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Book Review: The Cambridge Companion To Anselm

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Kvanvig's routes to this destination, I applaud and welcome his two most important bottom-line contentions: first that epistemologists should think more about the *value* of knowledge and other epistemic states, and second that what normative epistemology should really be after is not knowledge, but understanding.

NOTES

1. Thus, in effect, Kvanvig: "Attending to the relationship between knowledge and understanding can give us hope in our pursuit of special and unique value for epistemic achievements, even though we have had to give up such hope regarding the cognitive achievement of knowledge" (p. 186). Cp. Burnyeat, *The Theaetetus of Plato*: "A better understanding of knowledge is the precondition for solving the problem of false judgement (p. 200c-d)."

2. This is my gloss, prompted by comparison with other contexts, where Kvanvig very frequently contrasts accounts of the nature with accounts of the value of knowledge. If there is a misprint here, it is not, unfortunately, the only one. (p. 13 "Daedelus" for "Daedalus"; p. 30 "Buryeat" for "Burnyeat"; on p. 201 we have "laudatory" where the context demands "laudable," on p. 108 the non-word "virtuosity"; on p. 193 it is disappointing to find Cambridge University Press, of all people, misspelling the Greek *epistêmê*.)

3. However we translate *epistêmê*. Kvanvig rightly points out that "knowledge" may actually be a less accurate translation for what Plato has in mind than "understanding" (p. 193). "Science" (in a broad sense, like the German *Wissenschaft*) might also be more accurate than "knowledge."

The Cambridge Companion to Anselm, edited by Brian Davies and Brian Leftow. Cambridge University Press, 2004. 323 pages. \$65.00 cloth/\$29.99 paper.

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The Introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* begins by describing Anselm of Canterbury as "at once one of the best- and least-known of medieval thinkers" (p. 1). This volume of the Cambridge Companion series does an excellent job of both offering substantive pieces on the topics for which Anselm is already so well known (most notably, the ontological argument) and introducing readers to those for which he is not, but arguably ought to be. As the authors make clear, there is a breadth and passion to Anselm's thought that can often be missed when simply reading Anselm as a set up for contemporary debate regarding God's existence.

There are twelve essays in this text, a substantive bibliography, and an index. Among the notable strengths of the volume is the spectrum of topics covered: biography, philosophy of language, modality, freedom, ethical theory, as well as theological topics including the Trinity and the atonement. Significant as well is the variety of approaches. Peter King's essay, "Anselm's philosophy of language," provides an analysis of Anselm's texts on the topic. King writes, "[Anselm] takes up issues in the philosophy

of language in nearly everything he wrote" [84]), and King ends with a comparison with more modern conceptions. In contrast, Simo Knuutti-la's "Anselm on modality" explicitly focuses on the context of Anselm's thought, tracing the critical sources and comparing Anselm's view with many of his own contemporaries. Like Knuutti-la, Gareth Matthews's essay ("Anselm, Augustine, and Platonism") focuses on Anselm in his historical context, but with an emphasis on (albeit somewhat cursory) comparison between Augustine's and Anselm's thought on a few select topics.

It is a strength of the volume that it includes both essays which read Anselm in his contemporary context and essays which place Anselm in the context of more modern debates. Perhaps the most successful at emphasizing Anselm's relevance for modern debate while not allowing interpretation of Anselm to be limited by modern categories is Sandra Visser's and Thomas Williams's discussion of Anselm on freedom. Visser and Williams open by noting reactions contemporary metaphysicians would likely have to Anselm's definition of freedom (they say of Anselm's definition of freedom of choice as 'the power to preserve rectitude of will for the sake of that rectitude itself': "From the point of view of contemporary metaphysics, this is one of the most unhelpful definitions imaginable" [p. 179]). Throughout the essay, they point to places in Anselm's texts where modern readers are likely to be perplexed, and they use this perplexity as an opportunity to explicate the subtlety of Anselm's analysis of the various types and meanings of freedom. It is an essay that left me wanting more, suspecting that there are even more resources to mine in Anselm's reflections on a topic so important to contemporary thought.

Among the striking and important theses argued for is that of Jeffrey E. Brower. In the opening paragraph of Brower's "Anselm on ethics," he writes: "Although it is easy to overlook the systematic nature of Anselm's ethical theorizing, as well as its genuine originality, his contribution to medieval ethical theory is considerable" (p. 222). Brower argues that "Anselm's theory is deontological in nature: unlike the eudaimonism characteristic of this period, it separates morality from happiness (at least conceptually) and emphasizes the need for agents to be motivated by justice rather than happiness" (p. 223). In doing this, Anselm ought to be given credit that is usually reserved for Duns Scotus; Anselm breaks with the Aristotelian tradition in ethics and thereby makes a substantive contribution to the development of ethical theory.

Although topically and methodologically varied, the volume also exhibits a deep coherence. Several themes are picked up and repeated in numerous essays; the most obvious of which is a key theme introduced in the first biographical chapter: correctness (*rectitudo*). (Unfortunately, the index does not cite well the recurrence of the idea.) Correctness for Anselm is not merely technical exactitude or a correspondence between mind and thing. Rather, correctness has to do fitting into a whole, possessing a kind of harmony, and doing what a person or thing was meant to do. Thus, for example, in evaluating the truth of a statement, we ought not to be concerned simply with its correspondence but also its correctness—that is, doing the kind of thing a statement is to do. The concern for *rectitudo* recurs regularly, and the different essays reveal multiple facets in Anselm's use of the term.

Perhaps somewhat less surprising, given the skill of our editors, the two essays touching most directly on the ontological argument fit well together and into the volume as a whole, and they provide a substantive discussion of Anselm's most famous proof. Brian Leftow in "Anselm's perfect-being theology" summarizes Anselm's project: "Roughly speaking, Anselm is trying to find descriptions that apply to God and would still have described Him even if only He existed" (p. 134), in contrast, for example, with the notion of God as Creator. Leftow provides an important clarification about why Anselm approaches questions of God in the way that he does and thus prepares us to engage rightly in the ontological argument. Brian Davies's essay on that argument ("Anselm and the ontological argument") is, as one would expect, a model of clarity.

After complimenting the editors for great success at what is surely a difficult task—bringing together a coherent but broad and varied volume on a thinker such as Anselm—it may seem a bit nit-picky to complain about a single infelicitous phrase in the Introduction. But perhaps the emphasis will highlight what the editors have accomplished. Davies and Leftow write in the Introduction that Anselm can be taken as a philosopher insofar as we understand a philosopher as "someone concerned to argue for conclusions in a cogent way" (p. 2). Surely Anselm was concerned to argue and do so cogently, but, as numerous essays in the volume show well, such thin ideals do not capture the depth and richness of Anselm's own vision of what theoretical and philosophical activity is about. The volume makes clear that Anselm is a passionate thinker, convinced that truth is transformative and that reflection on fundamental issues, especially God and the soul, is part of piety to God. To focus on the cogency of the arguments without also attending to the quality and attitude of the soul making the arguments and the transformative nature of the topics studied, is to construe what it means to be a rational, reasoning human being in a way quite different from how Anselm would. Theoretical reflection is about seeking truth, but truth for Anselm is not something that can be divided into parts. There are not many truths, but one truth. Thus the pursuit of truth does not involve a limited aspect of oneself (e.g., certain cognitive faculties) but includes the full transformation of the person. It is a vision foreign to modern ears but rich with resources—which makes this volume all the more welcome.

Duns Scotus on God, by Richard Cross. Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology, Ashgate Publishing Limited: Aldershot, 2005. 289 pages.

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This is a well researched, well written, and well argued book on an important topic. Cross has succeeded admirably in a difficult task—explaining enough of Scotus's complex philosophy to allow those unfamiliar with either Scotus's thought or medieval philosophy in general to follow, reasonably well, the arguments Scotus offers on a range of difficult questions in natural and philosophical theology.