



Truth and Morality in Saint Anselm of Aosta

Verdad y moralidad en san Anselmo de Aosta

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Abstract

This paper aims to recover the notion of truth in the thought of Saint Anselm of Canterbury, one of the foremost theologians and philosophers of the 11th century. Writing within a Neoplatonic-Christian framework, his philosophy intertwines metaphysics, anthropology, and morality in a coherent and organic whole, so that morality ultimately receives its foundations from the metaphysical conception of being. For Anselm, truth is not primarily a property of judgment but resides in being itself: God is the *Summa Veritas*, cause and measure of all ontological, logical, and moral truth. The truth of things consists in their *rectitudo* or conformity with the divine idea that defines them; therefore, the ethical truth of the human being lies in the rectitude of the will, that is, in freely willing what it was created for: justice. This conception has direct implications for philosophical anthropology: the human soul, naturally oriented toward the Supreme Good, is called to align its will with divine truth, and this alignment constitutes the very definition of moral freedom. Far from being a merely negative capacity to choose between good and evil, freedom is understood as the power to preserve rectitude for its own sake. The study conducts a textual and philosophical analysis of Anselm's main works —especially *De Veritate*, the *Monologion*, and the *Proslogion*— in order to show the organic unity between ontology, anthropology, and ethics in his thought. It seeks to demonstrate that Anselm offers an integral understanding

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of truth that transcends mere epistemological concerns and remains highly relevant for contemporary reflection on the metaphysical foundations of morality, the objectivity of ethical norms, and the relationship between being and the good.

Keywords: Saint Anselm, Metaphysics, Ethics, Truth, Rectitudo.

Resumen

Este trabajo busca recuperar la noción de verdad en el pensamiento de san Anselmo de Canterbury, uno de los principales teólogos y filósofos del siglo XI. Desde una perspectiva neoplatónico-cristiana, su filosofía entrelaza metafísica, antropología y moral en un conjunto coherente y orgánico, de tal modo que la moralidad recibe sus fundamentos últimos de la concepción metafísica del ser. Para Anselmo, la verdad no es primariamente una propiedad del juicio, sino que reside en el ser mismo: Dios es la *Summa Veritas*, causa y medida de toda verdad ontológica, lógica y moral. La verdad de las cosas consiste en su *rectitudo* o conformidad con la idea divina que las define; por tanto, la verdad ética del ser humano radica en la rectitud de la voluntad, es decir, en querer libremente aquello para lo que ha sido creado: la justicia. Esta concepción tiene implicaciones directas para la antropología filosófica: el alma humana, naturalmente orientada hacia el Bien Supremo, está llamada a alinear su voluntad con la verdad divina, y dicha alineación constituye la definición misma de la libertad moral. Lejos de ser una mera capacidad negativa para elegir entre el bien y el mal, la libertad se entiende como el poder de conservar la rectitud por ella misma. El estudio realiza un análisis textual y filosófico de las principales obras anselmianas —especialmente el *De Veritate*, el *Monologion* y el *Proslogion*—, con el fin de mostrar la unidad orgánica entre ontología, antropología y ética en su pensamiento. Se pretende demostrar que Anselmo ofrece una comprensión integral de la verdad que trasciende las preocupaciones meramente epistemológicas y sigue siendo sumamente relevante para la reflexión contemporánea sobre los fundamentos metafísicos de la moralidad, la objetividad de las normas éticas y la relación entre el ser y el bien.

Palabras clave: San Anselmo, Metafísica, Ética, Verdad, Rectitudo.

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1. Introduction

The thought of Saint Anselm holds colossal importance, and many consider him the greatest philosopher of the 11th century. He has primarily gone down in the history of philosophy for his proof of the existence of God, presented in the *Proslogion*, often overshadowing the significance of the arguments in the *Monologion*. Anselm's proof of God's existence, later termed the ontological argument by Kant, has garnered both supporters and critics over the course of a thousand years, making it essential to keep it present (Cf. Plantinga, 1965). On the other hand, it should be noted that Saint Anselm closely follows the philosophical stance of Saint Augustine without merely repeating him; rather, the writings of the Aostan mark a development within Augustinianism itself, particularly in the field of morality. He does not deviate from the main principles of Augustinian ethics but rather, through his reflections, expressed with great precision in his works, provides a clear vision of an ethic deeply rooted in the Neoplatonic-Christian perspective of philosophy (Cf. Jackson, 2023, pp. 5–19). The equivalence between *veritas* and *rectitudo*, which Saint Anselm—though not its originator (as Saint Augustine and Saint Gregory the Great had already discussed it)—is one of its most lucid exponents, holds significant relevance in scholastic Christian philosophy (Cf. Schmitz, 1984).

2. Faith and Reason: Ontological Progression

Following the Bishop of Hippo, Saint Anselm asserts that philosophy consists in the rational inquiry into truth, which constitutes the greatest longing of every intelligent creature. This inquiry into truth inevitably leads to God, for, in Anselm's view, God is the Truth, the *Summa Veritas* of *De Veritate*, as will be seen. Truth can be attained through faith, prayer, and reason, and in this sense, Anselm holds a favorable opinion of philosophy. Philosophy, therefore, is

one of the paths that lead to truth. It is common in Saint Anselm's works, especially in the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*, to intersperse prayers to God. Indeed, as he develops his philosophical arguments, he immediately adds a prayer, yet philosophy remains necessary as it allows for a deeper understanding of truth. However, like Saint Augustine, to delve into truth using reason, one must first presuppose faith. Faith is preliminary: when someone professes a creed, this creed enables them to become grounded, to take root in the truth, as it provides a certain certainty, as Saint Augustine himself has stated (Cf. Buganza, 2023, pp. 51–69). This rooting of belief through faith enables the investigative work carried out by philosophy.

Thus, in Saint Anselm, the Augustinian adage *credo ut intelligam, intelligo ut credam* is fulfilled. Belief aids Anselm in understanding, as he explicitly states in the *Proslogion*:

I do not seek, Lord, to penetrate Your depth, for I cannot in any way compare my intelligence to it, but I desire to understand, to some degree, Your truth, which my heart believes and loves. Nor do I seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For I also believe this: that if I did not believe, I would not understand. (Saint Anselm, *Proslogion*, c. 1)

Faith, moreover, serves to provide grounding and certainty for the use of reason: it helps to purify our being. Indeed, faith aids in purifying appetites, in purifying the heart. Faith assists in freeing oneself from concupiscent desires, in particular, which hinder the ability to direct attention toward higher things. It is necessary to first purify the heart with faith (cf. Saint Anselm, *Monologion*, c. 64; cf. Evans, 1989, p. 27); it is necessary to be nourished by revealed truth in order to understand. The fundamental task of reason is to explore and expound the truth in which one believes; indeed, it enables the exposition of what is believed. This exploration is carried out through reason, that is, by employing philosophy. It could not be otherwise, for both faith and reason are gifts from God Himself to humanity. They are two lights with which God has endowed the human creature. Faith is a gift bestowed by God, while reason is a natural endowment through which man engages in his reasoning, yet it is also given by the Creator. For Saint Anselm, the possession of truth through faith is certain,

but it becomes even more certain when confirmed by reason. In this sense, and again following Saint Augustine, Anselm dedicates himself to making intelligible to reason what faith has already embraced (Cf. Mondin, 1998, pp. 300–301).

The two main works where the dialogue between faith and reason is evident, and consequently where Anselmian Christian philosophy is expounded, are the *Monologion* and the *Proslogion*. Both treatises share the same structure, that is, they are divided into three parts. In the first part, they seek to demonstrate the existence of God; in the second, they address the nature and attributes of God; and in the third, they tackle the theme of the Trinity. How does Saint Anselm speak of the Trinity in a philosophical sense? This is not foreign to him, as the Bishop of Canterbury embraces the Neoplatonic vision of philosophy. Neoplatonism speaks of the three Hypostases, such that this hypostatic Trinity has been incorporated into Christian philosophy, which now considers these Hypostases as Persons of the Trinity. Now, he presents proofs of God's existence in the aforementioned works. In the *Monologion*, he argues following the traditional canons of rational theology: he addresses God's existence from the perspectives of His goodness, His perfection, and His being. Observing that what surrounds man consists of limited beings—good to some extent, possessing being to a certain degree, but never fully, always with some trace of limitation—he demonstrates the existence of God by affirming that He is the Supreme Good, the Supreme Perfection, and the Supreme Being, a single entity:

This single entity, therefore, must exist through itself. And since what exists through another is inferior to what exists through itself, the entity that exists through itself is also superior to every other entity (*maxime et summe omnium*). Now, greatness has already been identified with goodness; therefore, the greatest and supreme entity is also the supreme good. (Vanni Rovighi, 1987, p. 29)

He uses the term *quantitate* not in a physical sense, but to indicate quality and perfection, as Augustine does in *De Quantitate Animae*: That God is supremely great means He is supremely perfect. This is evident in any type of perfection, as Saint Anselm attests:

Moreover, if one observes the nature of things, one realizes, whether one likes it or not, that not all things are on the same level of value, but that some of them are distinguished by a difference in degrees. Indeed, who would doubt that a horse is by its nature better than wood, and a man better than a horse, except someone who is undoubtedly unworthy of being called a man? Since it cannot be denied that some natures are better than others, reason likewise persuades us that none of them surpasses it. In fact, if such a distinction of degrees were infinite and there were no higher degree to which a superior one could not be assigned, reason would be led to admit that the multitude of those natures would have no end. [...] Therefore, if the multiple natures of which nothing can be better cannot be such either by their essence or by any other thing, then there can in no way be multiple natures of that kind. Thus, it follows that there is only one nature, so superior to the others that it is inferior to none. But such a thing is the greatest and best of all. There is, therefore, a nature that is the supreme being. Now, it cannot be such unless it is what it is through itself, and unless all other things are what they are through it. Indeed, since reason has taught us that what exists in itself and through which the rest exists is the supreme being—or, conversely, the supreme being exists through itself and all other things exist through it—otherwise, there would be multiple supreme beings. But it is clear that there are not several supreme entities. Therefore, there exists one nature or substance or essence that is good and great through itself and is what it is through itself, and through which everything that exists is truly good, or exists, or is great, or in any case is something; and this nature or essence is the supreme good, the supreme greatness, the supreme being or existent, that is, the highest reality. (*Monologion*, c. 4)

Since degrees are found in reality itself, and one cannot go to infinity in the number of causes or degrees, it is necessary to posit one that is above all. This is an echo of a Neoplatonic type of argumentation with an Aristotelian amalgamation. Indeed, this argument combines two philosophical traditions: the Neoplatonic idea of an ontological hierarchy that culminates in a Supreme One or Good, from which everything else participates or derives; and the Aristotelian principle that one cannot proceed to infinity in the series of causes or degrees

(the rejection of infinite regress), which compels us to stop at a first term. Saint Anselm, thus, argues for the existence of God by considering both traditions. In Chapter Three of the *Monologion*, he states:

Indeed, everything that exists either exists through something or through nothing. But nothing exists through nothing. In fact, it cannot even be thought that something exists except through a reality. Therefore, everything that exists, exists through something. Now, if this is so, is the being through which everything that exists exists one or multiple? If it is multiple, either the many refer to a single being through which they exist, or each exists through itself, or one exists through another. But if the many exist through a single being, then it is no longer true that all things exist through many, but rather they exist through that single being for which they are many. Now, if the many exist each through themselves, then there is a power or nature to exist through themselves, which they must have in order to be themselves; now, there is no doubt that they exist through that one from whom they have the ability to exist through themselves. Therefore, all things exist more truly through that one rather than through the many that could not exist without the one. [...] And just as all things exist thanks to the same single being, certainly this one exists through itself. Hence, all other things exist through another, and the one alone through itself. (*Monologion*, c. 3)

The argument is evidently Neoplatonic; the Aristotelian element lies in the impossibility of going to infinity in the number of causes, as the ancient Neoplatonists themselves do: there must be something that is supremely Good, supremely Great or Perfect, supremely Being. On this last point, it should be emphasized that Saint Anselm has adopted the teaching of the Church Fathers, according to whom God is Being. In Platonism, God is preeminently the Good; for the Church Fathers, although He is also the Good, God is Being. This stance is adopted thanks to Revelation. In the sensitive reality, one has experience with beings that participate in being to a greater or lesser degree. In contrast, God does not participate but is Being fully and purely; He is absolute Being.

In Chapter 3, Saint Anselm begins with a simple but powerful disjunction: everything that exists does so either *through something* or *through nothing*. The second option is impossible, for nothing can come from nothing, and existence cannot be conceived without a cause or ground. Therefore, all things exist through something. He then eliminates the possibility of an infinite or circular chain of dependent beings: if many things existed each through itself, they would still require a common power or nature that enables them to exist *per se* and that power would itself be the true single source. Thus, there must be one supreme being that exists *through itself* (*per se*), while all others exist *through it*. This is the core of the argument: a single, self-existent reality upon which everything else depends. In chapter 4, Saint Anselm shifts from causation to degrees of perfection observable in reality itself. Not all things have the same value or dignity: wood is inferior to a horse, and a horse to a human being. Such gradations cannot ascend infinitely, for then there would be no highest term at all. Reason therefore demands a nature that is superior to all others and inferior to none: the supreme good, the supreme great, and the supreme *being*. This highest nature cannot derive its excellence from anything else; it must possess it *through itself*, and all lesser things must derive their goodness, greatness, and existence from it.

Saint Anselm thus fuses two traditions. The hierarchical ascent toward a Supreme One or Good echoes Neoplatonism (especially as mediated by Augustine). The rejection of infinite regress in causes or degrees reflects the Aristotelian principle that an actual infinity in ordered series is impossible. Yet on the decisive point (that the supreme reality is not merely the highest *Good* but absolute *Being* itself) Saint Anselm follows the Church Fathers. This identification of God with *ipsum esse* (Being itself) has its ultimate root in biblical Revelation, above all in the divine name revealed to Moses (cf. Ex. 3:14). In created things we experience beings that *participate* in existence to varying degrees; God alone is Being fully, purely, and without participation. In short, the two chapters together show that the observable hierarchy and dependence in reality logically require one Supreme, self-existent Being who is the source of all that is good, great, or real. This Being is what Christians call God.

3. The Immortality of the Soul

Regarding the theme of the soul, it is characterized in the manner of Saint Augustine. Its fundamental faculties are memory, intellect, and will, which Anselm also refers to as love. What does the perfection of the soul consist of, or what does it rely upon? It fundamentally consists in the creature directing all its effort, all its power, and all its desire toward understanding and loving the Supreme Good, toward which it is naturally oriented. Human nature is naturally called by God, and what man is called to do is to understand and love God with all his strength. In doing so, man becomes complete, for man is fundamentally his soul. Likewise, Saint Anselm holds that the human soul is immortal, offering two proofs for this. The first is commonly called the argument from love and is found in the *Monologion*:

There is no doubt that the human soul is a rational creature; therefore, it must have been created to love the supreme essence. Hence, it was made either to love it without ceasing or to love it in such a way that it loses this love at some point, either spontaneously or by force. But it is not permissible to think that the supreme wisdom has destined the human soul to despise such a great good at a certain moment or to lose it by force while it wishes to retain it. Thus, by exclusion, it follows that it was created to love the supreme essence without end. Now, it cannot do this unless it lives forever. Therefore, it was made to live forever, provided it always desires to do what it was destined to do. It would be contradictory to the supreme good and supremely wise, omnipotent Creator not to make this creature, which He created to love Him, endure as long as it truly loves Him; or to take away, or allow to be taken away, from a creature that loves Him, that being which He spontaneously gave when it did not yet love, so that it might love forever [...]. Consequently, it is evident that life will never be taken from the human soul if it always seeks to love the higher life. (c. 69)

In summary, if the human soul is called to love God without end, then it must necessarily be immortal if it is naturally oriented toward this purpose. A closer look at Anselm's reasoning in Chapter 69 reveals a clear logical structure. He starts from the undeniable fact that the human soul is a rational creature, and therefore created to love the supreme essence (God).

The soul cannot have been made either to abandon this love voluntarily at some point or to lose it against its will, for both alternatives would be unworthy of the supreme wisdom, goodness, and omnipotence of the Creator. By exclusion, the only fitting purpose is that the soul love God without end. However, loving God eternally is impossible unless the soul itself lives forever. Therefore, the soul must be immortal. Saint Anselm strengthens the conclusion by noting the contradiction it would entail for the supremely good and wise God: it would be incoherent for Him to create a being oriented toward eternal love and then either withdraw its life while it still loves Him or allow it to be taken away. Hence, if the soul perseveres in its natural orientation toward loving God, its life will never be taken from it.

The other argument is called the “retribution” argument (Mondin, 1998, p. 317). More than a purely rational argument, it is one that incorporates elements of revelation, that is, of faith. God is supremely just and powerful and, therefore, must reward or punish those who persevere or fail in love, and He must do so for eternity. Consequently, the soul is immortal. Anselm states in the *Monologion* itself:

Therefore, if the soul that despises the good for which it was created were to die so as to no longer feel anything or no longer be anything, it would be in the same condition when it bears the greatest guilt as when it is without any guilt; and the supremely wise justice would make no distinction between one who can do neither any evil nor any good, and one who desires to do the greatest good or the greatest evil. Now we can see how untenable this is. Therefore, nothing is more logical and more worthy of belief than this: that the human soul is made in such a way that, if it neglects to love the supreme essence, it will face eternal misery. Thus, if it loves, it will enjoy an eternal reward; but if it despises the supreme good, it will suffer an eternal punishment. And just as, in the first case, it will experience an unchangeable satisfaction, so too, in the second case, it will endure an inconsolable deprivation. (c. 71)²

² As Sandford and Gracia note: “Rationality, then, ultimately consists in knowing the proper object of love, which is God Himself, for to love what reason tells us to love is to love God” (2002, p. 89).

If the soul that despises the supreme good for which it was created could simply cease to exist or become insensible after death, then the supremely just and wise God would treat the greatest guilt in exactly the same way as complete innocence. This would be incoherent with divine justice. Therefore, the soul must be immortal so that it can receive either eternal reward for persevering in love or eternal punishment for rejecting it. This argument is not purely philosophical but integrates elements of Christian revelation concerning God's justice and the final destiny of rational creatures. It connects directly with the notions of *veritas* and *rectitudo* that will be examined in the next section: The soul was created with the capacity and obligation to love God, which constitutes its proper *rectitudo*. To love God is to will what is true and right (*veritas*). Eternal life makes possible the definitive fulfillment or definitive failure of this rectitude, allowing divine justice to manifest itself fully in the soul's ultimate state.

4. Truth and Morality in *De Veritate*

The theme of the immortality of the soul is undoubtedly linked to the epistemological and moral argument. With remarkable clarity, Saint Anselm maintains that truth is *rectitudo*³. Starting in *De Veritate* with a logical analysis of truth—that is, analyzing that a proposition is called true when it expresses how things are (*esse quod est*)—the Bishop of Canterbury asserts that this is the same as saying the proposition is right, meaning it possesses *rectitudo*. Truth and rectitude are, therefore, equivalent in this discourse: “Therefore, truth is nothing else but rectitude” (*De Veritate*, c. 13)⁴. However, when one states how things are not (*non esse quod non est*), that statement is also said to be true or right. Saint Anselm assures that, indeed, when this happens, the statement has a “certain truth and rectitude” (*De Veritate*, c. 2). But when one affirms, that is, when one does not negate, there is a “double” (*dupliciter*)

³ Among other things, the Aostan stands out within the framework of Christian philosophy for neatly highlighting the concept of truth as *rectitudo*, even though it is already found in this same tradition, as demonstrated by Dreyer (1997, pp. 67–85).

⁴ Further on, he compares *veritas* and *rectitudo* with genus and species (cf. *De veritate*, c. 13). About this equivalence (cf. Külling, 1984).

truth, meaning that what ought to be (*debet*, as the saint explicitly states) is affirmed doubly: “because it signifies both what it is capable of signifying and that for which it was made” (*De Veritate*, c. 2)—which can be understood, it seems to us, as the cause. It is commonly said that something is true and right due to the latter, that is, due to the cause, which, unlike mere signification on its own, is always present: the proposition is grounded in its cause. To say “daytime” is true and right because it is so, that is, because in fact it is day; when one says “nighttime”, the statement alone is true and right, but it does not indicate the state of the thing, which Saint Anselm asserts translates to not using discourse rightly. But the source of discourse is thought, *cogitatione*; therefore, truth also resides in thought, though in a more germinal way. Hence,

he who thinks how things are, thinks what he ought to, and thus his thought is right. Therefore, if thought is true and right solely because we think how things are or are not, the truth of thought is nothing other than rectitude (*Quapropter qui putat esse quod est, putat quod debet, atque ideo recta est cogitatio. Si ergo vera est et is recta cogitatio non ob aliud quam quia putamus esse quod est, aut non esse quod non est: non est aliud eius veritas quam rectitudo*). (*De Veritate*, c. 3).

Now, if truth resides in thought, and the latter, given the breadth of connotations implied by the Latin term *cogitationes*—which encompasses all acts of man’s higher faculties—there is no contradiction in including the acts of the will therein. Thus, it is understood that there is also truth in the will, and therefore rectitudo. Truth in the will is, in short, rectitude. Hence, since it is said that the devil does not remain in the truth (Jn. 8:44). Saint Anselm explains this with perfect clarity:

As long as he willed what he ought to, that is, that for which he had been given a will, the devil was in rectitude and in truth: the truth in the will can only be understood as rectitude, for both truth and rectitude in his will were nothing other than willing what he ought to (*De Veritate*, c. 4)

From these considerations, metaphysical connections can be drawn in Anselmian philosophy. Indeed, truth consists in the rectitude with which the finite mind aligns itself with

the infinite Mind. All particular things, all particular truths, all adequate concepts have their seat in the divine Mind, so that when man aligns with that Mind, he acquires a “right” mind. Truth is thus understood as the rectitude of the finite mind aligning with the infinite Mind. The rational foundation of truth, therefore, lies in the Mind of God. Saint Anselm declares: “We can define truth as a rectitude that can only be perceived with the spirit” (*De Veritate*, c. 11). Of course, this thesis has anthropological-moral implications. If it is possible, then, to align the mind with the Ideas, Models, and Prototypes of God’s Mind, there is a straight way to act, because, for an action to be good, the moral agent must be guided by truth; consequently, he must be guided by God Himself. In chapter 5 of Anselm’s *De Veritate*, he explicitly addresses the theme of true action, which the theologian from Aosta equates with good action, “It is the common opinion that whoever does what he ought, acts rightly and performs rectitude” (*De Veritate*, c. 5). Indeed, he who does what he ought does good, just as he who thinks what he ought does so with truth: “the truth of action is rectitude” (*De Veritate*, c. 5). But Saint Anselm goes further to reach the core of truth, that is, the rectitude of action, and locates it in the *recta voluntate*, for actions properly stem from it: “For he who wills what he ought is said to act rightly and well” (*De Veritate*, c. 5). For this reason, the devil, whose case prompted these reflections, does not act well, because his will is not right⁵.

Of course, even though the devil does not have a right will and acts wrongly, what he does is still true. Everything that happens is true because it is grounded in the *Summa Veritas*, that is, in God, such that the principle applies: “Therefore, whatever is, truly is” (*De Veritate*, c. 7). However, how can the fact that what actually occurs is true—even in the case of evil actions (*opera mala*)—be reconciled with the idea that such things ought not to be? Does it not involve a contradiction to say that the same thing ought to be and ought not to be? Nothing

⁵ This is the reason why some contemporary commentators of St. Anselm’s work consider that the teleological criterion is contained in the Aostan’s proposal. Indeed, Moya and Rodríguez point out: “In the case of the proposition, because of its referential character (*significatio*), rectitude will exist fully when it performs its proper task, that is, when its description of the content is correct in relation to its object. The Anselmian notion of truth necessarily involves the reason of end, and only by the fulfillment of such an end can we correctly predicate that something is true” (Moya & Rodríguez, 2013, p. 659).

exists unless God causes it to be, ultimately. But if God is absolutely Good, how is it that He causes things to be that are neither wise nor good?

Therefore, the same thing must be and must not be. It must be, because it is permitted with goodness and wisdom by Him without whose permission it could not be, but it must not be with respect to the one who conceives it with an evil will. (*De Veritate*, c. 8)

The same thing is and ought not to be, and it is the subtleties that allow the issue to be resolved. Thus, for example, in heating, both the action of heating and the passion of being heated are involved, even though they are opposites, yet they are united in one. The same action can be judged in opposing ways, namely, as heating and being heated. In the case of a morally evil action, must it be because it factually is, and yet must it not be? In other words, is it right and not right? Without stating it explicitly, Saint Anselm certainly holds that a thing can be right, just, and in accordance with nature from one perspective, but not right, unjust, and against nature from another. What is important to extract from these considerations of the Aostan is that the truth of the essence of things, whose metaphysical foundation is the Mind of God, is the truth that few consider. It is by the truth of this Mind that things must be what they are; but the created mind does not have such sovereign power, that is, it cannot change the essence of things, but rather, in considering them, it either aligns with them or not, as happens with truth, for example, in knowledge, or with rectitude, which, as seen, is linked to truth, but also to volition and action.

The *Summa Veritas* is Rectitude. But it is not so because it owes something; rather, by being such, it is Right in the highest degree. All other things that are right are so because they owe it to Her. Therefore, in terms of truth, Saint Anselm does not hesitate to say: “The truth that is in the existence of things is the effect of the Supreme Truth” (*De Veritate*, c. 10). The truth or rectitude of a thing is owed to the Supreme Truth, to the Mind of God, while the thing itself “is the cause of the truth of thought” (*De Veritate*, c. 10), understanding *cogitatio* in the broadest possible connotation, encompassing the higher operations of man: without hesitation, the thought produced by the finite mind is not the cause of further truths from this

perspective; it does not create knowledge or the rectitude of volition, but rather the intellect and will receive truth and rectitude from outside. Thus, we return to the definition of truth as *rectitudo* perceived only by the mind, for even though it can be said, for example, that it is true that the stick is brown because the eyes see it, the truth of “brown” is conceived only by the mind that distinguishes it from what is not so. This highlights that the finite mind requires the infinite Mind, for in metaphysical terms, the former does not give itself being.

With these preliminaries, the moral dimension is fully understood: justice is linked to rectitude and, consequently, to truth (Cf. Pouchet, 1964). One might even assert a certain equivalence. Indeed, since truth, and therefore rectitude, are conceived through the mind, justice is also conceived there. Perhaps truth is the simplest path to achieving justice; in other words, metaphysics is the path that leads to morality. During the Anselmian dialogue, the misconception that might surround the activity of any non-intelligent being that does what it ought to do is clarified: the rock that falls to the ground does what it ought; the horse that grazes does likewise, etc. But in them, there cannot properly be justice because there is no mind. For justice to exist, a mind is required, as it is a necessary condition for morality to emerge. And morality necessarily implies that the agent can act contrary to what he ought to do, which does not happen with the rock or the horse, which do what they ought but do not do so out of rectitude or virtue. For there to be rectitude and justice, there must be truth, as has been stated, since they are equivalent; and truth exists only in the mind, that is, in knowledge; consequently, justice requires the mind. Therefore, only in an intelligent creature can justice, the virtue par excellence, exist. In other words, justice can only be exercised by the finite mind, but through which faculty primarily? It might seem to be through the intellect, but, like many Christian philosophers, Saint Anselm clearly states that it is exercised through the will:

And if one understands rightly or acts rightly, but does not will rightly, can he be praised for his justice? D.: – No. M.: – Therefore, this justice is not the rectitude of knowledge or action, but the rectitude of the will (*De Veritate*, c. 12)⁶

The subtleties that Anselm employs follow the teaching, made classical by Aristotle, that justice requires knowledge and self-determination; that is, the ignorant or the one who suffers coercion, even if he performs a just act, is not praised for it: only the one who knows and truly wills to be just is praised. Therefore, even if there is knowledge and no trace of coercion, the object toward which the will aims must also be right: this is the case of someone who feeds the hungry for the sake of vainglory. Saint Anselm operates within the framework according to which “Every will has a what and a why” (*De Veritate*, c. 12), that is, it always wills something and there is some reason why it wills. Now, this willing is subordinated to duty, that is, the willing is subject to what ought to be: every will must will what it ought to. This “why”, moreover, responds to a reason: It ought to be willed in this way, precisely because it ought to be, so that his will may be just (cf. *De Veritate*, c. 12)⁷. Indeed, the reason why the will must will is of a moral nature, namely, to be just. From the very moment the will seeks to serve justice, it becomes just itself. In summary, when the will seeks justice for its own sake, then it is just.

This doctrine takes on another nuance when applied to the case of God. Indeed, the will of God is itself rectitude: it is the right will taken in an absolute sense. The divine will does not serve anything other than itself, that is, it does not observe or uphold anything other than itself. Moya and Rodríguez are correct when they explain:

The *summa veritas* does not need to correspond or align with anything, but rather everything owes itself to it as a cause, and therefore, as a finality. The truth of things

⁶ Elsewhere he says: “In man, on the other hand, the will, while upright, is neither a slave nor subject to what it should not be, nor can it be diverted from uprightness by any extraneous force, unless it itself does not willingly consent to what it should not” (*De libertate arbitrii*, c. 5).

⁷ He writes right there: «Iustus namque cum vult quod debet, servat voluntatis rectitudinem non propter aliud, in quantum iustus dicendus est, quam propter ipsam rectitudinem».

is an effect of the *summa veritas*, and all other truth, ultimately, is caused by things.
(2013, p. 661)

In the case of man, his will is not absolute in itself, but rather is subject to something else, namely, justice, in this case, which is the moral good. The created will observes justice, and therein lies its becoming just. The upright heart or the absolute rectitude of man is spoken of in direct reference to the observance of justice, whereas, in the case of God, He is the very measure. To put it differently, while the measure of justice is God Himself, and thus what He wills and does is the most just, in the case of the created will, which certainly includes that of the devil, the measure is not set by the will itself but is received from something else: it is right when it aligns with that measure, ultimately. But this measure, although not strictly an Anselmian term⁸, does fit his doctrine when considering that it transcends the created will; that is, *rectitudo* stands above the will of creatures and is, in this sense, transcendent. Hence he says: “Therefore, there is no right signification except by virtue of that rectitude which remains even when the signification perishes” (*De Veritate*, c. 13). The meaning of the expression “according to the rectitude which always is” (*De Veritate*, c. 13), clearly shows that the created mind, to be in truth and to be right, aligns with something that transcends it (cf. Mazzoli, 2021, pp. 132–133), that is above it, and that has the characteristic of immutability, for it is the Supreme Truth (cf. Rogers, 2022), which depends on nothing but is absolute: “Thus the Supreme Truth, subsisting by itself, is of no thing; but when something is according to it, then it is called the truth or rectitude of that thing” (*De Veritate*, c. 13; in a soteriological perspective, cf. McGrath, 1981). In this way, man can align with God’s designs, with God’s *rationes*, to use Augustinian language. Indeed, justice is understood in these precise terms by the Aostan: “Justice, then, is the rectitude of the will kept for its own sake” (*De Veritate*, c. 12), which can be understood precisely as the alignment of the finite mind with the infinite Mind, the immutable seat of truth or rectitude that is identified with His Supreme Being.

⁸ This *misura* is rather late medieval; it is used, for example, by St. Thomas, in an Aristotelian register (cf. Cavini, 1993, p. 584).

5. Will and Freedom

It is a fact that Saint Anselm acknowledges that the moral good, that is, *iustitia*, lies in conforming one's mind, specifically the volition, to the infinite Mind, that is, to the Supreme Truth. Actions undoubtedly stem from volition itself, as they are its ultimate expression, and consequently, they are said to be true, right, or good by aligning with the truth. In this sense, evil is understood, in the traditional manner, as a *privatio*, a privation of the good, as Saint Augustine comprehended it. It consists in the distorted use of freedom by intelligent creatures (cf. Saint Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 17, 7). On this topic, Saint Anselm dedicates several works, among which *De Casu Diaboli*, *De Libertate Arbitrii*, and *De Concordia Divinae Praescientiae et Praedestinationis et Gratiae Dei cum Libero Arbitrio* stand out. There, he maintains that God is not the cause of evil; the cause of evil is rooted, as Saint Augustine would say, in the use of freedom. God is only the cause of evil insofar as the intelligent creature has received reality, but God does not directly cause evil; rather, the intelligent being, as a free creature, has the possibility to commit sin. God would be a cause only insofar as He enables the consequences, but the condition of possibility is not sufficient for the effect to occur, which depends entirely on the intelligent creature. From a moral standpoint, evil consists in the absence of rectitude, meaning that something is done in a way that God does not want it to be done, that is, when something is done contrary to God's designs or rationes.

This evil is fundamentally expressed in the concept of sin, which undoubtedly derives from the creature that is made to choose, to freely align or not with God's will. Following this same line, freedom, then, consists in the power, the capacity to serve justice: it is "the ability to preserve the rectitude of the will for its own sake" (*De libertate arbitrii*, c. 3); it is the capacity to act rightly by one's own design. Thus, the will weakens, becomes less strong, when it chooses to sin: freedom is exercised to a lesser extent. Indeed, the will wears itself out when it chooses to sin, since the will is naturally oriented toward the good. Anselm states clearly:

No temptation can overcome a right will. If it could, indeed, it would have the power to overcome and would overcome by its own power. But this cannot be, because the will can only be overcome by its own power. Therefore, temptation cannot in any way overcome a right will, and when it is said to overcome it, it is said improperly. (*De libertate arbitrii*, c. 5)

Indeed, it naturally tends toward *rectitudo*, such that the contrary effect or action distorts the right path of the will. Sin, in this sense, is the deviation from rectitude. Thus, the free will that decides or inclines toward sin becomes less free, and this allows for a further affirmation: Since God is never inclined toward evil—that is, His will is in no way inclined toward evil—and although He is absolutely free, He is so because He is always in harmony with Himself, who is the Good. God is the fullest will because He does not sin.

It is worth emphasizing that the will has such strength that, although it often succumbs to temptation, this is not because the latter is stronger than it. On the contrary, whenever the will falls to temptation, it is because it wills to do so. Temptation can indeed be very compelling, giving the impression that it inevitably leads the will to sin. But, as Saint Anselm says, it is more a matter of difficulty than impossibility: “Not from impossibility but from difficulty” (*De libertate arbitrii*, c. 6). The strength of the will remains intact; in fact, it remains so much so that it consents to succumb: it is the will itself that submits itself. In short, it is not impossible to remain steadfast in *rectitudo*, but difficult; and each time the will consents to the allurements of temptation, it habituates itself to them, making the path to liberation increasingly steep.

Of course, Saint Anselm distinguishes different types of will and, consequently, of free will, for the will and free will of God is the force that subsists by itself, while the will and free will of creatures have a different nature. Among the latter, some are permanently adhered to *rectitudo*, while others can occasionally separate from it. Among the angels, there are those who have turned away from the truth, and the same is true among men who have fallen due to original sin. But once intelligent creatures overcome their own trials, they adhere to the truth unbreakably. Man, in this life, can adhere to rectitude, though it is evident that he

can also fail to do so; yet, even so, he can recover it (passing the trial corresponding to each individual, theologically this possibility is canceled) (cf. *De libertate arbitrii*, c. 14). Now, to speak in modern terms, moral freedom is a specification of freedom as such, but it is, in a certain sense, a limitation of the will itself. Saint Augustine has insisted on this topic, but due to the clarity with which Saint Anselm expounds it, it is worth revisiting the Aostan. Indeed, if the will is ordered toward the good, the freedom that allows one to choose between good and evil, between acting rightly or wrongly, is a limitation of the will; therefore, it is found in the condition of fallen man. The will that can sin is less powerful than the will that is fixed on the good, as is the case with God's will. The power to sin is not a power in a positive sense but in a negative one: it is a limitation of freedom itself, not a sign of its greatness, but of its misery, its desolation. In this sense, moral freedom is not the power or capacity to do moral good or evil, but "the capacity to preserve the rectitude of the will for its own sake (*potestas servandi rectitudinem voluntatis propter ipsam rectitudinem*)" (*De libertate arbitrii*, c. 3).

6. Conclusions

The thought of Saint Anselm clearly demonstrates the connections between the various parts of philosophical-theological reflection, that is, between metaphysics, anthropology, and morality. According to his *De Veritate*, among the various seats of truth, practical truth stands out, namely, that which is grounded in the will and action. Indeed, as has been seen, Saint Anselm recovers and proposes a vision of Christian philosophy in which practical truth, justice, undergoes significant development and exerts considerable influence among medieval theologians. It is revealing that, already in the *Monologion*, his stance on truth is clearly stated, in a way calling *foolish* someone who doubts that the nature of a horse is better than that of wood; likewise, it is evident that God surpasses created natures and, consequently, is the *Summa Veritas*, for He is the Supreme Being. In our view, the Augustinian core of Anselm's proposal of truth as *rectitudo* is strengthened by asserting that the finite mind aligns with the infinite Mind. Justice, in which the will plays a central role, has its ultimate seat in the *Summa Veritas*. Now, justice requires knowledge and, as stated, a



will that seeks to act out of duty, that is, that must be just. Thus, the moral will is the capacity of the intelligent creature to remain steadfast in the good, to align with justice, which is not produced by it, but received.

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