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# ANSELM AGAINST MCCANN ON GOD AND SIN: FURTHER DISCUSSION

Katherin A. Rogers

Hugh McCann argues that God wills human sin, that humans are nonetheless significantly free, and that his position provides a satisfying theodicy of sin. I defend an Anselmian view: Although God causes the existence of all that exists, He does not produce sin. Human beings are the ultimate sources of their sinning, which sinning should not happen. McCann rejoins that my position is incoherent and that my criticisms are not well taken. I respond, clarifying Anselm's understanding of human freedom, revisiting and defending my previous criticisms, and arguing that in practice McCann's position is a poor fit for the Christian life.

Hugh McCann argues that God wills human acts of sin, that human beings are nonetheless free in a robust enough way to ground moral responsibility, and that his position provides a satisfying theodicy of sin. I have responded that McCann's position implies that God is an "unloving deceiver," so his theodicy fails and the alternative view offered by Anselm of Canterbury is preferable; although God causes the existence of all things that exist, it is logically impossible that God produce sin, and human beings are free enough to be the ultimate cause of their sinning, which sinning really and absolutely should not happen.<sup>1</sup> McCann rejoins, in a recent paper, that the position I impute to Anselm is incoherent, and that my criticisms of his, McCann's, view are not well taken.<sup>2</sup> The question of whether or not God is the ultimate source of human sins seems to me a fundamental one in the philosophy of religion, with broad and deep theoretical and practical consequences for the Christian believer. In the present paper I hope to respond to McCann, clarifying Anselm's understanding of human freedom, revisiting and defending my previous criticisms, and trying to develop some of the practical consequences which follow from our two opposing views. Each view is internally consistent, and each has its advantages and its drawbacks, but where theory meets practice, McCann's position is a poor fit for the Christian life.

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<sup>1</sup>"God is Not the Author of Sin: An Anselmian Response to McCann," *Faith and Philosophy* 24 (2007): 300–310, in response to McCann's "The Author of Sin?" *Faith and Philosophy* 22 (2005): 144–159.

<sup>2</sup>"God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm: A Reply," *Faith and Philosophy* 26 (2009): 420–431.



*McCann's Position*

McCann holds that his view is roughly the same as that held by Saints Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> I suspect that he may be correct concerning the long and distinguished pedigree of his position.<sup>4</sup> Let me first offer a very quick sketch of McCann's understanding of this traditional view as it appears in his most recent paper and then we can move to Anselm's (and my) disagreement. McCann notes the classical theist position, shared by Augustine and Aquinas and Anselm, that all that has being of any kind derives that being through God's creative act. Does God "create" sin? Regarding free choice and sin McCann quotes Aquinas,

[E]very being, whatever the manner of its being, must be derived from the first being. . . . [Thus] every being in act is reduced to the First Act, viz., God, as to its cause, who is act by his essence. Therefore God is the cause of every action, in so far as it is an action.—But sin denotes a being and an action with a defect. But this defect is from a created cause, viz., free choice, as falling away from the order of the First Cause. Consequently, this defect is not reduced to God as its cause, but to free choice; just as the defect of limping is reduced to a crooked leg as its cause, but not to the power of locomotion, which nevertheless causes whatever there is of motion in the limping. Accordingly, God is the cause of the act of sin; and yet he is not the cause of sin, because he does not cause the act to have a defect.<sup>5</sup>

God is the source of everything that exists, including every action. But how can He be the cause of the act of sin and yet not be the cause of sin? Sometimes it is said that God is not the cause of sin since evil is simply a privation of the good that ought to be there, and mere absence has no cause. This is insufficient, though. If an agent could be absolved of causing sin because the evil of sin is an absence, then the human sinner ought to be equally acquitted. More needs to be said. And here the analogy of limping is helpful, but it is also puzzling. It makes the useful distinction between the "power," what supplies the motion, the causal efficacy, on the one hand, and the element where the motion "goes wrong" on the other. But the puzzle lies in locating the source of the defect. If the limping is analogous to the sinful choice of the will, then the defective leg is analogous to the defective will in the created agent. And here "defective" does not mean simply "limited" but rather "not as it ought to be" or "not properly functioning." A well-functioning leg might be limited—it's just a leg, after all—but the leg which inevitably produces the limp is a badly functioning leg. The pressing question then is; how and why is the created will defective? If we take the paradigm of a free choice, the first human sin, the claim would seem to be that Adam's will was defective before he

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 420–421.

<sup>4</sup>I have argued that Augustine is a theist compatibilist in my *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 31–52.

<sup>5</sup>McCann, "God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm," 420–421. *ST I-II*, Q.79, Art. 2. A standard and convenient English translation is available online at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>.

ever sinned. (The defective leg comes before the limp temporally and logically.) That means that he was created originally by God with a defective will. And if the defect of the will *explains* the sin, as the passage quoted from Thomas seems to suggest, then the sin is due to God's making Adam with a defective will and supplying the motive power for the will to act. In that case the first sin looks to be inevitable and ultimately traceable to God.<sup>6</sup> Was God incapable of making a created agent with a non-defective will? That seems to limit His power. Did He choose to make Adam with a defective will, though He could have made him (or some other human agent) with a well functioning will? Or is the limping analogy misleading and best forgotten?

McCann does not directly address these questions motivated by the quote from Thomas, but he does attribute human sinning to God in a way that Anselm cannot allow. Though Thomas says that God is the first cause, McCann prefers not to say that God is the cause of our choices. He writes, "our doings are not the causal product of God's will but rather its content or embodiment."<sup>7</sup> There are modern usages of "cause" which insist upon criteria like temporal priority which are inapplicable to God's activity, and perhaps that is the reason McCann eschews the term. So as not to beg any questions, I will use the term "produce" and its cognates where I explicitly intend the term to cover God's immediate creative activity. So, for example, my keyboard exists at this moment. I take it that it exists because God is immediately keeping it in being. The existing keyboard is a "content or embodiment" of God's will. God "produces" my keyboard. (Like the term "create," there is equivocation—or at least analogical usage—when "produce" is applied to God and creatures. Creatures never "create" or "produce" as God does. At best they move existent things around. They never bring things into being *ex nihilo*.) So, on McCann's view, God produces created agents complete with their choices. Should the created agent sin, God is producing the agent with the sin. God wills that the agent exist and that he be sinning.

But isn't sin to choose against the will of God? How can God will that the created agent sin? McCann appeals to a distinction found in Aquinas between God's antecedent and His consequent will. As McCann portrays it, God antecedently wills general principles, like "Do not commit adultery!" but consequently, "that is, what he wills all things considered" God wills everything that actually happens.<sup>8</sup> Sin is disobedience to the commands expressed in God's antecedent will, so it is indeed choosing against the will of God. But the sinful choices are willed by God through His consequent will. Why? McCann proposes a theodicy of sin in which

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<sup>6</sup>This sounds very like Augustine's analysis of the original situation of the angels. They could not persevere in the good without extra help from God. To some He gave that extra help and to others He didn't. Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 43–52.

<sup>7</sup>McCann "God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm," 425.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 426.

he argues that sin is necessary for the achievement of certain goods. I will address this theodicy later in the paper.

### *Anselm's Alternative*

On McCann's understanding of the traditional view of Augustine and Aquinas, God wills that the sinner sin. Anselm finds this unbearable for two reasons. First, if God (*per impossibile* in Anselm's view) brings it about that the agent chooses sinfully, then the sinner is not free in a robust enough sense to ground blame. This entails the corollary that if it is God who brings it about that the agent chooses well rather than sinfully, then the agent is not free enough to be praiseworthy. But then the agent is not a true *imago Dei*.<sup>9</sup> Second, as Anselm understands it, sin should not happen. Though God permits people to sin, He wants them to behave well. To sin is to fail to will what God wills that you will. So it is logically impossible that God should will that the agent sin.<sup>10</sup> Chapter 8 of Anselm's *De Veritate* might appear to contradict this point. Here Anselm is concerned to argue that sometimes the very same event both ought and ought not to happen. For example, suppose someone deserves a beating. It might be the case that another person, who does not have the proper authority to beat him, might administer the beating. In this case, the beating ought to occur, because the one being beaten deserves it, but it ought not to occur because the one administering the beating is not the one who should be doing it. I do not believe Anselm has contradicted himself. Note, first, that he is extremely careful throughout the chapter to repeat the disjunction—there is what God actively does (*facit*) on the one hand or what God permits (*permittit*) on the other. Knowing that it is logically impossible that God should will that someone sin, we can analyze the beating case this way: God wills that the beating happen, insofar as He wills the justice of the deserved punishment. He wills that the beating not happen insofar as He wills that created agents act within the limits of their appropriate authority. He wills to permit the one who should not administer the beating to do so for two reasons. First, He permits bad free choices as a necessary part of the mechanism which allows for good free choices. Second, the beating was deserved. This case (and other examples in Chapter 8) might suggest that God would permit the bad choice only if some consequent good were to be derived from it, but I think this would be extracting too much from the examples.

To Anselm's first point concerning the requirements for freedom, McCann holds that the created agent can be free with "legitimate and authentic moral freedom" if it meets three conditions: "that the decision

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<sup>9</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 56–60, 76–78. A good proof text for this point is *Cur Deus Homo* 2.10 where Anselm says that the good angels are to be praised "due to the fact that, in a way, they have it from themselves that they are [now] unable to sin; in this they are, to some extent, similar to God, who has whatever He has from Himself (*a se*)" (my translation from the Schmitt edition of Anselm's *Opera Omnia*, Vol.II, p.107, ll.27–29).

<sup>10</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 89. See chapter 8 of Anselm's *De libertate arbitrii*.

or willing in question not arise from some independent event by nomic causation, that it exhibit the spontaneity of agency, and that it be intrinsically intentional."<sup>11</sup> And McCann holds that, although the created agent, complete with his act of willing, is immediately and directly produced by God, these criteria can be met. The choice is not the effect of some event rooted in deterministic, natural causal laws (if that, or something relevantly similar, is what "nomic causation" means here). It exhibits "spontaneity of agency" insofar as an agent may "feel [he is] a genuine source of control and spontaneity in the universe."<sup>12</sup> And it is intentional, that is, it follows from deliberation. Anselm might well endorse each of these criteria.<sup>13</sup> But the Anselmian will hold that they are not sufficient.

Why does the libertarian insist that we cannot be free in the right way if all of our choices are the product of nomic causation? Usually the response goes something like this: If my choices are ultimately the products of some thing or event outside myself, such that I could not choose other than this thing or event makes me choose, then the ultimate responsibility does not lie with me, but with what ultimately caused the choice. This is true even if things or events "within" me, such as my judgements, desires, and deliberation, are part of the causal chain stretching between the factors outside of me and my choice. But if I do not bear ultimate responsibility, then I am not free in the way required for praise and blame. If this is why nomic causation conflicts with freedom, then it is not only nomic causation which conflicts with freedom. We might deny that choices are nomically produced and still hold that the choosing agent is not free. Suppose, for example, that a mad neurosurgeon, through a non-determined act of free agency, takes control of my brain. (A machine which produces non-determined effects—perhaps it is moved this way or that depending on the non-determined behavior of sub-atomic particles—would suit the example equally well.) This mad neurosurgeon implants in me desires, judgements, and deliberative processes, such that I can choose only what he causes me to choose. In that case, it is not really up to me what I choose. Though my choice is not nomically caused in that it is not the product of deterministic natural processes, nonetheless I do not have ultimate responsibility for my choice, and I am not free in the right way.<sup>14</sup> McCann may point out that God's productive activity is not like that of the mad neurosurgeon. The mad neurosurgeon steps in from outside to manipulate the agent, whereas

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<sup>11</sup>McCann "God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm," 425. These criteria are developed more fully in McCann's "Sovereignty and Freedom: A Reply to Rowe," *Faith and Philosophy* 18 (2001): 110–116.

<sup>12</sup>McCann "Sovereignty and Freedom," 113.

<sup>13</sup>There might be a question about the "spontaneity." Anselm would hold that the agent must be a source of spontaneous activity (Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 76–78), but it is not so clear that the agent must *feel* that his choices are "from himself." Someone who had never considered the question of free will, or who was a devout determinist, might *be* free without *feeling* free. And, on the other hand, someone whose choices were caused by something outside himself might *feel* that his choices were from himself.

<sup>14</sup>Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 64–71.

God is the source of the very being of the agent, complete with his choices. But the relevant similarity remains: if it is up to someone else what choices I make in such a way that I cannot choose other than this person brings it about that I choose, then I am not responsible or free.

My choices must truly originate with me. But how is that possible in an Anselmian universe in which all that has ontological status is from God? If the “act of sin” is any sort of thing—any being with ontological status—then must it not come from the source of all being, from God? What I take Anselm to be saying is that the “choice” per se is *not* a thing. *Prima facie* this may seem a bizarre claim. Surely choices are things of a sort. They can be temporally located and serve as the subjects of sentences. We might say, for example, “Her choice to cheat happened during the test yesterday.” And surely Anselm would have seen that! Let me try to spell out and develop my understanding of the Anselmian position regarding the ontological status of choice.<sup>15</sup>

Take the example of Bill, the adulterer (and bracket worries about original sin for the sake of the argument).<sup>16</sup> We all pursue what we desire, says Anselm, and all desires come from God. (Anselm uses *velle* and *voluntas* and their cognates in a number of different senses. Sometimes “desire,” the verb or the noun, seems the best translation. For our purposes here “desire” stands for the various intentions and other motivating factors that lead to choice.) Suppose married Bill desires sex with this particular woman who is not his wife. Now suppose this is *all* he desires—no other thought is in his mind. (To be properly Anselmian, add that this fixation is *not* the product of his own past free choices.<sup>17</sup>) An act of willing in Anselm’s system is just the pursuing of an occurrent desire.<sup>18</sup> But not every act of willing is a free choice. The act of willing is not a free choice unless there are robustly open options. Bill, right now in the condition of desiring only sex with this woman, is effectively willing adultery. Anselm would have it that Bill is not blameworthy, in the sense of having committed some injustice or sin, because, in our hypothetical situation, he is simply pursuing the one, god-given, desire he “has” to pursue given the nature of created agency.<sup>19</sup> Bill,

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<sup>15</sup>McCann, “God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm,” rightly, I now believe, faults my language when I speak of a created agent who can “create” a choice (422). In *Anselm on Freedom* I speak of the created agent having “primary agency” as opposed to “secondary agency” analogous to primary (divine) causation and secondary (created) causation. I have come to regret this terminology. For one thing, if a previous act of creation is required to make a choice, this leads to an infinite regress. More importantly, neither Anselm nor I want to suggest that the created agent can bring a choice “into being” as God brings things into being. I am grateful to McCann for his well-taken criticism on this point.

<sup>16</sup>We can tell an Anselmian story about grace such that this example, as I will develop it, is consistent with the fallen condition.

<sup>17</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 83–85.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.* 63–64, see the three meanings of *voluntas*.

<sup>19</sup>Anselm does not spell it out, but I take it that he would say essentially the same thing if Bill had two desires, but one was so much stronger than the other that the stronger one *must* succeed in moving Bill to action. Here Bill might deliberate and perhaps feel free and

his will, his desire, and his ultimately following the desire, insofar as these can be characterized as “things” or “powers,” are from God. Bill, in this case, is like the horse or dog which does will things based on desire, but does not have free will. Animals have wills and desires, says Anselm, and can even will rightly. But they cannot step back from their immediate desires and choose to try to pursue only those desires which are appropriate, and so they are not free.<sup>20</sup>

Created freedom requires alternative possibilities. Thus God sometimes provides competing desires of which the satisfaction of one precludes the satisfaction of the other.<sup>21</sup> Say that Bill desires sex with this woman who is not his wife, but also desires to control himself and behave properly. The former desire can be characterized as a “mere” benefit, while the latter, in Anselm’s terminology, is a desire for justice. And both are god-given. Bill, as he struggles to decide what to do, is effectively trying to pursue the two incompatible desires. In the end he will succeed in pursuing one, and following through on the one desire will mean the defeat of the other. And he, Bill, will be the one who succeeds in following one rather than the other. It is absolutely up to him which desire he follows. What makes this second scenario different from the first is that Bill follows through on one desire *when he could have pursued the other*. If Bill chooses adultery, he is blameworthy because he wills adultery *rather than* continence. If he chooses continence he is praiseworthy because he wills continence *rather than* adultery. But there is no *thing* “rather-than-ness” or, to invent a Latin barbarism, no *potiusitas*. (Anselm himself does not use the term.) Bill does not add to the sum of things or powers in the universe when, in the first scenario, he pursues his one desire, and he does not add to the sum of things or powers in the universe when, in the second scenario, he pursues one desire over another.

The claim here is that there is no separate event of choosing. In the literature a choice is often portrayed as an event where the agent is poised at a moment of stasis, then suddenly makes a choice. But this is not Anselm’s picture. A “motionless” agent cannot up and move itself. The agent cannot generate some new action *ex nihilo*. Moreover, in the literature, a choice is very often characterized as a unique and separate sort of doing, different from the having of desires. But this is what Anselm denies. The created agent cannot bring some new sort of activity into being—only God brings things into being. On the contrary, you *will* something when you desire it, and you *choose* something when you have conflicting desires and you pursue your desire for this, rather than pursuing your desire for that. That is, you pursue *this* one of the two incommensurate desires *through to completion*. Anselm even coins a term for this phenomenon, “*pervelle*,” to

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responsible, but Anselm’s understanding is that he really must have been able to choose other than he chooses.

<sup>20</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 64.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 73–76.

express the thought that one not only desires this rather than that, but one perseveres in desiring it *through to completion*.<sup>22</sup> The choice, then, is not a new thing separate from the god-given desire.

The critic may say that there must be a difference between simply desiring something and actually choosing it. Without this distinction no one could resist temptation, since in order to resist temptation there must be desire, but not choosing. I respond that one may desire without choosing, just as one may drink without drinking to excess. But drinking to excess is a manner of drinking, and choosing can be analyzed as a manner of desiring . . . through to completion. Thus Anselm can maintain that everything in the free choice *that exists*—the agent, the faculty of will, the desires which move the will—all of these owe their existence to God. Still the pursuit of this over that is “up to” the agent in the right way due to the “rather-than-ness,” the *potiusitas*, which is not a thing or power or event at all. The choice is an event, in that it is a doing of the agent which happens at a time, but it is a “thin” event—it is just the success of the agent in pursuing this over that—and has no ontological status beyond that ascribed to the god-given elements involved.<sup>23</sup>

It seems to me that whether or not Anselm’s understanding is plausible here depends as much on experience as on metaphysics.<sup>24</sup> Were it the case that we all experience choice as a unique and discrete event, different from following desire, there would be evidence against the Anselmian view. But it is not clear that we do. We might distinguish between merely “having” desire and “following” desire, but this would not introduce some new event, the choice. Little work has been done on the actual phenomenology of choice, but try to remember the times you have struggled to make a decision. Did you reach a point of stasis where you suddenly engaged in a new sort of activity, the choosing? Do you remember there being more to choosing than going one way rather than the other? I am talking here about significant value choices where you were truly trying to pursue two desires, and not choices of indifference—such as chocolate or pistachio—where you might literally or figuratively flip a coin. Such flipping would, presumably, be a new act. And here it would be the coin (or

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<sup>22</sup>*De casu diaboli* 3. I take Anselm’s coining of the term *pervelle* as good evidence that he did indeed entertain the view that I ascribe to him. I am more interested in the position than in the history, but I believe there is good reason for me not to take credit for this extremely clever move.

<sup>23</sup>I try to develop this thought at more length in “Anselm on the Ontological Status of Choice,” forthcoming in *International Philosophical Quarterly*. My analogy for choice is someone passing another runner in a race. I take the “passing” to be a genuine event, but one which does not produce anything with additional ontological status beyond the runners and (allowing for a liberal ontology) their capacity to run and their “runnings.”

<sup>24</sup>I take it that Anselm’s analysis—foreshadowing Robert Kane’s (Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 99–101)—has an advantage over some other forms of libertarianism in that he is able to give a parsimonious explanation for the choice in terms of preceding factors. Of course, he cannot give a *complete* explanation in the sense of demonstrating why the preference for one option over the other had to be, since the agent could choose either option. That is just what libertarianism entails.

other similar decision method) that “made the choice,” not you, the agent. For myself, I find Anselm’s analysis fits well with experience. In any case, it seems to me that if Anselm is to maintain the classical position that all things and powers are made by God, and also to hold that the choice to sin is not produced by God, then he must maintain that the choice to sin is not, itself, a thing or a power. And it still seems to me, despite McCann’s efforts to defend the contrary, that there are excellent reasons to insist that God does not will the act of sin.

### *McCann’s Unpleasant God*

In an earlier paper I charged that God, on McCann’s portrayal, while not Himself a sinner, must nonetheless be an unloving deceiver; unloving because He wishes ill to some of His created agents and a deceiver because He deceives.<sup>25</sup> Were McCann a universalist, then the charge of painting a picture of an unloving God could be somewhat mitigated. Then we might say that God wishes a *temporary* ill to some of His created agents, but in the final analysis He wishes all to be saved. (I will note below that I do not think this move fully succeeds.) McCann is not a universalist. He asks, “Could a loving God possibly will not only the existence of [the reprobate], but also the very decisions on their part in which they continually turn aside from him, as well as the final reprobation to which they are condemned?” He believes it is possible. He sets out the traditional view that the greatest evil suffered by the damned is being separated from God. “But if this is the greatest evil of damnation, then no one who ends that way is treated unfairly, for this separation is precisely what one chooses by insisting on a life of rebellion rather than seeking reconciliation with God.”<sup>26</sup> But if this is a defense of divine love, I do not understand the argument. God prefers that these sinners be damned rather than not. He could will them to choose well and be saved, without, in McCann’s view, any infringement on their free will, and He does not. He produces their act of rebellion. Perhaps there is some definition of “fair” by which it is fair to create a vessel fit for wrath complete with its sinful choices and then visit wrath upon it, but “loving” seems the wrong word to use here.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Rogers, “God is Not the Author of Sin,” 303–305. Here I had taken McCann’s statements (“The Author of Sin?” 151–152) to the effect that to sin is to disobey the command of God and that “[God’s] ordinances are the source of moral obligation” to be expressions of some form of divine command theory. I had noted standard difficulties with that view and opposed to it the traditional position that all good is a reflection of the *nature* of God. McCann (“God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm,” 423–424) says that he does not hold the views I attributed to him in this regard. I grant that it may be consistent to root moral obligation in divine command while still holding that, ultimately, good of any description consists in a reflection of the divine nature, and I regret it if I mischaracterized McCann’s position.

<sup>26</sup>McCann, “The Author of Sin?” 154.

<sup>27</sup>The issue of unmerited grace for the post-lapsarian human agent might arise here. Anselm follows Augustine in the view that God does not offer grace to all. I argue that this position is not a load-bearing member in his theoretical edifice and—unlike within the Augustinian system—could be altered without any damage to the overall view (Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 141–145).

Some philosophers have argued that the eternal damnation of the reprobate provides otherwise unobtainable goods for the universe as a whole. This does not respond to the charge of God's preferring permanent and irremediable ill regarding the damned, and hence being unloving at least towards them.<sup>28</sup> But perhaps it is justified as necessary for the overall good? The Augustinian, Neoplatonic tradition to which Anselm subscribed emphasized the value of having the most compossible kinds of things. Could we argue that damned souls are necessary to round out the number of kinds in the universe? But including the reprobate as a "kind" is peculiar. On the Great Chain of Being we do not carve out separate links for the healthy dog, the slightly unwell dog, the very sick dog, and the dog at death's door.<sup>29</sup> They are not separate kinds of things, but rather they are all dogs, and the last three are just "fallings away" from the dog as he ought to be. It is equally peculiar to insist upon the damned as a separate kind necessary to fulfilling the order and beauty of the universe.

Thomas proposes that the existence of the damned allows for the presence of God's justice in punishing them.<sup>30</sup> But it is difficult to see the presence of such justice as a proper justification for *creating* the reprobate. God's justice in rewarding the saved is essentially the same phenomenon, so isn't that enough justice?<sup>31</sup> Don't—at least in a Thomist universe—the souls in Purgatory suffer for their sins? Won't that suffice to exhibit justice? What about a world in which no one is damned, but it is the case that God *would* punish the reprobate were there any? The justice is "there," it just does not need to be visited as punishment upon anyone. The most fundamental problem, of course, has to do with the understanding of justice in this case. It is God who creates the reprobate in their sins. Having made the vessel fit for wrath, it is difficult to see that the creator is just in blaming the vessel for being fit for wrath. It is being punished for doing as God made it to do. Is this justice?<sup>32</sup>

It is hard to see that God is not being unloving towards the damned. What of His deceit? I argued that the meaning of commanding implies that the one who issues the command believes it is possible for the command to be obeyed and wants it to be obeyed. I am speaking here of serious and genuine commands, not commands made in jest or on stage etc.

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<sup>28</sup>McCann notes, as would Anselm, that even for the damned it is better that they should exist than not ("The Author of Sin?" 155). But surely it would be *even better* for them to exist and be saved. On the Anselmian model God could not see to it that sinners are saved without interfering with their freedom, but on McCann's understanding, God could simply produce in the otherwise damned the choices necessary for salvation.

<sup>29</sup>I offer a brief defense of the idea of the Great Chain in "The Medieval Approach to Aardvarks, Escalators, and God," *The Journal of Value Inquiry* 27 (1993): 41–53.

<sup>30</sup>McCann makes this suggestion briefly ("The Author of Sin?" 154–155).

<sup>31</sup>True, the blessed are saved through grace, but nonetheless they deserve their reward due to their merits. *ST Supplementum Tertiae Partis* Q.87, Art. 2.

<sup>32</sup>One might argue that God's justice is not our justice. Then the appropriate dictum would be: "Regarding that about which one cannot speak one should keep silent." Neither McCann nor I seem likely to embrace that advice.

Someone issuing an apparently serious command who does not believe it is possible for the command to be obeyed or who does not want the command to be obeyed is behaving deceitfully towards those who are the recipients of the command. On McCann's view moral obligation for the created agent arises from the commands issued by God. It is praiseworthy to obey the divine commands and blameworthy to disobey them. But, in the case of the sinner, God knows that the sinner cannot obey the command, since God Himself will produce the act of sin. And God, with His consequent will, wills that the sinner should sin. He does not, all things considered, want to be obeyed. That being the case, I argued that in issuing commands which He knows cannot be obeyed and which He does not want to have obeyed, McCann's God is a deceiver.<sup>33</sup> McCann argues, to the contrary, that it is just false to suppose that in all (or the vast majority of)<sup>34</sup> cases the utterance of apparently serious commands implies that the commander believes it is possible that the command should be obeyed and truly wants to be obeyed. He gives examples in defense of his claim.

He writes, as an example of the command which cannot be obeyed,

An army commander may order a unit to take a certain objective even if he believes it is impossible for the unit to do so—for example, if he believes that a mere attempt to take the objective is important to the army's overall success. Furthermore, experienced troops know that such commands are sometimes given. But that does not alter their behavior, because they also know that this fact does not change or diminish their obligations in any way.<sup>35</sup>

But this example does not make McCann's case. Surely the command—the order to be obeyed—is that the unit should try as hard as it can to take the objective. The command might be something like "Take the objective, or die trying!" If a lone, legless, armless member of the unit should survive the doomed attempt, it would be absurd to court martial him for insubordination in that, though he tried his hardest, he failed to do the impossible and take the objective. He did not disobey the command and is not blameworthy. In doing everything in his power, he did obey the command under any reasonable understanding of the command. And it would add another layer of absurdity if the commander (analogous to McCann's God) were to blame the soldiers for disobedience when the reason the unit cannot succeed is because he, their commander himself, is deliberately blowing them to pieces as they try to take their objective. The non-absurd understanding of the command involves the qualification, "... or die trying!" precisely because the meaning of commanding entails

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<sup>33</sup>Rogers, "God is Not the Author of Sin," 303–305.

<sup>34</sup>If the ingenious philosopher comes up with the "one in a million" case in which the serious command does not imply these tacit entailments, I do not think this really affects my argument, unless it can be shown in a principled way that divine commands should be expected to exhibit this rare and anomalous feature, such that God giving them is not deceitful.

<sup>35</sup>McCann "God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm," 425.

that the commander believes it is possible for the command to be obeyed. Note, too, that the army commander cannot rule out the possibility of a miracle, and so, unlike God, he cannot be sure that it is really impossible to take the objective. Moreover, if he wants his soldiers to try their hardest to take the objective, he may well attempt to issue his command in such a way that the soldiers believe that he, their commander, believes it to be possible. But that is deception. So this is not a case where someone issues a serious command, which does not intend to deceive, but which the one commanding believes to be impossible to execute. McCann's example illustrates my claim rather than disproving it.

What of the point that the very giving of a command implies that the commander wants the command to be obeyed? McCann offers the counterexample of the difficult and much-discussed story of Abraham and Isaac, but he allows that God apparently does want Abraham to demonstrate a willingness to obey. To say that this is not an obvious counterexample would be a gross understatement given the mental energy that has been devoted to puzzling over it down the ages. But there are other examples. McCann suggests that a "parent might command a rebellious child to perform an action *A*, not because he wants *A* done but because he knows the command will induce the child to perform *B* instead, which is the action the parent really wants performed. And again, this situation does not take away the child's obligation to do *A*."<sup>36</sup> But this is not a counterexample to my claim at all. The parent here is deceiving the child. In order for the trick to work, the child *has* to be deceived. Presumably the very issuing of the command deceives the child because the child assumes that the meaning of commanding entails that the parent wants the command to be obeyed. My claim was not that no one could issue a command which he does not really want to have obeyed. My claim was that, given the meaning of a command, it would be deceitful for someone to issue an apparently serious command which he does not want to have obeyed.

McCann's point that the child has an obligation to do *A* is also doubtful. The doubt occurs because of cases like this: the child, unknown to the parent, has undergone a conversion involving seeing and internalizing the fact that his parents love him. Now the child recognizes the wisdom of obedience to his parents. Suppose he overhears Mom and Dad talking about the trick they've played to get him to do *B*, which is the action they want him to perform. They note that it is the best action under the circumstances. It will promote his well-being and gladden their parental hearts. Should the reformed child really do *A*, knowing his parents want him to do *B*? Abelard takes it as obvious that, when you know that God wants to be disobeyed, the right thing to do is to disobey.<sup>37</sup> Myself, I think McCann is probably correct about the child's obligation, which is

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>*Ethics or Know Thyself*, chapter 3. I am suspicious of this conclusion, having first run across it in the mouth of the devil in C. S. Lewis's *Perelandra*.

a powerful reason why parents should avoid getting tricky. Parents who do use such trickery may rightly be blamed for their deceit, it seems to me. And so again, McCann's example illustrates my point rather than disproving it.

McCann concludes his discussion regarding divine deception by noting that the commands issued by God are in accord with His antecedent will, just not with His consequent will. For example, "In itself, adultery must surely be displeasing to God. . . . It may be, however, that a better world overall will result if certain adulteries occur."<sup>38</sup> Certainly, God permits adultery and can bring about great good from it. But God does not command merely that some or most adultery be avoided. He commands that adultery be avoided. This seems a serious command such that one who deliberately disobeys is ipso facto blameworthy. If, as Anselm insists, God is the Truth in which all that is true participates, and the standard for the Rightness to which all that is right conforms, He cannot command one thing, but will another. He cannot command that all should avoid adultery and then produce in some the choice to commit adultery.

McCann concludes his discussion of deceit by noting that "*any* account on which God knew in creating the world that it was *this* world he was creating and not some other, must be an account on which every bit of wrongdoing that ever occurs is in accord with his consequent will."<sup>39</sup> Quite right. Anselm does not offer an account "on which God knew in creating the world that it was *this* world he was creating." God knows what we choose *only because we actually choose it*. Our choices—the preferences by which we opt for this over that—are not created by God, either individually or as part of the entire world-package. God creates this world taking into account the choices of free created agents, but logically He does not know, absent our choosing, what it is we choose. Logically, not temporally. No Open Theism here! Anselm adopts isotemporalism—all times, past, present, and future, are real and ontologically equal—and God sees all that happens "at once" in His eternity.<sup>40</sup>

#### *Problems with McCann's Theodicy of Sin*

McCann's theodicy focuses on a different question than Anselm's. Anselm proposes a free will theodicy, and asks why God *permits* sin. His answer is that in order to be genuine *imagines Dei* we must be able to choose from ourselves, but this means genuinely open, morally significant options. Yes, God can bring good out of the sins, but still, human agents could and should have consistently chosen well. In that case the world would be at least as good as, and perhaps better than, it is.<sup>41</sup> Alas, they did not. The

<sup>38</sup>McCann "God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm," 426.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, chapters 8 and 9. See especially 171–176.

<sup>41</sup>This last point is extrapolation on my part since Anselm does not devote any energy to comparing the values of possible worlds. He is firmly rooted in the actual—a wholesome

ability to choose is necessary for the metaphysical stature of the created agent, but moral evil *per se* is pointless in the sense that it is not required for the existence of some intrinsic good. By an intrinsic good I mean something good in itself, which of itself adds to the order and beauty of the whole. The product of adultery may be a good person, but qua being a good person, not qua being the product of adultery. Surgery is a good, but not an intrinsic good. It is good only as a response to illness. Someone who valued surgery in itself would be perverse. God permits sin because for Him to interfere with the act of sin and its consequences (or to interfere very often) would be to shut down the morally significant options required for freedom.

McCann's theodicy, on the contrary, must show that it is false that "a completely sovereign God can accomplish all of his goals without the occurrence of sin."<sup>42</sup> He must show that sin is required for some goods, where it is better (or at least as good) to have both than neither. The Anselmian certainly does not dispute that all manner of goods may have sin in their causal history.<sup>43</sup> Some might be the sorts of goods that God, being able to do anything logically possible, could create *ex nihilo* without there being any need for sin. So, for example, one might point to knowledge or appreciation of the good, or joy in friendship with God, brought about by comparison with having lived, and then repented of, the sinful life. In an earlier paper I suggested that the knowledge, the appreciation, and the joy, being genuine independent phenomena, could be made by God *ex nihilo* without the causal history of the sin and repentance.<sup>44</sup> I should have added that this result could be achieved without deception on God's part. The created agent might come into being on the doorstep of heaven with a set of memories which he recognizes as false. I imagine something rather like that feeling you get when you awaken from a terrible dream in which you have done something dreadful and the whole world has turned dark. There is that wonderful sense of relief and pleasure born of the realization that it wasn't real. The possibility of this scenario does not challenge the role of sin in Anselm's theodicy, since the *actual* ability to choose contributes to the metaphysical stature of the agent, which Anselm deems to be so important. But it does pose a challenge to a theodicy which justifies sin through its possible consequences.

McCann, however, insists that there are some goods for which actual sin is necessary. He writes, "the good that I claim arises out of sin consists

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place, it seems to me. I think the extrapolation is legitimate in that he never suggests that the evil of sin is necessary for some greater good and seems to suggest the contrary in *De casu diaboli* 25. On the other hand, *De Veritate* 8 seems to argue that whatever evils God permits, He does so for a good purpose. Still, it is noteworthy that in all his discussion of the Incarnation he does not argue that the original fall was fortunate.

<sup>42</sup>McCann, "God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm," 426.

<sup>43</sup>As a striking example, the Incarnation is certainly good, and, on Anselm's view, the fall made it necessary. It does not follow that an unfallen world would be worse overall.

<sup>44</sup>Rogers "God is Not the Author of Sin," 305–306.

in two things: the defeat of the rebellion that constitutes our sinfulness, and the establishment of a relation of friendship with God.<sup>45</sup> In order for sin to be defeated there must be sin, and in order for repentance to be "true" (McCann's term) there must be something to repent. This seems right. The first question, though, is: Should we believe that created agents and/or the world they inhabit are better (or no worse) off given sin, its defeat, and repentance, than they would be had God chosen to bring about created agents and see to it that they never chose to sin? On the one hand, I suspect that a sinless world is largely unimaginable to us, and so a certain reticence about what it would be like is appropriate. But if one engages in a theodicy of sin, presumably part of the job is to show, not just how sin might be necessary for some goods, but how, overall, the sin and consequent goods produce a world which is as good as, or better than, a world without both. Illness is a necessary link in the causal history of the good of surgery. The invasion and the cutting could not be a good unless it were necessary to remedy some disease. But it would look, at least *prima facie*, to be a better world in which everyone stayed healthy and surgery was not required. If friendship with God is a good thing, why not permanent friendship? If it is argued, for example, that friendship lost and regained is preferable because of the knowledge of what the absence of God entails, then, again, the knowledge is an independent phenomenon which can be produced by God *ex nihilo*. Anselm certainly never suggests that the good angels should be pitied for never having had the experience of sinning themselves. They chose well when they had the option and are now confirmed in the friendship of God such that they can never sin. And good for them! If it is, all things considered, better (or as good) to have sin and its defeat than not to have either, we need an argument.

I do not rule out the possibility of a persuasive argument that the world with sin may be at least as good as the world without sin. Many philosophers subscribe to one or another version of the fortunate fall thesis, and God in his omnipotence may bring a full complement of good out of the evil of sin. But it seems to me there is a fundamental paradox in McCann's theodicy of sin. If I am understanding him, he argues that genuine rebellion is a necessary prequel to true repentance and hence to friendship with God. McCann does not spell out what repentance consists in, but ordinarily we would suppose that repentance involves sorrow for the past deed. One who repents says, "I did wrong. I should not have done it. I wish I had not done it." It is hard to see how genuine repentance would be possible for someone who believes McCann's analysis of the relationship between God and the act of sin. One believing that he should not have done something likely believes that he could have done otherwise, and it was truly up to him that he failed to do otherwise. On McCann's view the act of sin is produced by God. In McCann's universe, if the agent is right in saying "I should not have done it," then it would seem to be the case

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<sup>45</sup>McCann, "God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm," 428.

that God should not have brought it about that the agent did the deed. But on McCann's theodicy, the act of sin is willed by God as a necessary means to a greater good. The sinner who understood this ought not to say "I should not have done it. I wish I had not done it." He ought to be glad that he did it—and that God produced his doing it. But this is paradoxical. The good which justifies God's producing the act of sin is repentance and friendship with God, but someone who truly understood that God produces the act of sin to achieve this good could not truly repent. He, the agent, would not hold himself responsible, since he did what he did as the inevitable product of the will of God. And he would not be sorry he (and God) had done it, since he (and God) had to do it for the greater good to be produced. It seems that only someone who does not accept McCann's theodicy could sincerely, *coherently*, repent. In McCann's universe, for the good to be achieved, the sinner would have to be deceived about the nature of things.

Of course, on McCann's account, the repentance is also caused by God. The whole drama of rebellion against God, repentance, and the return to friendship with God is a play written entirely by God. There is only one will that acts decisively, and that is God's. Of course the characters choose and act, but they choose and act as God wills that they should choose and act. A rebellion against Himself, willed and produced by God, does not seem like *real* rebellion, and repentance on the part of His mock rebels, willed and produced by God for what He has willed them to do, does not seem like *real* repentance. I do not see that the good which McCann points to as the justification for God's producing the act of sin is really to be had in McCann's universe.

On the other hand, there is a widely-recognized practical danger in adopting McCann's view, and it needs to be remembered. At least since Augustine's day people have worried that a belief that God produces all choices will encourage moral laxness in individuals and harm to society as a whole. It can take effort to walk the narrow path, and if you are convinced that whatever you actually choose and do is what God is willing you to choose and do, and all for the best, then this belief might provide a solid excuse not to make the effort to behave well. And aren't we always looking for excuses? Intuitively this strikes me as a very plausible concern, and there is some evidence from experimental psychology supporting the intuition.<sup>46</sup> Suppose there is a greater risk of behaving badly for the individual and hence harm to society in general in adopting McCann's view. (Of course I do not say that all who accept it behave badly! I acknowledged in the beginning that Augustine and Thomas may well share McCann's position, and I do not doubt that many, many who adhere

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<sup>46</sup>Azim F. Shariff, Johathan Schooler, and Kathleen D. Vohs, "The Hazards of Claiming to Have Solved the Hard Problem of Free Will," in *Are We Free?: Psychology and Free Will*, ed. John Baer, James C. Kaufman, and Roy F. Baumeister (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 181–204.

to it are exemplary human beings.) Then we can do a little Pascalian wagering to see that the Anselmian position is the safest bet.<sup>47</sup>

Suppose that McCann is correct. If we believe that our choices are produced by God, we enjoy the benefit of believing the truth, but we run a greater risk of behaving badly. This might or might not produce harm to the individual and society, but we cannot count it as a harm overall, since the belief and its consequences, on McCann's account, are produced by God for a greater good. If we believe that our choices are *not* produced by God we suffer the harm of not believing the truth, but again, this cannot be counted as a harm *overall*, since the belief is produced by God to achieve a greater good. And we may (God willing, of course) enjoy the benefit of being encouraged to make the effort to behave well, which will benefit others, too. So if McCann is correct, there is no ultimate harm done whatever we believe, as is to be expected in a world in which absolutely everything is produced by God for some good purpose.

But suppose that Anselm is correct. In the Anselmian universe, if we believe that we bear ultimate responsibility for our morally significant choices, we have the advantages of believing the truth and of being encouraged to make the effort to behave well. If we believe that God is the ultimate source of all our choices, we suffer the disadvantage of believing falsehood and we run a greater risk of behaving badly. So if we side with Anselm we cannot lose. In the McCann universe our Anselmian belief is false but ultimately beneficial and in the Anselm universe it is true and ultimately beneficial. If we side with McCann, and he is correct, we don't gain anything over what we would if we sided with Anselm, since whichever way we go constitutes God's producing our belief to achieve the better outcome. But we run the risk of losing big time. If ours is an Anselmian universe, our belief is not only false but also involves the risk that we may do ourselves serious harm by failing to make the effort to behave well. Better bet on Anselm. The matter can be put succinctly with this rhetorical question: Which would you rather tell your 13 year old as he heads off to Middle School: that it's up to him to make good choices and he must make every effort to behave well, or that it's up to him to make good choices and he must make every effort to behave well, but that whatever he actually ends up doing, God willed him to do it in order to achieve some greater good?

#### *A Final Note on Safety*

In my earlier paper criticized by McCann, I granted that if we say that our choices are, in the last analysis, up to us, we must allow the possibility that we will choose badly with dire and everlasting consequences. Anselm does argue that the blessed are sure of continuing in the friendship of God, since they no longer see anything extraneous to desire. So

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<sup>47</sup>In engaging in Pascalian wagering I am following a suggestion from my research assistant, Joseph Fitt.

we can reach a point where the danger is over and we can be certain of our beatitude.<sup>48</sup> McCann holds that if it is ultimately up to God what we choose, then, in this life, we may enjoy “the security of the believer: the assurance that, having once invested full trust in God to see to their salvation, that trust will not be betrayed, so that their ultimate union with him is guaranteed.” For God to produce the repentant sinner’s act of choosing to rescind his faith in God, “God has to drop the ball: he must, after he has been accorded full trust by the sinner to secure his eternal destiny, betray that trust, by willing that the sinner turn away from him. A loving father would never do that.”<sup>49</sup>

Were McCann a universalist his claim about what God as a loving father would or would not do might be more persuasive (though still subject to the points made above). In that case he could hold that the acts of sin God produces in his created agents ultimately lead to the good for all of those agents. God wills the good for *all* of his children and their sin is the necessary means to secure it. But McCann is not a universalist. He suggests Aquinas’s point about divine justice, and goes on to say,

I think, however, that our real concern about the lost is not how they are recompensed for their lives. What is troubling, rather, is that God should create such beings at all, much less will their performance of the very actions through which they reject him. It may be argued, however, that even here God’s love is at work. The lost are, after all, full participants in securing their tragic destiny; and while a life ruined by final rebellion is morally indefensible, it is still morally meaningful.<sup>50</sup>

McCann, then, holds that God does bring it about that some are lost. And it seems to be an evident empirical fact that some who had been committed to faith in Christ as their savior abandon that faith, quite possibly in favor of permanent rebellion. On McCann’s view this is willed by God. Given the facts about the human condition I simply do not see the argument connecting God’s producing all choices to the safety which McCann hopes for. Perhaps it may be seen as an advantage that on McCann’s view we can suppose that God creates the lost as lost since it is necessary to the overall good of the divine plan. We can take comfort in the thought that it is better that there should be some in Hell than not. The Anselmian holds that it is just bad that some, under their own steam, opt for Hell. It would be better if everyone were saved, and God would prefer that everyone

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<sup>48</sup>Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 84–85. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (section 2005) says, “Since it belongs to the supernatural order, grace *escapes our experience* [emphasis in the original] and cannot be known except by faith. We cannot therefore rely on our feelings or our works to conclude that we are justified and saved.” Roman Catholicism, then, would seem to preclude certainty regarding salvation. Perhaps for McCann’s thesis faith and hope, rather than certainty, are adequate? In that case McCann and I may not be too far apart regarding the appropriate attitude towards one’s own salvation.

<sup>49</sup>McCann, “God, Sin, and Rogers on Anselm,” 430.

<sup>50</sup>McCann, “The Author of Sin?” 154–155.

be saved.<sup>51</sup> So I do not see that McCann's universe is less dangerous than Anselm's. And I find it more comforting to believe that the reality of Hell is our doing, not God's.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Anselm himself holds that God does not extend grace to all the fallen, but the Anselmian—one who accepts Anselm's overall system—could reject that one detail without any of the rest of the construction being shaken.

<sup>52</sup>Possibly the *most* comforting picture would entail a universalism such that those who freely choose God are saved as free agents, and those who freely reject God are demoted to agents without Anselmian freedom and *made* to be saved. That way everyone is saved and some are able to enjoy the elevated metaphysical stature which free will bestows. But scripture and Church teaching must trump comfort, it seems to me.

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