**Analogical Reasoning in Saint Anselm's *De* *Concordia*:**

**Grace, Free Will, and Cooperation**

Robert Francis George Allen, *Ph.D*.

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'The truth is that I always return to the olive grove. It was a very familiar and natural movement for my soul. I’d never realized it until that moment. Suddenly Our Lord had shown me grace and revealed through my old master’s lips that nothing would tear me from my chosen place in eternity. I was a prisoner of the Holy Agony.'

George Bernanos, *Diary of a Country Priest*

St. Anselm is a master of philosophical prose. His writings on God, truth, and free will are models of clarity, born of unflagging concern for argumentative precision. He is especially adept at using analogies to cinch his readers' understanding of these recondite matters. Welcome light is shed upon the concept of mind-independent existence by the Painter Analogy in the Ontological Argument; his River Analogy illumines the unification of the Holy Trinity. Such intellectual insights could only be gifts of the Holy Ghost for the edification of the Holy Mother Church.

I shall discuss here the three splendid analogies that he draws in *De* *Concordia* to reconcile grace and free will.[[1]](#footnote-2) My intention is to show that they foster an understanding of cooperation according to which divine assistance must accentuate, rather than nullify, exercises of human freedom. Central to my discussion will be The Father of Scholasticism's neo-Aristotelian, four-fold distinction between a power, its exercises, the effects of those exercises, and opportunities to bring about those effects.

**Free Will and Grace**

Having previously defined free will as 'the (self-exercised, choice-forming, teleologically guided) ability to maintain volitional rectitude (its own perfection) for its own sake,'[[2]](#footnote-3) Anselm, in *De Concordia*, delves into its role in the economy of salvation:

'It remains now for us to consider grace and free choice doing so with the assistance of this grace. This controversy arises from the fact that Divine Scripture sometimes speaks in such a way that only grace and not free choice seems to avail to salvation. On the other hand, it sometimes speaks as if our entire salvation were dependent upon our free will.'[[3]](#footnote-4)

Several difficult, interrelated questions are raised here, with Divine Scripture seemingly only adding to the confusion. Is free will otiose when it comes to bringing abo one's salvation? How could it not be? How could a penitent sinner possess choice or self-control here? Divine assistance cannot fail nor would it require our help in achieving its end. Grace is irresistible; it will 'have its way' with one regardless of one's own intentions: 'You seduced me Lord and I was seduced.' (Jeremiah, 20:7) What more needs to be done to remain amongst the elect once one has received grace? I must help my fellows help me. But God? He needs absolutely nothing from any of his creatures. Grace is furthermore a gift, something one cannot earn without the Almighty appearing less than infinitely merciful- what, He wouldn't save me but for the fact that *I* ...? My will can do *nothing* to entitle me to grace. Perish even the thought that anything but Calvary is responsible for one's entry into Paradise! On the other hand, if free will has nothing to do with one's final destiny, what justifies damnation? There must be something that distinguishes the elect from the reprobate. But, if all it is, is the possession of grace, we are faced with the Calvinistic theological determinism. That is, if the elect are in Heaven simply because of something that the Almighty did on their part and the damned are in Hell because of His unwillingness to bestow that same favor upon them, the whole arrangement appears unjust, violating the principle that like cases ought to be treated alike. Thus, God's power and mercy appear diminished if free will is afforded a role in the economy of salvation, but He seems capricious if it is *not* included therein.

Here is the gist of St. Anselm's response to this query: The will is 'infused' with grace, empowering it to preserve its rectitude, that is, efficiently cause the willingness to do God's will. Further the will may reject grace, prevenient, or subsequent, making its effects avoidable. Thus, grace *is* irresistible, but if and only if it is willed: unless cooperated with, it is of no avail. Thus, its presence in the soul is compatible with both principles of choice and self-control. Nor would one's salvation be 'overdetermined,' as grace and the will have become one, as form to matter. ('But as many as received Him, he gave them power to be made the sons of God, to them that believe in His name.' John: 1:12) These conclusions Anselm then establishes and elaborates by the use of three sterling analogies.

**The Sight Analogy**

His Sight Analogy (SA) first reveals what grace restores and how that restoration yet affords a role to free will in the salvation of penitents:

'Assuredly, there is no doubt that the will wills rightly only because it is upright. For just as sight is not acute because it sees acutely but sees acutely because it is acute, so the will is not upright because it wills rightly but wills rightly because it is upright.'[[4]](#footnote-5)

Just as acute vision enables one to see acutely, without being visualization, a grace infused will empowers one to will correctly, that is, perpetuate its rectitude, without being an exercise of the will, which is still effected by an agent, a person himself acting *via* this power. *Sans* grace those pursuing sanctity are vainly desirous of a non-existent goal, being not in possession of that which they are to retain. Prevenient grace, freely received, restore's the will's '*teleos*.' Subsequent grace effects its realization, but only in communion with the will's cooperation. The will as an instrument is, thus, perfected by grace, but its reception and exercise is left up to its owner: in that his continual cooperation with that assistance is required for it to remain in this, its, proper state. Exercising his will, he must steadfastly cause the willingness to do God's will to abide in his 'heart', preferring to manifest its will-for-justice rather than the will-for-happiness should their inclination be mutually exclusive.

Using SA, we should say of the Old Testament figures, to illustrate this point, that it was not as if they couldn't (see) will.  They were not (blinded) made automatons.  As St. Augustine contended, the Fall entailed a loss of considerable goodness in the world, not an imposition alien to divinity: evil, like all privations, is nothing.[[5]](#footnote-6)  Thus, it did not destroy (vision) the will itself but its (*acuity*) *rectitude*, rendering it incapable of functioning properly. They were yet able to will of their own accords; they were using their own volitional power to effect choices. They were not, however, able to will freely; to use that instrument as it was intended to be used, the instrument itself lacking that which it was designed to protect and enhance- rectitude. Calvary allows us to again (see) will freely by restoring that lost rectitude: the opportunity to realize the will's purpose- (acuity) rectitude retention and enhancement- is provided by Christ's Eternal Sacrifice.

Again: Let's assume that acuity of vision is retained if and only if one eyes only that which is illuminated. (As children we were always told 'Don't read in the dark.') And let us suppose further that the whole point of vision is to retain visual acuity. Original sin would then correspond to straining to see things un-illuminated; while Grace may be thought of as entering the open eyes of Believers in the form of visual acuity, providing them once again with the opportunity (and obligation) to retain and enhance it.

**The Clothing Analogy**

St. Anselm's Clothing Analogy (ACA) forestalls charges of Pelagianism, the heresy according to which Paradise can be somehow merited. Appealing to ACA, we may assign free will a role in the economy of salvation while at the same time pointing up the moral difference, justifying damnation, between Christ's followers and unbelievers without violating St. Paul's dictum that: "All have sinned and have need of the Glory of God." (Rm. 3:23)

'The case is like someone's giving clothes to a naked person to whom he owes nothing and who by himself is unable to obtain a garment. Although the naked person has the ability to use and not to use the clothing he has received, still if he does use it, the fact that he is clothed must be credited not to him but to the one who gave him clothes.'[[6]](#footnote-7)

The garment here would be analogous to the grace we are offered in the form of our will's lost rectitude. which would 'clothe' that faculty in perfection were we but to acknowledge, *a la* the naked man, our shameful state and heed the call of reason (and sanity), gratefully accepting and wearing God's most precious gift, purchased, as it was, by His Son's most precious blood.

There is no merit in either freely accepting or freely cooperating with God's grace: it would be like crediting a penniless, naked man for his willingness to avail himself of a gratuitous offer of clothing. On the other hand, anyone so proud as to reject God's loving assistance deserves damnation. Why should anyone feel sorry for someone lacking garments because of his own arrogant refusal to take advantage of others' good-will? Does he not know that he ought to be clothed? No. Is he unable to accept clothing from others? No. Is he even incapable of suppressing his swollen pride? No again. Was anything or anyone else determinative of his rejection of help or was that choice, like all other uses of his will, completely up to him? It was his and his alone to make- until his rejecting of assistance took place the possibility of him accepting it yet existed, to be cancelled only by his fiat. So there's no valid excuse for his nakedness, born, as it is, of the free choice to rejects charity, a misuse of his will, but an autonomous exercise of it nonetheless. That is, *he himself*, not anything or anyone else, brought about his shameful state of affairs, when there was an easily accessible alternative thereto.

It is hard for us to understand how someone else could consign himself to nakedness, adamantly refusing to overcome his pride, yet each one of us knows in his own heart that the project is eminently doable: 'Work out your salvation in fear and trembling.' *Philippians*, 2:12. And, as if that evidence was insufficient, there is, of course, the divinely revealed example of Lucifer and his minions, who, even more unbelievably, spiritually denuded themselves for all of eternity. ACA, thus, establishes moral asymmetry between the elect and damned so as to refute Pelagianism: the former are willing to cooperate with grace, but that is not a meritorious act or choice whereas the latter of their own accords reject His assistance out of inordinate pride- covetousness of the autonomy of the Creator (the harboring of which being a prior sinful choices) which is blameworthy. 'Brethren: He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord. For he is not approved who commends himself, but he whom the Lord commends.' *Corinthians* 10: 17-8

**The Marriage Analogy**

We finally come to St. Anselm's beautiful Marriage Analogy (MA):

'(J)ust as although natural functioning does not procreate an offspring apart from a father or except through a mother, nevertheless not even any rational thought excludes either a father or a mother from an offspring’s generation: so too, grace and free choice are not incompatible but cooperate in order to justify and to save a man.'[[7]](#footnote-8)

The form of rectitude, as a grace, vivifies a will, entailing a purpose for its exercise. It is freely received by 'an open heart,' the will itself as material and efficient cause of said reception, the two of them then working together seamlessly unto the latter's justification and sanctification. (Think of the Blessed Mother's '*fiat*' and her subsequent role as *'Co-redemptrix*.') We can see such cooperation in the way the Sacrament of Marriage makes one a man and woman, open to the reception of such a grace, so as to allow them to raise children in concert. Grace actualizes a potency, operating upon receptivity, in their case. The unity of form and matter here insures that there is only one cause bringing about the intended effect: a family, not competing forces, but two persons of one mind and body, acting for their common good, neither one being sufficient unto himself/herself for that end, each one needing the other to be whole. So it is with God and sinners. Our Lord wishes to marry Himself to our wills as members of the Holy Mother Church, so that together we may enter Paradise, the fruit of our common labors: 'And the multitude of believers had but one heart and one soul: neither did any one say that aught of the things which he possessed, was his own; but all things were common unto them.' *Acts* 4:32. Nothing alien to our wills effects our salvation any more than a husband/wife would deny his spouse's contribution to their children's well-being. Nor should we even be willing to 'go it alone', like a 'husband/wife' who would arrogate the duties of his/her spouse. The MA refutes both Theological Determinism and Pelagianism.

So what do we learn of the harmonious working of free will and grace from these analogies taken *en* *toto*? We realize that grace is the most precious gift conceivable in that it is something of which we are in no way deserving but without which, on the contrary, we would be deservedly damned. Our free wills were meant by God to be clothed in rectitude; original sin was the self-willed, avoidable shedding of that blessed garment ('The eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked.' *Genesis* 2) which we could not recover on our own. Prevenient grace, entailed by the sacrifice of God the Father's own son on Calvary, fervently urges, without coercing, the sinner to allow that same loving Father to again clothe him in perfection ('And the father said to his servants: Bring forth quickly the first robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.' Luke 15:21) Supplements thereof provide the necessary further assistance, with which he may freely co-operate, to remain so attired unto his eternal salvation. The 'clothing' and that which is attired here, then, is not ours: we do not create our wills as instruments nor could we endow them with purpose. But its exercises and the wills (willingness) that result from them- our choosing and choices- that are effected are causes and effects that we cause, with or without divine assistance that we may accept or reject 'at will'. We are either helping God help us to help us keep our wills properly attired or allowing ourselves to once again become morally naked. ('And the king went in to see the guests: and he saw there a man who had not on a wedding garment ... (He) said to the waiters: Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the exterior darkness: (where) there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' *Matthew*, 22:11-13) In the former we are like the materially needy, taking up a would be benefactor on his offer of assistance out of desperation and the instinct for self-preservation- owing all to his generosity, ourselves no great shakes. But should we spurn *charitas* Himself, our hard-heartedness ... may God have mercy on our souls! And it must always be kept in mind that this eternally tragic choice is possible. As in vision, where focus depends upon an agent, if not clear-sightedness, so with the objects of the will, to be willed or nilled at will. ('If thine eye offends thee, pluck it out.' Matthew 18:9) There is nothing in either happiness or justice itself compelling a choice of one over the other. Nor is either of our inclinations to pursue these goals compulsory in any way. The activation of one and simultaneous shunning of the other, *ipso facto* the concomitant content of one's will, can only be caused by one's fiat. Thus, both repentant and defiant sinners are responsible for their eternal rewards, the former with the help of God, the latter, as they perversely wanted it, all by themselves. Our Creator, in making us free, has willed that salvation, like a happy family, can only be the fruit of cooperation. 'For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish, according to his good will.' *Philippians* 2:13

1. *De Concordia* (henceforth *C*) in *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (*AC*) ed. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. *On Free Will* 3, in *AC* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. *C*, III, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. *C*, III, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. The City of God (New York: Random House, 1993) XI, Chap. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. *C* III, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. *C*, III, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)