketchy, but the basic idea is pretty clear and was employed in the early medieval doctrine of God as acting by choice between alternatives. This involved an intuitive idea of modality based on atemporal or synchronic alternatives, which was not employed in ancient philosophy. Let us take a look at some eleventh-century discrepancies between the Catholic doctrine of God's freedom and power and the philosophical modal conceptions which were entered in Peter Damian's *On Divine Omnipotence* and known also to Anselm.

PETER DAMIAN AND THE DIALECTICIANS

Gerbert of Aurillac, Abbo of Fleury, and Garland the Computist, among other tenth- and eleventh-century logicians, were acquainted with the *Categories* and *De Interpretatione* of Aristotle, the *Topica* of Cicero, the *Isagoge* of Porphyry, Boethius's commentaries on these works, and Boethius's own logical onographs. Garland's *Dialectica* summarizes the main doctrines of the sources in six books.¹⁹ Some learned people interested in logic and philosophy asked how Christian doctrine stands in relation to the ancient philosophical heritage and how each should take the other into account. The matter was not of merely theoretical interest, as is attested by the controversy between Berengar of Tours (d. 1088) and Lanfranc (1010–89) about the Eucharist. One of the controversial questions pertained to the application of logic to the Christian mysteries.²⁰ Boethius's theological treatises, the *Opuscula Sacra*, were discussed in the schools alongside elementary logic, and it seems that this coexistence of theology and dialectic was one of the sources of eleventh-century quarrels.²¹

Lanfranc, who died as Archbishop of Canterbury, was an Italian, and so was Peter Damian (1007–72), an influential monastic writer and counsellor to many popes. In his book *On Divine Omnipotence* Damian states that some teachers of his day were applying logic to theology in a way which threatened orthodoxy. According to Damian, logic as a verbal art is not competent to teach anything but how to make statements and to operate with consequences (*De Div. Omnipot.* 604a–b, 615a). While generally condemning the misuse of logic in theology, Peter Damian was particularly concerned about the views of dialecticians, which, in his opinion, questioned divine omnipotence.

The first group of Peter's examples of philosophical necessities, not acceptable without qualification in theology, comprises traditional examples of invariant causal patterns. According to Peter, such invariances remain in the control of their creator (see, e.g., *De Div. Omnipot.* 610d–615b). It has been assumed that Berengar of Tours was one of the dialectical theologians whom Peter Damian is attacking.²² According to Damian, God can change the invariant patterns which are called natural necessities and represent the natural *consuetudo* (611b, 612b, 614a):

Is it a wonder when he who gave the law and order to nature exercises the power of his will on the same nature so that the necessity of nature does not rebel against him, but acts in submission to the laws, like a servant? The nature of things itself has a nature, namely, the will of God, so that as what is created obeys the laws of nature, so, when ordered, it reverently obeys God's will, giving up its rights.

(*De Div. Omnipot.* 612c–d)

Damian thought in an Augustinian manner that natural causes function uniformly on the condition that God does not want an exception from the common course of nature. (Cf. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 21.8.)

Another philosophical notion of necessity discussed by Damian is the necessity associated with dialectical consequences or consequences of discourse (*consequentia disserendi*):

According to the consequence of discourse, if it is going to rain, then it is entirely necessary that it will rain and thus entirely impossible that it will not rain. Thus, what is said about past things can be concluded no less with respect to present and future things, for as what has been necessarily has been, so what is, as long as it is, necessarily is, and what will be necessarily will be . . . Who would not patently see that if these arguments, having the order of the words they have, are accepted, the divine power is shown to be impotent at all moments of time.

(*De Div. Omnipot.* 603a–b, d)

Damian here describes what Boethius called temporal or conditional necessity, stating that, if it is applied to all moments of time, everything seems to be necessary. Even God cannot do anything but what he in fact does. He also mentions that philosophers have introduced the conception of *ad utrumlibet* contingency, according to which some things may happen or may as well not happen, in order to speak about things that can be

otherwise than they are. Damian thought that since this idea was based on the variable nature of things, it did not really solve the problem contained in the claim that at the time when something is, it necessarily is as long as it is (602d–603a). Whatever one thinks about dialectical views of necessity or contingency in the temporal order, these do not provide any proper way of discussing God’s power, because what is created would then be the criterion for determining what is possible for the creator (cf. 612b). Damian’s brief descriptions of what he considered to be the standard philosophical modalities evidently drew, directly or indirectly, on Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* 9 and Boethius’s commentaries on it.²³

The starting point of Peter Damian’s treatise is the following statement by Jerome: “I will speak boldly; although God can do all things, he cannot raise up a virgin, after she has fallen” (Jerome, *Epistulae* 1.150). The idea that what is past is necessary was generally accepted by ancient philosophers. Peter Damian did not want to use the expression that there is something God cannot do. Since divine omnipotence is outside time and there can be no changes in God’s possibilities to do things, the historical beginning of the existence of Rome does not have any influence on the fact that God can see to it that Rome never exists (*De Div. Omnipot.* 619a).

Some authors have thought that in Damian’s view God can change the past, and the Law of Contradiction does not impose limits on divine power. This kind of argument seems to be found in the following passage: “Contraries cannot belong to one and the same thing together. This is correctly called an impossibility with respect to the limited power of nature, but it should not be applied to the divine majesty” (*De Div. Omnipot.* 612a–b).

The context of this text is, however, ambiguous in many ways. Some scholars think that Damian merely wanted to stress that one should not apply the principles of natural philosophy when speaking about God (see *De Div. Omnipot.* 597b–c).²⁴ Peter Damian takes it for granted that when the conception of God’s power is considered problematic, something is wrong with the manner in which the problem is formulated. If it is asked whether God can do bad or harmful things, it is wrongly assumed that such states of affairs are brought about by a power. Following the Neoplatonic view of Augustine and Boethius, Damian states that to bring about things of this kind is not a sign of ability but of inability (610b–d).²⁵ Furthermore, if it is claimed that when an individual event has taken place, God can no longer prevent it, God’s power is discussed in temporal terms. These are inadequate, since there is no temporal order in eternity, where God makes His eternal decisions in a nontemporal way (*De Div. Omnipot.* 619a–620c).

Even though Damian refers to the theological conception of alternative providential

programs, he does not elaborate upon this idea while discussing the question of God's having power over the past (600a, 614d). It seems that, while defending the absolute nature of God's power, Damian was led by the Augustinian conception of God's acting by choice, which implies a theory of alternative possible states of affairs, but he did not manage to create a coherent theory of his own. Damian thought that God's choice is eternal and God has the power to realize the actual choice as well as all possible alternative choices. He did not realize (or chose to deny) that the temporal results of the actual choice exclude a choice with incompatible temporal results and that God's real possibilities to actualize alternative choices are restricted by the actual choice.²⁶

TRADITIONAL MODALITIES IN ANSELM

Anselm of Canterbury was a pupil of Lanfranc at Bec and succeeded him as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093. He was aware of the debates about the relationship between faith and reason and dealt with questions similar to those in Damian's work on omnipotence, though it is not clear whether he was familiar with it. More than Damian, Anselm was interested in modal conceptions themselves and tried to codify some aspects of the semantics implied in the Christian use of the notions of necessity and possibility. I shall first deal with Anselm's answers to questions also discussed by Damian and then with Anselm's attempt to develop a semantic theory of modality.

Anselm was much more of a philosophical thinker than Damian, as is seen from his formulation of the question of the relationship between divine and natural possibilities. In [Chapter 12](#) of his dialogue *De Casu Diaboli*, Anselm asks how it was possible for the world to exist prior to its creation. He states that it was possible because of God's ability to create it, but the world itself did not have the capability to be, and could not be.²⁷ In the late incomplete dialogue called the *Lambeth Fragments* or *Philosophical Fragments*, Anselm returns to the same topic. The student presents the following problem: if things can be in virtue of their capability to be and if something which does not exist has no capabilities, and as such neither the capability to be nor the capability not to be, it seems to be both necessary and impossible for something which does not exist to be and, similarly, not to be. This is explicated by the statements that "x has no capability to be" seems to mean "x cannot be" or, equivalently, "it is not possible for x to be" or "it is impossible for x to be" or "it is necessary for x not to be." The statement "x has no capability not to be" is explicated in the same manner: "it is not possible for x not to be" or "it is impossible for x not to be" or "it is necessary for x to be."²⁸ While Anselm often deals with these Aristotelian definitions, he did not develop any more advanced theory of modal equipollences by analyzing the structures of modal statements, as Abelard did by separating modalities *de sensu* and *de re*.²⁹ Anselm thought that the student's paradoxes can be solved through his semantic theory of the meaning of modal words, but this

answer is not included in the fragments.

The question of how something which does not exist is possibly something is a problem if actualization is considered as an activation of a passive potency which is embedded in an existing subject, but one that had to be faced, for Christians, and so called for a different modal metaphysics. Since God has created the world out of nothing through His omnipotence, the power of omnipotence is apparently a power which does not presuppose a passive potency in the subject on which it acts. When Anselm states that the world did not have a capability to be before its creation, he did not mean that it would be impossible for it to be. Anselm thought that the world cannot begin to be without an external activator, but divine power does not make impossible things possible. This is explained in the early work *Monologion* where Anselm deals with the realizable model of the world which is not yet created. Anselm's theory of the ontological basis of the possibility of the world is largely derived from Augustine's trinitarian view of the Son as a Word which is the perfect image of the Father and also includes the ideas of less perfect possible imitations of the highest being. Anselm describes the Word as the perfect divine image of itself; this involves an eternal explication of the highest intelligible being as well as of all things which can imitate it in various degrees, since the highest being is the source of all beings and can be imitated by lower beings. Therefore things which can be created have a model or form or similitude or rule in the divine Word (*Mon.* 9, 31–34). In the *Monologion* Anselm speaks about the models of actualized things in God's thought, but he believed, like Augustine, that God's thought involves a providential model for the actual history and also models things which are not actualized.³⁰ If this was Anselm's view, why did the possibility of the nonexistent world remain a problem? Anselm apparently thought that in the *Fragments* the student mistakenly assumed that one could specify the modal status of nonexistent beings on the basis of their lack of any potency. Anselm's point is that a thing before it exists can become actual, if there is an external power which can actualize it and its actuality is not contradictory.³¹ But even then one could ask how a nonexistent thing which can exist and be understood is something as distinct from a merely impossible thing which cannot be understood.³²

Like Peter Damian, Anselm also avoided speaking about the restrictions of divine omnipotence and preferred formulations according to which all necessities and impossibilities are subject to God's will:

As already stated, it is said in an improper sense that God cannot do something or does something by necessity. Indeed, all necessity and impossibility are subject to His will, but His will is not subject to any necessity or impossibility, for nothing is necessary or impossible without His willing it to be so, but it is not true at all that He wills or does not will something because of a necessity or an impossibility.³³

Thomas Bradwardine, who often quotes Anselm, paraphrases this text in his influential *De Causa Dei* (1344). Bradwardine was interested in Anselm's formulation while discussing the question of whether necessary and possible truths are in last analysis freely chosen by God (1.14, 209). When referring to Anselm, Bradwardine is speaking about the *de re* modalities of existing created beings. These modalities as inherent potencies or inclinations are created and their existence is dependent on God's will. Bradwardine's view of the foundations of the modalities which precede existence was not voluntarist. In order to explain the difference between created and noncreated necessities and possibilities, Bradwardine calls the latter absolute modalities. These are not dependent on God's will:

It is not simply necessary for God to will or not to will this part or that part of such a contradiction, but He can will or not will either of them freely. It is therefore evident that even though any such disjunction is necessary by a simple and absolute necessity which is naturally prior to divine will, so that its necessity or truth is not subject to divine will or to a liberty with respect to contradictories or to a corresponding free power, the truth or falsity of its parts is subject to divine will.

(1.21, 231)

One of Bradwardine's examples of the absolute necessities is the conditional: "If this creature exists, God is its Lord." The truth of the conditional is prior to God's will, but the truth of the antecedent depends on God's will (1.21, 231). Anselm similarly thinks that there are necessary truths which do not depend on God's will in the sense that they would be freely chosen, for example those about God's existence and attributes and the principles of logic.³⁴ As for the created world, Anselm states that whatever occurs takes place either by natural causes, the functions of which are determined by God, or by the acts of the free will, or by God's power and will. Events which take place in accordance with the common course of nature are naturally necessary or impossible with respect to the laws of the created order, but God as the Lord of this order can bring about effects which are naturally impossible. Miraculous divine interventions do not violate natural patterns, since they are meant to be subordinate.³⁵ Anselm's view of the miracles is similar to that of Damian, though Anselm states that when something has happened it is no longer able not to have happened and it is always true that it has happened. According to Anselm, one should not say that God cannot change this truth or that God necessarily accepts it, for "God, since He is the truth, wills that the truth always be immutable, just as it is."³⁶ Anselm's above remarks on God's will and modalities are based on the view that nothing is necessary or impossible to God in the proper sense of these terms, "necessarily" as referring to being compelled and "impossibly" to being prevented. All natural necessities and impossibilities of this kind are caused by the creator. I will return

to Anselm's distinction between proper and improper modalities in the last section.

Damian's second concern pertaining to the alleged limitations of divine power was the deterministic interpretation of the Aristotelian principle that what is, necessarily is, when it is. In discussing questions pertaining to future contingents, foreknowledge, and freedom, Anselm deals with this dialectical question by applying the distinction between "antecedent" (*necessitas antecedens, necessitas praecedens*) and "subsequent" necessity (*necessitas subsequens, necessitas sequens*).³⁷ Events or states of affairs compelled or constrained by external causes are necessary by antecedent necessity. When something is called necessary in the sense of subsequent necessity, there is no reference to such a constraint but only to the fact that nothing can affect its being the case. Anselm says that this is the Aristotelian necessity by which all that has been necessarily has been, all that is necessarily is and necessarily is going to have been, and all that is going to be is necessarily going to be.³⁸ Some of Anselm's formulations of the subsequent necessity do not differ from Boethius's temporal necessity. In *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17 Anselm writes:

When the heavens are said to revolve because it is necessary for them to revolve, this is the antecedent and efficient necessity. When I say that because you are speaking, you are necessarily speaking, this is the subsequent necessity which does not cause anything but is caused. For when I state this, I mean that nothing can bring it about that you do not speak while you are speaking.

(S II: 125.9–13)

The actuality of a thing excludes the possibility that it is not actual at that time. This necessity is said to be caused by actuality:

But this kind of necessity does not compel a state of affairs to occur; rather the existence of the state of affairs causes the existence of the necessity.

(S II: 125.6–7)

Some authors have characterized Anselm's distinction between antecedent and subsequent necessity as a distinction between physical and logical necessity.³⁹ This is misleading, since no kind of logical necessity is dealt with in the statements above. They are clearly based on the traditional doctrine of the necessity of the present and its application to past and future things, which are also immutable in so far as they are past or future facts.

Anselm explains the temporal aspect of the subsequent necessity as follows in *De Concordia* 1.2. Events are past, present, or future with respect to a particular present moment of time. Insofar as they are contingent in themselves, they are not necessarily past, present, or future, but *qua* past events they are necessarily past, *qua* present necessarily present, and *qua* future necessarily future. As for contingent past events, before they occurred it was possible that they would not occur, but when they are past, it is not possible that they have not occurred since their antecedent possibility of not occurring is lost. The same applies to present events. Some of the future things have the possibility of not happening in the future.⁴⁰ All this is in accordance with the traditional idea that alternative possibilities refer to the future. The necessity of the present and past is a corollary of treating possibilities as potencies with respect to actualization in one linear history. According to Anselm, a past event *qua* past is necessarily past, just as a white thing, *qua* white, is necessarily white.⁴¹ Formulations of this kind have contributed to attempts to read Anselm's subsequent necessity as the "logical" necessity "if p, then p."⁴² However, Anselm's accounts of this necessity show that he did not operate with any clear distinction between "logical" and "temporal" necessity. It is worth noticing that he sometimes associates the subsequent necessity with the form "Because x is, x is" and sometimes with "If x is, x is" without commenting on the difference.⁴³

Anselm associates the subsequent necessity with the truth of statements about future contingent events. In explaining Mary's believing the truth of a prophetic statement about the death of Christ, Anselm writes:

Therefore, since her faith was true faith it was necessary that things would be as she believed. But if you are once again disturbed by my saying "It was necessary . . .," then remember that the truth of the virgin's faith was not the cause of his dying freely but that her faith was true faith because this was going to happen.

(*Cur Deus Homo* 2.17; S II: 124.27–125.3)

Anselm thinks that future contingent propositions are true or false and that this does not have an influence on the contingency of the events. This was suggested by Boethius, but Anselm formulated the idea more explicitly. A similar theory was employed by most scholastic thinkers.⁴⁴ It is analogous to those contemporary approaches in which "is" is regarded as tenseless when temporally definite propositions are said to be true or false. Each proposition has a truth-value, but the historical states of affairs, which are the truth-makers of future contingent propositions, are not yet causally fixed.⁴⁵ Antecedent causal necessity can determine the truth-maker of a future proposition, but this does not happen to propositions which refer to the acts of free will. Such an act cannot be determined

and, before the act, its alternatives are possible as well. In this context Anselm makes use of diachronic modalities which were extensively analyzed by Boethius. In addition to antecedent necessities there are antecedent alternative possibilities of which the unrealized ones cease to be possibilities.⁴⁶

In his *De Grammatico* Anselm employs two modal syllogisms which D. P. Henry regards as signs of fairly systematic discussion of the logical properties of such syllogisms.⁴⁷ This is merely a speculative suggestion. Anselm makes use of some further modal principles as well, such as “from an impossibility something impossible follows,” but he does not systematically discuss modal consequences or modal syllogisms.⁴⁸

THE ELEMENTS OF MODAL SEMANTICS

The incomplete *Lambeth Fragments* involves preliminary notes for a work in which Anselm planned to present a general analysis of predication and, as part of it, a general account of the uses of modal terms. Although the project remained unaccomplished, some main features of Anselm’s modal semantics can be formulated on the basis of his remarks in this brief text and in some other works. Anselm thought that a general theory of predication could be built on an analysis of the possible bases for the ascription of *facere* (to do, to make, to bring about). The combination of *facere* and predication was based on the view that in some sense a subject can be considered a cause of its predicate.⁴⁹ Anselm thought that the causes are either efficient or nonefficient; allowing for nonefficient causation makes the “causal” theory of predication somewhat more understandable.⁵⁰ Eileen Serene has summarized Anselm’s analysis of direct and indirect modes of agency in the *Lambeth Fragments* as follows. A subject (*A*) may be said to bring about a state of affairs (*s*) directly or through other states of affairs (*m*, *n*, *o*, *r*) causally related to *s* only if at least one of these six conditions is satisfied:

- (i) *A* directly brings about *s*;
- (ii) *A* directly fails to prevent *s* from occurring;
- (iii) *A* brings about *m*, and *m* causally contributes to the occurrence of *s*;
- (iv) *A* fails to bring about *n*, and *n*’s not occurring causally contributes to the occurrence of *s*;
- (v) *A* prevents *o* from occurring, and *o*’s not occurring causally contributes to the occurrence of *s*;
- (vi) *A* fails to prevent *r* from occurring, and *r*’s occurring causally contributes to the occurrence of *s*.⁵¹

Anselm states that a verb is properly ascribed if and only if the subject directly brings about what is ascribed to it. In all other cases the ascription is improper.⁵² He assumed that the above distinction or some parts of it apply to all verbs and predicates and that analyzing the relationships between the proper and improper uses of terms was an important philosophical task. In a brief note he suggests that one could investigate the differences between proper and improper uses when a term is applied to a genus and its species, a cause and its effect or a whole and its part.⁵³ Some contemporary thinkers have found Anselm's analysis of *facere* interesting, because it shows certain similarities to modern theories of the logic of action.⁵⁴

In Anselm's view *debere* ("ought") and *posse* ("can") can be analyzed in the same way as *facere*.⁵⁵ While there is a brief discussion of "ought" in the fragments, it does not involve an analysis of "can." What Anselm says about the proper meaning of necessity and possibility in his earlier works is pretty straightforward: "is necessarily something" properly ascribes a constraint to its subject, and "is possibly something" properly ascribes a capability or power to a subject. Modal terms in their proper senses refer to properties of things, such as the power to bring something about or received constraints. If modal terms are used in any other way, they are used improperly.⁵⁶ In the *Lambeth Fragments* Anselm seems to regard the notion of capability as the basic modal notion, and there are examples of this way of thinking in other works: something is necessary in an improper sense with respect to the causes which cannot prevent it, and something is similarly impossible with respect to the causes which cannot bring it about.⁵⁷ While Anselm gave many examples of improper uses, he did not develop a detailed theory of improper modalities. Clearly, however, Anselm was interested in these because of their importance for certain theological doctrines. God is necessarily truthful in the improper sense of necessity. While there is no constraining proper sense necessity in God, His truthfulness is necessary in the sense that there is nothing which could from occurring, and ring it about that He does not declare the truth.⁵⁸ While God cannot do things which can be done only through impotence, there is no proper impossibility in the sense of inability in God.⁵⁹ When it is said that "This man can be overcome," the possibility is not said properly, because of an ability in him, but improperly, because of an ability in someone else. Similarly "This man cannot be overcome" does not imply an inability in the man but in others.⁶⁰ "The will of this man is overcome by temptation" is not true at all, since the will is only overcome by its own power.⁶¹ As stated above, Anselm was particularly interested in the question of how a thing can exist before it exists. On his analysis it can exist in the improper sense of "can," because something else can actualize it.

In discussing the possibility as an ability, Anselm thought, as did Aristotle, that

fullpotencies or possibilities are combinations of various partial potencies. In [Chapter 3](#) of the *De Libertate Arbitrii*, Anselm analyzes one's ability to see a mountain; its components are said to be: (1) the power of seeing in one who sees, (2) the power in the thing to be seen, (3) the power which helps the sight (light), and (4) the power consisting in the fact that nothing obstructs the view. It is then stated that if one of these four powers is missing, the other three are not able to accomplish the result. A person can see the mountain in the full sense of the word only when the four powers are present.

In *Metaphysics* 5.12 and 9.1 Aristotle characterizes potency, the principle of motion or change, either as an activator or as a receptor of a relevant influence. The theory of active and passive potencies was meant to explain how and why a particular change takes place.⁶² This model allowed Aristotle to speak about all kinds of unrealized partial possibilities by referring to various levels of potentiality or by treating passive and active potencies separately. A full possibility requires that the active and passive factors are in contact and the actualization is not externally prevented, the possibility being necessarily realized in such a case (*Met.* 9.5 [1048a5–21]). This way of looking at possibilities is associated with the problem that there seems to be no difference between a full possibility and its actuality. Partial possibilities are not genuine possibilities because they cannot be actualized as such. Anselm also seems to think that a full possibility is the sum of partial possibilities. He does not explain how to keep full potency or possibility and actuality separate. In *De Casu Diaboli* Anselm writes that what is particularly needed for an act of will, in addition to the ability to will, is the act of using the ability. This is not very helpful.⁶³

Anselm's difficulties with partial and full potencies become clear in his discussion of sin and grace. He supposes that men have the ability to maintain uprightness of will for its own sake, although they cannot use this ability because of Adam's fall. When Anselm says that men are free not to sin, his assertion reflects a partial possibility founded on the presence of a power in a person, and when he says that they cannot be without sin, this impossibility is based on the absence of a further component power of an upright life. Anselm could consider the presence of a power in a subject as sufficient for calling an action possible for the subject and to claim, at the same time, that the absence of another partial potency is sufficient for calling the action impossible.⁶⁴ Anselm's view of proper possibility as a direct power does not qualify the thought of the necessity of the present, since an efficient power as such is only a partial possibility.⁶⁵ The temporal necessity of the present is qualified by the idea that all created things can be thought not to exist at any time.⁶⁶ This is in accordance with Augustine's view of atemporal divine alternatives, but Anselm did not systematically apply this approach in his discussions of the meanings of modal terms. Anselm sticks to the idea of capability as the basic modal notion and the

distinction between proper and improper modalities. This was too narrow a basis for modal semantics, as shown by the problems associated with the question about full and partial possibilities and also by some artificial constructions of the meaning of modal statements.

NOTES

1. See S. Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993); S. Knuuttila, “Duns Scotus and the Foundations of Logical Modalities,” in L. Honnefelder, R. Wood, and M. Dreyer (eds.), *John Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); H. Lagerlund, *Modal Syllogistics in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, Brill, 2000).
2. See *Commentarium in librum Aristotelis Perihermeneias*I–II (henceforth, *In Periherm.*), ed. C. Meiser (Leipzig: Teubner, 1877–80), 2, 453.8–455.19.
3. *In Periherm.* 2, 236.5–18; cf. 243.13–15.
4. *In Periherm.* 2, 237.1–9; cf. 1, 120.7–121.16.
5. For Boethius’s modal conceptions, see Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, 45–62.
6. *In Periherm.* 1, 200.27–201.3; 2, 237.1–5; 239.3–6.
7. *In Periherm.* 1, 124.30–125.14.
8. *In Periherm.* 1, 121.20; 2, 241.7–243.27.
9. *In Periherm.* 2, 241.10–13. In *Prior Analytics* 1.13 (32a18–20) Aristotle defines possibility as that which, when assumed to be realized, results in nothing impossible. In *De Caelo* 1.12 he states that if something is always actual, its nonexistence is impossible, since assuming this would mean that the same thing is and is not. The notion of possibility is understood as referring to actualization without contradiction, but there is only one and real world which serves as the reference. This assumption excludes possible alternatives

of past, present, and omnitemporal states of affairs.

10. See, e.g., *In Periherm.* 1, 106.11–14; 120.9–16; 2, 190.14–191.2; 203.2–11; 207.18–25.

11. For recent discussions, see Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, 56–58, and R. Gaskin, *The Sea Battle and the Master Argument* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 146–84. All translations are my own.

12. For future contingents in early medieval thought, see C. Schabel, *Theology at Paris, 1316–1345: Peter Aureol and the Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 20–46.

13. See Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, 60–61.

14. C. B. Mayer, “Creatio, creator, creatura,” in C. P. Mayer (ed.), *Augustinus-Lexicon*, vol. II (Basel: Schwabe, 1996), 56–116.

15. E. Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of Saint Augustine* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1961), 210–12.

16. Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, 103–104; Knuuttila, “Duns Scotus,” 135–36.

17. S. Knuuttila, “Time and Creation in Augustine,” in N. Kretzmann and E. Stump (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 107–109.

18. “Potuit sed noluit”; *Contra Faustum* 29.4.

19. See O. Lewry, “Boethian Logic in the Medieval West,” in M. Gibson (ed.), *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 90–134. For other sources of eleventh-century philosophical discussions, see J. Marenbon, *From the Circle of Alcuin to the School of Auxerre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) and John Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy (480–1150)* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983).

20. See T. Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology in the Eleventh Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 44–118, and T. Holopainen, “Necessity in Early Medieval Thought: Peter Damian and Anselm of Canterbury,” in P. Gilbert, H. Kohlenberger, and E. Salmann (eds.), *Cur Deus homo* (Atti del Congresso Anselmiano, Rome, 1999), 221–34.
21. M. Gibson, “The *Opuscula Sacra* in the Middle Ages,” in M. Gibson, *Boethius: His Life, Thought and Influence* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981), 220.
22. If this is true, Damian did not quite understand Berengar’s position; see Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology*, 80–95.
23. Cf. J. Isaac, *Le Peri Hermeneias en Occident de Boèce à Saint Thomas* (Bibliothèque Thomiste 29, Paris: Vrin, 1953), 45–47.
24. For different interpretations, see I. M. Resnick, *Divine Power and Possibility in St. Peter Damian’s De divina omnipotentia* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 77–111; Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology*, 6–43.
25. Boethius, *Phil. Cons.* 3.12.27–29; 4.2.44; Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* 12.6–8.
26. For philosophically more sophisticated discussions of divine possibilities in eleventh-century Arabic thought, see T. Kukkonen, “Possible Worlds in the *Tahâfut al-falâsifa*. Al-Ghazâlî on Creation and Contingency,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 38 (2000), 479–502.
27. S I: 253.4–254.9.
28. *Fragments*, 343.7–39 (see R. W. Southern and F. S. Schmitt [eds.], *Memorials of St. Anselm (Auctores Britannici Medii Aevi, I)* [London: Oxford University Press, 1969]).
29. Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, 82–94.
30. The question of alternative divine possibilities is not central in Anselm, who is more eager to argue why theologically significant events of the actual history are as they should be. However, Adam or the Devil could have not sinned (*De Lib. Arb.* 2; S I: 210.3–4) and the Son of God could have been begotten from another mother, though it was fitting

that he was a son of the Virgin (*De Conc. Virg.*, 18; S II: 159.13–16).

31. For impossible things as conceptually inconsistent, see *Prosl.* 2–3.

32. Cf. *Prosl.* 4. Serene suggests that when Anselm distinguished between various modes in which a subject can count as “something” in the *Fragments*, he attended to the improper uses of “something” without the requirement that the subject exist, because he wanted to find a way of speaking about the capacities of nonexistent objects. See E. F. Serene, “Anselm’s Modal Conceptions,” in S. Knuuttila (ed.), *Reforging the Great Chain of Being* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1981), 125–27.

33. See *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17 (S II: 122.25–30), *Meditatio Redemptionis Humanae* (S III: 86.60–62). In *Prosl.* 7 (S I: 105.23–27) Anselm states in a traditional manner that many of the alleged counter-examples to omnipotence are signs of impotence rather than power.

34. A thing than which nothing greater can be thought is so truly that it cannot be thought not to exist and, furthermore, it cannot be thought not to be whatever it is better to be than not to be (*Prosl.* 3, 5); for inferential necessity, see for example *De Gramm.* 1–2 (S I: 145–46).

35. *De Conc. Virg.* 11 (S II: 153.7–9, 154.4–15).

36. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17 (S II: 123.3–9); cf. *Prosl.* 7 (S I: 105.10–11).

37. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17 (S II: 125.8–11), *De Conc.* 1.3 (S II: 248.5–249.9).

38. *Cur Deus Homo*, 2.17 (S II: 125.18–126.2).

39. D. Henry, *The Logic of Saint Anselm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 179; Marenbon, *Early Medieval Philosophy*, 103; J.-F. Genest, *Prédétermination et liberté créée à Oxford au XIVe siècle* (Paris: Vrin, 1992), 129–31.

40. S II: 248.5–250.11.

41. S. II: 249.17–19.

42. See the references in note ³⁹.

43. In *Cur Deus Homo*, 2.17 (S II: 125.11) Anselm writes: “Because you are speaking, you are necessarily speaking”; this is mistakenly translated “If you speak . . .” in Henry, *The Logic of Saint Anselm*, 175. In *De Conc.* 1.2 Anselm prefers the “if – then” form.

44. See Schabel, *Theology at Paris*.

45. See G. H. von Wright, *Truth, Knowledge and Modality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984), 52–67 and the works mentioned in W. L. Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 110.

46. See, e.g., *De Conc.* 1.3 (S II: 250.113–16; 251.20–28).

47. Henry, *The Logic of Saint Anselm*, 243–46.

48. *De Conc.* 1.1 (S II: 246.4–7, 23–24); for indirect proof in Anselm, see Holopainen, *Dialectic and Theology*, 145–55.

49. *Fragments*, 342.26–343.22.

50. *Fragments*, 338.35–339.2; 343.31–34; cf. the division of causes in Boethius’s commentary on Cicero’s *Topica*, trans. with notes and an introduction by E. Stump (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), 237.

51. *Fragments*, 344.8–345.4; Serene, “Anselm’s Modal Conceptions,” 122–23. I shall not deal with the question of how (ii) should be analyzed; Anselm himself regarded it as problematic.

52. *Fragments*, 347.15–28.

53. *Fragments*, 347.5–8; for Anselm’s semantic program, see Serene, “Anselm’s Modal Conceptions,” 121–30 and Henry, *The Logic of Saint Anselm*, 17–21.

54. See, for example, D. Walton, “Logical Form and Agency,” *Philosophical Studies* 29

(1976), 75–89, and K. Segerberg, “Getting Started: Beginnings in the Logic of Action,” in G. Corsi et al. (eds.), *Atti del Convegno internazionale di storia della logica. Le teorie delle modalità* (Bologna, CLUEB, 1989), 222–24.

55. *Fragments*, 346.22–25.

56. See Serene, “Anselm’s Modal Conceptions,” 130–44.

57. See *Cur Deus Homo* 2.5 (S II: 100.20–28) and 2.17 (S II: 123.27–30) for the necessities and impossibilities in God.

58. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17 (S II: 123.31–124.2); for the necessity of God’s immortality and justice, see *Cur Deus Homo* 2.10 (S II: 108.3–8), *De Conc.* 1.2 (S II: 247.6–11).

59. *Prosl.* 7 (S I: 105.24–27): “When someone is said to have a power (*potentia*) to do or undergo something which is not his advantage or which he ought not to do, then what is understood by ‘power’ is impotence, because the more he has this power, the more adversity and perversity have power over him, and the more impotent he is against them” (translated in Serene, “Anselm’s Modal Conceptions,” 155, n. 49).

60. *De Ver.* 8 (S I: 188.18–22); *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17 (S II: 123.15–20).

61. *De Lib. Arb.* 5 (S I: 216.29–217.6).

62. For agent and patient in Aristotle’s natural philosophy in general, see S. Waterlow, *Passage and Possibility: A Study in Aristotle’s Modal Concepts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 159–203.

63. *De Casu Diab.* 27 (S I: 275.25–33), 28 (S I: 276.14–15).

64. *De Lib. Arb.* 12 (S I: 224.6–22); *De Conc.* 3.3 (S II: 265.26–266.23).

65. *Pace* Serene, “Anselm’s Modal Conceptions,” 141.

66. *Reply to Gaunilo* (S II: 131.18–22).

6 Anselm's perfect-being theology

Brian Leftow

Philosophy and theology both ask what sort of being God is. One way toward an answer begins from the idea that God is in all respects perfect, and fills out the concept of God by reasoning about what a perfect being would be like. Anselm's is perhaps the name most associated with this program. The perfect-being project had a long history before Anselm. Plato, Aristotle, and such Stoics as Zeno and Cicero all offered perfect-being arguments.¹ But Anselm probably had no access to these. It is likely that passages in Augustine and Boethius suggested the perfect-being project to him.

Anselm took up the perfect-being project in *Monologion* 15. Prior to this, the *Monologion* has argued that there is something “through which all good things are good” (*Mon.* 1) – something that plays the role of a property of goodness all good things share. But, Anselm suggests, whatever it is that makes all good things good must be a great good itself. (This suggestion is not backed up. Perhaps Anselm had some such thought as this in mind: delete this thing from reality, and all goodness goes with it. Perhaps an item's goodness is in some proportion to how much less good things would be without it.) If this thing *is* good, it must be good through itself, as it is that through which *all* good things are good. So there is, Anselm thinks, a good thing whose goodness is entirely due to its own intrinsic character – not a function of its relations to anything else. Anselm asserts that this is the best of all goods, just because it is not good through anything other than itself (*Mon.* 1). The highest good turns out to be the efficient cause of all things other than itself (*Mon.* 7). So while it plays the *role* of a property of goodness, it is not after all a property. Properties are not causes. When you see a red thing, it is not redness, the property, that reflects light into your eyes, but the thing that is red; when the brightness of the light makes you blink, strictly speaking it is the light which makes you blink, in virtue of its brightness. Rather than be coy, let us just call this supremely good thing God: for Anselm, while the terms “God” and “goodness” differ in sense, they refer to the same thing. In *Monologion* 15 Anselm asks what sort of being God might be intrinsically – what *makes* God so very good. Anselm frames this as a search for “names” or “words” that “apply to the substance” of God.

Anselm does not mean to imply by his talk of words “applying to the substance” that God is a substance, at least in any ordinary sense (*Mon.* 26–27). Nor does Anselm mean to limit his search to words from the Aristotelian category of substance – words that

ordinarily either name particular things (words for “first substances”) or express kinds into which things fall (words for “second substances”). For he obviously does not do this. Rather, he ends up applying to God words from the categories of quality (“true,” “just,” “living”) and quantity (“omnipotent,” which concerns how much power God has). Anselm argues that words that imply relations between God and other things do not apply to or express God’s “substance” (*Mon.* 15). Rule out such words, and only words that give intrinsic descriptions are left. A description is intrinsic just in case an item’s satisfying it (or not) depends entirely on the item, not on anything beyond or outside it. Thus if a description is intrinsic, one could satisfy it regardless of what (outside oneself) one did or did not at some time coexist with (or bear any other relation to).² If being human is intrinsic, I can be human coexisting with whales or with centaurs, and could equally well be human if I did not coexist with anything, that is, if the created universe ended at my skin. (Granted, I would not last long.) So Anselm’s talk of words “applying to the substance” is meant to focus us on intrinsic descriptions.³

Such descriptions as “creator,” “creator of Adam” and “knowing that Adam lives” are not intrinsic. For nothing can be a creator if it has not made a creature. If it has made one, then while that one existed, its creator coexisted with it. Again, nothing can know that Adam lives if it does not coexist with Adam. So if Anselm is seeking only intrinsic descriptions of God, he is not seeking a way to determine what God knows or does to, for, or with other things. Anselm does not think that perfect-being theology will let him reason “here is the most perfect thing God could have done, and so since He is perfect, He has done it.” Perfect-being theology (he thinks) tells us about God, not things outside God. Roughly speaking, Anselm is trying to find descriptions that apply to God and would still have described Him even if only He existed.

Anselm seeks “names” or “words” – bits of language. He is being careful when he says that he seeks these rather than seeking properties that God has. There are at least two reasons to speak this way. One can be traced to the *Monologion*’s first argument for God’s existence. This proceeds, again, by first arguing that something plays the role of a property of goodness. “Good” applies to anything other than the property of goodness because it has a property distinct from itself, namely goodness. “Good” does not apply to goodness because it has a property distinct from itself, for goodness is not distinct from itself. “Good” applies to anything else because it has a relation of real dependence on goodness. If it applies to goodness, it does so because goodness is identical to goodness. Identity to goodness and real dependence on goodness are distinct attributes. Nothing can have both. So while one term, “good,” applies to goodness and other good things, it applies in virtue of different attributes. But really, there is an even deeper problem here. What makes goodness good is not a property that goodness has. It is instead the property that goodness *is*. If intrinsic attributes are by definition “things had” and distinct from the item having them, goodness has no intrinsic attribute of goodness. Nor then does

Anselm's God, who is identical with goodness. "Good" applies to Him, and is a purely intrinsic description. But it does not apply in virtue of an attribute at all. It applies due to what God is, not what He has.

This problem is not localized to "good," either. For Anselm, it infects all other intrinsic descriptions we would like to apply to God. Anselm argues that God is identical with the wisdom we want to ascribe Him, the mercy we want to ascribe Him, and so on (*Mon.* 17). So there is a sense in which Anselm's God has no intrinsic attributes at all. Anselm wants to describe the way God intrinsically is. All he has to work with are materials provided by our knowledge of other things. So he must try to transfer to talk about God words we learn to understand by experiencing and thinking about other things. But just as God does not have the attribute that makes any other good thing good, God does not have the attribute that makes any other just thing just, and so on. If Anselm seeks *attributes* common to God and other things, on his own terms he must come up with none. On his terms only *words* can be in any way common to God and other things: only "names" can transfer to describe the perfect being. But these "names" will not transfer in their ordinary senses (*Mon.* 65). For descriptions usually express attributes – calling something a dog expresses its having the attribute of being a dog. And descriptions cannot both apply to Anselm's God and express the attributes they usually do, for God does not have those attributes. Purely intrinsic descriptions do truly apply to God – He has *some* intrinsic character. But it is not clear that any intrinsic descriptions we command apply to Him in any sense we grasp, since the attributes that these descriptions express elsewhere are ones God does not have. This threatens to leave the perfect-being project pointless: why apply *words* to God if we do not have any idea what they say when so used? Anselm recognizes the problem (*Mon.* 65). His reply is that we can at best draw conclusions about God based on what is like Him, and say about Him things which are true, but not in the senses in which we understand them (*Mon.* 65).

THE PERFECT-BEING RULES

Monologion 15 develops four ways to fill out the concept of a perfect being – four rules to follow for selecting descriptions to apply to it. Two of the rules are that God

must not at all be said to be any of those things to which something which is not what they are is superior, and . . . must be said to be any of those things to which whatever is not what they are is inferior.⁴

Suppose that something that is F is superior to anything that is not F. Then if God is not F, something is superior to God. But God (as the supreme good) is better than any other

existing thing. Thus the negative rule:

1. If some F-thing is superior to every not-F thing, do not say that God is not F.

Further, God is superior to whatever is not God. If some F-thing is superior to anything that is not F, God can be superior to everything other than Himself only if He is an F-thing. And so the positive rule:

- 2 If some F-thing is superior to every not-F thing, say that God is an F.

Obviously, whoever follows (2) and wants not to contradict him – or herself will also follow (1). We see below that all outputs of these rules are compatible: all descriptions they select can apply to the same being. Note that these rules compare all existing objects in the states they are actually in. They rest only on the idea that God is the best thing there actually is.

Monologion 15 seeks only intrinsic descriptions. But (2) does not yield only these. Consider being the creator of all good things other than itself. On its most obvious reading, this is not an intrinsic description, for something is so only if there are good things other than itself.⁵ But according to Anselm, whatever this description applies to is greater than whatever it does not apply to. For only God has it, and God is greater than every other thing. So (2) selects it, though we cannot know this until we know that God in fact has it.⁶ The same will obviously apply to any relational description only God satisfies. So (2) has intrinsic descriptions as output only if it gets only intrinsic descriptions as input. It is a rule for selecting among descriptions known to be intrinsic on other grounds.

On the face of it, (2) is not very helpful. Can we know that every G is superior to every non-G without knowing whether God is a G? Perhaps not: perhaps every non-G *but* God is inferior to some G, and God is the one exception. There is nothing peculiar to God's case in this. The problem is that if all we consider is the position of individual Gs on greatness scale, we can not know that *every* G is superior to *every* not-G unless we have surveyed all of each, and if everything must be either G or not-G, this requires surveying everything whatsoever, including God. Anselm wants a decision procedure, something that will tell him whether God is intrinsically G, for any G, starting from only the knowledge that God is the best actual thing – *not* assuming that we know whether God is G. Rule (2) does not give him that. We can see, further, that there is really only one way around this problem. For there are just two ways to know whether every G is superior to every non-G. One is to survey Gs and non-Gs. The other is to learn something about what it is to be G and what it is not to be G that guarantees that Gs will

(or will not) be better than non-Gs. An effective decision procedure for perfect-being theology must focus on descriptions, not on the things satisfying them.

Further, (2) does not fit the opening example in Anselm's discussion, wisdom (*Mon.* 15). Anselm wants his rules to select "wise" to apply to God. His intuitions tell him that God ought to be a wise thing. (His reading of Scripture and his belief that it is Scripture's God he is reasoning about no doubt inform these.) But Anselm allows that a just wise person is better than a wise unjust person (*Mon.* 15). If this is so, then in the sense now under discussion, "wise" is not one of "those things to which whatever is not what they are is inferior" – some non-wise things are superior to some wise things. Hence Anselm needs another rule to select further descriptions.

BETTER RULES

Anselm in fact suggests other rules *before* stating the two that I have so far treated. He has already pointed to a class of descriptions:

In some cases something is in every respect better than its negation – as for example wise than not-wise. For although someone who is just but not wise seems better than someone who is wise but not just . . . whatever is not wise is, *insofar as it is not wise*, unqualifiedly inferior to what is wise; for whatever is not wise would be better if it were wise . . . but in some cases the negation is in some respect the better; for example not-gold than gold. For it is better for a man to be not-gold than to be gold . . . the more inferior in nature a man would become if he were gold, the better thing a man is than gold

(*Mon.* 15).

Anselm's example is not entirely apt. A man cannot be golden. Someone who tried to turn a man to gold would instead replace the man with a golden statue. So it cannot be better for a man to be non-golden than to be golden, any more than it can be better for him to be non-golden than to be a round square. You can be better off being F than being G only if you can be F and can be G. Still, what Anselm has in mind is clear enough. "Whatever is not wise would be better if it were wise" makes two comparisons. One is between actual things that are actually not wise and those very things as they would be if they were wise: between an actual thing in its actual state and the same thing in a state it is not actually in. An attribute – say, wisdom – is an *improving attribute* for a kind only if normal members of the kind are able to have it and they would (*ceteris paribus*) be better or more valuable members of the kind if they had it than they would be if they did not. One point Anselm is making is that wisdom is an improving attribute for rational

beings. The other comparison is between things able to be wise (men) and things not able to be wise (masses of gold). In this second case, “whatever is not wise would be better if it were wise” does not compare a thing in an actual state with the same thing in another possible state. It asserts instead that things of a kind to be wise are better or more valuable than things not of such kind. Involved here, obviously, is the idea that some kinds of thing are objectively better to be than others: being a spirit, for instance, is supposed to be better than being a physical object (*Mon.* 15). Members of superior kinds can not have some improving attributes for inferior kinds. It improves a human body to be muscular. Spirits can not be muscular. But presumably Anselm thinks a very weak spirit is still a better thing than a very muscular body. Thus when Anselm calls being wise “in every respect better than its negation,” he asserts that being wise is an improving attribute for a kind, and being able to be wise does not entail belonging to a kind with a superior.

Anselm’s other rules for selecting descriptions for God come in this passage:

Just as it is blasphemous to suppose that (God) is something which in some respect it would be better not to be, so (God) must be whatever in every respect it is better to be than not to be. For (God) alone is that than which nothing at all is better.

(*Mon.* 15)

Let us call being a member of a kind with no superior a perfection, and also call every improving attribute for that kind a perfection. Then there are at least two rules here:

- 3 do not say that God has any non-perfection, and
- 4 do say that God has every perfection.

To smooth the discussion, I will talk of attributes, not descriptions, despite what was said above.⁷ Then (3) dictates deny in God membership in every kind with a superior and possession of every improving attribute only a member of such kinds can have. Rule (4) dictates ascribing to God membership in the highest kind in the scale of kinds and possession in the highest degree of the improving attributes for that kind (if these attributes have highest degrees).⁸ The last sentence of the last-quoted text is not an apt support for these rules. God could be the best actual thing without having all perfections and even if He had some non-perfections, as long as every other actual thing was even less impressive. The last sentence quoted supports only (1) and (2): as we have seen, these trade precisely on the idea that God is the best actual thing. This rather suggests that Anselm does not clearly see how (3) and (4) differ from (1) and (2). But (3) and (4) do in fact differ: they avoid the problems of (1) and (2). For one thing, perfections

provide a genuinely usable decision procedure for filling out the concept of God. We can know what kinds have superiors and what features are as such improving for various kinds without knowing anything at all about God – we can learn this through experience of other things. For another, it is at least plausible that as Anselm thinks, “wise” is a perfection, and so (4) will select it. For it certainly seems as if anything that could be wise and is not, would be better if it were wise, *ceteris paribus*. And if we are willing to traffic at all in such claims as that one kind of thing is more valuable than another, we are likely to find it at least a bit plausible that *rational being* is a kind with no superior.

Like (2), (4) is meant to select intrinsic attributes, but does not select only these. Consider being such that it is up to one whether there is anything outside oneself that one has not created *ex nihilo*. This sort of control over what exists sounds like a perfection; it seems that anything that could have this attribute would be greater if it did. But this attribute is not wholly indifferent to accompaniment. Nothing can have it if it coexists with something over the existence of which it does not have the right sort of control. Having it depends not just on the creator’s inner state, but on the state of the world outside the creator.

Rules (3) and (4) direct us to compare possible states of God. So the result of applying them is an at least partial conception of the actually greatest being as it would be in its best possible state. But there is a problem: nothing in *Monologion* 1–14 assures us that this being is in its best possible state. Anselm’s initial argument is simply to the existence of something that is actually best of all existing things – whether or not it itself could be still better. He does not attempt to show that the best being actually is in its best possible state until the *Proslogion*.

THE *PROSLOGION*

Anselm sought in the *Proslogion* “one argument” that would yield all the *Monologion*’s theses – including, then, that the best actual being is in its best possible state. Actually, the *Proslogion* goes even a bit further, arguing that the best actual being is the best *possible* being in its best possible state. The decision procedure the *Proslogion* uses to fill out the concept of the best possible being compares thinkable (roughly, possible) states of God. [Chapter 5](#) displays the *Proslogion*’s decision procedure this way:

What then are you, Lord God, than whom nothing greater can be described? . . . the greatest of all things . . . who made all other things from nothing. For whatever is not this is less than can be described. But this cannot be thought of you.⁹

This is an example of the *Proslogion*'s "one argument" – really one *form* of argument. Unpacked, the argument runs this way:

- 5 God = that which is in the greatest describable state. So
- 6 No possible being can be described that would if actual be in a greater state than God actually is in.¹⁰
- 7 Suppose for *reductio*: we can describe God as the greatest of all things (etc.), God can be the greatest of all things (etc.),¹¹ God would if so be greater than if not so, and God is not the greatest of all things (etc.). Then
- 8 When we describe God as the greatest of all things (etc.), we describe a possible being (God) in a greater state than God actually is in.
- 9 By (6), we cannot do so. So
- 10 (7) is false, by *reductio*. So
- 11 If we can describe God as the greatest of all things (etc.), God can be the greatest of all things (etc.), and God would if so be greater than if not so, then God is the greatest of all things (etc.).

Anselm takes the truth of the antecedent to be obvious. We can generalize from (11) to get

- 12 For all F, if we can describe God as F, God can be F, and God would if F be greater than if not F, then God is F.

Given (12), Anselm can derive divine attributes easily. The *Monologion* sought only God's intrinsic attributes. The *Proslogion* apparently wants more: the first description Anselm selects for God in [Chapter 5](#) includes a non-intrinsic note, having made all other things. This *could* be understood as intrinsic if we took it as being such that there is nothing distinct from Him which He has not made, a description God satisfies whether or not there are other things. But Anselm wants all the *Monologion*'s results to fall out of his *unum argumentum*. The non-intrinsic reading is one of the *Monologion*'s results.

If God can have all perfections, this argument-form justifies (4): "therefore you are . . . whatever it is better to be than not to be" (*Prosl.* 5).¹² Let G be a sample perfection. If God can have all perfections, then God can have G. If G is a perfection, either being G is being of the most valuable kind of thing, or G is an improving attribute for that kind, one such that anything of that kind that can be G would be better if G than it would be if it were non-G, *ceteris paribus*. Obviously, then, God would be greater with than without G. So if we can describe God as G, by (12) it follows that God is G. But there is a problem. *Proslogion* 15 uses the argument-form illustrated above to conclude that God is greater than can be described: if He were not, Anselm reasons, we

could describe a greater, namely a God so great as to be beyond our powers of description.¹³ If God is greater than we can describe, then even if the greatest thing we can describe is a God who is F, God might nonetheless be greater still, by being in a state we cannot describe that is incompatible with being F. *Proslogion* 15 casts a pall over Anselm's whole method. Anselm asserts, for instance, that the argument-form (or equivalently (12)) selects being wise. It does so only if there is no quality available to the highest kind of thing that is superior to being wise and incompatible with it: for if there is, it is not true that God would if wise be greater than He would be if not wise. Perhaps we know of no such quality, but if God is greater than we can describe, how can we be sure that there is not one and that He does not have it? That wisdom is among the best qualities we can *conceive* God to have does not seem to count for much once divine inconceivability enters the picture.

The *Proslogion* does not *exactly* take it for granted that one being can have all outputs of its argument-form. Anselm sees at least *prima facie* problems reconciling some outputs with others: can God be both perfectly merciful and perfectly just? Merciful and impassible? Omnipotent and unable to sin? But it seems fair to say that Anselm thinks all these *prima facie* problems can be overcome: he thinks all outputs of the argument-form are in fact compatible, though it may be hard to see how they can be. Still, if the reasoning leading to (12) and (12) itself fairly represent Anselm, he faces a problem. To use (12) to derive a divine attribute – say, necessarily perfect justice – we must know that God can have it. Can we know whether God can be necessarily perfectly just if we do not know what other attributes God can have? Perhaps there is a case that God can have necessarily perfect mercy as well. But perhaps, too, nothing can be both necessarily perfectly just and necessarily perfectly merciful. For it might well be that if God can have both, He is both perfectly just and perfectly merciful, or even that if God can have both, He is necessarily perfectly just and perfectly merciful: each conclusion would follow in widely accepted modal logics. But as we see shortly, it is difficult to reconcile these two attributes. If they are not in fact compatible, it is not the case that God can have both. He can have at most one. In order to be sure that there are no such conflicts, or to decide them if they exist, we would need to know all attributes God can have – a daunting task – or else know some attributes God *does* have, which limit the ones He can have. The most we can know without the survey or some knowledge of what attributes God has is that *prima facie* God can be (say) necessarily perfectly just. But we cannot produce the survey. And if we have only (12) to tell us what attributes God has (save for being that than which no greater is describable), we cannot learn what attributes God has without first knowing which ones He can have. Nor is it as if Anselm starts with a base set of given divine attributes (other than being that than which no greater is describable) and evaluates others as to whether they are compatible with these. On Anselm's approach, all attributes save the key one start on a par, equally to be ascribed to God only if (12) so dictates.

It is not an option to deal with this by deleting “God can be F” from (12). That clause alone keeps (12) from producing supposed divine attributes God cannot really have – which would render (12) ineffective. So if only (12) tells us what attributes God has, and the most we can plug in as a premise in conjunction with (12) is that *prima facie* God can be F, the most (12) can give us is the conclusion that *prima facie* God is F. That is, we must modify (12) to

12a For all F, if we can describe God as F, *prima facie* God can be F, and God would, if F, be greater than if not F, then *prima facie* God is F.

“*Prima facie*” allows for the possibility of conflicts between attributes God *prima facie* has. If two of these are incompatible, God has at most one. If we start not knowing any attributes God does have (save being that than which no greater is describable), and (12a) tells us only what attributes God *prima facie* has (12a) takes us all the way to a claim that God actually has an attribute only if it turns out that having this attribute is compatible with having every other attribute God *prima facie* has.

According to *Proslogion* 5, we should ascribe every perfection to God. But it is a live possibility that He cannot have all perfections. Take it for granted that God can belong to the highest kind. (Arguably deity *is* the highest kind, or is if there can be deities. If that is right, God cannot belong to it only if there cannot be a deity.) Even so, it is not obvious that all attributes that are improvin for that kind are compatible: perhaps some kinds have more than one possible summit, more than one intrinsic state for a member of that kind than which no greater is possible. Perhaps being perfectly just would be one summit for a deity. Perhaps being perfectly merciful would be another. And perhaps there is just no way one God can be both. After all, one might think, someone perfectly just would never remit a deserved punishment, but someone perfectly merciful would at least sometimes remit a deserved punishment. There being two summits for deity is compatible with God’s being something than which no greater can be described, as long as neither summit is greater than the other. And perhaps this can be so: perhaps two possible Gods, one with the rest of the perfections plus perfect mercy and not quite perfect justice, the other with the rest of them plus perfect justice and not quite perfect mercy, would just be incommensurable in overall perfection.

If it is a live option that God cannot have all perfections, it is a live option that (12a) will not fill out the concept of God. Suppose that perfections F and G are not compatible. Then we must decide: would something having all other perfections plus F be greater than something having all the others plus G? If $+F > +G$, we pick F. If $+G > +F$, we pick G. If $+F = +G$ or the two are incomparable, we are at an impasse. In fact, (12a) may not even let us conclude definitely of a single attribute that God has it. Suppose that the

prima facie candidates sort themselves into sets such that we cannot by (12a) decide which set God has. And suppose no single candidate figures in every set. We can then know that God has one of the sets, at least if we know that God is a perfect being and a perfect being must have one of the sets. And we can know that God has this set *or* that set *or* that . . . But we cannot say of any individual member F of any set that God has it. For if candidates sort themselves into mutually exclusive sets and we do not know which set God has, the only way to show that God has F would be to show that F is a member of every set.

RESULTS

Let us ask, then, what sort of attributes Anselm's rules pick out. Rule (2) selects attributes F such that any non-F is less perfect than any F. This restricts its output to attributes that locate things having them on a scale of value encompassing every object, that is, which are such that, for an object, either it is an F or it is in some respect more or less perfect than an F. One may wonder how many such attributes there are. And one may wonder whether (2) picks, say, omniscience. Is any omniscient being better than any angel? Some omniscient being might know more than any angel (if no angel is omniscient, which is not clear). But perhaps there are many omniscient beings, and unless being omniscient entails having the rest of the divine nature (again, unclear), perhaps some omniscient beings are overall less perfect than some angels. The rule also selects only attributes F and G such that either every F is a G or every G is an F. For suppose that every F is better than every non-F, and every G than every non-G. Then if every F is not a G, then some G is better than that F. If some G is also a non-F, then a non-F surpasses some F, and so it is not true that every F is better than every non-F. If either every F is a G or every G is an F, something actually is both F and G. So an advantage of (2) is that any attributes it selects are compatible.

Rule (4) does not require a common value-scale encompassing all objects. Like (12a), all it requires is that we be able to compare an object as F with itself as non-F. (4) selects God or perfect being as kinds to which a perfect being would belong, if perfect being is a kind. In *Proslogion* 5, Anselm quickly recaps the results of the *Monologion*: (12a) selects being creator *ex nihilo*, supreme good, source of all good, and "whatever it is better to be than not to be." In *Monologion* 15, the latter includes being living, wise, omnipotent, true, blessed, incorporeal and eternal (atemporal). "Incorporeal" raises questions: is being incorporeal part of belonging to the highest kind? Is it true that were something of this kind able to be incorporeal and not so, it would be greater if it were so? Like questions arise for being atemporal.

Monologion 16 adds being just, beautiful (on which see *Prosl.* 17), blessed, immortal,

incorruptible, and immutable. It has been questioned whether being immortal or incorruptible would necessarily be good things: perhaps even heaven might be boring given enough time, life on earth would be more surely so, and boredom would be the least of one's worries in an everlasting hell, at least as hell is usually conceived. Nothing about mere prolongation of life guarantees that the life will be worth having (or so at least it seems to me). But if we suppose we are talking about the immortality or incorruptibility of a being also blessed – which presumably includes being perfectly happy, among other things, and *interalia* immune to boredom – presumably the guarantee of ever-more life is itself worth having. If this being is in addition atemporal, the whole worry about boredom blows over: it takes time to get bored. As to immutability, I will just note that it follows from atemporality if nothing atemporal is possibly temporal. For everything that changes exists at two times, at one of which it has an attribute F and at another of which it lacks it. So something atemporal possibly changes only if it is possibly temporal.

Anselm gives perfect-being arguments for his doctrine of divine simplicity, the idea, already met, that God is identical with each of (what we would otherwise call) His intrinsic attributes (*Mon.* 16–17). Whether a perfect being really is, as such, simple is one of the deepest-lying issues between “classical theism,” the broad sort of God-concept Anselm favors, and its contemporary critics. The *Proslogion* adds being knowledgeable, merciful, impassible, and impeccable. Here only impassibility will raise questions, but Anselm presumably thinks that being immune to negative affects (sorrow, grief, etc.) is a component of being completely blessed.

(4) and (12a) select the maximal degree of any degreed attribute they select. If, for example, it is better to live for one year than for one month, and so forth, then to live forever becomes automatically the best, and so is selected. (A timeless being, if alive, lives forever, in that at every time it is equally true that timelessly, it exists.) If “rational” passes, (4) and (12a) select the maximal degree of perfections distinctive to this: maximal knowledge, and if rationality carries will and freedom with it, maximal perfection of these, which includes maximal power.

We can view the *Proslogion* 2 argument for God's existence as an application of (12a) that selects “exists in reality.” This supposes (as the argument seems to) that we can compare God as existing in reality with God as He would be if He existed (only in the mind and) not in reality.¹⁴ The argument includes a claim that if we think God to exist, we think Him greater than we would think Him to be if we thought Him not to exist. This is so only if we think of existence as a perfection. As Anselm would presumably not rest an argument to God's existence on an opinion of ours he thought false, it seems to follow that Anselm thinks of existence as a perfection. If he does, we must ask whether he is on his own terms right to do so.

Being F is “in every respect better than” being not-F if anything would be greater than it would be if not-F. If a thing does not exist, it has no attributes at all, and so no greatness at all.¹⁵ So it seems to follow that if existent it is greater than it would be if not existent. It might seem that we cannot say that a thing if existent is greater than *it* would be if non-existent, because if a thing does not exist, there is no “it” to which to refer, to be less great: we cannot compare existing and nonexisting things for greatness. Anselm might reply that we can at least compare things existing in reality with themselves as existing *in intellectu*. But also, we can say of this very existing thing before us that *it* would have no greatness if it did not exist – with “it” referring only to the existing thing before us. And having some greatness entails having more than no greatness. So it seems that being existent is an improving attribute for every kind: cats and dogs, for example, are greater cats and dogs if they exist than they would be if they did not exist. There is, however, another problem. Anselm explicates the idea of “something . . . in every respect better than its negation” by saying that “whatever is not wise is, *insofar as it is not wise*, unqualifiedly inferior to what is wise.” I have not shown being existent to meet this condition. For I have not shown that existence is, as such, a source of greatness: I have not shown that existing things are great precisely *qua* existing. I have shown only that a thing must exist to have any other attribute that confers a degree of greatness. Anselm gives two tests for being a “something . . . in every respect better than its negation,” a “greater with or without?” test and one involving *qua*. Whatever meets the second meets the first, but perhaps not vice-versa. If Anselm would say that meeting just one of these tests is enough to make existing a perfection, then on his terms, he is correct to call existing a perfection.

If meeting the “greater with or without?” test is enough to make existing a perfection, it also grants the title “perfection” to every attribute that no existing thing could fail to have. No existing thing could fail to be such that $2 + 2 = 4$. So nothing exists unless it is such that $2 + 2 = 4$. So being such that $2 + 2 = 4$ is a perfection if existing is, on Anselm’s terms. For something fails to have it only if it fails to exist, and if it fails to exist, it lacks something it is “in every respect better” to have.

SOME EXPLANATIONS

Anselm gives rather more attention to some of these attributes than to others. William Mann’s piece in this volume explicates Anselm’s doctrine of divine simplicity: that doctrine is, in a nutshell, that every sentence ascribing something purely intrinsic to God is made true by precisely the same thing, which is identical with all of God Himself. Anselm does not develop the doctrine as elaborately as (say) Aquinas was to, and in particular does not consider its application to God’s thinking, knowing, and willing in any great detail, save insofar as it affects the way these figure in the doctrine of the Trinity.

Divine simplicity entails that, in all purely intrinsic respects, God must be as He is: He must be identical with Himself, and that which makes all purely intrinsic claims about Him true is identical with Himself, with what He must be identical with. But this does not rule out God's having done or known other things than He in fact has. Differences in these respects are not purely intrinsic. For instance, God's act of creating is not indifferent to what else exists. If God has created, there exists what God has created. Similar points apply to God's knowledge and many noncreative volitions.

As Anselm sees it, God's being simple entails His being atemporal, that is, His life's having no temporal location. *Per* (4), God has an everlasting eternal life, temporal or atemporal. God is identical with His eternity (*Prosl.* 18). Being simple, God has no parts (*Prosl.* 18). If God is identical with His eternity and God has no parts, His eternity has no parts (*Prosl.* 18). So it has no past or future parts (*Prosl.* 18–19). But any everlasting life in time always has past or future parts. So God's life, Anselm concludes, is atemporal. Anselm's argument fails. What is in danger of having past or future parts is not in fact the same entity that the doctrine of divine simplicity would identify with God. The simplicity doctrine, again, concerns what is purely intrinsic to God. What is purely intrinsic is God's attribute of being eternal. What is in danger of past or future parts is not an attribute. It is the concrete span of life God lives – the set of events making up His life. If these events include His knowing and willing what He does, their content is *not* purely intrinsic to God. For if things were different beyond God, it would follow that God knew and had done different things in these events. So divine simplicity does not entail the events of God's life being identical with God, since it entails this only for what is purely intrinsic in God.

Though he does not manage to show that God is atemporal, Anselm has an interesting way to explain the claim that He is. Anselm's key claim comes in the late *De Concordia*:

In eternity there is only a present, which is not a temporal present like ours, but an eternal present, in which all of time is contained. As the present time contains every place and the things which are in any place, so the eternal present contains at once the whole of time and whatever exists at any time . . . Eternity has its own simultaneity, in which exist all things which exist at the same place or time and all things which are diverse in place or time.¹⁶

No part of God's life ever *was* or *will be* (*Mon.* 24; *Prosl.* 19): in God's life, there is only a present. But then in God's life nothing *else* ever was or will be either. Now, I was once an infant. But if for God I *was* an infant, this lies in His past, and so He has a past. I will be dead one day. But if for God I *will be* dead, this lies in His future, and so He has a future. So for God, every event is present, all at once: in His present I am at once an

infant, an adult and a corpse. But obviously there is no single temporal present at which all events occur. So all events occur at once in God's nontemporal present – while still being at various different presents in time. Anselm's view is that events are present not just while they occur in time but also while they co-occur with the life of God. So at any time, some events are present in God's time-series, the sequence (or lack thereof) of events making up His life, but not present in another time-series. On some readings of Special Relativity, there is nothing particularly odd about this: some events are present in my proper time, but not in the proper time of someone in my present who is in motion relative to me. Another part of Anselm's view will be controversial to many. If we take him at his word when he says that eternity is to time as time is to space, Anselm's view requires that every temporal event also occurs in eternity, as every spatial event also occurs in time.

Like Boethius before him, Anselm uses the metaphysics of eternity to explain how divine foreknowledge and human freedom are compatible. They seem not to be. A standard way to show this asks us to suppose of some truth about future free human acts that God believes it, for example that

13 Yesterday God infallibly believed that (P) I will write to my mother tomorrow.

If so,

14 It is now necessary that God infallibly believed that P.

15 Necessarily, if God infallibly believed that P, then P. So

16 It is now necessary that P. So

17 I cannot do otherwise than write to my mother tomorrow. So

18 I will not do so freely.

(13) incorporates the idea that God is temporal.¹⁷ Given (13), (14) is true because of the unalterability of the past: it is not a logical or metaphysical necessity that God believed P, but “necessary” expresses the idea of being beyond the power of any present agent to affect. (15) simply draws a consequence of being infallible. (14) and (15) entail (16) in accord with a standard thesis of modal logic. Anselm blocks the argument by denying (13): God believed this not yesterday but at no time at all, that is, atemporally. So (Anselm notes) the only necessity (14) can involve is the necessity of eternity. In raising the specter of the necessity of eternity, Anselm takes a step beyond anything Boethius considered. This *is* a specter if we have this thought: if what is past is beyond our power to affect, surely what is timelessly the case is even more so. But the necessity of eternity, Anselm writes, is just “subsequent” necessity, the necessity that a thing be so *given* that it is so (*De Conc.* 1. 5) – like the necessity that I am writing *if* I am in fact writing, which is just the necessity that I not be writing and not writing at once. The very event that has

this kind of necessity given that it is happening can also have been avoidable: given that I am writing, I cannot now simultaneously not be writing, but before now, it was entirely in my power not to be writing now. So if it is now necessary in eternity that God believes that I write to my mother tomorrow, this necessity merely reflects the fact in eternity that I do write to my mother on that day. It is in fact contingent that I write, therefore contingent that this is what God “sees” in eternity, therefore contingent that this is what God “fore”knows me to do.

COMPATIBILITY PROBLEMS

Anselm spends some of the *Proslogion* resolving apparent incompatibilities between attributes (12) or (12a) ascribed to God. There are many more questions of this sort than he thought. Many wonder, for instance, whether a timeless being can be alive, or have powers. I will speak only about the resolutions Anselm actually offers.

God is omnipotent (*Prosl.* 7). According to Anselm, He is also impeccable, unable to sin (*Prosl.* 7). There can seem to be a problem here: I am strong enough to sin, so why is not an omnipotent God? Anselm replies that impeccability is not a lack of some power to sin. Rather, “power” to sin, “ability” to do wrong, is really a case of lack of power (*Prosl.* 7). We can explicate Anselm’s thought this way, at least for the case of a perfect being. A perfect being desires to do no wrong. If so, any ability to do wrong would be one to fail to do what it wants, and do something it does not want to do. But one fails to do what one wants and instead does what one does not want only by being in some way unable to do what one wants: by a simple lack of power, by lack of appropriate knowledge, by being in a circumstance that forces one to act against one’s desires, and so on. So, given what a perfect being can be presumed to want, ability to do evil would be or rest on some deeper inability. More generally, Anselm argues, if there is anything that omnipotent God is “unable” to do, a deeper analysis will reveal that it would actually be not power but a lack of power to be able to do it.

Anselm also takes a second tack here. Being impeccable is being such as necessarily not to sin. But he finds it troubling

that we say that something (e.g. to lie) is impossible to God or that God is something (e.g. just) by necessity. For impossibility suggests powerlessness, and necessity suggests compulsion.¹⁸

Anselm resolves this by noting:

We often say “necessary to be” of what is not compelled to be by any force, and “necessary not to be” of what is not excluded by any preventing factor. For example, we say . . . “it is necessary for God not to be unjust” . . . not because some force . . . prohibits Him from being unjust, but because nothing can . . . cause Him to be unjust.¹⁹

The last is not the most obvious way to parse a necessity-claim. But Anselm’s modal metaphysic makes some sense of this. His *Philosophical Fragments* raises it as a puzzle:

We sometimes speak of there being an ability in a thing in which there is no ability. For everyone grants that whatever can, can by virtue of an ability. So when we say “what does not exist can exist,” we say that there is an ability in that which does not exist . . . But I cannot comprehend this. For there is no ability in what does not exist.²⁰

This and his unease about talk of God necessarily not sinning suggest that for Anselm the primary sense of “can” is or rests on power-ascription, and so “cannot” primarily or properly expresses lack of power. Anselm’s parsing of God’s necessity of being just depends on this: he parses “necessarily” as “not possibly not,” the latter as “there is no ability to bring it about that not,” and then locates the lack of ability in things *other* than God.

This leads to a surprising fact: even metaphysical necessities do not constitute an external boundary on the power of Anselm’s God. Anselm argues that whatever is necessary is so because God wills that it be so.²¹ We might think it a conceptual or a metaphysical necessity that there is no undoing what is past: Anselm asserts that this is so only because God wills that the past be unchangeable.²² God has disposal over all necessity, for Anselm, because as Anselm sees it, things are possible or not according as powers exist to bring them about. All power other than God’s is His gift to creatures. So what powers there are other than God’s is under God’s control. If this is so, all necessity save that imposed by God’s very nature is likewise under the control of God’s will, since on Anselm’s terms it is necessary that P just if no power can bring it about that not-P. (Perhaps God’s nature imposes boundaries on God’s power, but if so, these are not *external* boundaries. They come from within God.) You might ask, “what about God’s necessary existence? Surely it is not in His power whether He exists necessarily?” It is not up to God whether He ever exists, of course. But recall Anselm’s parsing of necessity in divine contexts: God exists necessarily just if “nothing can cause Him not to be immortal” (*De Conc.* 1. 2). Now, God cannot cause Himself not to be immortal. This would be willing the supreme good not to exist, a supremely evil willing (since it would

remove all good from the universe). An impeccable being cannot will this. That is, He is not inclined to it Himself, and nothing can force Him to. So God can not be immortal only if something else can force Him not to be immortal, despite His not willing not to be immortal. It is not implausible that nothing can force an omnipotent being to die if He wishes to live. Beyond this, as nothing else exists unless God causes it to do so, and nothing has any power unless God grants it, nothing exists with the power to cause God not to be immortal unless He brings this about. God would simply be irrational if He willed there to be something that could force His hand in this direction, given that it is not one He wants to go in and there is no need to create something with this power. So there is nothing able to make this happen. This lack of anything able to force God to will Himself not to exist, or directly cause Him not to exist, is all “God necessarily exists” asserts – according to Anselm.

Anselm thinks God both merciful and impassible (*Prosl.* 8). The former will appeal to us as a primary moral perfection (and of course in harmony with Scripture). The latter implies a lack of (literal) compassion: impassibility is immunity to all negative affect, including having “a heart sorrowful out of compassion for the wretched.” Anselm can reconcile mercy and lack of compassion because while compassion is a matter of what we feel, being merciful is an inner state manifested in what we do. While God feels no sorrow, His inner state, whatever it is in terms of feeling, issues in an effect we correctly identify as mercy, and this is reason to say that God’s inner state is one of mercy. A tougher nut to crack is the reconciliation of justice and mercy. For (again) presumably a perfectly just being would punish all who deserve it, as fully as they deserve, while a perfectly merciful being would presumably remit some punishment somewhere. Anselm attempts some moves on this in the *Proslogion*, but they are at best inconclusive: God’s mercy is “just to Himself” – appropriate to His own character – but Anselm in the end cannot explain how it can be just for God to save some sinners and let others equally evil be damned. Anselm’s best thoughts on the subject, not surprisingly, come in *Cur Deus Homo*, explicating the distinctively Christian reconciliation of justice and mercy. God’s justice and mercy, he argues there, are both fully expressed in the Incarnation and atonement. There is justice, in that punishment appropriate to sin is meted out. There is also mercy, in that God takes the punishment on Himself rather than applying it to us. We may wonder whether punishing someone else for a crime really counts as justice, but consider the analogy of a monetary fine: if you pay with money that is in your possession, you still have been fined, even if the money came to you by a benefactor’s gift. On Anselm’s account, Adam’s race paid a fine with resources loaned to it by having God incarnate in one of its members. We can add that perhaps neither God’s justice nor God’s mercy is really at stake in the saving of some and the damning of others – given what God has done toward the saving of all, that is in the end the others’ responsibility.

NOTES

1. For quotations and discussion, see my “Concepts of God,” *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 1998), vol. IV, 93–102.
2. This is of course roughly the Lewis/Langton definition (Rae Langton and David Lewis, “Defining ‘intrinsic’,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 58 (1998): 333–45. See also Dean Zimmerman, “Immanent Causation,” in James Tomberlin (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. XI (Atascadero, CA: Ridgeview, 1997), 462–63). This is not ideal, but we need not seek a better for present purposes.
3. Boethius used “substantial” in the same way. See his *De Trinitate*.
4. Translation by Thomas Williams. All other translations are my own.
5. On a less obvious reading, this does not follow: if there are no good things other than God, there are none He did not create, and for this reason it is trivially true that He is the creator of all good things other than He.
6. It might seem to follow from this that God’s greatness requires Him to create. But it does not. Rule (2) selects this attribute *given that God has created*. Had God not created, it would not select this attribute. There are two ways to see this.

One way is that (2) is probably not designed to apply to this case. Anselm probably understands “everything” statements to have existential import – that is, he would probably take it (for instance) that if God is greater than all things other than He, there *are* things other than He. This was standard in the logic he knew, though today’s orthodoxy disagrees. If this is how Anselm thought of it, he intended (2) to apply only if there *are* things other than God for “everything” to refer to. So his view would be that if there are no things other than God, (2) does *not* select being creator of all other good things. If (2) does not select this if God has not created, accepting (2) does not commit us to the view that God’s greatness requires Him to create, even if (2) does select the attribute of being creator given that God *has* created.

Suppose on the other hand that (2) *does* operate if only God exists. If only God exists, then for any F God has, there are no non-Fs. If there are no non-Fs, there are no non-Fs greater than God. So (2) selects every F God has. And so (2) tells us that if God has not created, it is greater not to be creator, while if God does create, it is greater to be

creator. So if (2) operates if only God exists, the result is the same. (2) does not commit us to the claim that God's greatness requires Him to create, even if it does have some relational descriptions as outputs.

7. This will involve speaking as if God had many attributes. This is misleading, in discussing Anselm. As already noted, Anselm would say that God has none, strictly speaking. In a slightly looser sense, he would say that God has just one – that all divine attributes are identical with God's nature (*Mon.* 17). The only “many” involved in talk of God, for Anselm, are the many descriptions God satisfies. Still, with this problem noted, we can go ahead and speak with the vulgar.

8. If Anselm wants only intrinsic descriptions to fall out of (4), he is assuming that being of the highest kind and having all its improving attributes are intrinsic attributes. The assumption about kind is reasonable. It is at least plausible that all kinds are intrinsic attributes, though this has been denied (some argue that being human, for instance, entails having had a particular evolutionary history). Even if this is not true for kinds in general, if we take it that the highest kind is deity, this seems plausible in the particular case: surely God would be God if He had never created anything. Improving attributes for some kinds may not be purely intrinsic. But if we take those for the kind deity to be knowledge, power, and moral goodness, then it seems that God could have the highest degrees of these (omniscience, omnipotence, and moral perfection) even if He had not created.

9. The Latin here, *cogitari*, is neutral between “described” and “referred to.” As Anselm eventually says that God is beyond our powers of description (*Prosl.* 15), “referred to” might seem more appropriate. But one can refer to something with a description, and Anselm *wants* to find descriptions for God: thus I choose “described.”

10. While Anselm does not explicitly refer to possible things, he must intend this restriction. Otherwise it would be easy to describe “things” greater than God actually is – impossible things. For instance, there is some value to being the Devil. (Though down on his luck, he is an archangel.) If so, something that was both God and Devil would be greater than God: it would have all God's greatness plus all the Devil's. But there cannot be something both God and Devil.

11. The text quoted does not mention this, but Anselm is obviously assuming it.

12. It thereby also justifies (3) if and only if having no non-perfections is a perfection. Absent this assumption, it is not clear that the *Proslogion* underwrites (3).

13. Obviously there is a point to be made here about levels of description. If we describe God by saying that He is beyond description, we do not contradict ourselves. Rather, we say (in effect) that He is beyond description in ordinary first-order language, language simply about God. This statement is itself second-order. That is, it is about the relation of language to God, not about God in Himself. Note, incidentally, that at this point we *must* read Anselm as talking about describing rather than referring to God. It is not clear that being beyond our powers of reference is an improving attribute, and if God were beyond our powers of reference, it would follow that Anselm had not in fact referred to Him. In that case Anselm could not have produced an argument for His existence: his attempt in *Proslogion* 2 would have failed.

14. For this sort of understanding of the logic of Anselm's argument, see, e.g., Robert M. Adams, "The Logical Structure of Anselm's Arguments," *Philosophical Review* 80 (1971): 28–54.

15. *Proslogion* 2's argument for God's existence speaks of some things as existing in reality and others as existing only *in intellectu*. But that argument treats things existing *in intellectu* as having attributes and degrees of greatness: someone who understands the description "that than which no greater can be conceived" has in mind, according to Anselm, a being with all the greatness that description entails. So the text's point is not affected by the *Proslogion* 2 distinction. Anselm would simply say that to have no attributes and no greatness, a thing must fail to exist not only in reality but also *in intellectu*.

16. Anselm, *De Conc.* 1.5 (S II: 254.6–10, 13–15).

17. It also incorporates the claim that God has beliefs. While it is usual to speak so in setting out this sort of argument, not all philosophers accept this.

18. *Phil. Frag.*, Exordium.

19. *De Conc.* 1.2.

20. *Phil. Frag.*, Exordium.

21. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17.

22. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17.

7 Anselm and the ontological argument

Brian Davies

Immanuel Kant (1724–1804) claimed that there are only three possible ways of proving the existence of God by means of “speculative reason.”¹ He called one of them “the ontological proof,” and it is often said that this (or “the ontological argument” as it is now commonly called) was first advanced by Anselm in [Chapters 2 and 3](#) of his *Proslogion*. Anselm’s collected works run to many pages, but nothing he wrote has commanded so much attention as these short texts. Yet what was he arguing in them? And how should we evaluate his reasoning? These are questions which have been answered in a bewildering variety of ways.² In this chapter I aim only to present a brief introduction to the reasoning of *Proslogion* 2 and 3 together with some tentative suggestions as to how we might reflect on it.

FAITH, REASON, AND THE *PROSLOGION*

Anselm’s writings are not what some would regard as typical works of philosophy. Philosophers cannot, of course, avoid speaking from some viewpoint or other, but they often foster the impression that they seek only to follow “where reason leads,” and they encourage us to suppose that they have no serious beliefs to start with, especially religious ones. Anselm, however, rarely does this. Almost all of his writings are presented as the work of a committed Christian, and such is the case with the *Proslogion*. This text is conceived as a religious treatise from start to finish. It is even written in the form of a prayer.

Its first chapter sets the tone clearly with a plea for divine assistance. “Come then, Lord my God,” says Anselm, “teach my heart where and how to seek You, where and how to find You.”³ In language full of allusions to the Bible, Anselm laments the fact that he does not see God but lives as a fallen descendant of Adam, and he begs for God to reveal Himself to him. According to Anselm, we cannot find God if God does not help us to do so. *Proslogion* 1 therefore ends with Anselm stating that his aim in what follows is to understand God from a position of faith.

I do not try, Lord, to attain Your lofty heights, because my understanding is in no way equal to it. But I do desire to understand Your truth a little, that truth that my heart believes and loves. For I do not seek to understand so that I may believe; but I

believe so that I may understand. For I believe this also, that “unless I believe, I shall not understand.”⁴

Anselm is here quoting from the prophet Isaiah, so we can understand those, such as Karl Barth (1886–1968), who maintain that the *Proslogion* is not a work of philosophy and should not be approached as such. In *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (1931) Barth insists that Anselm’s *Proslogion* is nothing but an attempt to articulate what belief in God amounts to on the basis of Christian faith. In particular, says Barth, it is at no point concerned to justify belief in God’s existence at the bar of reason.

For all that he says about the importance of faith, however, Anselm manifestly thinks that some religious beliefs, including the belief that God exists, can be defended in what we may recognize as a philosophical manner. This fact is evident from his *Monologion*, which Anselm offers as a treatise on the existence and essence of God making no appeal to the authority of Scripture. And the *Monologion* and *Proslogion* should be read as complementary works. Anselm wrote the *Proslogion* only because he came to find the *Monologion* to be irritatingly lacking in something to pull its parts together. He describes it as “made up of a connected chain of many arguments” and says:

I began to wonder if perhaps it might be possible to find one single argument that for its proof required no other save itself, and that by itself would suffice to prove that God really exists, that He is the supreme good needing no other and is He whom all things have need of for their being and well being, and also to prove whatever we believe about the Divine Being.⁵

What Anselm describes himself as looking for here he believed he had found when reflecting on the idea that God is “something than which nothing greater can be thought” (*aliquid quo maius nihil cogitari potest*). This formula appears early in *Proslogion* 2, and it dominates the discussion to the end of the work.

PROSLOGION 2

Anselm begins *Proslogion* 2 by invoking the formula just noted. “We believe,” he says, “that You [God] are something than which nothing greater can be thought.” Since the Bible never explicitly speaks of God as being something than which nothing greater can be thought, one might wonder why Anselm does so. The reason may lie in the fact that his way of referring to God has parallels in non-biblical authors prior to Anselm. St. Augustine, for instance, says that God is something *quo esse aut cogitari melius nihil possit* (“than which nothing better is able to be or be thought”).⁶ Then again, Seneca (*c.*

5 BC–AD 65) asserts that God’s “magnitude is that than which nothing greater can be thought.”⁷ Wherever Anselm got his formula from, however, it is clear that he does not construe it as taking God to be something than which nothing, *in fact*, is greater. Anselm is saying that nothing could *conceivably* be greater than God, that to claim that something might be greater than God is to assert what is intrinsically absurd. And it is from this basis that he develops his subsequent case.

In Psalms 15 and 53 we read of a “Fool” who “has said in his heart, there is no God.” Could the Fool here be right? Anselm’s reply is “No.” Why so? Because, thinks Anselm, when the Fool speaks of something than which nothing greater can be thought, he can understand the words being uttered. So “the Fool understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his mind, even if he does not understand that it actually exists.” It is, says Anselm, “one thing for an object to exist in the mind, and another thing to understand that the object actually exists.” I can have something in mind even though there is nothing in reality that corresponds to it. Or, as Anselm, by way of example, puts it: “When a painter plans beforehand what he is going to execute, he has [the picture] in his mind, but he does not yet think that it actually exists because he has not made it.” And yet, Anselm reasons, God cannot be nothing but an idea in someone’s mind. Given that God is that than which nothing greater can be thought, he must exist not only in the mind (*in intellectu*) but also in reality (*in re*). “Si enim vel in solo intellectu est potest cogitari esse et in re quod maius est.”

There are two possible ways of translating this piece of Latin. To begin with, we could render it along the lines: “For if it is only in the mind it can be thought to be in reality as well, which is greater.” If we translate the sentence in this way, Anselm appears to be saying that something than which nothing greater can be thought cannot only be in the mind or understanding, since it is greater to exist in reality than it is to exist only in the mind or understanding. In other words, his argument would seem to be:

1. God is something than which nothing greater can be thought.
2. God exists in the mind since even the Fool can think of (have in mind) something than which nothing greater can be thought.
3. But God cannot just be in the mind since it is greater to be in reality than it is to be only in the mind and since God is something than which nothing greater can be thought.

Yet “Si enim vel in solo intellectu est potest cogitari esse et in re quod maius est” could also be translated “For if it is only in the mind, what is greater can be thought to be in reality.”⁸ And if that is what Anselm intended to convey, he is not necessarily invoking a

general evaluative contrast between things existing only in the mind and things both in the mind and *in re*. He is not obviously saying that it is always greater to be *in re* than to be only *in intellectu*. Rather, he might only be suggesting (a) that we can think of something that is greater than something which exists only in the mind, and (b) that, on the supposition that God is something than which nothing greater can be thought, God cannot exist only in the mind because something real (*in re*) and greater than it can be thought. In other words, his argument would seem to be:

1. God is something than which nothing greater can be thought.
2. God exists in the mind since even the Fool can think of (have in mind) something than which nothing greater can be thought.
3. But we can think of something which is greater than something existing only in the mind.
4. So something than which nothing greater can be thought cannot only exist in the mind.

Which translation of Anselm should we prefer? It would have been nice if Anselm himself had helped us out here and elaborated on the thought in the sentence now in question. In *Proslogion* 2, however, he does not. He simply draws to a close with an emphatic reiteration of the claim that something existing only in the mind cannot be that than which nothing greater can be thought. “If then,” he says,

that than which a greater cannot be thought exists in the mind alone, this same that than which a greater *cannot* be thought is that than which a greater *can* be thought. But this is obviously impossible. Therefore there is absolutely no doubt that something than which a greater cannot be thought exists both in the mind and in reality.

Yet Anselm does seem generally to have believed that being *in re* and greatness somehow go together or imply each other.⁹ So *Proslogion* 2 may well be asking us to suppose that God cannot be only in the mind since it is greater to be in reality than to be only in the mind. It is, however, worth noting that, when elaborating on the reasoning of *Proslogion* 2 in another work, Anselm does not stress the idea that it is better to be *in re* than to be only *in intellectu*. Instead, he explains how it can be thought that there is something greater than something that is only in the mind.

I am referring here to the text known as *Quid Ad Haec Respondeat Editor Ipsius*

Libelli (A Reply to the Foregoing by the Author of the Book in Question) – a response by Anselm to a criticism of his *Proslogion* argument for God's existence coming from Gaunilo, a monk of the Abbey of Marmoutier.¹⁰ Here Anselm argues that something than which nothing greater can be thought (as opposed to something which is only *in intellectu*) "cannot be thought save as being without a beginning" while "whatever can be thought of as existing and does not actually exist can be thought of as having a beginning of existence" so that "'that than which a greater cannot be thought' cannot be thought of as existing and yet not actually exist."¹¹ In his reply to Gaunilo, Anselm also argues: (a) that something than which nothing greater can be thought must exist, whole and entire, at all times and at all places, and (b) that something which might or might not exist is not something than which nothing greater can be thought.¹² We shall later be returning to Anselm's reply to Gaunilo, and to Gaunilo's reply to Anselm, but, even from what I have just noted, it should be clear that Anselm was to a large extent concerned to distinguish between (a) what is only in the mind and (b) that than which nothing greater can be thought, because he believed that the latter, unlike the former, must be without a beginning, must be whole and entire at all times and places, and must be not able not to exist.

PROSLOGION 3

Yet something can be both in the mind and in reality without being what Anselm took God to be. My cat is such a thing. I can form a concept of it (I can think of something matching its description, as a painter can think about a non-existent work of art). But it also exists in reality. Fond though I am of it, however, I could hardly describe it as divine. Why not? One reason (among many) is that it has not always existed, and one day it will perish. Yet those who believe in God have not traditionally thought of Him as being like my cat in these respects. They have taken Him to be something the existence of which is ultimate, underived, and belonging to him by nature. And Anselm seems to be very much aware of this fact as he proceeds to *Proslogion 3*, for here (anticipating how he will later argue in his reply to Gaunilo) he maintains that something than which nothing greater can be thought has to be something which cannot even be *thought* not to exist.

Some people have held that *Proslogion 3* presents a separate argument for God's existence to be distinguished from what we find in *Proslogion 2*.¹³ In *Proslogion 3*, however, Anselm only seems to be supplementing what he maintains in the [previous chapter](#). There he was concerned to explain why something than which nothing greater can be thought cannot just be in the mind. In *Proslogion 3* he seems intent on adding that something than which nothing greater can be thought is, not just *in re*, but something *in re* that (in addition to being *in re*) cannot possibly fail to exist. In language that suggests that the reasoning of *Proslogion 2* is just being carried a stage further, Anselm

begins *Proslogion* 3 by saying “And certainly this being so truly exists that it cannot even be thought not to exist.”

Anselm seeks to establish this conclusion by means of the following argument:

1. We can think of something existing which cannot be thought not to exist.
2. Such a thing would be greater than something which can be thought not to exist.
3. So something than which nothing greater can be thought cannot be something which can be thought not to exist.
4. So something than which nothing greater can be thought cannot be thought not to exist.

Or, in Anselm’s words:

For something can be thought to exist that cannot be thought not to exist, and this is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Hence, if that than which a greater cannot be thought can be thought not to exist, then that than which a greater cannot be thought is not the same as that than which a greater cannot be thought, which is absurd. Something than which a greater cannot be thought exists so truly then, that it cannot be even thought not to exist.

ANSELM AND GAUNILO

Many have thought that the arguments of *Proslogion* 2 and 3 are bad ones. Gaunilo is a case in point. According to him, Anselm is wrong, because (a) we should not think of God as being in the mind or understanding, and (b) Anselm’s case for God’s existence entails unbelievable consequences.

Gaunilo challenges the claim that that than which nothing greater can be thought is in the understanding by insisting on the incomprehensibility of something than which nothing greater can be thought. His basic point is: we do not understand what God (or that than which nothing greater can be thought) is, so God (or that than which nothing greater can be thought) is not in the understanding. He writes:

I can so little think of or entertain in my mind this being (that which is greater than all those others that are able to be thought of, and which it is said [i.e. by Anselm]

can be none other than God Himself) in terms of an object known to me either by species or genus, as I can think of God Himself . . . For neither do I know the reality itself, nor can I form an idea from some other things like it since, as you [i.e. Anselm] say yourself, it is such that nothing could be like it.¹⁴

According to Gaunilo, “Something than which nothing greater can be thought” is nothing but “a verbal formula,” a string of words which fails to furnish the basis of a proof of God’s existence.

Gaunilo’s second main criticism of Anselm comes in the following (much quoted) passage:

They say that there is in the ocean somewhere an island which, because of the difficulty (or rather the impossibility) of finding that which does not exist, some have called the “Lost Island.” And the story goes that it is blessed with all manner of priceless riches and delights in abundance, much more even than the Happy Isles, and having no owner or inhabitant, it is superior everywhere in abundance of riches to all those islands that men inhabit. Now, if anyone tell me that it is like this, I shall easily understand what is said, since nothing is difficult about it. But if he should then go on to say, as though it were a logical consequence of this: You cannot any more doubt that this island that is more excellent than all other lands exists somewhere in reality than you can doubt that it is in your mind; and since it is more excellent to exist not only in the mind alone but also in reality, therefore that it must needs be that it exists. For if it did not exist, any other land existing in reality would be more excellent than it, and so this island, already thought by you to be more excellent than others, will not be more excellent. If, I say, someone wishes thus to persuade me that this island really exists beyond all doubt, I should either think that he was joking, or I should find it hard to decide which of us I ought to judge the bigger fool.¹⁵

Here Gaunilo seems to be saying (a) that thinking akin to Anselm’s would successfully prove the existence of things we cannot seriously believe in, and (b) that something must therefore be wrong with Anselm’s reasoning.

Is Gaunilo right in his critique of Anselm? A notable feature of it is its frequent failure to focus on Anselm’s key formula: “that than which nothing greater can be thought.” Sometimes Gaunilo more or less quotes this expression exactly. Mostly, however, he construes Anselm as arguing for the existence of something which is, *in fact*, greater than all other things. Hence, for example, and early in his reply, he represents Anselm as

holding that, if God exists only in the mind, “that which is greater than everything would be less than some thing and would not be greater than everything.”¹⁶ This is also how Gaunilo seems to be understanding Anselm as he offers his lost island argument, for here he denies that there has to be a best island just because we can conceive of such a thing.

But Anselm is not seeking to prove the existence of a *best* anything. As he says in response to Gaunilo:

You often reiterate that I say that that which is greater than everything exists in the mind, and that if it is in the mind, it exists also in reality. However, nowhere in all that I have said will you find such an argument. For “that which is greater than everything” and “that than which a greater cannot be thought” are not equivalent for the purpose of proving the existence of the thing spoken of.¹⁷

That which is greater than everything, Anselm adds, can be thought of as possibly not existing, while that than which a greater cannot be thought cannot be thought of as possibly not existing. And Anselm is clearly right in at least one respect here: for “that which is greater than everything” is certainly not equivalent to “that than which a greater cannot be thought.” Someone can believe that X is the greatest existing thing without needing to describe it as “that than which a greater cannot be thought.” And that which is, *in fact*, greatest *could* be very imperfect indeed.

Yet, even supposing that Gaunilo’s island is really not analogous to what Anselm means by “something than which nothing greater can be conceived,” might he not still reasonably call on us to accept his first line of criticism of Anselm? Might he not ask us to wonder whether “that than which a greater cannot be thought” signifies anything intelligible? Might he not fairly suggest that we cannot really conceive of such a thing, that it cannot truly be said to be “in the understanding”?

Well, perhaps he can. For *could* there be something than which nothing greater *could* be thought? Do we really know that there *could* be such a thing? Maybe we do. But how? Anselm does not tell us. He assumes that as soon as we hear the phrase “that than which a greater cannot be thought,” we should understand it as a label signifying a possibly existing being. But should we? Might there not, for example, be no limit to conceivable greatness? Let us suppose that we are thinking of X and that we cannot, as it happens, think of anything greater than X. Does it follow that X is something than which nothing greater can be thought? Obviously not. For, maybe, somewhere or sometime, someone might be able to think of something greater than X. Let us call this new something Y. Does it follow that Y is something than which nothing greater can be

thought? Obviously not. For, maybe, somewhere or sometime, someone might be able to think of something greater than Y. And how do we know that this process of being able to think of something greater cannot proceed *ad infinitum*? Anselm, at any rate, does not show that it cannot.

In that case, however, he has not proved that something than which nothing greater can be thought is in the mind. In reply to Gaunilo he insists that it is because

- (a) Gaunilo believes in God, so must therefore have in mind the notion of something than which nothing greater can be thought;
- (b) We can understand the notion of there being something which lacks a beginning, which cannot not exist, which exists whole and entire at all times and places.¹⁸

Anselm's "something than which a greater cannot be thought" formula is not, however, forced on Gaunilo simply by his subscription to belief in God's existence. It is not even forced on him by his allegiance to Christianity. Many orthodox Christians have believed in God without claiming that God is "something than which a greater cannot be thought." Furthermore, even if "___ lacks a beginning, cannot not exist, and exists whole and entire at all times and places" is truly predicable of something, it does not follow that the thing in question is "something than which nothing greater can be thought." We might wonder whether that formula signifies anything thinkable even though we might believe that there is something which lacks a beginning, cannot not exist, and exists whole and entire at all times and places. In this sense, we might agree with Gaunilo's claim that God is not "in the mind."

We might also agree with it for another reason. As we have seen, part of Gaunilo's case against Anselm rests on the suggestion that God cannot be thought since, even if he exists, he belongs to no genus or species. Without denying God's existence, Gaunilo here seems to be saying (a) that he cannot form a concept of God as he can of other things, (b) that his inability to do so means that God does not exist in the mind (his mind, anyway), and (c) that Anselm is therefore wrong to say that the existence of God can be proved just from an understanding of what God is. And Gaunilo is making a reasonable point here if, indeed, God, or that than which nothing greater can be thought, is taken to belong to no known genus or species, and if one cannot form a concept of what does not belong to any genus or species.

Yet "something than which nothing greater can be thought" is a formula we can work with negatively, so to speak, and with an eye on the notion of something that could be better. Though we might find our minds going blank when faced by the phrase "something than which nothing greater can be thought," we can surely make sense of the

idea that X is not something than which nothing greater can be thought if we can think of something greater than X. We can surely say with some confidence that, for example, a rabid dog is not something than which nothing greater can be thought, for we can think of something greater than a rabid dog. And with this kind of example in mind Anselm might legitimately defend himself against the claim that “something than which nothing greater can be thought” cannot be legitimately employed in a case for God’s existence *in re*. He might argue like this:

- 1 God is something than which nothing greater can be thought.
- 2 If we can think of something greater than X, then X is not God.
- 3 We can think of something greater than anything which exists only *in intellectu*.
- 4 So something existing only *in intellectu* cannot be God.
- 5 So God does not only exist *in intellectu*.

And he might add:

- 6 God is something than which nothing greater can be thought.
- 7 We can think of something which can fail to exist.
- 8 Something which can fail to exist is less great than something which cannot fail to exist.
- 9 So something which can fail to exist cannot be God.
- 10 So God is not something which can fail to exist.

And this might be all that Anselm is arguing in *Proslogion* 2 and 3. We need not take him to be claiming that “something than which nothing greater can be thought” can be proved to be a coherent formula or a description of something which could possibly exist. All we need to take him to be claiming is that something which is only *in intellectu*, and which might possibly fail to exist, is not something than which a greater cannot be thought. And that claim, perhaps, is hardly absurd. After all, is it not plausible to suggest that something that exists *in re* by nature has the edge over something which is nothing but a figment of someone’s imagination?

THE LOGIC OF ANSELM’S REASONING

Validity

Anselm’s *Proslogion* 2 argument seems to be formally valid. It begins with something like a definition: “God” is “something than which nothing greater can be thought,” and it goes on to assert that something than which nothing greater can be thought is in the

understanding. Then it introduces the suggestion that something than which nothing greater can be thought is not *in re* (the position of the “Fool”). Anselm’s clear objective is to show that this suggestion cannot be true (his argument is what is known as a *reductio ad absurdum*: it aims to prove that, given certain premises, a particular assertion leads to contradiction and is, therefore, false). And (regardless of how we translate “*si enim vel in solo intellectu est potest cogitari esse et in re quod maius est*”) Anselm moves to his conclusion by arguing:

- a If something is *in intellectu* but not *in re*, something greater than it can be thought.
- b If something than which nothing greater can be thought is *in intellectu* but not also *in re*, then something greater than it *can* be thought (from [a]).
- c Something than which nothing greater can be thought is in the understanding but not also in reality.
- d Something greater than something than which nothing greater can be thought can be thought (contradictory conclusion from [c]).

Anselm’s reasoning here seems logically impeccable: given his premises, his conclusion appears inescapable. “Something greater than something than which nothing greater can be thought can be thought” is clearly self-contradictory. Given Anselm’s reasoning, therefore, we ought to conclude that it is, indeed, absurd to say that something than which nothing greater cannot be thought does not exist *in re*. We may, of course, reject this reasoning by rejecting some of its premises. But those premises indeed seem to entail that it is absurd to deny that something than which nothing greater can be thought exists *in re*.

Premises

Are Anselm’s premises true, however?

With respect to the first one, could it be that we have no reason to think of God as something than which nothing greater can be thought? Thomas Aquinas (1224/6–1274) rightly notes that not everyone has taken the word “god” (*deus*) to signify “something than which nothing greater can be thought.”¹⁹ Yet Anselm is surely entitled to stipulate what he means by “God” for the purposes of an argument. Furthermore, insofar as he is seeking to engage with what we might call the Judeo-Christian concept of God, Anselm’s “something than which nothing greater can be thought” expression seems not inappropriate. As I have noted, it echoes the way in which Augustine speaks of God. In addition, it is hard to conceive of anyone in the Judeo-Christian tradition being prepared

to say “There might, after all, be something greater than God.” The idea that God is unsurpassably great seems to be part and parcel of Judeo-Christian theism, and to say that God is something than which nothing greater can be thought seems to be a succinct way of capturing what those in the Judeo-Christian tradition mean by “God.” As Norman Malcolm puts it: “God is usually conceived of as an *unlimited* being. He is conceived of as a being who *could not* be limited, that is, as an absolutely unlimited being. This is no less than to conceive of Him as *something a greater than which cannot be conceived*.”²⁰

With respect to Anselm’s second premise, could it be that “something than which nothing greater can be thought” does not describe anything possible? As I have said, one might think that it does not (as some have suggested, one might think that it may be compared with expressions like “greatest prime number”). As I have also said, however, one can entertain the thought of something than which nothing greater can be thought so as intelligibly to conclude that something (e.g. a rabid dog) is not something than which nothing greater can be thought. The expression “something than which nothing greater can be thought” is hardly unintelligible. If that is so, however, we might, as Anselm does, ask whether there is something than which nothing greater can be thought *in re*. We might also ask whether more can be said of something than which nothing greater can be thought other than that it exists *in re*.

Some would say that Anselm needs to demonstrate that there is no intrinsic absurdity in the notion of something than which nothing greater can be thought. But why should he feel the need to do so? And how could he succeed in doing so? People might claim that there are arguments to show that such and such an expression signifies nothing that could possibly exist, and politeness would then require us to examine their arguments. But what can one do to demonstrate in the abstract that a particular form of words signifies the concept of something possible (or does not express an impossibility)? By various arguments one might seek to demonstrate that there could be something rightly referred to by the form of words in question.²¹ Such arguments, however, will inevitably depend on what those who offer them take, without argument, to be possible.

Yet what of the premise “If something is *in intellectu* but not *in re*, something greater than it can be thought”? Many would reject it because, they would argue, it has to mean that existence *in re* is a perfection and, therefore, a property or characteristic of things, which it is not. And it certainly seems odd to speak of existence as a perfection, if only because “___ exists” does not specify a way in which that of which it is predicated differs from anything. When we say that something has a perfection, we generally seem to be noting some particular way in which it differs from or resembles a limited number of other things. But “___ exists” cannot serve to distinguish one thing from another since, so to speak, everything exists.

Anselm's argument, however, does not call on us to think of existing as a particular perfection. It asks us to accept (a) that thinking of something than which nothing greater can be thought is not the same as thinking of something than which a greater can be thought, and (b) that something only *in intellectu* cannot be thought of as something than which nothing greater can be thought. But (a) and (b) here are plausible claims. (a) is clearly self-evident. We would contradict ourselves by denying it. And (b) seems true since we surely can think of something greater than something which has nothing but the status of existing as an idea in someone's mind. As Anselm himself says, we can think of something which cannot fail to exist. And such a thing, so one might plausibly suggest, is greater than something which exists only as an idea in someone's mind (and which, considered as such, can certainly fail to exist). Following Kant's discussion of what he called the "ontological proof," philosophers have often attacked the *Proslogion* while echoing Kant's assertion that "**Being** is obviously not a real predicate."²² And perhaps there is much to be said for this assertion, for it could be construed as suggesting that, as Gottlob Frege (1848–1925) put it, "___ exists" is not a first-level predicate (i.e. a predicate which ascribes a distinguishing property to an object or individual – by contrast, for example, with "___ is made of plastic" or "___ is bald"). And there are well-known arguments in favor of this suggestion.²³ In the *Proslogion*, however, Anselm does not seem to be arguing that "___ exists" is or is not a first-level predicate. Rather, he seems to be contrasting objects of thought and saying that one of them cannot be sensibly described as something than which nothing greater can be thought – the one in question being, of course, something which exists only in the mind (like, to use his example, the painting conceived by an artist thinking of what he might proceed to create). Anselm's main idea seems to be that of two thought objects, the first being something than which nothing greater can be thought, and the second being something which is only *in intellectu*, the first is greater than the second.

Thinking of God

Yet from this idea it does not follow that the Fool is wrong to deny that God is *in re* just because he is prepared to accept someone's insistence that the word "God" means "something than which nothing greater can be thought." The Fool could always say: "I am happy to allow it to be stipulated that 'God' means 'something than which nothing greater can be thought.' But on that basis alone I do not have to agree that there really is something (God) than which nothing greater can be thought."

In other words, the Fool might rightly insist that one cannot establish the existence of something *in re* on the basis of a stipulative definition. Such definitions do not, by themselves, tell us anything when it comes to what really exists. For the most part, we produce definitions of what we take to be really existing things, and we do so on the

basis of what we believe ourselves to know about them. If someone asks us what, for example, an elephant is, we would probably seek to define the word “elephant” while relying on the reports of zoologists. Mere definitions of names, however, do not, by themselves, mean that there is anything corresponding to them.

So we might side with Anselm’s fool if we start by supposing that “a being than which nothing greater can be conceived and which cannot be conceived not to exist” is, so to speak, a phrase to be read within quotation marks. In other words, the Fool could always say that “a being than which nothing greater can be conceived and which cannot be conceived not to exist” is just an expression which some people (though not he) use when talking (perhaps mistakenly) of what they take to be something.

Children refer to Santa Claus, and we can buy into their talk so as to agree, for example, that it is silly, for anyone who is seriously thinking about Santa, to deny that he delivers presents on December 25. But we would not thereby be committed to concluding that someone called Santa Claus delivers presents on December 25, since we do not seriously think of anything or anybody as being Santa Claus. By the same token, so the Fool might reason, buying into the talk of believers, we might say that what believers think of as a being than which nothing greater can be thought, and which cannot be thought not to exist, certainly has to be asserted to exist by anybody seriously thinking of this object as such. But this does not mean that we are, on pain of self-contradiction, committed to thinking of anything being something than which nothing greater can be thought and which cannot be thought not to exist. Or, as Aquinas writes:

Even if the meaning of the word “God” were generally recognized to be “that than which nothing greater can be thought,” nobody accepting this definition would thereby be forced to think of God as existing in the real world rather than existing as thought about (*in apprehensione intellectus*). If one does not grant that there is something than which no greater can be thought, it cannot be proved that God [sc. as so defined] really exists. And those who hold that God does not exist do not grant that there is something than which no greater can be thought.²⁴

Suppose, however, that we *are* prepared to think seriously of something than which nothing greater can be thought. In doing so, we would not have to suppose that there *is* any such thing in reality, for we can seriously think of what does not exist – as a painter can think of a painting yet to be painted. All we would have to do is to entertain the thought of something than which nothing greater can be thought without presupposing either its nonexistence or its real existence. All we would have to do is to take it to be the thought of something possible, something the nature of which we might further reflect

on. What then?

Well, if we are so prepared to think seriously of something than which nothing greater can be thought, it seems that we are committed to acknowledging an absurdity in the claim that it is only in the mind and able not to exist. At any rate, we are so committed if Anselm is right to say that we can think of something greater than what is only in the mind and able not to exist. Or, to put the point in another way, Anselm's argument is effective against us if we are prepared to refer to that than which nothing greater can be thought "constitutively" as opposed to "parasitically."²⁵

Our basic way of referring is constitutive. That is to say, when we refer to or think of things, we commonly do so without distancing ourselves from what other people think or believe. If I say "Let's think about London," we would normally go on to do so without worrying whether or not "London" is the name of a place in Britain, or a name used only in works of fiction or by deluded people who take it to be the name of a real city.

Yet suppose I say "Let's think about ghosts." We can do so since we can refer to ghosts *parasitically*. That is to say, we can latch on to what has been said about ghosts and we can think about them only on the basis of that. We can think about ghosts without being committed to anything other than a claim to understand what has been said or believed about them whether seriously (by people we may think of as deluded) or in works of fiction (by people whose writings we admire and find entertaining).

Now think about God considered as something than which nothing greater can be thought. You could think of God parasitically here. You could take "God" to be a word which some people understand as meaning "something than which nothing greater can be thought." And though you might come to agree that "God, considered as something than which nothing greater can be thought, is only in the mind and might fail to exist" is somehow contradictory, you would not be committed to supposing that there actually is a God who is (a) something than which nothing greater can be thought, (b) something which is not only in the mind, and (c) something which cannot possibly not exist. But you *would* be so committed if you are prepared constitutively to think about something than which nothing greater can be thought, and if you are prepared to accept the premises Anselm employs in *Proslogion* 2 and 3, and if you take his reasoning there to be formally valid.

If we constitutively think of something than which nothing greater can be thought, then we ought to concede that we cannot be (seriously) thinking of something which is nothing but an idea in the mind (like the thought of an unpainted painting). And if we constitutively think of something than which nothing greater can be thought, and if "not

being able not to exist” signifies a possible perfection or great-making quality, we ought to concede that we cannot be (seriously) thinking of something which might be able not to exist. Someone might say that this claim only amounts to the suggestion that *if* God exists then He necessarily exists. Yet how are we to understand the “*if*” here? It seems to imply that it is possible that God does not exist. It also seems to imply that we might consistently assert that “If God exists, and it is possible that He does not, then He necessarily exists.” But is this last assertion not self-contradictory?

Anselm and thinking of God

Is Anselm arguing along the lines that I have just put forward? Does he view himself as starting from the possibility of constitutively referring to something than which nothing greater can be thought? One might think that he does not since this would leave him assuming to begin with what he claims to be out to prove in *Proslogion* 2 and 3 (i.e. that God is *in re* and cannot be thought not to exist). Anselm, however, is perfectly aware that one can think seriously of something *without asserting or presupposing that it really exists*. One might reply to this point by suggesting that all Anselm is arguing is that a definition of God implies God’s real existence. Yet Anselm does not say anything, either in the *Proslogion*, or in the reply to Gaunilo, to indicate that he is reasoning as simply as this. What he does say, however, clearly shows that he thought it absurd seriously to think of something than which nothing greater can be thought while also insisting that this is something which might not exist *in re* and which might possibly not exist.

So perhaps we might well read Anselm along the lines that I indicate above. An additional reason for doing so is that Anselm is unlikely to be taking his “Fool” to be referring parasitically to God when he supposes him to have in mind something than which nothing greater can be thought. It is implausible to suppose that Anselm (or, for that matter, the author of Psalms 15 and 53) ever encountered an atheist of the sort who would say “Yes, I know what people mean by the word ‘God,’ but though I perfectly understand their way of talking, I cannot take it any more seriously than I take the talk of children when they refer to Santa Claus.” Atheists like this just did not belong to Anselm’s world (or to the world of the authors of the Psalms), so we should therefore not suppose him to be arguing with them in the *Proslogion*. That work (offered, note, as a sequel to the *Monologion*) clearly has in mind an audience composed of people whom Anselm would have expected to entertain the notion of something than which nothing greater can be thought constitutively rather than parasitically.

In this connection it is, perhaps, worth noting the tone which Anselm sets at the start of his reply to Gaunilo. He writes: “Since it is not the Fool, against whom I spoke in my text, who takes me up, but one who, though speaking on the Fool’s behalf, is an

orthodox Christian and no fool, it will suffice if I reply to the Christian.”²⁶ This remark strongly suggests that Anselm saw his *Proslogion* 2 and 3 line of reasoning as directed to someone able and willing to think constitutively of God as something than which nothing greater can be thought. It suggests that Anselm is not writing for people who can only have, or are only willing to have, a concept of God in the way that we (most of us, anyway) have a concept of wizards or Santa Claus. It suggests that Anselm, though *without explicitly assuming that God exists*, is chiefly concerned to argue that it is not foolish to believe that there is a God *in re*. It suggests that he is out to show that thinking seriously (as opposed to parasitically) of God cannot be intellectually reconciled with holding that God might not exist.

Notice, however, that Anselm’s remark about Gaunilo being an orthodox Christian need not, taken in context, be read as suggesting that Anselm is merely preaching to the choir, that he is merely explaining what believers mean by “God” (as, for example, Barth said that he is). Rather, it suggests that anyone (believer or not) who can seriously think of something than which nothing greater can be thought (anyone who can entertain this as a legitimate object of thought, and anyone who is prepared to accept what this object of thought implies) cannot reasonably conclude that God is but an idea in people’s minds. People sometimes ask whether Anselm in *Proslogion* 2 and 3 (taken together with his reply to Gaunilo) is (a) trying to take those who believe in God into a deeper understanding of what God is, or (b) trying to establish the existence of God without presupposing that God exists. The answer, perhaps, is that he is seeking to do both of these things. There is no reason why one cannot attempt to enrich the understanding of those who believe in God without also, and simultaneously, aiming to show that God exists (*in re* and not only *in intellectu*) without presupposing that there is any God at all. Given the “faith seeking understanding” bell that he rings in *Proslogion* 1, Anselm, in *Proslogion* 2 and 3 (and in his reply to Gaunilo) is clearly talking to believers. Taken as a whole, however, his line of thinking concerning that than which nothing greater can be thought does not seem bluntly to presuppose that there is a God. Rather, it seems to be conceived of by Anselm as claiming that, without presupposing the existence of God, and given certain premises, it would be absurd for someone to say that there is no God.

CONCLUSION

If that is how Anselm thinks of his *Proslogion* 2 and 3 arguments (and allowing for his reply to Gaunilo) then he defends himself well. His *reductio* argument seems valid, and his premises are hardly incredible. He has clearly not shown that *everyone* has to conclude that God is *in re* and cannot be thought not to exist (for some people may insist on thinking only parasitically of God as something than which nothing greater can be thought). Be that as it may, however, Anselm has plausibly explained how we cannot

seriously think of God as something than which nothing greater can be thought without also being committed to the conclusion that God is *in re* and that God cannot possibly not exist. And, since he does so *without presupposing that there really is a God*, one might well take him to have defended belief in God's existence in a significant way. People have offered many arguments for God's existence. Some, for instance, have claimed that God exists on causal grounds (as Anselm himself does in the *Monologion*). But there are more ways than one to skin a cat, and Anselm's *Proslogion* way is impressive. That, presumably, is why it has generated attention for several hundred years and is still being studied and discussed.

NOTES

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A590/B618.
2. For an account and discussion of the ontological argument from Anselm to the present, see Graham Oppy, *Ontological Arguments and Belief in God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). For some primary texts, see Alvin Plantinga (ed.), *The Ontological Argument from St. Anselm to Contemporary Philosophers* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965). Note that what Kant called "the ontological argument" is something he found in the writings of Descartes. We have no reason to believe that Kant ever read Anselm.
3. All my quotations from the *Proslogion* come from *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (hereafter *Major Works*), edited with an introduction by Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
4. *Major Works*, 87.
5. *Major Works*, 82.
6. Augustine, *De Moribus Manichaeorum*, 2, 11.
7. *L. Annaei Senecae Naturalium Questionum libri viii* (ed. Alfred Gercke, Stuttgart, 1907).

8. This point is stressed by G. E. M. Anscombe in “Why Anselm’s Proof in the *Proslogion* Is Not an Ontological Argument,” *Thoreau Quarterly* 17 (1985).
9. See *De Casu Diab.* 1 where Anselm (taking “being” to mean “being *in re*”) says: “Just as from the highest good only good comes, so from the highest being only being comes, and all being comes from the highest being. Since the highest good is the highest being, it follows that every good is being and every being is good” (*Major Works*, 195–96). See also *Mon.* 31 and *Prosl.* 3, where Anselm equates truly existing with existing greatly.
10. We know nothing of Gaunilo other than that he was a monk of Marmoutier (located close to the modern day French city of Strassbourg). His claim to fame derives from the fact that Anselm directed that Gaunilo’s reply to Anselm, and Anselm’s reply to Gaunilo, should always be appended to published copies of the *Proslogion*. Readers of Anselm might usefully reflect on why he did this. A plausible theory is that he took his reply to Gaunilo to be a serious explanation of what he understood himself to be arguing in *Proslogion* 2 and 3.
11. *Major Works*, 111–12
12. *Major Works*, 112–13; 116–17; 121.
13. See Norman Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” *Philosophical Review* 69 (1960). Here Malcolm claims to find two distinct arguments for God’s existence as between *Prosl.* 2 and 3. Malcolm, however, does concede that there is no evidence that Anselm thought of himself as offering two different proofs in these chapters (p. 45).
14. *Major Works*, 161. For a similar critique of Anselm’s line of reasoning, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 11 and *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 2,1.
15. *Major Works*, 109.
16. *Major Works*, 105.
17. *Major Works*, 116.
18. *Major Works*, 111–13.

19. See *Summa Contra Gentiles* I, 10–11 and *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 2,1.
20. Malcolm, “Anselm’s Ontological Arguments,” 47.
21. Richard Swinburne attempts to do this with respect to the concept of God; see *The Coherence of Theism* (revised edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).
22. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A598/B626 f.
23. For a full-scale defence of it, see C. J. F. Williams, *What Is Existence?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
24. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 2,1.
25. For this distinction, see Gyula Klima, “Saint Anselm’s Proof: A Problem of Reference, Intentional Identity and Mutual Understanding,” in G. Holmström-Hintikka (ed.), *Medieval Philosophy and Modern Times* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000). I am greatly indebted to Professor Klima for personal discussions of the distinction and its bearing on the reasoning of the *Proslogion*.
26. *Major Works*, 111.

8 Anselm's account of freedom

Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams

INTRODUCTION¹

According to Anselm's official definition, freedom of choice² is "the power to preserve rectitude of will for the sake of that rectitude itself."³ From the point of view of contemporary metaphysics, this is one of the most unhelpful definitions imaginable. Does such freedom require alternative possibilities, for example? Is it compatible with causal determination? Is the exercise of such freedom a necessary and sufficient condition for moral responsibility? The definition sheds no light on these questions.

So we need to move on from Anselm's definition to Anselm's *account* of freedom. Here, though, we encounter the opposite problem. Where Anselm's definition seems not to answer these questions at all, Anselm's account seems to answer all these questions, sometimes with a yes and sometimes with a no. Consider the question about alternative possibilities. In *De Libertate Arbitrii*, Anselm seems clearly to deny that freedom involves alternative possibilities. God, the good angels, and the blessed dead cannot do otherwise than preserve rectitude, but they are still free – freer, in fact, than those who are capable of abandoning rectitude.⁴ On the other hand, in *De Casu Diaboli* Anselm seems to require alternative possibilities for freedom. For if an angel is to be just, Anselm says, he must have both the power to will rectitude and the power to will happiness. If only one power were given him, he would be able to will nothing but rectitude or nothing but happiness, as the case might be; being unable to will otherwise, his will would be neither just nor unjust. Now justice, according to *De Veritate* 12, is rectitude of will preserved for its own sake. So an angel without alternative possibilities cannot have rectitude of will, and *a fortiori* cannot *preserve* rectitude of will; hence, an angel without alternative possibilities is not free.

In this paper we offer a reconstruction of Anselm's account of freedom in which this apparent inconsistency and others like it are resolved. As it turns out, the linchpin of this account is the definition of freedom. Anselm argues that the power to preserve rectitude for its own sake requires the power to initiate an action of which the agent is the ultimate cause, but it does not always require that alternative possibilities be available to the agent. So, while freedom is incompatible with external causal determination, an agent can, under certain circumstances, act freely even though he cannot act otherwise than he

does.

THE DEFINITION OF FREEDOM AND ITS ROOTS IN *DE VERITATE*

Freedom of choice is the power to preserve rectitude of will for its own sake. In order to understand what Anselm means to convey by this definition, we must first turn to his dialogue *De Veritate*, where the notion of rectitude is fleshed out in detail. Anselm's student asks for a definition of truth. Anselm replies that, so far as he remembers, he has never run across a definition of truth. Perhaps, he suggests, they can look for such a definition by examining the various things in which truth is said to exist.⁵ Thus they consider what truth is in statements, opinions, the will, actions, the senses, and finally the essences of things.

In each case, Anselm argues that truth is a matter of *rectitude*: that is, something's being or doing what it was meant to be or do.⁶ Thus the "rectitude of will" that figures in Anselm's definition of freedom is equivalent to truth in the will. The Devil, Anselm points out, is said to have abandoned the truth. He asks the student to explain what is meant by "truth" in that case. The student replies:

Nothing other than rectitude. For if, so long as he willed what he ought – that is, that for which he was given a will – he was in rectitude and in truth, and if when he willed what he ought not, he abandoned rectitude and truth, truth in that case cannot be anything other than rectitude, since both truth and rectitude in his will were precisely his willing what he ought.⁷

Just as the truth or rectitude of a statement is the statement's doing what statements were made to do, the truth or rectitude of a will is the will's doing what wills were made to do.⁸

In [Chapter 12](#) of *De Veritate* Anselm links rectitude of will with both justice and moral evaluation. Justice in its most general sense is equivalent to rectitude in its most general sense; whatever is as it ought to be has both rectitude and justice. The student objects, "Shall we say that a stone is just when it seeks to go from higher to lower, since it is doing what it ought to, in the same way that we say human beings are just when they do what they ought to?"⁹ After some further discussion, Anselm notes, "I see you are looking for a definition of the justice that deserves praise, just as its opposite, injustice, deserves reproach."¹⁰ The justice that is the proper subject of moral evaluation is ultimately defined as "rectitude of will preserved for its own sake."¹¹ Such rectitude

requires that someone perceive the rectitude of his action and will it for the sake of its rectitude. Anselm takes the second requirement to exclude both compulsion and “being bribed by some extraneous reward.”¹²

Since freedom of choice is by definition the power to preserve rectitude of will for its own sake, the arguments of *De Veritate* imply that freedom is also the capacity for justice and the capacity for moral praiseworthiness. So before turning to *De Libertate Arbitrii* it is useful to note how these equivalences must constrain Anselm’s account of freedom, if he is to be consistent. It is both necessary and sufficient for justice, and thus for praiseworthiness, that an agent will what is right, knowing it to be right, because he knows it is right. That an agent wills what is right because he knows it is right requires that he is neither compelled nor bribed to perform the act. Freedom, then, must be neither more nor less than the power to perform acts of that sort.

ARRIVING AT THE DEFINITION OF FREEDOM IN *DE LIBERTATE ARBITRII*

Much that is initially puzzling about Anselm’s account of freedom in *De Libertate Arbitrii* becomes clear when one reads it – as Anselm meant for us to read it – with *De Veritate* in mind.¹³ The first question is whether free choice is, or at any rate involves, the power to sin. Anselm has two arguments to show that it does not. The first is as follows: God and the good angels have free choice; God and the good angels do not have the power to sin; therefore, free choice neither is nor entails the power to sin. But could not someone object (the student asks) that the divine and angelic free choice differs from human free choice? Irrelevant, says Anselm: however much their free choice might differ from ours, the definition of free choice is the same and must apply equally to both.¹⁴

The second argument relies on the premise that a will is freer when it is incapable of sin than when it can be turned to sin. So if the power to sin is added to a will, its freedom is diminished; and if it is removed, the will’s freedom is increased. Obviously, though, if something’s absence increases freedom and its presence diminishes freedom, that thing cannot itself be identical with freedom, or even a part of freedom.

Both of these arguments are valid, but each relies on a controversial premise. In the first argument, Anselm assumes that God and the good angels have free choice, and the student raises no objection. But why should this assumption be so obvious? Since Anselm has yet to define free choice, we can only assume at this stage that free choice is something good, the lack of which would be a defect. But when we come to [Chapter 3](#) and the definition of free choice, it will turn out (as we have already seen) that no one

can be just or praiseworthy without possessing free choice.¹⁵ It would be impious (*nefas*) to deny that God and the good angels are just and praiseworthy, so it would also be impious to deny that they have free choice. So the controversial premise will turn out, in retrospect, to have been justified.

The disputable premise in the second argument is that a will is freer when it cannot sin. Here the student raises the obvious objection: “I don’t see why a will isn’t freer when it is capable of both [sinning and not sinning].” Anselm replies, “Do you not see that someone who has what is fitting and expedient in such a way that he cannot lose it is freer than someone who has it in such a way that he can lose it and be seduced (*adduci*) into what is unfitting and inexpedient?” The student, perhaps unlike the contemporary reader, replies, “I don’t think anyone would doubt that.”¹⁶ Anselm’s interrogative argument for the questionable premise is philosophically revealing. Unlike most contemporary philosophers, he thinks of freedom as teleological. Freedom is a power *for* something, and that power is greater just insofar as it is less apt to fall short of its purpose. Specifically, beings have freedom for the purpose of having what is fitting and expedient; the more tenuous a being’s grip on what is fitting and expedient, the less free that being is.

But if free choice is the power to hold on to what is fitting and expedient, and it is not the power to sin, does it make any sense to say that the first human beings and the rebel angels fell through free choice? The student formulates the problem acutely:

I cannot rebut your arguments at all, but it strikes me quite forcefully that in the beginning both the angelic nature and our own had the power to sin – if they had not had it, they would not have sinned. But if both human beings and angels sinned through this power, which is extraneous in this way to free choice, how can we say they sinned through free choice? And if they did not sin through free choice, it seems they sinned out of necessity. After all, they sinned either spontaneously¹⁷ or out of necessity. And if they sinned spontaneously, how was it not through free choice? So if it was *not* through free choice, they apparently sinned out of necessity.¹⁸

Anselm insists that human beings and angels did in fact fall through free choice:

It was through the power of sinning, and spontaneously, and through free choice, and not out of necessity that our nature, and that of the angels, first sinned . . . The fallen angel and the first human being sinned through free choice, since they sinned through their own choice, which was so free that it could not be compelled to sin by

any other nature . . . They sinned through their choice, which was free; but they did not sin through that in virtue of which it was free, that is, through the power by which it was able not to sin and not to be a slave to sin. Instead, they sinned through that power they had for sinning.¹⁹

Though embedded in what looks like an unpromising bit of proto-scholastic distinction-mongering, Anselm's point is both subtle and plausible. The argument clearly relies on taking *arbitrium* (choice) to be the power for self-initiated action. So when Anselm says that the *arbitrium* of angels and human beings before the fall was *liberum* (free), he is saying that they had a power for self-initiated action that was not compelled by any external agency. To say that they sinned *per liberum arbitrium* (through free choice), as Anselm does twice, is simply to say that they sinned by an exercise of that power. But when he denies that they sinned "through that in virtue of which [their choice] was free," he is emphasizing the teleological nature of freedom; full-fledged freedom of choice is the power for self-initiated action *for some good end*, and the angels did not sin through *that*. Finally, the *potestas peccandi* (power for sinning) through which the angels did fall is simply *liberum arbitrium* unsupplemented by freedom from sin.

Thus Anselm can consistently maintain that the primal sins were committed *per liberum arbitrium* and yet deny that the power to sin is a part of *liberum arbitrium*. If *liberum arbitrium* is simply the power for self-initiated action not compelled by any external agency, then *liberum arbitrium* neither entails nor includes a power to sin. For *liberum arbitrium* can be perfected by something else, as yet unspecified, that renders it incapable of sinning. So the power for self-initiated action as such does not entail or include the power to sin, even though that same power, if unsupplemented by freedom from sin, is itself the power to sin.

ANSELM'S DEFINITION AND ITS IMMEDIATE IMPLICATIONS

Anselm's arguments in the first two chapters of *De Libertate Arbitrii* pull in two different directions. As we saw in the last section, [Chapter 1](#) hints at a normative definition: free choice is the power to hold on to what is fitting and expedient. [Chapter 2](#), however, suggests a purely descriptive definition: free choice is a power for self-initiated action not compelled by any external agency. In [Chapter 3](#) Anselm opts unmistakably for a normative definition: "free choice is the power to preserve rectitude of will for its own sake." Anything that satisfies the normative definition will also satisfy the descriptive definition, since (as Anselm made clear in *De Veritate*) the power to preserve rectitude of will for its own sake requires that an agent be able to initiate his own action on the basis

of what he believes to be right, and act for the sake of that rightness, without being either compelled or bribed.²⁰ In keeping with this line of thought, Anselm goes so far as to say that freedom of choice *consists in* having the rational ability to know what is right in conjunction with the will by which one can choose it.²¹

But the entailment does not work the other way around: a power could satisfy the descriptive definition without satisfying the normative definition. Suppose there were a capacity for self-initiated action that is at least sometimes free from external compulsion but was not bestowed upon its possessor for any particular purpose or designed with any particular end in mind. (The free will described by many contemporary libertarians is just such a capacity.) That capacity satisfies the descriptive definition but not the normative definition, and Anselm would not call that capacity *liberum arbitrium*. He would, in fact, find the very idea of such a capacity bizarre. For to suppose that such a capacity exists is to suppose that God created a power for which He had no particular purpose in mind – hardly the act of a rational creator. Accordingly, Anselm shows no interest in what we might call “garden-variety” freedom: freedom with respect to whether one has pasta or pizza for dinner, say. It is, indeed, difficult to imagine Anselm’s God granting us a power for self-initiated menu choices, at least under that description. If we in fact have garden-variety freedom, it will be only as a by-product of the morally significant freedom that interests Anselm. Accordingly, in *De Concordia* 1.6 Anselm explicitly acknowledges that his discussion in *De Veritate* and *De Libertate Arbitrii* concerns only the freedom necessary for salvation.²²

Even so, we should not overestimate the importance of Anselm’s opting for the normative definition. Although Anselm proceeds, in the remainder of the work, to derive a number of important conclusions using the normative definition, most of the arguments would work equally well if he used the descriptive definition. For example, he argues in [Chapter 5](#) that no temptation forces anyone to sin unwillingly:

Student: But how is the choice of the human will free in virtue of this power [i.e. free choice], given that quite often a person whose will is right abandons that rectitude unwillingly because he is compelled by temptation?

Teacher: No one abandons rectitude otherwise than by willing to do so. Therefore, if by “unwilling” you mean someone who does not will, no one abandons rectitude unwillingly. For a man can be tied up unwillingly, since he does not will to be tied up; he can be tortured unwillingly, since he does not will to be tortured; but he cannot will unwillingly, since he cannot will if he does not will to will. For everyone who wills, wills his own act of willing.²³

This argument assumes only that actions performed through free choice are uncompelled and self-initiated; Anselm need not appeal to the purpose for which human beings were given free choice. Even the argument that nothing is freer than an upright will ([Chapter 9](#)) depends explicitly only on the descriptive definition, although the influence of the normative definition is evident in Anselm's specifying the *upright* will.

FREEDOM AND ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES IN *DE CASU DIABOLI*

The account of freedom that is in place by the end of *De Libertate Arbitrii* seems to entail the falsity of what contemporary philosophers call the Principle of Alternative Possibilities (PAP), which states (roughly) that an agent performs an action freely only if it was causally possible for that agent to act otherwise than he did. Suppose, for example, that God commands the angel Gabriel to announce the Incarnation to Mary. Since this command is given after the good angels have been confirmed in goodness, it is not possible for Gabriel to do otherwise than obey God.²⁴ And yet Gabriel announces the Incarnation freely, because in doing so he is preserving rectitude for its own sake: he knows that it is right for him to obey God, he wills that obedience for the sake of its rightness, and he initiates his own act of obedience. It follows that PAP is false; Gabriel acts freely even though he cannot do otherwise.

When we turn to *De Casu Diaboli*, however, hints of some version of PAP are everywhere. We hope to show that these new arguments extend the account of freedom in *De Veritate* and *De Libertate Arbitrii* but are fundamentally consistent with it. For although free action does not always involve alternative possibilities, it often does; and the reasons why it does arise straightforwardly out of the account of freedom we have already sketched.

The first argument suggesting PAP comes in [Chapter 5](#):

T: Do you think the good angels were likewise able to sin before the evil angels fell?

S: I think so, but I would like to understand this through reason.

T: You know for certain that if they were not able to sin, they preserved justice out of necessity and not in virtue of their power. Therefore, they did not merit grace from God for remaining steadfast when others fell any more than they did for preserving their rationality, which they could not lose. Nor, if you consider the matter rightly, could they properly be called just.²⁵

It is tempting to see in this argument a straightforward endorsement of PAP. After all, Anselm seems to argue that if the angels who refrained from sinning had not been able to do otherwise – had not been able to sin – they would not have been free. They could no more have abandoned rectitude than they could have abandoned rationality, and it would be as incongruous to praise them for remaining upright as to praise them for remaining rational.

Despite the initial appearances, however, there is no appeal to PAP in this argument. Rather, the appeal is to the requirement that a free action have its origin in the agent rather than in some external cause. Consider the situation Anselm is envisioning. The good and bad angels were in exactly the same position before the fall: they were equal in nature, in knowledge, and in power. We know that the bad angels fell by exercising their power for self-initiated action: “It was through the power of sinning, and spontaneously, and through free choice, and not out of necessity that . . . the angelic nature first sinned.”²⁶ If it was not likewise possible for the good angels to fall, that could only have been because some external agency was preventing it; for there was, *ex hypothesi*, nothing internal to their own power of agency to account for that impossibility. And in that case, the good angels did not preserve justice through their own power, but out of necessity.

So Anselm is not assuming PAP. Alternative possibilities come into the picture as a kind of by-product. They are not constitutive of freedom; they just happen to be available, given the requirement that free action have its origin within the agent, in conjunction with the relevant circumstances of the particular case. No doubt alternative possibilities will often be available to agents exercising free choice, but nothing in Anselm’s account requires that they always be.

A second passage that seems to involve reliance on PAP is the extended argument of [Chapters 12](#) through 14, an argument we summarized at the beginning of this paper. Anselm argues that an angel must have both a will for justice and a will for happiness if he is to be morally responsible. If he had only one of these wills, he would be able to will nothing but rectitude or nothing but happiness, as the case might be. He would therefore will rectitude or happiness necessarily. Necessity, as we have already seen, is incompatible with freedom. Therefore, an angel without the alternative possibilities provided by the two wills would not be free.

What we shall now show, however, is that this quick summary misrepresents Anselm’s argument. Once again, it is not PAP but the requirement of self-initiated action that generates the two-will theory – as we can show by offering a more careful recapitulation of Anselm’s argument in [Chapters 12](#) through 14. In Chapter 12 Anselm

argues that in order for an angel to will anything at all, God must give the angel its initial will. For if some agent moves himself to will, he first wills to move himself. Hence, whatever does not yet will anything at all cannot move itself to will. “So it must be the case,” Anselm concludes, “that the angel who has already been made apt to have a will but nonetheless does not will anything cannot have his first will from himself.”²⁷ His first will must therefore come from God.

Anselm’s use of “will” (*voluntas*) in this argument and those that are to follow can cause confusion. He explains in *De Concordia* ²⁸ that *voluntas* can mean three different things. *Voluntas* can mean the “tool” that the soul uses in order to will (i.e. the faculty or power of will), the disposition of that tool to respond to certain features of what is proposed to it for willing (i.e. desire or motivation or dispositional volition), and the act in which that tool is employed (i.e. occurrent volition). Let us call these respectively “faculty,” “disposition,” and “volition.” When God gives the angel its initial will, is He giving the faculty, the disposition, or the volition? Anselm does of course hold that God gives the faculty of willing, just as He gives every other creaturely power, but the faculty is clearly not what is at issue in the argument just stated. That argument seems to require that we interpret *voluntas* as volition: if there is no volition at all, there cannot be the volition by which the soul wills to employ its faculty of will in a particular way. But the argument would then be obviously mistaken. Surely if the angel has a disposition to will in a certain way, then so long as he has the faculty of willing (and there are no impediments to the use of that faculty), there is no reason why the angel cannot generate his first volition for himself. So what Anselm must mean is that unless God gives the initial *disposition*, the angel cannot have any *volition*. He thinks this because he understands volition as goal-directed: “we do not will anything at all unless there is a reason why we will it.”²⁹ The faculty of will does not engage in pseudo-Sartrean reasonless choice. So if the faculty of will is to be operative at all, God must give the angel at least one motivational disposition in response to which it can engage in actual volition.

In Chapter 13 Anselm asks us to suppose that God first gives this angel the will (i.e., the disposition) for happiness, and no other will. Can he move himself to will (i.e. have a volition for) something besides happiness? The teacher and student agree that he cannot:

S: I can’t see how someone who wills nothing besides happiness would move himself to will anything other than happiness. After all, if he wills to move himself to will something else, he wills something else.

T: Therefore, just as he could not will anything at all on his own when no will had yet been given, so also he cannot have any other willing from himself if he has received

only the will for happiness.³⁰

For similar reasons, the angel will also be unable to refrain from willing happiness. So unless God gives him some other will, he will will happiness; and the higher his estimation of happiness, the more intensely he will will it. If he cannot have the best things, he will will lesser things – even “the base and impure things that please irrational animals.”³¹ But no matter what he wills, his will is “the work and gift of God, just as his life and his power of sensation are, and there is neither justice nor injustice in it.”³²

In Chapter 14 we are assured that the same conclusions follow if the angel is given only the will for rectitude: he will not be able to help willing rectitude, and his will will be neither just nor unjust. Now he cannot be happy unless he wills to be happy, and he cannot deserve happiness unless he also wills to be just. So if he is to be deservedly happy, he must have both the will for happiness and the will for justice.

At each stage of this argument, Anselm appeals not to anything like PAP, but to the requirement that the agent be able to initiate his own action. The angel can have no volition at all until God gives him a disposition to will in a certain way. If God gives him only the will for happiness, every volition of happiness will have its ultimate origin in God and not in the angel himself; his will is “the work and gift of God.”³³ He will not have the power to originate any willing that he did not receive from God; by the descriptive definition of free choice, then, the angel is not free. Similarly, if God gives him only the will for rectitude, every willing of rectitude will have its ultimate origin in God; the angel will again lack the power to initiate any willing that is genuinely his own, so he will lack free choice. Only if God gives him both wills does he have that power.³⁴ For then he has the power to will happiness as tempered by justice, and to will happiness without regard for justice. Neither of those volitions is received from God; both have their ultimate origin in the angel himself.

Even though, as we have argued, the arguments of *De Casu Diaboli* 5 and 12–14 are not driven by PAP, they do show an important connection between freedom as Anselm understands it and the possession of alternative possibilities. Freedom requires that an agent be able to initiate an action that is genuinely his own. Now creatures receive their wills – that is, both their faculty of will and their characteristic dispositions – from God. So if God makes a creature’s will in such a way that alternative possibilities are never open to him, every volition of that creature will be “the work and gift of God.” He will not be able to initiate any action that is genuinely his own, so he will not be free. It is, therefore, not freedom as such, but *creaturely* freedom, that requires alternative possibilities.³⁵ And even then, alternative possibilities are required only once, as the case

of the good angels makes clear. The good angels had alternative possibilities with respect to their primal choice. Afterwards God made them unable to sin; in this way He closed off any alternative possibilities, but He did not destroy their freedom.

Thus, Anselm's arguments up to this point in *De Casu Diaboli* merely elaborate on the account of freedom that has been in place since the early chapters of *De Libertate Arbitrii*. But his discussion of the primeval angelic freedom takes an unexpected turn in Chapter 23 of *De Casu Diaboli* when he argues that the angels would not have been free if they had known for sure that they would be punished if they fell. He seems to say that their fear of punishment would have been so great that they would inevitably have willed to retain rectitude, not for the sake of rectitude, but for the sake of avoiding punishment. The just action – willing rectitude for its own sake – would not have been open to them, and by the normative definition of free choice, they would not have been free.

The problem is that the good angels do have this knowledge now, thanks to the example of their fallen brethren. Anselm seems to have a dilemma on his hands. If the good angels are now just, they are preserving rectitude for its own sake, and not merely for the sake of evading punishment. But then there is no reason to think they could not have preserved rectitude for its own sake even if they had known then what they know now. On the other hand, if they are indeed merely trying to evade punishment, they are not just, not praiseworthy, and indeed not free, because their new knowledge is such as to preclude their preserving rectitude for its own sake.

The dilemma owes some of its force to a misreading. It seems natural to read Chapter 25 as arguing that the only reason why the good angels can no longer sin is that they are aware of the consequences of sin. But in fact the argument is more subtle. Anselm is interested in maintaining that *even if* their knowledge of the consequences of sin is the sole reason why the good angels can no longer sin, their not sinning is still to their credit.³⁶ At the end of the chapter Anselm clearly denies that their inability to sin derives from this knowledge. The teacher remarks, “But in fact you know – because it became evident earlier – that the reason why [the good angel] cannot sin is that by the merit of his perseverance he has attained such happiness that he no longer sees what more he could will.”³⁷

The back-reference is to [Chapter 6](#). [Chapters 4](#) and [5](#) had shown that the fallen angels sinned by willing some additional good that God had not yet given them, and that the good angels could have willed “that something extra” (*illud plus*) but chose instead to retain the just will that God had given them.³⁸ Anselm then argued in [Chapter 6](#) that as a reward for their perseverance in justice, God gave the good angels whatever it was they had passed up in the interests of justice. Thanks to this divine gift, there is nothing for

them to will that they do not already enjoy.³⁹ Now, at the end of Chapter 25, Anselm makes sure we do not think he has abandoned this explanation of the sinlessness of the angels.

So Anselm does not after all argue that their knowledge of the consequences of sin renders the good angels unable to sin. But some version of the dilemma we posed above still threatens his account. If the good angels after the fall can have this knowledge and yet retain free choice and choose rectitude for its own sake, why would this knowledge subvert the free choice of angels before the fall? In particular, Anselm thinks that if an angel had this knowledge before the fall, it would necessitate his action.⁴⁰ And yet after the fall, it does not necessitate his action. Why would the very same knowledge undermine freedom before the fall but be consistent with freedom afterwards?

Remember that the angels have only two wills: the will for justice and the will for happiness. Now imagine two angels, Gabriel and Michael, who are preserving the will for justice. Both know all the consequences of sin, but Gabriel knows this before the fall, whereas Michael first learns this after the fall, by noting the fate of the rebel angels. It follows straightforwardly from the account of freedom given thus far that neither angel can abandon his will for rectitude, but that Gabriel is necessitated, whereas Michael is free. Consider Gabriel first. He can only will happiness and rectitude – and that is God’s doing, not his. He cannot sin by willing happiness, because he knows full well he will not get happiness by sinning. He cannot sin by willing rectitude, obviously. So his not sinning is entirely God’s doing, not his own. He is necessitated by God’s creative acts not to sin.

Michael’s case is different. He too cannot sin by willing happiness, but that is because he already has all the happiness he can imagine as a reward for his decision to preserve rectitude. His retaining the will to rectitude, though, is his own doing, not God’s. As we saw earlier, God gave him the will for rectitude and the will for happiness, but the decision to subject his will for happiness to the demands of rectitude was the angel’s own doing. Moreover, he retained rectitude for its own sake. So, as long as he sustains that will, he is acting on his own, not out of any necessity. True, he has no temptation to abandon rectitude, but he retains rectitude under his own steam, so to speak, and not because of God’s action.

Of course, according to our contemporary way of using modal terms, it seems obviously false to say that Michael is not acting out of necessity. Surely if it is not possible in those circumstances for Michael to sin, it is necessary in those circumstances that he not sin; Michael, it seems, is as much necessitated as Gabriel. Obviously Anselm has something different in mind when he speaks of “necessity,” and since he has been regularly opposing necessity to freedom since the first chapter of *De Libertate Arbitrii*,

we need to be clear about what exactly Anselm takes this freedom-threatening necessity to be.⁴¹ As one would expect from *De Veritate*, compulsion certainly imposes such necessity. More generally, what a contemporary philosopher would call causal necessity is also incompatible with freedom. Thus, when Anselm sets out in *De Concordia* to reconcile free choice with divine foreknowledge, he explains that the kind of necessity that attaches to what God foreknows is not the freedom-threatening kind that “brings it about that a thing exists” (*facit rem esse*) or that “compels” (*cogit*) something to come about.⁴² Even what God *predestines* does not happen “by that necessity which precedes a thing and brings it about” (*ea necessitate quae praecedat rem et facit*),⁴³ for such causal necessity would destroy freedom.

But the examples of Gabriel and Michael show that Anselm’s most fundamental notion is this: an action is necessary just in case its ultimate explanation is external to the agent. Causal determination makes actions necessary because it prevents an agent from initiating any action that is genuinely her own; Gabriel’s knowledge of the consequences of sin makes his action necessary for exactly the same reason. No self-initiated action can ever properly be described as necessary, even if it is not possible for the agent to act otherwise in the relevant circumstances.

Anselm’s most striking affirmation of this understanding of necessity in action comes in a discussion of God’s action in *Cur Deus Homo*. After Anselm has argued that in some sense God *had* to provide a remedy for sin, Boso objects: “If this is so, it seems that God is, as it were, compelled to secure human salvation by the necessity of avoiding impropriety (*indecentia*) . . . And how will we ascribe our salvation to God’s grace if He saves us by necessity?” Anselm replies:

God does nothing by necessity, since He is in no way compelled to do or prevented from doing anything; and when we say that God does something as if from the necessity of avoiding dishonorableness – which He certainly does not fear – it is rather to be understood that He does this out of the necessity of preserving His honorableness. And this necessity is nothing other than the immutability of His honorableness, which He has from Himself and not from another and which is therefore improperly called necessity.⁴⁴

Because God’s immutable uprightness is “from Himself and not from another,” every upright divine action will be self-initiated; and for that very reason Anselm insists that no such action should be called “necessary.” Divine aseity in fact guarantees that *every* action God performs is self-initiated. So all of God’s actions are free, even if He never has alternative possibilities available to Him.

RECONCILING THE TWO DEFINITIONS

It is instructive to see how Anselm's two definitions can be combined into a single general definition without doing violence to Anselm's theory. Recall that Anselm offers a normative and a purely descriptive definition of free choice. According to the descriptive definition, free choice is a power for self-initiated action. According to the normative definition, free choice is the power to preserve rectitude of the will for its own sake; the normative definition entails that the agent (1) is able to initiate his own action on the basis of what he believes to be right, and (2) is able to act for the sake of that rightness. How can a normative and non-normative definition be reconciled?

The answer lies in Anselm's motivation for discussing free choice in the first place. Anselm's primary interest in free choice is how it bears on human responsibility for sin and the need for grace. Any other exercise of free choice is ancillary. Thus, his normative definition (his preferred one) explicitly builds in features central to his moral and theological concerns. Anselm believes that some goals are better than others. Specifically, he believes that while justice and happiness are our two most important goals, justice is incomparably more important than happiness. So, if God gave us free will for a purpose, and that purpose is to achieve the best goal through our own free action, then we are acting most freely when we seek to achieve that goal. Further, Anselm seems to think that following this goal is the most rational thing to do as well.

As we shall now show, however, one can abandon Anselm's own story about our ultimate goal without doing much damage to his account of free will. That is, one can accept a teleological account of free choice and reject the notion that the best goal is justice or that one acts most freely when one acts for the sake of justice. If there is no objective hierarchy of goals, an agent will not be more or less free depending on which goals he has chosen, but he will be more or less free depending on how well he satisfies Anselm's descriptive definition of free will.

For if we look at exactly how his descriptive definition (the one Anselm uses when he is not concerned with ultimate goals) would function in actual examples, we will see where we build back in those teleological concerns – properly modified – without realizing it. The normative aspects of Anselm's second definition concern justice. As Anselm says in *De Veritate* 12, "Every will not only wills something but also wills for the sake of something. Just as we must examine what it wills, so also we need to understand why it wills."⁴⁵ (Notice that this is presented as a general claim, without any reference to rectitude.) And again, "Every will has a what and a why. For we do not will anything at all unless there is a reason why we will it."⁴⁶ So we do no violence to Anselm's descriptive definition if we reformulate it as follows: free choice is the power to attain

one's goals for the sake of those goals. This definition, which we shall call the enriched descriptive definition,⁴⁷ requires that an agent (1) be able to initiate his own action on the basis of what he believes will achieve his goal, and (2) be able to act for the sake of that goal.

The relationship between the enriched descriptive definition and Anselm's preferred normative definition becomes clear in one of Anselm's own illustrative examples in *De Concordia*:

Let us now offer an example involving an upright (that is, a just) will, freedom of choice, and choice itself; and let us consider how the upright will is tempted to abandon rectitude and how it maintains that rectitude by its free choice. Suppose someone is resolved to hold fast to the truth because he understands that it is right to love truth. This person surely already has an upright will and rectitude of will. Another person approaches and threatens to kill the first person unless he tells a lie. We see that it is his decision (*in eius arbitrio*) whether to abandon life in favor of rectitude of will, or rectitude of will in favor of life. This decision . . . is free, because the reason by which he understands rectitude teaches that this rectitude ought always to be preserved out of love for rectitude itself, and that whatever is offered to him as a pretext for abandoning rectitude is to be held in contempt, and that it is up to the will to reject or choose as the understanding of reason dictates . . . Hence, a decision of the will to abandon this same rectitude is also free and not forced by any necessity, even though it is assailed by the dreadfulness of death.

For although it is necessary that he give up either life or rectitude, nevertheless no necessity determines which he preserves or abandons. Surely in this case the will alone determines which of the two he retains; nor does the force of necessity cause anything, where only the will's choice is operative. And if there is no necessity for someone to abandon the rectitude of will that he has, it is clear that the power to preserve it – i.e. freedom – is not absent . . . In virtue of this freedom both the choice (*arbitrium*) and the will of a rational nature are said to be free.⁴⁸

Anselm's arguments in connection with this example obliterate any distinction between the descriptive and the normative definitions of freedom. Anselm begins by appealing to the key elements of the enriched descriptive definition: the person in the example is free because he knows what goal he ought to aim at and has the power to choose accordingly, and no external force is operating so as to necessitate his choice. But since the goal that he ought to aim at is precisely the preservation of rectitude for its own sake, he satisfies the normative definition. What it is for him to satisfy the enriched descriptive definition is

precisely the same as what it is for him to satisfy the normative definition; the two definitions, in other words, are equivalent.

THE USEFULNESS OF ANSELM'S ACCOUNT OF FREEDOM

So in the end, the enriched descriptive definition of free choice turns out to be equivalent to the normative definition that Anselm prefers, given the assumption that reason shows us that rectitude of will is the paramount goal to be respected in all action. If we decline to join Anselm in that assumption, the two definitions will not be equivalent; but for that very reason, the reformulated descriptive definition becomes a useful and interesting option for contemporary debates about freedom. We can accept it without committing ourselves to any substantive moral claims, and we disentangle the discussion of freedom from the specifically theological concerns that motivated Anselm.⁴⁹

The greatest advantage of the enriched descriptive definition of free choice is that it satisfies both incompatibilist and compatibilist intuitions about free will. Certainly Anselm takes very seriously the incompatibilist intuition that a free action cannot be causally determined. The reasons that a person has for performing a free action do not determine that he take that action. But while it is true that many free choices are entirely unpredictable, not all of them are. So while Anselm's account satisfies the intuitions of incompatibilists, there are other conditions in which it also satisfies some of the intuitions of compatibilists. What is central to Anselm's definition is that the action be self-initiated and consciously chosen, not that it be one of at least two possibilities. This aspect of Anselm's theory partially satisfies the intuition that as long as a person knows what he is doing and why he is doing it, his action is free, regardless of whether the agent had some other option available to him. Of course, while the compatibilist does not care whether the action is self-initiated, but only that the agent is doing what he wants, the Anselmian insists that the action be self-initiated. But the Anselmian can explain why there is a pull to say that a person who has chosen a particular course of action and is happy with it has sometimes chosen freely, despite a lack of alternatives.

Moreover, in light of arguments purporting to show that which goals and desires one finds oneself with are largely (or even fully) beyond one's control, the enriched descriptive definition helps to explain how it is fair (or just) to hold a person responsible for acting on whatever goals he finds himself with. According to Anselm, how one comes by one's goals is irrelevant. He in fact *presupposes* that the motivations of rational creatures derive entirely from outside themselves, although he of course thinks the external source is God rather than heredity, upbringing, or the like. What is relevant to freedom is not the source of the motivations, but whether, when there is a decision to be made among competing goals, it is the agent himself who is doing the deciding. If the

agent initiates the choice and is not determined by circumstances outside his control, then his choice is free and it is permissible to hold him responsible for his action. In the unfortunate, and indeed unlikely, instance in which a person has absolutely no good motives from which to choose, he is still responsible for the action that results from the motive he chose to follow.

What one might see as the greatest strength of Anselm's account – its ability to capture both incompatibilist and compatibilist intuitions – might also be its greatest weakness. We can imagine that a compatibilist would find it incredible that while one's decision to act on a desire might determine one's action, nothing determines which desire one opts to follow. It is true that the Anselmian can give an explanation of her free choice; the explanation will always be in terms of which desire she placed above the others, and she might have reasons for preferring that desire to another. But ultimately, when asked whether that preference determined her action, the Anselmian will say no. In fact, given the same situation, she might conceivably do something else – if there were more than one motive at work in her decision. And that, a compatibilist might well say, is hardly an appealing picture of the relation between free choice and reasons for action.

In reply, an Anselmian should note that the key point behind some brands of compatibilism (especially the freedom-*entails*-determinism varieties) is that unless my character determines or at least explains my actions, they are not really actions at all, but merely spasms. But the only plausible motivation for *that* view is the belief that free actions are those that the agent herself originates, those for which the agent is somehow responsible. And Anselm's theory secures that belief. The compatibilist simply refuses to face the problem that worries Anselm in [Chapters 12](#) to 14 of *De Casu Diaboli*. If both the good and the bad angels are to have been free and responsible for their primal choice, it cannot be the case that anything about their desires, powers, or knowledge determined their choice either to preserve or to abandon rectitude. For their desires, powers, and knowledge were all owed to God. Therefore, if their desires, powers, and knowledge had determined their choice, that choice too would have been owed to God. God, not the angels, would have been responsible for it; the bad angels would not have been blameworthy, nor the good angels praiseworthy. Indeed, there would have been no distinction between good and bad, because they all had the same desires, powers, and knowledge, and would therefore have made the same "choice." The angels would not have been agents at all, but inert conduits for divine agency.

In contemporary terms, Anselm's arguments amount to this claim: there is no responsible agency unless there is an element of radical voluntarism somewhere. If a certain set of cognitive and affective states, all of which have their origin outside the agent, guarantees a certain choice, the agent is not really an agent at all, but an inert conduit for external causes. An exercise of agency, therefore, is possible only where what

the agent has “received” from outside does *not* guarantee one choice over another.

On the other hand, an incompatibilist might flatly refuse to be convinced that anyone in a situation in which he cannot do otherwise is free. It might not move him at all to hear that one is self-consciously, and without compulsion, acting on a choice that one initiated oneself. It might not move the incompatibilist to know that there is nothing else the person is inclined to do and that a million alternatives would not change his action at all. Some people are just resistant to Frankfurt-style stories.

Once again, however, the Anselmian has a promising line of response. The whole motivation behind incompatibilism, after all, is the intuition that if external causal factors are responsible for our actions, then they are not really *our* actions in the sense that matters, and we are not (either causally or morally) responsible for them. The idea of alternative possibilities comes in only because people wrongly conclude that if there is no causal determination, there is nothing to narrow down the options to one. Anselm’s theory saves the real motivation for incompatibilism by preserving the agent’s own causal and moral responsibility for his actions, but without making the unwarranted leap to alternative possibilities, since it shows that there can be cases where it is the agent’s own action-initiating power (will and reason, operating together) and not any external causal power that narrows the options down to one.

NOTES

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1. Whenever we quote a text we give a reference to the critical edition of F. S. Schmitt, identified as “S”; and to the English translations in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), hereafter *Major Works*, or to those in *Three Philosophical Dialogues*, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002), hereafter *Dialogues*. All translations are our own.

2. Anselm uses *libertas arbitrii* and *liberum arbitrium* interchangeably. We shall translate as “freedom of choice” and “free choice,” respectively, with no distinction in meaning.
3. *De Lib. Arb.* 3 (S I, 212; *Dialogues*: 36). At *De Lib. Arb.* 13 this definition is endorsed as complete (*perfecta*): that is, as stating a necessary and sufficient condition for freedom of choice.
4. See *De Lib. Arb.* 1 and 14.
5. *De Ver.* 1.
6. See our discussion of Anselm’s account of truth in [Chapter 9](#) of this volume.
7. *De Ver.* 4 (S I: 181; *Dialogues*, 8–9).
8. Thus, in the passage cited above, the student says that the Devil “voluit quod debuit, ad quod scilicet voluntatem acceperat.” The construction admits of two different readings; and while the difference appears slight at first, we think it is important. On one reading, the last “quod” has the same referent as the preceding “quod”; on the other, the last “quod” refers to the whole clause “voluit quod debuit.” On the first reading, Anselm’s meaning is “he willed that which he ought to will – in other words, he willed that for the sake of which he had received a will.” On the second reading, his meaning is “he willed what he ought to will – which is the very reason why he had received a will.” (McInerny’s translation, *Major Works*, 156, adopts the second reading; our translation above is deliberately ambiguous but is perhaps more naturally taken in the first way.) The first reading suggests a material, the second reading a purely formal specification of the will’s end. The parallels to the account of truth in statements give some warrant to the first reading. Anselm offers a material specification of the end of statements (statements are for signifying the way things are), not a purely formal one (statements are for signifying what they ought to signify). More important, however, the philosophical barrenness of a purely formal specification tells decisively in favor of the first reading. Anselm cannot sensibly say that God gave us a will so that we could will what God gave us a will to will – we would get either an empty circle or an infinite stutter (“we should will what God gave us a will to will, which is willing what God gave us a will to will, which is willing . . .”). Fortunately, the first reading makes for better Latin as well as better moral philosophy.

9. *De Ver.* 12 (S I: 192; *Dialogues*, 21).
10. *De Ver.* 12 (S I: 193; *Dialogues*, 22).
11. *De Ver.* 12 (S I: 194; *Dialogues*, 24).
12. *De Ver.* 12 (S I: 194; *Dialogues*, 24).
13. See the preface to *De Ver.* (S I: 173–74; *Dialogues*, 1–2).
14. *De Lib. Arb.* 1
15. Notice that Anselm’s assumption here, namely that moral praiseworthiness and blameworthiness require free will, is commonly made in the contemporary debate as well.
16. *De Lib. Arb.* 1 (S I: 208; *Dialogues*, 32).
17. “Spontaneously” translates “sponte,” for which there is no good English equivalent. “Of their own free will” would ordinarily be a good translation, but in this context it would obviously be confusing. As the context makes clear, actions done *sponte* are contrasted with actions done as a result of necessity; there is no connotation of impulsiveness or lack of premeditation. We discuss Anselm’s conception of necessity on pp. 192–94.
18. *De Lib. Arb.* 2 (S I: 209; *Dialogues*, 33).
19. *De Lib. Arb.* 2 (S I: 209–10; *Dialogues*, 33–34).
20. *De Ver.* 12; see p. 181 above. Anselm makes a similar argument in *De Lib. Arb.* 13.
21. *De Lib. Arb.* 4; cf. *De Lib. Arb.* 12.
22. The same restriction applies to the discussion in *De Concordia* itself, where Anselm notes more than once that he is relying on the account of freedom developed in the

earlier works, applying it to show that freedom is compatible with divine foreknowledge, predestination, and grace. Other than some helpful distinctions and examples, which we discuss in this chapter, *De Concordia* contributes little of substance to the account of freedom. It does, however, offer important discussions of necessity, the relation of time and eternity, and (especially) grace and justification. These discussions are beyond the scope of the present paper.

23. *De Lib. Arb.* 5 (S I: 214; *Dialogues*, 39).

24. We have not yet been told *why* this is not possible – that explanation is delayed until Chapter 6 of *De Casu Diaboli* – merely *that* it is not possible (*De Lib. Arb.* 1 and 14).

25. *De Casu Diab.* 5 (S I: 242–43; *Dialogues*, 64).

26. *De Lib. Arb.* 2 (S I: 209; *Dialogues*, 33–34).

27. *De Casu Diab.* 12 (S I: 254; *Dialogues*, 78).

28. *De Conc.* 3.11.

29. *De Ver.* 12 (S I: 194; *Dialogues*, 23). On pp. 194–96 we examine some implications of this feature of Anselm’s view.

30. *De Casu Diab.* 13 (S I: 256; *Dialogues*, 79).

31. *De Casu Diab.* 13 (S I: 257; *Dialogues*, 81).

32. *De Casu Diab.* 13 (S I: 257; *Dialogues*, 81).

33. *De Casu Diab.* 13 (S I: 257; *Dialogues*, 81).

34. In correspondence, Eleonore Stump raised the following objection: “Why shouldn’t we suppose that what God gives an angel is the power to initiate anything the angel takes to be good, where it is up to the intellect to determine what counts as good, in any sense of ‘good’? Then the angel could initiate an action for happiness or for justice, and it would really be his own will which did the initiating, even though the angel had only one

will and not two.” The answer is that God has given the angel a properly functioning intellect, so he will always see justice as better than mere happiness (see *De Conc.* 1.6). If the angel’s only motivational disposition is toward willing what his intellect takes to be good, he will of course will what has greater goodness (justice) in preference to what has lesser goodness (happiness). In that case, the angel’s willing justice has its ultimate origin not in the angel but in God, who gave him the motivational disposition and the properly functioning intellect that together guarantee his willing justice.

35. So Anselm’s view requires that God, who receives nothing from outside himself, *never* needs alternative possibilities in order to be free. We take up this issue at the end of this section.

36. McInerny’s translation (*Major Works*, 228–30) generally leaves out the “if,” making the dilemma all but inescapable for anyone reading *De Casu Diaboli* in his version.

37. *De Casu Diab.* 25 (S I: 273; *Dialogues*, 97).

38. Anselm commendably refrains from indulging in speculative angelic psychology and tells us that he has no idea what the something extra could have been. Scotus, who read *De Casu Diaboli* attentively, is somewhat less circumspect. See John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 2, d. 6, q. 2.

39. *De Casu Diab.* 6 (S I: 243; *Dialogues*, 66): “adhærentes iustitiæ nullum bonum velle possint quod non gaudeant.” In McInerny’s translation (*Major Works*, 204), the good angels “can enjoy all the goods they will.” This not only gets the Latin wrong, it gets Anselm’s point wrong. The point is not that they are capable of enjoying whatever they will, which is consistent with their asking so little out of life that Simon Stylites would look like a hedonist by their side. The point is that God has showered them with every good thing they could possibly want.

40. *De Casu Diab.* 24.

41. Anselm uses *necessitas*, *necessarium*, and *necesse* in a variety of ways, and a thorough analysis of his use of modal terms would require a paper in itself. Here we are considering only what is involved in affirming or denying of *actions* that they are necessary in the sense in which “necessary” is the opposite of “free.”

42. *De Conc.* 1.3 (S II: 250; *Major Works*, 439).

43. *De Conc.* 2.3 (S II: 262; *Major Works*, 451).

44. *Cur Deus Homo* 2.5 (S II: 99–100; *Major Works*, 319). “Honorableness” and “dishonorableness” translate “honestas” and “inhonestas,” respectively.

45. *De Ver.* 12 (S I: 193–94; *Dialogues*, 23).

46. *De Ver.* 12 (S I: 194; *Dialogues*, 23).

47. We call it “enriched” because it makes explicit certain requirements that Anselm takes to be implied by the original descriptive definition, not because it actually adds something new.

48. *De Conc.* 1.6 (S II: 257; *Major Works*, 446).

49. Because the enriched descriptive definition is silent about what an agent’s goals are or should be, and hence says nothing about the content of the agent’s “knowledge,” it is ultimately merely Anselmian, not Anselm’s. Anselm insists that we have only two motivations – one for happiness, the other for justice. The only sorts of choices that are of interest to him are ones that involve a conflict between the two. Any other decisions require a conflict among intermediate goals and their potential to make a person happy. Mistakes in this regard are all due to lack of knowledge or lack of rationality. Anselm wants to be able to say that a person is most free when his motivation for action is justice (preserving rectitude for its own sake). Thus, the person who believes (and acts on the belief) that a base hedonistic life leads to happiness, but does not realize that it is inconsistent with justice, is less free than the person who knows that they are inconsistent, but chooses happiness over justice (not realizing that ignoring justice will preclude ultimate happiness), and he in turn is less free than the person who once chose justice over happiness, now realizes that they lead to the same place, and maintains his desire to uphold justice for its own sake. By contrast, if we refrain from building a substantive moral theory into the enriched descriptive definition, there will be no such hierarchy of degrees of freedom. If, say, a person foolishly believes that smoking combats colds, then the smoker can smoke as freely as the non-smoker refrains.

9 Anselm on truth

Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams

INTRODUCTION

A good place to start in assessing a theory of truth is to ask whether the theory under discussion is consistent with Aristotle's commonsensical definition of truth from *Metaphysics* 4: "What is false says of that which is that it is not, or of that which is not that it is; and what is true says of that which is that it is, or of that which is not that it is not."¹ Philosophers of a realist bent will be delighted to see that Anselm unambiguously adopts the Aristotelian commonplace. A statement is true, he says, "when it signifies that what-is is."² But the theory of truth that Anselm builds on this observation is one that would surely have confounded Aristotle. For no matter what the topic, Anselm's thinking always eagerly returns to God; and the unchallenged centrality of God in Anselm's philosophical explorations is nowhere more in evidence than in his account of truth. Indeed, we see in the student's opening question in *De Veritate* that the entire discussion has God as its origin and its aim: "Since we believe that God is truth, and we say that truth is in many other things, I would like to know whether, wherever truth is said to be, we must acknowledge that God is that truth."³ The student then reminds Anselm that in the *Monologion* he had argued from the truth of statements to an eternal supreme Truth. Does this not commit Anselm (the student seems to be asking) to holding that God himself is somehow the truth of true statements? But what definition of truth could make sense of such an odd claim? Anselm is happy to take up the challenge of showing that his description of God as "supreme Truth" is no mere metaphor, but the expression of the deepest insight into the nature of truth. An account of truth is just theology under a different name.

This first distinctive characteristic of Anselm's theory, the centrality of God as supreme Truth, helps to account for a second distinctive characteristic: its strong insistence on the *unity* of truth. All truth either is God or somehow reflects God; thus, one simple being provides the norm by which all truth-claims must be judged. As G. R. Evans rightly notes, "When Anselm makes distinctions, as he frequently does, he intends to show more clearly the underlying unity of what is being subdivided."⁴ As we shall see, Anselm will deploy the concept of *rectitude* to assimilate all the various manifestations of truth – in statements, opinions, wills, actions, the senses, and the being of things – to each other and, in the end, to the supreme Truth. Indeed, it will turn out that truth is so much the same thing in each of its manifestations that it is not strictly correct to speak of

the truth *of* this or that thing. There is just truth, period; instead of speaking of the truth *of* action *a* and statement *s*, we should say that both action *a* and statement *s* are in accordance with truth, period.

TRUTH AND RECTITUDE

In their search for a definition of truth, the teacher and student who are the interlocutors in *De Veritate* begin with the most common sort of truth: the truth of statements. Anselm's account of truth in statements is a sort of double-correspondence theory. A statement is true when it corresponds *both* to the way things are *and* to the purpose of making statements. Of course, the purpose of making statements *just is* to signify the way things are, so the two correspondences cannot pull apart. But Anselm clearly thinks that the function of statements explains why we should call them true when they correspond to reality; their corresponding to reality would not be reason to call statements true unless such correspondence were what statements were *for*:

TEACHER: For what purpose is an affirmation made?

STUDENT: For signifying that what-is is.

T: So it ought to do that. – S: Certainly.

T: So when it signifies that what-is is, it signifies what it ought to. – S: Obviously.

T: And when it signifies what it ought to, it signifies correctly (*recte*). – S: Yes.

T: Now when it signifies correctly, its signification is correct (*recta*). – S: No doubt about it.

T: So when it signifies that what-is is, its signification is correct. – S: That follows.

T: Furthermore, when it signifies that what-is is, its signification is true.

S: Indeed it is both correct and true when it signifies that what-is is.

T: Then its being correct is the same thing as its being true: that is, its signifying that what-is is. – S: Indeed, they are the same.

T: So its truth is nothing other than its correctness (*rectitudo*).

S: Now I see clearly that this truth is correctness.

So for statements, at least, rectitude (correctness) is a fundamentally teleological notion: statements are correct when they do what they were “made for.”

But made by whom? Anselm goes on to make a distinction that shows clearly that it is not the one who *utters* a statement who “makes” it in the sense that is relevant to determining its rectitude or truth. The distinction arises out of a clever observation by the student:

S: A statement . . . has received the power to signify (*accepit significare*) both that what-is is, and that what-is-not is – for if it had not received the power to signify that even what-is-not is, it would not signify this. So even when it signifies that what-is-not is, it signifies what it ought to. But if, as you have shown, it is correct and true by signifying what it ought to, then a statement is true even when it states that what-is-not is.⁵

To this the teacher responds that we do not customarily call a statement true just because it signifies what it received the power to signify: but we *could*. Statements have two truths or two rectitudes. A statement’s signifying what it received the power to signify is “invariable for a given statement”: “It is day,” for example, always signifies that it is day, so it has that sort of rectitude “naturally.” But a statement’s signifying what is the case is “variable”: “It is day” does not always signify that what-is is, so it has this second sort of rectitude “accidentally and according to its use.” This accidental rectitude is what a statement has “because it signifies in keeping with the purpose for which it was made.” And here is where Anselm makes it clear that it is not made by a particular speaker:

T: For example, when I say “It is day” in order to signify that what-is is, I am using the signification of this statement correctly, since this is the purpose for which it was made; consequently, in that case it is said to signify correctly. But when I use the same statement to signify that what-is-not is, I am not using it correctly, since it was not made for that purpose; and so in that case its signification is said not to be correct.

Note first that this speech makes it clear that a statement (*oratio*) is a type, not a token. The token is a *use* of the type, and such a use is correct – or true – when the

speaker uses the type in accordance with the purpose for which the type was made. Now the purpose of every statement-type is to signify that what-is is, so a given statement-token is correct when it signifies that what-is is. The statement-token as such has no further purpose, beyond that of the type, by which it can be evaluated as correct or incorrect, true or false.

One might be tempted to think that the token does have a purpose of its own, namely, the speaker's purpose. But Anselm's understanding of truth as rectitude precludes him from identifying the purpose of a statement-token with the speaker's purpose in uttering that token. For if the purpose of the token really is the speaker's purpose, then every token (except perhaps those that involve Freudian slips and other kinds of misspeaking, in which the speaker fails to utter the words he intended to utter) will achieve its intended purpose. Now whatever achieves its intended purpose has rectitude and, therefore, truth. So if the purpose of the token is the speaker's purpose, almost every sentence-token will turn out to be true. Strictly speaking, then, the token does not have a purpose. The *tokening* (the act of uttering the token) has a purpose, but the token itself is simply an instance or use of the type, and it is the type that has a purpose. Using the type correctly is using it for its proper purpose.

Of course, the tokening is an act, and as we shall see, acts have rectitude and truth as well. Once again, Anselm cannot hold that the speaker's purpose in uttering the token establishes the purpose of acts of tokening. For in that case, an act of lying would have rectitude if the speaker succeeded in the deception he intended, but an act of truth-telling would lack rectitude if the speaker failed in, say, the persuasion he intended to produce in his audience. Here again, therefore, it seems that action *types* have purposes (in this case, the purpose of the type *tokening statement-types* is that of using signification correctly), and particular actions are right when they accord with the purpose of the action-type. Thus, speaker's purpose and agent's purpose do not matter for rectitude. Rectitude is a matter of natures or types, and it is God who makes natures and thus gives them their purpose. Creatures have no genuine power to confer purposes.⁶

So it is statement-types, not tokens, that were "made" in order to signify that what-is is. We asked earlier: made by whom? By now it has become clear that Anselm's answer is: by God.⁷ This answer certainly appears strange, since the statement-types that Anselm is talking about here are *natural-language* statements, not the denatured propositions of contemporary philosophy.⁸ Indeed, Anselm does not have our notion of proposition, in the sense of whatever it is that is equally "expressed" by the Latin "Dies est" and the English "It is day."

The strangeness of the view lies not in the mere claim that God makes natural-

language statement-types. God's making those is in itself no odder than His making any other type. The strangeness lies instead in the *teleological* element of Anselm's claim. God not only makes the type "It is day" but confers on it its purpose of signifying that it is day (when, in fact, it is day). So if the English language had developed in such a way that we all used "It is day" to express what we now mean by saying "It is obligatory," we would all be misusing that statement-type. We would be violating God's will for our linguistic practices. Since English is not something we are making up, we can get it wrong.

Now there are ways of mitigating the strangeness of this view, but we will not pursue them here, since they all involve a platonism so lush and giddy that even Anselm ought to blanch at them.⁹ The important point is that there is no need to go to such lengths in order to preserve the teleological notion of truth to which Anselm is committed. One can build the teleology into our God-given power to use language, rather than into the statement-types themselves. Such a move allows one to recognize the conventionality of natural languages – to acknowledge, in other words, that it is human beings who make natural-language statement-types – but insist that our ability to make and use such languages was given to us by God for the purpose of signifying that what-is is. Thus, we use our power of speech correctly when we use conventional natural-language statement-types in order to signify that what-is is. Unfortunately, Anselm himself cannot take this approach, since it involves conceding that creatures do have a limited power to create natures and confer purposes on them.

In any event, the truth of statements (which Anselm also calls the "truth of signification") is only the first manifestation of truth that the teacher and student consider. They turn next to the truth of thought or opinion, which is also identified with rectitude, again understood teleologically:

S: According to the reasoning we found persuasive in the case of statements, nothing can be more correctly called the truth of a thought than its rectitude. For the power of thinking that something is or is not was given to us in order that we might think that what-is is, and that what-is-not is not. Therefore, if someone thinks that what-is is, he is thinking what he ought to think, so his thought is correct. If, then, a thought is true and correct for no other reason than that we are thinking that what-is is, or that what-is-not is not, its truth is nothing other than its rectitude.¹⁰

Scripture also requires that we speak of truth in the will and in action,¹¹ and these are analyzed in the same way. There is truth in a will as long as a rational creature wills "what he ought – that is, that for the sake of which he had received a will";¹² there is

truth in an action so long as the agent (whether rational or irrational) does what it ought to do, which is whatever it was created by God to do.¹³ Thus, as the student notes, truth in the will is just a special case of the truth of action.¹⁴ There is also a close connection between the truth of action and the truth of signification, as the teacher argues in Chapter 9: “since no one should do anything but what he ought to do, by the very fact that someone does something, he says and signifies that he ought to do it. And if he ought to do it, he says something true; but if he ought not, he lies.”

Thus far, Anselm’s discussion of truth poses no special philosophical difficulties (apart from the strangeness of the suggestion that natural-language statement-types are created by God). Truth is rectitude – in fact, Anselm defines truth as “rectitude perceptible by the mind alone.”¹⁵ Rectitude, in turn, is a matter of something’s doing or being what it ought to do or be. As applied to statements, thoughts, wills, and actions, this account of truth seems straightforward enough. But two further applications of the account will reveal deep philosophical puzzles beneath the superficial simplicity. When Anselm turns to the truth that is in the being of things, he finds that the notion of “what something ought to be” is unexpectedly complicated. And when he finally turns to the supreme Truth, God, he insists that God is rectitude but denies that we can ever correctly say that God “ought to be” anything whatever.

THE TRUTH IN THE BEING OF THINGS

Having analyzed the truth that is found in statements, opinion, the will, action, and the senses, Anselm turns in [Chapter 7](#) of *De Veritate* to a consideration of what he calls “the truth of the being of things.” The teacher asks, “Do you think anything is, in any time or place, that is not in the supreme Truth and did not receive its being, insofar as it has being, from the supreme Truth; or that it can be anything other than what it is in the supreme Truth?” The student replies, “That is unthinkable.” Now “is” and “being” are used very broadly here: Anselm has in mind not merely the existence of things, but their being the way they are, having the characteristics they have, and so forth. On this understanding of “is” and “being,” we can identify at least two distinct claims to which the student is agreeing:

- (1) Everything that exists (is a certain way, is the case) received its existence (its being that way, its being the case) from the supreme Truth.
- (2) Necessarily, everything that exists (is a certain way, is the case) exists (is that way, is the case) in the supreme Truth.

Claim (1) is simply an emphatic affirmation of God’s sovereignty and providence. Anselm’s formulation is, as always, very careful. He does not say that God *causes* the

being of all things, but that all things receive their being from God. For there are evils that God permits but does not bring about; but it is nevertheless legitimate, Anselm argues, to say that those evils are received from God.¹⁶

What (2) means is less clear. What exactly is it for something to “exist in” or to “be a certain way in” the supreme Truth? By way of an example, suppose John is young. According to (2), John is young in the supreme Truth. This cannot simply mean that God knows that John is young, or even that John’s youth exists as an object of awareness for the divine mind. For Anselm will argue that John’s being young is *correct* or *right* – that it is as it ought to be, and hence is *true* – because it is in the supreme Truth. Now it would make no sense to say that John’s being young is as it ought to be because God knows that John is young or because John’s youth is an object of awareness to the divine mind. The notion seems to be, rather, that John’s being young is in accordance with God’s plan or purpose. If this is a correct understanding of (2), then there is a close connection between (1) and (2). (1) says that things received their existence and their characteristics from God; (2) says that what they received from God necessarily accords with His plan for them. Thus, according to (2), there is rectitude in all things, because all things accord with God’s plan for them. Whatever is, is right.

In [Chapter 8](#) Anselm addresses an obvious objection. Both what God permits and what God causes equally ought to be, according to Anselm, because God in His perfection would not allow or cause anything that ought not to be. And yet among the things that God permits are evil actions. Hence, the student asks, “But how can we say, with respect to the truth of a thing, that whatever is ought to be, since there are many evil deeds that certainly ought not to be?” Anselm argues that such things both ought to be and ought not to be:

- T: I know you do not doubt that nothing is at all, unless God either causes or permits it . . . Will you dare to say that God causes or permits anything unwisely or badly?
- S: On the contrary, I contend that God always acts wisely and well.
- T: Do you think that something caused or permitted by such great goodness and wisdom ought not to be?
- S: What intelligent person would dare to think that?
- T: Therefore, both what comes about because God causes it and what comes about because God permits it ought equally to be.
- S: What you are saying is obviously true.

- T: Then tell me whether you think the effect of an evil will ought to be.
- S: That's the same as asking whether an evil deed ought to be, and no sensible person would concede that.
- T: And yet God permits some people to perform the evil deeds that their evil wills choose.
- S: If only He did not permit it so often!
- T: Then the same thing both ought to be and ought not to be. It ought to be, in that God, without whose permission it could not come about, acts wisely and well in permitting it; but if we consider the one whose evil will instigates the action, it ought not to be.

Anselm's position has some apparently unwelcome consequences. First, Anselm cannot argue that one of the ways of looking at a situation is privileged and thus mitigate the awkwardness of saying that the same action both ought to be and ought not to be. If there were a privileged way of looking at the situation, it would surely be God's way. But God looks at every situation in at least the same variety of ways that humans do. (To speak anthropomorphically, He must ask "Ought John to kill Samantha?" in one way when assessing His providential plan, and in quite another way when assessing the punishment that might be due to John.) Which way is relevant depends entirely on the circumstances in which, or the reasons for which, we want to know the answer to the question, "Ought S to have done X?" or "Ought S to do X?"

Since Anselm applies this analysis to "can" statements as well as to "ought" statements, the view has a second unwelcome consequence. Not only whether someone *ought to* perform a certain action but also whether someone *can* perform a certain action depends on the way in which one is considering the "can"-statement. It might be true, for example, that Gertrude can both wash her car tomorrow and refrain from washing her car tomorrow, when we ignore God's eternal plan. But when we assess the same thing while considering His plan, Gertrude can only do one or the other, depending on what God planned to permit.

One might object that Anselm need not embrace these consequences. Contrary to what Anselm seems to think, one might argue, in such cases we are not considering the same action in two different ways. Instead, we are considering two different actions. In

the first example, we are not evaluating John's murdering (considered morally) and John's murdering (considered in terms of providence); rather, we are evaluating John's murdering and God's permitting John to murder, which are clearly distinct actions. Unfortunately, Anselm cannot dissolve the apparent paradox so easily. For he is interested in whether these two actions ought to have occurred, and here we cannot assess God's action of permitting without considering what it is that He is permitting, namely, John's murdering of Samantha. And since whatever God permits ought to be, then John's murdering of Samantha ought to be.¹⁷ Yet, looked at in another way, it ought not to be. The requirement that we assign different truth values to one and the same statement depending on the ways in which the statement is considered cannot be eliminated after all.

So what is it to consider the truth of one and the same statement in different ways? It is to take into account different features or aspects of reality when assessing a sentence. One might want to argue that if this is all that is meant by "ways" of considering the truth of statements, then it is clear that there *is* a privileged way: the one in which we consider everything about how the world is. But Anselm cannot go along with this suggestion, since it implies that any judgment of the form "X ought not to be" is, if considered in the privileged way, false. For if we consider everything, then we consider God's plan; and if we do that, then whatever is the case ought to be the case. But then there seems to be little sense left in saying that one ought not to have murdered or lied or been spiteful to one's friends, because whatever one did is what God permitted one to do and therefore what – taking everything into account – one ought to have done. And clearly Anselm is not willing to strip moral judgments of their force in this way. So we are left with a theory of truth according to which one and the same statement is true or false depending on the context of assessment.¹⁸

In the end, this odd feature of Anselm's view is almost invisible in *De Veritate*. He rarely explicitly refers to the context in which he assesses the truth of normative and modal claims – perhaps because it is typically obvious which context is the relevant one given the discussion at hand. When there is ambiguity, Anselm is quick to let us know what the relevant context is. Nonetheless, the view that the truth value of normative and modal statements varies depending on the context of assessment has important implications for other areas of his thought. We do not have space in this essay to pursue those implications, but we will note that there can be no fully adequate account of Anselm's views on human freedom, grace, providence, and divine foreknowledge without a recognition that modal statements do not, for Anselm, have context-independent truth values. Indeed, if Anselm's perspectivalism can be defended, it opens up philosophically promising avenues for discussions of those perennially vexing issues.

THE SUPREME TRUTH

In *De Veritate* 2–9 Anselm examines a variety of truths and finds that each of them can be identified as rectitude. It is therefore no surprise that when he comes to God, the supreme Truth, at the beginning of Chapter 9, Anselm easily wins his student's agreement that the supreme Truth is rectitude. But Anselm immediately makes it clear that God cannot be rectitude in the same sense as all the other rectitudes:

- T: You will surely not deny that the supreme Truth is rectitude.
- S: Indeed, I cannot acknowledge it to be anything else.
- T: Note that, while all the rectitudes discussed earlier are rectitudes because the things in which they exist either are or do what they ought, the supreme Truth is not a rectitude because it ought to be or do anything. For all things are under obligations to it, but it is under no obligation to anything.¹⁹

By affirming that the supreme Truth is rectitude, Anselm completes his assimilation of all truths to rectitude. But by insisting that the rectitude of the supreme Truth is not the same as the rectitude of all inferior truths, he seems to run up against two problems. The first is what we shall call *the problem of significance*: what can Anselm *mean* by calling God the supreme Truth or rectitude? He cannot avoid such language, since both Scripture and the arguments of the *Monologion* require him to call God "Truth," and the earlier arguments of *De Veritate* require him to identify truth with rectitude. And yet the earlier sense of rectitude, according to which a thing has rectitude in virtue of its being what it ought to be or doing what it ought to do, cannot apply to God. So it is hard to see what significance Anselm can attach to this language that he now has no choice but to use.

The second problem is what we shall call *the problem of unity*: by insisting that God is not a truth or a rectitude in the same sense as all other truths or rectitudes, Anselm appears to abandon his stated aim of showing that "there is one truth in all true things." For the truth that we identify with God is not the same as the truth of statements, actions, and the other true things analyzed in the earlier chapters. Now recall the student's opening question: "Since we believe that God is truth, and we say that truth is in many other things, I would like to know whether, wherever truth is said to be, we must acknowledge that God is that truth." It appears that Anselm has now backed himself into such a corner that he must deny that God is the truth "wherever truth is said to be."

We shall begin with Anselm's solution to the problem of significance. Immediately after pointing out that the supreme Truth is rectitude, but a rectitude of quite a different sort from all the others, the teacher continues:

- T: Do you also see that this rectitude is the cause of all other truths and rectitudes, and nothing is the cause of it?
- S: I see that, and I notice that some of these other truths and rectitudes are merely effects, while others are both causes and effects. For example, the truth that is in the being of things is an effect of the supreme Truth, and it is in turn a cause of the truth of thoughts and statements; and the latter two truths are not a cause of any other truth.

This exchange strongly suggests that what we mean when we call God "Truth" is that he is the cause of the other truths.

This suggestion is confirmed by the new spin that Anselm gives to the argument from *Monologion* 18 with which the student had confronted him at the beginning of *De Veritate*. Anselm had argued from the truth of statements to the existence of a supreme Truth without beginning or end:

Let anyone who can do so think of this: when did it begin to be true, or when was it not true, that something was going to exist? Or when will it cease to be true, and no longer be true, that something existed in the past? But if neither of these can be thought, and neither statement can be true apart from truth, then it is impossible even to think that truth has a beginning or end.²⁰

Now that the student understands that the supreme Truth is the cause of other truths, Anselm says, he is in a position to appreciate the true force of that earlier argument:

When I asked, "when was it not true that something was going to exist?" I did not mean that this statement, asserting that something was going to exist in the future, was itself without a beginning, or that this truth was God.

Instead, what he meant was that no matter when the statement "Something is going to exist" might have been uttered, it would have been true. Therefore, the cause of its truth must always have existed. And, Anselm continues,

The same reasoning applies to a statement that says something existed in the past. Since it is inconceivable that this statement, if uttered, could lack truth, it must be the case that the supreme cause of its truth cannot be understood to have an end. For what makes it true to say that something existed in the past is the fact that something really did exist in the past; and the reason something existed in the past is that this is how things are in the supreme Truth.

So to argue that the supreme Truth is eternal is not to argue that some feature of statements is eternal, but that the cause of their truth is eternal. God is the supreme Truth because He is the cause of the truth of all other true things.

Having thus solved the problem of significance, Anselm turns to the problem of unity: “Let us . . . ask whether there is only one truth in all the things in which we say there is truth, or whether there are several truths, just as there are several things in which (as we have established) there is truth.”²¹ Suppose, for example, that “the rectitude of signification differs from rectitude of will because the one is in the will and the other in signification.” It would follow that “rectitude of signification has its being because of signification and varies according to signification.” The student replies:

So it does. For when a statement signifies that what-is is, or that what-is-not is not, the signification is correct; and it has been established that this is the rectitude without which there is no correct signification. If, however, the statement signifies that what-is-not is, or that what-is is not, or if it signifies nothing at all, there will be no rectitude of signification, which exists only in signification. Hence, the rectitude of signification has its being through signification and changes along with it.

The teacher quickly rejects this commonsensical position. The rectitude or truth of signification does not have its being through signification, but in fact is altogether independent of signification. For suppose (the teacher argues) that no one wills to signify what ought to be signified. Then there will be no signification, but “the rectitude in virtue of which it is right for what-ought-to-be-signified to be signified, and by which this is demanded, does not cease to exist.” The teacher concludes:

So when rectitude is present in signification, it is not because rectitude begins to exist in signification when someone signifies that what-is is, or that what-is-not is not; instead, it is because at that time signification comes about in accordance with a rectitude that always exists. And when rectitude is absent from signification, it is not because rectitude ceases to exist when signification is not what it should be or there

is no signification at all; instead, it is because at that time signification falls away from a rectitude that never fails.

Thus, the rectitude of signification does not depend on signification. And there is nothing distinctive about signification in this regard: rectitude of will does not depend on the will or rectitude of action on action. Rectitude does not depend on the things in which there is rectitude: there is one never-failing, unchangeable rectitude for all things in which we say there is truth or rectitude.

The conclusion that there is only one truth in all true things seems to come too quickly, since it is possible that the never-failing rectitude that makes it right for what-ought-to-be-signified to be signified is distinct from the never-failing rectitude that makes it right for what-ought-to-be-done to be done, and so on for each of the other sorts of rectitude discussed in *De Veritate*. In other words, the original question about whether there are distinct *species* of truth, corresponding to the distinct species of true things, is not answered by the teacher's discussion of the rectitude of signification, which seems designed to show that there are not distinct *instances* of a given species. Nonetheless, given what he has already said in discussing God as supreme Truth, Anselm is entitled to this conclusion. For we know that God is the cause of *all* the truths:

T: Do you also see that this rectitude is the cause of all other truths and rectitudes, and nothing is the cause of it?

S: I see that, and I notice that some of these other truths and rectitudes are merely effects, while others are both causes and effects. For example, the truth that is in the being of things is an effect of the supreme Truth, and it is in turn a cause of the truth of thoughts and statements; and the latter two truths are not a cause of any other truth.

So the one and only never-failing rectitude, in accordance with which whatever is right in signification, thought, action, or will comes to be, is God. The supreme Truth is in fact the only truth. As the student suggested at the outset, "wherever truth is said to be, we must acknowledge that God is that truth."

But then why, the student asks, "do we speak of the truth *of* this or that particular thing as if we were distinguishing different truths, when in fact there are not different truths for different things?" The teacher replies that such language is not strictly correct:

T: Truth is said improperly to be *of* this or that thing, since truth does not have its being

in or from or through the things in which it is said to be. But when things themselves are in accordance with truth, which is always present to those things that are as they ought to be, we speak of the truth of this or that thing – for example, the truth of the will or of action – in the same way in which we speak of the time of this or that thing despite the fact that there is one and the same time for all things that are temporally simultaneous, and that if this or that thing did not exist, there would still be time. For we do not speak of the time of this or that thing because time is in the things, but because they are in time. And just as time regarded in itself is not called the time of some particular thing, but we speak of the time of this or that thing when we consider the things that are in time, so also the supreme Truth as it subsists in itself is not the truth of some particular thing, but when something is in accordance with it, then it is called the truth or rectitude of that thing.

Note that Anselm's solution to the problem of unity is not a standard Platonic maneuver of the sort that we see in his account of goodness. That is, he is not arguing that since various things are true, there must be something that is true in the highest degree and has its truth from itself rather than from another.²² Anselm in fact never argues in this way that God is true, as he argues that God is just, good, and so forth. (The expression "true God" is common in Anselm in Christological contexts, but he seldom uses "true" of God predicatively.) So the unity of truth is not the unity of a property in its various instances, but strict numerical identity. There is one truth because Truth is God, who is one.

CONCLUSION

We now have a complete picture of Anselm's view of truth. "Wherever truth is said to be" – in statements, opinions, wills, actions, the senses, and the being of things – that truth is rectitude. Something has rectitude because it accords with its purpose. Something receives its purpose from whatever caused it. God causes all things. So whatever is said to be true is true in virtue of being caused by God in accordance with His will, and God is Truth because He causes all things and establishes the standards by which they are to be evaluated.

To a contemporary philosopher, Anselm's commitment to the unity of truth might well seem gratuitous. For one thing, we would not today speak of truth in wills, actions, the senses, and "the being of things," so the effort to try to capture all those uses of the word "true" in a single theory seems needlessly strained. And even in the cases where we would speak of truth – in statements and opinions – the elaborate theory Anselm

develops in the interest of a unified theory of truth adds unnecessary complexity to his promisingly commonsensical observation that a statement is true “when it signifies that what-is is.”

But in fact it is not so difficult to see how Anselm’s Grand Unified Theory of Truth emerges out of the deceptive simplicity of the Aristotelian commonplace. His first account of the truth of statements is that a statement’s truth is its correctness, its getting things right. But its getting things right is not simply a matter of its corresponding to the way things are: it is a matter of the statement’s *doing its proper job*. If a statement had some purpose other than saying that what-is is, its saying that what-is is would not be any reason to call the statement correct. (We call a clock “right” when the time it tells is the actual time, but only because clocks are meant for telling time.) Once Anselm starts attending to the notion of “getting things right” in this sense, however, it is perfectly natural for him to ask about the proper job of the will, of actions, and of all the other things whose rectitude he investigates in *De Veritate*. In every case, the proper job is the job assigned by God. All sorts of things can therefore be said to be right or correct or true if they do the job assigned them by God. Contemporary philosophers would not put it that way, of course; we would prefer to say that things “are as they ought to be,” rather than that they are correct or true. But our linguistic conventions should not be allowed to obscure Anselm’s fundamental point, which is that the truth we find in statements is not a property limited to the domain of language.

NOTES

1. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 4.7 (1011b 25–28). All translations are our own.
2. *De Ver.* 2. We will hyphenate “what-is” and “what-is-not” for ease of reading.
3. *De Ver.* 1.
4. G. R. Evans, *Anselm and a New Generation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 136.
5. *De Ver.* 2.
6. This is not to say that creatures do not act purposively – some of them obviously do – but that in acting purposively they perform actions, make statements, and so forth,

whose *genuine* purposes are determined, not by their own wills, but by God's creative activity. For example, *my* purpose in making a statement may be to hurt a colleague's feelings, but it does not follow that that is what the statement is actually *for*.

7. Although Anselm does not state explicitly that natural-language statement-types were made by God, Anselm describes the powers and purposes of statements using exactly the same sort of language he uses to describe the powers and purposes of creatures generally. Thus, statements "received the power to signify" (*accepit significare*) just as an angel created by God "received the power to will" (*accepit velle*). And a statement's signifying what it received the power to signify is "natural" – Anselm's usual word for what follows from the nature that God gave a thing – just as, if an angel received only the power to will happiness, its willing happiness would be "natural." In *De Ver.* 5, in fact, Anselm expressly notes that the invariable truth of statements is an instance of the rectitude that actions have when a thing acts in accordance with the nature that God gave it: "For just as fire, when it heats, does the truth, since it received the power to heat from the one who gave it being, so also the statement 'It is day' does the truth when it signifies that it is day, whether it is actually day or not, since it received naturally the power to do this."

8. Anselm's usual word, as we have noted, is *oratio*. *Propositio* occurs a few times in *De Veritate*, but it is not distinguished in sense from *oratio*.

9. We take the expression "lush and giddy platonism" from William E. Mann, "Simplicity and Properties: A Reply to Morris," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986): 343–53, at 348.

10. *De Ver.* 3. Note that if Anselm thought of propositions as a kind of mental language, as some later medieval thinkers would, then he would have no need to suppose that God creates natural-language statement-types. For then utterances would express mental language or thought, which is the same in all human beings because it is a function of the powers we were given by God. In this way the truth of statements could be analyzed in terms of the truth of thought or mental language. Unfortunately, Anselm does not think of propositions in this way.

11. For truth in the will the teacher appeals to John 8:44, which says that the Devil "did not abide in the truth." "It was only in his will," the teacher says, "that he was in the truth and then abandoned the truth." For truth in action the teacher appeals to John 3:21: "He who does the truth comes to the light."

12. *De Ver.* 4.

13. *De Ver.* 5.

14. *De Ver.* 5.

15. The qualification “perceptible by the mind alone” excludes rectitude that can be perceived by the senses, such as the rectitude (that is, the straightness) of a stick.

16. See *De Casu Diab.* 20.

17. Would Anselm then infer that John ought to kill Samantha? The answer is not altogether clear from the text, but we are inclined to say yes. Anselm acknowledges that expressions of the form “S ought to Φ ” do not always imply that S is under an obligation to Φ . So he can consistently affirm both that John is not under an obligation to kill Samantha (indeed, that he is under an obligation not to kill her) and that he ought to kill her.

18. It is important not to confuse this claim with the superficially similar (and relatively uncontroversial) claim that the propositional content, and hence the truth-value, of an utterance can change depending on the circumstances of the utterance. Anselm holds the much stronger and more counterintuitive view that one and the same utterance, with just one determinate propositional content and in one determinate set of circumstances, can have different truth-values according to different ways of assessing the utterance.

19. More literally: “. . . the supreme Truth is not a rectitude because it owes something. For all things owe [something] to it, but it owes nothing to anything.”

20. *Mon.* 18, quoted verbatim in *De Ver.* 1.

21. *De Ver.* 13.

22. For the argument concerning goodness, see Jeffrey Brower’s contribution to this volume.

10 Anselm on ethics

Jeffrey E. Brower

There is a real question about whether Anselm developed anything like a systematic ethical theory.¹ Indeed, scholars have sometimes suggested that his treatment of ethical matters consists in little more than recapitulation of ethical principles implicit in Scripture or transmitted to him by Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Boethius.² The truth of the matter, however, is quite the opposite. Although it is easy to overlook the systematic nature of Anselm's ethical theorizing, as well as its genuine originality, his contribution to medieval ethical theory is considerable. Admittedly, none of his philosophical or theological works is devoted to the systematic presentation of ethical issues; nor is there much novelty to be found in them at the level of specific ethical principles. Nonetheless, it is possible to extract from his work something that moral philosophers today would recognize as a worked-out ethical theory – one that includes a sophisticated moral metaphysics, moral semantics, and moral psychology.³

For purposes of classification, we can divide ethical theories into two main categories, *teleological* and *deontological*, each of which admits of further subdivision.⁴ Teleological (or good-based) theories attempt to explain the moral value of actions in terms of their conduciveness to some ultimate end or good state of affairs (*telos* in Greek): actions that promote this end are morally good, right, or obligatory, whereas actions that obstruct it, or promote its opposite, are morally bad, wrong, or prohibited. Nowadays the most familiar forms of teleological theory are ones that – like the utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill or G. E. Moore – identify the end of morality in terms of the goodness for all sentient creatures or the universe as a whole. During Anselm's time, however, the only prominent forms were those that – like the eudaimonism of Plato and Aristotle – require agents to aim at their own individual happiness or well-being (*eudaimonia* in Greek), where this is taken to include the good of others and to involve the possession of the moral and intellectual virtues.

By contrast with teleological theories, deontological (or duty-based) theories attempt to explain the moral value of actions in terms of their rightness or obligatoriness, a property to be distinguished (at least conceptually) from conduciveness to the well-being of any sentient creatures or the universe they inhabit. Because deontological theories place great emphasis on duty or obligation (*deon* in Greek), they typically also stress the need for proper motives or intentions, requiring agents not only to perform the right action, but also to perform it for the sake of its rightness. Some familiar twentieth-century forms of

deontology – such as the intuitionism of H. A. Prichard and W. D. Ross – claim that rightness or obligatoriness is a primitive or unanalyzable property of actions to which we have direct, intuitive access. Others – such as the formalism of Immanuel Kant – attempt to analyze the rightness or obligatoriness of actions in terms of their formal features (e.g. their universalizability). During Anselm's time, there do not appear to have been any worked-out forms of deontology. Indeed, given the prominence of eudaimonism throughout the Middle Ages, deontological theory is often regarded as a late development, associated with the attempts of some late-medieval philosophers to analyze the rightness of certain actions in terms of their conformity to the absolute will of God.

One of the most distinctive features of Anselm's ethical theory is the extent to which it succeeds in combining elements of theories falling in both categories. At bottom, I shall argue, Anselm's theory is deontological in nature: unlike the eudaimonism characteristic of this period, it separates morality from happiness (at least conceptually) and emphasizes the need for agents to be motivated by justice rather than happiness. This, in itself, is historically significant, since it is typically the late-medieval philosopher, John Duns Scotus (d. 1308), who is credited with being the first medieval thinker to develop a distinctively non-Aristotelian or duty-based conception of morality.⁵ Despite the deontological orientation of Anselm's ethical views, his account also incorporates central elements of medieval eudaimonistic ethical theory. Like other medieval eudaimonists, Anselm devotes considerable attention to the nature of happiness or the human good, ultimately identifying it with a form of union with God. Moreover, he argues at length that right action necessarily leads to happiness (at least in the long run) and that something like Aristotelian virtue has an essential role to play in morality.⁶

The main features of Anselm's ethical theory can all be seen as deriving from his distinctive conception of morality in terms of justice rather than happiness. My discussion, therefore, is organized accordingly. I begin with a brief examination of Anselm's views about the nature of justice, and its place in his theory of value generally. This examination will provide us with Anselm's answers to some familiar metaethical questions – that is, questions about the nature of moral language and the properties in virtue of which such language applies to the world. With answers to these questions in hand, I then turn to the details of Anselm's normative views and moral psychology – that is, to his views about the conditions under which moral properties are exemplified and the psychology required to explain our motivation with respect to them.⁷

Because the elements of Anselm's ethical theory are scattered throughout a large number of sources, ranging over a host of topics, and because they seem to me to show no significant change over time, I will draw freely on his entire corpus in my discussion. Moreover, because his views are interesting, in part, for the extent to which they succeed

at integrating aspects of eudaimonistic ethical theory, I will also compare them, wherever appropriate, with a standard medieval form of eudaimonism – helping myself to the succinct formulations it receives at the hands of philosophers such as Aquinas and Scotus, rather than trying to reconstruct it in every case from Anselm’s own sources.⁸

ANSELM’S METAETHICS

Throughout his works Anselm assumes that moral statements, of the form “*X* is good” or “*X* is right,” are either true or false (and hence have *cognitive* value), and also that their truth or falsity is independent of the (objects of) beliefs, desires, and other psychological states of individual human beings (and hence that the cognitive value of moral statements is an *objective* matter). Incontemporary terms, therefore, he accepts both cognitivism and objectivism in ethics. In this respect, Anselm does not differ from most other medieval philosophers, who also assume that moral statements are objectively true or false. But there is another respect in which he does differ from most other medieval philosophers: his views about the nature and types of properties that must be appealed to in order to explain the objective truth or falsity of moral statements.

Types of value

According to a standard medieval form of eudaimonism, all value is to be explained in terms of goodness, and all goodness is to be explained in terms of being. According to this theory, therefore, the only properties that must be invoked to explain the objective truth or falsity of moral statements are the natural properties in virtue of which things exist or have being.⁹ Since the distinctive nature of Anselm’s views can be brought into relief by contrasting them with this sort of medieval theory, it will be useful to spell out a few of its details.

Eudaimonism, of the standard medieval variety, is grounded in a form of universal teleology. Things belong to their specific natural or metaphysical kinds in virtue of possessing certain natural capacities or dispositions (namely, those that are definitive of their kind). Thus, things belong to the kind *plant* if they possess all and only the capacities definitive of plants (such as the capacity to take in nutrition, reproduce, and grow); whereas they belong to the kind *human being* if they possess all and only the capacities definitive of human beings (such as the capacity for rational cognition and volition). Now, to the extent that things have the capacities associated with a specific kind, they are said to *exist* and hence to *have being* as members of that kind. Thus, things are said to have being *as plants* just in case they possess the capacities definitive of plants; whereas they are said to have being *as humans* just in case they possess the capacities definitive of human beings; and likewise for other kinds of things (e.g. cats,

dogs, horses). We might call this sort of being “essential being,” since it is associated with the nature or essence of a thing, placing it within its specific metaphysical kind.

In virtue of possessing their distinctive capacities, things not only have essential being (i.e. existence as a member of some kind); they also have an inclination to a set of further states or activities. Moreover, it is the actualization of these further states or activities that constitutes a thing’s being fully developed as a member of its kind. Thus, a fully developed plant or animal will possess not only the capacities definitive of its kind, but also the corresponding states or conditions (in the case of human beings, they are called “virtues”) that constitute the actualization of these capacities. Because it is typically an “accidental” or contingent matter whether a thing possesses such further states or conditions, medieval eudaimonists conceive of them as Aristotelian accidents – that is, as properties falling within one of Aristotle’s nine accidental categories. Moreover, because of their special relationship to the kind-defining capacities of their possessor, medieval eudaimonists also think of such states or conditions as giving their possessor additional being or actuality as members of their specific kinds. Hence, a fully developed plant or animal, they say, not only has existence as a plant or an animal, but also has “more being” as a plant or animal than other, less developed members of their kind. We might call this second sort of being “kind-relative accidental being” – *accidental* because it contrasts with *essential* being, and *kind-relative* because it contrasts with accidental being (such as hair color or blood type in human beings) that does not directly contribute to something’s being an ideal member of its kind.¹⁰

As this brief sketch makes clear, medieval eudaimonists conceive of being as involving more than just existence. On the one hand, they think of something as *having being* in virtue of existing. Like most contemporary philosophers, moreover, they think of this type of being as an all-or-nothing affair: something exists (full stop) just in case it has essential being – that is, just in case it has the capacities definitive of some natural or metaphysical kind. On the other hand, however, medieval eudaimonists also think of something as *having being* to the extent that it actualizes the capacities associated with its kind – that is to say, to the extent that it has *kind-relative accidental being*. In this respect, they differ from most contemporary philosophers. For in conceiving of kind-relative accidental being as a type of *being* – despite the fact that, unlike existence, it is not an all-or-nothing affair, but rather comes in degrees – medieval eudaimonists are led to say that being itself comes in degrees. Even so, it should be clear that the sense in which they think being comes in degrees is quantitative rather than qualitative. Things have being, in the first place, in virtue of existing, and they have “more (or less) being” to the extent that they have quantitatively more (or less) kind-relative accidental being – that is, quantitatively more (or less) of the accidents required to complete them as members of their kind.¹¹

According to medieval eudaimonists, the complete development of a thing is not only *an end* toward which its nature inclines it, but also *the good* for things of that kind. Like being, therefore, they regard goodness as kind-relative and degreed: to the extent that a plant (or human being) is fully developed, to that same extent it has both *being* and *goodness* as a plant (or human being). In the ideal case, plants (or human beings) will have not only the essential being associated with their specific kind, but also *all* the kind-relative accidental being it is possible for them to have. That is to say, they will be good as plants (or human beings) *in every respect*. In the limiting case, by contrast a plant (or human being) will have *only* the essential being associated with its kind, and hence be good as a plant (or human being) *only in one respect*. Finally, in most if not all actual cases, plants (or human beings) will have the essential being associated with their kind and *some but not all* of the kind-relative accidental being it is possible for them to have, and hence be good as plants (or human beings) *in some respects but not others*.

Anselm's ethical theory shares much in common with that of the medieval eudaimonists. Like them, he admits a type of value that supervenes on being: things are good, he says, to the extent that they have being (*Mon.* 1). Like the medieval eudaimonists, moreover, Anselm recognizes two different ways in which things can have being, and hence two corresponding types of goodness. On the one hand, he says, things can have goodness just in virtue of possessing a nature or essence (where a nature or essence is that which accounts for a thing's natural powers or capacities). This sort of goodness appears to be what I called "essential goodness" above. On the other hand, he says, things can also have goodness in virtue of actualizing the capacities or powers associated with their nature (*De Casu Diab.* 12). This appears to be what I called "kind-relative accidental goodness."

In ethical contexts, Anselm has little to say about essential goodness, presumably because insofar as it derives from our nature, it is not something over which we have control. The notion of kind-relative accidental goodness receives more attention from him. Unlike the medieval eudaimonists, however, he is prepared to distinguish two different types of goodness here too, one of which he refers to as "advantage," the other as "justice":

Setting aside the fact that every nature is called "good," there are two goods, and two evils contrary to them, that we commonly speak of. One good is that which is called "justice," and whose contrary evil is injustice. The other good is that which can be called "the advantageous," or so it seems to me, and the evil opposed to it is the disadvantageous.

(*De Casu Diab.* 12; S I: 255.4–8)

As passages such as this one help to make clear, Anselm recognizes three types of value or goodness: namely, essential goodness and two types of kind-relative accidental goodness, advantage and justice. As we shall see, “advantage” is Anselm’s name for the type of kind-relative accidental goodness recognized by medieval eudaimonists – that is, the value associated with a thing’s complete actualization – whereas “justice” is his name for a type of accidental goodness peculiar to human beings (or rational agents). Both types of value qualify as “accidental” because whether, and to what extent, a rational agent possesses them is a contingent or accidental matter. From the ethical perspective, moreover, they are the only really interesting types of value – not only because their possession is under the agent’s control, but also because they can, at least from the agent’s perspective, come into conflict. According to Anselm, an agent possesses justice if and only if that agent does what it ought to do (or fulfills its duty); but duty, he thinks, can sometimes require agents to sacrifice advantage.

We shall see more clearly below how Anselm understands the relation between justice and advantage, when we turn to his normative views concerning the conditions under which each of these properties is possessed (see pp. 234ff.). Before turning to these conditions, however, it will be useful to clarify how Anselm conceives of the nature of the properties themselves. Does he think of them as primitive, unanalyzable properties (as moral intuitionists such as Prichard and Ross do)? Or does he rather think of them (in the spirit of a Kant or Scotus) as somehow analyzable in terms of other properties, say universalizability or conformity with divine commands? In order to address these questions clearly, it will be useful to impose some terminological uniformity. Hereafter, therefore, I shall use the term “value” (rather than “goodness”) to refer to the genus of which essential goodness, advantage, and justice are species; and I shall use the term “goodness” to refer to essential goodness and advantage, referring to the third species of value simply as “justice.” Eventually we shall see that when Anselm himself wants to speak about value in general, and hence about the genus to which goodness and justice belong, he introduces another evaluative term – namely, “rightness.”

The nature of value

As we have seen, medieval eudaimonists admit one fundamental type of value, goodness, which is kind-relative and admits of degrees. Because they regard this type of value as “supervening on,” or explicable in terms of, the natural properties in virtue of which things have being, they typically deny that goodness is anything ontologically over and above such properties. In other words, they conceive of goodness as “multiply realizable” – that is, as a functional property realized by the different natural properties in virtue of which different things are completed as members of their kind. In conceiving of goodness in this way, many medieval eudaimonists take themselves to be following Aristotle, who famously rejects the Platonic view that we must admit a Form of

goodness in which all good things participate.¹²

As we have also seen, Anselm too admits a type of goodness that supervenes on being, a type that is both kind-relative and comes in degrees. Unlike medieval eudaimonists, however, he thinks we must recognize a distinct Form or property for such goodness. Indeed, in *Monologion*, he claims that we must recognize a distinct Form wherever we have a property admitting of degrees, introducing the following anti-Aristotelian (or Platonic) principle:

(P1)

Whenever two (or more) things can be said to be *F* to the same or different degree, we must understand these things as being *F* by virtue of participating in something like the Platonic Form or standard of *F-ness*.¹³

His paradigm example of things satisfying this principle is that of just things:

Whenever things are said to be equally just, or more or less just, in comparison with one another, they can be understood as just only through justice, which is not different in the diverse things.

(*Mon.* 1; S I: 14.13–15)

But as he immediately goes on to say, the same principle applies to good things as well:

But, then, since it is certain that all good things, if they are compared with one other, are either equally or unequally good, it is necessary that all good things are good through something understood to be the same in the diverse things.

(*Mon.* 1; S I: 14.15–17)

In addition to (P1), Anselm also thinks we must endorse another broadly Platonic principle:

(P2)

The Form of *F-ness* must itself be *F* – indeed, *F* through itself – since it is the source of the *F-ness* of all other things.

Anselm makes (P2) explicit in the case of goodness: “Now who would doubt that this thing, through which all goods exist, is itself a great good?” And since he takes this Form, as well as every other, to reside somehow in God, he concludes that what we say about goodness must be said of God: “Therefore, He is good through Himself, since every good exists through Him” (*Mon.* 1; *S I*: 15.4–7). And the same, he says, applies to the Form of justice.

As the foregoing helps to make clear, we must distinguish on Anselm’s view the goodness or justice of *Forms* from the goodness or justice of *things participating in them*. Unlike some Platonists, Anselm never shrinks from saying that things other than the Form of goodness or justice can truly be good or just. Nonetheless, he is committed to saying that the goodness or justice of such things is nothing but their standing in a certain relation to these Forms (namely, the relation of participation). But what about the rightness or goodness of the Forms or standards themselves? Anselm does not tell us very much about them, but what he does say – that they are good and just “through” themselves – certainly suggests that they are good and just, respectively, solely in virtue of being what they are. Moreover, since Anselm says that each of these Forms or standards somehow resides in God, we can infer that God, too, must be regarded as good or just solely in virtue of what he is.

At this point a question, inspired by Plato’s *Euthyphro*, arises about how Anselm understands the relationship between the standards of goodness or justice and God. In locating these standards in God, does Anselm mean to be articulating some type of divine-command theory, as his late-medieval admirer, John Duns Scotus, did? That is to say, does he think that things are good or just merely because they conform to God’s will, or does he rather think that they conform to God’s will because they are good or just?

Anselm is aware of the need to answer this sort of question. As it turns out, he does think that whatever God wills is just or right and whatever He does not will – or wills against – is unjust or wrong. But as he points out, it does not follow from this that something is just or right simply because God wills it: “When it is said ‘what God wills is just, and what He does not will is not just,’ this must not be understood to mean that if God were to will anything inappropriate, it would be just *because* He willed it” (*Cur Deus Homo* 1.12; *S II*: 70.14–17). This passage certainly suggests that Anselm rejects any straightforward identification of justice or rightness with what God wills. Indeed, on the basis of what he says here, it is natural to suppose that he would reject *any* type of divine-command theory of value, and hence to conclude that insofar as standards of value reside in God, they must reside not in His will or other psychological states, but in His nature, where this is conceived of as utterly distinct from any psychological states.

The picture that emerges from this passage is complicated, however, by the fact that, like other medieval philosophers and theologians, Anselm accepts the doctrine of divine simplicity. According to this doctrine, God is an absolutely simple being, devoid of any distinct metaphysical parts, properties, or constituents. The doctrine leads Anselm not only to deny any real distinction between God and His nature or will, but also to deny any real distinction between God and any of the Forms or standards residing in Him. Thus, comparing God's justice to the justice of a human being, he says:

A human being cannot *be* justice, but it can *have* justice. Consequently, a just human being is not understood as existent justice, but rather as having justice. By contrast, the supreme nature cannot properly be said to *have* justice, but rather to *exist as* justice. Therefore, when it is said to be just, it is properly understood as existent justice.

(*Mon.* 16; *S I*: 30.20–23)

Insofar as Anselm's rejection of divine-command theory appears to require a real distinction between the divine nature and will, passages like this one might seem problematic. After all, if God is identical both with His nature and with the standard of justice, and each is in turn identical with His will, then it might appear that He is committed to some form of divine-command theory after all.¹⁴ I strongly suspect, however, that Anselm would deny the validity of this last inference. Even if God is identical both with the standard of justice and with His will, there is still a *conceptual* distinction to be drawn between the two, so that it is not *qua* participating in God's will that something is right or just, but *qua* participating in the Form of justice. And this, Anselm may assume, is all that is needed to avoid commitment to any type of divine-command theory.

The assumption that we can distinguish (at least conceptually) which Form a given thing participates in, even if all Forms are identical with God, seems to be required for the success of Anselm's project as a whole. For as we shall see, in the special case of the will (and the agents who possess it), he wants to maintain that a thing can participate in justice without participating in goodness, despite the fact that God is identical with each. This is not the place to pursue the doctrine of divine simplicity in detail. Nonetheless, it must be recognized as an important element of Anselm's ethical theory, not only for the reason just given, but also because one of its consequences – namely, that God is identical with the standard of justice – will become important later on, when I examine Anselm's views about moral motivation.

In the end, therefore, I think it is fair to say that Anselm's meta-ethical views commit him to a type of theistic Platonism, which we may summarize as follows:

Anselm's theistic Platonism

Anselm's theistic Platonism

- (i) There are Forms of goodness and justice.
- (ii) These Forms (like all others) exist in God – or rather, given divine simplicity, are identical with God, though they can be conceptually (but not really) distinguished from His will and other psychological states.
- (iii) These Forms are good or just solely in virtue of being what they are, whereas all other things are good or just in virtue of, and to the extent that, they participate in them.

Anselm's commitment to (i) and (iii) distinguishes him from those Aristotelians who deny that there are Forms for any fundamental types of value. By contrast, his commitment to (ii) distinguishes him from those medievals (such as Scotus) who attempt to explain at least certain types of value in terms of divine commands. Indeed, the conjunction of all three commitments seems to align Anselm with recent moral theorists, such as Prichard and Ross, who think of the fundamental types of value as irreducible or unanalyzable – though even here there are differences, since Anselm thinks of creaturely value in terms of irreducible *relations* rather than *properties*.

Anselm's theistic Platonism leaves unresolved certain questions that we might expect a metaethical account of his sort to answer. For example, how exactly are we supposed to conceive of the genus of value? What do all species of this genus have in common, and what are the *differentiae* by which they are distinguished? Anselm does have answers to these questions. But since they emerge only in the context of his normative ethics and moral psychology, I shall hold off presenting them until we have had a chance to see the basic contours of his views in each of these areas.

THE ROOTS OF ANSELM'S NORMATIVE ETHICS AND MORAL PSYCHOLOGY

In the course of examining Anselm's views about justice and goodness, an account of the conditions under which these properties are exemplified has begun to emerge. A thing can be said to exemplify justice if and only if it is doing what it ought to be doing, or fulfilling its duty. By contrast, a thing exemplifies goodness if and only if it is a fully developed member of its kind. Now, since being complete as a member of one's kind is just a matter of actualizing the natural powers or capacities distinctive of that kind – say, the

capacity for nutrition in the case of plants, or to be strong and swift in the case of horses (cf. *Mon.* 2) – the conditions for possessing goodness are fairly clear (or at least as clear as the theory of natural kinds underlying it). But what is involved in a thing’s *doing what it ought to be doing*, and hence in the conditions for possessing justice? As medieval eudaimonists see it, when a human being has done all that is required for it to be complete as a member of its kind, there is a clear sense in which it has done what it “ought” to do. Indeed, this appears to be all there is to the notion of obligation or rightness for medieval eudaimonists.¹⁵ Assuming, however, that Anselm really takes justice to be a type of value distinct from goodness, this can not be what he has in mind when he speaks of obligation. But then what does he have in mind? How are we to distinguish the conditions for possessing justice from the conditions for possessing goodness? The rest of this chapter is largely given over to answering these questions. In the remainder of this section, I identify the general form that these answers take; in the following section, I fill them out in further detail.

Rightness, goodness, and justice

In order to determine Anselm’s views about justice and its relation to goodness, we must turn to his account of rightness in general. As I indicated in the discussion of Anselm’s metaethics, “rightness” is the name he gives to the genus of which both goodness and justice are species. Hence, his discussions of the nature of rightness are the natural place to look for an account of the difference between these two species – in particular, the different conditions required for their possession.

Anselm’s only extended treatment of rightness, and the conditions under which its various species are possessed, occurs in his *De Veritate*. This text is one of three dialogues “pertaining to the Study of Holy Scripture” (*De Ver.* preface). As its title indicates, the topic of *De Veritate* is truth, but the dialogue covers much more than philosophers now associate with this topic.

The dialogue opens with a student, perhaps one of Anselm’s own students, asking him about the relationship between God and truth:

Student: Since we believe that God is truth, and we say that truth is in many other things, I would like to know whether we ought to acknowledge that, wherever truth is said to be, God is that truth.

(*De Ver.* 1; S I: 176.4–6)

No doubt the student's question is prompted by passages of Scripture such as John 14:6, where Christ asserts "I am the way, *the truth*, and the life," and the extended reflections on such passages one can find in authorities such as Augustine.¹⁶ As Anselm sees it, the student's question must be ultimately answered affirmatively. In the last chapter of the dialogue, he argues that since all true things are true by participating in the Form of Truth, and since this Form resides in God – or given divine simplicity, is identical with God – true things are true by participating in God. Hence, in every case God is their truth or the Form by which they are true (*De Ver.* 13). Rather than begin the dialogue with an affirmative answer to the student's question, however, Anselm approaches the issue indirectly, attempting to show first that truth is identical with rightness.¹⁷ This enables him to introduce an elaborate theory of truth and value, without which he thinks a straight affirmative answer to the student's question would be unacceptable.¹⁸ Since the general theory of truth and value will be important for understanding Anselm's views about justice and its relation to goodness, we must begin by examining it.

In order to see the connection between truth and rightness in general, Anselm asks us to consider the case of truth in statements, the most familiar bearers of truth. The key to understanding the truth of statements, he suggests, lies in understanding their purpose. By "purpose" here Anselm appears to mean *that end or good toward which a thing's nature directs it*. Since to be a statement, on his view, is just to be a certain kind of sentence or proposition – one that has the capacity to be true or false – he says that the purpose of statements is to correspond to reality.¹⁹ Thus, the purpose of an affirmative statement, he says, is to signify as being the case what is the case, whereas that of a negative statement is to signify as not being the case what is not the case (*De Ver.* 2).

Having thus identified the purpose of statements, Anselm proceeds to argue that when they are fulfilling it – that is, when they are actually corresponding to reality – they are doing what they "ought" to do, or what it is "right" for things of their kind to do, and hence possess rightness. But since statements are also true, and hence possess truth, under precisely the same conditions, he claims that their rightness *is* their truth:

TEACHER: For what purpose is an affirmation made?

STUDENT: For the purpose of signifying as being the case what is the case.

T: So it ought to do that. – S: Certainly.

T: So when it signifies as being the case what is the case, it signifies what it ought to.

- S: Clearly
- T: And when it signifies what it ought to, it signifies rightly. – S: Yes.
- T: Now when it signifies rightly, its signification is right. – S: No doubt about it.
- T: So when it signifies as being the case what is the case, its signification is true.
- S: That follows.
- T: Furthermore, when it signifies as being the case what is the case, its signification is true.
- S: Indeed it is both right and true when it signifies as being the case what is the case.
- T: Then its being right is the same thing as its being true: that is, its signifying as being the case what is the case. –
- S: Indeed, they are the same.
- T: So its truth is nothing other than its rightness.
- S: Now I see clearly that this kind of truth [i.e. the truth of statements] is rightness. (*De Ver.* 2; S I: 17.8.8–26)

There are obvious problems with the argument that emerges from this passage. For one thing it appears to be of the following form:

- (1) A statement has rightness just in case it corresponds to reality (since in that case it is fulfilling its purpose and hence doing what it ought to do).
- (2) But a statement is also true (or has truth) just in case it corresponds to reality.
- ∴ (3) The truth of a statement is its rightness.

But this form of argument is invalid. Even if the conditions under which statements possess the properties of truth and rightness are the same, it does not follow – at least without further assumptions that Anselm does not provide here – that their truth and rightness are identical. (Consider the analogous properties of being a creature with a heart

and being a creature with a kidney, which are traditionally spoken of as being exemplified under the same conditions.)

But even setting aside the form of the argument, one might be skeptical of the account of truth that emerges from it. According to it, truth (or rightness) is not to be *identified* with the correspondence that true statements have to reality; rather it is a property or feature that true statements have *in virtue of* such correspondence. As indicated above, however, Anselm thinks of truth as a Platonic Form (or aspect of God) in which true things participate. Hence, the truth (or rightness) of statements, on his view, is nothing but their standing in an appropriate relation to the Form or standard of Truth, which is God Himself!

If the foregoing argument were all Anselm had to offer on behalf of the identity of truth and rightness, the thesis itself might seem to have very little going for it. I suspect, however, that the argument stated above is not what explains Anselm's sympathy for the general thesis; rather it is his sympathy for the general thesis that explains his acceptance of the argument, along with the consequences that follow from it. But what, then, explains his sympathy? Anselm himself seems to provide the answer when he points out what he takes to be the greatest virtue of this thesis, namely its ability to make sense of the fact that Scripture applies the notion of truth to non-linguistic items such as the will and to action:

The Truth Itself [i.e. Christ] claims that there is truth in the will when he says that the Devil "did not remain steadfast in the truth" [John 8:44]. For it was only in his will that he was in the truth and then abandoned the truth.

(*De Ver.* 4; S I: 180.21–23)

We must equally believe that there is truth in action as well, just as the Lord says: "He who does evil hates the light" [John 3:20], and "He who does the truth comes to the light" [John 3:21].

(*De Ver.* 5; S I: 181.12–14)

Taken on their own, passages such as these might seem puzzling. But as Anselm points out, on the assumption that truth is identical with rightness, their sense becomes perfectly clear. Thus, in the case of the will, he says:

If [the Devil] was in rightness and in the truth so long as he willed what he ought to will – namely, that for the sake of which he had received a will – and if he abandoned rightness and truth when he willed what he ought not to will, then we can understand truth in this case as nothing other than rightness, since both truth and rightness in his will were nothing other than his willing what he ought to will.

(*De Ver.* 4; S I: 181.4–8)

Likewise in the case of truth in action:

If doing evil and doing the truth are opposites, as the Lord indicates when He says “He who does evil hates the light” and “He who does the truth comes to the light,” then doing the truth is the same as doing good, since doing good and doing evil are contraries. Therefore, if doing the truth and doing good are opposed to the same thing, they are not diverse in their signification. Now everyone agrees that he who does what he ought to do, does good and what is right (*rectitudinem facit*). From this it follows that doing what is right is doing the truth, since it is clear that to do the truth is to do good, and to do good is to do what is right. So nothing is clearer than that the truth of an action is its rightness.

(*De Ver.* 5; S I: 181.19–28)

In the end, therefore, the identification of truth with rightness seems to be justified, for Anselm, not only – nor even primarily – because of the argument given above, but rather because it provides us with a single, unified account of truth that can be applied to such disparate cases as truth in statements, will, actions, as well as various other cases (cf. *De Ver.* 3; 6–7).

Be this as it may, the important question for present purposes is what this general account of truth or rightness has to do with Anselm’s ethical theory. So far, it does not seem to have helped us make much progress toward answering our original question about the relationship between the two species of rightness, namely, goodness and justice. Indeed, from what we have just seen of Anselm’s general account of rightness, it might appear that no such answer could be forthcoming. For what the foregoing account suggests, if anything, is that Anselm’s notion of rightness captures nothing more than the eudaimonist notion of goodness. After all, Anselm tells us that something possesses rightness just in case it is doing what it ought to do. But according to the general account this is nothing but its fulfilling the purpose dictated by its nature – which just appears to be the conditions under which the eudaimonist says that a thing possesses goodness.²⁰ What we still want to know, therefore, is whether there is anything in Anselm’s

discussion of rightness to ground the distinction he draws in his metaethical discussions between goodness and justice.

Anselm provides the beginnings of an answer in [Chapter 12](#) of *De Veritate*, where he specifically turns to the question of justice. In its ordinary sense, he tells us there, justice is that species of rightness that “deserves praise, just as its opposite, injustice, deserves reproach.” He then proceeds to argue that rightness of this sort must be identified with rightness of will:

- T: Since all justice is rightness, the justice that makes praiseworthy the one who preserves it does not exist anywhere at all except in rational natures.
- S: That must be right.
- T: Where, then, do you think this justice exists in human beings, who are rational?
- S: Either in the will, or in knowledge, or in action.
- T: If someone understands correctly or acts correctly, but does not will correctly, will anyone praise him for his justice?
- S: No.
- T: Therefore, this justice is not rightness of knowledge or rightness of action, but *rightness of will*. (*De Ver.* 12; S I: 193.4–13)

Of course, the mere fact that Anselm identifies justice with rightness of will does not by itself show it to be a type of value distinct from goodness. Even the medieval eudaimonists typically allow that the accidental goodness by which rational creatures are completed as members of their kind is under their voluntary control, and hence intimately connected with their will. Indeed, this explains why they think the kind-relative accidental goodness of rational creatures qualifies as *moral goodness*.²¹

In order to see why Anselm conceives of justice as a distinct type of value, therefore, we must look beyond its mere connection to will. Indeed, as I now want to argue, the basis for Anselm’s distinction between rightness possessed by the will – that is, justice – and the rightness possessed by everything else, lies in the fact that, in the special case of the will, it is possible for *fulfillment of purpose* (i.e. the conditions for possessing

rightness) to come apart from *complete actualization* (i.e. the conditions for possessing goodness). In order to see this, however, we must turn from his discussion in *De Veritate*, to those texts in which he explains the distinctive “purpose” of will in rational creatures.

Will and the purpose of rational creatures

In both the *Monologion* and *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm tells us that God created rational beings – which include not only human beings but also the angels – with the intention of making them happy through enjoying Him, the supreme good (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.1; *Mon.* 68). Initially, this might suggest that, like the medieval eudaimonists, Anselm conceives of the purpose of rational creatures in terms of happiness, so that in their case the possession of rightness (or fulfillment of purpose) is to be identified with the possession of their goodness or happiness after all (namely, union with God). But in fact this is not the case. Rational creatures cannot possess, much less enjoy, God unless they first love Him in the right way. “Thus, it is certain,” says Anselm, “that rational nature was made for the purpose of loving and choosing the supreme good above all other things” (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.1; S II: 97.14–15). Fulfillment of this purpose, however, is not to be understood as that in which happiness consists, but rather as a precondition for happiness. Indeed, to judge by passages such as the following, Anselm regards happiness as an external reward, something that a good God is simply constrained by His nature to bestow on creatures who love Him.

For if He gives no reward to the one who loves Him, He who is most just does not distinguish between the one who loves what ought to be supremely loved and the one who disdains it; nor does He love the one who loves Him – or else it does no good to be loved by Him. But all those things are incompatible with His nature. Therefore, He rewards everyone who loves Him perseveringly.

(*Mon.* 70; S I: 80.11–14)

We must not be misled by Anselm’s way of speaking here. Although it rightly emphasizes that creatures who receive happiness are worthy to receive it, and that their actually receiving it requires some action on God’s part, it also obscures the close connection that exists between the fulfillment of rational nature on the one hand and happiness on the other. According to Anselm, happiness partly *consists* in loving God, since enjoyment is just the possession of an object one loves. Moreover, once the rational creature loves God, and so is in a position to enjoy Him, Anselm thinks that God is finally able to give what He intended to give the creature all along.

Properly understood, therefore, the purpose of rational creatures is to do their part to enter into that loving relationship for which God originally created them. As Anselm sees it, moreover, this is the purpose for which rational creatures received their distinctive powers or capacities – namely, reason (or intellect) and will (or rational appetite). Reason, he says, was given by God to enable rational creatures to “distinguish what is just from what is unjust, what is good from what is evil, and what is a greater good from what is a lesser good” (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.1; S II: 97.5–7), whereas the will was given to these same creatures to enable them to respond appropriately to reason’s judgments or discriminations – that is, to “hate and avoid what is evil, love and choose what is good, and more greatly love and choose the greater good [over the lesser good]” (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.1; S II: 97.9–11). Moreover, since Anselm thinks the will is the main source of agency and control, and is capable of directing intellect or reason, the fulfillment of the rational creature’s purpose depends primarily on it.

Now according to Anselm, justice requires us to love the supreme good above all else (*Cur Deus Homo* 2). Presumably, this is because justice requires us to give each its due, and hence to love each thing in proportion to its value. As he also tells us, however, loving the supreme good above all else requires us to make it the ultimate object of our pursuit – that is, “loving and choosing it for its own sake, not for the sake of anything else” (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.1; S II: 97.15). As he says: “If rational nature loves the supreme good for the sake of something else [such as happiness], it loves not the supreme good, but this other thing” (*Cur Deus Homo* 2.1; S II: 97.16). And again elsewhere: “Someone who wills something for the sake of happiness is not willing anything other than happiness” (*De Casu Diab.* 13; S I: 256.22–23). Evidently, it is this line of reasoning that leads Anselm to break with eudaimonism – that is, to separate morality from happiness and to introduce another end at which agents (and their wills) should be directed, namely, justice. For unless one recognizes on the basis of reason that it is right to love God above all else, and also loves Him in this way because it is right to do so, Anselm thinks it is impossible to love God appropriately (or perhaps even to love God at all). But this is precisely what is required to fulfill the purpose of rational nature.

It might be objected, at this point, that Anselm’s introduction of rightness faces the same difficulty that he finds with loving God for the sake of happiness. After all, even if we love the supreme good for the sake of rightness rather than happiness, are we not loving it for the sake of something else? In order to respond to this objection, we need to recall one of the consequences of Anselm’s commitment to divine simplicity – namely, that God is identical with the standard of rightness or justice. Thus, when Anselm tells us that we must love what is supremely good or valuable above all else, he is telling us that we must love justice above all else, and hence all other things in relation to it. Since Anselm takes God to be identical to justice, however, there is no danger on his view that in loving rightness above all else we will be loving something other than God – or that in

loving God for the sake justice we will be loving Him for the sake of something else.

But can not the same be said for happiness or the human good? After all, God is identical not only to the standard of justice but also to the standard of goodness. So is not the same sort of reply open to the medieval eudaimonist? No. To love God for the sake of happiness, as Anselm sees it, is not to love Him for the sake of the goodness with which He is identical (i.e. standard of goodness), but rather to love Him for the sake of one's *own* goodness with which He is not identical. For although one's own goodness (or happiness) participates in the standard of goodness, it is not to be identified with it.

All of this helps to reinforce the conclusion that, for Anselm, justice is fundamentally a different type of rightness than goodness. As we have seen, Anselm thinks that the will has justice under precisely the same conditions as a thing has rightness – namely, when it is *fulfilling its purpose* or *achieving the end toward which its nature directs it*. This just goes to show that justice is a species of rightness. In the case of all things other than the will, however, the end toward which their nature directs them is their complete development or actualization. This is what gives rise to the temptation to identify all species of rightness with goodness. But as Anselm's discussion of the will shows us, we must resist this temptation. For there is one case in which a thing's nature does not direct it, at least not first and foremost, toward its complete actualization, but rather toward the supreme good, which is justice.

In the end, therefore, Anselm's theory of rightness does, in fact, yield the two distinct kinds of value (namely, goodness and justice) that our earlier discussion of his metaethics led us to expect. In the case of all things other than the will, the end toward which their nature directs them is their own goodness or advantage – that is, their complete actualization. Hence, in the case of all things other than the will, their rightness will be their goodness.²² In the case of the will, however, things are more complicated. Here we must distinguish one species of rightness (namely, justice) from goodness. And the reason is that, unlike all other things, the will's distinctive nature directs it toward an end beyond itself, namely, supreme good or justice.

In the next section, we shall see what it is about the distinctive nature of the will that leads Anselm to explain its "purpose" in terms of justice rather than goodness. Before doing so, however, it is worth noting that we now have an answer to the earlier question about how Anselm conceives of the genus of value and the differentiae that divide it. As we have seen, Anselm conceives of all value in terms of "rightness." But since rightness is a matter of a thing's achieving the end toward which its nature directs it, and there are two fundamentally different kinds of end, it follows that there are two main species of rightness, and hence two fundamental kinds of value – namely, goodness and justice –

differentiated by the different ends with which they are associated.²³

RIGHTNESS OF WILL

Although I have touched on Anselm's views about justice or rightness of will, and hence on the conditions under which it obtains, I have yet to provide a precise characterization of these conditions. In this final section, I provide the required characterization, and in the process complete my account of Anselm's normative ethics and moral psychology. It is important to note that, in turning to the precise conditions under which justice obtains, we are turning to what appears to be the heart of Anselm's ethical theory. For it is only when the will – which is the seat of agency and control – possesses rightness that Anselm thinks we get a sort of rightness that deserves moral praise or commendation. Or to put the point in more Platonic terms, it is only when *the will* participates in the standard of rightness that we have a subject of moral justice or praiseworthiness.²⁴

In order to identify the precise conditions under which Anselm thinks rightness of will obtains, I must begin with his account of the nature of the will itself, which he describes in terms of its two distinctive capacities or dispositions.

The two dispositions of will

As we have seen, Anselm conceives of the will as a responsive faculty, its purpose being to respond appropriately to the value judgments of intellect or reason. Not surprisingly, he says that reason is capable of making two main kinds of value judgment or discrimination, one corresponding to each of the two fundamental types of value he takes to exist in the world – namely, goodness and rightness. The will, in turn, is capable of responding to each of these types of value – or better, to objects presented by reason as possessing these types of value. Thus, at one point in *De Casu Diaboli*, he has his student say: “we will nothing but what we *think* is either just or advantageous” (*De Casu Diab.* 4; S I: 241.15–16). And he makes the same point in *De Concordia*, this time speaking in his own voice: “Undoubtedly, the will (in the sense of a tool [or faculty]) wills only what is either advantageous or right. For whatever it wills, it wills either because of its usefulness or because of its rightness, and even if it is mistaken, it *considers* what it wills as related to these two ends” (*De Conc.* 3.11; S I: 281.7–10). Unlike Anselm, medieval eudaimonists admit only one fundamental type of value, goodness, and hence postulate only one source of motivation in the will – the disposition for happiness (i.e. the disposition to respond to what reason judges to be conducive to one's own goodness). Because Anselm insists, by contrast, that there are two fundamental types of value, and that the will must be capable of responding to both, he thinks we must postulate two dispositions or sources of motivation in the will – the

disposition for happiness (or advantage)²⁵ and the disposition for justice. Even so, Anselm agrees with the eudaimonists that there is a tight connection between the faculty of will and the disposition for happiness. Indeed, he suggests at one point that the will of every rational creature possesses this disposition as a matter of necessity: “Not everyone wills justice, and not everyone avoids injustice. On the other hand, not only every rational nature, but indeed everything that can be aware of it wills the advantageous and avoids the disadvantageous” (*De Casu Diab.* 12; S I: 255.8–11).²⁶

Given what we have seen of Anselm’s views about morality – that it consists in the pursuit of the supreme good, or justice, for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else (including happiness) – it is not surprising that he denies that there could be any genuinely moral agents, actions, or volitions without the further disposition for justice. What is, perhaps, surprising is that Anselm also denies that there could be any genuinely moral agents without the disposition for happiness.²⁷ After all, why could not God create a rational agent whose will possesses only the disposition for justice?

Part of the reason, I suspect, is that Anselm takes there to be a necessary connection between the possession of a will and the disposition for happiness. In virtue of possessing the capacities definitive of some natural kind, creatures are naturally inclined to the actualization of those capacities – that is to say, they possess the disposition for advantage. In the case of rational creatures, however, the disposition for advantage just is the disposition for happiness (since “happiness” is just the name Anselm uses for the state of complete actualization of rational creatures). But this is only part of the reason. According to Anselm, the will is also essentially free. But as he argues in *De Casu Diaboli* 13–14, it would be impossible for God to create an agent with freedom of will without endowing it both with the capacity for happiness and with the capacity for justice.²⁸ For freedom requires the ability to initiate one’s own acts of will or volitions. And if God gave a creature only a single disposition, he would be unable to will anything other than the objects toward which it disposed him; indeed he would be unable to refrain from willing them. In such a case, says Anselm, his acts of will would be not his own, but rather “the work and gift of God, just like his life or his power of sensation” (*De Casu Diab.* 13; S I: 257.27–28). Anselm summarizes the argument of Chapters 13–14 in this way:

One cannot be called just or unjust for willing only happiness or for willing only what it is appropriate, when he wills in that way out of necessity. Again, one neither can nor ought to be happy unless he wills to be happy and wills it justly. For both of these reasons, therefore, God must create both wills in him in such a way that he both wills to be happy and wills it justly.

As the discussion in *De Casu Diaboli* makes clear, Anselm thinks that it is the possibility of conflict, to which the possession of both dispositions (or “wills,” as he speaks of them here) gives rise, that makes freedom possible (at least in the case of creatures).²⁹ It is the presence of distinct dispositions for action that places the exercise of either disposition in power of the agent itself. Moreover, it is this sort of freedom that makes rightness of will – and hence justice – possible in the case of creatures.

Rightness, happiness, and virtue

We are now, at last, in a position to identify the precise conditions under which rightness of will (or justice) obtains. From Anselm’s general views about rightness, we know that rightness of will, like that of all other things, is a matter of the will’s fulfilling its purpose, where this consists in its doing what it ought to do. Unlike the case of all other things, however, the distinctive capacities of the will – that is, the dispositions for happiness and justice – can be in conflict. And when they are in conflict, the agent who possesses them ought to exercise its disposition *for* justice and *against* happiness. But this, in turn, means that in the special case of the will, fulfillment of purpose or doing what one ought to do, at least as Anselm uses those expressions, requires one to be willing to sacrifice what is to one’s advantage. Anselm makes this point clearly in *De Casu Diaboli*, when he suggests that it was precisely this sort of sacrifice that the bad angels, who according to Christian tradition fell from grace, were unwilling to make, and that the good angels, who maintained their justice, were willing to make. Speaking of the original sin of the Devil in particular, he says: “He sinned by willing something advantageous that he did not have and ought not to have willed at that time, but that could have served to increase his happiness” (*De Casu Diab.* 4; S I: 241.19–20). In the case of the good angels, by contrast, Anselm says: “The good angels willed the justice that they had rather than that additional something which they did not have. As far as their own will was concerned, they *lost* that good, as it were, for the sake of justice” (*De Casu Diab.* 6; S I: 243.17–18). It might be wondered why Anselm inserts so many qualifications into the last sentence of the second passage – “as far as their own will was concerned,” “as it were.” The reason is that, immediately after “sacrificing” their happiness, Anselm says that God saw to it that the good angels received, “as a reward for justice,” precisely what they thought they had permanently lost (*De Ver.* 6; S I: 243.19–20). Indeed, by giving to them this one thing they lacked, Anselm says that God made the angels perfectly happy, and thus removed the possibility of their ever sinning again – since one can sin only by acting against justice, but one could never act against justice except by willing something advantageous that one does not already have. Since their will for justice, however, was initiated by them, Anselm claims that God did not thereby remove their freedom – rather

He insured the continued uninterrupted of their self-initiated will for justice.

From everything we have seen, it appears that rightness of will is a matter of the will's willing the right thing – the supreme good – for the right reason. This is in fact how Anselm characterizes rightness of will in *De Veritate* 12. There he argues that the will has both a “what” and a “why” – that is, an object and a motive – and that rightness of will requires the correctness of both: “just as everyone must will *what* he ought, so also everyone must will it *because* he ought, in order for his will to be just” (*De Ver.* 12; S I: 194.9–10). Moreover, he also emphasizes here that in order to will something for the right reason, the rightness itself must be what motivates one's willing:

When the just man wills what he ought, he does not – insofar as he deserves to be called just – preserve rightness for the sake of anything other than rightness itself. But someone who wills what he ought only because he is compelled, or because he is bribed by some extraneous reward, preserves rightness not for its own sake, but for the sake of something else – if he deserves to be said to preserve rightness at all.

(*De Ver.* 12; S I: 194.18–22)

It is easy to get the impression from passages such as this one that Anselm thinks rightness of will is a property that wills (and derivatively, agents) have when and only when they are *occurently* willing the right thing for the right reason. In this respect, it might appear that Anselm accepts a form of deontology sometimes associated with Kant and his followers. The appearance, however, is misleading. And seeing why will bring to light an aspect of Anselm's ethical theory that is not always emphasized by Kantians – namely, the importance of virtue.³⁰

When Anselm speaks of the just person as having the *will* for justice, or as *willing* what is right for its own sake, he is not talking about occurrent volitions. As he himself points out, the term “will” (*voluntas*) and its cognates are often ambiguous between three possible meanings: (1) a faculty or power of the soul (i.e. the will); (2) a particular act of that power (such as a choice or volition); (3) any kind of state or disposition of that power (such as an intention, attitude, want, or desire). In the same context, moreover, he claims that it is only will in the third sense that is relevant for understanding rightness of will: “A just man is said to possess – even while he is asleep and not thinking at all – the will to live justly. And an unjust man is denied to possess – even when sleeping – the will to live justly” (*De Conc.* 3.11; S II: 283.5–7)

A just person who is asleep, says Anselm, does not differ from an unjust sleeping person in having either a faculty of will or an occurrent volition. For both possess the former and lack the latter (provided they are not dreaming). He concludes, therefore, that the just person must differ from the unjust person in having a disposition that the unjust person lacks. Now the disposition in question can not merely be the natural disposition for rightness. For as we have seen, this disposition is possessed just in virtue of possessing the will, and hence the just and unjust cannot be distinguished in terms of it. Moreover, Anselm makes it clear that rightness of will can be lost (see pp. 249–50 below). Evidently, therefore, the disposition in which rightness of will consists must be the sort of disposition that the medieval eudaimonists have in mind by *virtue* – that is, a stable disposition or habit for choosing what is right for the right reason.³¹ Indeed, we might characterize it as the disposition that gives to the just person's will its overarching or dominant bent, that single desire or intention which is unifying or architectonic in the just person's life.

In the final analysis, therefore, rightness of will appears to consist not in any particular volition, or series of volitions, but rather in an enduring state of the will in which justice is valued over happiness. Speaking of a creature in this state, Anselm says the following:

[J]ustice governs his will for happiness in such a way as to restrain its excess without eliminating its power to exceed. Thus, since he does will to be happy, he can exceed the limits of justice, but since he wills it justly, he does not will to exceed them. And thus, having a just will for happiness, he both can and ought to be happy. By refraining from willing what he ought not to will, even though he could will it, he deserves to be unable ever to will what he ought not; and by always retaining justice through a disciplined will, he deserves not to lack happiness in any way.

(*De Casu Diab.* 14; S I: 258.22–29)

As this passage makes clear, a just will is one in which the distinctive capacities of will are properly ordered or balanced, with the disposition for justice or rightness regulating the disposition for happiness – though not in such a way as to extinguish freedom of choice.

By this point the main contours of Anselm's ethics will be clear. According to him, a right action is one that possesses rightness, which, given his theistic Platonism, means that it participates in the Form (or lives up to the standard) of rightness – that is, God under a certain description. Even so, it is not actions, but agents, on Anselm's view, that are the primary locus of moral evaluation. Thus, a moral agent, as Anselm characterizes it, is one that possesses rightness of will (or justice) – that is, the habit or virtue of will

that disposes one to choose the right action for the right reason, even if it means (temporarily) sacrificing one's own happiness.

Although I think this description of Anselm's ethics is correct as far as it goes, I cannot close without calling attention to certain of his theological commitments, which affect the way he thinks of the just person and of the disposition or virtue by which such a person is just.

The preservation of rightness and theological virtue

Rightness of will, as Anselm conceives of it, is not something that rational creatures, at least in the first instance, are responsible for acquiring; rather it is something they are responsible for preserving once it has been given. In this respect, rightness of will, on Anselm's view, is more like what Aquinas and other medieval eudaimonists would call a theological virtue than it is like one of the traditional moral or intellectual virtues – that is to say, it is something supernaturally infused as opposed to acquired by repeated action.³² Indeed, according to Anselm, God created rational nature – both angels and the first human beings – with rightness of will precisely because they could not be happy without it. This explains, moreover, why he prefers to characterize rightness of will in terms of *preserving* (rather than merely *willing*) rightness for its own sake:

When a will was initially given to the rational nature, it was, at the same time as that giving, turned by the Giver Himself to what it ought to will – or rather, it was not turned but *created* upright. Now as long as that will remained steadfast in the rightness in which it was created, which we call “truth” or “justice,” it was just. But when it turned itself away from what it ought to will and toward what it ought not to, it did not remain steadfast in the original rightness (if I may so call it) in which it was created.

(*De Casu Diab.* 9; S I: 246.26–247.1)³³

According to traditional Christian doctrine, the first human beings and certain of the angels fell from grace by sinning. Anselm explains their sin in terms of their abandoning, or failing to preserve, rightness for its own sake. For as he says, “no one preserves justice except by willing what one ought to will, and no one abandons justice except by willing what one ought not to will” (*De Casu Diab.* 4; S I: 241.1–2). Now in the case of the bad angels (i.e. Satan and his cohorts), Anselm thinks their loss is permanent or irretrievable. In the case of the first human beings, however, and their descendants (to whom the original loss was transmitted), Anselm thinks that, at least prior to death, their

rightness of will can be recovered – though here again the recovery is primarily a matter of grace (cooperating with free will) rather than the result of any effort on the part of individual human beings. Indeed, as he says at one point, emphasizing the difficulty of recovering such rightness, “it is a greater miracle when God restores rightness to someone who abandons it than when He restores life to a dead person” (*De Lib. Arb.* 10; S I: 222.2–4).

All of this serves to emphasize the difficulties that Anselm thinks morality is fraught with in this life and the impossibility of moral success apart from grace. In our post-fallen state, he thinks we must begin by asking God to restore the rightness of will that once belonged to our first parents, and then committing ourselves to holding on to what He graciously gives us in response to our request.³⁴

NOTES

1. References to Anselm: all references are to the critical edition of F. S. Schmitt, 1946–61, which I cite by volume and page (and wherever appropriate also by line) number. Although all translations are my own, for *Monologion*, *De Veritate*, *De Libertate*, *Arbitrii*, and *De Casu Diaboli* I have consulted and sometimes relied extensively on the translations in Thomas Williams (trans.), *Monologion and Proslogion with the Replies of Gaunilo and Anselm* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1995) and Thomas Williams (trans.), *Three Philosophical Dialogues* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002). For *Cur Deus Homo* and *De Concordia*, I have consulted the translations in J. Hopkins and H. Richardson (trans.), *Complete Philosophical and Theological Treatises of Anselm of Canterbury* (Minneapolis, MN: Arthur J. Banning Press, 2000) and Brian Davies and G. R. Evans (eds.), *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

2. J. R. Sheets is engaged, at least partly, in the attempt to dispel this impression; see J. R. Sheets, “Justice in the Moral Thought of St. Anselm,” *Modern Schoolman* 25 (1948). For discussion of the relation between Augustine and Anselm, see R. D. Crouse, “The Augustinian Background of St. Anselm’s Concept *Justitia*,” *Canadian Journal of Theology* 4 (1958) and Hiroko Yamazaki, “Anselm and the Problem of Evil,” *Anselm Studies* 2 (1988).

3. Anselm’s ethical views have received very little attention from contemporary scholars, and as a result there is no satisfactory systematic treatment of them available in the contemporary literature. Important aspects of Anselm’s ethical views, however, are

discussed in: Eugene Fairweather, "Truth, Justice and Moral Responsibility in the Thought of St. Anselm," in *L'homme et son destin d'après les penseurs du moyen age: Actes du premier congrès internationale de philosophie médiévale* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1960); Jorge J. E. Gracia and J. J. Sandford, "Ratio quarens beatitudinem: Anselm on Rationality and Happiness," in J. Yu and Jorge Gracia (eds.), *Rationality and Happiness: From the Ancients to the Early Medievals* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2003); Douglas Langston, "Did Scotus Embrace Anselm's Notion of Freedom?," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 5 (1996); Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, "Anselm's Account of Freedom," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 31 (2001); and the works cited in note 1. For more complete bibliographical information, see Klaus Kienzler et al., *International Bibliography—Anselm of Canterbury: Anselm Studies Volume IV* (Lewiston, Queenston, and Lampeter: Mellen Press, 1999), especially §10.5.

4. For the sake of simplicity, I treat *consequentialist* and *eudaimonistic* (or *virtue-ethical*) theories as species of teleological theory, though they are often treated separately.

5. For Scotus's ethical theory, see John Hare, *God's Call: Moral Realism, God's Commands, and Human Autonomy* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001); John Hare, "Scotus on Morality and Nature," *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9 (2000); and Thomas Williams, "How Scotus Separates Morality from Happiness," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 69 (1995). Hare suggests not only that Scotus's ethical theory can be seen as a natural development of views already present in Anselm, but also that Anselm's ethical theory can be seen as a natural development of certain views of Augustine. Although Hare seems to me right about the relationship between Scotus and Anselm, his suggestion about the relationship of both to Augustine seems mistaken. Augustine certainly emphasizes the role of justice in morality, and in this respect must be regarded as a source for Anselm's views. But I see no evidence to suggest that the emphasis on justice led Augustine either to separate morality from happiness or to develop (as both Anselm and Scotus do) a doctrine of two affections or wills.

6. Anselm's success at integrating key elements of eudaimonism is all the more striking given the paucity of resources that he had to work with. Because he belongs to the period of medieval philosophy prior to the recovery of Aristotle in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, he was writing well before any part of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, one of the chief sources for later medieval eudaimonism, was available in translation to philosophers in the Latin West. For an account of eudaimonistic ethical theory, therefore, Anselm had to rely on what could be gathered from the often diffuse writings of such philosophers and theologians as Augustine, Boethius, Cicero, and Seneca.

7. I have little to say, in what follows, about Anselm's theory of action. But for an argument that Anselm's moral psychology leads him to embrace a distinctive theory of action, one that differs in important respects from that of medieval Aristotelians, see Calvin Normore, "Goodness and Rational Choice in the Early Middle Ages," in Henrik Lagerlund and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (eds.), *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002).

8. For useful summaries of medieval eudaimonistic ethical theory, to which my own discussion is indebted, see: David Gallagher, "Thomas Aquinas on the Will as Rational Appetite," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991); Scott MacDonald, "Egoistic Rationalism: Aquinas's Basis for Christian Morality," in Michael D. Beaty (ed.), *Christian Theism and the Problems of Philosophy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990); Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991); Scott MacDonald, "Later Medieval Ethics," in Lawrence C. Becker (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, vol. I (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991); and Williams, "How Scotus Separates Morality from Happiness."

9. This is at least one of the motivations behind the standard medieval view that things are good to the extent they are in being, and that evil is a privation of being. For discussion of the various considerations motivating this view, see the introduction, as well as the essays, in MacDonald, *Being and Goodness*.

10. The distinction between essential and (kind-relative) accidental being is customary in late-medieval philosophy. See, for example, Scotus's discussion in *Quodlibet* q. 18.

11. This last point must be qualified in light of the fact that medieval eudaimonists also distinguish degrees of being in connection with different metaphysical kinds, so that the being of God is said to be greater than that of human beings, which in turn is said to be greater than that of plants. Even here, however, degrees of being are best thought of quantitatively rather than qualitatively. Thus, a human has "more being" *qua* human than a plant *qua* plant because members of the kind *human being* possess quantitatively more capacities than members of the kind *plant*: they possess all the capacities associated with plants (such as the capacity for nutrition, growth, and reproduction) as well as several others (such as the capacity for rational thought and volition). The same is also said to be true of God relative to the members of all other kinds (including *plant* and *human being*) – though this leads to familiar puzzles about how God can be said to possess the capacities associated with material beings, puzzles which the medievals attempt to solve by appealing to the notion of *eminent* possession. See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a, 4,2.

12. See *Nicomachean Ethics* 1.

13. Anselm does not explicitly speak of *participation* in the *Monologion*; nor does he explicitly refer to goodness and justice there as Platonic *Forms* or *standards*. Nonetheless, it is natural to assume that he is following Augustine in this regard, who does explicitly talk in this way (e.g. in *De Libero Arbitrio* 2), especially since Anselm does invoke such notions in other works (see, e.g., *De Ver.* 2 for an explicit appeal to participation and *De Ver.* 13 for his argument that God is the Form in which all true things participate). For discussion of the historical context in which Anselm develops his views about universals, see Yukio Iwakuma, “The Realism of Anselm and His Contemporaries,” in D. E. Luscombe and G. R. Evans (eds.), *Anselm: Aosta, Bec, and Canterbury* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996). For discussion of his understanding of universals themselves, see Marilyn McCord Adams, “Was Anselm a Realist?: The *Monologion*,” *Franciscan Studies* 32 (1972); Desmond P. Henry, “Was Saint Anselm Really a Realist?,” *Ratio* 5 (1963); and Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (eds.), *Anselm of Canterbury*, vol. IV: *Hermeneutical and Textual Problems in the Complete Treatises of St. Anselm* (New York: Mellen Press, 1976).

14. Anselm’s argument in *Cur Deus Homo* 2.17, that all necessity and possibility are subject to God’s will, might be taken to support this conclusion, assuming that some moral truths are necessary (or possible). It is important to recognize, however, that Anselm’s concern in this chapter is primarily with the question of whether anything external to God necessitates (in the sense of *compels*) Him to do the things He does.

15. At least bracketing certain considerations having to do with natural law. See, e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae, 94.

16. See, e.g., *De Libero Arbitrio* 2.

17. Anselm actually distinguishes at one point (*De Ver.* 11) between the rightness perceptible by the senses and the rightness perceptible only by the mind, and argues that, strictly speaking, truth should be identified only with rightness of the latter sort. For my purposes, however, we can ignore this complication and think of rightness perceptible only by the mind as rightness in general.

18. In this regard, Anselm may be consciously following Augustine’s example in *De Libero Arbitrio*. In Book 2 of this work, Augustine is concerned to show that God is identical with truth, but he attempts to do so only after first attempting to establish the identity of truth with another evaluative notion (though in his case, the evaluative notion

is wisdom rather rightness).

19. See *Der Ver.* 2 and [Chapter 9](#) of this volume for Anselm's view of statements.

20. This is most clear, as we have seen, in the case of statements. Interestingly, in the context of statements, Anselm distinguishes two kinds of rightness (or truth), which correspond exactly to the two kinds of goodness he distinguishes in the *Monologion* – namely, essential goodness and the kind-relative accidental goodness by which a thing is completed as a member of its kind (i.e., advantage). Thus, statements have one kind of rightness (or truth), he says, just in virtue of having the capacity to correspond to reality, and they have another kind of rightness (or truth) in virtue of actualizing this capacity (*De Ver.* 2). But this just appears to be another way of saying that, in virtue of possessing the first kind of rightness, a statement has essential goodness (and hence qualifies as a good statement in some respect), whereas in virtue of possessing the second kind of rightness, it also has the accidental goodness of advantage (and hence qualifies as a good statement in every respect).

21. Cf., e.g., Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1a2ae, 6 *divisio textus*.

22. Indeed, if we distinguish, as Anselm does, the first and second rightness (or truth) of things, we can say that their first rightness will be their essential goodness and their second rightness will be their advantage (or kind-relative accidental goodness).

23. Here again, however, we can distinguish two species of goodness – namely, essential goodness and kind-relative accidental goodness. If we follow Anselm in referring to these two species of goodness as “first rightness” and “second rightness,” we might call justice, to which goodness in general is coordinate, “third rightness.”

24. Anselm does say at certain points that we can speak of the justice or praiseworthiness of agents or actions, but he is careful to add that such moral goodness or value is wholly derivative on the praiseworthiness of the will from which they proceed: “There is no justice that is not rightness, and no rightness other than rightness of will is called justice in its own right. For rightness of action is called justice, but only when the action proceeds from a correct will. Rightness of will, on the other hand, is always entitled to be called justice, even if it is impossible for what we rightly will to come about” (*De Ver.* 12; S I: 194.30–33). Analogous points apply, he says, to the relationship between rightness of will and agents (cf., e.g., *De Casu Diab.* 9).

25. Anselm also refers to this at one point as the “natural will” for advantage: “No one is compelled by fear or the expectation of something disadvantageous, or incited by love of something advantageous, to will something, unless he first has a natural will to avoid what is disadvantageous or to have what is advantageous” (*De Casu Diab.* 12; S I: 254.23–26).

26. In the next sentence Anselm goes so far as to say: “In fact, no one wills anything unless he thinks that it is in some way advantageous for himself.” This is a puzzling claim, since it suggests that it is impossible to will anything for the sake of rightness alone. Perhaps Anselm’s point is merely that no one considers any course of action unless it at least appears in some way advantageous (though after considering it, one may will it on the basis of rightness alone).

27. In this respect, Anselm’s views about the two dispositions seem to differ from those of Duns Scotus, who follows Anselm in many other respects. Cf. John Boler, “Reflections on John Duns Scotus on the Will,” in Henrik Lagerlund and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (eds.), *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2002).

28. Although Anselm focuses specifically on angels here, it is clear that he thinks his discussion generalizes to all rational creatures.

29. As Visser and Williams (“Anselm’s Account of Freedom,” 238) point out, no such conflict is required in the case of divine freedom: “Divine aseity in fact guarantees that every action God performs is self-initiated. Even if, *per impossibile*, God never had alternative possibilities available to Him, every action of His will would still be free.”

30. Until recently, it was customary to downplay the role of virtue in Kant’s ethics, and even to contrast Kantian views with those of virtue theorists generally; see, e.g., Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) and Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). But more recent commentators have begun to challenge the conventional wisdom; see, e.g., Stephen Engstrom, “The Concept of the Highest Good in Kant’s Moral Theory,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 52 (1992). Engstrom argues that “the primary focus of attention in Kant’s moral theory is not, as is often thought, on isolated instances of choice and action, but rather on a person’s disposition or character” (748). For more extended treatments of the same issue, see F. G. Munzel, *Kant’s Conception of Moral Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Nancy Sherman, *Making a Necessity of Virtue* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1997).

31. Though, of course, medieval eudaimonists will explain what is involved in “choosing what is right for the right reason” differently than Anselm.

32. Sheets (“Justice in the Moral Thought of St. Anselm”) emphasizes the supernatural origin of the will’s rectitude, though he is skeptical (for reasons I find unconvincing) that Anselm could have possessed the notion of a virtue in the standard Aristotelian sense. See esp. 136–37.

33. The same point also emerges from the passage quoted above from *De Casu Diab.* 12, if we restore its original context: “He cannot be called just or unjust for willing only happiness or for willing only what is appropriate, when he wills in that way out of necessity. Again, he neither can nor ought to be happy unless he wills to be happy and wills it justly. For both of these reasons, therefore, God must create both wills in him *in such a way* that he both wills to be happy and wills it justly. *This added* justice governs his will for happiness in such a way as to restrain its excess without eliminating its power to exceed.”

34. I presented earlier versions of this chapter at Purdue University, Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, the Cornell Summer Colloquium in Medieval Philosophy, and Marquette University’s Midwest Seminar in Ancient and Medieval Philosophy. I am grateful to the audiences on those occasions for stimulating discussion and comments. I am also grateful to Michael Bergmann, John Boler, Jeff Hause, Patrick Kain, Brian Leftow, Scott MacDonald, Dan Maloney, Michael Rea, Paul Studtmann, and especially Susan Brower-Toland for helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts.

11 Anselm on the Trinity

William E. Mann

One of the central mysteries of the Christian faith is the doctrine of the Trinity. According to it, there is but one God, yet that one God is threefold in nature: there is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. That God is triune in nature is a “mystery” in a special, theological sense of the term: it is communicated to humans by divine revelation, it is beyond the powers of natural human reason to demonstrate, and so if it is to be accepted, it must be accepted as an item of religious faith. Skeptics in their polite moments might call the doctrine a “mystery” in the more usual sense of the term. They will claim that the doctrine flouts elementary principles of counting, confusing one with three. For skeptics the only mystery to be explained is how Christians can think they remain faithful to monotheism while courting polytheism.

Anselm investigates the doctrine of the Trinity extensively in three of his treatises. Roughly two-fifths of the *Monologion* is devoted to it, and it is the sole center of attention in *On the Incarnation of the Word* (*De Inc. Verbi*) and *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* (*De Proc.*). Despite operating under a number of constraints that may appear to us to preclude successful completion of his project, he proceeds self-assuredly, confident that reason can demonstrate, not that the doctrine is true (for then it would not be a mystery) but that it is free from contradiction – more than that, that It All Makes Sense. I shall begin by describing briefly some of the constraints by which Anselm takes his investigation to be governed. I shall then examine selectively and in more detail the more noteworthy features of his investigations. Most of my attention will be devoted to the *Monologion*, which lays the foundation for Anselm’s position. *On the Incarnation of the Word* and *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* amplify but do not deviate from the *Monologion*.¹

AUTHORITY

Most importantly, because the doctrine of the Trinity is in the domain of revealed theology, Anselm takes his enterprise to be guided necessarily by authority, the authority of Scripture (the revealed word of God), the authority of confessional creeds formulated by Church councils (in particular, the Nicene Creed), and the authority of the Church Fathers (in particular, Augustine). It would require a book to document all these influences. Here are examples of each of these kinds of authority, however, that figure prominently in Anselm’s writings.

The first three verses of the Chapter of the Gospel according to John say that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made.” The passage anchors Anselm’s identification of the Son with the Word (*Mon.* 29–48), while simultaneously raising the question of what the point could be of saying, given that the Word *was* God, that the Word was also *with* God.

Here are excerpts from the Nicene Creed, as Anselm understood it:

I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made . . . And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified . . .

A significant bone of contention during Anselm’s lifetime was the claim that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* (*filioque*). Although the Western or Latin church affirmed the language of *filioque*, the Eastern or Greek church denied it, maintaining that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father *through* the Son. In 1098 Anselm attended the Council of Bari to defend the *filioque* conception of procession before delegates of both Latin and Greek churches. *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* is Anselm’s record of the views he expounded at the council.

Anselm was familiar with Augustine’s monumental work *On the Trinity*. In it Augustine had argued that among created things we can find images of the Trinity, traces, as it were, of the triune nature of their creator. Star examples are provided by the human mind: one is the mind itself, its self-love, and its self-knowledge (Book 9); another is the mental faculties of memory, understanding, and will (Book 10). Anselm reworks these Augustinian images in *Monologion* 46–67.

SIMPLICITY

Augustine also bequeathed to Anselm a remarkable metaphysical doctrine, the doctrine of God’s *simplicity*. Augustine gives partial expression to the doctrine in *On the Trinity*:

God indeed is truly spoken of in many ways as great, good, wise, blessed, true, and

whatever else is seen as not unworthily said [of Him]. But He is the same as His greatness, which is wisdom (for He is not great by means of bulk, but by means of power) and the same as goodness, which is wisdom and greatness, and the same as truth, which is all these. And in Him it is not one thing to be blessed and another to be great, or wise, or true, or to be good, or to be altogether Himself.

(6.7.8)

To say of a person that she is good and wise is to say two different things about her, and the two things thus said are distinct from the thing about whom they are said. A person is one thing, her goodness another, and her wisdom a third. She might have been good without being wise, or wise without being good, and in any event, her goodness and wisdom are accidental to her: she was born without them and, having acquired them, she might still lose them. But to say that God is good and wise is not to identify three things, or rather, it *is* to *identify* three things, for God just is goodness itself and wisdom itself (see also *On the Trinity* 15.5.7). To put it in the formal mode, the terms, “God,” “goodness itself,” and “wisdom itself” necessarily refer to the same thing, just as, on theories of direct reference, “Hesperus,” “Phosphorus,” and “Venus” are rigid designators necessarily referring to the same heavenly body. Thus even though “Gloria is good” and “God is good” have the same surface grammar, their deep structure is different. The “is” in “Gloria is good” is the “is” of predication. The sentence picks out a subject, Gloria, and predicates the property of goodness of that subject. In the case of “God is good,” however, the “is” signifies identity; the sentence is to be understood as “God is identical to goodness itself.” Although Gloria is good, Gloria is not goodness itself.

As so far put forward by Augustine, the doctrine of divine simplicity seems to supply a way of regimenting all predicates that apply necessarily or essentially to God, such as “is good,” “is wise,” and the like: convert the predicate, “is F,” into “is identical to F-ness itself,” and reconstruct the sentence according to the form “It is necessarily the case that God is identical to F-ness itself.” In the first twenty-five chapters of the *Monologion* Anselm presents a remarkable discussion of the doctrine of divine simplicity and extends it to cover other cases of predication. I shall concentrate on the aspects of Anselm’s discussion that are directly relevant to the doctrine of the Trinity.

It turns out to be crucial to Anselm’s discussion that we pay attention to a principle that he enunciates early on, a principle called *Aseity* (from the Latin *a se*, in or of itself):

Aseity:

God is the only being that exists and is what He is entirely through Himself. (*Mon.* 3. I use the term “God” where Anselm uses terms like “supreme essence.”)

The intuitive idea behind *Aseity* is that while every other being is a dependent being (dependent at a minimum, as Anselm argues in the same chapter, on God), God depends on nothing other than himself. *Aseity* will resurface shortly in this discussion.

Now one kind of claim that one can make about God that need not be a claim about God's essence or nature is a relational claim. One can say, for example, that God is greater than all creatures (*Mon.* 15). Anselm has no quarrel with the claim; he regards it as true. But, Anselm insists, its truth says nothing about God's essence. In order for "God is greater than all creatures" to be true, there have to be creatures to which the comparison is made. But if those creatures were to cease to exist, nothing would thereby have changed in God essentially. (Note that Anselm's argument does not rely on the claim that God might not have created anything. Consistent with this argument, Anselm could maintain that God's nature is such that He must create something.) An earthly parallel may help. "Homer is taller than all Arians" presupposes that there are some Arians. Upon the death of the last Arian the sentence would become false, but nothing need change regarding Homer's height. Thus the existence or nonexistence of Arians tells us nothing about how tall Homer is, or even what kind of thing Homer is. ("Homer" might be the name of a radio tower.) The following general principle seems to be at work here:

No-rel.:

No relational term ascribed to any being refers to that being's essence. (*Mon.* 15.)

Anselm agrees with Augustine that subject–predicate sentences that specify what God is essentially, such as "God is just," must be recast. In fact, the *Monologion* has been crafted to supply a theoretical justification for the recasting. If Gloria is just and God is just, then they are just "through" justice. Gloria is just in virtue of her participating in the quality of justice. But if God is just through justice and if, by *Aseity*, God is whatever He is through Himself, then God does not participate in justice, as if justice were a quality apart from God; God Himself *is* justice. The identities entailed by Augustine's remarks on divine simplicity receive, in Anselm's hands, their theoretical underpinning by way of *Aseity*.

Anselm presses on further with the doctrine of divine simplicity. In *Monologion* 17 he enunciates this principle about composite things:

Comp.:

If x is a composite thing, then x has its existence and nature through its components, and x 's components do not have their existence and nature through x .

Comp. and *Aseity* entail there being no composition in God. Anselm apparently thinks that *Comp.* is too obvious to require justification. How obvious it is may depend on what is covered by the notion of a component. The context and subsequent discussion indicate that Anselm means to claim that God has no physical or metaphysical components whatsoever. Thus *Monologion* 18–24 are given over to a discussion about how God exists everywhere and always even though he lacks spatial and temporal parts. On analogy to the principle that any spatially extended thing has spatial parts (for example, a left side and a right side), and is thereby composite, Anselm thinks that any temporally extended thing has temporal parts (for example, a past or a future), and is thus similarly composite.

We have seen Anselm argue that God’s essential “properties” are not components or parts of God, but just different ways of specifying what God is. But heretofore Anselm has not ruled out explicitly the claim that God has accidental properties. It is not obvious that *Aseity* and *Comp.* rule out divine accidental properties, for it does not appear that an accidental property must affect its bearer’s very existence or nature. Yet if God has accidental properties, then it would seem that to that extent, God is metaphysically complex, not simple.

In *Monologion* 25 Anselm tackles the issue of accidental properties. Properly speaking, an accidental property is always an indicator of a thing’s mutability: something a thing acquires after not having it, or loses after having it, or has modified over time by augmentation or diminishment. These processes occur only in beings that have a temporal career, divisible into temporal parts. But if God has no temporal parts, then He is not the subject of accidents properly speaking. But we do not always speak properly. Sometimes we describe individuals in ways that appear to imply change in them but really do not. Anselm notes that he is presently neither taller than, shorter than, nor the same height as someone who will be born next year. After that person, Gloria, is born, it may be true at different stages in Gloria’s growth that Anselm is taller than, subsequently the same height as, and finally shorter than Gloria. We can say, if we like, that Anselm has *become* shorter than Gloria. But we can at the same time suppose that this change is grounded entirely in Gloria, not Anselm. Similarly, Anselm maintains, whenever we use language that suggests a change in God, we will find that the locus of change is really in mutable creatures.

The example that Anselm supplies is relational. If all putative cases of accidental properties in God are relational in character, it might appear that they are ruled out by *No-rel.* But *No-rel.* requires only that no relations refer to God’s essence. *No-rel.* does not pronounce on whether God has relational properties that would be candidates for the status of accidental attributes. Moreover, *No-rel.* would not help Anselm in the event that

some putative cases of accidental properties in God are nonrelational in character. Despite initial appearances to the contrary, Anselm's case against accidental properties in God is based on *Aseity* and *Comp.*, along with a thesis that emerged in the *Monologion* 18–24 discussion, namely, the thesis that beings with temporal careers are thereby composite. This thesis, *Aseity*, and *Comp.* entail God's being essentially nontemporal. Together with the *Monologion* 25 claim that accidental properties can belong only to temporal beings, they yield the result that God has no accidental properties.

TRIPLICITY

One can be pardoned for wondering whether and how the doctrine of God's simplicity is consistent with the doctrine of the Trinity. How can God have no parts or composition of any kind yet be threefold in nature? The wonderment might increase when one sees that in the *Monologion* Anselm begins his delineation of the doctrine of the Trinity almost immediately after his defense of simplicity.

One might think that at a minimum, the doctrine of the Trinity must maintain that for some interpretation of "*P*" and "*Q*," God is three *Ps* but only one *Q*. Anselm follows the Latin church in saying that God is three *persons* in one *substance*. He acknowledges that the Greek church uses a formulation that can be translated as three *substances* in one *person*, but he is inclined to regard the difference as merely terminological; although the Greek church does differ from the Latin church in doctrine, the doctrinal difference is not located here. (See *Mon.* Prologue and *De Inc. Verbi* 16.) His toleration here may be brought about by his own perplexity about how to fill in the "*P*" place in the above schema. Speaking of the Father and the Son, he says that although they are two, he cannot say what they are two *of*. They are not "two equal spirits or two equal creators or two of anything that signifies either their essence or their relation to creation." (That is, they are not two supreme beings or two omnipotent beings, or two beings who said "Let there be light.") Nor are they two Words: only one of them is the Word; the other is the one who utters the Word (*Mon.* 38; see also *Mon.* 79).

Anselm realizes that there is deeper philosophical puzzlement than this. The most pressing challenge can be illustrated in the following way. *Arianism* had been identified by the formulators of the Nicene Creed as a heretical view, maintaining, among other things, that the Son (and perhaps also the Holy Spirit) is an impressive but nonetheless subordinate being created by the Father. The creed's language describing the Son, for instance, as "very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father," was directed against Arianism. In insisting on the radical ontological equality of the three persons, however, the creed can be (mistakenly) interpreted as an endorsement of *tritheism*, the position that if there really are three coequal divine persons, then there

are three Gods, not one. *Modalism*, on the other hand, maintains that there is only one God, but unlike Arianism, does not discriminate in favor of the Father against the Son and the Holy Spirit. “Person” comes from the Latin *persona*, whose root meanings include a mask or a character in a play. Modalism can exploit the etymology by maintaining that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three roles that the one God assumes or three functions – for example, creation, redemption, inspiration – that the one God discharges. A modalist might supplement such an account with an explanation of how humans can understandably come to think that there must be three agencies behind these different types of divine activity when in reality there is but one, just as early stargazers thought there must be three celestial bodies, the planet Venus, the morning star, and the evening star. Here is the challenge: from Anselm’s point of view, tritheism and modalism are both heretical positions, as heretical as Arianism. But is there a possible interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity that avoids Arianism, tritheism, and modalism and that is also consistent with the doctrine of divine simplicity?

Father and Son. Let us begin by examining the *Monologion*. Recall, first, that the opening verses of John had identified the Son with the Word, or the *logos*. Harking back to a preliminary discussion in *Monologion* 10–12 – a discussion interrupted by the digression on divine simplicity – Anselm describes the Son as God’s *locutio*, through which all things are made. The choice of *locutio* is initially curious; one might have expected *verbum* for *logos*. In fact, Anselm also uses *verbum*. But *locutio* conveys more clearly than does *verbum* an aspect of the Son that is important to Anselm. A *locutio* – henceforward, I will use the English “locution” – is a speech act. But Anselm includes in the notion of a speech act something that may be surprising to modern sensibilities. Thinking is a kind of speaking, an inner speaking: concepts function as inner words in the language of thought (*Mon.* 10). Thus there are mental locutions. Some of them take the form of plans for action. A craftsman first conceives of what he will produce and how he will produce it. The craftsman’s conception is a mental locution. Similarly, the world is the result of God’s locution.

The craftsman’s locution is merely an idea or a concept. Anselm confidently identifies God’s locution with the second person of the Trinity. Surely the Son cannot be merely an idea or concept in the divine mind; the very suggestion would make an Arian blush. That suggestion is based, however, on an illegitimate extension of the craftsman’s way of formulating locutions to God’s way. To illustrate the points that I believe Anselm wants to make, let us suppose that our craftsman is a violin maker who wishes to replicate an Amati. The violin maker’s plan or locution is an amalgam of images of Amatis that he has acquired from experience. Success in his execution is determined by two measures of likeness. How accurately does the violin maker’s locution represent a genuine Amati? How closely does the finished violin resemble the violin maker’s locution? Failure of match between the genuine article and the locution is primarily a kind of cognitive failure.

Perhaps the violin maker has not done enough research on Amatis or has paid insufficient attention to their details. Slippage between the locution and the violin produced is more likely due to a failure of power. Perhaps the violin maker's skill is insufficient, or perhaps he was unable to obtain the right raw materials.

Anselm insists that neither sort of liability can affect God's act of creation. Let us take the second one first. *Qua* omniscient and omnipotent, God does not lack the skill required to realize the content of His locution. Nor is His creative activity confined, as the violin maker's is, to acquiring and rearranging pre-existing material; in creating, God brings that material into existence (*Mon.* 11).

Anselm's dismissal of the applicability of the first sort of liability to God sheds some light on the notion of God's locution. To suppose that God's locution could fall short of some ideal of created reality is to put things precisely backwards. Return, for the sake of contrast, to the violin maker. There were two resemblance relations involving locution and objects here. The locution should resemble the archetypal object, and the object produced should resemble the locution. If both resemblances are sufficiently high, then the object produced resembles the archetype. The images constituting the violin maker's locution represent and thus are measured by a preexisting archetype, namely, the family of Amati violins. But there is no archetype against which God's locution is to be compared. On the contrary, God's locution *is* the archetype against which created things are compared. Whereas the violin-maker case involves two resemblance relations, the case of divine creation involves just one, and even it is a one-way resemblance. Created things are good to the degree to which they resemble this supremely excellent locution, not the other way around (*Mon.* 31). Thus for Anselm, "x resembles y" need not entail "y resembles x." Although he does not elaborate on why or when this is so, a plausible hypothesis is that he thinks that y need not resemble x in cases in which x is causally parasitic on y. Two peas in a pod can resemble each other, because neither is causally dependent on the other. But on the hypothesis I am attributing to Anselm, a person does not resemble her mirror image or portrait even if her mirror image and portrait resemble her.

This reversal of normal expectations concerning locution, archetype, and object produced is intimately connected with another reversal. In the normal course of events a concept or a mental word depends for its intelligibility on its bearing a resemblance to that for which it is a concept or word. In the beginning was the thing; the word comes later. There would still be a divine locution, however, even if God had decided not to create anything. In the absence of a created world there would be no created world for God to understand. Even so, supremely wise God would be aware of and understand something, namely, Himself. The doctrine of divine simplicity allows Anselm to infer that God's eternal self-awareness and self-understanding just is God's eternal locution. Thus

the Word is coeternal with the Word's source (*Mon.* 32). But Anselm is not content to leave matters here. To put it in Johannine terms, he has shown that the Word was with God, but he has not shown – at least not to his obvious satisfaction – that the Word was God. A second appeal to divine simplicity might appear to be all that is required. If, however, the doctrine of divine simplicity converts essential predications about God into necessarily true identity statements, then it is exactly the wrong thing for Anselm to use for the present task. Anselm does not want to conclude that it is necessarily the case that the Father is identical to the Son; that leads to modalism. To borrow a term from discussions of the Nicene Creed, Anselm presents the following argument to show that the Father and the Son are *consubstantial*, not identical.

Whenever a mind tries to understand something, it forms a conception of that thing. The more accurate the conception, the better the understanding. Consider now the special case of a mind trying to understand itself. If it succeeds, the conception it forms not only perfectly matches itself, it *is* itself: in understanding itself it understands itself as understanding itself. There is no room in this case for a distinction between ontologically superior subject and ontologically inferior image. The distinction here between subject and object of understanding is not ontological but rather a distinction discernible solely by reason (*Mon.* 33).

Because God is eternally omniscient, God cannot fail to have perfect, eternal self-understanding. This self-understanding is His locution. But we have just seen Anselm argue that in the case of perfect self-understanding, there can be no ontological difference between the self that understands and the vehicle that delivers self-understanding. That is, God's Word is consubstantial with God. And yet the Word is also what God understands about Himself. The English verb, "to conceive," which means both to become pregnant and to understand, would suit Anselm's purposes quite well. The Word is the act, object, and *offspring* of God's conceiving. The relation that holds between the Father and the Son, as the language of the Nicene Creed specifies, is the relation of *begetting* (*Mon.* 41–42). A relation is *asymmetric* if and only if for everything, *x*, and everything, *y*, if *x* bears the relation to *y*, then *y* does not bear the relation to *x*. The relation of *being taller than* is asymmetric: if *x* is taller than *y* then *y* is not taller than *x*. Anselm regards the *begetting* relation as asymmetric. The clearest evidence is provided in *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* I: "It is impossible for a father to be a son of him whose father he is, and for a son to be a father of him whose son he is." One can show that if a relation is asymmetric, then it is *irreflexive*, that is, that nothing bears that relation to itself. Consider, for example, the asymmetric *being taller than* relation. Suppose now that for some *x*, the *being taller than* relation were not irreflexive. In that case *x* would be taller than *x*. But since the relation is asymmetric, it would follow that *x* is *not* taller than *x*. Thus the supposition leads to its own denial. To apply this result to the case of *begetting*, the asymmetry of the relation entails the result, that Anselm

certainly accepts, that nothing begets itself. “Indeed, nature does not permit, nor does the intellect grasp, that something existing from something *is* the being from whom it exists, or that the being from whom it exists exists from itself” (*De Proc.* 1). The Father, then, begets the Son, but the Son does not beget the Father. Moreover, the Father does not beget Himself. Nor, as it turns out, does the Holy Spirit beget the Father. Since no other being is apt to beget the Father – that would be a violation of *Aseity* – it follows that the Father is unbegotten.

Perhaps because Augustine had used the notion in one of his images of the Trinity, Anselm introduces *memoria* in *Monologion* 48, immediately before beginning his discussion of the third person of the Trinity. If we translate *memoria* and *meminisse* as “memory” and “to remember,” respectively, we are saddled with some puzzling Anselmian assertions, chief among which is the claim that “Since a human mind is not always thinking of itself, as it is always remembering itself, it is clear that when it is thinking of itself, its word is born from memory.” Anselm infers from this that if a mind were always thinking of itself, its word would always be born from its memory. But God always thinks of Himself, so His word or locution, that is, the Word, is born from His eternal memory. The stumbling-block is the first premise. It is hard to know what Anselm means when he says that the human mind always remembers itself, especially when he has just granted that it does not always think of itself. And even if we get clarification on this issue, there is a further problem of seeing how the results would apply to God’s mind. Inasmuch as there are no temporal stages to God’s existence – in particular, nothing is *past* to God – it would seem that God has no need of nor capacity for memory.

I suggest the following way of understanding what Anselm intends. Like the English “memory,” *memoria* can refer to the mental faculty of recollection or the content retained therein. *Meminisse* can mean to recall actively, but it can also mean simply to retain in mind, not to have forgotten. We can interpolate various of these elements into a gloss on Anselm’s claim: “Since a human mind is not always thinking of itself, as it is always remembering itself [that is, always retaining its capacity to focus its attention on itself], it is clear that when it is thinking of itself, its word [in this case, its concept of itself] is born from memory [that is, is brought to consciousness by its faculty of recollection accessing its storehouse of concepts].” The rest of Anselm’s argument now goes smoothly enough. We can ascribe *memoria* to God as a faculty presupposed by self-reflection, even divine self-reflection. Divine *memoria* differs from human memory in these respects. In humans memory is an on-again, off-again sort of faculty, always present but finite in its capacity, sometimes dormant, sometimes active, and sometimes, when active, faulty at retrieving what it seeks. One source of its spotty retrieval record is the gradual decay or distortion of memory traces over time. Another source is internal to the metaphysics of human memory. The contents of human memory are likenesses or

images of the things (*Mon.* 36 and 62), caused, one presumes, by the things of which they are the likenesses. But the process of causal transmission can result in distorted images, due, perhaps, to imperfections in the medium of transmission or in the human recipient. In contrast, divine *memoria* is infinite in its capacity, never dormant, and never faulty. Nor is it timebound. If Anselm is right, memory is prior to self-reflection, but in the divine case the priority is only logical, not temporal. The Father, or *memoria*, is that from which the Son, the Word, or perfect image of the Father (an image in which the relation of resemblance is symmetric), is coeternally begotten. Finally, divine *memoria* does not contain images of created things, but rather, through the activity of the Word, the perfect essences of those things (*Mon.* 36), of which the things themselves are images.

Holy Spirit. In *Monologion* 49 and 50 Anselm lays the foundation of an argument for the third person of the Trinity. The argument proceeds in two stages, each stage depending on a principle connecting memory and understanding to love. In *Monologion* 49 the principle is this:

Utility:

An agent's memory and understanding of a thing are useless unless the thing itself is loved or rejected to the degree required by reason.

If we apply *Utility* reflexively, to the agent himself, we get the result that an agent's self-memory and self-understanding are of no use if the agent does not love or reject himself to the right degree.

Anselm does not expatiate on the notion of loving something "to the degree required by reason." He could – and perhaps did – find ample authority for the notion in the writings of Augustine.² According to Augustine, everything that exists is good, because everything that exists either is perfectly good God or was created by perfectly good God. But not everything is equally good; some things are more excellent than others (see *Mon.* 4 and 15), and their excellence resides in their being better images of God. So, for example, rational, perceptive, animate beings are better than nonrational, perceptive, animate beings, which in turn are better than nonperceptive animate beings, which are better than inanimate beings (*Mon.* 31). In light of these Augustinian considerations I shall risk imputing to Anselm a principle according to which love should track excellence:

Track:

A thing deserves to be loved to the extent to which it is excellent.

(I have chosen to phrase *Track* in this way rather than, for example, "One's love for a

thing should be proportionate to the thing's excellence," because *Track* leaves open the possibility of *grace*, understood as the notion of love that exceeds the merits of the beloved.)

Now I can expand, on Anselm's behalf, the compressed argument in *Monologion* 49. *Utility* requires that God's memory and understanding are useless if He does not love Himself to the degree that reason requires. Divine simplicity requires that God is His memory and understanding. Thus, God would be useless were He not to love Himself to the degree that reason requires. Anselm would regard that conclusion as absurd. Therefore, God loves Himself. This is the conclusion that ends *Monologion* 49, but we can extend the argument to capture a claim that Anselm makes in a subsequent chapter. *Track* entails God's deserving to be loved to the extent to which He is excellent. But God is supremely excellent. Thus God would be remiss if He failed to love himself to a degree equal to His supreme excellence. Since God cannot be remiss in anything, it follows, as Anselm puts it, that "His love is as great as He Himself is" (*Mon.* 52).

The second of the two principles connecting memory and understanding to love appears in *Monologion* 50:

Prior:

Any rational being that loves itself does so because and only because it remembers and understands itself; it does not remember and understand itself because it loves itself.

Prior makes a claim about the explanatory priority of self-memory and self-understanding over self-love. *Prior* gives us a conception of rational love, a kind of love that presupposes memory and understanding at a minimum. Yet memory and understanding are not sufficient. Anselm observes that there are many things we remember and understand but do not love. *Prior* is restricted in two ways, dealing only with self-love and only with rational beings who love themselves. Anselm immediately endorses, however, a less restricted principle, one that applies to all cases of love, namely, that *nothing* is loved without its being an item of (the lover's) memory and understanding. But even the less restricted principle does not imply that every rational being loves itself. For all that *Prior* says, there may be rational beings whose self-memory and self-understanding are such that they do not love themselves. Borrowing an idea from *Track*, we can say that it may be that such beings recognize their own conspicuous lack of excellence.

Because divine self-love must be coeternal with God – indeed, must turn out, for Anselm, to be consubstantial with the Father and the Son – it is important for Anselm's

purposes that explanatory priority need not involve temporal priority. Even among timebound creatures explanatory priority is compatible with simultaneity: a pendulum's length explains its period, not vice versa. So Anselm has grounds for holding that God's self-love follows from His self-memory and self-understanding, even though the "following" cannot imply a temporal sequence.

Anselm relies on the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son to establish to his satisfaction that this divine love proceeds equally from both, who love each other and themselves to the same extent – an extent compatible with their supreme excellence and independent of their creating anything – with one love that proceeds as a whole from each of them (*Mon.* 50–54).

In *Monologion* 55 Anselm stakes out a major claim, for which he offers two arguments. The claim is that divine love is not the offspring of the Father or the Son. That is, the asymmetric, irreflexive begetting relation that holds between the Father and the Son does not hold between them, singly or collectively, and divine love. Here Anselm is conforming to the demands of the Nicene Creed, which specifies that the Son is "only-begotten." The second of the two arguments consists of an attempt to reduce to absurdity the offspring hypothesis by ringing the changes on which of the first two members of the Trinity would be the mother. It cannot be that one is the father and the other the mother, since love proceeds from both the Father and the Son in exactly the same way. And it cannot be that both are father and mother; no nature could be both. The argument is less than overwhelming. Anselm has already conceded that there are no sexual distinctions to be found between the first two members of the Trinity. We regard them as male because of the gender of the nouns in Latin (*pater* and *filius*) and on the basis of sexist biology (*Mon.* 42). So to utilize generalizations about sexual reproduction in creatures is out of place. Moreover, if those generalizations are loosened up enough so that the Son can be begotten by the Father parthenogenetically, so to speak, without benefit of a mother, then it would seem not to be much more of a feat to have love begotten by both.

The first of the two arguments is more intriguing. Although the Son is the perfect image of the Father, Anselm asserts that divine love resembles neither the Father nor the Son. From this premise we are to conclude that divine love is not begotten. I presume that we are to fill in the argument by supposing that if divine love were begotten, as the Son is, it would resemble its parent(s). Therefore it must proceed from its source in some different way. What is intriguing about the argument is the lack-of-resemblance assertion. What could justify it?

There was the pressure of authority from Augustine, who had pronounced that "The

Son alone is the image of the Father” (*On the Trinity* 6.2.3). But that confers a pedigree, not a justification. I suggest that the reason why Augustine and Anselm converge on this assertion is grounded in the analogy of Trinity to memory, understanding, and will. Memory and understanding are essential to *cognition* or *contemplation* (liberally construed). We are entitled to impute the following picture to Anselm. Understanding is an intellectual process or state, represented in thought by mental locutions. The possibility of forming these locutions, and thus the possibility of understanding itself, depends on the understanding agent having in memory the relevant concepts, or inner words, from which the mental locutions are formed. A necessary condition for the agent’s understanding is that the agent’s mental locutions correctly image the connections that exist among the relevant concepts. The transfer of this picture to the first two members of the Trinity is reasonably straightforward. The Father is the primordial memory, as it were, that is perfectly imaged by the Son’s locution.

If, however, the third member of the Trinity is analogously identified with will, then we shift from the realm of cognition and contemplation to the arena of *desire* and *action*. It can seem natural to say that the process of coming to understand something resembles the process of recalling something, natural enough to lead Plato to assimilate all cases of genuine learning to recollection of what one already knows. But there is no similar obvious affinity between recalling or understanding something and desiring or doing something. In particular, love and love-motivated actions do not immediately resemble cognitive states and feats. I suspect that it is considerations like these that lead Anselm to assert the lack-of-resemblance thesis. Anselm never puts it this way, but it can be said on his behalf that if he had confined himself solely to a consideration of the first two members of the Trinity, without the dimension of divine love, he would have been left with a conception of God as a purely contemplative being, unconcerned about creation, unconcerned about Himself, unconcerned even about contemplation.

Divine love, then, is not the offspring of the Father or the Son but nevertheless proceeds from both of them. Although proceeding from them, it is uncreated, coeternal, and consubstantial with them. In traditional trinitarian terminology, the relation that describes this mode of proceeding is *spiration*, a kind of divine exhaling or sighing that produces – and *is* – the *Spirit* (identification of divine love by that term is postponed by Anselm until *Mon.* 57). Like the begetting relation, spiration is an asymmetric and irreflexive relation.

Following Augustine, Anselm models his conception of the Trinity on memory, understanding, and will. The model is fueled by the thought that among the created things that we ordinarily encounter, the human mind bears the clearest traces of its creator. Yet in the human mind, memory, understanding, and will are three separate faculties, each responsible for a separate domain of human competence and each

operating semi-autonomously from the others. In *Monologion* 57–61 Anselm argues, in effect, that this feature of human mental life cannot be ascribed to God. Divine memory, understanding, and will are not encapsulated. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are “equally in one another,” in such a way that, for example, the Father does not understand solely through the instrumentality of the Son and love solely through the Spirit. Each person of the Trinity is fully endowed with all the abilities of the others. Yet it is not as if each were a separate, free-standing module backed up with the capacities of the others. That would be tritheism.

TAKING STOCK

We have, then, the following results. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are associated, respectively, with memory, understand-ing, and will. Each of these mental functions was introduced by means of its self-reflective capacities, self-memory (adjusted to extend to a being for whom nothing is past), self-understanding, and self-love. In humans memory, understanding, and will are encapsulated or modular. In God they are not: the doctrine of God’s simplicity entails there being no separate “components,” mental or otherwise, in God. Anselm is thus insulated against a charge of tritheism. In order to avoid lapsing into modalism Anselm must find a way in which God is threefold that does not collapse into merely ascribing three different roles or functions to God. In service of that goal, Anselm relies on the two relations, begetting and spiration. The Son is distinguished from the Father by being begotten; the Holy Spirit is distinguished from the Father and the Son by being spirated from both.

But recall *No-rel.*, the principle that no relational term ascribed to any being refers to that being’s essence. Anselm invoked *No-rel.* to support his thesis that no relational term ascribed to God refers to God’s essence. But the terms, “begets” and “spirates,” are relational and ascribed to God. Now Anselm faces a dilemma. Take the case of begetting; analogous remarks apply to spiration. Either the Father begets the Son essentially or not. If the former, then *No-rel.* is false. If the latter, that is, if the Father does not beget the Son essentially, then it would seem that the Son’s existence is as contingent as the existence of any creature. But that consequence flies in the face of everything that Anselm has said about the Father and the Son, in particular, that the Father’s existence is necessary and that the Father and the Son are coeternal, coequal, and consubstantial. Anselm is in danger here of capitulating to Arianism.

If Anselm cannot have *No-rel.* along with essentially existing, coequal members of the Trinity, then perhaps he should jettison *No-rel.* The principle seems false for independent reasons. The proposition that the number 4 is even specifies part of 4’s essence. But that proposition is irreducibly relational: to be even is to be divisible by 2. We have already

seen that *Aseity* and *Comp.* suffice without *No-rel.* to ground an argument against ascribing accidental properties to God. My conjecture is that *Aseity* and *Comp.* are sufficient to allow Anselm to argue for a robust doctrine of God's simplicity.

Still, we are left with the question whether Anselm's doctrine of the Trinity falls prey to a charge of modalism, a question made all the more poignant by Anselm's candid admission that he cannot say what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three of. In *On the Incarnation of the Word* Anselm presents an arresting analogy that sheds light on this issue. An analogy like it had originally been employed by Augustine in *On Faith and Creed*. I shall first discuss Augustine's version of it, then Anselm's.

How is it possible, Augustine asks, that the Son is not the Father, and neither the Father nor the Son is the Holy Spirit, yet the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, without there being three Gods (*On Faith and Creed* 9.16)? It will help to dispel a sense of logical impropriety if we can find similar patterns of claims made about things found in nature. Think of a spring, the headwaters of a river. The spring is not the river itself. Nor is drinking water obtained from the spring or the river identical to the spring or the river. But the spring is water, the river is water, and the drink is water. We do not say that there are three waters; there is only one water (*On Faith and Creed* 9.17). Augustine is quick to point out that the analogy is not perfect; for the same water might at one time be in the spring, later in the river, and still later in the drink. God, is not, however, at one time the Father, at another the Son, and at still another the Holy Spirit. But that kind of slippage can be attributed to the difference between temporal and eternal entities. Augustine suggests a second analogy involving the roots, trunk, and branches of a tree all being *simultaneously* the same wood, not three woods.

"Water" and "wood" are *mass nouns*, nouns whose paradigm cases refer to stuffs. Mass nouns resist pluralization, numerical modifiers, the indefinite article, and the degree determinatives, "many" and "few." In some obvious ways, assimilating "God" to a mass noun should be attractive to monotheists. Even so, Augustine's analogies ignore a distinction that is critical in this context. Consider the two claims:

- (1) The spring is water.
- (2) The river is water.

Set aside worries about temporal successiveness. Focus instead on the copula, "is," and ask the question, What is the logical structure of (1) and (2)? Since "water" is a noun, the sentences cannot have a subject–predicate structure. Nor can the "is" express identity, for if it did, then (1) and (2) would be represented as:

- (1') The spring = water.

(2') The river = water.

(1') and (2') entail the falsehood that the spring = the river. Moreover, if the spring is supposed to be the analogue to the Father, the river the analogue to the Son, and water the analogue to God, we get the result, inimical to the doctrine of the Trinity, that the Father = the Son.

A more promising approach to (1) and (2) is to view them as elliptical for sentences that include a non-count quantificational noun applicable to water:

(1*) The spring is a portion of water.

(2*) The river is a portion of water.

Since the portion of water constituting the spring need not be identical to the portion constituting the river, the analogy gives no reason to think that the Father is identical to the Son. Nevertheless, the analogy implies that the Father and the Son are portions of God, which, insofar as it is intelligible at all, probably implies tritheism and certainly contravenes divine simplicity.

At first glance Anselm's reworking of the Augustinian analogy appears to be a trivially different variation of it.³ We are to envision the Nile, flowing from spring into river and from river into lake. (Ignore your knowledge of actual African geography.) The spring is not the river and neither the spring nor the river is the lake. Yet spring, river, and lake are all called the Nile; there are not three Niles but only one (*De Inc. Verbi* 13). One may be inclined to object that the analogy is more obviously inept than that of Augustine. The spring, river, and lake are *parts* of the Nile; thus Anselm's analogy even more overtly leads to tritheism or the denial of divine simplicity.

Anselm anticipates this objection: his response to it takes us well beyond the resources proposed by Augustine. We are to suppose that "the Nile" names something that exists from *where* it begins to where it ends and from *when* it begins to when it ends. It appears as though Anselm is advocating a view according to which "the Nile" names a four-dimensional entity, occupying a certain region, not just of space, but of the spatio-temporal continuum. (It is not too far-fetched to think of this use of "the Nile" applying to the Nile as perceived by God, *sub specie aeternitatis*.) Now Anselm claims that if we think of the Nile in this way, we will realize that "the whole Nile is the spring, the whole Nile is the river, the whole Nile is the lake," even though the spring, river, and lake are not identical with each other. Anselm's move from supposition to conclusion is not brokered by any intermediary steps, so, in addition to trying to decipher what the conclusion means, we need to understand why Anselm believes it to be a consequence of

his four-dimensionalistic premise about the Nile.

Let us suppose that Anselm would agree that what holds for “the Nile” holds for all proper names. In that case, for example, “Anselm” names a seventy-six-year-old continuant stretching through years of the eleventh and twelfth centuries and regions of Italy, France, and England. Now suppose that in the late eleventh century Gloria says that she just saw Anselm yesterday. Boso, an acquaintance of Gloria’s, seeks to correct her, pointing out that she did not see *Anselm*; strictly speaking, what she saw was just a “time-slice” of Anselm. Boso assures Gloria that her describing her encounter with the time-slice as an encounter with Anselm is a case of synecdoche. It occurs to Gloria that were she to acquiesce in Boso’s diagnosis, she would have to acknowledge that she never sees any three-dimensional object: all that she really sees are “space-slices,” or surfaces of objects. But why should Gloria accept Boso’s diagnosis? She can cling to four-dimensionalism and reject Boso’s diagnosis by maintaining that she *did* see the four-dimensional Anselm yesterday. This feat of perception is no stranger than the phenomenon of apprehending a felon by grabbing the felon’s ankle.

Anselm may have something like this in mind when he claims that the whole Nile is the spring, the whole Nile is the river, and the whole Nile is the lake. The expression is dramatic, to be sure. But it allows Anselm to preserve an important item of common sense, namely, that people routinely see the Nile, not just a fragment of it. And, finally, it provides Anselm, I think, with a way of rejecting modalism. If the whole of God is the Father, the whole of God is the Son, and the whole of God is the Holy Spirit, then it follows that the Father is the whole of God, the Son is the whole of God, and the Holy Spirit is the whole of God. Where there is wholeness, there is no room for apportioning roles or functions.

Anselm is fond of the Nile analogy. He suggests that it can help us to understand the doctrine of the Incarnation (*De Inc. Verbi* 14) and he uses it to argue for the appropriateness of the *filioque* doctrine (*De Proc.* 9). Yet we should bear in mind that when he introduces the analogy, it is designed simply to show how even among spatio-temporal things composed of parts, it is possible to find that “three can be said of one and one of three.” If the analogy helps to forestall a charge of modalism, that is to its credit. Anselm hastens to remind us, however, that the analogy, like the other analogies on which he has relied, is just that – an analogy, his best attempt to explicate what must remain inexplicable. The mystery of the Trinity remains a mystery. For now we see in a mirror dimly (*Mon.* 67), a mirror whose act of reflecting is itself a dim reflection of its maker.⁴

NOTES

1. Excellent overviews of *On the Incarnation of the Word* and *On the Procession of the Holy Spirit* can be found in Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), [Chapter 4](#). All translations of Latin texts in this essay are my own.
2. See the sources mentioned in William E. Mann, “Augustine on Evil and Original Sin,” in Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40–48.
3. For another analysis of Anselm’s Nile analogy, see Christopher Hughes, *On a Complex Theory of a Simple God* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), [Chapter 5](#).
4. An earlier version of this essay benefited from the criticism of Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, hereby gratefully acknowledged.

12 Anselm on atonement

David Brown

Although among philosophers and in the wider world generally Anselm is undoubtedly best known for his ontological argument, this is not where he has exercised most influence. Rather, it is in the field of Christian doctrine, and particularly in his account of the Christian doctrine of atonement or redemption. This influence has been displayed in both positive and negative forms: positive in the way ideas of his were taken up and developed by some later theologians; negative in the way yet others sought to put their own views at as great a distance as possible from those of Anselm. The result is that, though he is sometimes praised, he has more often been savagely criticized, particularly in the modern period. Not all of those criticisms are fair. The problem is that historical context is either ignored or, if acknowledged, explored at an insufficiently deep level. In what follows, therefore, I want to present his position as clearly as possible, noting where misunderstandings have arisen and where potential developments have occurred, or could occur.

Atonement means simply at-one-ment, and so is concerned with the issue of how in general, despite fault on one side, reconciliation is achievable between the two or more parties involved. The word can thus be used with a purely secular meaning as in the title of a recent work by the British novelist, Ian McEwan.¹ More commonly, though, and by origin, the word has an explicitly religious connotation and then the question focuses on how, despite the presence of sin, human beings can be reconciled to God. The sacrificial system in the Old Testament, and indeed in the ancient world more generally, indicates one way in which this might be conceived; the transformation of the ritual of the Day of Atonement in the Temple at Jerusalem into modern Jewish practice of a special day of penitence (Yom Kippur) another. However, so central is Christ to Christian self-understanding that Christianity has almost invariably insisted that no such reconciliation with God is possible except through the mediation of Christ.

That mediation has been expounded in a number of different ways: ransom, victory, example, penal substitution, sacrifice, and so forth. Theologians have often described these various approaches as rival “theories” or “models” but it is not clear that this is always how such talk was intended. Thus, although it is easy to identify particular verses in the New Testament that seem to support one approach or other (for example, 2 Corinthians 5:21 might be used for penal substitution),² there is little in the evangelists or

even Paul that suggests the development of a systematic account. Rather, the often incidental way in which the images are introduced hints at something rather different: the ransacking of a treasure-trove of potential metaphors, employed to highlight, now in one way, now in another, what the authors saw as the indispensable role of Christ in human salvation. Because the Old Testament was seen as fulfilled in Christ, whatever images of reconciliation and new life were available were applied to this new perception of faith and used to complement one another. Nor did this change much in the early history of the Church. Its preoccupation during the first millennium with how the Incarnation was to be understood (Christ as simultaneously God and man) meant that no attempts were made at formal definition in this area, so only one of the two principal creeds of the Christian church insists that Christ acted “for us,” and even then offers no guidance as to how exactly this was so.³

All this helps to explain why Anselm’s late work *Cur Deus Homo* (written between 1094 and 1098) constitutes such a major landmark in the history of Christian thought. For what is incontestably now offered is a fully developed and carefully articulated theory of how atonement is achievable only through the work of Christ. In brief, only someone who is both God and man can save us because, while it is human beings who owe recompense to God for sin, it is only God who has the power and ability to make such recompense. Anselm elaborates that basic structure into what turns out to be quite a complex, multi-staged argument.⁴ A brief analysis of its form is provided in my first section below. More important in my view, though, is appreciation of Anselm’s underlying strategy and terminology. Rather, therefore, than using the initial analysis as a basis for the discussion which follows, I have chosen to examine issues under a number of alternative headings: Anselm on the relation between reason and revelation; the key terms and their appropriate translation; finally, subsequent developments and responses by others to Anselm’s position.

THE ARGUMENT

As I mentioned above, I do not wish to lay much stress on the analysis that now follows, but it will give the reader some indication of how much more complicated Anselm’s position is than it is commonly characterized to be.

- (1) All human beings have sinned: *passim*.
- (2) Eternal salvation and reconciliation with God is not possible without freedom from the effects of sin.
- (3) These effects cannot be eliminated by an act of divine forgiveness: 1.11 (cf. also 1.15; 1.24; 2.5).
- (4) So either punishment must follow, or else compensation/satisfaction be paid:

1.13.

(5) But God does wish some human beings to be saved: 1.16–18.

(6) So compensation must sometimes be the chosen alternative.

(7) But “to sin is nothing other than not to render God his due”: 1.11.⁵

(8) So, compensation must consist in giving to God what is not his due: 1.11.

(9) But, “if in justice I owe to God myself and all my powers even when I do not sin, I have nothing left to render to him for my sin”: 1.20.

(10) Therefore, compensation must be paid by an act, not owed to God, performed by a person other than one of whom (9) is true.

11 But, given what we owe to God, any sin is of infinite extent: 1.21.

(12) So compensation “cannot be achieved, except the compensation paid to God for human sin be something greater than all that is beside God . . . Therefore, none but God can make this satisfaction”: 2.6.

(13) But it is necessary that the person paying the compensation be also a man: 2.8 (“Otherwise, neither Adam nor his race would make satisfaction for themselves”).

(14) “If, as is certain, it is therefore necessary that the heavenly community be made up of human beings and this cannot be effected unless the aforesaid satisfaction be made, which none but God can make and none but a human being ought to make, it is necessary for a God-man to make it”: 2.6.

(15) But it is not fitting for the Father or the Holy Spirit to be incarnated: 2.9.

(16) Therefore, the requisite compensation must be achieved by the incarnation of God the Son, and, from (8), such compensation will involve that “he somehow gives up himself, or something of his, to the honour of God, which he does not owe as a debtor”: 2.11.

(17) But “every reasonable being owes his obedience to God”: 2.11, cf. (9).

(18) “Therefore, it must be in some other way that he give himself, or something belonging to him, to God”: 2.11.

(19) But mortality is not an essential attribute of human nature “since, had man never sinned, and had his immortality been unchangeably confirmed, he would have been as really man”: 2.11.

(20) “Therefore, one who wishes to make atonement/satisfaction for human sin should be such a one who can die if he chooses”: 2.11.

(21) So compensation/satisfaction/ atonement will be made by the innocent death of God the Son.

REASON AND REVELATION

Anselm opens by saying that his intention is to offer an argument for nonbelievers that makes no assumptions initially regarding the historical Christ. For some theologians this

has been enough to mean that Anselm sets off on quite the wrong track, a suspicion that is only intensified by Anselm's own choice of words in his preface – “removing Christ from view” (*remoto Christo*). Christ, it is said, can only be properly known through revelation, so distortion must be the inevitable result of any such approach. As one recent commentator observes, “the attempt to ‘prove’ the necessity and possibility of redemption without any reference to the gospel story strikes us as perverse.”⁶ Although Karl Barth goes too far in his defence of Anselm when he asserts that Anselm's premises were all in any case implicitly derived from revelation,⁷ there are a number of more limited observations that may be made by way of response. First, though Anselm largely obeys his own ordinance, Scripture is in fact often seen lying just beneath the surface, and sometimes explicit quotations do actually emerge.⁸ More importantly, Anselm is insistent that nothing he asserts should be inconsistent with Scripture, which continues to be given supreme authority: “I am certain that if I say anything which indubitably contradicts sacred Scripture, it is false; and I do not wish to hold it, if I should become aware of this.”⁹ So it is not as though he ever subscribes to the view that the Bible could in theory be made to yield to the discoveries of reason, a distinctly modern notion. Nor is it ever the case that other texts are quoted in place of Scripture, for, in marked contrast to the theology of the time, all appeal to authority in fact disappears, a feature of Anselm's writing which deeply troubled his former teacher and predecessor as Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc.¹⁰

Anselm seems to have been motivated in part by apologetic reasons. As we have seen, he opens by specifying “nonbelievers” (*infideles*) by which he probably meant not atheists but Jews and Muslims. Both faiths believe that atonement is possible without an incarnation, and it may well be the case that Anselm had met intellectually plausible representatives of both groups. His biographer, Eadmer, tells us that while at Capua (where he completed the work) Anselm gained the respect of Muslims for his kind treatment of them, while his fellow Benedictine, Gilbert Crispin, had drawn his attention to the challenge presented by Jews.¹¹ Nonetheless, close attention to Anselm's text actually reveals a much more deeply seated concern to explicate belief more clearly for the Christian believer as such. So, for instance, he makes Boso, his conversation partner, reaffirm what Anselm himself had already asserted a couple of sentences earlier: “it seems to me an act of negligence if, after we have been confirmed in the faith, we do not strive to understand what we believe.”¹² Mystery, he concedes, will at some stage take over as the divine recedes from our limited human capacity to comprehend,¹³ but before that happens it makes sense to ask what is entailed by assuming that God does all things appropriately and well, and for that assumption he could well have quoted the authority of Scripture.¹⁴

Already in the preface Anselm had announced his intention to proceed by “necessary

reasons.” “What is inferred to be true by a necessary reason,” he tells us, “ought not to be called into doubt, even if the reason why it is true is not understood.”¹⁵ That insistence on the limits of human understanding matches well with his repeated insistence throughout this work that in offering “necessary” reasons he does not mean to imply any constraint on God. It is not a case of reason somehow imposing limits on God; rather, it is a matter of human beings coming to comprehend what follows from the fact that God remains consistent with his nature or else, putting it another way, is self-consistent.¹⁶ So in the absence of any external “compulsion” or “constraint,” we should not think of God as governed by “necessity” but rather by His own “eternal constancy.”¹⁷

One example of this is how divine mercy is understood. Anselm insists that it must be explicated in a way that is made consistent with justice, for God is both merciful and just. Simply to forgive without recompense would result in a “God inconsistent with Himself” (1.24), something external to God which He can choose, now to apply, now to reject; He is after all Justice itself (1.13). So it is not that Anselm is committed to a narrow theory of retribution, what some have called “rationalized vengeance,”¹⁸ but that for Anselm God cannot be portrayed as acting now in one way, now in another: punishing, according to the Bible, fallen angels and human beings who are irredeemably wicked, yet allowing others (the forgiven) apparently to escape all consequences of their sins. For “no unfitness, however small, is possible with God” (1.20). That may sound like an unyielding God requiring either punishment or compensation where wrong has been done, but for Anselm the issue as much concerns human attitudes; for we need to admit that we already owe everything to God. There would thus be an “unfitness” in us accepting forgiveness without compensation being paid, no less than in God offering such forgiveness unconditionally (1.21). The result would be an “unseemliness” that violated “beauty of arrangement.”¹⁹

That last reference illustrates a feature of Anselm’s argument that is often found rather strange in our contemporary context, and that is the extent to which Anselm appeals not only to requirements of logical consistency but also to what might now be more naturally termed aesthetic considerations: what is fitting or appropriate (*conveniens/debens*). Here we need to think ourselves back into a world in which God was identified not only with Justice, Truth, and Goodness but also with Beauty. Although the inclusion of beauty has been revived in the voluminous writings of the Swiss theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar (d. 1988), it is not an idea that comes naturally to the modern mind. It was mediated to the Western tradition particularly through the thought of St. Augustine, who finds measure and form intrinsic to goodness and argues that the search for balance can help to explain the presence of evil in the world, much as a beautiful poem is set off by its antitheses.²⁰ Building on an emphasis found as early as in Irenaeus, Anselm speaks of “the indescribable beauty” in the arrangement whereby salvation comes through a

woman (Mary) and a cross, for the fall was through another woman (Eve) and wood's source – a tree, in the Garden of Eden.²¹ But he also uses the notion much more widely. It would, for example, he suggests, not be fitting for the number of humans saved simply to substitute for the number of lost angels, for then any human being saved would have grounds to rejoice over an angel's fall, and that would not be "appropriate" (1.18). To the modern reader that may sound like a rather weak moral consideration, but for Anselm it is decisive. In that chapter as a whole, morality merges naturally into aesthetics, as attention is given to such topics as perfect numbers and an appropriate balance between the two natures (angelic and human). Again, it would be unseemly for there to be two sons in the Trinity, which is what would happen if any other than God the Son became incarnate (2.9). Indeed, so far as God's actions are concerned, "not fitting" is taken to imply our entitlement to draw the conclusion "necessarily not the case" (1.10; 1.19). For would not God create a beautifully ordered world?

Although it is possible to argue that the notion of beauty is central to both Testaments with their many references to the divine "glory" or "splendour," it is clear that the idea of beauty in balance and proportion which Anselm employs here is more strongly part of Christianity's inheritance from Platonism, though the Bible is not without its own examples. Paul is surely arguing in similar vein when he declares that "as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Romans 5:19; JB). The aesthetic delight in the careful Greek phrasing suggests that more than just a parallel is being drawn. Estimating the relative weight of such influences, however, is not always an easy matter. This becomes particularly difficult and controversial in respect of another key element in Anselm's strategy, the question of how one man's actions, even those of a God-man, are supposed inevitably to have an impact for the whole of humanity. On first reflection, somebody else paying the penalty or offering compensation seems a poor substitute for the guilty individual's own action.

The [next section](#) which is devoted to consideration of Anselm's terminology is the best place to examine one commonly proposed explanation, namely, that in terms of Anselm's reliance on feudal imagery. As we shall see, such a grounding is much less plausible than is usually claimed. Here, though, I want to look at two other possible sources, in the Bible and in Platonism. The methodology of *Cur Deus Homo* precludes explicit reference to either; so we must argue more indirectly and tentatively.

On the Bible, it should not be forgotten that Anselm was a Benedictine monk, so his reading would have been first and foremost the Scriptures. In the Old Testament, law and prophets address the people primarily not as individuals but as a corporate entity (Israel), and interdependence for both good and bad is a frequently reiterated notion. Although occasionally challenged, the Second Commandment's "visiting the iniquity of

the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” might be used to illustrate the interconnection in one direction, the high priest’s action on the Day of Atonement the presumed connection in the other.²² Although stress on individual responsibility is more marked in the New Testament, much of its imagery and theology continues to be corporate. For Paul we are all potentially “in Christ” just as we were once “in Adam,” and in his letters two competing but related images of the Church as “the body of Christ” are developed, by which something rather more than just metaphor is surely intended. The Evangelist John too offers a not dissimilar notion in his picture of Christ as the vine and ourselves as its branches.²³

Although *Cur Deus Homo* avoids any supporting biblical quotation of the above sort, more than once Anselm insists that Christ had to be “of the same kind” (*genus*) as ourselves (e.g. 2.8). Not only would an angel not do, Christ’s atonement can have no impact for good on fallen angels, precisely because they are not the same kind of thing (2.21). In the second passage, if not in the first, it is clear that “race” is the better translation, inasmuch as Anselm claims that it would not even have been enough for Christ to have had the same “nature”: there must also have been a genetic connection. But while such a connection can be used to help to explain transmission of Adam’s tendency toward sin (“original sin”) to successive generations, it is rather harder to see how this helps in the case of Christ’s action. Yet Anselm does use positive corporate language elsewhere in his writings, especially in his devotional works. So, for instance, in a eucharistic prayer he asks of Christ that he may be “worthy to be incorporated into your body which is the Church, so that I may be your member and you my head.”²⁴ One notes too his own strong sense of acting in a corporate role, both on behalf of his monastery and at Canterbury on behalf of the particular saints with whom the see was identified. Thus for him Augustine of Canterbury was anything but a distant historical figure, merely the first to hold the see. He was a living presence, whose mantle he had now in some sense adopted, and whose rights he was required to defend.²⁵ As one pope of the time put it, “we behold in you the venerable *persona* of St. Augustine.”²⁶

Sadly, this whole notion of “corporate personality” is one to which little philosophical attention has been devoted in modern times.²⁷ In part the worry seems to be that, if taken seriously, clear and valuable distinctions will thereby be undermined. Platonism would, however, seem to offer the possibility of a different view, and that is no doubt one reason why until fairly recently almost all commentators have assumed a Platonic background to the argument of *Cur Deus Homo*.²⁸ So, for instance, Sir Richard Southern observes of Anselm that “there can be no doubt that his essential philosophical ideas are Platonic” and that “his general tendency is to think of the species as more real than its individual components.”²⁹ Once again, though, there is no direct quotation, and indeed it is only Aristotle who is mentioned (once) in the course of Anselm’s text.³⁰ So

we must rely on indirect evidence. Chalcidius' version of Plato's *Timaeus* did become increasingly available throughout the eleventh century; so it is just possible that Anselm knew directly one of Plato's works.³¹ More certain is that he was well acquainted with Platonism as mediated through the writings of St. Augustine, for Lanfranc's stocking of the monastic library is on record.³² We also know that in contemporary discussion of approaches to what modern philosophers call the theory of universals Platonist versions were being canvassed, and indeed according to one reading of the evidence Anselm was forced to defend himself against the charge of veering altogether too strongly in that particular direction.³³ There are even occasional passages in Anselm's works which taken on their own can sound alarmingly Platonic.³⁴ So, for example in the opening chapter of his rather technical work *On the Incarnation of the Word* he observes that "anyone who does not understand how many men are one man in species cannot understand how . . . several persons . . . can be one God."

Platonism has had a long and complex history, so all I can do here is briefly indicate how such a philosophical background might have provided further underpinning to ideas already current in Anselm's mind from Scripture. In trying to resolve the question of universals, the issue of what it is that justifies the application of common or "universal" names as descriptions shared across unique, particular objects, Plato responds that the particulars only have intelligibility or reality insofar as they "imitate" or "participate in" the perfect exemplar of their kind.³⁵ The point is easily appreciated if we consider the term "circle." No matter how careful we are with our compass, any circle we draw on a piece of paper will only ever approximate to the perfect one that unqualifiedly fulfills the definition of a circle – as a figure, all points on the circumference of which are equidistant from the centre. The most real circle, as it were, lies elsewhere, so other circles are only struggling approximations. Equally, then, with Plato's own examples of knives and beds: particular knives will only be to varying degrees successful at their function of cutting well, beds to varying degrees successful at aiding a good night's sleep, and so on, and it is the ideal or "form" that remains the appropriate standard by which to measure the goodness of the particular.

While it is true that Anselm could not have read that particular discussion of Plato's, there is much that is similar in Augustine.³⁶ If the ideal "form" has moved into the mind of God, there is the same notion of degrees of participation, with lesser goods only good by participation in higher, unchangeable goods,³⁷ and Anselm seems to repeat that pattern of thinking in his *Monologion* (36). So far as atonement itself is concerned, the thought would then be that this is secured through us "participating" in the perfect exemplar or "universal" human nature that Christ came to offer. It was partly to defend that possibility that Cyril of Alexandria not long before the Council of Chalcedon (451) insisted that in the Incarnation God assumed an impersonal human nature, not the

characteristics that would make Him a distinct human personality. Known technically as the doctrine of *anhypostasia* and much attacked in the twentieth century, it is found reflected even as late as the nineteenth in Newman's declaration of Christ that "though Man, he is not, strictly speaking, a Man."³⁸ To my mind this means that translating the title of Anselm's work is not as simple as it may initially appear. If "Why God Became Humanity" is altogether too strong, "Why God Became a Human Being" is also not without its difficulties.³⁹ Such problems are not unknown in the Church of our own day. In contemporary Anglican translations of the Nicene Creed "men" is now excluded as unnecessarily sexist from the clause "for us *men* and for our salvation," whereas "man" has been retained in "he became man" despite that problem, because it is thought that otherwise something important could be lost.⁴⁰ Neither Plato nor Paul nor Anselm thought that identifying the ideal or corporate reality told the whole story, but all three presupposed a strong connection which to modern minds is not so immediately apparent, so modern readers need to be made aware of how differently Anselm's text would have been heard in his own day.

If I am anywhere near right about the biblical and Platonic background to the thought-world of Anselm and at least some of his contemporaries, then his arguments might well have carried greater weight than they do in our day. Because connections were assumed, Anselm felt no need to go on in *Cur Deus Homo* to consider how a particular individual might appropriate Christ's act: in a sense, it was already his own. Even so, the need for grace is mentioned, and the force of Christ's example stressed.⁴¹ The latter is especially worth noting, not least because Anselm is so often sharply contrasted with his younger contemporary Abelard (d. 1142), who is often portrayed as the great exponent of an exemplarist theory, the view that salvation is secured through following Christ's moral example. In fact they are less far apart than is commonly supposed. Not only does Abelard take up some of Anselm's themes,⁴² Anselm himself in a later work of 1099, his short *Meditation on Human Redemption*, uses powerful imagery to ram home the need for deep meditation on the extent of divine love shown in Christ's act. Concluding with a prayer that Christ's love should seize his whole being, he twice urges his readers to "feed," "chew," "suck," and "swallow" not only in the eucharist but whenever and wherever the story of Christ's love is retold.⁴³ In his influential *History of Dogma* Adolf von Harnack complained of the "unevangelical character" of Anselm's theory,⁴⁴ but if one turns to Anselm's devotional writings, one finds a stress on dependence on Christ as powerful as anyone might desire: "Sweet name! Name full of delights! Name to comfort sinners and bring them blessed hope. For what is Jesus if not saviour?"⁴⁵ Even tender, "feminist" imagery finds its place, as in his familiar description of Jesus as a mother, like a hen gathering her chicks under its wings.⁴⁶ I mention this not to turn Anselm into a modern thinker, but rather as a way of insisting that his position must be seen as a rounded whole. He was no cold rationalist imposing purely external criteria on God but a

devout monk concerned to explore his faith in a God, the internal logic of whose nature, he believed, entailed His never failing to act beautifully and well.

THE KEY TERMS

Hitherto I have largely avoided the term “satisfaction,” so often presented as the core of Anselm’s theory. Instead in the introduction I used the more neutral “recompense,” for, despite the centrality of the term, the dangers of misrepresentation in this word are considerable, as also in Anselm’s use of the related notions of “debt” and “honor.” None are concepts that contemporary Christians customarily employ to describe their relationship with God, and that very strangeness is intensified by the decision of so many commentators to find an explanation for this way of speaking in the feudal system of the time, within which Anselm was of course firmly ensconced as Archbishop of Canterbury. Medieval society was a system of reciprocal rights and obligations and very strictly hierarchical within that framework. One owed certain obligations to one’s lord and in return he provided protection. Violate those obligations, and some recompense was required to the lord’s offended honor either from oneself or from one’s family before normal relations could be restored. “Satisfaction” was the usual term used to indicate such recompense. For an application nearer our own times one might think of what used to happen in sword or pistol duels. The offended party might even utter “I demand satisfaction,” as he issued his challenge to recover his own offended honor (or that of his king or lady). Still nearer to our own times would be prosecution in the civil courts for “damages” for honor or character besmirched through libel or slander. I offer these examples not because I think Anselm would have approved, but partly to indicate that even today we sometimes think in such terms and partly (and more importantly) to indicate some of the reasons why, however expressed, such an approach might not have particularly appealed to Anselm. The analogy simply fails to take sin with sufficient seriousness (after all criminal courts and not civil deal with the greater crimes) and, as we know from his prayers, Anselm was acutely conscious of his own sinfulness, never mind that of humanity in general. Yet it can scarcely be denied that Anselm must have been influenced to some degree by this way of thinking, given how deep such notions ran in the world about him. But, recalling my earlier insistence on his desire to avoid any external restraint on God, it would not seem likely that Anselm would ever have allowed such an obviously artificial and external pattern to become central to what he had to say. That is why we need to treat with extreme caution Harnack and the many others who venture down this track. For him “the worst thing in Anselm’s theory” is its “mythological conception of God as the mighty private man who is incensed at the injury done to his honor and does not forego his wrath till he has received an at least adequately great equivalent.”⁴⁷ Put that bluntly, and it becomes clear that Anselm could never have thought of matters in such crude terms. Recall that for Anselm God is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived,” the source of all that is and not in any sense a

reflection of our own petty acts.

With so many readers relying on the English alone, it is all too easy for them to be unaware of how translations can manipulate us into particular ways of perceiving Anselm's position. To illustrate, let me offer two contrasting translations of the same sentence, the first more literal, but the second equally loyal to the meaning.⁴⁸ (1) "Everyone who sins ought to pay back the honour of which he has robbed God; and this is the satisfaction which every sinner owes to God." (2) "Anyone who sins should return to God the respect and worship that he has denied him; in doing this he makes up for the sin." Contemporary Christians are unlikely to take exception to the second version, whereas many may well recoil from the first, as it sounds like an excessively formal and external relationship. That Anselm in fact intended something quite different I want now to demonstrate by considering carefully each of the three key terms.

Take first the word "debt." "To sin is nothing other than not to render God his due" (1.11), writes Anselm, and that may seem to confirm a very formal view of sin that could easily legitimate some sort of crude payback system. But the reader needs to recall that exactly this definition of sin is given at the very heart of Christianity in the Lord's Prayer. For modern versions that speak of "forgive us our sins" or "forgive us our trespasses" stem from the more literal "forgive us our debts" (AV), or, more literal still, "forgive us what is owed." Exactly the same word is used in the Latin Bible as Anselm uses here.⁴⁹ So Anselm is picking up on notions that run deep within the New Testament itself. For him, as for the New Testament, everything in the world should be seen in essentially teleological terms, as created with a divine purpose to be fulfilled, and it is really into this context that so much of his vocabulary of "debt" and of what is "owed" should be set. It is not, then, that God has laid down some rules which inferiors have violated and so needs satisfaction for such infringements, but rather that human beings have been so made that they can only be fulfilled, only realise their capacity for happiness, if they fulfill or satisfy what is owed to God because of how He has made their natures. God made human beings for eternal bliss through their loving God for His own sake, which means that it is only when their natures are ordered aright in this way that salvation becomes possible for them.

It thus will not do to object that our obligation to God is limited, and so it is not impossible to pay back whatever is missing. This is a tactic which is sometimes tried, through drawing a parallel with our limited debts to our parents which are clearly finite in extent, despite their gift of life. Such a parallel will not work because for Anselm the point is not about externally acquired duties but about the direction in which our natures are already ordered internally. But if that allows a general context for Anselm's talk of "debt" and "what is owed" which does not require the specifics of his own society, it also

explains why he is not as far distant from justification by faith as Protestant commentators so commonly assume. For what this internal teleological ordering suggests is that there is nothing that human beings can now do that can make up to God for the wrong they have done, for any good that they might achieve is itself a matter of divine grace, of fulfilling the way in which their natures have already been teleologically ordered by God.⁵⁰ As Anselm observes, “whatever you give you have not of yourself but from Him to whom you give.”⁵¹

That is why for Anselm even the God-man Christ is in no sense compensating for human misconduct in the perfect life he leads. He is merely fulfilling the destiny of human nature which God made possible in creating it that way. Compensation or recompense must therefore, Anselm contends, lie elsewhere, and this he believes he has found in Christ’s death. According to traditional Christian teaching, human nature is intended for eternal life and human beings die only because of the fall. Therefore a life voluntarily surrendered to death has nothing to do with the teleology of human nature. It is something returned to God that is not owed, a purely gratuitous act, and, because it is the life of a human being who is also God, an offering of infinite worth.⁵²

That may seem to return us to feudal notions once more, for, as was noted earlier, feudal law did allow another, such as a parent or relative, under appropriate circumstances to make satisfaction on behalf of the person who had actually done the wrong. But, if that were really the point, the exception would now have become the norm, and that seems unlikely. Earlier I drew attention to an alternative explanation, to how biblical and Platonist assumptions could be used to help to make this notion of one acting on behalf of all more readily intelligible. In denying any alleged major role to the feudal analogy, added to this should now be the various other ways in which Anselm seeks to distance what is happening from standard feudal practice. The act is entirely voluntary: it is not part of an established pattern where such conduct is expected, and where satisfaction is in one form or other simply assumed. Again, there is no gain on the part of the person receiving the satisfaction; God, Anselm insists, cannot be benefited in any way because divine impassibility means that God cannot have been hurt or harmed in the first place by human sin, the majesty of God requiring that nothing be outside His power (1.14–15). To suggest otherwise would be for Anselm to impugn the very meaning of the word “God.” Finally, human beings as the recipients of the benefit cannot receive it purely passively as in the feudal situation without any further action required on their part because salvation only becomes activated, as it were, by their actively pleading Christ’s act in their own cause, as we saw with Anselm’s injunction to his readers to absorb Christ’s story by “chewing,” and so forth.

But all this has still not yet really brought us to the heart of the issue of terminology,

which is the question whether the language of “honor” and “satisfaction” can, like “debt,” be liberated from its medieval context. One reason for thinking that this might indeed be so is because, despite the eminence of his position in society, Anselm does not seem to have committed himself deeply to the formal structures of the time. This period marked the beginnings of the investiture controversy during which Pope Gregory VII (d. 1085) and his successors sought to wrest some of the powers of the monarchy over the Church back into their own hands. Anselm was an uncompromising opponent of the two kings under whom he served (William II and Henry I), but the surprise from the available historical evidence is that he was not at all interested in investiture issues as such, and only really acted because he believed himself bound by an oath of obedience to proceed in the way he did.⁵³ This surely suggests that his focus in *Cur Deus Homo* may also have been elsewhere than in the details of medieval legalism. Anselm saw himself primarily as a monk rather than as a feudal lord.

The suspicion that feudalism does not provide the key to his meaning is confirmed when we turn to Scripture. Although many, if asked, might well declare “honor” not to be a biblical word, this misleading impression is created only because so often its use is yoked with others, especially “glory.” So, significantly, God is repeatedly offered “glory and honor” in the worship of heaven, and that is also seen as an appropriate ascription to God here on earth.⁵⁴ More puzzlingly, it is not inconceivable that Paul may have thought “honor” a legitimate human aspiration also.⁵⁵ Whether so or not, more relevant to note here is the implication of all of this, that Anselm would have already found a context for “honor” in his daily reading of Scripture as a monk. That surely radically changes the nature of his question: the issue was not how to pacify God, like some offended potentate, but rather how to show proper respect and worship toward the Being to whom one owes everything but whom one has nonetheless let down. If of the three key terms it is “satisfaction” which remains the most difficult to extricate from its medieval context, even here one should note that its root meaning would have been consciously at the forefront of Anselm’s mind in a way that is no longer so even for the classicists of our day. It was a matter of when one had “done enough,” a question that remains independent of the specifics of any particular penitential or feudal system. Indeed, it may have been that basic sense of “making up enough” that initially set Anselm on the track of realizing that there could never be “enough” (*satis*) on our part, so that is why the act of the God-man was required.

LATER DEVELOPMENTS

In dispensing with any inescapable dependence on feudal ways of thinking, however, all problems are scarcely at an end for Anselm’s approach. One obvious difficulty that remains is that few of us now read the story of the fall as literally as Anselm clearly did.

To him death was a consequence of sin, so a perfect life would necessarily be exempt from death, and that is what made Christ's offering so gratuitous. But evolution suggests that humanity is naturally destined to die, whatever may happen to us thereafter. If that is so, then simply in virtue of taking on human nature, the God-man must have committed his humanity to die, whether or not he led a perfect life. That is a characteristically modern objection. So too would be the complaint that his Christ is too unlike us to make any meaningful identification possible, for Anselm insists on a Christ who was never without full and perfect knowledge even as a child; so Luke's comment about the young boy growing in "wisdom and stature, and favor with God and man" needed reinterpretation.⁵⁶ That, however, is not where his immediate successors found difficulty, so it will be as well to look first at earlier objections before seeing how his theory might be defended today.

It was only gradually that his approach gained wide acceptance, but by the century following his death we find that Aquinas, for example, "comes very close to Anselm's position."⁵⁷ The major difference is in the former's insistence that there are a number of other ways that God could have acted to achieve the same end, for "nothing is impossible with God."⁵⁸ It is worth noting that where Anselm and Aquinas differ is in their understanding of the divine nature. For, as we have seen, Anselm agrees that there can be no external restraints on God, but his view is that there is nonetheless an internal constraint on the divine nature (something owed to himself) which means that God not only always acts consistently but also "fittingly." Even Anselm, though, has problems with this kind of approach when it comes to identifying the sense in which Christ "owed" or "ought" to have done what he did: he was bound by what he wished, Anselm suggests, not by the fact of the debt (2.18). A little later Duns Scotus (d. 1308), while retaining the language of satisfaction, is much more radical in his critique.⁵⁹ He wants to sweep away all talk of *infinite* debt and satisfaction which Aquinas had retained, and in its place put a system of merit supervening even in the case of ordinary human beings. The principal way of gaining merit, though, remains for him also in identification with the death of Christ.

Although Calvin rejected any talk of merit on our part, what comes as a surprise to many is the extent to which his views were continuous with those of Anselm, even to the extent of frequently using the language of "satisfaction." Admittedly, Calvin prefers to talk of "a heavenly decree" rather than any "absolute necessity"; nonetheless, it requires a "God-man" "to present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God's righteous judgment."⁶⁰ Although a life of obedience is also now part of that price, there is little doubt that for Calvin the death remains the main focus, but with its gruesome character stressed in a way that would have been quite foreign to Anselm. For Anselm it was enough that Christ had given up what he did not owe (his life), whereas for Calvin the

satisfaction borne is the punishment that might otherwise have been imposed on us. “Making up enough” can thus for Calvin no longer be compensatory and so potentially different in kind; instead, it must be exactly the same sort of thing: punishment exactly matched by punishment. The effect is particularly conspicuous in the treatment he accords the reference to Christ’s descent into hell in the Apostles’ Creed. For, rejecting the traditional interpretation, which found in the phrase an allusion to the liberating effect of Christ’s death on those who died before him, he transformed the meaning of “hell” from “the place of departed spirits” to a hell of suffering that Christ had endured on humanity’s behalf in order “to bear and suffer all the punishments that they ought to have sustained.”⁶¹ That is why Calvin can be seen as in some ways more truly medieval than Anselm. For, despite the accusation that is sometimes made that it is Anselm who sets the trend for the medieval literary and artistic obsession with the horrors of Christ’s death,⁶² nowhere does Anselm dwell on such details or characterize them as a divinely imposed punishment.

The most commonly raised objection against Calvin is the difficulty of comprehending the justice of an innocent man paying the price for the guilty in complete violation of any plausible theory of retributive justice. Although I earlier rejected the analogy, it is certainly very much easier to understand how “damages” might be paid by another, and indeed modern states sometimes do just that, for example in cases of negligence in hospitals where the hospital board pays on behalf of the offending doctor. In speaking of crime rather than debt it is thus far from clear that Calvin has improved the argument. Of course, where he thought he scored was in underlining the seriousness of sin. Anselm, though, as we have seen, never denied the seriousness, only that further punishment was the remedy. Yet the way in which Calvin tries to extricate himself from the retributivist objection can perhaps be allowed to provide an indication of how Anselm’s own position could be adapted for continuing use.

Calvin frequently reminds us that, though “we shall behold the person of a sinner and evildoer represented in Christ, yet from his shining innocence it will at the same time be obvious that he was burdened with another’s sin rather than his own.”⁶³ Taking up such hints, modern followers such as Barth in effect transform Calvin’s theory into a way of seeing ourselves.⁶⁴ The punishment is not something required of Christ or of us by God, but rather how we need to see ourselves (as totally undeserving of God’s love) before change can begin to be effected in us. Anselm could also be read with a similar transformation. The important point is our identification with a life of making amends, of seeing ourselves at one with that life and death. Anselm of course thought that only death fulfilled this role because it was the giving up of something that was not due, but one could question his argument by observing at this point that God the Son’s taking up of a human life was also a gratuitous act. For it is far from clear that, simply in virtue of being

a human life, all he did was owed to the Father, since it was not a human life that emerged as part of the natural course of things but rather one by special divine decision and action. Indeed, even Anselm himself on occasion seems to come close to identifying the life as well as part of the atonement.⁶⁵ But, whether part of his historical position or not, it would certainly make greater sense in our modern context.

Moreover, the model would have one obvious advantage over Calvin, in that it would not just look to the negative effects of sin but also direct attention to what happens thereafter, the pursuance of a particular style of living, one that continued that pattern of making amends. The requirement that Christ be both God and man would also still be preserved. Christ must be human because only in that way can we identify with his offering as our own; but equally he must also be God because only in that way is it an offering that is in no sense required: God the Son only became human in virtue of becoming incarnate and was not unconditionally and by definition human as we are. Yet, though deeply embedded in so much of Christian theology, some may still recoil from the denial to humanity in general of any positive contribution of their own. I noted earlier one possible response from Anselm to the objection that God cannot claim to have granted us life as a gift if he insists on all the credit subsequently as well. But there is also another way of reacting, that to speak at all of “a credit balance” in the individual case is already to invite the temptation of pride and a lack of a proper sense of dependence on divine generosity and grace.⁶⁶ Even as modern a philosopher as Kant thought it folly to pretend that we had ever done enough.⁶⁷ In insisting therefore that only one person has ever performed that enough (*satis*-faction), Anselm ensures a particular way of looking at ourselves. Intriguingly, atonement figures in novels are almost invariably themselves flawed figures. Think, for instance, of Prince Myshkin in Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot*, of Sydney Carton in Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, or, more recently, of the whiskey priest in Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* or the brawling McMurphy in Ken Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. Anselm preserves the recognition of that flaw in his claim that only a God-man could offer an unqualified “enough.”⁶⁸

NOTES

1. I. McEwan, *Atonement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2001). There is no final resolution within this novel. For an exploration of some implicitly Christian examples, see F. W. Dillistone, *The Novelist and the Passion Story* (London: Nelson, 1960).

2. “He made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin” (AV). Similarly, possibilities for

ransom would include Mark 10:45; also, for example, John 3:16; for victory over the Devil, Luke 10:18; for sacrifice, Hebrews 9:26, and so on.

3. The Apostles' Creed merely recites the outline of Christ's life, while the Nicene at least talks of that life being "for us and for our salvation" and "for our sake."

4. For discussion of the stages listed below, see my "Necessary and Fitting Reasons in Christian Theology," in W. J. Abraham and S. W. Holtzer (eds.), *The Rationality of Religious Belief* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 211–30, esp. 212–14.

5. All the translations that follow are my own.

6. T. Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 85–103, esp. 100.

7. K. Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (New York: Meridian, 1962), 55–57.

8. E.g. several times in 1.9. In 1.18 he actually considers rival textual versions of Deut. 32:8 ("sons of Israel" versus "angels of God").

9. *Cur Deus Homo* 1.18 (388A).

10. Epistle 72 describes how Anselm sent the *Monologion* to Lanfranc for approval, only for Lanfranc to complain of his failure to appeal to appropriate authorities.

11. For Muslims, see Eadmer, *Life of St. Anselm*, ed. R. W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 111–12 (xxxiii); for Jews, R. W. Southern, *Saint Anselm: A Portrait in a Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 198–202.

12. 1.1 (362C).

13. 1.1; cf. *Prosl.* 16.

14. "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25; AV). The sentiment catches Anselm's thinking well, even if the Vulgate translates the passage quite differently.

15. 1.25. A similar point is made in *Mon.* 44.
16. For some helpful comments in this direction, see E. Fairweather, “*Iustitia Dei* as the *Ratio* of the Incarnation,” in P. Grammont (ed.), *Spicilegium Beccense* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1959), 327–36.
17. 2.10; cf. 2.5; 2.17.
18. Cf. Gorringe, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 199–200.
19. 1.15: The Latin words are *deformitas* and *ordinis pulchritudo*.
20. For the former point, *On the Nature of the Good* 3; for the latter, *City of God* 11.18.
21. 1.3; 2.8. Cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* V, 19.
22. Exodus 20:5 (AV); Leviticus 16, esp. vv. 18ff. For a challenge to corporate thinking, Ezekiel 18:20.
23. 1 Cor. 12:12–30; Col. 1:15–20; in the later Paul Christ is treated as the head rather than identified with the whole body. See also John 15:1–11.
24. S III: 10; English available in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm*, trans. B. Ward (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 100–101, esp. 101.
25. Cf. Southern, *Portrait*, 330–47, esp. 332, 346.
26. Epistle 452. His contemporary Pope Gregory VII (d. 1085) exhibits similar attitudes: cf. M. Maccarone, “I fondamenti petrini del primato romano in Gregorio VII,” *Studi Gregoriani* 13 (1989): 55–128, esp. 96ff.
27. For a counter-example, see R. Harré, *Personal Being* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), 75–140, esp. 85–89.

28. Although challenging Platonist influence, Iwakuma Yukio concedes that this has been the dominant view: “The Realism of Anselm and His Contemporaries,” in D. E. Luscombe and G. R. Evans (eds.), *Anselm: Aosta, Bec, and Canterbury* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 120–35, esp. 120, n. 3.
29. R. W. Southern, *Anselm and His Biographer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 62; Southern, *Portrait*, 214.
30. 2.17 (424B): on the necessity of the future.
31. For statistics, C. S. Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideas in Medieval Europe, 950–1200* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994), 174.
32. Cf. Southern, *Portrait*, 57.
33. In responding to Roscelin: Southern, *Portrait*, 174–81.
34. “Alarming” because it would seem to commit him to the view that God is an entity distinct from the three persons of the Trinity in much the same way as the Platonic Man is from men.
35. Plato used his example of “bed” to argue that the work of artists is at a lower level than that of artisans, since what they create is only an imitation of an imitation: *Republic* 595–602.
36. The *Republic* was not available at this time.
37. Cf., e.g., *De Trinitate* 8.3.5.
38. For exposition and some discussion, see D. M. Baillie, *God Was in Christ* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 15–20, 85–93.
39. This is to express disagreement with Jasper Hopkins in his *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 198–202, esp. 201.

40. First introduced in the American *Book of Common Prayer* (1977) and then followed by the Church of England in its *Common Worship* (2000).
41. For references to grace, 1.20; 2.5; for example, 2.11; 2.18. Grace as aiding his critical acumen is also mentioned in 1.1.
42. It is altogether too simplistic to reduce Abelard to an exemplarist and nothing more, since elsewhere in his *Commentary on Romans* he speaks of both cross and the mass in terms of satisfaction and sacrifice. Anselm's concern with beauty means that comparisons with Bernard can also be given a certain plausibility: M. B. Pranger, "The Mirror of Dialectics," in Luscombe and Evans (eds.), *Anselm: Aosta, Bec, and Canterbury*, 136–47.
43. This *Meditation* is available in *Prayers*, 230–37.
44. A. von Harnack, *History of Dogma* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1899), vol. VI, 54–78, esp. 68.
45. S III: 76–79; toward the end of the First Meditation in *Prayers*, 221–24.
46. Part of his Prayer to St Paul: *Prayers*, 153–54 (lines 397–415). He is developing Matt. 23:37.
47. Harnack, *Dogma*), 203.
48. From the end of 1.11 (377A).
49. Matt. 6:12. The only difference is that the Gospel uses the plural *debita* and Anselm here the singular *debitum*.
50. For a commentator taking such teleology seriously, see R. Campbell, "The Conceptual Roots of Anselm's Soteriology," in Luscombe and Evans (eds.), *Anselm: Aosta, Bec, and Canterbury*, 256–63.
51. 1.20 (392C).

52. For death not required of the sinless, 1.9; for the infinite value of the offering, 2.6 and 2.14.
53. Southern, *Portrait*, 228–307, esp. 234, 280–84, 305.
54. For heaven, Revelation 4:9, 11; 5:12; 7:12. For ascriptions, e.g. 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16. Christ receives “honor and glory” from the Father in 2 Peter 1.17.
55. Rom. 2:7. For disputed interpretations, see C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1980), vol. I, 147.
56. 1.9; 2.13; cf. Luke 2:52 (AV).
57. B. Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 324–32, esp. 327.
58. *Summa Theologiae* 3a, 46, 2.
59. For an exposition of similarities and differences, see R. Cross, *Duns Scotus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 129–32.
60. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. J. T. McNeill (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), vol. I, 464–67, esp. 464, 466 (Bk. II, 12.1–3).
61. Calvin, *Institutes* I, 512–20, esp. 516 (Bk. II, 16.8–12). The Latin *infera* / *inferna* literally means “below” or “the depths,” though the associations of the latter, less used variant might well be taken to hint at what Calvin wanted to imply.
62. Gorringe, *God’s Just Vengeance*, 103.
63. Calvin, *Institutes* I, 509 (Bk. II, 16.5).
64. For Barth briefly, *Dogmatics in Outline* (London: SCM Press, 1949), 101–107, 114–20.

65. As when Boso sums up his position at the beginning of 2.18.
66. The phrase is adopted by Richard Swinburne in his own account of atonement in *Responsibility and Atonement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 81–92, 148–62, esp. 81.
67. I. Kant, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*, trans. T. M. Greene and J. R. Silber (New York; Harper & Row, 1960), 60–72, esp. 65–66.
68. I am grateful to Brian Davies and Ann Loades for commenting on earlier drafts.

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