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Anselm of Canterbury

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Anselm (b. 1033; d. 1109) flourished during the period of the Norman Conquest of England (1066), the call by Pope Urban II to the First Crusade (1095), and the strident Investiture Controversy. This latter dispute pitted Popes Gregory VII, Urban II, and Paschal II against the monarchs of Europe in regard to just who had the right—whether kings or bishops—to invest bishops and archbishops with their ecclesiastical offices. It is not surprising that R. W. Southern, Anselm's present-day biographer, speaks of Anselm's life as covering "one of the most momentous periods of change in European history, comparable to the centuries of the Reformation or the Industrial Revolution" (1990, p. 4). Yet it is ironic that Anselm, who began as a simple monk shunning all desire for fame, should nonetheless today have become one of the most famous intellectual figures of the Middle Ages. And it is even more ironic that this judgment holds true in spite of the fact that he wrote only eleven treatises or dialogues (not to mention his three meditations, nineteen prayers, and 374 letters).

Anselm was born in Aosta, today a part of Italy but in Anselm's time a part of the Kingdom of Burgundy. Italians usually refer to him as Anselm of Aosta (when they are not referring to him as Saint Anselm), whereas almost everyone else names him Anselm of Canterbury, after the identifying seat of his archiepiscopacy. Most of what we know about Anselm's life derives from three primary sources: viz., from his own collection of his letters and from the two informative works *Vita Anselmi (Life of Anselm)* and *Historia novorum in Anglia (History of Recent Events in England)*, written by Eadmer, a monk at Canterbury who was Anselm's contemporary. To a much lesser extent, further impressions of Anselm's thought may be gleaned from the *Dicta Anselmi (Anselm's Sayings)*, compiled by Alexander, also a monk at Canterbury.

The foregoing sources tell us that Anselm's father was Gundulf; his mother, Ermenberga; and his sole sibling, his sister Richeza. After his mother's death (ca. 1050) Anselm's relation with his father became progressively more strained—to the point that he left home in 1056 and travelled within Burgundy and France, perhaps staying with relatives of his mother. In 1059, at the age of 26, he arrived at the Benedictine monastery at Le Bec, France, where he aspired to study with his compatriot, Lanfranc of Pavia, then prior of the community. Within a year of his arrival he decided, in great part through Lanfranc's influence, to take the vows of a monk and to remain at Bec. In 1063, when Lanfranc was made Abbot of the Abbey of St. Etienne in Caen, Anselm was elected to replace him as Prior of Bec. Fifteen years later (September 1078) he was chosen by his fellow-monks as abbot. And another fifteen years later (March 6, 1093) he was invested as Archbishop-elect of the see of Canterbury—invested against his personal wishes but in accordance with what he himself,

along with the others, understood to be the will of God. His consecration to the office came on December 4, 1093.

Anselm became archbishop at a time when there were two rival claimants to the papacy, each having excommunicated the other. Anselm had already given his allegiance to Urban II, rather than to Clement III; England's King William Rufus (William II, son of William the Conqueror) was soon to do likewise. All too early on, Anselm quarrelled with Rufus over the service of knighthood that was owed to the king by the Canterbury archdiocese because of the lands that it held by permission (under feudalism) of the Regal Overlord. The quarrel became so grave that Anselm left England, with William's consent, for a self-imposed, three-year exile (November 1097 to September 1100), whose main purpose was to confer with the pope, Urban II. After Anselm's departure Rufus confiscated the Canterbury land-holdings. Upon Rufus's death under suspicious circumstances (August 2, 1100), Anselm was invited back to England by the new king, Henry I, Rufus's younger brother, who promised to restore the Canterbury lands. Anselm returned, yet fell into conflict with Henry over the issues of homage and of investiture. In April of 1103 Anselm again left England to take counsel of Pope Paschal II, who had become pope (August 13, 1099) during Anselm's previous absence from England, though after Anselm had left Rome. Not until September of 1106 did Anselm once again return to England, having become reconciled with Henry, whom he had threatened to excommunicate and whom Henry had threatened not to allow back into the country. Anselm died in Canterbury on April 21, 1109 and was buried in Canterbury Cathedral. After a fire his body was relocated within the cathedral, and its whereabouts forgotten.

Anselm is lastingly important not so much for his ecclesiastical resoluteness and his tenacious commitment to *libertas ecclesiae* but rather for his abiding intellectual accomplishments. The primary influences upon his thought, apart from Lanfranc's tutoring in dialectic, are AUGUSTINE, BOETHIUS, and Aristotle. Anselm knew only portions of Aristotle's philosophy, with whose thought he was familiar only through Boethius' Latin translations. In particular, he knew Aristotle's *De interpretatione* and *De categoriis*, together with Boethius' commentaries thereon. Furthermore, he knew Boethius' own works on the hypothetical syllogism (*De hypotheticis syllogismis*), the categorical syllogism (*De syllogismo categorico*), as well as Boethius' *De consolacione philosophiae* (*The Consolation of Philosophy*) and his *Tractatus theologici* (*Theological Tractates*). Likewise, he was acquainted with Cicero's *Topics* but not with Boethius' accompanying commentary. Anselm's knowledge of Plato was secondhand, mainly through Augustine's comments, though he might possibly also have read Calcidius' or Cicero's Latin translation of the *Timaeus*.

In terms of the impression that Anselm made on subsequent generations, we may be certain that his greatest impact proceeded from (1) his *Proslogion* (*An Address [of the Soul to God]*) (*P*) and (2) his *Cur Deus homo* (*Why God Became a [God-]man*) (*CDH*). In lesser ways, various future thinkers also took some account of (3) his doctrine of the Trinity, (4) his statements about faith and reason and (5) his early writings on truth, freedom, and evil. These are the five areas of his thought from which one may extract his essential ideas.

Proslogion and debate with Gaunilo

We must keep in mind that the *Proslogion* is a unified work, in spite of the fact that our interest in it tends to gravitate towards chapters 2 to 4, which contain the richly provocative, and extremely controversial, "ontological" argument for God's (necessary) existence. In rightly

assessing the *Proslogion*, we must look beyond these initial chapters in order to take full account of what Anselm himself tells us: that the *Proslogion* (written ca. 1077-8) is an attempt to restate more simply and tersely the ideas that were previously set down in the *Monologion* (*M*) (completed in 1076). Although the *Monologion*, too, proposed considerations ostensibly enabling one to conclude that God exists (*M* 1-4), most of the *Monologion* deals with determining, *sola ratione* (i.e., by reasoning alone, apart from Scriptural revelation), the nature and the attributes of the Divine Being. Accordingly we must not forget that the *Proslogion*, likewise, focuses not just on determining *that God is* but also on determining *what God is*. In arriving at its conclusions—the same major conclusions as reached in the *Monologion*—the *Proslogion* uses a new strategy. This strategy begins with *unum argumentum*—a single consideration—and reasons from it to the existence and the nature of the one and only God. Thus Anselm makes use of a *single consideration*, not of a *single argument*; for this consideration (that God is Something than which nothing greater can be thought (of)) gives rise to several different arguments, each of which has an identity of logical structure. Oftentimes this structure is misinterpreted. One prominent historian of philosophy, for example, identifies the argument-form as syllogistic:

God is that than which no greater can be thought:
 But that than which no greater can be thought must exist, not only
 mentally, in idea, but also extramentally:
 Therefore God exists, not only in idea, mentally, but also extramentally.
 (Copleston (1947-75), II: p. 162)

Yet Anselm's reasoning is decidedly not syllogistic but, rather, proceeds by way of *reductio ad absurdum*:

- (1) Whatever is understood is in the understanding.
- (2) If one understands what is being spoken of when he hears of Something than which nothing greater can be thought, then Something than which nothing greater can be thought is in the understanding.
- But: (3) When one hears of Something than which nothing greater can be thought, he understands that which is being spoken of.
- Thus: (4) Something than which nothing greater can be thought is in his understanding.
- (5) Either That than which nothing greater can be thought is in the understanding only, or That than which nothing greater can be thought is in the understanding and exists also in reality.
- Assume: (6) That than which nothing greater can be thought is in the understanding only.
- (7) If anything is in the understanding only and does not exist also in reality, then it can be thought to exist also in reality.
- So: (8) That than which nothing greater can be thought can be thought to exist also in reality.
- (9) Whatever does not exist in reality but can be thought to exist in reality can be thought to be greater than it is.
- So: (10) That than which nothing greater can be thought can be thought to be greater than it is.
- Thus: (11) That than which nothing greater can be thought is That than which something greater can be thought—a contradiction.
- Hence: (12) Something than which nothing greater can be thought is in the understanding and exists also in reality.

The foregoing reasoning postulates one alternate of a disjunctive proposition that exhausts the universe of discourse. From the alternate it derives a contradiction— a fact that justifies

the assertion of the other alternate. Once Anselm has shown to his own satisfaction that there exists Something than which a greater cannot be thought, he turns to showing—by means of reasoning that repeats the logical structure of his existence-argument—that this Being is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, merciful, just and “whatever else we believe about the Divine Substance.” For example, implicit in *Proslogion* 5 is the following parallel reasoning:

- (1) Either Something than which nothing greater can be thought is omnipotent, or
Something than which nothing greater can be thought is not omnipotent.
- Assume: (2) That than which nothing greater can be thought is not omnipotent.
- (3) If anything is not omnipotent, it can be thought to be omnipotent—something which is
greater.
- So: (4) That than which nothing greater can be thought can be thought to be greater than it is.
- Thus: (5) That than which nothing greater can be thought is That than which something greater can
be thought—a contradiction.
- Hence: (6) Something than which nothing greater can be thought is omnipotent.

Interestingly, Anselm continues onward to demonstrate — in *Proslogion* 15, still implicitly using the same argument-form—that Something than which a greater cannot be thought is also Something greater than can be thought. Here he means to indicate not that God cannot at all be conceived (he makes clear in *Reply to Gaunilo* 8 that God can to some extent be conceived) but that He cannot at all be comprehended, cannot at all be perfectly conceived (except by Himself), cannot be conceived as He is in and of Himself, for “we see [only] through a glass, darkly” (I Cor. 13:12). Anselm thinks of himself as having proved (*probare*—the word he uses in his *Reply to Gaunilo*) both that, necessarily, God exists and that God exists necessarily. Implicit in his line of thought is the point that Spinoza later made explicit: that there cannot be two or more beings each of which is such that no one of them is even conceivably greater (more perfect) than the other since all of them are coequal in power, wisdom, goodness, etc. Spinoza argues that if there were two Gods, neither would be omnipotent, since each would limit the other's power by not being at all subject to it. (And being God, requires being omnipotent.) Anselm makes a comparable point in *Proslogion* 5: Since God is Something than which nothing greater can be thought, He alone must exist only through himself, with all other things existing through him; otherwise, he could be thought to be greater, since there could be thought to be a single self-existent Creator of all else.

Anselm's interchange with Gaunilo, monk of the Abbey of Marmoutier (near Tours, France), is highly instructive both of his intent and of the actual structure of the argument-form in *Proslogion* 2-3. Nonetheless, just as Gaunilo, in attacking Anselm, misunderstands some of what Anselm writes in the *Proslogion*, so Anselm, in defending himself, misunderstands several of Gaunilo's key points. To be sure, Gaunilo misapprehends. For he construes Anselm to be claiming that “if this thing [than which nothing greater can be thought] existed solely in the understanding, then whatever existed also in reality would be greater than it.” But Anselm's point is, assuredly, different: that if That than which nothing greater can be thought existed solely in the understanding, then it itself could be thought to be greater, inasmuch as it could be thought to exist also in reality, so that That than which a greater cannot be thought would be That than which a greater can be thought—an impossibility. Accordingly, this *reductio* approach allows Anselm to generate the kind of contradiction that is crucial to his strategy.

On the other hand, Anselm himself misconceives two points that are important to the relevance of Gaunilo's attack: Anselm misconstrues Gaunilo's shorthand phrase *maius omnibus* as an abbreviation for *illud maius omnibus quae sunt* ("That [Being which is] greater than all [other] existing things"); but Gaunilo means it as an abbreviated form of *illud maius omnibus quae cogitari possunt* ("That [Being which is] greater than all [else] that can be thought"), an expression that exactly captures Anselm's notion. Similarly, Anselm mistakenly accuses Gaunilo of inconsistently maintaining both that unreal things can be understood and that 'to understand *x*' means 'to apprehend with certainty that *x* really exists.' Yet, in his *On Behalf of the Fool* 2, Gaunilo is defining the meaning of *intelligere* not as *scientia comprehendere re ipsa illud existere* ('to understand with certainty that that thing exists in reality') but only as *scientia comprehendere* ('to understand with certainty')—as the editorial use of parentheses would make clear: "*quia scilicet non possim hoc aliter cogitare, nisi intelligendo (id est scientia comprehendendo) re ipsa illud existere.*"

A final clarification is necessary. For the question often arises as to whether or not Anselm regarded existence as a perfection. Kant, of course, imagines that he does. And Kant is right. For Anselm stands, to a certain extent, within the Neoplatonic tradition that considers there to be degrees of existing and degrees of participation in exemplars. During the medieval period these exemplars were regarded as existing in the Divine Mind—and regarded, more strictly, as being (in last analysis) a single Exemplar that is identical with the Word of God, the second member of the Trinity. (See *Monologion* 10, 11, and 33.) The doctrine of degrees of being—a doctrine that enters into the *Proslogion*—is best observed in the *Monologion*:

For no one doubts that created substances exist in themselves very differently from the way they exist in our knowledge. For in themselves they exist in virtue of their own being; but in our knowledge their likenesses exist, not their own being. It follows, then, that the more truly they exist anywhere by virtue of their own being than by virtue of their likenesses, the more truly they exist in themselves than in our knowledge (*M* 36; cf. *M* 31).

This same doctrine of degrees of existing underlies the *Proslogion*. Yet, whether or not one regards the argument of *Proslogion* 2-4 as sound, and whether or not one regards as dispensable to the argument the presupposition that existence is a perfection, everyone will agree that the crux of Anselm's thinking in those chapters is the following: If one understands God to be Something than which a greater cannot be thought, then in thinking of God, one cannot think of Him as not-existing. Hence, since His non-existence is inconceivable to each person who understands rightly what He is, only a Fool would assert to be non-existent that very Being whose non-existence he himself rightly finds to be inconceivable.

Of course, the question remains: Does our conceiving of a Being as inconceivably non-existent entail that, in fact, that Being exists? This question was resolved differently by Thomas Aquinas and by Gottfried Leibniz. And the pondering of this question led Nicholas of Cusa to argue, in his *De apice theoriae* 13:4-14 (*Concerning the Loftiest Level of Contemplative Reflection*), along lines that, clearly, are cognate with Anselm's strategy.

Atonement and original sin

Anselm's *Cur Deus homo* and *De conceptu virginali* are magnificent attempts to explain (1) why the Divine Incarnation was necessary for the redemption of human beings and (2) why,

nonetheless, the Incarnation was not necessitated, though in certain respects it appears to have been so. Had Eve alone sinned, reasons Anselm, God could have created another woman, from whom Adam could have produced sinless progeny. But once Adam himself sinned, he was powerless to reproduce descendants who would be free of the guilt of original sin. Original sin, according to Anselm, is the sinfulness, or guiltiness, which each descendant of Adam incurs at his origin. For at his origin he inherits a sinful human nature. That is, when Adam sinned personally his personal sin corrupted his human nature, with the result that the nature inherited by his progeny was also a corrupted nature. In the progeny this corrupted human nature contaminated the person, so that when Adam's descendants reach the age of accountability, each of them will at some point personally choose to sin. Each Adamic descendant is held accountable only for his own personal sin—held accountable in spite of the fact that his personal sin is occasioned by his inherited sinful Adamic nature. He is not personally accountable for Adam's personal sin. However, unbaptized infants who die without having sinned personally (as none of them do sin) are still excluded from entrance into the Heavenly Kingdom, since no one with any sinfulness at all (including a sinful nature) may enter into that Kingdom. Such infants do not, however, experience punishment or damnation.

Any personal sin against God is very grave, notes Anselm; for one ought not to refuse to obey God's will even if the consequence of obedience to God were that the entire world would perish. Indeed, one ought not to disobey God even were an infinite number of such worlds as ours to perish. Anyone who does disobey God must both repent and make payment to God for that dishonoring of Him. Involved in repenting is the idea of expressing sorrow for the wrong-doing and the idea of resuming full obedience. Making payment will consist of giving to God something that will compensate for the dishonoring. But human beings have, of themselves, nothing with which to make this payment, or this satisfaction. They owe to God obedience, gratitude, good works, humble conduct, etc., by virtue of being his creatures. So these services cannot count as making satisfaction. Indeed, the satisfaction that must be made by the sinner has to be satisfaction that is greater than is that for whose sake he is obliged not to dishonor God. Since one is not supposed to dishonor God even were doing so to keep an infinite number of worlds from perishing, the sinner must render to God something whose value exceeds the value of an infinite number of worlds. Now, no human being can make this required payment of compensation. Yet, only an Adamic human being ought to make this payment, because only someone of Adam's lineage can—on behalf of himself, of Adam and of the whole human race—make payment, or repayment, to God of the debt incurred by Adam and by himself and his fellow human beings. Only a human being *ought* to make this satisfaction; but only God *can* make it; therefore, it is necessary that a God-man make it (*CDH* II, 6), reasons Anselm.

The God-man can make this payment (the making of which makes up for the human race's dishonoring of God) by letting himself be killed for righteousness's sake, i.e., by letting himself be killed rather than saving his life and abandoning the truth by telling the lie that he is not God. Here Anselm makes a further theological assumption: "that a sin which is committed in regard to his [i.e., the God-man's] person surpasses, incomparably, all conceivable sins which are not against His person" (*CDH* II, 14). But "every good is as good as its destruction is evil"; so the incomparable good of Christ's life is offered to God in payment for all conceivable sins that are not against the person of the God-man. And the sin that is against the person of the God-man—a sin that would have been, in and of itself, incomparably evil had it been perpetrated knowingly—is only a venial sin because it was done unknowingly. (Anselm does not maintain, as some interpreters have supposed, that the

Jews bear “infinite guilt” for insisting to Pontius Pilate that this execution take place. When the Jews exclaimed “His blood be upon us and upon our children” (Matt. 27: 25), Anselm regards the guilt as venial.) Thus, the merit of the God-man’s death infinitely exceeds the demerit of all actual sins. Such a righteous abiding by the truth, on pain of death, deserves to be rewarded. Since nothing can constitute a reward to the God-man, who, as God, needs nothing, the reward may rightly be transferred to those to whom the God-man will have it given. It is, therefore, applied against the debt of men's sins. The God-man's death is meritorious also because the God-man, being sinless, did not deserve at any time to die.

Anselm’s theory of atonement, including its underlying presuppositions, has often and extensively been studied and disputed. Some philosophers (Gombocz 1999) have questioned, for example, the soundness of the inference, to wit, that if atonement is to be made, then it must be made by a God-man; for only a man (a human being) *ought to* make satisfaction and only God *can* make satisfaction, so that only a God-man both ought to and can. One problem seems to be that the sense in which only a man (i.e., only a human being) ought to make atonement is not the sense in which the God-man ought to make atonement. For a human being of Adam's race ought to make satisfaction because he *owes* the debt that is incurred due to sin—owes it both on his own behalf and on behalf of his race. However, the sense in which the sinless God-man ought to make satisfaction is not that he himself owes—either for himself or for others—any debt that is due to sin. Rather, he ought to make satisfaction only in the sense that he wills to do so and that he ought to do what he sinlessly and meritoriously wills to do. Accordingly, Anselm stands accused of equivocation, something detrimental to his line of reasoning.

Anselm's theological claims lead him into various intriguing philosophical puzzles, puzzles that he himself recognizes as springing forth. He claims, for instance, that the God-man (whom in the end he identifies with the historical Jesus) was born of a mother (Mary) who was free of sin. And she was free of sin, he further claims, by virtue of her faith in the efficacy of his future death. But now the question arises: How is it that Jesus died freely, rather than by necessity? For since he was begotten by Mary in her purity, it seems that he was under the necessity of sacrificing himself, since otherwise Mary's faith would not have been true faith and Mary's purity would not have been true purity. (Although Anselm teaches the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Jesus, he does not teach the immaculate conception of Mary, whom he, nonetheless, speaks of [in *De conceptu virginali* 18] as “beatified with a purity than which a greater cannot be conceived except for God’s.”)

Trinity and Incarnation

Anselm's view of the Trinity and the Incarnation is wholly orthodox. He maintains that God is one nature (or substance or essence) in three persons (or relations or operations). These numerically three persons differ from one another irreducibly, without differing numerically from one another in nature. In other words, the numerically one Divine Nature is related to itself in numerically three different ways: as Father, as Son, as Holy Spirit. Anselm repudiates both Sabellianism and tritheism. According to the latter, there are three numerically distinct divine natures; according to the former, there is a single Divine Nature that appears at different times in the mode of Father, in the mode of Son, in the mode of Holy Spirit—these being that Nature's three, non-coexistent modes-of-being. By contrast, Anselm believes that in the Incarnation the second member of the Trinity, namely the Son of God (or Word of God), assumed a distinct human nature. Thus, he became *a* man

(i.e., a human being); he did not become *man* as such. Anselm would not agree with the nineteenth-century theologian Ferdinand Christian Baur, who taught that “Christ as man, as God-man, is universal man. He is not a single individual but is, rather, the universal Individual” (*Die christliche Gnosis*, p. 715).

Similarly, Anselm repudiates Arianism, Apollinarianism, Docetism, Eutychianism, and Nestorianism. Arianism supposedly taught that the Father created the Son—*ex nihilo* and before all time—as the firstborn of all creatures. Thus, the Son is not of the *same* substance (*homoousios*) as the Father but is of *like* substance (*homoiousios*) with the Father. In the historical Jesus the human nature is said to *partake of* the divine nature. Apollinarianism claimed that in the historical Jesus there was no human soul, no human mind, since the human soul was replaced by the Divine Logos. Jesus did, nonetheless, have human flesh, according to the Apollinarians. By contrast, Docetism denied that the Son of God assumed a real human body; rather, he only appeared to have a body. Eutychianism viewed Christ as having but a single nature—the divine nature—into which the human nature was absorbed. And Nestorianism, in its condemned version, was viewed as affirming that Jesus had not only two natures but also two persons—persons that were united in a moral union. Moreover, Mary was said to be the bearer not of God (*theotokos*) but only of Christ (*Christotokos*), for she begot not a divine nature but only a human nature that became united to a divine nature.

It is not possible to separate the doctrine of the Incarnation from the doctrine of the Trinity, and Anselm makes no attempt to do so. Thus, his treatise *De incarnatione Verbi* treats both issues concurrently. In writing *De incarnatione Verbi* and *De processione Spiritus Sancti* (*DP*) — both of which were completed after his departure from Normandy for England — Anselm was still writing with an eye to the monks of Bec, for whom he desired to be as clear as possible. Because this was his envisioned audience, he was led to seek out illustrations that would prove elucidating to the minds of the more simple among these monks. Hence he proposes his example of the Nile river as a way of providing such elucidation. The Nile is one body of water which, nevertheless, is also three things: a spring that begets a river that proceeds into a lake. The spring is not the river or the lake; the river is not the spring or the lake; and the lake is not the spring or the river. Yet, each is one and the same Nile. Here Anselm's example is motivated by a slightly different example from Augustine's *Faith and the Creed* 9.17 (*Patrologia Latina* (*PL*) 40:189). Finally, we must not forget that Anselm's concern with the doctrine of the Trinity is not a localized concern but is a concern that pervades his entire intellectual period: it begins to express itself in the *Monologion*; and it continues on until his late work *De processione*, completed in 1102.

In the late Middle Ages Anselm's claims about the Trinity came to be challenged on the grounds that the distinction between the members of the Trinity is not a numerical distinction—at least, not numerical in any sense in which we understand a distinction to be numerical. Meister Eckhart, for example, distinguished between God and the Godhead. And Nicholas of Cusa declared: “the Maximum is infinitely above all trinity” (*De docta ignorantia* I, 20 (61)). Or, as he says elsewhere, God is three without number, even as the oneness that is predicated of him is not mathematical oneness (*De Possess* 46 and 50).

Faith and reason

Anselm's conception of the relationship between faith and reason is best discerned from the prefacing and introductory remarks that he makes in some of his works. For example, the

preface to the *Monologion* expresses his desire to conform that work to the expectation of certain monks at Bec who prescribed the following guidelines:

that nothing at all in the meditation would be argued on Scriptural authority, but that in unembellished style and by unsophisticated arguments and with uncomplicated disputation rational necessity would tersely prove to be the case, and truth's clarity would openly manifest to be the case, whatever the conclusion resulting from the distinct inquiries would declare. They also desired that I not disdain to refute simple and almost foolish objections which would occur to me.

And at the outset of chapter 1 Anselm speaks of reaching conclusions *sola ratione*, by reason alone. Accordingly, in the *Monologion* he attempts to simplify both his style and his approach and to proceed toward giving proofs that would be rationally compelling. Other things that he tells us elsewhere cohere with this same programmatic approach, at times supplementing it, never contradicting it or veering from it. Thus, when he indicates in the *Proslogion* that his method is that of *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding), this method is not opposed to that of the *Monologion*, even though the style of these two works and their respective strategies are strikingly different. Yet, like the *Proslogion*, the *Monologion* is the soliloquy of a religious believer who is seeking certainty; and like the *Monologion*, the *Proslogion* is seeking the certainty that accompanies rational necessity. This latter fact is evident from Anselm's declaration in *De incarnatione Verbi* 6, where he groups the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion* together and states that he wrote each of them in order to show that “what we hold by faith regarding the divine nature and its persons—excluding the topic of incarnation—can be proven by compelling reasons apart from [appeal to] the authority of Scripture.” In other words, the *Proslogion* moves via the principle of *sola ratione* just as decidedly as does the *Monologion*.

Similarly, in the *Cur Deus homo* the preface informs us that Anselm intends to pursue his argument in book one in such a way as to furnish us with a conclusion reached by rational necessity and apart from appeal to revelation—i.e., a conclusion arrived at *Christo remoto*, as if nothing were known historically of Jesus. And, likewise, the argument in book two is said to aim at clarity and at necessity of theological inference. Of course, amid all of his arguing, whether in the *Cur Deus homo* or elsewhere, Anselm never forgets that his reason needs the assistance of grace, needs to be “cleansed by faith.” Thus, in *De incarnatione Verbi* 1 he alludes disapprovingly to certain men who are

accustomed to mount up presumptuously unto the loftiest questions of faith before they possess spiritual wings through firmness of faith. Consequently, when they try to ascend to those questions which first require the ladder of faith (as it is written, “Unless you believe, you will not understand”), but try to ascend in reverse order by means of first understanding, they are constrained to fall into many kinds of errors on account of their defective understanding. For it is apparent that they have no foundation of faith who, because they cannot understand what they believe, argue against the truth of this same faith—a truth confirmed by the holy Fathers. It is as if bats and owls, which see the sky only at night, were to dispute about the midday rays of the sun with eagles, which with unblinded vision gaze directly at the sun.

In this same section Anselm makes two further significant points: (1) The reason that he who does not believe will not understand is that he will not experience and, hence, will not know. (2) A mind that lacks faith and obedience will not be able to grasp higher religious and theological truths; and, moreover, “by the neglect of good conscience even

the understanding which has already been given is sometimes removed and faith itself overturned.”

In the commendation of the *Cur Deus homo* to Pope Urban II Anselm again quotes Isaiah 7: 9 (in the Old Latin version) to the effect that “unless you believe, you will not understand.” And he again seeks the rational basis of faith and, in doing so, advances *sola ratione* (CDH II, 22). Within the body of the *Cur Deus homo* Anselm draws his well-known distinction between *rationes necessariae* (rationally compelling reasons) and *rationes convenientes* (fitting reasons). (Yet we must remember that as early as the *Monologion*’s preface Anselm used the expression *rationis necessitas*.) Both kinds of reasons suffice to *persuade*. However, the former kind are understood to be conclusive, whereas the latter kind are taken to be conditionally compelling: they are sufficient until such time, if ever, as stronger reasons are discerned:

I would like for us to agree to accept, in the case of God, nothing that is in even the least degree unfitting and to reject nothing that is in even the slightest degree reasonable unless something more reasonable opposes it. For in the case of God, just as an impossibility results from any unfittingness, however slight, so necessity accompanies any degree of reasonableness, however small, provided it is not overridden by some other more weighty reason. (CDH I, 10)

Anselm’s notion of *rationes convenientes* serves to illustrate the fact that when he speaks of arguing *sola ratione*, his conception of *ratio* and *rationabilis* is very broad. It includes appeal to whatever renders a premise or a conclusion more plausible than any alternative premise or conclusion. In particular, it encompasses not only the reasonableness of self-evidence and of formal demonstrations but also evidence from empirical observations, conceptual judgments that are based on comparisons or analogies or parallelisms, and ideas that serve to complete a pattern of thought. As an illustration of this last point, we may note what is said in *Cur Deus homo* II, 8:

God can create a human being in either of four ways: viz., (1) from a man and a woman (as constant experience shows); (2) neither from a man nor from a woman (as He created Adam); (3) from a man without a woman (as He created Eve); (4) from a woman without a man (something which He had not yet done). Therefore, in order for Him to prove that even this fourth way is subject to His power and was reserved for this very purpose, nothing is more fitting than that He assume from a woman without a man that man about whom we are inquiring.

Although Anselm by and large seeks to reason *sola ratione*, *rationibus necessariis*, and *rationibus convenientibus*, without recourse to supporting evidence from Scripture, nevertheless he does sometimes resort to filling out his line of reasoning by introducing considerations from Scripture. This point holds true especially when his topic is more theological than it is philosophical, so that he is obliged to introduce interpretations of various Scriptural texts. Thus, we see that in *De processione*, when he is arguing (against the Greeks) that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, he maintains that if “proceeding” means “being given or sent,” then the Holy Spirit proceeds also from the Son because he is given and sent by the Son as well as by the Father (DP 2). And his authority here is the Scriptural verse John 15:26. Moreover, he once again appeals to Scripture when he vehemently asserts: “we nowhere read [in Scripture], and we wholly deny, that the Holy Spirit is the Son” (DP 4). (The Greeks, of course, make this same denial.) Throughout *De processione* Anselm looks to Scripture; and the reason for this viewing is that the basis for deciding whether or not to accept the *filioque* addition to the Nicene-Constantinople Creed of

381 is primarily scriptural. What is amazing, however, about the *De processione* is how *logically* it attempts to reason, how *philosophically* it approaches this theological theme.

In summary, Anselm aims—no doubt, without always succeeding—to reason very clearly about topics that are suggested to him by his reading of Scripture. Indeed, he aspires to reasoning so clearly that his opponent will be forced to use the very words of concession that in a different context Anselm himself utters: “I understand to such an extent that [even] if I did not want to believe ... I could not fail to understand” (P 4).

Truth, freedom, and evil

Anselm's notions of truth, freedom, and evil are highly influenced by Augustine. In *Soliloquies* 2.2.2 (PL 32:886), for example, Augustine argues that truth cannot perish, because if it perished it would still be true that it had perished; and a proposition cannot be true unless there is truth. Likewise, in his work *On Christian Doctrine* he employs at 2.35.53 (PL 34:60) an Aristotelian notion of propositional falsity, when he writes: “The false is defined when we say to be false our signifying of a thing when the thing is not as it is signified to be.” And in *On Free Choice* 2.12.34 (PL 32:1259) he concludes that because some truths are unchangeable, there is unchangeable truth. And if truth is unchangeable, then it is eternal, so that it is identifiable as God, identifiable as Truth. Anselm follows Augustine's lead by arguing both in *Monologion* 18 and *De veritate* 1 that certain propositions (such as “Something was going to exist”) have always been true, whereas other propositions (such as “Something has existed in the past”) will never cease being true, so that these truths attest that truth (without which the truths could not be true) is without beginning and without end. Like Augustine, Anselm too does not hesitate to identify beginningless and endless truth as Truth itself, that is, the Eternal God.

Since God, as omniscient, eternally knows all true propositions, the truth of these propositions is eternal. Thus, the truth even of true propositions that begin to be conceived at some time by the human mind, i.e., that begin to be conceived in *time*, exists ontologically prior to the temporal conceptualization of them. Thus, such propositional truths, being eternally known by God, are themselves eternal, existing apart from all time, rather than being perpetual, existing for all time. In *De veritate* Anselm, again in a manner reminiscent of Augustine, picks up on Aristotle's notion of propositional falsehood, as well as of propositional truth, so that (for Anselm) correspondence becomes a key notion. But he goes beyond Aristotle when he affirms that things other than propositions may also be true. For truth has to do with a thing's being what it ought to be or as it ought to be, and with its doing what it ought to do as it ought to do it. Thus Anselm can ascribe truth to thoughts, to actions, to acts of will, to the senses—and even to the very being of things insofar as these things are what God wills for them to be, since otherwise they would not at all exist.

In last analysis, Anselm defines ‘truth’ in terms of *rectitudo*: truth is a kind of *rightness*: viz., rightness that is perceptible only to the mind. In fact, as he notes in *De veritate* 12, truth and rightness and justice are interchangeable notions, for justice is (up)rightness-of-will kept for its own sake (only). When a will is thus upright, it “does the truth,” he explains, thereby using a scriptural expression (John 3:21). Freedom-of-will also has to do with rightness, or uprightness, so that Anselm defines such freedom as the ability to keep uprightness-of-will for its own sake (only). Thus, ‘freedom’ is defined in accordance with the possession of an ability and not in accordance with the possession of strong motivation. Accordingly, free will is a power (we speak even today of having “willpower”); but it is not the power of alter-

native choice. It is the power always to choose, or to consent to, that which is morally upright. Each one of us always has this power, supposes Anselm, even when his will is not morally upright. That is, in spite of the fact that an unjust will has *no* power to become just in and through its own acts, nevertheless once it is made just—made just by God on the basis of the confession of wrongdoing and of repentance—the will with restored uprightness does have the power to retain its uprightness.

Anselm's conception of human free will gives rise to a number of paradoxes. Three such paradoxes are especially noteworthy. First, on Anselm's theory, as we have said, an unjust will (i.e., an unrighteous will) is free even though it is powerless to will that which is morally perfect; i.e., it is powerless continually to will *that which* is morally right *because* it is morally right. Indeed, an unjust will is free only in the reduced sense that it has the residual power to keep itself just, after it has once again been made just through the divine grace of forgiveness and restoration. As Anselm claims: It is more appropriate for us to call the unjust will *free* on the basis of its residual ability than to call it *unfree* on the basis of the fact that it has no uprightness to retain and that it has no power to regain uprightness, or justice. Secondly, according to Anselm, even a will that is free in the defined sense of having the ability to keep uprightness-of-will for its own sake (only) cannot, if it is unjust, actually use this ability, since such a will has no actual uprightness to keep. Most people, however, will find it strange to speak of as *free* a will that has an *actually unusable* ability. Thirdly, it seems counterintuitive that Anselm would say, as he does, that no one can ever be compelled to will anything. This claim of his seems to indicate his own failure properly to analyze the concept of compulsion.

In spite of such paradoxical conclusions Anselm's theory of free choice is truly intriguing. It contains aspects of philosophical truth that must be patiently identified and mulled over. Above all, it represents an heroic attempt to square the demands of experience with the deliverances of reason and the teachings of Scripture. And it rightly recognizes that our choices are *motivated*—are occasioned, induced, "caused." Anselm avoids Augustine's suggestion that Satan's initial choosing to do evil resulted from a "deficient cause," for this expression conveys the impression that there was something defective with respect to Satan's nature (*De concordia* III, 10). Anselm understands Satan's initial act-of-will to constitute not an unwillingness to keep uprightness but, rather, a willingness to possess some good that Satan did not then have and was not supposed to have at that time. In willing this good he *ipso facto* willed to abandon uprightness-of-will. Just what this good was, Anselm does not claim to know (*De casu diaboli* 4). Thus, he also does not know *why* Satan willed to have it. Accordingly, he states that Satan willed what and as he did *only because he willed to* (ibid. 27). There was neither an external inducement nor an internal predisposing sinful inclination. Still, Anselm does not say that Satan's act-of-will was uncaused: he says that it was the "efficient cause of itself," an expression that he knows to be problem-filled (ibid. 27). It is his way of saying, perhaps, that Satan's *superbia* (pride) is inexplicable to us. In any event, Satan's will, like every human and angelic act-of-will, has both a *what* and a *why* (cf. *De veritate* 12). And God's "foreknowledge" of Satan's fall did not compel Satan's sinful act-of-will. (This conclusion is inferable from *De concordia*, where the interrelationship between foreknowledge, predestination, grace, and free will is insightfully discussed.)

Evil is regarded by Anselm either as *incommodum* (detriment) or as *nihil* (nothing). Evil *qua* detriment (disease, pain, hunger, etc.) is said in Scripture (Isaiah 45:7) to be created by God, inasmuch as God wills to permit both it and the conditions that precipitate it: "I form the light and create darkness. I make peace and create evil," a verse that Anselm cites in *De concordia* I, 7. But evil *qua* nothing is privation: it is the absence of justice, or uprightness,

from a will that ought to have it. Hence, moral evil, per se, is an absence, a form of not-being. Yet, we sometimes speak of it as if it were something. We use, for example, the expressions “Greed caused it” or “Lust caused it,” where greed and lust are the absence of moderation, the absence of restraint. Hence, our statements are comparable to a statement such as “The absence of a bridle caused the horse to run wild” (*De casu diaboli* 26; cf. 24). Here we are speaking not according to fact (*secundum rem*) but after the fashion of ordinary usage (*secundum formam loquendi*) (*De casu diaboli* 11).

Anselm’s least important work is the *De grammatico* (*On (an) Expert-in-Grammar*), which takes up the question of whether *grammaticus* is a quality (the quality of being expert-in-grammar) or a substance (an expert-in-grammar) and whether the word *grammaticus* signifies a quality or a substance. The question arises because Latin has neither a definite article (corresponding to our word ‘the’) nor an indefinite article (corresponding to our word ‘a’/‘an’). Anselm intended for this dialogue to provide training, of sorts, to the monks of Bec who wanted to develop skills in eristic. The topic under discussion was motivated by a passage in Aristotle’s *Categories* 1 and by the section of Boethius’ *Commentary on the Categories* that is entitled *De denominativis*. Anselm’s keen interest in the relationship between language and reality is apparent not only in *De grammatico* but also in his *Philosophical Fragments*.

Conclusion

In the end, Anselm is deserving of the epithet “Father of Scholasticism” that has come to be conferred on him. His emphasis on furnishing argumentation, on searching out *rationes necessariae*, on distinguishing *usus loquendi* from *significatio per se* and on further distinguishing *significatio per se* from *significatio per aliud*—all of these warrant his being honored by historians, who have given him this special title. Yet, amid our admiring his clear-mindedness and succinctness, we must not lose sight (1) of his openness to having his views corrected and (2) of his humility in not wanting to be among those who “judge with foolish pride that what they are not able to understand is not at all possible” (*De incarnatione Verbi* 1).