

Seminar 2.3: Our Imperfect Freedom: The Natural Pursuit of Happiness and the Problem of Justice
St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), “On the Fall of the Devil” (*De Casu Diaboli*, between 1080 and 1086).

in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, B. Davies and G.R. Evans, eds., 193-232. Oxford.

“The subject-matter of ... *On the Fall of the Devil* is a natural sequel [to Anselm’s *On Free Will*]. The choice Satan made to do what he ought not to do was also a failure to ‘stand fast in the truth’, John 1: 44. Anselm was pioneering new ground here in certain respects. Much had been written about the fall of Adam and Eve, but the fall of the Devil is, if anything, a great puzzle. These angels enjoyed the very presence of God before they fell and they were pure spirit, purely rational beings. Since God cannot be the author of evil and he made them, it is extremely difficult to explain how they can even have got the idea of disobedience. Anselm argues that what Satan did wrong was to desire something (to be like God) which was itself a good thing, but which he wanted to a degree not possible for his created nature, high though it was. So his fault had to do with wanting something he ought not to have wanted. It was a breach of *rectus ordo* [right order], which carried its own terrible inescapable consequences.” “Introduction,” xvi

Notes:

- Anselm believes that everything that exists was created by God. All “being”, or existence is something he bestowed. Nothing has anything that did not come from God. Moreover, God must sustain all being.
- Anselm argues that evil is a privation of good and thereby “nothing” (Questions 8-11 and 26).
- However, in Anselm’s view, to stop sustaining a being is not to cause evil, but simply for things to revert to their former state. (Question 1)
- Unlike men, Angels have complete knowledge of everything to which their cognitive powers extend. In Anselm’s view they were made to know, love and serve God, and with given wills for happiness and justice that they could use freely (like men).
- Yet despite complete knowledge, the devil fell. How is this possible? This is the problem Anselm tackles. Of course, if the fall is possible for an angelic intellect, there are obvious implications for the freedom of man’s “perseverance in the truth” as well.

Question 1: The verse ‘What do you have that you have not received?’ applies to angels too; from God come only good and being and every good is being and every being is good.

Student: does the phrase from St Paul, ‘What do you have that you have not received?’ [1 Cor 4:7], apply only to men or to angels as well

Teacher: No creature has anything of itself. How can something that does not have being of itself, have anything of itself? In short, if there is only one who creates and whatever is created is from that one, it is clear that he who creates and what he has created is all there is.

S: That is clear.

T: Also, the Creator himself and what has been created can only be from that same Creator. ... He also has of himself all that he has, while other things have nothing of themselves. And other things, having nothing of themselves, have their only reality from him.

S: I do not quite see what you mean by 'other things have their only reality from him.' For who else brings it about that the many things we see pass from being to non-being are not what they were even if they do not pass wholly into nothingness? Or who else makes something not to be save the one who makes whatever is to be? Again, if something is only because God makes it, it is necessary that what is not is not because he does not make it....

T: It is not only the one who makes that which was not, to be, or that which is, not to be, who is said to make a thing to be or not to be. He who could bring it about that something is not, yet does not do so, is said to make it be, and he who could make something be, yet does not, is said to make it not be. Just as both he who strips someone and he who could prevent this but does not are said to cause someone to be nude or undressed. But the former is properly said to cause it. And the latter improperly. When the latter is said to make another nude or unclothed, all that is meant is that when he could have he did not bring it about that the other was not stripped or remained dressed.

S: In this way God is said to do many things that he does not, as when he is said to lead us into temptation when he does not prevent temptation that he could, and to cause what is not since he could make it be and does not. But if you consider the things which pass into non-being, you will see that it is not God who cause them not to be. For not only is there no essence he does not make, but nothing he does make could last if he did not preserve it, for when he stops preserving what he made, it is not the case that he turns what was a being into a non-being, as if he caused non-being, but only that he stops causing it to be. And even when in anger, as it were, he destroys something by taking away its existence, the non-being is not from him; rather when God's creative and preserving causality is removed, the thing reverts to the non-being it had of itself before it was created and does not have from God. If you were to ask someone for the cloak you had lent when he was naked, he does not receive his nakedness from you, but by the fact that you take back what is yours, he reverts to the condition that was his before you clothed him. Indeed, just as from the highest good only good comes, so from the highest being only being comes, and all being comes from the highest being. Since the highest good is the highest being, it follows that every good is being and every being is good. Hence nothing and non-being do not come from God, from whom come only good and being.

...

Take care not to think, since we read in Sacred Scripture (or say in quoting it) that God causes evil or non-being, that I am criticizing or denying what is said there. But, in reading Scripture, we ought not to attend so much to the impropriety of the words that covers truth as pay attention to the propriety of the truth that is hidden under various kinds of verbal expression. ...

Question 4: How the devil sinned and wanted to be like God.

Teacher: Do you still doubt that the devil did not will to keep what he had because he willed to abandon it and not vice versa, that is, that he willed abandon what he had because he did not wish to keep it?

Student: First show what [the devil] wished to keep that he did not have, in order that he might will to abandon what he had,

T: You do not doubt that he [the devil] sinned, because he could not be unjustly condemned by a just God, but you are asking how he sinned?

S: Yes.

T: If he had served justice with perseverance, he would neither sin nor be unhappy.

S: So we believe.

T: No one serves justice except by willing what he ought, nor abandons it save by willing what he ought not.

S: No one doubts that.

T: Therefore by willing something that at the time he ought not to will, he abandoned justice and thus sinned.

S: That follows, but I am asking what he willed.

T: Whatever he had, he should have willed.

S: Certainly he should have willed everything that he had received from God, nor could he have sinned by willing that.

T: Hence he willed something that he did not have and that he ought not to have willed then, as Eve willed to be like a god before God willed it.

S: I cannot deny that either.

T: But the only things he could will were justice, or what was useful to himself or the fitting. And happiness, to which every creature aspires, is constituted by the fitting.

S: We can see this in ourselves, since we do in fact will only that which we see as just or pleasant.

T: The devil certainly could not have sinned by willing justice.

S: True.

T: So he sinned by willing something that pleased him and that he did not have and that he should not then have willed, but that could increase his happiness.

S: He could not sin in any other way.

T: And you recognize, I think, that, by inordinately willing more than he had received, his will exceeded the limits of justice.

S: I see clearly now that the devil sinned either by willing what he should not have or by not willing what he should have. And it is evident enough that he willed more than what he should have, not because he did not will to maintain justice, but ... because he willed something else, something that required the abandonment of justice, ...

[Question 8: The will and its turning are not evil itself.]

Question 9: That injustice is evil itself and is nothing

S: So what is the evil that makes them bad and the good that makes them good?

T: We should hold that justice is the good whereby they are good or just, both angels and men, and that whereby the will itself is called good and just; and injustice is the evil that is only a privation of the good, and makes angels and men bad and makes their will bad. So we should say that injustice is nothing but the privation of justice. As long as the will originally given to a rational nature is simultaneously oriented to its rectitude by the same act with which God give it, thus not lonely inclined to rectitude, but created right, that is oriented to what it ought do, as long as, I say, the will remains in that rectitude that we call truth or justice, it was just. But when it distanced itself from what it ought and turned against it, it did not remain in the original rectitude in which it was created. And when it abandoned it, it lost something great, and acquired in exchange only the privation of justice we call injustice and that has not positive being.

Question 13. If it had only the will for happiness, it could neither will anything else nor not will it, and the will, whatever it willed, would but neither just nor unjust. [God must give two wills: one for happiness and one for justice]

T: Let us say then that God gives him, as his first volition, only the will for happiness, and see whether because he has this volition, he is not capable of willing something other than what he has been given to will.

S: Go on. I am eager to hear.

T: It is obvious that he does not yet will anything other than happiness because it has not been given to him to will anything else.

S: True.

T: So what I am asking is whether he is capable of moving himself to will something else.

S: I do not see how he can move himself to will something other than his happiness, since he does not will anything else. For if he wills to move himself to will something else, he already wants that something else.

T: Therefore just as when he has not received any volition he is not able of himself to will, so having received only the will for happiness, he is not able of himself to will anything else.

S: That is so.

T: And can he not determine himself to will that which he believes will lead to his happiness?

S: I do not know how to answer. If in fact he cannot, I do not see how one who cannot will what he believes leads to happiness can be said to will happiness. If he can, I do not see what he cannot will something else.

T: But what does he who seems to will something, not for its own sake, but for something else really will? That which he is said to will or that by means of which he wills it?

S: Certainly that which he wills by means of the other.

T: So one who wills something for the sake of his happiness, really wills nothing other than his happiness. Hence he can will that which leads to happiness while willing only his happiness.

S: That is clear enough.

T: Then I ask you if, having only the will for happiness he is able to not to will it.

S: He cannot simultaneously will and not will.

T: True, but that is not what I asked. I asked if he could abandon this will, to move himself to will not to will happiness.

S: If in fact he does this unwillingly, he does not do it. If willingly, he wills something other than happiness. But he does not. So it is clear, I think that he can in no way of himself not will that which alone he is given to will.

T: You understand well, but tell me whether he who wills only happiness and cannot not will it, can will happiness more the more he understands it?

S: If he cannot will happiness more the more and better he understands it, either he does will happiness at all or he wills something else of the sake of which he does not will the better. But we agreed that he loves happiness and nothing else.

T: Therefore he wills to be happy to the degree that he knows is.

S: Without a doubt.

T: Then he wills to be like God.

S: Nothing is clearer.

T: So what do you think, can the will to be like God be unjust.

S: I cannot call it just, because he would want what does not befit him, nor unjust, because he would will it necessarily.

T: But we said that one who wills only happiness, wills only the useful.

S: Yes.

T: If then he who wills only the useful cannot have something more and more truly useful, he would will a lesser advantage, but one accessible by him?

S: Indeed, he cannot not will the less, if the greater is impossible of him.

T: And would the will of one who wills the less useful and the unclean things in which irrational animals delight be unjust and blameworthy?

S: But how can his will be unjust and reprehensible if he wills that which he is not given to the capacity not to will?

T: Yet it is obvious that the will itself that wills either the more or less useful is the work and gift of God, as are life and being indeed with sense. Which do not involve morality and in which there is neither good nor evil.

S: There is no doubt there.

T: So to the degree that the will is a being, it is good, and so far as concerns morality it is neither good nor evil.

S: Nothing is clearer.

T: But the angel cannot be happy if he does not have morally good will. If in fact he wills what he cannot and ought not to be, he cannot be perfectly and worthily happy.

S: That is obvious.

Question 14: It would be the same if the angel were given only a will for rectitude [justice]. [In this case, the angel could only will rectitude and his act, since necessary, would not be morally just or unjust.]

Question 17: Why the angel that abandons it cannot regain justice

T: When earlier we spoke of an angel that was given only the will for happiness, we saw that he would not be able to will anything else.

S: Yes.

T: Now, justice having been abandoned and only the prior will for happiness remaining, can the deserter go back to the will for justice by himself, something that was not given to him beforehand to do?

S: Much less. Before it was due to a condition of nature that he could not have it, but now it is by reason of his fault as well.

T: So there is no way in which he could acquire justice when he does not have it, either before receiving it or after having abandoned it.

S: He cannot have anything of himself.

[Question 18: How the bad angel makes himself bad and the good angel makes himself good, and that the bad angel owed thanks to God for the goods he received but abandoned, just as the good angel does who retained what he had received.]

Question 19: That the will as such is good and that nothing is evil.

T: Let us turn now to a consideration of the will and recall the conclusions to which we have come: namely, that the will for happiness, whatever it wills, is not an evil but a good before receiving justice. From which it follows that, when it abandons the justice received, if it is the same essence that it was before, it is something good insofar as it exists, but insofar as justice is not in the thing that it was in, it is called evil and unjust. For if to will to be like God were evil, the Son of God would not will to be like the Father. Or if to will lesser pleasures were evil, the will of brute animals would be called evil. But neither the will of the Son of God nor the will of the irrational animal is said to be evil because they are not unjust.

From this it follows that no will insofar as it exists is evil but is good because it is the work of God, nor is it evil except insofar as it is unjust. Therefore since only a bad will or what is due to a bad will is called evil, such as a bad man and a bad action, nothing is clearer than that nothing is evil nor that evil is anything but the absence in the will, or in something because of will, of that justice which has been abandoned.

Question 20: How God is the cause of evil and willing and action, and how they are received from him.

S: ... But if to want to be like God is not nothing nor is it evil but rather something good, this desire can only come from him from whom all that is comes. Therefore if the angel has nothing he has not received, what he has he received from the one who gave it. What could he receive from him that he did not give? Or if he has a desire to be like God, he has it because God gave it.

T: But why wonder that, just as God is said to lead into temptation when he does not free from temptation, we admit that he gives a bad will by not impeding it when he could, since the capacity of willing anything depends on him alone?

.....it is not incongruous that to receive should mean both one taking what is offered and presuming what is illicit.... When the devil wills what he ought not, this is received by him because God permits it, and that he has not received it because God did not agree with it.

... So when the devil turned his will to what he should not, both his will and this turning were something real, and yet he could not have this reality except from God, since he would not will nor move his will if it had not been permitted by God, who causes all substantial and accidental natures to be, both universal and individual.

Insofar as the will and its movement or turning are real they are good and come from God. But insofar as they are deprived of some justice that they ought to have, they are not absolutely bad but bad in a sense, and what is bad in them does not come from the will of God or from God insofar as he moves the will. Evil is injustice, which is only evil and evil is nothing. But the nature in which injustice is found is something evil, because it is something real and differs from injustice which is evil and is nothing. Therefore, what is real is made by God and comes from him; what is nothing, that is evil, is caused by the guilty and comes from him.,

S: It is certain that God creates the natures of all things, but who could admit that he causes the actions of bad will or the depraved movement of the will by which the will moves itself?

T: What wonder if we say that God causes the singular actions that come from the bad will, when we allow that he makes the singular substances which come to be unjust by will and bad action.

S: I have nothing to say against it. I cannot in fact deny that every action is a reality nor that whatever is has its being from God. Your argument neither accuses God nor excuses the devil, but rather absolves God and accuses the devil.

Q 21: That the bad angel could not foresee that he would fall.

S; But I want to know whether the angel who abandoned justice foreknew this of himself.

T: ...if you mean a foreseeing that requires knowledge of an object founded in a certain concept, I reply that he cannot have known that which could equally well not have been. That which is capable of non-being cannot be foreseen with absolute certainty. Thus it is clear that he could not have foreseen with certainty his fall since it was not necessary. For let us suppose that in fact he did not fall, do you think he could have foreseen that which would not be?...

Question 22: That he knew that he ought not to will what he sinned by willing and that he ought to be punished if he were to sin.

T: If he knew that he ought not to will what unjustly he willed he would have been ignorant that he ought to retain the will that he abandoned. Wherefore he would neither be just in retaining

it, nor unjust in abandoning a justice of which he was unaware... Finally, since he was rational, and nothing prevented him from using reason, he could not be unaware what he should and what he should not will.

S: I do not see how your argument could be refuted, but it seems to me to give rise to a problem. ... how could he spontaneously will that which would make him unhappy, he who had received as an inseparable inclination of his will to be happy?

Question 23: That he ought not to know that he would be punished if he sinned

T: Just as it is certain that he could not be ignorant of the fact that he should be punished if he were to sin, so is it that he ought not to have known that having sinned he would be punished.

S: And how could he have ignored this, if he was so rational that his rationality could not be impeded from knowing his truth because it was weighed down as we are with a mortal body?

T: Because he was rational, he could understand that he would justly be punished if he sinned, but since God's judgements are a deep abyss and his ways inaccessible to us [Rom 11:33], he was unable to know whether God would do what he justly could do. But, even if one should say that he could not believe that God would have condemned the creature he had made with so much goodness because of his guilt, he would not in fact express something impossible, especially since no example of justice punishing injustice would have preceded, and the angel was certain that the number that were created to enjoy God had been established with so much wisdom as to have nothing superfluous and to be unable to be lessened without leaving something incomplete, and that God's wonderful work could remain partially incomplete...

...

T: Let us return to what I said, that is, that the bad angel need not know that he would be damned. If indeed he had known it, he would have been unable to will spontaneously that which would render him unhappy while he had and willed felicity. And then he would not have been virtuous in not willing that which he ought not, because he could not do otherwise....

..

S: One who truly sinned ought not to have known the punishment.

Question 25: That the good angel by the fact alone that he now has knowledge of the fall of the devil is said no longer to be able to sin, though for him this works for glory.

T: [The good angel learned about punishment from the fall of the bad angel, but secondarily, because primarily as] it was made clear above, ... he [the good angel] cannot sin because, thanks to the merit of his perseverance, he has progressed to the point where he does not see what more he could desire.

Question 26: What horrifies us about the word 'evil' and the works that injustice is said to do if both are nothing.

S: Although you have responded to all my questions, I still wait for you to explain what horrifies us when we hear the word 'evil' and what causes the actions of injustice such as in theft, and lust – if evil is nothing.

T: ...That evil which is vice is always nothing; the evil that is suffering is sometimes without doubt nothing, as with blindness, and sometimes real, like sadness and sorrow, and we always detest the suffering that is something real. When then we hear the word 'evil' we do not fear the evil that is nothing; but that which is something real and follows the lack of the good. Many sufferings follow on injustice and blindness and those in fact are nothing, but these sufferings are evil and are something real and it is these we fear when we hear the word 'evil.'

When we say injustice causes theft or that blindness causes a man to fall into a ditch, we do not say that injustice and blindness cause something real, but that if justice were in the will and sight in the eye, theft would not come about and one would not fall into the ditch. ...

S: ... You have satisfied me with respect to the evil that is injustice, ... But the evil that in some way is something seems to cause difficulties for the true faith.

Question 27: How evil came to an angel when he was good

S: So would you please reply briefly to my fatuous request, so that I can reply to one who asks me. It is not always easy to reply wisely to the questions of the unwise. So I ask you whence comes for the first time that evil which is called injustice or sin in the angel who was created just. ... Why does justice depart from the just angel?

T: Speaking properly, it does not depart from him, but he abandons it by willing what he ought not.

S: Why does he abandon it?

T: When I say that by willing what he ought not he abandons it, I show openly why and how he abandons it. He abandons it because he wills what he ought not to will, and in this way it is by willing what he ought not that he abandons it.

S: Why does he will what he ought not?

T: No cause precedes this will except that he can will.

S: And he wills because he can?

T: No. Because the good angel could will similarly yet does not. No one wills what he can will because he can, without some other cause, although if he is unable to will he never does.

S: Why then does he will?

T: Only because he wills. For this will has no other cause by which it is forced or attracted but it was its own efficient cause, so to speak, as well as its own effect.