

Anselm's Account of Freedom¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

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.

And 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

¹ References to Anselm are given as follows: DV=*De veritate*, DLA=*De libertate arbitrii*, DCD=*De casu diaboli*, DC=*De concordia*, and CDH=*Cur Deus Homo*. Whenever we quote a text we give a reference to the critical edition of F. S. Schmitt, *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia* (Stuttgart-Bad Canstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1968), 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), identified as 'O'. 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 DLA 3 (S I:212, O 179). At DLA 13 this definition is endorsed as complete (*perfecta*): that is, as stating a necessary and sufficient condition for freedom of choice.

⁴ See DLA 1 and 14.

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 coercion and external causal determination, an agent can, under certain circumstances, act freely even though he cannot act otherwise than he does.

II. 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. Two of these—the truth of statements and the truth of the will—turn out to be important for understanding what 'rectitude of will' means in Anselm's definition of freedom.

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,

⁵ DLA 1.

so the two correspondences cannot pull apart. But Anselm clearly takes the function of statements to explain 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. —S: Yes.

T: Now when it signifies correctly, its signification is correct. —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.⁶

S: Now I see clearly that this truth is correctness.⁷

So for statements, at least, rectitude (correctness) is a fundamentally teleological notion: statements are correct when they do what they were designed to do.

Truth in the will also turns out to be rectitude, again understood teleologically. 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:

⁶ ‘Correctness’ is the word *rectitudo*, which appears in Anselm’s definition of freedom as ‘rectitude’. We translate it here as ‘correctness’ to emphasize that *rectitudo* is merely the abstract noun corresponding to the adjective *rectum* (‘correct’) and the adverb *recte* (‘correctly’).

⁷ DV 2 (S I:178, O 154). The Oxford translator, Ralph McInerny, translates ‘*veritatem hanc*’ as ‘its truth’ rather than ‘this truth’, but we take it that the student is here drawing a conclusion about what truth is in statements generally (hence “this truth,” the truth being investigated in this chapter), not about what truth is in some particular statement (“its truth”).

Nothing other than rectitude. For if, so long as he willed what he ought—i.e., 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.⁸

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.⁹

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, "Are we to say that a stone is just when it seeks to go from above to below—since it is doing what it should—in the same way that we say a man is just when he does what he should?"¹⁰ 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."¹¹ The justice that is the

⁸ DV 4 (S I:181, O 156).

⁹ 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." (McInerney's translation, O 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.

¹⁰ DV 12 (S I:192, O 166-167).

¹¹ DV 12 (S I:193, O 167).

proper subject of moral evaluation is ultimately defined as “rectitude of will preserved for its own sake.”¹² 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 coercion and “being bribed by an extraneous reward.”¹³

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 entails 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.

III. 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.¹⁴ 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 couldn’t 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.¹⁵

¹² DV 12 (S I:194, O 169).

0. Ibid.

¹⁴ See the preface to DV (S I:173-174, O 151).

¹⁵ DLA 1

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 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.¹⁶ 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."¹⁷ 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,

¹⁶ Notice that Anselm's assumption here, namely that moral praiseworthiness and blameworthiness require free will, is commonly made in the contemporary debate as well.

¹⁷ DLA 1 (S I:208, O 176).

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 (as you have said) alien 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, it was either of their own doing¹⁸ or a result of necessity. And if it was of their own doing, how was it not through free choice? So, on the assumption that it was *not* through free choice, they apparently sinned as a result of necessity.¹⁹

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

It was through the power of sinning, and of their own doing, and through free choice, and not out of necessity that the human and the angelic nature fell. . . . 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 forced by any other nature to sin. . . . They sinned through their choice, which was free; but they did not sin through that in virtue of which it was free, i.e., through the power by which it was able not to sin and not to serve sin. Instead, they sinned through that power they had for sinning.²⁰

Though embedded in what looks like an unpromising bit of proto-Scholastic

¹⁸ 'Of their own doing' 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. We discuss Anselm's conception of necessity in section v.

¹⁹ DLA 2 (S I:209, O 177).

²⁰ DLA 2 (S I:209-210, O 177).

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 coerced 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 coerced by any external agency, then *liberum arbitrium* does not entail 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 uncoerced self-initiated action as such does not entail the power to sin, even though that same power, if unsupplemented by freedom from sin, is itself the power to sin.

IV. 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 coerced 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 coerced or bribed.²¹ 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.²²

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 coercion 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.²³

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

²¹ DV 12; see section II above. Anselm makes a similar argument in DLA 13.

²² DLA 4 (S I:214, O 181); cf. DLA 12 (S I:224, O 190).

²³ Note that in DC 1.6 (S II:255-256, O 444-445) Anselm explicitly restricts the scope of the discussion in *De veritate* and *De libertate arbitrii* to morally significant freedom, i.e., the freedom necessary for salvation. He recognizes that we might speak of, for example, freedom either to speak or to be silent; but his own discussion of freedom is not concerned with that sort of usage because he finds it to be of little consequence.

that no temptation forces anyone to sin unwillingly:

S: 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?

T: 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.²⁴

This argument assumes only that actions performed through free choice are uncoerced 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.

V. 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.²⁵ 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

²⁴ DLA 5 (S I:214, O 181).

²⁵ 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 (DLA 1 and 14).

that obedience for the sake of its rightness, he initiates his own act of obedience, and he is not coerced by any external force. 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 similarly able to sin before the bad ones fell?

S: I think so, but I would like to understand this on the basis of 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 deserve grace from God for remaining faithful when others fell any more than they did for preserving their rationality, which they were unable to lose. Nor, if you consider the matter rightly, could they properly be called just.²⁶

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— i.e., 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

0. DCD 5 (S I:242-243, O 203).

knowledge, and in power. We know that the bad angels fell by exercising their power for uncoerced self-initiated action: “It was through the power of sinning, and of their own doing, and through free choice, and not out of necessity that the . . . angelic nature fell.”²⁷ 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

²⁷ DLA 2 (S I:209, O 177).

will, he first wills to move himself. Hence, whatever does not yet will anything at all cannot move itself to will. “So it follows,” Anselm concludes, “that this angel who has been made apt to have a will, but who does not yet will anything, cannot have his first will from himself.”²⁸ 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 elsewhere²⁹ 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 will absolutely nothing unless there is a reason why we will it.”³⁰ 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.

²⁸ DCD 12 (S I:254, O 213).

²⁹ DC 3.11 (S II:279-280, O 467-468).

³⁰ DV 12 (S I:194, O 168). In section VI we examine some implications of this feature of Anselm’s view.

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 cannot see how someone who wills nothing else besides happiness might move himself to will anything else. For if he wills to move himself to will something else, he is willing something else.

T: Therefore, just as he was not able to will anything at all on his own when no willing had yet been given to him, so also he cannot from himself have any other willing [besides willing happiness] when he has received only the will for happiness.³¹

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.”³² But no matter what he wills, his will is “the work and gift of God, just like his life or his power of sensation, and there is neither justice nor injustice in him.”³³

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

³¹ DCD 13 (S I:256, O 214).

³² DCD 13 (S I:257, O 215).

³³ DCD 13 (S I:257, O 216).

himself; his will is “the work and gift of God.”³⁴ 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, and so he will lack free choice. Only if God gives him both wills does he have that power.³⁵ 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, and so he will not be free. It is, therefore, not freedom as such, but *creaturely* freedom, that requires alternative possibilities.³⁶ 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

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ 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 DC 1.6). If the angel’s only motivational disposition is towards 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. So Anselm’s view entails 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.

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 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 the good angels can no longer sin, their not sinning is still to their credit.³⁷ At the end of the chapter Anselm clearly denies that their inability to sin derives from this knowledge. The teacher

³⁷ McInerney's translation (O 228-230) generally leaves out the 'if', making the dilemma all but inescapable for anyone reading *De casu diaboli* in his version.

remarks, “But in fact you know—because it became evident earlier—that the reason [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.”³⁸

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.³⁹ 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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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

³⁸ S 273.

³⁹ Anselm commendably refrains from indulging in speculative angelic psychology and tells us that he has no idea what the something extra could have been.

⁴⁰ DCD 6 (S I:243, O 204): “adhærentes iustitiæ nullum bonum velle possint quod non gaudeant.” In McInerny’s translation, 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.

⁴¹ DCD 24.

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 on 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.⁴² As one would expect from *De veritate*, coercion certainly imposes such necessity. More generally, what a contemporary philosopher

⁴² 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’.

would call causal necessity is also incompatible with freedom. Thus, when Anselm sets out to reconcile divine foreknowledge with free choice, 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.⁴³

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 necessity and coercion make actions necessary because they prevent 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. 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

⁴³ DC 1.2-3. At DC 2.3 (S II.262, O 451) Anselm further insists that what God *predestines* does not happen “by that necessity which precedes a thing and brings it about” (*ea necessitate quae praecedit rem et facit*).

⁴⁴ CDH 2.5 (S II.99-100, O 319). ‘Honorableness’ and ‘dishonorableness’ translate ‘*honestas*’ and ‘*inhonestas*’, respectively.

should be called 'necessary'. Divine aseity in fact guarantees that *every* action God performs is self-initiated. Even if God never has alternative possibilities available to him, every action of his will still be free.

VI. 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 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 will absolutely nothing 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:

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

⁴⁵ DV 12 (S I:193-194, O 168).

⁴⁶ DV 12 (S I:194, O 168).

⁴⁷ We call it "enriched" because it makes explicit certain requirements Anselm takes to be implied by the original descriptive definition, not because it actually adds something new.

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.

VII. THE USEFULNESS OF ANSELM'S ACCOUNT OF FREEDOM

⁴⁸ DC 1.6 (S II:257, O 446).

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

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 doesn't realize 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.

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 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 what have you. 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.⁵⁰

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

⁵⁰ Anselm, of course, is not worried about a person's lacking good motives because he thinks that ultimately there are only two—the desire for happiness and the desire for justice—and they are God-given.

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, uncoercedly, 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 narrow the options down to one.