

## ***De Casu Diaboli: An Examination of Faith and Reason Via a Discussion of the Devil's Sin***

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*Although De Casu Diaboli is not a traditional locus for a discussion of faith and reason, it is nonetheless subtly permeated by this topic in two ways. The first concerns Anselm's general strategy for answering the student's questions regarding the cause of the devil's first sin. Anselm ends by claiming the devil willed incorrectly for no other cause than that his will so willed. Anselm thus ultimately calls upon the student to have faith in the mysterious, libertarian self-determining power of the created will; explanation must cease and the student must accept that God would only have punished the devil if the devil's will were freely to blame. This implicit, ultimate appeal to faith appears in stark contrast to the content of the entire treatise—a treatise up to that point filled with explanations of how the devil sinned in terms of the structure of the angels' wills and intellects. In other words, the purpose of the treatise had been to provide a reason for the devil's sin. It would seem that such reasons-giving discussions which occupy the first part of the work would be unnecessary if Anselm were ultimately to appeal to the student to rest upon his faith. The first part of the paper accordingly explores and attempts to alleviate this seeming tension. Additionally, Anselm explains that the devil had some compelling reasons to choose the way in which he did given his particular epistemic state. Despite this, the devil was to have faith in God's prohibition and not follow his reasons for doing otherwise. The second part of the paper, therefore, discusses how the relative priority of faith can be inferred from Anselm's discussion of the devil's first sin.*

It is well known that Anselm prioritizes faith to reason. What is not as well known is the extent to which this prioritizing is displayed in *De Casu Diaboli* (hereafter, *DCD*). This paper will demonstrate the great degree to which *DCD* prioritizes faith over reason by focusing on two related features of the treatise. The first (and primary) feature to be paid attention to is the general strategy of the treatise. The entire treatise is a reasons-based discussion in which Anselm (the "Teacher") repeatedly offers rationales for the devil's sin. The text ends, however, with Anselm simply appealing to the student's faith—an appeal that could have been made at any point during the text. There thus arises a paradox in that the entire work, characterized as it is by a reasons-giving discussion, seems unnecessary since it was to end with a simple appeal to faith that abstracts from providing any reasons. The resolution of this paradox will reveal the extent to which Anselm prioritizes faith over reason in *DCD*. This subordination of reason to faith will be confirmed by paying attention to a second feature of the text—Anselm's specific explanation of the devil's cognitive state at the moment he sinned.

Before beginning, it is necessary to clarify briefly what is meant by the term "faith" as it is contrasted with "reason" in this paper. Often, to have "faith" is understood as meaning "to believe that God exists." Such an understanding of the term "faith," however, is not the only

possible one and is not the one at issue in this paper. Indeed, “faith” has a myriad of meanings.<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this paper, “faith” will be used as a contrast to “reason” in the sense that to believe some proposition *p* through faith means simply to believe that *p* without requiring a reasons-based explanation. This is not at all intended to imply that believing that *p* is necessarily irrational; instead, it merely implies that the one who believes that *p* through faith believes it without requiring rational proof of *p* per se or without requiring that she herself understands why *p* must rationally be the case. Having clarified this point, the way in which *DCD* prioritizes faith over reason can be discussed.

The first task of this paper will be to recount the multiple arguments that comprise the body of the treatise. This is necessary so as to fully demonstrate the reasons-based nature of *DCD*. Please note that while some examination of those arguments will be necessary, it will be outside this paper’s purpose to evaluate these arguments to the extent to which they deserve. Instead, the point to note is that they *are* arguments and, as such, establish *DCD* as a sustained, ratiocinative inquiry into the cause of the devil’s sin.

Anselm’s first explanation for the devil’s sin (understood as a failure to persevere in the truth) arises in chapter two. We will label it DS1.

**DS1:** The devil sinned (did not persevere in the truth) because he lacked perseverance.<sup>2</sup>

Apart from being merely an analytic statement, DS1 gives rise to the student’s follow up question: Why would the devil lack perseverance?<sup>3</sup> The answer is contained in DS2.

**DS2:** The devil lacked perseverance because he did not receive it.<sup>4</sup>

DS2 is explicated by explaining that it is not God’s fault that the devil did not have perseverance. God offered perseverance but did not give it to the devil because he did not accept it. As did DS1, so does DS2 give rise to a further question: Why would the devil not accept the perseverance being offered to him by God? The student posits that either the devil lacked the capacity or the desire to receive it. Anselm, however, immediately denies this is the cause for the devil’s sin. The devil, just as the good angels did, had both the desire and capacity.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see chapter 1 of Joseph Koterski, *An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy: Basic Concepts* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> “. . . Consequens ets igitur quia ille qui ‘in veritate non stetit’, quemadmodum ideo non perseveravit quia perseverantiam non habuit” (ch. 2; S I: 235). All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own. The Latin text is from : *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*. Ad fidem codicum recensuit Franciscus Selesius Schmitt (Stuttgart–Bad Cannstatt: Friedrich Frommann Verlag, 1984). References to this text will be made with an “S,” followed by the volume number, colon, and page number.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the quality of “perseverance” is apparently being reified. It is outside the scope of this paper to pursue the propriety or impropriety of this understanding of perseverance.

<sup>4</sup> “M. Non accepit et ideo non habuit” (ch. 3; S I: 237).

Understandably enough, the student assumes that having the desire and capacity to receive some  $x$  should have been sufficient for the devil to possess that  $x$ .<sup>5</sup> Anselm, to the contrary, denies that this is the case when it comes to perseverance. His reasoning lies in the temporal nature of perseverance. To persevere in some task is to keep performing that task from its inception ( $t_1$ ), throughout the intervening moments ( $t_n, t_{n+1}, . . .$ ) until its completion ( $t_{end}$ ). Anselm notes it is possible that at  $t_1$  one can have the desire to persist in some activity all the way to  $t_{end}$ . Nonetheless, at some time  $t_n$  before  $t_{end}$  has been reached, one can change one's mind about completing the activity all the way to  $t_{end}$  and thus fail to persevere despite having had the desire at  $t_1$  to persevere. In other words, it is possible to lack the desire to persevere after having had the desire. We can thus state this stretch of argumentation as Anselm's third attempt to explain the devil's sin:

**DS3:** The devil did not receive perseverance despite having the capacity and desire to receive it because he failed to persevere in the desire to receive it before he fully received it.

In order to appreciate the complexity of Anselm's answer, it must be noted that there are two different "perseverances" in DS3: the devil sinned because he failed to persevere in the desire (call it "perseverance<sub>d</sub>") to persevere in the activity of remaining in the truth (call it "perseverance<sub>a</sub>").

DS3's introduction of a second perseverance, however, seems to solve nothing and simply moves the question one step back. Namely, it must now be asked how could perseverance<sub>d</sub> be lost. The student's answer, to which Anselm agrees, is that one loses perseverance<sub>d</sub> when one no longer wants (*velle*) to persevere in the desire. We can thus state DS4.

**DS4:** The devil ultimately sinned because he did not have perseverance<sub>d</sub> (which was necessary for perseverance<sub>a</sub>) because he no longer wanted (*velle*) to persevere in the desire.

In light of DS4, it may be asked why one would not want (*velle*) to persevere in some desire? The only answer seems to be that such a one wanted to have perseverance<sub>d</sub> but did not *persevere* in wanting to have perseverance<sub>d</sub>. In other words, one must have failed in having some prior perseverance<sub>d</sub>.<sup>6</sup> We would thus have three different types of perseverance under discussion. The failure of perseverance<sub>a</sub> would be explained by the failure of perseverance<sub>d</sub> which, in turn, would be explained by the failure of a prior perseverance<sub>d</sub>.

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<sup>5</sup> "D. Accepit ergo et habuit perseverantiam" (ch. 3; S I: 237).

<sup>6</sup> "D. Iterum responderem quia perseverare volui, sed non perseveravi in hac voluntate, nisi rem viderem in infinitum procedure, te semper ideam ipsum interrogante et me eadem respondente" (ch. 3; S I: 238).

As both Anselm and the student quickly realize, to explain failures of perseverance by appealing to prior failures of perseverance will lead to an infinite regress. In order to adequately explain some failure of perseverance, Anselm notes that “one should introduce another reason.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, to avoid tautology an *explanandum* must be explained in terms that do not appeal to the *explanandum* itself. Let us call this axiom with which Anselm is working AX1:

**AX1:** For an explanation of a phenomenon to be meaningful, the explanation must not be phrased in terms of the *explanandum* itself.

So as to avoid flouting AX1, Anselm and his student decide it best to clarify what the term “perseverance” itself means. They agree that to persevere in something means to “will it all the way” (*pervelle*).<sup>8</sup> This leads Anselm to state that “the devil . . . did not receive perseverance and did not persevere because he did not will all the way (*pervelle*).”<sup>9</sup> This can be stated as DS5.

**DS5:** The devil lacked perseverance<sub>d</sub> because he did not will all the way (*pervelle*).

It is admittedly not clear how DS5 conforms to AX1.<sup>10</sup> This worry notwithstanding, DS5 gives rise to an additional worry: Why would the devil not have “willed it all the way” given that he initially wanted to will it all the way? The details of Anselm’s answer need not detain us.<sup>11</sup> Let it suffice to say that the devil failed to will completely because at some point before  $t_{\text{end}}$  he did the following:

**DS6:** The devil “willed something that he did not have and that he ought not to have willed at that time.”<sup>12</sup>

Anselm admits that he does “not see what that could have been” which the devil willed.<sup>13</sup> Whatever it was, though, God did not want him to will it and by doing so, the devil “inordinately

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<sup>7</sup> “M. Quod si iterum quaeritur quare non perseverasti in voluntate, alia causa reddenda est, unde scilicet contigerit defectus illius voluntatis, quam quia non perseverasti velle voluntatem” (ch. 3; S I: 238).

<sup>8</sup> *Pervelle* is a term that Anselm apparently created. For this particular rendering, I follow Ralph McInerny’s translation in: Anselm, *De Casu Diaboli*, ch. 3, trans. Ralph McInerny in *The Major Works*, ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 199.

<sup>9</sup> “M. Ita ergo dic quia diabolus qui accepit velle et posse accipere perseverantiam et velle et posse perseverare, ideo non accepit nec perseveravit quia non pervoluit” (ch. 3; S I: 238).

<sup>10</sup> If *pervelle* is the analytical definition of perseverance, then to explain the lack of perseverance by the failure to *pervelle* does indeed seem tautological. To explore this issue further is outside the scope of purpose of this particular paper.

<sup>11</sup> Anselm’s explanation at this point is rather well-known and is even referenced (incorrectly, in my view) by Duns Scotus (*Ordinatio* II, d.6, q.2, n.35). Anselm basically explains (via the examples of holding a hot coal and a miser wanting to eat) that sometimes one can be deprived of something one has and desires to keep because of an even greater desire to possess a good incompatible with the one she *ceteris paribus* would prefer to keep. For example, a miser would prefer to keep his money but will be deprived of it when hungry because of a greater desire to have bread. Cf. *DCD* 3.

<sup>12</sup> “M. Voluit igitur aliquid quod non habebat nec tunc velle debebat” (ch. 4; S I: 241).

willed to be similar to God.”<sup>14</sup> Unsurprisingly, this answer is inadequate because it does not explain why the devil willed that which he ought not have. To respond to this query, Anselm develops his innovative understanding of the will.

Anselm denies that there can be any unmotivated willing.<sup>15</sup> For an angel’s will to actually will anything, it must be characterized by a certain disposition, or affection, for the particular object that provides the motive for such a willing.<sup>16</sup> Thus, if happiness is to be willed and thereby achieved (which is part of a created nature’s *telos*<sup>17</sup>), God must endow that will with an “affection for happiness.”<sup>18</sup> It is not enough, though, that a will possess *only* the “affection for happiness” since, if it did, the angel could will only happiness and could not thereby be just.<sup>19</sup> If justice is to be willed, an angel needs to be endowed with an “affection for justice.” The affection for justice, however, can likewise not be the only affection characterizing an angel’s will. If it were, the angel would have to will justice necessarily and would not thereby be just of himself.<sup>20</sup> Consequently, an angel’s will must be characterized by both affections. In this way, an angel can choose whether or not to let his affection for justice moderate his will for happiness and thus be self-determined.

Given this understanding of the will as affection, Anselm explains that the devil sinned by willing something in accordance with his affection for happiness which was incompatible with considerations of justice and thereby not moderated by the affection for justice. We thus come to DS7.

**DS7:** The devil sinned because he failed to let his willing for happiness be moderated by the affection for justice.

Despite the complexity of Anselm’s description of the will, the student is still puzzled as to why the devil would have chosen to will in accordance with his affection for happiness without letting that will be moderated by the affection for justice. Anselm answers that no reason

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<sup>13</sup> “M. Quid illud fuerit non video; sed quidquid fuerit, sufficit scire quia fuit aliquid ad quod crescere potuerunt, quod non acceperunt quando creati sunt, ut ad illud suo merito proficerent” (ch. 6; S I: 244).

<sup>14</sup> “M. . . . hoc ipso voluit esse inordinate similis deo, quia propria voluntate, quae nulli subdita fuit, voluit aliquid” (ch. 4; S I: 242).

<sup>15</sup> To establish this claim is largely the purpose of *DCD*, ch. 12.

<sup>16</sup> He refers to these dispositions as *affectiones* in *De Concordia* III, ch. 11. In *DCD*, they are referred to as “wills” or “desires” (*voluntas*). The idea of will-as-affection is most fully developed in *DC* III. For clarity of exposition, I will follow Anselm’s most mature thoughts and refer to these dispositions as “affections”.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Monologion*, ch. 69; *De Concordia* III, ch. 13; and *DCD*, ch. 12.

<sup>18</sup> *DCD*, chs. 12–13.

<sup>19</sup> *DCD*, ch. 13.

<sup>20</sup> *DCD*, ch. 14.

is to be found. The devil wills unjustly “only because he wills. For this will has no other causes . . . it was its own efficient cause.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, Anselm’s ultimate answer to why the devil sinned is:

**DS8:** The devil willed sinfully for no other reason than that his will so willed.

After twenty-seven chapters,<sup>22</sup> seven previous attempted explanations, and numerous logical ratiocinations, one may be forgiven for having hoped for a more substantive conclusion. We hereby arrive at the major paradox characterizing *DCD* when it comes to faith and reason. Why did Anselm go through the hassle of appealing to the quality of perseverance, explicating its durative nature, appealing to different kinds of perseverance, exploring the nature of perseverance as *pervelle*, and developing a complex understanding of the affections of the will if his ultimate answer was basically going to be the tautological “the devil sinned because the devil willed to sin?” Concluding in this manner is tantamount to Anselm calling upon his student to simply have faith and believe in the mysterious, libertarian self-determining power of the will. If he were ultimately going to conclude with such an appeal to faith, it appears as if the entire treatise, characterized as it is by reasons-giving, is unnecessary.

This seeming pointlessness of the entire discussion is supported once it is realized that Anselm could have offered DS8 at any point during the discussion. For example, instead of DS2<sup>23</sup> he could have simply said that the devil lacked perseverance because he simply willed not to receive it. Note, moreover, that the ultimate answer in DS8 seems to violate AX1. Given that, why was Anselm not receptive to the student’s previous temptation to violate AX1 before DS5 and end the treatise at that point? It would seem that Anselm has wasted his, the students, and our time by walking us through a catalogue of reasons when his ultimate answer was to simply appeal to faith.

There are a few ways in which this paradox may be resolved and the purposefulness of the reasons-giving nature of *DCD* be maintained. Marilyn McCord Adams, for example, notes that the reasons-giving portion of *DCD* can be viewed as a pedagogical tool in which the student learns how to conduct rational argumentation.<sup>24</sup> In addition, it permits Anselm to explain his own beliefs about the structure of the will which he employs elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> Another solution can be found in Montague Brown’s suggestion that the “sustained intellectual life requires a kind of

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<sup>21</sup> This translation follows McNerny’s. “M. Non nisi quia voluit. Nam haec voluntas nullam aliam habuit causam qua impelleretur aliquatenus aut attraheretur, sed ipsa sibi efficiens causa fuit, si dici potest, et effectum” (ch. 27; S I: 275).

<sup>22</sup> There is a brief twenty-eighth chapter that follows Anselm’s espousal of DS8. The explanation of the devil’s sin, however, is completed by the twenty-seventh chapter.

<sup>23</sup> DS2: The devil lacked perseverance because he did not receive it.

<sup>24</sup> Marilyn McCord Adams, “Anselm on Faith and Reason,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*, ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 32–60, p. 40.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 49. Cf. *De Libertate Arbitrii* and *De Concordia*.

rhythm . . . that moves between the poles of quest and analysis.”<sup>26</sup> Simple appeals to faith without attempting the rational analysis characteristic of the majority of the treatise would thus be against our intellectual nature. In other words, the mysteriousness of the devil’s sin naturally drives us to want to understand this mystery.<sup>27</sup>

To these possible solutions, I wish to add another. I posit that one purpose of *DCD* is to emphasize—in a way and extent not necessarily accomplished in other works—the priority of faith over reason. It is well known that Anselm espouses the preeminence of faith over reason in *Proslogion* 1 when he tells us that unless he believed, he would not understand.<sup>28</sup> But while it is one thing to *tell* us that reason is subservient to faith, it is another to *show* us. And that is exactly what *DCD* does.

In *DCD*, Anselm as the teacher and we as the reader give reason its ‘best shot’ (so to speak) at explaining the devil’s sin. Despite having taken its best shot, reason ultimately comes up short; it is inadequate of itself to understand the mysteries of faith. In virtue of being led through several rational explanations that ultimately fail despite their intricate argumentation, the reader comes to actively *experience* the subservience of reason to faith. Traipsing through those arguments and their failures leads the reader to recognize the priority of faith over reason in a way she could not do by simply being told it. As such, the portion of *DCD* concerned with rational explanation is not only not pointless, but it is essential to *DCD*’s objective of accentuating faith’s priority over reason.

This observation is not meant to denigrate reason by any means. Nobody could ever accuse Anselm of holding reason in low esteem. Nonetheless, in *DCD* we see the extent to which reason must ultimately cede priority. Some mysteries can only ultimately be understood through faith, and the devil’s sin is one such mystery.<sup>29</sup> Explanation must at some point cease and the student must accept through faith that God would only have punished the devil if the devil were to blame in a self-determined way that nonetheless eludes sufficient rational explanation.<sup>30</sup>

Before concluding, I want to support my claim that part of *DCD*’s purpose is to emphasize the priority of faith over reason by focusing on one more aspect of the work: the description of the devil’s cognitive state at the time of his sin. Recall that the devil sinned by

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<sup>26</sup> Montague Brown, “Faith and Reason in Anselm: Two Models,” *The Saint Anselm Journal* 2.1 (2004): 10–21, p. 19.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Brown, 18: “Analysis reveals mystery, and the intuition of the mystery at the heart of things *impels us to want to understand*” (italics mine).

<sup>28</sup> “Nam et hoc credo: quia >>nisi credidero, non intelligam<<.” (*Pros.* 1; S I: 100).

<sup>29</sup> For an explanation of how faith is required for understanding that is different, yet compatible, with the one presented here, see: Victor W. Roberts, “The Relation of Faith and Reason in St. Anselm of Canterbury,” *The American Benedictine Review* 25 (1974): 494–512.

<sup>30</sup> The student does indeed do this several times (cf. chs. 2, 4). Note also that I am intentionally avoiding use of the term “freedom” or any of its cognates here. This is due to the fact that, although Anselm clearly espouses what contemporary philosophers call libertarian freedom, his own definition of freedom famously does not contain within it the ability to sin or not sin. Instead, his definition of freedom is the ability to uphold justice (cf. *De Libertate Arbitrii*, chs. 1–3). I therefore am attempting to avoid use of the term freedom so as to avoid unnecessary confusion.

choosing not to let his affection for justice moderate his affection for happiness. Interestingly, Anselm provides some considerations that compellingly support the devil's choice.

Although the devil did know that he ought to be punished if he were to sin, it was necessary that he not know that he would be punished.<sup>31</sup> He moreover had good reasons to doubt that he would be punished. The angels were created as a good creation. It would thus seem unlikely that God would condemn such a good creation. There had furthermore never been an example of an injustice being punished by an all-merciful God. Additionally, it was believed that the number of angels God had created corresponded to the number of creatures God intended to enjoy eternal bliss with God. Having no idea that humans were to be created and could be put in place of fallen angels, the devil believed an angel could not be condemned away from God's presence. If one were, it would seem that God's work would be incomplete, which would be unworthy of God. Consequently, the devil had good reason to believe that although he should be punished were he to sin, he would not. The devil could apparently have his cake (will his own happiness) and eat it too (not be punished). No reasons for not thus sinning are provided; the only motivation for not sinning is simply that God said not to. Anselm thus makes it seem almost *irrational* for the devil not to will in accordance with his own highest happiness. Reason seemed to dictate that the devil sin.

This fact, I posit, leads Anselm directly to his point: reason, when used in isolation from faith, is likely to lead to sin. Whereas *reason* alone seemed to dictate that the devil will in favor of his own happiness, the devil was to have *faith* in God and follow God's prohibition. The devil thus sinned in virtue of prioritizing reason over faith. Similarly, Anselm is showing his readers that they too risk sinning when they prioritize human reason to faith. While reason is important, it ought not be valued so highly that it outstrips the reach of faith.

In conclusion, we have seen that *DCD* is a work in which the reader is not merely *told* that faith is prior to reason; instead, it is a work in which faith's priority to reason, and the necessity of prioritizing faith to reason, is multiply emphasized. And this emphasis comes not by Anselm merely *telling* us that faith is prior to reason (as he does in *Proslogion* 1). The emphasis comes through the reader's own experience of giving reason 'its best shot' and ultimately having to accept its ultimate inadequacy in and of itself—an acceptance verified in the devil's own experience.

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<sup>31</sup> *DCD*, ch. 22–23.