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Reflections on free will in Anselm's thought

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Synopsis

This research project is dedicated to the study of Anselm's theory of free will, especially to his last treatise, *De concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et gratiae Dei cum libero arbitrio*. This research is part of my PhD project, which is the translation of *De Concordia* and a study about this philosophical and theological work. The aim of this project is to analyze Anselm's main arguments of his compatibilist theory of free will, with special attention on his reasoning in *De Concordia*. Because my doctoral project is ongoing, this is not an exhaustive study. Hence, my commentary on Anselm's theory of will, can be integrated in a more developed work, but I think that through this study I will present some major ideas that summarize the fundamental points of Anselm's arguments.

I have conceived this work in four chapters. In each chapter I try to investigate how Anselm arrived to his arguments in *De Concordia*. The first chapter is devoted to some historical contextualization; in other words, I talk about the ideas of Augustine, Boethius and Eriugena with reference to the free will and I explain those features of their rhetoric which were adapted by Anselm for his own theory. The objective of the first chapter is to give an intelligible view on the influence of previous medieval thinkers on Anselm's philosophy and theology. In the same time, I will highlight the point of departure of Anselm from his predecessors.

In the second chapter of my study I will try to understand the reasons for which *De Concordia* was often neglected by scholars specialized in Anselm's philosophy and to deconstruct their criticism in a way that will allow a new interpretation of Anselm's last treatise. In this chapter my main argument is that some issues regarding Anselm's theory of free will remained unsolved in his previous works and the reason for his final approach on this subject was his desire to emphasize the compatibility between free will and God's foreknowledge and grace. I think that he wanted to complete his ideas from the three dialogues devoted to the issue of free will and to give a more compelling image of how the grace of God do not cancel the merit of human actions and the human responsibility. In this chapter, I also take notice on the change of style and method that were often interpreted by many scholars as a sign of diminution of Anselm's depth and argumentative force. Although I do not consider this change an inconvenient for the rhetoric of *De Concordia*, I rather incline to appreciate the change as a serious search for a new way to express philosophical and theological problems.

In the third chapter I analyze the arguments offered by Anselm in *De Veritate*, *De Libertate Arbitrii* and *De Casu Diaboli*, and I discuss about the development of his theory of free will. We have valid reasons to believe that Anselm first wrote *De Libertate Arbitrii*, but his strongly recommended to read together the three dialogues, starting with *De Veritate*, which has a great importance for his theory of free will because he sets here some terminological distinctions that are functional for his other works, such as *Libertate Arbitrii*, *De Casu Diaboli*, and even *De Concordia*. The discussion about the truth in *De Veritate* is not just from an epistemological viewpoint; the premises of Anselm's assumptions and his conclusions are also metaphysical and ethical. The major aim of his conceptual distinctions made across *De Veritate* was to introduce the notion of "rightness" or "rectitude" (*rectitudo*) which will prove to be essential for the entire theory of free will. In fact, Anselm defines the truth as nothing else but rightness (*rectitudo*). This claim is fundamental for the development of his arguments in *Libertate Arbitrii* because in this treatise Anselm defines the free will through the notion of rightness. Only the person who is keeping rightness for its own sake can really have free will. Hence, we can observe that the concepts of truth, rightness, and free will are interconnected. Furthermore, in *De Casu Diaboli* Anselm analyze why the devil has sinned and how an upright will can be corrupted. I have noticed that the arguments of Anselm in this dialogue are gravitating around two points:

- God is not the source of evil and the only responsible for the fall of the devil is devil himself who was not capable to keep his initial rightness (this argument is analogous for the original sin)
- Humans and angels were created with two wills: one is the will for benefit (*commoditas*) and the other is the will for rightness (*rectitudo*). Even though this two will are not opposite, they are often in conflict because a fallen creature cannot recognize the fact that keeping rightness is the greatest benefit of all.

In this point, I show that Anselm cleverly introduce the concept of "grace" and the major role of this gift from God as a second chance for the human salvation and the problems regarding the free will that are generated from this concept are addressed thoroughly in his last treatise, *De Concordia*. The final chapter of my research is an investigation into the apparently conflict between the free will and predestination, grace, and God's foreknowledge. I have tried here to support the idea that Anselm's theory of will is completed only with this remarkable short work which has been disregarded by many of his commentators. This dense philosophical and theological treatise is pointing out some of the issues that were unaddressed in the dialogues. If

Anselm have struggled to define free will in his previous works, in *De Concordia* he is doing what Augustine was unable to convey: divine grace and human merit are both fundamental in the process of salvation. By doing so, Anselm is still able to justify why God has foreknowledge of all our action and how this foreknowledge and his grace are not in conflict with the free will. Two major ideas are guiding Anselm's argumentative line: first, his refined distinction between two orders of necessity, and second, his updated distinction between the will as instrument, the will as use (the process of willing which is different from the actual will), and the will as inclination (two inclinations that are specific for every human being, i.e. the inclination for benefit or advantage, and the inclination for rightness or justice).

Following with careful attention the Latin text of *De Concordia*, I have assert in this project that the arguments of Anselm regarding his theory of will are not only innovative for that time, but they are also sustainable and still valuable for the present day discussion about free will and determination.