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AN ANSELMIAN APPROACH TO DIVINE SIMPLICITY

Katherin A. Rogers

The doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) is an important aspect of the classical theism of philosophers like Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. Recently the doctrine has been defended in a Thomist mode using the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction. I argue that this approach entails problems which can be avoided by taking Anselm's more Neoplatonic line. This does involve accepting some controversial claims: for example, that time is isotemporal and that God inevitably does the best. The most difficult problem involves trying to reconcile created libertarian free will with the Anselmian DDS. But for those attracted to DDS the Anselmian approach is worth considering.

Introduction

The doctrine of divine simplicity (DDS) holds that God has no parts and that the various attributes we ascribe to Him are one and identical to God. It is an important, but difficult, plank of classical Christian theism, understood as the view of God and creation espoused by the great late classical and medieval philosophers like Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. Classical theism holds (among other things) that God is a necessary being, simple, immutable, omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good, the present creator *ex nihilo* of all that is not Himself—in sum, a being than which no greater can be conceived. (“Present creator” here means that God is the immediate cause of the existence of anything with ontological status at the time it exists.) Here I focus on a particular challenge to DDS: Don't we want to say that God knows and causes a variety of changing things over time? And perhaps He could have been knowing and causing different things than He is actually knowing and causing. But then there looks to be multiplicity constituted by God's basic, unchanging nature and then, something separate, His manifold activities and beliefs which change over time and might have been other than they are.

Recent, favorable discussions of the DDS have tended to proceed against a background of certain Thomist assumptions, and this includes attempts to respond to the challenge that apparently God's beliefs and actions change



and could have been otherwise.¹ But this Thomist response is problematic, as I will argue. Thus it is worthwhile to explore another way of dealing with this challenge to DDS by appealing to a different tradition, the more Neoplatonic approach of Anselm of Canterbury. I do not offer a developed historical account, and scholars debate about the correct interpretation of Anselm's views, though I will provide enough citations to Anselm's work to show that the ascription "Anselmian" to the present proposal does have historical warrant. I will not argue that the Anselmian approach is *obviously* preferable to the Thomist. Each has difficulties. But the advantages of the Anselmian position render it worth considering for anyone tempted to adopt the DDS.²

Classical theism, of both the Neoplatonic and the Thomist variety, was adamant that proposing any multiplicity in God would be demeaning. There are basically two reasons, both of which are elucidated by Anselm. First, there is an argument from the necessity of God's perfect independence: Anything composed of parts can be understood to be, in some way, dependent on those parts for its existence. Being dependent is a limitation or weakness. Thus God cannot have parts.³ Moreover, following upon the analysis of God as that than which no greater can be conceived, Anselm argues that anything thought to be composed of parts can be thought to be divisible, and hence its ceasing to exist is conceivable. But then a greater being can be thought—one that cannot even be thought to cease to exist. God, then, cannot be thought to be composed of any parts.⁴ And classical theists understood this claim in a very strong sense. God just *is* all the attributes we ascribe to Him. But further, His knowing and doing are one and identical with His nature.

But therein lies the challenge. This strong doctrine of DDS entails immutability. If we say that God's knowledge and actions can change we imply a distinction between God, considered in Himself, and the multiplicity of beliefs He has and acts He does. In Himself He is always the omnipotent, omniscient, source of all. But on the non-negotiable Christian assumption that God's knowledge and activity engage with our changing world, if we understand this to require that the divine knowledge and activity changes, then we must add to God's underlying nature and suppose that He is constantly gaining and losing properties as what He knows and does changes with our changing world. And this is too much multiplicity for the classical theist. A similar problem arises if we posit that God might have been doing other than He actually is doing. This looks to entail, again, that there is the fundamental divine nature, and then a multiplicity of divine properties that might have been different than they actually are.

¹James Dolezal offers a general defense of the doctrine of divine simplicity in *God Without Parts*.

²Norman Kretzmann recommends a closer look at the Neoplatonic tradition in discussing two questions related to the DDS: "Must God create?" and "Must God create our actual universe?" ("A General Problem of Creation" and "A Particular Problem of Creation.")

³*Monologion* 17. Citations are to the the Schmitt edition of Anselm's *Opera Omnia*; translations are mine.

⁴*Proslogion* 18.

Classical theism admits of at least two main approaches to this challenge to DDS arising from the necessity of holding that God, who is identical to His knowledge and His actions, both knows and acts with regard to our world. The Thomist approach requires that the relationship between God and creatures be such that even though creatures change over time, there is no change at all in God. And even if God had made a different world, or not created at all, God would be exactly the same as He is now, having made our world.⁵ The Anselmian approach posits a different relationship between God and creatures, one that insists upon the Christian Neoplatonic claim that God is simultaneously transcendent and immanent.⁶ As source of all God utterly transcends His creation. And that a simple God should be transcendent fits well theoretically with the DDS.⁷ Some non-Christian Neoplatonists, not sharing the Christian commitment to immediate divine creation, locate the ultimate Source of All in splendid isolation from the world around us. Plotinus's One—which is nothing if not simple—pours forth only into the next most perfect thing, Nous, the First Intelligence. But Christian Neoplatonists cannot distance God from our world. The perfect Good is necessarily self-diffusive and the immediate Creator of our world. Even as He is above all, He is in all, and all is in Him⁸. As St. Paul explains to the Athenians, in lines beloved and oft quoted by Christian Neoplatonists, it is in God that we live, and move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). But this insistence upon divine immanence in a changing creation surely exacerbates the challenge to DDS. In order to address this challenge the Anselmian subscribes to two controversial theses: time is isotemporal (all times exist equally) and God could not be doing other than He is doing. These views are problematic, and if one is

⁵By the "Thomist" approach I mean the sort of view defended by W. Matthews Grant in *Free Will and God's Universal Causality* and "Divine Simplicity, Contingent Truths, and Extrinsic Models of Divine Knowing." Thomas's position is debatable, and I do not offer an historical interpretation of his work. For an excellent canvas of possible interpretations relevant to the challenge to DDS see Grant and Spencer, "Activity, Identity, and God."

⁶See, for example, Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 4.12.23. Thomas Aquinas, too, holds these dual commitments: He writes that God is above all things due to the excellence of His nature, but He is in all things as the cause of their being (*Summa Theologiae* I 8,1 ad 1). Thomas may owe more to the Neoplatonic tradition than is sometimes assumed, but this question lies beyond the scope of this paper. Here the "Thomistic" approach refers to a particular, contemporary, Thomistic view attempting to address difficulties with DDS. Mark K. Spencer proposes that Thomistic commitments allow a different approach ("The Flexibility of Divine Simplicity").

⁷Introducing the entry on DDS in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, William Vallicella writes that DDS "is to be understood as an affirmation of God's absolute transcendence of creatures."

⁸Anselm makes this point in *Monologion* 14 having given, at the beginning of the work, a classic Platonist argument that the goods and the beings we observe must exist "through" the highest good and highest being. In *Proslogion* 14 he offers an almost anguished prayer rooted in the apparent contradiction; God, he knows, is immediately present to him, but is yet unseen. Using the light imagery ubiquitous among Neoplatonists, he cries that the brightness of the divine light overpowers and blinds the vision of the limited creature.

committed to libertarian freedom for created agents, as I believe Anselm is, the difficulties only get worse. But perhaps they are not insurmountable, and I will briefly suggest ways they might be addressed. In any case, a discussion of the Thomist approach may serve to bolster the thought that those sympathetic to the DDS may want to consider the Anselmian alternative.

The Thomistic Approach

In discussing the relationship of God to creation Thomas Aquinas proposes the difficult thought that, while creatures are really related to God, God is not really related to creatures.⁹ In outline, the relationship of a creature's being caused to exist by God involves three elements; God, the creature, and the property of being created which exists only in the creature. The relationship of God to the creature, which might have been thought to be something real in God—His knowing and causing the creature—is not “real,” but is rather a “relation of reason”; it is a product of the created mind, not a property in God.¹⁰ The challenge to the DDS can thus be answered by saying that although God is the creator of a changing world, and might, according to Aquinas, have made a different creation, or no creation at all, God does not change and would not be other than He is, even if He never created.

In developing this view with regard to DDS some contemporary Thomists distinguish between what is predicated of God intrinsically and extrinsically. They note that the distinction is not easily drawn.¹¹ Roughly, intrinsic predication is what we can say of something due to the way it, itself, is, and extrinsic predication is what we can say of something due to its relation (or lack of relation) to something outside of itself. So if we say of some man, Fred, that he is a man, that is intrinsic predication. If we say that Fred is taller than Sam, that is extrinsic. And that extrinsic predication might be true at one time, but false at another—Sam might grow—without that change being grounded in any change in Fred.

Brian Davies, though not using the intrinsic/extrinsic language, discusses the relationship of creation to God by proposing the example of teaching to explain how an unchanging agent may produce an effect. One teaches, Davies notes, only when students learn. Thus the would-be teacher may engage in learning-inducing activities, but she goes from not teaching to teaching only when the students start to learn, and that occurs in the students. “So the activity of teaching is not, in fact, definable in terms

⁹*Summa Theologiae* I 28, 1 ad 3.

¹⁰Brower, “Medieval Theories of Relations.” Brower finds a version of this theory in Augustine, but the text he quotes from Augustine does not necessarily support this conclusion. See also Grant and Spencer, “Activity, Identity, and God.”

¹¹Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality*, 254n2; Alexander Pruss, “On Two Problems,” 151. In the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* under “Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties,” Dan Marshall and Brian Weatherstone list ways of understanding the distinction, but none of them suits the present discussion of the challenge to the DDS.

of changes in teachers. And . . . the same is true of any activity where we have something achieving an effect in or on something else."¹² Reference to the teacher's efforts is intrinsic, but reference to the *teaching* is extrinsic.

Applying this distinction to God and creation it goes roughly like this: God's omniscience and omnipotence do not involve internal beliefs or acts of will in God logically preceding, and separate from, the things actually known and caused. And created things are sufficiently distanced from God that when we predicate something of God with regard to created things we employ extrinsic predication. Thus, we can say that God could know and do different things over time, or He could have known and done different things than He has actually known and done, without this entailing any difference at all in terms of how God is in Himself. So, for example, God might create our world, or a different world, or not create at all, yet God Himself be absolutely the same in these three scenarios. W. Matthews Grant explains, "On the extrinsic model of divine agency, God's act of causing or bringing about some effect E consists in a causal relation to E, and God would be no different intrinsically were he not standing in that relation, were he not causing E."¹³ Grant writes that, "God's cognitive state, his act of knowing, extends out beyond God to embrace contingent things in themselves."¹⁴

But this seems to place created things at a distance from God and is hard to square with the standard classical theist principles that it is God's knowledge and power that are immediately keeping created things in being and that the DDS entails that God *is* His act of knowing and causing.¹⁵ The example of Fred and Sam, illustrating the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction, is helpful when we assume that Fred and Sam are both normal human beings. But it plays very differently if we suppose that Fred—through his knowledge and his power—is keeping Sam, with all his properties including his height, in being from moment to moment, and it is up to Fred to determine how tall Sam is or whether Sam even exists. If Fred knowingly and willingly makes Sam grow, then the situation in which Fred is no longer taller than Sam seems clearly to be a result of a change in Fred's knowing and willing.

Similarly, to make the analogy of the teacher and the student more apt for divine creation, which is the source of all that exists that is not God, we would have to suppose that it is the teacher alone who produces learning in the student (not to mention that the very existence of the student would have to be caused by the teacher). And then—assuming, as in the original analogy, that teaching requires a student—it would nonetheless be up to the teacher whether or not she is teaching, not teaching, or changes to become a teacher. If what exists that is not God is caused to exist from moment to moment by God's immediate causal presence, the thesis that creation is so separated from God that claims about God's knowing and

¹²Davies, "The Action of God," 82.

¹³Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality*, 270.

¹⁴Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality*, 266.

¹⁵*Monologion* 14.

causing are predicated of God extrinsically is deeply puzzling. Of course, one supposes that the relationship between God and creation is not much like a teacher teaching or the respective heights of two men, but the point is that the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction, while not especially difficult to illustrate using relationships between created things, is hard to square with classical theism's insistence on things being immediately caused by God's knowing and willing.¹⁶

Moreover, it is standard Christian doctrine to say that God made our universe "out of love." Ordinarily one would be likely to read that as claiming that what explains the existence of our universe is a fact about God: being loving He wanted to make our world as something for Him to love. But that common thought seems to suggest a desire in God for creation, with the corollary that if God did not desire creation and hence choose to create, God would be other than He is—He would not be the loving Creator. The Thomist holds that God is exactly the same whether or not He chooses to create. To suggest a "desire" in God is to posit a "need." Rather, the Thomist has it that the goal of God's act is Himself. As James Dolezal puts it, "In all his willing he is his own ultimate object of desire, as it were." "God's final object or end in all his willing is himself." "Just as God knows all non-divine things in knowing his own essence, so he wills all non-divine things in willing the goodness of his essence . . . [God] wills creatures *for* himself and not *for* themselves."¹⁷ God is perfectly self-sufficient and can express His goodness simply by being the Trinity and not creating, or by creating our world, or by creating a different world, and the perfect act that is God is exactly the same whichever He does.¹⁸ But if God's love might issue in a different creation or no creation at all, then His love would equally explain the existence of a different creation or no creation at all. Thus the existence of our universe, *as opposed to* a different creation or no creation at all, cannot be *explained* by citing God's love.¹⁹ Thus the claim that God made our world "out of love" has no explanatory

¹⁶Here one might consider Thomas's thought that our language must apply to God analogically. But there is significant debate over what the doctrine of analogy actually holds, and a critic might complain that, on the level of conceptualizing God, it serves only to distance Him further from creation. Anselm considers and rejects a version of the doctrine of analogy preferring instead a qualified theory of univocal predication. See Anselm's discussion of the definition of "justice" in *De Veritate* 12 and of the definition of "freedom of choice" in *De libertati arbitrii* 1.

¹⁷Dolezal, *God Without Parts*, 165, 177, 182.

¹⁸Some argue that the libertarian, at least, ought not cavil at the thought that God might be just the same, whatever His effects, since this is how libertarian free agency is sometimes described. Anselm holds that this misses the point of libertarian free will which is that *created* agents can help to construct their moral characters by making morally significant choices (*De casu diaboli* 18). The libertarian free created agent comes to be very different depending on what choices he makes. God does not have libertarian free will, does not make morally significant choices, and does not construct His character (*Cur Deus Homo* Bk. 2, Chaps. 10–11, 17).

¹⁹Explanatory causes in science sometimes do not produce their effects, but presumably this is due to the limitations of secondary causes. This point cannot be transferred to God's causing.

value.²⁰ Indeed, applying the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction, to say that God made our world out of love is to say something about our world, but not about God. That seems a fundamental violation of ordinary Christian belief. One could respond that “ordinary” beliefs should not play a role in philosophical and theological discussions. We are, after all, discussing the DDS! Still, we might want to consider alternatives before we commit to a claim that seems to undermine a belief as widespread, as central, and as *practical* as that God—God considered in Himself—loves our world. Anselm, and the Christian Neoplatonic tradition, offer a different way of analyzing divine simplicity.

The Anselmian Approach

On a Christian Neoplatonic understanding the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction places too great a distance between God and His creation. God is both transcendent and immanent, and any attempt to find space between God and His creatures, beyond the distinction that the creatures are creatures, and hence not identified with God, runs counter to the insistence that God causes all things to be. He causes them by the simple act of self-diffusive love which just is Himself. Anselm expresses this thought using the standard Neoplatonic image of God as light.²¹ Light plays a ubiquitous role in Medieval Neoplatonism. It was believed that the sun poured forth light—its own nature—out of itself without ever being diminished; a lovely image for the self-diffusive love of God. Anselm appeals to another standard Neoplatonic image, God as fountain, in discussing a worry relevant to divine simplicity: How is it that God can be both just and merciful, when justice and mercy seem to us to be almost opposed to one another? Anselm concludes that it is the transcendent magnitude of God’s goodness that allows it to overflow with what look to be, from our perspective, two opposed effects, justice and mercy. “Is it that your goodness is incomprehensible, which hides this in the inaccessible light in which you dwell? Truly, in the highest and most secret place of your goodness is hidden the fountain from which pours forth the river of your mercy.”²² But if this “pouring forth,” this immediate divine presence to creation, is to be taken seriously, how can the Anselmian possibly deal with the challenge to DDS? How can this immanent God be sustaining a changing world without changing? And could He have done otherwise, if His

²⁰One might hold that divine love entails that God would not make an overall bad world, so perhaps one could say that divine love explains why our world is not worse than it is, but this is a pretty minimal explanatory claim.

²¹*Monologion* 6, *Proslogion* 9, 14. Augustine suggests that there is more to the use of light imagery than imagery. When Christ is referred to as the “cornerstone” that is metaphor, but when He is called “light” that should be taken literally (*De Genesi ad litteram* 4.28). Aquinas—perhaps in a more Neoplatonic moment—agrees. The term “light,” he says, is common to material and spiritual things if it is taken as the principle of manifestation (*Summa Theologiae* I 67, 1). He also uses light imagery to explain divine immanence (*Summa Theologiae* I 8, 1).

²²*Proslogion* 9.

simple nature is associated with the knowledge and action that produce *our* world? The best move for the Anselmian may be to accept at least two controversial claims: All times are equally existent and God inevitably does make the one best world He can. And if one is a libertarian, a third *very* controversial claim seems unavoidable: Created agents contribute to the nature of God.

Prima facie it looks to be the case that if God is as close to His creation as the Anselmian suggests, His knowledge and actions would have to change. Suppose that ascriptions of knowledge and action to God are not extrinsic, but intrinsic. If *now* He knows and causes what is going on *now*, and in five minutes in the future He will be knowing and causing what is going on five minutes in the future, then it would seem that God's knowledge and actions would have to change. But then the Neoplatonic version of the DDS, which includes identifying God with His knowledge and actions, seems incoherent; don't we have to say that there is in God at least the multiplicity of His basic nature, and then the changing properties involved in His sustaining the changing creation? But there is a move that the Anselmian can make. In order to reconcile the DDS with the thought that God's knowledge and actions vis-à-vis a changing creation are not extrinsic one can adopt an isotemporal analysis of the nature of time. (This theory is sometimes called "Four-dimensionalism" or "Eternalism.") This is the view that all times exist equally.²³ What to a given perceiver at a given moment appear to be past, present, and future are subjective to that perceiver at that moment. There is no privileged and unique *now*. Objectively—that is, from the God's-eye point of view—all the moments of time exist. Before, simultaneous with, and after, are objective, but past, present, and future, are subjective. There are texts in Anselm which appear to assume a presentist view of time—only the present moment exists, and the past and future are non-existent.²⁴ But these texts admit of a different interpretation, and there are other texts which seem isotemporalist.²⁵ The clearest expression of isotemporalism comes in a late work, *De Concordia*, where Anselm is attempting to reconcile divine foreknowledge with

²³Another possibility is to make an objective distinction between God's eternal present, which contains all things in their order, but without temporal succession, and the limited, moving present of the temporal order. One could interpret Anselm this way when he says that things exist differently in eternity than in time (*Monologion* 20–24 contains locutions that suggest this thought, but also ones that support the isotemporal view). But this implies the puzzling theory that created things exist twice, as eternal in God's present and non-eternal in our world's time. Another possibility posits an eternal perspective on our temporal world relative to God and a different, temporal perspective relative to temporal perceivers (*Leftow, Time and Eternity*). But on the view that God's "perspective" causes all of reality, if God "sees" all the times of our world equally, it looks to follow that they must exist equally, and that is isotemporalism.

²⁴See, for example, *Monologion* 28 where he describes the temporal creature which, compared with God, barely exists. However, the non-existence of the creature's past and future could be read as *quoad nos*.

²⁵In *Proslogion* 19 and 20 Anselm says that God's eternity contains all times.

created free will. Here he explains that divine eternity should be understood as what we might call a kind of “fifth dimension” containing all of space and time:

Although nothing is there [in eternity] but what is present, it is not a temporal present like ours, but an eternal [present] in which all times are contained. Just as the present time contains all place and whatever is in any place, in the same way the eternal present encloses all time and whatever exists in any time. . . . For eternity has its own unique simultaneity (*Habet enim aeternitas suum simul*) in which exist all the things which exist at the same place or time, and whatever exists in the different places and times.²⁶

Isotemporalism is a phenomenologically difficult theory. The you of five minutes ago and of five minutes hence exist as much as the you of—what is to you at this moment—*now*. And that is hard to imagine. But, difficult or not, it does solve theological problems. Regarding the freedom and foreknowledge dilemma, Anselm explains that God knows what you are doing tomorrow because what is tomorrow to you at this moment is present to God, as are all the moments of time. And relative to the DDS, isotemporalism can allow God to be immediately knowing and acting on the changing created universe without Himself changing at all. Change in the created universe means things within creation being one way at one time and another way at another time. But the *whole* of space-time does not *change*. It just is as it actually is and, barring a failure in the principle of non-contradiction, it cannot be other than it is.

That God is absolutely immutable—which points towards isotemporalism—sounds radical, but this was the understanding of Augustine and his tradition, in which Anselm was schooled. Augustine holds that God does not know and do different things over time, for then He would be mutable.²⁷ Anselm agrees in *Monologion* 21 when he argues that God’s eternal life cannot be composed of temporal parts stretching over past, present, and future. What is past is different from what is present and future, etc., and so, since God is identical with His eternal life, were His life temporally extended, that would involve differences at different times, constituting parts in the divine life, and so God would not be simple. Anselm makes a similar case in *Proslogion* 18 and 19. Presentism, then, conflicts with Anselm’s DDS, while isotemporalism seems to follow from it: God is immediately knowing and causing the whole of space-time in His one, simple act which is immutable. Isotemporalism permits the claim that God not only transcends, but is immanent in, the created universe without

²⁶*De Concordia* 1.5, S.II p.254, ll.6–15. Scholars debate whether or not Anselm is indeed an Isotemporalist. For a defense of this interpretation see my *Anselm on Freedom*, 176–184.

²⁷*Confessions* 12.15 and *De diversis quaestionibus ad Simplicianum* 2.2.2. This motivates Augustine’s meditation on time in *Confessions* 11. The question “What was God doing before He made the universe?” is intended to show the incoherence of an immutable creator. Augustine does not respond that God’s basic nature might stay the same while His knowledge and actions change. Rather he ruminates on the nature of time. It is not clear, though, that Augustine explicitly embraces isotemporalism.

that entailing that God Himself must change from moment to moment. DDS is preserved.

But a similar problem arises for DDS if we hold that God might have done other than He is actually doing. Again—if we reject the Thomist approach—it looks, *prima facie*, to be the case that we have to posit at least the minimal multiplicity of God’s basic nature plus additional properties that He in fact has, but that He might not have had, if He had chosen to cause a different creation or no creation at all. (All of God’s knowledge and actions are subsumed under His “causing creation.”) The Anselmian move, and this is rooted in the Neoplatonic tradition, is to allow that God, being the Highest Good, necessarily does the best, and this entails that the actual creation is the best world God could make. One standard element of the Neoplatonic system is the Principle of Plenitude; that is the thought that the perfectly good Creator would inevitably want to make the best world possible, and that would be a world containing the most possible different kinds of things.²⁸ (St. Thomas agrees that God necessarily does the best, but that could mean making a different creation or not creating at all.²⁹) If we posit that there is one best world that God makes, then God could not be doing other than He is actually doing. His basic nature does not need to be distinguished from His knowledge and His activity. His nature, His knowing, and His doing are one, simple act which could not be other than it is.

Does this mean that God is not free? He does not choose between open options, but on Anselm’s understanding “freedom” is “the ability to keep justice for its own sake.” Created agents must confront open, morally significant, options in order to “give justice to themselves.”³⁰ But perfect freedom, which created agents can win by the choices they make when they had options, and which God has just because He is God, is the *inability to lose* justice.³¹ God is Justice itself, the standard for all that is right in any way. God wills *freely*, on Anselm’s view, but He certainly does not exercise morally significant choice, since He cannot possibly choose badly—or even less well than He might. And the freedom to choose between equivalent goods would not, in Anselm’s view, constitute any enhancement of the divine nature. Anselm argues at length that insisting that God must do the best does not undermine divine freedom.³² It is not clear that the ability to make “coin toss” choices is a valuable trait and so must belong to that than which no greater can be conceived. And holding that God does the best protects DDS without having to go the puzzling Thomist route.

²⁸For the Neoplatonic tradition, see Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, chs. 2–3. For Anselm see Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, ch. 10.

²⁹*Summa Theologiae* I 19, 3.

³⁰*Cur Deus Homo* bk. 2, ch.10.

³¹*De libertate arbitrii* 1.

³²This is especially clear in *Cur Deus Homo* Book 2, chs. 10, 16–17.

But perhaps embracing the position that God does the one best thing He can do fails because the claim that there is a “best” creation is ultimately absurd or incoherent. God, one might argue, is infinite and no creation could be the one, best creation to reflect the infinite divinity.³³ But recently some philosophers of religion have proposed that sense can be made of a best creation if we posit some version of a theist multiverse; roughly, God makes all the universes that are overall good.³⁴ I have argued that the classical theism of Augustine and Anselm, which embraces the Neoplatonic doctrine of the Principle of Plenitude, could easily support this contemporary suggestion about a best possible creation being a multiverse.³⁵ A best possible creation is not obviously absurd, and may be worth considering as part of the defense of DDS.

There is a difficulty to be noted here. Combining isotemporalism with the thought that God makes the best world—possibly a multiverse—may entail a “modal collapse.” (I prefer the more positive term “modal simplicity.”) If all times exist equally and are immediately present to God (even in all the universes of a multiverse) and if God inevitably does the one best thing there is to do, then it looks to be the case that things (even things in all of the multiverses) cannot be other than they are. The thesis of the multiverse may help us here, in that the intuition that there are other *real* possibilities may be grounded in the thought that these possibilities are actualities in other universes. I do not support the picture of the theist multiverse as a version of Lewisian modal realism. For one thing, I argue that there is reason to deny that particular individuals could exist (or their counterparts could exist) in multiple universes. But the multiverse could ground intuitions about possible *kinds*. If, indeed, the unicorn is a possible creature, perhaps it exists in some universe other than ours.³⁶ In any case, though many philosophers seem to find modal simplicity intuitively repugnant, it would be difficult to demonstrate the falsity of the claim that things just are as they are. And perhaps the modal collapse is just not as fearsome as some seem to believe.³⁷

Invoking isotemporalism and allowing that God necessarily does the best may be good moves to support the more Neoplatonic version of DDS. But there is a further, very thorny, problem to be considered. Suppose that one is committed to the thought that created agents require robust libertarian freedom in order to be made in the image of the free and independent God and in order to be appropriate subjects of praise and blame. Also, one might embrace libertarian freedom in order to be able to employ the Free Will Defense. I have argued elsewhere that Anselm is indeed a

³³Summa Theologiae I 25, 6.

³⁴Hudson, “Hyperspace and Theism”; Kraay, “Theism, Possible Worlds, and the Multiverse”; O’Connor, *Theism and Ultimate Explanation*, 111–131; Turner, “The Many-Universes Solution to the Problem of Evil.”

³⁵Rogers, “Classical Theism and the Multiverse.”

³⁶Rogers, “Classical Theism and the Multiverse.”

³⁷Kraay, “Theism and Modal Collapse.”

libertarian regarding the choices of created agents.³⁸ Even if my interpretation is controversial, whether or not Anselm's version of DDS can be reconciled with libertarianism is an interesting question, so I will proceed on the assumption that my interpretation is correct. Anselm himself does not address this problem in reconciliation (though he says things that are relevant), and my proposals here are tentative. Anselm (arguably) holds that a created agent's libertarian free choice, for which the agent can be justly praised or blamed by God, must ultimately be up to the agent, and not up to God, and that is how I will understand libertarian free choice. Thus, if created agents make libertarian free choices, how the universe goes is in part due to these choices. How, then, can a simple God be identified with His act of causing creation, if creation might have been different, as seems to be the case if created agents have libertarian free will? Anselm himself is surprisingly comfortable with the suggestion that God inevitably pursues the best course given human choices. For example, the argument in *Cur Deus Homo* is that, having created human beings, God's goodness will not permit Him to abandon humanity, and so He *must* become incarnate in response to humanity's freely sinning.³⁹ Before attempting to square libertarian freedom with the DDS a few comments on Anselmian libertarianism will help to undergird my proposals.⁴⁰

Anselm defines "free will" as "the ability to keep justice," and this definition applies to both divine and created free will. God, being Justice Itself, does not need open options. But, in order for created agents to "keep justice" on their own, they must confront open options between good and evil. Options allow the choice to be up to the agent himself, *a se*.⁴¹ (We know that created agents can choose *a se* since sometimes they sin, and it is *logically impossible* that God causes the choice to sin.⁴²) This insistence on aseity entails that any truth about, or knowledge of, a created agent's choice is grounded in the actual making of the choice. A morally significant choice is possible when an agent entertains two, mutually exclusive, god-given desires; one for an inappropriate benefit and one for justice, and it is absolutely up to the created agent which he pursues to the point of its becoming his intention. I have argued elsewhere that this proposal allows Anselm to maintain the view, non-negotiable in classical theism, that God is the source of everything that has ontological status.⁴³ It is true that created agents may exercise a counter-factual causality over God. For example, if Adam and Eve had not sinned, God would not have had to become incarnate. But this need not entail that creatures exercise any

³⁸Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom and Freedom and Self-Creation*.

³⁹One might suggest that Anselm's view is that God had the ability to choose otherwise in that He could have chosen not to create human beings, so the "necessity" for the Incarnation follows upon an earlier choice that entailed open options. Anselm, though, never says this.

⁴⁰For a developed discussion see Rogers, *Freedom and Self-Creation*, chs. 2–3.

⁴¹*De casu diaboli* 13–14.

⁴²*De libertati arbitrii* 8. Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 73–78.

⁴³Rogers, *Freedom and Self-Creation*, 102–109. Proof text: *De Concordia* Q.1.2.

sort of causal *power* against God. The divine knowledge may be the result of God's knowing which desire of the agent's, He, God, keeps in being through the point where the desire becomes the intention.⁴⁴

One might wonder how libertarian free will could possibly be reconciled with the modal collapse which was generated by God's doing the best coupled with isotemporalism. Probably the most promising approach is to make the same move that Anselm uses in regard to the dilemma of creaturely freedom and divine foreknowledge. Yes, there is a necessity regarding the future choice foreknown by God, but it is an innocuous "subsequent" necessity which derives from the agent actually making the choice.⁴⁵ The "ability to choose otherwise" will be parsed as a *power* belonging to the agent debating the morally significant options, and, so long as the truth about what the agent chooses is absolutely grounded in the agent's own free choice, neither divine foreknowledge nor the claim that things just are as they are in a modally simple, isotemporal world need conflict with robust free will.⁴⁶

But still, if there are created free agents, some of what the divine outpouring causes to exist constitutes a response to the choices of those agents, and this could suggest a duality in God; there are the elements of the divine act which do not involve a response to created choices—the causing of atoms and aardvarks and the laws of nature, for example—and then there are the elements of the divine act which *do* involve a response to created choices, such as the causing of cell phones or of Christ Incarnate. (Presumably there is an unimaginably complex intertwining of the two.) But this apparent multiplicity may be innocuous. Unlike the non-Christian Neoplatonist such as Plotinus, the classical Christian theist holds that God is the immediate creator of our world and hence knows and does various things in the simple act which constitutes His being. Is there DDS-undermining multiplicity in God's causing the aardvark and the cell phone, just because the latter (likely) has human free choice in its explanatory history? Anselm concluded that divine justice and divine mercy, which appear to be opposed in their effects, are both manifestations of the act of goodness that is God, so why not the aardvark and the cell phone?

But there is a deeper problem here than this apparent multiplicity. If created agents have libertarian free will it seems to follow that the way the universe goes is in part up to created agents. And then it looks to be inevitable that God's knowledge and action is determined in part by the free choices of created agents. On the Anselmian version of DDS that I have been spelling out there is no real distinction to be made between God's nature on the one hand and His knowledge and action on the other. And

⁴⁴Rogers, "Foreknowledge, Freedom, and Vicious Circles," 96–97.

⁴⁵*De Concordia* Q. 1.

⁴⁶I have argued the point about divine foreknowledge in Rogers, *Anselm on Freedom*, 169–184. The bottom line is that freedom cannot possibly entail the ability to do *in the present* other than one is doing *in the present*. And all times are "present"—equally real—in an isotemporal universe.

this seems to entail the very difficult position that, if there are libertarian free creatures, then God in Himself, in His very nature, is dependent upon their choices. And, in that one reason for accepting DDS was to ensure the divine independence, this consequence of holding libertarianism is severely problematic vis-à-vis DDS.

One might abandon DDS or this understanding of libertarian freedom. Perhaps, although Thomas Aquinas himself says that God is the cause of all human choices, if one wanted to preserve robust libertarian freedom, the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction could be invoked such that God's knowledge and action is not in any way dependent upon the free choices of created agents. Though, again, it is puzzling how God could be causing the consequences of your choice for X, but He could have been causing the consequences of your choice for some Y which is not-X, and He would be exactly the same either way. So suppose one hoped to salvage both the proposed version of libertarian freedom for created agents—where it must be absolutely up to the agent what choice he makes—and the Anselmian DDS. Perhaps one might mitigate the difficulty by proposing that, as a matter of logical sequence, God's freely willing to create free agents is the ultimate source of the situation in which God is dependent upon the choices of those agents. Maybe this kind of self-limitation is both possible for God and a good thing, since it would allow Him to make creatures who can reflect the divine independence. To say that God just cannot make libertarian free creatures seems to put limitations on the divine, too. But perhaps this attempt at reconciling libertarianism and Anselmian DDS ascribes too elevated a metaphysical stature to created agents. If so, adopting some form of compatibilism, which proposes a more humble role for the created agent, might be the better move.⁴⁷

The Christian Neoplatonic tradition presents a portrait of a simple God who, being so filled with goodness and love, inevitably pours that goodness and love into a best creation to which He is immediately present. He is keeping the changing plenitude of creatures in being from moment to moment, but is Himself eternal and immutable. The contemporary Thomist intrinsic/extrinsic distinction supports a version of DDS by holding that claims about God's knowledge of, and action in, creation are actually all about creation and not about God. But this seems to place God at too great a distance from the world He has made. Ultimately this Thomist analysis seems harder to square with the beliefs of most believers even than the, admittedly difficult, Anselmian DDS and its entailments. And so, although it involves accepting controversial claims, the Anselmian approach to DDS is worth considering.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ Augustine is clearly a compatibilist in his later works on grace.

⁴⁸ Thanks to Mark Murphy and to anonymous referees for very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

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