

# **An Analysis of St. Anselm's *De Casu Diaboli* in Light of the Evolution of Thought on the Conceptualization of Satan & Demons Throughout History**

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**Abstract:** This paper will explore the evolution of the conceptions of Satan (the devil), and demons throughout the past 3,000 years, in light of an in-depth study of St. Anselm of Canterbury's medieval text, *The Fall of Satan (De Casu Diaboli)*. Anselm's brilliant work, *De Casu Diaboli*, has inspired much reflection into not just the nature of angels and demons but also into our own. It is worth noting that, it is impossible to exhaustively cover a 3,000-year period on such a major topic, but a brief overview of the significant periods will be provided before focusing on *De Casu Diaboli*.

**Keywords:** De Casu Diaboli; The Fall of Satan; St. Anselm of Canterbury; Satan; demons; demonology; Job; Desert Fathers; Origen; St. Thomas Aquinas; Martin Luther; Renee Girard;

## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper will explore the evolution of the conceptions of Satan (the devil), and demons throughout the past 3,000 years, in light of an in-depth study of St. Anselm of Canterbury's medieval text, *The Fall of Satan (De Casu Diaboli)*. Anselm's brilliant work, *De Casu Diaboli*, has inspired much reflection into not just the nature of angels and demons but also into our own. It is worth noting that, it is impossible to exhaustively cover a 3,000-year period on such a major topic, but a brief overview of the significant periods will be provided before focusing on *De Casu Diaboli* (henceforward DCD).

## THE PRE-MONOTHEISTIC PERIOD

The pre-monotheistic period (until the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.) of the Old Testament dealt with ancient demonic figures such as Asmodeus, Azazel, and Belial. Throughout such a period, at times, these demonic figures were also worshipped as gods for other people. An example would be the worship of a false God, such as Ba'al, who during the Jews' monolatrist period was the Canaanite god of fertility.<sup>1</sup> Ba'al was also used to signify gods for the Phoenicians and the Arameans.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the connection between some demons and deities remain unclear and vague.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the Hebrews during this pre-monotheistic period had a tendency to personify physical forces and abstract concepts,<sup>4</sup> Belial which means "wickedness" in Hebrew would be an example.<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew tradition of personification is brought to the fore with the transliteration of Belial in several Old Testament passages including Deuteronomy 13:13; Judges 19:22; 1 Samuel 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 2 Samuel 16:7 and Nahum 1:15.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W. Herrmann, "Ba'al," in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, eds. Karel Van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Peter W. Van Der Horst (Boston: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 137.

<sup>2</sup> Herrmann, "Ba'al," 132.

<sup>3</sup> Although not explicitly referred to as a demon in the Old Testament, there were perhaps correlations to the false god figure Ba'al that morphed/evolved into such. The line between deities and demons can become quite blurred (especially through the passage of history and linguistic manipulations). The saying "one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist", in our context, would be akin to saying: one person or group's god is another person or group's demon. In the New Testament, Ba'al had morphed into Ba'al Zebub a demon of high rank in the Synoptic gospels.

<sup>4</sup> S.D. Sperling, "Belial," In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Karel Van der Toorn, Bob Becking and Peter W. Van Der Horst (Boston: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 169.

<sup>5</sup> Sperling, "Belial," 169.

<sup>6</sup> Sperling, "Belial," 169.

## THE MONOTHEISTIC PERIOD

Throughout the monotheistic period we get a glimpse of a “prototypic” satanic figure in the book of Job. We move from various demons that were at times deified, to a singular character like in the book of Job. However, it is not the full-blown Satan of the New Testament. In the context of Job, the word Satan which in Hebrew is a common noun that signifies adversary but when translated into Greek is *diabolos*, i.e., devil.<sup>7</sup> Interesting peculiarities occur between Hebrew and Greek and the definite articles which come to mean opposite things with respect to each language.<sup>8</sup> In the book of Job, we have the satan occupying the role of a tester, testing the integrity of Job in order to demonstrate the strength of his faith in God. For instance, in Job 1:13-19, we witness all of Job’s possessions and fortune taken from him including the lives of his 10 children. Once Job passes this first test, God permits the satan (*ha satan*) to inflict bodily harm on Job and test him again. Job passes both tests. For the first time in the Old Testament, we witness God using someone to administer his tests and punishment, as opposed to doing it himself. This figure of the satan is part of the heavenly court, and as such, can freely roam on earth and inflict pain on human subjects while also even daring God himself (Job 1:10).

## SATAN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The demons and Satan of the New Testament vary significantly with the conceptions of the pre-monotheistic and monotheistic periods of the Old Testament. We finally see the development of a singular character of evil: Satan or the devil. However, there are also a series of subordinates, known as demons who he rules over. It is important to note that the word demon translates to *daimon* where among Greek pagans is suggestive

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Kelly, *Satan: A Biography*, 2-3.

of an inferior deity, which could be either good or bad.<sup>9</sup> Within the context of the New Testament it denotes an evil spirit.<sup>10</sup> The word *daimonion*<sup>11</sup> with the meaning “demon,” occurs over 50 times in the gospels and Book of Acts but only 9 times in the rest of the New Testament.<sup>12</sup> One thing that is a striking contrast between the Synoptic gospels and the Old Testament are that references to Satan and demons do not appear together in a single passage, unlike the New Testament.<sup>13</sup> Satan in the Synoptics is referred to as “the prince of demons” – such references can be found in the Beelzebul controversies in Matthew 12:22-32; Mark 3:22-30 and Luke 11:14-26. Demons alone in the Synoptic gospels are responsible for possessions.<sup>14</sup>

The Book of Revelation, more than any other biblical book, mentions Satan or the devil. In this book, there is mention of 3 beasts, one of the beasts, the Dragon is clearly identified in Revelation of 12:9, as “that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.” So, we see the concepts of Satan, demons and the devil as transforming throughout time. The New Testament’s depictions have led scholars to a number of differing interpretations of these demonic figures, including retroactive interpretations of the Old

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<sup>9</sup> W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers* (London: Oliphants Ltd., 1957), 291. This lends support to what was aforementioned regarding demons and deities being used interchangeably depending on the shifting contexts.

<sup>10</sup> W.E. Vince, *An Expository Dictionary*, 291.

<sup>11</sup> Has the same meaning as *daimon*, i.e., demon? Interestingly though, in Acts 17:18 it denotes an inferior pagan deity such as *daimon*.

<sup>12</sup> Sydney T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan & Demons* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1995), 98.

<sup>13</sup> Page, *Powers of Evil*, 99.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that in modern times, whether portrayed in novels, cartoons, Hollywood motion pictures (such as *The Exorcist* of 1973) or other mediums, when Satan is attributed with possessing someone, it is unbiblical since in the New Testament, demons alone possess humans, there is no account of Satan actually possessing anyone. One should be cautious in interpreting Luke 22:3 and John 13:27, where it is said that Satan entered Judas to mean possession, but such an example signifies more of an influence over someone not necessarily an actual possession. Moreover, the verb, *daimonizomai* signifying demon possession is not utilized in either of the passages.

Testament texts in light of some of these interpretations. Other ancient apocalyptic texts seem to have had large impacts on the Book of Revelation such as the Book of Enoch although there is no clear connection with the figure of Satan.<sup>15</sup> Here one can witness a sharp contrast with the functions of the Satan of Zechariah and Job, who are part of a divine council.<sup>16</sup> One wonders what the connection between the Book of Enoch and the views of scholastic thinkers such as Anselm and Aquinas was on their views of the demonic. It is not precisely clear except for the occurrence of a fallen angel myth (1 Enoch 6-11) which seems to have influenced the Book of Revelation and subsequent interpretations by later Christian thinkers.<sup>17</sup>

## ORIGEN

Origen had a peculiar view of Satan. He asked questions that were deemed heretical. Origen had the audacity to pose the question of whether Satan could be saved through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and be forgiven for his sins. Although he does admit he does not know the answer to such a question, Origen's question and thought stands out from the rest of thinkers examined, for its boldness and uniqueness. Despite the uniqueness of his question, Origen blurred the lines between moral and ontological scales creating unnecessary overlapping and confusions between the two scales in an attempt to reconcile, two irreconcilable scales since they speak of very distinct things.<sup>18</sup> The devil would be very high on the

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<sup>15</sup> The characters of Semyaza and Azaz'el act as head figures of the rebellious angels in the Book of Enoch. They function as a Satan like character because of their leadership roles. It is a very obscure and prototypic resemblance to the devil found within the New Testament.

<sup>16</sup> Derek R. Brown, "The Devil in the Details: A Survey of Research on Satan in Biblical Studies," *Currents in Biblical Research* 9, no. 2 (2011): 200-27.

<sup>17</sup> A number of scholars agree that the primary function of the fallen angel myth occurring through 1 Enoch 6 to 11 is to explain and describe the origin of evil in the world. It is difficult to precisely trace the connection and impact such a myth had on St. Anselm and his DCD. However, one can argue that both are attempts to explain the origin of evil in the world from their respective contexts.

<sup>18</sup> Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, 79.

ontological scale but would be on the lowest end of the moral scale.

## **THE DESERT FATHERS**

The Desert Fathers, in particular St. Anthony, had a rather intimate relationship with Satan and various demons. The Desert Fathers would deliberately go to the desert to confront temptation and the devil, head on, just as Jesus did in the Synoptic gospels. However, the vivid accounts of the monks' experiences with Satan's temptations, historically added a new dimension to the view of Satan and his personality.<sup>19</sup> In *The Life of St. Anthony*, St. Athanasius describes Anthony's life as permeated with unceasing tribulations with demons and the devil including heavy physical and psychological abuses. Are we to understand the accounts of St. Anthony as portrayed by St. Athanasius, as historical occurrences or narratives envisioned by St. Anthony about his struggles, in his pious imitation of the life of Christ? The physical attacks endured by Anthony are they biblical? In Job, we witness, *the* Satan, able to administer psychological, financial and physical torment but in the New Testament, Jesus, the apostles and disciples who had a strong faith were able to exorcise humans with one word. Why could the desert fathers not do the same in physical attacks?

## **ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

In Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, particularly in his *Treatise on Angels* and *On the Assault of the Demons*, he addresses a number of questions revolving around the metaphysical and ethical nature of Satan and demons. He does so by making extensive references to biblical passages, while utilizing philosophical tools to understand them in light of angels, demons and Satan. Some of the questions Aquinas posed were in line with Anselm's thought in DCD, such as

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 86.

“whether the devil desired to be as God?” and “whether any demons are naturally wicked?”

### **MARTIN LUTHER**

For Martin Luther, Satan was a very real experiential reality.<sup>20</sup> His understanding of the devil was a combination of his scriptural interpretation and his personal experience. It is difficult to discern which took precedence since the two seemed to influence each other. If Luther was not so averse to scholastic thought it would have resolved many of the contradictions and shortcomings in his theological thinking regarding the interrelations between faith and reason. Moreover, if he looked to Anselm’s thought it would have helped relieve tensions on his conceptions of free will concerning the relations between God and Satan, God and man and Satan and man. His views on Satan affected his view of the reformation and Roman Catholic Church’s corruption. He believed Satan affected the interpretation of Scripture among many other humanly affairs. Martin Luther also supposed that Satan was the greatest enemy that a Christian can and would face. In essence, Luther saw, the figure of Satan in the New Testament as being comprehensible only as the counter-principle to Christ, failure to understand this would bring great harm to the essence of Christianity.<sup>21</sup>

### **RENE GIRARD’S INSIGHTS**

Rene Girard although not a theologian, had some interesting insights concerning Satan that sprung forth from his background as a literary critic and anthropological philosopher. Girard expounds his theory of mimesis built around human psychology, whereby people learn by imitation but can almost unavoidably lead to the occurrence of mimetic rivalry where two or more people desire the same thing. Inevitably, mimetic

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<sup>20</sup> It is worth nothing that Luther’s intimacy and concern with the devil was the most definitive on an experiential level since the Desert Fathers.

<sup>21</sup> Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, 79.

rivalry leads to conflict which can build up to violence eventually, this can only be relieved by the targeting of a scapegoat who is blamed for this mimetic “rivalistic build-up.” For Girard, the figure of Satan utilizes as a principle, a cycle that leads to the death of innocent people, specifically what is termed the “single victim mechanism.”<sup>22</sup> Girard holds that Satan paradoxically acts as a principle of both disorder and order within a community.<sup>23</sup> In terms of disorder, Satan sparks and incites mimetic cycles that lead to violence, whereas, in terms of order, Satan restores order when chaos reaches its pinnacle within a community. Girard is clear on the ontological status of Satan’s existence, as he states: “He is totally mimetic, which amounts to saying nonexistence as an individual self.”<sup>24</sup> He also states that:

Christianity does not oblige us to see him as someone who really exists. The interpretation that assimilates Satan to rivalistic contagion and its consequences enables us for the first time to acknowledge the importance of the prince of this world without also endowing him with personal being. Traditional theology has rightly refused to do the latter.<sup>25</sup>

In other words, Girard not only denies Satan’s existence but suggests that traditional theology has as well. I am not convinced this is the case. It appears Girard may be referring an Augustinian interpretation of evil where evil is seen as a privation of the good, likewise Satan could be viewed as an ontological privation of ultimate goodness. This however would lead to some bizarre sort of ontological dualism, but it is unclear precisely what Girard means. Be that as it may, Girard’s views certainly have interesting consequences when applied to

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<sup>22</sup> Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 35.

<sup>23</sup> Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 45.

Anselm methodology and understanding of Satan's will and responsibility in *DCD*.

## **AN IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF *DE CASU DIABOLI* (DCD)**

### ***Purpose***

The purpose of analyzing *DCD* is to understand the logic behind it. Throughout the remaining sections of this paper, I will focus on very specific aspects which I believe are the most significant to understand the philosophy and theology present within *DCD*. The sequencing of the main themes is also relevant to gradually grasp the logic behind Anselm's argumentation in its totality. Anselm's work is one of the first rational discourses on Satan and the origin of evil. As will be demonstrated, it reveals more about the philosophical rationale for God's nature and human free will. It marks a unique and innovative period of thought in the history of what can be branded as "demonology."

### ***Preamble***

Eadmer, a contemporary and biographer of Anselm and his works, lists Anselm's three works in the following order without providing dates of their production: *Concerning Truth* (*De Veritate*), *On Freedom of Choice* (*De Libertate Arbitrii*) and *DCD* last – the precise dates are unknown to the works, although rough estimates have been proposed.<sup>26</sup> Anselm in the preface to the three works suggests that they are all related in content and style. Moreover, Anselm recommends that they be read together.<sup>27</sup> All three treatises are composed in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and student where the student poses a question involving an objection of sorts and then the teacher replies with an answer. These dialogues which involve

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<sup>26</sup> Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 11.

<sup>27</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Three Philosophical Dialogues: On Truth, On Freedom of Choice, and On the Fall of the Devil*, trans. Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2002), page 2 of preface written by Anselm.

a presentation of classical problems in theology and philosophy, function as an excellent pedagogical tool for analyzing some of the best medieval Christian philosophy and theology up until Saint Thomas Aquinas.

It is also vital to note that *DCD* operates well as a thought experiment for the concept of finite free will.<sup>28</sup> This is true whether or not Satan and/or demons exist, even though Anselm did believe in such beings, the book functions well in such a way. The problem with respect to human will is that it possesses an entrenched existence in the material world, which presents a host of difficulties for the analysis including things like food intake, physical and mental ailments, disabilities, differing mental and physical capacities, differing life circumstances, reproduction and material desires which all profoundly complicate such an analysis. Moreover, human beings with respect to the Christian doctrine of the Fall are broken down and imperfect and are in dire need of repair and reconciliation.<sup>29</sup> God's reparatory work involves grace and the action of human free will which is a horribly complex relationship. However, within the angelic realm this question of grace never arises since they were in perfect condition when they made their decision to be with God.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, there exists a high level of simplicity within the angelic realm because angels exist in a transcendent reality beyond the complexities of the material world, so much so, that an analysis of finite free will, can be carried forth with much more ease. Yet, there is a caveat, i.e., that it is not fully applicable to finite human free will. It nonetheless, can be a heuristically fruitful thought experiment to think deeply on finite free will.

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<sup>28</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, *Truth, Freedom, and Evil: Three Philosophical Dialogues*, ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 45.

<sup>29</sup> St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Three Philosophical Dialogues: On Truth, On Freedom of Choice, and On the Fall of the Devil* Trans. With notes Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2002), x.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, *Three Philosophical Dialogues*, x.

### ***Relevant Terms***

First, it is interesting to note the prominence of certain relevant terms throughout *DCD* (excluding chapter titles). The term devil is mentioned 21 times, while the term Satan is mentioned 10 times and the term evil angel figures 30 times. Moreover, there is no mention of demons. Satan (the devil) is examined as a singular evil character in Anselm's work.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, the term God occurs 142 times and Son of God twice. The term good angel occurs 28 times, which is proximate to the mentioning of the evil angel. So, despite the title of the book, the content of the book is clearly God centered, even though Satan's role is important to flush out many of the philosophical and theological themes. This becomes evident, when a simple comparison between the terms associated with the devil and God are carried out – God figures substantially more than twice as many times.

### ***Further Preliminary Thoughts***

If anything, Anselm helped reduce both the role of Satan and the prominence of diabolology in theology – precisely because of his logical methodology in *DCD*.<sup>32</sup> The analysis, in *DCD* with respect to the fall of the devil, is a discussion of the origin and nature of evil. Jeffrey Burton Russell illuminates this by indicating that:

In explaining the Devil's fall, Anselm cut through the old knot that had stuck at the center of the question since the time of Augustine. The conditions that surround an evil are in no way its cause. No preconditions caused Lucifer's fall, none at all. Why did Lucifer sin? For the reason that he willed to. If any condition causing a free-

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<sup>31</sup> This is indicative of the medieval period and its fixation on the singular character of evil over that of his subordinates. To explain much of Satan would be to explain much of the origin and nature of evil.

<sup>32</sup> Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, 131.

will choice existed, the choice would not be entirely free. Free will is not a mere appearance; it is not compelled; it is not caused; it is really, truly and absolutely free.<sup>33</sup>

Anselm relies on tradition and Scripture for his understanding of the evil angel's fall – this is presupposed within *DCD*.<sup>34</sup> It will be of great aid to keep all of this in mind as I develop what I see to be the most vital elements to Anselm's argument. I will enumerate some of the main ones that will be examined. These concepts include God as the source of being and goodness, God as the source of possibility to be, the distinction between necessary and contingent beings, the meaning of "nothing and "evil," giving and receiving uprightness, Satan's responsibility in sinning, and Satan's desire in being God.<sup>35</sup>

Before proceeding to these key elements, it is worth mentioning the relevant biblical passages that Anselm utilizes. The use of scripture for Anselm's argumentation in *DCD* is quite important. Anselm utilizes biblical passages either through alluding to them or quoting them in order to ground his philosophical and theological argumentation in biblical truth. The relevant passages Anselm refers to include 1 Corinthians

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<sup>33</sup> Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, 132.

<sup>34</sup> One cannot help but wonder if the Book of Enoch indirectly played a role in influencing Anselm's views on fallen angels. Although the Book of Enoch was not directly accessible to medieval scholars, remnants of it through the writings of early church fathers, were available.

<sup>35</sup> The titles of the significant elements (used as section headings for this part of the paper), for the most part, are taken from the editor's introduction of Jasper Hopkins & Herbert Richardson's edited and translated version of Anselm of Canterbury's *Truth, Freedom, and Evil: Three Philosophical Dialogues*. Moreover, some of the notions with respect to the titles aforementioned, that are considered in their introduction are utilized and further explored within this paper. Much of this section is a re-working and/or elaboration of this introduction by Hopkins and Richardson.

4:7, John 8:44 and Genesis 3:5 since they all deal with an aspect of Satan or the devil, directly or even indirectly.

### ***God as the Source of Being and Goodness***

Anselm begins the first chapter of *DCD* with a biblical question taken from 1 Corinthians 4:7 – “What do you have that you have not received?” This gets at the heart of God as the source of being and goodness. Anselm iterates that creatures and everything that exist, receive everything that they possess ultimately from God. So, that all creatures (including humans and angels) that exist, receive their entire being and goodness from God, where God is the greatest conceivable being. Therefore, God is the Highest being who is the cause of all beings and is the Highest good and the cause of all goodness. This question, according to Anselm is addressed to all but for the purpose of his study, the focus will be on angels and angelic freedom. Modern biblical scholars may scoff at framing Paul’s question in such a way, suggesting that Paul is not addressing the question to angels and just to a particular set of human beings, i.e., first-century Christians in the new church at Corinth in the context of being humble about their received spiritual gifts.<sup>36</sup> Regardless for whom the question was written, it stimulates major philosophical and theological questions around creaturely freedom and responsibility. What is crucial to realize is that the angelic realm functions as a fruitful thought experiment because many of the complexities of the material world are removed when speaking of freedom of the will. Moreover, humans have freedom in certain ways that may not affect their salvation directly, such as deciding what to eat, at a certain meal. The only thing we know with respect to Anselm’s study is that some angels fell, and others did not.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the choice they made affects their eternal destiny.<sup>38</sup> This

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<sup>36</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, viii.

<sup>37</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, x.

<sup>38</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, x.

makes the study vital and even dramatic but at least lucid and comprehensible.

The student in the dialogue, in the first chapter, raises an important objection that begins to set the ball rolling for the work's major argumentation concerning evil. The student suggests that God is also the cause of all non-being. By suggesting this, one can then ascribe evil to God, as being the cause and creator of evil. This argument is rather significant to Anselm's philosophy and theology. Anselm wants to demonstrate that evil has no ontological standing, i.e., that it is a privation of goodness, not an actual thing in and of itself. This will be discussed in more explicit detail below. Anselm replies to the student by explaining two distinct meanings of the word "cause." Anselm here explains that something can be caused to be, and something can be caused not to be. He also makes a distinction between someone who *could* cause something not to be but does not and someone who *could* cause something to be but does not. God, at times, is said to be the cause of the non-existence of things, either by bringing them out of existence or by not creating them. What Anselm considers an improper use of the word cause is that of the second sense, that of causing the non-existence of something by not creating it or by not preventing something from occurring. He also suggests that cause in this particular sense has nothing really to do with action but inaction, namely that of not doing a particular thing, thus such a thing cannot be accurately deemed as acting, causing or doing something. For example, Anselm alludes to our Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4 – that of "lead us not into temptation" when he states, "It is in this way that God is said to do many things that he does not do, as when he is said to lead us into temptation because he does not spare us from temptation even though he could" (*DCD*, Ch. 1). If anything within this context, it is not that God is performing the action or that God is directly responsible for causing one to be lead into temptation, but rather God is deemed responsible for not doing a particular thing, namely, not leading one into temptation. So, there is an indirect responsibility ascribed to

God. In an attempt to demonstrate that God does not cause things into a state of non-being when God stops causing them to exist, he argues that the original state of non-being was not something God had caused, it was something that came from the particular thing itself and not from God. This is evident when Anselm states: “He is not the cause of its not being; but by His reclaiming what he had bestowed, then that thing which He had made and was keeping in existence returns into not-being. It had this not being before it was made, and hence had it from itself and not from Him” (DCD, Ch.1). However, it is unclear how a particular thing would possess a property of non-being from itself; if it has non-being it effectively possesses and is nothing, but the difficulty encompasses envisioning how one can possess nothing since it is not a thing to be possessed. Moreover, it is hard to conceive, since we never witness such a thing, one can witness particular things change states but not the composition of a particular object completely ceasing to exist.

### ***God as Being the Source of the Possibility to Be***

Through continuing this logic of God being the cause of all existence, God would also be the cause of all possibility to be. Moreover, if God does not cause non-being then also the possibility of not being cannot be derived from God as well. The words “possibility” and “ability” through the translation of the Latin word “potestas” are both used.<sup>39</sup> For Anselm, essentially, there exist four modes for possibility<sup>40</sup>: (1) possible to be, (2) possible not to be, (3) not possible to be and (4) not possible not to be. (1) and (2) “exist” contingently while (3) and (4) “exist” necessarily.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, (1) and (4) represent a sort of being while (2) and (3) represent a sort of not-being.

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<sup>39</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 49.

<sup>40</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 49.

<sup>41</sup> Note that possibilities whether of being or non-being, and not possible to be, are not actualized state of affairs and so do not actually exist.

In chapter 12 of *DCD*, Anselm continues his argument from God being the source of being and goodness, to God being the source of the possibility to be. Here Anselm is referring to “ability to be.” He really wants to make sure that the world “possessed” no ability to exist before it actually existed. So, as the “teacher” states in response to the “student”: “Before there was a world, it was both possible and impossible for it to be. It was impossible for the world, since the world had no ability to be. It was impossible for the world, since the world had no ability to be; but it was possible for God, since it was in God’s power to make the world be. Therefore, the world exists because God had the ability to make a world before there was a world, and not because the world itself possessed an ability to be, before it was” (*DCD*, Ch. 12). Anselm is candid about admitting that there must be a possibility for the world to exist but ascribes this possibility to God, not to the world itself. So, it is possible for God to make the world before the world existed since he has the ability to create it but impossible for the world itself to be before the world existed.

This is a relevant argument when it comes to modern physics since physicists are attempting to ascribe the world with a potentiality to bring itself into existence which leads to all kinds problems and absurdities. Anselm’s argument functions as an argument against metaphysical naturalism. So, essentially all things are causally effete before they exist – nothingness is causally effete unless God brings something from nothingness into being. In other words, God is the only being capable of doing such a thing, through mind without pre-existing matter. Anselm’s conclusion is that no created thing possesses the possibility to be, before it is actually created. The “student” responds to the “teacher” after accepting Anselm’s conclusion because he cannot refute it but suggests that language permits us to say otherwise. Anselm indicates that language may permit us to say many things that have no ontological basis and that there are “improper” uses of language (*DCD*, Ch. 12).

### ***Distinction between Necessary and Contingent Beings***

Quite simply put, Anselm used the distinction between necessity and contingency to separate God from His creation. Some scholars speculate that Anselm's focus on the distinction between necessity and contingency was heavily influenced by the focus on the problem of death as opposed to sin and this directly played an influence in the depiction of the nature of God.<sup>42</sup> Anselm's interpretation of God had the characteristic of necessity, as something that distinguished God from all other things and which was the basis for his famous ontological argument.

### ***The Meaning of "Nothing" and "Evil"***

As you recall, we have already examined Anselm's defence of the position that God causes only being and not non-being. So, God is not the direct cause of non-being or the ability for a thing not to be. Anselm held to the Augustinian view that evil was a privation or corruption of a good, not a thing in and of itself. By holding the view, he had of God and causation, this allowed him to absolve God as it were from being implicated in the causation of evil.

In chapter 10 and 11, the student is not satisfied with such definitions and objects to evil signifying nothing and attempts to argue that it is an actual thing. Essentially, what Anselm was trying to resolve here were ancient dilemmas that were portrayed in both Parmenides' poem and Plato's *Sophist*.<sup>43</sup> Inherent to Parmenides' poem was this notion that to deny the existence of a particular thing, involved a contradiction, so one cannot talk logically about non-being. Then Plato in his *Sophist* moved away from the idea that such contradictions exist, by suggesting that there are just different set of affairs – this allowed him to suggest that negative statements did not refer to

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<sup>42</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 55

non-being.<sup>44</sup> This is tied into Plato's notions of Forms, negation is but just one Form among the multiplicity that could exist, so it is not an indicator of non-being just a different kind of being. Within *DCD* we witness Anselm, alluding to these ancient difficulties in the voice of the student and shrewdly providing a two-pronged response. First, the word "nothing" means both nothing and something but in different contexts. Second, there is a thing which is both something and nothing. He states: "For it is not necessary that nothing be something simply because its name somehow signifies something; rather, nothing must be nothing, because the word 'nothing' signifies something only in the sense we've mentioned" (*DCD*, Ch.11). So, the word nothing is only something in terms of its signification. In other words, what is properly meant by nothing - that nothing is actually not-something but of course this "not-something" signifies something even if it is indicating the absence of whatever is something.

Anselm provides the example of blindness or non-vision, explaining that blindness is not actually a thing but the lack or absence of something as he states, "Therefore, blindness is not something in the eye, just because there ought to be vision in the eye, any more than non-vision or the absence of vision is something in a stone, where there ought not to be vision" (*DCD*, Ch.11). In the same sense, he refers to both "nothing" and "evil."

Hopkins and Richardson, put it succinctly in terms of what Anselm accomplishes with his delineations of "nothing" and "evil", when they state: "The importance of Anselm's line of thinking lies in its awareness that "nothing" is a peculiar semantical operator, whose meaning does not depend upon a unique referring relationship."<sup>45</sup> So, in essence, "nothing" is an actual functional name, the bizarre thing is, it does not really obtain any real meaning from what it is naming, since such a

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<sup>44</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 56

<sup>45</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 58.

thing does not exist. Even to this day, the concept of “nothing” and the word nothing require much more clarity. The sort of clarity that a thinker like Anselm brought forth in his day, is completely lost among modern physicists. The word “nothing” has been abused, particularly in modern big bang cosmology and has essentially come to mean a particular thing such as a quantum fluctuation or a virtual particle, as opposed to “not-something” or “not-anything.” Modern physicists could use the aid of some philosophical reasoning to sort out these confusions and/or language abuses, that is, of course assuming that philosophy is not dead as boldly declared by some.<sup>46</sup> I believe the key to Anselm’s thought regarding “nothing” and “evil” is with respect to the very simple insight that language and expression do not necessarily correspond to how things are in reality (*DCD*, Ch. 11).

Another important point regarding the ontological status of evil is related to what one fears or dreads about evil, if it is not anything. The student wonders what causes injustices, such that evil causes robbery. Anselm brings precision on to what he believes it is that one fears or dreads concerning evil. He believes the answer lies in the fact that certain disadvantages proceed from certain evils, even though the evil or injustice itself is not anything. He illustrates this through an example, by indicating that blindness is not a thing but if sight was in place within an individual they would not fall into a pit and suffer the consequential bodily pain that comes along with falling into a pit (*DCD*, Ch. 26).

### ***Giving and Receiving Uprightness***

At the beginning of chapter 2, the student elucidates his objection by suggesting that the good angels persevered because God had given them perseverance but that the evil angel, that is Satan, never persevered because he never received

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<sup>46</sup> This is meant to be a jab at Hawking and Mlodinow’s bold declaration, see Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 5.

it, so Satan would not be responsible or blameworthy for his decision. In the student's objection there is a quote taken from John 8:44: "did not remain steadfast in truth" which is a reference to Satan and his lies. Moreover, it refers to Jesus' words concerning those who do not follow Him and prefer to follow Satan and oppose the will of God, this touches upon human freedom and persons opposition to God, much in the same way Satan chose to oppose God, as is presupposed in *DCD*. The fact that Satan did sin, alludes to the notion that there is something inadequate within God and his ability to create a being that can receive uprightness.

Anselm is starkly opposed to any position that wants to deem God as inadequate or his Creation as inadequate, especially in suggesting that He created imperfectly. Anselm points out that God did not cause or create Satan with any imperfections, in either his will or his perseverance of uprightness. This is true according to Anselm because God gave Satan the ability to persevere in uprightness while also offering him the gift of perseverance – yet the key is that Satan refused such a gift. The other important point that Anselm makes, is that Satan chose evil not because of any deficiency in his will but because he perceived and preferred another good, as opposed to the one God had given him. Given this line of thought, as Anselm presents it, one can see God as offering a gift to Satan, i.e., persevering in uprightness with Satan not lacking anything since God gave him an originally perfect nature. So, in this sense we can say that Satan is blameworthy and responsible for his action of not persevering in uprightness, since he was given the perfect ability to do so. Anselm therefore absolves God through this line of logic. Anselm essentially points out that the student commits a basic fallacy. The student believes that if person A receives a particular thing then person B gave it but wrongfully believes that if person A did not receive a particular thing then person B did not give it, such logic can only operate assuming that if person B did not give the particular thing then person A did not receive it (*DCD*, Ch.3). Anselm demonstrates that God may have given perseverance, but Satan did not

receive because of his refusal. It is important to realize that Anselm's view of "not-receiving" is not caused by the "not-giving" a particular thing, as he states: "even if giving were always the cause of receiving, not giving would not always be the cause of not receiving." (DCD, Ch. 3)

### ***Satan's Responsibility in Sinning***

Anselm argues that the cause of Satan's sin, lies in his will to desert uprightness, not in his unwillingness to uphold it. So, it is anything but imperfection that caused Satan to sin. It is because of his willingness to rebel as opposed to a weakness of the will. In support of this argument, Anselm, provides, the example of a miser who is willing to give up money to receive bread, but he does this before he is unwilling to keep the money (DCD, Ch. 3).

Hopkins and Richardson suggest, that the only way we could:

know this [is] if we could actually specify what it was that Satan preferred to the uprightness of the will he received. So, the student challenges Anselm to show what the analogue to the miser's bread is in the case of Satan's fall, 'Show me what Satan willed to have that he didn't have ... Then, if nothing can contradict it, I will agree that it is true.'<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless, it is thought-provoking to ponder how Anselm argues that the responsibility of sinning is put fully on Satan's shoulders, in the sense that he is the own cause and effect of his will that led him to sin: "Only because he willed [it]. For this willing had no other cause (*causa*) by which in any respect to be driven or drawn; rather, it was an efficient cause of itself—if this can be said—and its own effect." Through purely his own volition which was uncaused by anything else, other than his own will, Satan becomes responsible for his own decision to

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<sup>47</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 63.

desert perseverance in uprightness and willing what he ought to not have willed. In this sense, Satan becomes blameworthy for his decision and the good angels are praiseworthy for not following such a sinful path.

### ***Satan's Will to be God***

Anselm must now explain what Satan chose over maintaining uprightness that he received from God upon his creation. Anselm argues whatever it was that Satan must have preferred over maintaining uprightness, must have been good since Satan would have not chosen a thing that was not-a-good to the good of justice. Yet, it is possible that Satan chose an alternative good, to the good of justice, as Anselm remarks at the end of chapter 12.

Happiness that is desired by rational beings involves attaining good and things that benefit one. According to Anselm, Satan could not have sinned by desiring or willing the good of justice, it must have been something else, since willing justice cannot entail sinning (*DCD*, Ch. 4). The thing that Satan willed may have increased his happiness even though he did not possess and was not supposed to possess it (*DCD*, Ch. 4)

What is it that Satan willed? It is something that could make him happy to will but it was willed unjustly, that made it a sin. Anselm must demonstrate in a convincing manner that the cause of Satan's sin is based on his "willingness to desert" as opposed to his "unwillingness to keep" in terms of his perseverance of uprightness. The dilemma lies in figuring out precisely what it was that Satan preferred. Anselm further indicates that Satan chose something that was not just, but still advantageous since he went beyond the confines of what is entailed within justice.

Anselm derives his argument from both reason and revelation as found in the scriptures of the Old Testament. The response from scripture is that of electing to be "like God." It is precisely

here that Anselm makes reference to Genesis 3:5, where the serpent said to Eve, “You will be like the gods, knowing good and evil.” Through utilizing scripture, Anselm invents an *a priori argument* in order to demonstrate that the original sin was that of wanting to be “like God.”<sup>48</sup> What was carried forth by Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis is applied to Satan and his fall. In order for the argument to function, it is not necessary to presuppose that Anselm equated the serpent with Satan or that Satan was attempting to make humanity fall by the same sin that made him fall beforehand. Rather, Anselm indicated that original sin is for both humans and angels. But is such an argument sound? Does Anselm have any warrant or justification for making such a move? Anselm needs to be very specific in what this original sin really entails.

The student immediately objects to such a move by stating that: “If God cannot be conceived except as a unique being, so that nothing else can be conceived to be like Him, how was Satan able to will what he could not conceive? He was not so obtuse that he thought something else could be conceived to be like God” (*DCD*, Ch. 4). It is evident that the student is alluding to Anselm’s ontological argument, which was formulated roughly 10 years prior in *Proslogion*, for the sake of contradicting Anselm’s view that Satan willed to be like God.<sup>49</sup>

In an attempt to save his argument, Anselm provides two distinct definitions of the term “like God.” Anselm suggests that perhaps Satan did not necessarily will to be “like God” as the object of his action but willed to be something less than God. Then Anselm suggests that what Satan willed, was something that was contrary to God’s will. And as long as this object of his will was not something that God willed for him, he willed to be “like God.” This is important to Anselm, since God is the only one that can “will something by his own will and to obey no higher will” (*DCD*, Ch. 4). Then in the following statement,

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<sup>48</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 64.

<sup>49</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 64.

Anselm indicates that in fact Satan did not want to be equal to God but wanted to be even greater than God, this was done by placing “his own will above God’s will by willing what God didn’t want him to will.” (*DCD*, Ch. 4). The distinction is between willing to be like God and willing what one wants to will, while running contrary to God’s will. It could be that Satan did not will to be like God as the object of his willing, but willed to be like God in the way or fashion of his willing. The problem lies in Anselm’s lack of specification as to precisely what this good was that Satan wanted, that became the object of his evil willing.

Anselm’s argument may have worked if he identified Satan’s sin and the object of his evil choice with that of being “like God”. Yet, instead, he offers another meaning of “like God” equating it to the manner of Satan’s will – this move complicates the matter because there is no precision as to exactly what Satan willed. It is just a vague argument about the method and content of what Satan willed. This is where the argument is said to have suffered because Anselm has not convincingly demonstrated with certainty that God did not cause, Satan to have an imperfect will.<sup>50</sup>

Let us briefly consider some of Girard’s thoughts in relation to Anselm’s thought experiment on Satan’s will to be God. There is an interesting congruence between Anselm and Girard in terms of the actual *object* of Satan’s desire. Regardless of whether Girard views Satan as a process of violence symbolized as a figure of evil, over a personal being – the following notions may be of applicable interest.

If one were to refer to the work of Anselm and Aquinas for instance, in terms of Satan’s will before his fall, a series of question revolving around Girard’s mimesis theory arises. Girard in reference to John 8:42-44, suggests that Jesus speaks of desire by imitation, that either one imitates God’s or the

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<sup>50</sup> Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 65.

devil's desires. According to Girard's view, then how would we describe mimetic desire to Satan with respect to his 'original' sin since ultimately Satan did not mimic God's will or desires but went against them. He desired to be equal to God but there is in essence no mimetic rivalry to be and since God is the greatest being by His own very nature and is not in competition with anyone, yet Satan is cast out because of desiring something that is not proper to him. Does this support or contradict Girard's mimetic theory? Since ultimately what should have been mimicked, was God's will and desires but it was not. He's willing to be like God but not willing of his father's desire? Does Satan function as an ultimate scapegoat for humanity – as an ultimate single victim mechanism? Moreover, can one argue that Satan's expulsion from heaven is an example of the single victim mechanism, in order to maintain order in the heavenly court amongst the other angels? Or was Satan's fall an example of a self-expulsion since it was done through his own volition?

## **CONCLUDING REFLECTION**

The evolution of the conception of Satan, the devil and demons throughout history is indeed a complex issue. Different societies with different cultural backgrounds have had divergent views. We observed the shift from the pre-monotheistic period's understanding of demons to be multiple and associated with natural phenomena associated with what we could come to understand as natural evil or natural forces which can cause pain and suffering. We also witnessed shifts from these false gods or demi gods in the monolatrist period (pre-monotheistic) to relegating them as demonic figures. The monotheistic period saw demons or prototypic satanic figures become more personalized. The authors from the period of the New Testament and forward have had a number of distinct approaches to tackle diverse issues regarding these demonic figures. From the New Testament forward we witnessed what I will call a ultra-hyper personalized form of not only demons but in particular of a demon-figure head such as Satan or "the

devil.” The shift is intriguing. We shift from impersonal forces, to false gods to ultra-hyper personalized multiple and, but also singular demonic figures, such as how Christianity has come to understand Satan. The more our understanding of God becomes personalized, so does our understanding of the demonic. I am not sure of the precise connection between the two, but it would be worth further investigation. Interestingly, we also examined Girard’s insights on the figure of Satan who in his estimation has no ontological status but has a useful anthropological and societal function. In *DCD*, we get a glimpse at one of the first rational and rigorous philosophical discourses on Satan and the origin of evil. It actually reveals much more about God and our human nature. It provides fruitful insights into the nature of human free will and responsibility, in a valuable pedagogical form. Curiously, Girard’s work had some unexpected interrelationships with Anselm’s profound insights.

Nonetheless, some questions remain open after such an analysis. The philosophical question of the actual existence of a being such as Satan, in the context of Christianity, would be something worthy of rational investigation but beyond the purview of this paper. This of course, must be done after such a proposed being is clearly and precisely defined, otherwise the endeavour will not be fruitful.<sup>51</sup> How can we propose to understand such entities without even tackling the metaphysical issue regarding their existence?<sup>52</sup> In *DCD*, like in

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<sup>51</sup> For an interesting article which proposes an ontological argument for the devil, see David Haight and Marjorie Haight, “An Ontological Argument for the Devil,” *The Monist* 54 (1970): 218-220. The argument is meant to be a counter argument to Anselm’s ontological argument, but the argument fails unless one assumes a metaphysical dualism where the devil is equal to God but with the attribute of omni-malevolence. The article is an attempt to undermine the notion that God must necessarily be good.

<sup>52</sup> Another issue, although not directly related to this study, worthy of consideration, is cruelty and torture and how that corresponds to Satan/demons and their relationship with humanity. It would be interesting to also look at how sometimes murderers have claimed to have been used by demons/Satan as instruments/pawns to carry out such acts of cruelty and torture. Whereas, in contrast, some murderers have justified their actions in the name of God for other reasons.

many of the other periods regarding thought around demonology, we learn much about human nature, as we examine the evolving conceptualization of demons and Satan.

Throughout different portions of *DCD*, Anselm makes use of certain passages of Scripture to justify his arguments. 1 Corinthians 4:7 is a reference made about angels in general which would encompass Satan under Anselm's view. John 8:44, makes reference to the devil and Genesis 3:5 to the ancient serpent which certain interpretations have equated with the devil (particularly medieval ones). We can witness that Anselm's utilization of Scripture in terms of referring to Satan or the devil has been heavily influenced by the traditional views of the medieval period. This has been presupposed within the text itself. Thus, the fallen angel myth is presupposed within the text.<sup>53</sup> His traditional conception of Satan, came to influence his view of scripture and his utilization of such in *DCD* – particularly as we witness him develop an *a priori* argument of Satan's original sin from having the desire to be "like God." Yet, one is left a bit frazzled as to why there is not an emphasis on Scripture, particularly passages concerning Satan or the devil, since as Anselm himself mentions in the preface to all three dialogues that they are treatise on Holy Scripture. What is it that Anselm has in mind when he says this? It is definitely not how we understand biblical exegesis in our time period.

Nonetheless, as has been demonstrated through this analysis of Anselm's text, we can see that Anselm does well in resolving the ancient dilemma that the conditions of evil were its cause. And that it was all done through Satan's own free volition. So, it is a simple resolution, the reason Satan sinned was because he willed to do so, by wanting to be "like God" not because of any antecedent causes as previously believed. Despite this apparent disentanglement of an old dilemma, Anselm remains with other problems. Although Anselm makes some clever

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<sup>53</sup> The relationship of Anselm's views on Satan's fall was explored above with respect to the potential correlation with that of the book of Enoch.

arguments to remove God's direct responsibility from Satan's fall, perhaps what God had provided Satan, was insufficient to prevent him from falling. The problem still remains with God's indirect involvement in the causation of evil because of its inevitability. This brings us back to Girard's "single victim mechanism" or "scapegoat." Was it a necessary part of God's plan? A determinist view of existence would argue so. Nevertheless, what is interesting is Anselm's reasoning behind God's permission of Satan carrying forth his evil deed. If one wants to hold God accountable for Satan's will to sin, it must be done by understanding God's granting power, through His permission of allowing the possibility of Satan's will to sin and its actual occurrence. Yet, in no way shape or form is God approving of Satan's choice to sin nor is God effecting or influencing its occurrence.

One may wonder why there was a strong emphasis on God, in our section on *DCD*. After all, this paper is intended to be an exploration of Satan and demons. Well, it would be very difficult to understand Satan within *DCD* if one were to detach God's central role since He functions as the source of being, goodness, the possibility to be, a necessarily existent being, distinguished from the contingent world and not being a direct cause of evil. A careful reading of *DCD* shows that even though it deals with the fall of the devil, it is a deep reflection upon the question of finite free will and God's nature. Free will and how it affects Satan's decision to persevere and maintain in uprightness or not, says a lot about God in terms of what type of free will he has granted his finite creatures and his involvement in Satan's decision. Dare I say that *DCD* has elements that make it into a sort of prototypic theodicy? In it, Anselm defends particular aspects of the nature of the Christian God, against what he would believe as a Christian medieval philosopher/theologian, to be one of the most unfortunate rebellions and tragedies that occurred throughout the history of God's creation, i.e., the fall of Satan which would in turn lead to the origin of evil. He sought to demonstrate that there is a coherence with God's nature, particularly as a

necessarily existing omniscient being, who is the source of all being and all goodness. The chief preoccupation of Anselm in *DCD* was to demonstrate that evil really has no ontological status and that God is not the source of evil. The study of demons and Satan, whether we acknowledge their ontological status or not, reveals many important insights into our own nature including fears, desires and hope. It is fertile ground for future research. I will conclude with a question to incite further reflection: does *DCD* stand as a coherent text or are there irreconcilable contradictions inherent within the text, such that they undermine Anselm's argumentation and his depiction of God's nature?

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