

Justifying Atonement: An Anselmian Response to Modern Critics

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*This paper considers three modern objections to Anselm's argument on atonement in book I of *Cur Deus Homo*. The objections are from Friedrich Nietzsche, R. C. Moberly, and Hastings Rashdall; each one makes the case that Anselm's argument is fallacious. Each one interprets Anselm's position as requiring that someone innocent suffer punishment in order to acquit guilt. I contend that these objectors do not offer a strong case against Anselm's argument, principally because they have not examined it completely and have misunderstood his reasoning. In fine, Anselm's case is (a) the Son's obedience to the Father suffices for atonement, (b) the Son is an advocate for Adam and his heirs and stands in for them because of his blood ties to humanity, and (c) the Son is the advocate for the Father in the latter's attempt to end human estrangement from justice. Being both an advocate of the Father and an heir to Adam, the Son's Incarnation itself prepares the way of reconciliation and the life of the upright will resolves estrangement. The fact that the Son suffers pain and death is due not to the Father's will but to our resistance to the justice of the Son's upright will.*

In the paper I provide an outline of Anselm's original argument and attempt to show through analyzing its various parts how Anselm avoids the objections made against him. The basic assumptions that Anselm has about the motivation for redemption—the role of sin and suffering in humanity—and the resolution through love and justice is not alien to the modern critic. Indeed, as I show in the conclusion, Anselm shares these basic assumptions with Rashdall and the latter's commitment to Ideal Utilitarianism.

The doctrine of atonement, as offered by Saint Anselm in *Cur Deus Homo*, appears to have two distinct assumptions. First, that there has been reconciliation between the divine and human orders. Second, that such a reconciliation has occurred directly because of the Incarnation and the exemplary rectitude of Jesus in his obedience to the Father's will. Ancillary to the doctrine is the account of Jesus' suffering because of his rectitude, but that suffering was not directed by God for the purpose of reconciliation.

I will begin this paper with three objections to the doctrine, allegedly against Anselm's formulation or, at least, against the traditional understanding that Anselm favored. The first is from Friedrich Nietzsche who presents his case in the *Gay Science*. The second is from R. C. Moberly, one of the founders of Personalism, who makes his case against the doctrine in *Atonement and Personality*.¹ The third is from Hastings Rashdall, the originator of Ideal Utilitarianism, who offers his objection in *The Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* and who gives a response to the traditional doctrine in *The Theory of Good and Evil*. After considering

¹ I am choosing Moberly as representative of the movement, even though there are others who would do equally well in expressing the personalists' opposition to Anselm, especially, Borden Parker Bowne, *The Atonement* (NY: Eaton & Mains, 1900) and *Studies in Christianity* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909). Moberly's argument is, I believe, more sensitive in its attempt to understand Anselm's argument than what can be found in Bowne's writings.

these objections, I will present Anselm's argument and identify the relevant propositions that look to answer the opposition. Finally, I will show that Anselm and Rashdall appear to share a similar philosophical position on the question of the good through reconciliation.

I. Objections to the Doctrine

A) Friedrich Nietzsche

It is fair to say that Nietzsche presents a common place argument against the doctrine of atonement. The argument appears as follows:

1. Sin is an offense against God's and not humanity's honor.
2. God's honor is to be restored by human contrition, degradation, and suffering.
3. The only way for God to forgive sin is if one repents.
4. Repentance thus is suffering.
5. God does not care if humans suffer and, indeed, he demands it of them.
6. Suffering has no nobility or honor to it.
7. The only way to restore God's honor is if humans lose every vestige of their honor.
8. God is identified with oriental despotism.

Therefore, the doctrine fails to consider the effects of sin on humanity; it fails to be humane; it annihilates human value.²

What Nietzsche does not say at this point but which would have been appropriate to his argument is that Jesus had to suffer the acute loss of every vestige of honor for the sake of restoring it to the Father. In other words, Jesus' suffering would be part of the demand that God makes against humanity in order to restore his own self-dignity. The indictment in his analysis is that only a tyrant would inflict such suffering, especially when there is no real loss of honor; for how could God, as absolute power and might, suffer any actual loss of honor by the sin of humanity? The only one who could suffer the loss of honor is the sinner. Sin does not affect God. What would make sense, according to Nietzsche, is to claim that there are real and not superhuman consequences to sin which affect the human condition, but the doctrine of sin and atonement are indifferent to the world, focusing instead on God's purported loss. The doctrine, then, makes no sense in terms of human experience. It is just another sign of the Christian's "slave mentality" inherited from Jewish guilt. Notice in this argument that "we" are the victims of God's cruelty; we are the slaves whose actions, whether virtuous or blameworthy, cannot affect the Master whose own intentions appear to continue and exasperate the condition of slavery. Nietzsche's "cultural analysis" does not approach the most plausible cultural attributes of medieval fidelity: the reciprocal relationship of Lord to Vassal. Because he victimizes us, the relationship can only be seen in terms of tyranny.

² Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* in *Kritische Studienausgabe*, hrsg. Giorgio Colli u. Mazzino Montinari (zweiter Auflage; Berlin/NY: Walter de Gruyter, 1988), Bd. 3, §135, p. 486f. Cf. *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (NY: Random House, 1974), p. 187f.

B) Robert C. Moberly

If Nietzsche's common-place objection is lacking in theological or philosophical nuance, the same cannot be said about the Personalists' arguments against Anselm's doctrine. There are several versions of these objections, but Rev. R. C. Moberly was one of the first to make the case that Anselm's argument is fallacious. There are two parts to his opposition. First, Anselm's view of sin is flawed because he considers it solely arithmetically. Secondly, the conception of sin and redemption is flawed because it is not addressed in terms of states, or possibilities, of personality. Let us look at the first objection more closely. Moberly claims:

The fact is that the failure of the *Cur Deus Homo* lies at the very onset of his [Anselm's] attempt. It lies in his statement of the problem, and his view of the meaning of the terms with which he starts: What is sin? What is the forgiveness of sin? . . . His question is conceived arithmetically, and raised in terms of arithmetic. [Anselm's formula,] "Non est aliud peccare quam Deo non reddere debitum" . . . is fatal. It makes sin in its essence quantitative and, as quantitative, external to the self of the sinner, and measurable, as if it had a self, in itself. The problem caused by sin is exhibited as if it were a faulty equation, which by fresh balancing of quantities is to be equated right.³

If we are to follow Moberly's line of reasoning, we can see that he is claiming that Anselm's first mistake was in the definition of sin as being "nothing other than not rendering to God what is owed him" (Cf. *Cur Deus Homo*, I, xii).⁴ Even though it would be more accurate to say that the flaw is in identifying sin with a failure to pay. To pay what? Anselm's answer is that every rational creature owes God his will and obedience; thus sin would be when any rational creature fails to place his will in God. Why the payment is quantitative is not so clear, but later in the text Anselm does speak of "requiting" the debt of sin, as if there is an exchange of payment for debt. This seems to be the way to achieve Moberly's sense that we are looking at a quantitative measure in Anselm's doctrine.

We should be careful, however, to accept what appears to be Moberly's economic interpretation of the equation. There are different kinds of debt and different kinds of payments. Some are no doubt quantitative, as when I borrow a hundred dollars from you and do not pay you back, but other debts are *qualitative*, as when I fail to keep my promise to attend my child's basketball game or fail to pay my respects as a parent to a child by forgetting a birthday. In these kinds of failures I cannot just repay them by coming to another game or sending my respects later. The qualitative fault lies in the nature of the original transgression in my will which by my

³ R. C. Moberly, *Atonement and Personality* (London: John Murray, 1901). Hereinafter this work will be cited intratextually.

⁴ Anselm, "Cur Deus Homo," *Opera Omnia*, ed. Francis Schmitt, OSB (Edinburg: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1944), vol. 2, book I, pp. 49-96. Hereinafter all citations are to this edition by book and chapter numbers. The translation is based on S. N. Deane, trans., "Cur Deus Homo," in St. Anselm, *Basic Writings* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1962), pp. 191-302.

commission or omission has adversely affected another who is due attention or respect. In these circumstances the difficulty is that while I cannot undo what was done, I can seek forgiveness, but even so I cannot make up, or quit, the debt retroactively. Nor, at least at first glance, does it appear that another can repay what I owe. It would not suffice if my brother went to my child's game or if he sent a birthday card on my behalf. We will, however, come back to this problem later in the paper.

The second side of Moberly's opposition is directed against both the concept of sin and its forgiveness, focusing on an entirely different issue, namely, his sense that "in fact, sin is not in what I *do* . . . [but] in what I *am* [T]he sin lies not in the deed, as deed; but in the 'I,' as the doer of the deed. The 'I' is not distinguishable from the sin. The sin is within 'I.' It is in what 'I' am" (p. 370). The question of forgiveness is for him changing the personality of the sinner, to change one possible state for another by which the sinner is converted into someone who has faith. In this way, Moberly argues that Anselm would have had to change the basic assumption of his argument; the answer to sin and forgiveness occurs only ". . . in the production of Divine love within us. . . being the doctrine of the Holy Ghost. . . as it is the characteristic experience of the Christian life" (p. 382). Atonement is ultimately not forgiveness of a sin committed but a conversion of the heart. Atonement in this sense appears to be reconciliation without either the acknowledgement of committing wrongs or the forgiveness of the wrongs done. It appears to have the sense of spontaneous reconciliation through conversion; it is a baptism into faith.⁵ We should wonder, however, about the process itself.

In Anselm's account there is an experience of guilt on the part of the transgressor, at least in some part of the process. I recognize my own failings; I seek reconciliation. The problem, as mentioned before, is that I cannot undo what was done. I cannot change the act (or inaction). Forgiveness in this account is predicated on a change in will but also to make some amends for my transgressions. But here, again, the problem is that I have already placed my will in something inordinate, and simply because I want to change my disposition that does not mean that I have changed my will. For instance, I may want to make amends but since I cannot reverse my actions, I cannot do what I want; I may want to be a better parent but because I am inordinately attached to my own worldly pursuits I may still forget my son's next birthday. Now, it is true that forgiveness could be granted without making amends, even without my change of will, but in that case there will not be reconciliation, because since I have not made amends and I have not set my will in what is an ordained good, then I will fail in the attempt at reconciliation. Moberly wants the end state of full reconciliation without the effort of the process involving the recognition of guilt, forgiveness, and change. The "production of Divine love" seems to be just a gift bestowed without a process or effort that involves a real change in my condition.

⁵ One implication in Moberly's argument is that one who already has the Christian life does not require forgiveness. Atonement is for the non-Christian. Anselm makes the case, of course, that atonement is necessarily for all of humanity.

C) Hastings Rashdall

One of the positive contributions that Rashdall makes in understanding Anselm's doctrine of atonement is to show what the doctrine does not state. Unlike earlier Patristic accounts where the suffering and death of Jesus is said to be a ransom to the Devil,⁶ Anselm's argument has nothing to do with the older doctrine and, indeed, separates itself even from the Biblical notion of a "scapegoat" whose sacrifice is demanded by an angry God.⁷ The point should be well-considered because even today theologians mistakenly attribute the ransom and scapegoat theories to Anselm.⁸

Rashdall's objections to Anselm's arguments have, however, similarities both to Nietzsche's and Moberly's arguments, but his focus is on Anselm's legalisms. He believes that Anselm made several different kinds of mistakes in the argument. First, Anselm approaches the question of sin and atonement legalistically, based on his understanding of Lombardian law.⁹ Rashdall agrees with Nietzsche's point that the offense is to be seen only in one way, namely, against God's honor, and with Moberly's point that the measure of sin is arithmetic. The additional consideration he adds is that one who offends must be either punished or there must be an alternative method of satisfaction for dishonor. Rashdall's strategy is to show that neither alternative is viable when we are speaking of humanity as a species.

Let us look more closely at Rashdall's addition to the debate. He fastens on the purported false implications of a legalistic theology and its incoherence. He contends:

I need not dwell upon the tendency to confuse the conception of criminal and civic justice, to identify moral transgressions with personal affront; the debt, which according to ordinary legal ideas can be forgiven by the creditor, with the penalty due the wrong-doing which must be supposed to rest upon some moral ground and cannot therefore be arbitrarily remitted (p. 355).

⁶ Cf. "He [Jesus] loved us when He gave Himself as a ransom for us, that He might cleanse us by His blood from our old ungodliness, and bestow life on us when we were almost on the point of perishing through the depravity that was in us," St. Ignatius of Antioch, "Letter to the Trallians" in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. A. Cleaveland Cox (revised ed.; Grand Rapids, Wm. Eerdmans, 1956), p. 69.

⁷ Rashdall notes, "For such a man [namely, Anselm] the ransom theory was discredited...God owed the Devil nothing but punishment...[H]e made a serious attempt to vindicate the whole scheme from the point of view of justice instead of falling back...upon the arbitrary will of God..." *The Idea of Atonement and Christian Theology* (London: MacMillan & Sons, 1919), p. 350f, *et passim*. Hereinafter citations to this work will be intratextual whenever possible.

⁸ For instance, James L. Chrenshaw claims that "Later theologians offered various theories...the most prominent of which was drawn from the realm of slavery. According to this theory, championed by Anselm, Jesus' death paid the ransom that purchased freedom for all," *Defending God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 146. As we will see below there is nothing in Anselm's argument that supports this interpretation.

⁹ "Anselm's early education at the School of Pavia has been partly an education in law—especially Lombard law," Rashdall, p. 351.

At the heart of the objection is what he sees to be Anselm's total confusion as to what a "debt" implies:

The fundamental defect of Anselm's attempt to reconcile the traditional scheme with ordinary ideas of justice is that no civilized system of law permits the attribution of guilt to all humanity for the sin of the one; nor can the payment of a penalty by the sinless Christ rationally or morally be considered to make any easier or any juster the remission of the penalty which man owes for his own sin. So much the ordinary moral consciousness affirms unhesitatingly. . . . (Rashdall, p. 355f).

There are two points being made by Rashdall in this passage. First, a debt cannot be incurred by everyone if only one person has committed the offense. Second, that the debt cannot be paid on moral grounds by someone else who has not incurred it. Thus, from this objection it seems that humanity cannot be said to have to pay the debt of Adam, since Adam sinned and not the collective "humanity," and also that Jesus cannot morally pay any debt that is owed by Adam because being sinless he has no debt to pay.

Rashdall's analysis is strictly moralistic, but it not clearly consistent with his ideal utilitarianism. Let us consider the second point first. It is true that Jesus cannot be made to pay for another debt, but it not true to say that out of friendship or loyalty that the sinless would not incur the debts of the sinner. In fact, ideal utilitarianism values friendship, love, and community above other responsibilities. From the perspective of achieving the greatest good, the selfless individual ought to be willing to impose upon himself or herself the obligations of others if that fosters the values of friendship, love, and community. It is not just the individual who ought to be so willing, but since friendship, love, and community are social as well as individual values, it ought to be the case that the collective "humanity" is willing to impose upon itself obligations to individuals if by so doing the greatest good is advanced. Thus, Rashdall's moralistic rejection of Anselm looks unjustified based on utilitarian principles.

The first point looks more likely to be true on intuitive, common sense grounds, but it is not clear that it is true legalistically. Consider, for instance, that I incurred numerous debts in my lifetime and died without paying for them. Would it not be true that my family as shareholders in my estate is likely to incur my debts? The family, as my heirs, is the collective assuming an individual debt.¹⁰ They will have to pay what I failed to pay. But, of course, the case for atonement is in fact not a matter of individual debt, since it not the case that just one individual incurred it. The entire family is collectively incurring debt according to the doctrine because the collective members uniformly fail to keep their wills upright, that is, upholding what they ought to do.

¹⁰ Oliver Wendell Holmes explains the principle in common law: ". . . if the effects of the ancestor were insufficient to pay his debts, the heir was bound to make up the deficiency from his own property," *The Common Law and Other Writings* (Birmingham: Legal Classics Library, 1982), p. 347. Hereinafter citations to the *Common Law* will be intratextual.

In respect to both above mentioned points, Rashdall makes it appear that Jesus as the payer of the debts is being placed in the position of an indifferent third party, assuming responsibility for the “heirs” of Adam’s sin without any morally justified reason. It is not clear that this is true, however. Jesus is not a neutral third party; he is one who has received an obligation to act on behalf of Adam and his heirs collectively in order to resolve the payment of the debt. He has also received an obligation to act on behalf of the one to whom the debt is owed, namely, the Father. Rashdall himself gives us this clue when he mentions that Anselm was versed in Lombardian law. The transfer from plaintiff to advocate the right to pursue the legal issue in terms of debt was part of early common law. Oliver Wendell Holmes explains the principle: “A lawsuit was to be transferred by the proper plaintiff to another more versed in the laws, and better able to carry it on—in fact, to an attorney. But a lawsuit was at that time the alternative of a feud, and both were the peculiar affair of the family concerned. Accordingly, when a suit for killing a member of the family was to be handed over to a stranger, the innovation had to be reconciled with the theory that such a suit belonged to the next of kin. Mord is to take upon himself Thorgeir’s suit against Flosi for killing Helgi. . . .” (p. 359). The advocate assumes the role of the plaintiff’s next of kin, and in this case Jesus, as the next of kin, receives from the Father the right to settle the dispute.

As Jesus has received the case from the Father acting on his behalf, he has also received the case from Adam’s heirs under the legal title, *quos heredes appellavit*. In this capacity Jesus is not a stranger, since he belongs to Adam’s family as one who is called “heir.” In Lombardian law this transfer was not unknown: “The Lombards had a similar transfer [compared to the Franks], in which the donee was not only called *heres*, but was made liable like an heir for the debts of the donor on receiving the property after the donor’s death. By the Salic law a man who could not pay the *wergild* was allowed to transfer formally his house-lot, and with it the liability. But the transfer was to the next of kin” (Holmes, p. 357). Jesus has received the debt of Adam but his acting on behalf of Adam and all his heirs.

In both capacities Jesus is acting to settle what amounts to a “blood feud”; he is acting in a legal and moral capacity for both parties. But the point to understand is that for the Father, he seeks to end the conflict, but from the heirs of Adam, who have nothing to pay and keep deepening the debt, he receives the burden of payment.

I bring up these points only to show that Rashdall’s conception of the problem and the relationship of Jesus as paying for Adam’s debt is not being properly conceptualized according to what he claims is Anselm’s underlying assumptions. If Anselm is reasoning like a Lombardian lawyer, who understands the complexities of feudal “family court,” then one has to see that Jesus having received two briefs is acting on behalf of both parties, where it is the plaintiff who wants to settle and the defendant who having no resources has transferred the debt on to his next of kin, namely, Jesus himself. In this second relationship Jesus is under the obligation to pay for Adam’s infidelity.

The final point that Rashdall raises against the doctrine returns to Nietzsche's original point, namely, that any God who demands such satisfaction hardly deserves that name; for "A God who really thought that his Honour was increased by millions of men suffering eternal torments, or that it was a satisfactory compensation to Himself that in lieu thereof an innocent God-man should suffer upon the cross, would not be a God whom Anselm in his heart of hearts really worshipped" (p. 356). That is to say, a God who requires satisfaction is not the Christian God but is in Nietzsche's words a tyrant who imposes suffering not on the wicked but on the innocent.

What should have God done? Rashdall provides an answer in his best known work, *The Theory of Good and Evil* (1909), where Ideal Utilitarianism was first formulated and presented. Near the conclusion of volume one, Rashdall makes the case that if there is to be forgiveness of sin there cannot be satisfaction through punishment; the two are opposing actions. Thus, if one is to seek reconciliation when an offense is committed, and the goal is to bring together what was separated, then one would have to pursue forgiveness in lieu of punishment, or at least it would have to be the case that punishment should be conceived as a kind of rehabilitation of the criminal, so that he can receive and accept forgiveness (Cf. Rashdall, 309–12). Retribution, in any sense of the word, would never be sought or desired. In the instance of retribution directed against an innocent who stands in for the guilty, that would simply in Rashdall's mind be incomprehensible. In terms of theology, he makes the point clearly: "...the acceptance of the principle [of vicarious satisfaction] laid down here [by Anselm] about forgiveness may involve no less than a complete reconstitution of many popular schemes concerning divine forgiveness and atonement. . . .The idea of substituted vicarious punishment would never for a moment be defended by a modern Christian except to booster an obsolete theological tradition" (Rashdall, p. 311f). From these remarks, it seems clear that Anselm's doctrine belongs to the "obsolete theological tradition," which no one would have the good sense to defend.

Rashdall's conception shares with Nietzsche the common place assumption, namely, that central to Anselm's doctrine is that Jesus had to be punished for the sins of Adam and all of humanity. I believe as we look at Anselm's argument we see that this assumption is simply not true. In brief, the suffering of Jesus is a result of his fidelity and nobility which are in conflict with our state of sin. It is the sinners who punish him for his goodness. The Father, even as he knows that Jesus will suffer, is seeking to end the conflict by altering the nature of humanity. Let us turn now to Anselm's argument and look at what he actually says.

II. Justifying Atonement

These various objections identify and criticize specific parts of Anselm's argument, but only specific parts. The objectors never attempt to analyze the whole of the argument nor, I submit, the most salient parts. No objection, I contend, succeeds in actually defeating the long and complex thread of reasoning that Anselm gives in *Cur Deus Homo*.

I wish to focus on Book I of the argument, which Anselm says is directed “to the infidel” as compared to Book II which is directed to the Christian believer. The main reason to look at Book I is that it is the part which has received the most attention from the critics. I am going to ignore the two long tangents present in Part I because they address the condition of the angels and the problem of the Jewish people and are not directed at the issue at hand. While these digressions are interesting in their own right, the main thread of the argument concerning atonement and reconciliation can and should be separated from them. Let’s consider in summary form the propositions of the main argument.

1. Death comes to humanity because of human disobedience, and thus it is fitting that life is returned to humanity through human obedience (iii).¹¹
2. Sin and our condemnation entered the world through woman, and thus it is fitting that righteousness and redemption enters again through woman (iii).
3. Only God could bring about redemption through righteous obedience, because if no other entity performed this act, then that entity would be God to us and we would be his servants (iv).
4. Although God could have willed redemption through another means, that he willed the incarnation and redemption through the God-man suffices to show that it is right and consistent with reason (viii).
5. It is consistent with reason to say that the God-man suffers, or becomes lowly, for our sake; although his divine nature does not change, his human nature can alter and thus suffer (viii).
6. The Incarnation is not, however, the lowering of God but the raising of humanity (viii).
7. God did not compel the innocent to suffer nor compel Jesus to suffer and die for humanity.
8. Jesus endured suffering and death by his own will (viii).
9. Jesus endured suffering and death out of obedience to truth and justice and not because it was demanded of him (ix).

Let me interrupt the presentation of the argument at this point, because of its significance to the entire debate. Propositions one-through-nine clearly show Anselm’s line of reasoning that the Father’s plan was never to impose suffering and death on Jesus as the necessary means for reconciliation. The emphasis on propositions four-through-six is that Incarnation itself is the principal means by which reconciliation occurs, and proposition nine clearly shows that atonement is not in Jesus’ suffering but in his obedience to the Father. Suffering occurs as a result of his upright will which, as we will soon see, is opposed by us who partake in a sinful nature. Let us continue with the argument.

10. Since God is himself truth and justice, every creature owes obedience to him (ix).

¹¹ The dialogue is composed of brief chapters. I am citing the propositions, or paraphrases of them, according to the chapter since it might be easier for the reader to locate them in this fashion than through page numbers. Thus, hereinafter all citations to *Cur Deus Homo*, Part I, is to Anselm’s *Opera Omnia*, ed. Francis Schmitt, OSB (Edinburg: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1944), vol. 2, pp. 49-96. Citations are to the chapter number.

11. Jesus held his will upright in obedience to God, and for that reason, and no other, he died (ix).
12. Jesus' upright will was in complete agreement with God's will, thus Jesus subsumed his own will to the Father (ix).
13. God did not save Jesus because if he had, then humanity would not have been rescued from sin (ix).
14. Suffering was required in order for there to be the salvation of humanity (ix).
15. God willed that Jesus die for the sake of human salvation and for no other reason (ix).

This is the crucial and contentious part of the argument, because by proposition eleven Anselm has already shown what was necessary for atonement, the obedience of Jesus to truth and justice, and that in itself would suffice to satisfy the terms of the debt that Adam incurred. But now in propositions thirteen and fourteen, Anselm is making a point about what is necessary for humanity; namely, that humanity could not have changed its nature were it not for Jesus' suffering. The point is certainly opaque on its face. The answer to it, I suspect, lies in the relationship that Jesus has to humanity as Adam's heir.

If Rashdall's legalistic supposition is in some sense right, then Jesus is the advocate for humanity but also has incurred the debt as "heir." This means not that the Father requires satisfaction from Jesus but that he requires a fundamental alteration in human nature. As Rashdall points out in the *Theory of Good and Evil*, while we could forgive the criminal his crimes, it would do no good unless the criminal had a change of heart and gave up his criminal behavior. God is faced with the same dilemma; to say that the debt is satisfied entirely by Jesus' will without a change of heart in humanity would do no good for humanity. We, in our sinful nature, would continue our habitual disobediences and injustices without knowing the good. Anselm will go on to explain that God will not change our nature by fiat since he has given us free will. The only plausible way to alter our nature is by following the morally upright model of Jesus' life devoted to truth and justice. Jesus acting on behalf of humanity shows humanity the way of devotion to the Father, and for that he is to suffer, not by the Father's commission but by the omission of truth and justice in our lives, which then leads to our crimes against the God-man. The Father wills Jesus' suffering indirectly because he wills Jesus to give to humanity the model of truth and justice. Jesus suffers directly because the "infidels" reject his life and teaching. Thus, Jesus' suffering is necessary because of our hard-heartedness, not because of the Father's will. Let us now continue with the argument.

16. The Father gave Jesus a free will; it was not necessary that Jesus choose obedience but he chose it for the sake of salvation for humanity (x).
17. Jesus had the power either to endure the suffering for human salvation or to reject it (x).
18. It would have been "just" in either case in respect to humanity (x).
19. Sin is the failing in the obligation that is owed to God (xi).
20. Men and angels sin because they failed to give God what he is owed (xi).
21. Paying what one owes is never a sin, and he who pays is innocent (xi).
22. Paying one's debts and meeting obligations is just (xi).

23. [Jesus himself does not owe the Father any obligation out of debt, but he assumes the debt that is owed to God by humanity.¹²]
24. If the debt has not been paid, then there is an injustice until it has been paid (xi).

Once again, this part of the argument makes sense under the assumptions that (a) debts should be paid, (b) paying of debts is just, (c) the payer is not guilty of something by paying, and (d) some third party can pay someone else's debts. *Prima facie* these assumptions seem true, all other things being equal, but what is peculiar to the argument is whether D is somehow required when the debtor cannot pay. In fact, Anselm appears to say that it is not required. This point is essential if one takes Moberly's "exchange value" criticism or even Rashdall's objections to legalisms to heart. For Rashdall holds, against Anselm, that the traditional doctrine is that Jesus had incurred Adam's debts. While, as we have seen, this transference is possible under early Common Law, Anselm's point is not that Jesus has incurred the debt because he is Adam's heir but because he is the Father's heir, and the Father has given his son the right to settle the dispute. Propositions sixteen and seventeen clearly state that Jesus need not have accepted the case but that he wanted to. Proposition eighteen and twenty are implicit; they show that justice could have been served just as well by Jesus not accepting the defendants' role. But by not accepting this role, humanity would remain in corruption without recourse to the model of truth and justice that could alter its nature. Only by accepting to pay Adam's debt will justice *for humanity* be restored.

The argument continues by defining the nature of the debt, and it continues to show that obedience to truth and justice suffices to repay it because God's honor is respected by adherence to law and rightness. It proceeds:

25. Only the restitution of honor could repay the debt of disobedience that is owed God by humanity in their sin (xi).
26. Justice demands restitution, nothing less would be just, thus it would be unjust to forgive the debt by compassion (xii).
27. Without restitution there must be punishment (xii).
28. God whose will is just must always punish the disobedient until there is restitution of honor (xii).
29. To forgive without at least the acknowledgement of guilt is lawless (xii).
30. God does not will that any being exist lawlessly, but every will is bound to rightness and law (xii).

¹² This proposition seems implied by the following assertions: "It was for this reason...to teach the human race that there was no other salvation for them but by his death, and not to show that he had no power at all to avoid death...For he was omnipotent, and it is said of him, when he offered up [his life], that he desired it. And he says himself: '...I have power to lay [my life] down, and I have the power to take it up again.'" (x). The proposition is thus implied by the voluntary nature of Jesus' act to assume the debt of humanity and that it is *within his power not to accept the obligation*. Anselm, further, makes the point clearly in chapter xi that Jesus accepts God's will to suffer and repay the debt from his own sense of rightness, by which he submits his will to the Father's and desires the same end for humanity that the Father has planned.

31. Nothing is more just than the dignity and honor of God, and it is supreme injustice to dishonor God (xiii).
32. Humanity committed the supreme injustice by disobedience to God's will, and therefore they dishonored him (xiii).
33. The punishment of humanity is just (xiv).

It is, of course, this segment of the argument that Nietzsche is directing his criticism against. God's honor must be upheld, and since humanity has abused that honor God is required to punish us. God cannot forgive without there being punishment. Thus, the punishment of humanity is just. That this is an economic and legal requirement plays into Moberly's and Rashdall's objections as well since it seems that only by upholding the demands of the law that justice is served; compassion is not allowed to forgive the crime. To use a clearer illustration, God has, or so it seems, the temperament of Angelo from Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* when he assures us he shall not show mercy to Claudio because the law will not allow it.¹³ Angelo does not have the temperament of the Duke who forgives even the unpardonable, Barnardine, just because his compassion and mercy permit him to. The Duke even forgives immoderate Lucio, so long as he marries, who has throughout the play persistently dishonored the Duke by insinuating that he is as vice-ridden as Lucio himself. The single rationale provided by Shakespeare for clemency consists of one line: "for all earthly faults, I quit them all; And prey thee, take this mercy to provide For better times to come" (Act V, scene I). Mercy makes life better for everyone which the merciful sovereign conveys to all.

Given this illustration between the rigorous and unbending moralist and the compassionate sovereign, it is easy to see how Anselm's argument appears weak; for it is obvious to anyone with a modicum of humanity that the Father could out of mercy forgive any dishonor done by Adam and his heirs, just as the Duke forgives Lucio, inflicting on him only the "punishment" of making him marry. In morality and in law, of course, unlike literature, justice is a virtue that must involve reciprocity. If there is a crime, then there must be some kind of punishment, even if the punishment is the acceptance of guilt and the repentance for it. The sacrament of reconciliation has this as its principle, and Anselm not only is committed to upholding the rightness of justice as virtue but also the requirements of a sacramental life. It is inconceivable that mercy would substitute for justice, and of course it is not true that mercy makes everyone's life better. But the more significant issue is that unlike the Shakespearean comedy, where the malefactors all are exposed and admit their wrongdoings in the last Act, the heirs of Adam still pit their wills against the will of the Father. This "blood feud" is not caused, or continued, by the Father who, as we have seen earlier, is committed to reconciliation, but it continues because of Adam's heirs. They continue their wrong doings and fail to accept their debt, yet alone fail to attempt repaying it by seeking forgiveness. They continue to dishonor the Father by their sins. This is the point that the critics never acknowledge. The end of dishonor is

¹³ "We must not make a scarecrow of the law, Setting it up to fear the birds of prey, And let it keep one shape, till custom make it their Perch, and not their terror," William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, Act II, sc. 1.

when the “sons and daughters” learn to respect the Father. In order to achieve that end, the living model of rightness must be given to them in the flesh.

I do not wish to suggest that Anselm is rejecting or qualifying the principle of retribution. There is nothing in this argument, or in any other argument that I am aware of, where Anselm tempers the principle. He might even think, as Oliver Wendell Holmes contends,

A pain can be inflicted upon the wrong-doer, of a sort which does not restore the injured party to his former situation, or to another equally good, but which is inflicted for the very purpose of causing pain. And so far as this punishment takes the place of compensation...it may be said that one of its objects is to gratify the desire for vengeance. The prisoner pays with his body (41).

The *morality* of this legal position has been upheld by both Jeremy Bentham and Bishop Butler who, as Holmes mentions, do not appear to agree on much else (41).¹⁴ There is no reason to believe that Anselm would dissent from the principle. But, against his critics, there is reason to believe that Anselm is not making his case on atonement based on the cogency of this principle either, despite the portion of the argument noted above. We have to look further into the argument to see why.

Proposition thirty-three states that the punishment of humanity is just. But we already know from an earlier portion of the argument that the Father is not pursuing the punishment of humanity to the greatest possible extent nor pursuing it *ad infinitum*. If he were to do so, he would not hand the case over to his son; he would not have already planned, knowing that Adam would sin, redemption through the Incarnation. Thus, it appears that Anselm is making the following kind of case. The punishment of humanity is just, but the Father has sought a way to cancel out the crime without continuing to have Adam’s heirs punished for either his sins or their own. In this kind of case the punishment is not clearly for the purpose of retribution in the moralistic sense that Holmes, Bentham, and Butler affirm. The more likely interpretation is that punishment teaches the malefactors what is wrong. Its purpose is to reform by instruction through example. If punishment has this purpose then a *lesser* punishment may be more

¹⁴ Jeremy Bentham holds that “punishment, by the sufferings of an individual, produces a general good. Suspend punishment, the world becomes a scene of robbery, and society is dissolved. Re-establish it, and the passions grow calm, order is restored, and the weakness of each individual is sustained by the protection of the public force,” *Theory of Legislation*, ed. C K. Ogden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1950), p. 341. Joseph Butler argues against compassion for the offender who commits capital crimes when he asserts that “Since therefore it is necessary for the very subsistence of the world, that injury, injustice, and cruelty, should be punished; and since compassion, which is so natural to mankind, would render that execution of justice exceedingly difficult and uneasy; indignation against vice and wickedness is, and may be allowed to be, a balance to that weakness of pity, and also to anything else which would prevent the necessary methods of severity....But let us suppose a person guilty of murder, or any other action of cruelty, and that mankind had naturally no indignation against such wickedness and the authors of it; but that every body was affected towards such a criminal in the same way as towards an innocent man: Compassion amongst other things, would render the execution of justice exceedingly painful and difficult, and would often quite prevent it,” Sermon VIII of the “Sermons Preached at Rolls Chapel,” in *The Works of Joseph Butler*, vols. 1-2 (1867; rpt. Np: Adamant Publications, 2006), vol. 2, p. 85.

appropriate, even more morally correct, than the punishment which demands of the criminal that he or she “pays with his body.” This version of punishment is consistent with the doctrine of atonement and reconciliation. Before Christ, Adam and his heirs were punished by banishment from paradise and had to suffer mortality, but banishment and mortality are the lesser punishments which end in principle with the Resurrection. The punishment is not endless, nor does it seem to be extreme in the sense that an immortal life with God is ever denied them.

The problem with this interpretation of human punishment is that it seems susceptible to a more serious objection. If the lesser punishment is justified for humanity, tempered by the mercy appearing in the Incarnation and the Resurrection, then is it not unjust for the son to suffer the *greater* punishment—paying compensation with his body—on behalf of humanity? Obviously, the purpose of Jesus’ suffering is not to reform him, and it is nonsense to say that it is for retribution. I believe that this objection, which on its face looks telling against Anselm’s doctrine, can be answered but only when we consider the last portion of the argument.

34. To disobey God is multifariously wrong since while nothing can take away God’s honor and dignity, the disobedience disturbs the natural order negating the harmony of all things (xv).
 35. Any evil no matter how slight is a wrong since it violates the order and divine appointment of all things (xv).
 36. God for the sake of his own creation and keeping to his standard of justice may not permit any evil to occur without correcting it by either punishment or restitution (xv).
 37. Given that evil has entered into creation and has produced many wrongs, which have disrupted the order and harmony of all things, the material world must be renewed until perfect harmony and order are restored (xviii).¹⁵
 38. The material world needs renewal through good and just persons, but no human exists who is without sin (xix).
 39. In order for the material world to be renewed there must be atonement for sin (xix).
 40. Atonement must be proportionate to the offense; otherwise it would not be just (xx).
 41. Humanity itself either singularly or collectively cannot atone for its offence because they have nothing to give that belongs to them (xx).
 42. All that they have to give already belongs to God (xx).
 43. Only one who is without sin and equal to the Father can make the atonement (xx & xxv).
 44. Only Jesus is without sin and equal to the Father (xxv).
- Therefore, only Jesus *qua* God-man can make the atonement (xxv).

Notice for this phase of the argument the emphasis has shifted away from punishment for dishonoring God to what is necessary for renewal of a natural order. Retribution would be just, but it is not retribution that the Father seeks. Again, it seems Anselm’s critics did not consider the final phase of the main argument. While punishment would be a just alternative, the Father’s

¹⁵ I am skipping over chapters xvi-xvii which deal with the case of the disobedience of the angels and the question how to consider the Jews in relation to salvation history. I consider both cases tangents off the main argument.

will is for a restitution of harmony, or a return to the hegemony of righteousness. This can only be done, Anselm claims, if one who is completely just re-establishes the order and harmony that has been disrupted by sin. How is it to be restored? The answer, again, seems to reside more on the rectitude of Jesus' obedience to the Father's will than for him to receive any punishment. Punishment is not the means to renewal but rectitude is. The punishment is replaced by Jesus' offering of honor and respect to the Father in obedience to the Father's will. In his honoring and obeying the Father, restitution of justice is restored. The qualification is, however, that only Jesus could perform such service.

What, then, about the suffering of Jesus? In terms of Jesus' relation to the Father and in the sense that the Father's will is honored by Jesus' obedience, the simple answer is that Jesus' suffering is not justified. It was never necessary in terms of the doctrine since atonement is only a matter of performing rightly what the Father wills, and Jesus did that throughout his life. The honor of the Father is upheld by Jesus' fidelity to the Father. Thus, even if Jesus lived without incurring the Passion and death, atonement was already fulfilled by his righteous life. But, what is equally true is that by adhering to the Father's will Jesus will provoke those who opposed the Father, and knowing this, Jesus, by choosing to save humanity, will undergo the unjust suffering of the Passion. In this sense he chose suffering because he knew that our evil would oppose his rectitude. As mentioned earlier, the "necessity" of his suffering is due to our hard-hearted sinful reaction to his good will.

While this scenario answers the question above on whether Jesus' suffering is justified, it still raises another question: since Jesus did not have to suffer, and since the Father shall not allow evil to endure into creation without commanding a restoration of goodness, would not the Passion of Jesus call for further human punishment or another act of renewal? The implicit answer present in Anselm's argument is that further punishment for humanity or another act of reconciliation by the Son would be necessary in order to fulfill the Father's will given the fact that evil continues to oppose God's will. This seems especially true when we consider the injustice committed against Jesus by his tormentors and the persecutions of the saints thereafter. Anselm himself does not approach this question directly in *Cur Deus Homo*. But I believe that there is no reason for Anselm to abandon the principle explanation of atonement. Namely, corporeal punishment, or "paying with one's body," would be just but it is not necessary because the Son acts on behalf of the Father who himself seeks to restore humanity to a respectable state; the Son acts on behalf of the sons and daughters of Adam in order to restore their lost estates because they cannot do it themselves. The fact that the condition of sin and guilt continues after the Incarnation and the Son's life of the upright will might be perplexing, but the principle need not be changed in order to answer the challenge. Guilt is expiated only by obedience to the righteous will of God; forgiveness comes with rectitude. Salvation is attained with rectitude. The continuing existence of sin does not alter this condition; it only means that the lesson of goodness has to be repeated again. In theological terms the lesson of atonement will be taught once again in the Second Coming. While Anselm does not provide us with an eschatological account as such, he has set down in his argument the essential line of reasoning which can explain the plan of salvation. That plan is not, as Nietzsche and the rest of the modern critics

surmise, based on retribution and blood sacrifice, but on the need for restoring order, providing forgiveness, and ending “blood feuds” in the accomplishments of Jesus as the true son and good brother who acts simply on behalf of both the Father and Adam’s heirs.

III. General and Specific Conclusions

I have attempted to show in this paper that Anselm’s critics make their case against the doctrine of atonement on an incomplete and inadequate understanding of his argument in *Cur Deus Homo*. A more thorough analysis of the argument shows us that Anselm is showing that Jesus’ suffering is neither required nor intended by the Father’s will; the Father is not some petty tyrant demanding that there be death and suffering because he was dishonored; the resolution to the “debt” of Adam is through rectitude, and the recovery of Adam’s “estates” is through the reform of humanity to accept responsibility and adhere to justice, which is itself only possible through the Father’s grace and the Son’s life as the paragon of virtue. Anselm’s conclusion is to establish the necessary truth that only Jesus could have accomplished the task of reconciliation. The argument rejects the assumption that the suffering of Jesus was willed by the Father; it rejects that Jesus is paying a ransom or acting as a scapegoat for humanity.

What is intriguing about this particular debate is that some of Anselm’s detractors appear to have the same assumptions and principles as does Anselm. This is especially the case when we consider Rashdall. As I mentioned earlier, Rashdall while arguing against Anselm legalistic assumptions and while rejecting the traditional doctrine of atonement ends up sounding a great deal like Anselm on the need to have some punishment to instruct individuals on moral values. For instance, Rashdall contends that “The existence of punishment for an offense may create a state of feeling in which the act is looked upon as wrong in itself. The individual who begins with abstaining from fear of punishment may end by regarding the act with hearty and spontaneous dislike....There is no civilized State which does not in practice punish many offences for no other reason than there is a strong moral feeling against them” (299, *et passim*).

Rashdall’s objection is that while punishment for sin may well be necessary, it is not sufficient for moral guidance and virtue, and thus it is not sufficient for reconciliation. Anselm would no doubt agree with him, because as we have seen, Anselm contends that humanity requires Jesus, as the moral paragon of justice, in order to understand what is right and to be guided to do the Father’s will. Anselm also showed us why punishment alone would not do in the Father’s plan because that alone does not restore justice and honor to humanity. Reconciliation requires the “upright man” who alone perfectly obeys the Father’s divine will. Reconciliation begins to occur with the Incarnation, and becomes the means of salvation through the acts and character of Jesus, but it is not fully consummated until humanity is restored to justice in its upright will. That restoration, once more, requires an infusion of moral purpose in humanity in order to combat our weak-will. Rashdall appears to agree with Anselm on this point, although he does not directly associate the life of Jesus with this restitution. Instead, he contends that the “Theism of the Christian type is the creed which secures the maximum emotional hold of human morality upon the mind....[T]here is clearly no kind of personal affection or social

emotion except the fear and love of God which can be trusted to range itself invariably on the side of the Moral Law....[A] belief in the divine Justice is necessary to the individual's conception of God as a Person worthy of reverence" (259, *et passim*). To bring someone to the point where they develop their own upright will requires an enthusiasm for the divine. Anselm shows that this occurs in and through the person of Jesus.

These assumptions and propositions show us that Rashdall and Anselm are actually thinking that reconciliation between humanity and the divine is possible because of the idea that God is both just and merciful and that God's plan is the program of forgiveness and moral instruction. Rashdall's objection, then, to Anselm's teaching on atonement looks to be based on a straightforward misunderstanding of the original argument.

Both Rashdall and Anselm also show us what is lacking in Moberly's argument. Moberly makes a plausible case that the "correct" doctrine of atonement requires a change of heart, or a conversion of faith. Moberly rejects, however, that punishment plays any role in such a conversion. He rejects Anselm's claim that atonement is about a restitution of justice. Such a rejection, if Rashdall and Anselm are right about human needs and motivations, is ill-conceived since Moberly seems to assume that conversion of the heart "just happens," as if the idea of God, like the Duke from Shakespeare's play, is casually indifferent to the causes and effects of human wickedness. Conversion of the heart requires, at least, an understanding of morality and the motivation to follow it. It requires the acknowledgement of evil and the seeking of the penitent for forgiveness. Moberly fails to grasp the nature of the problem. In contrast, the logic of Anselm's argument develops the case that atonement is predicated on the restoration of justice which shows us clearly both the failings of humanity and the end of all grievances. It is true, of course, that his language is about "repayment of debts," but as we have seen, the "debt" is not some quantitative measure; instead, it concerns the "quality of sin" which has produced the loss of human honor and our inability to "pay" because we are not attending to religious and moral responsibilities. The "debt" is paid when the case against humankind is resolved by the righteousness of the Son in his life as the heir of Adam. It is not repaid by either our or his suffering.

Finally, there is only one objector with whom Anselm shares no common assumptions. Nietzsche's entire description of what is presumed and entailed by the doctrine is foreign to Anselm's argument. Despite the lack of any congruity, each philosopher in his own way makes the case that punishment for sin cannot be the "correct" answer to the problem of salvation. Nietzsche believes that no punishment is required because there is no sin, thus it is not a necessary condition for atonement. Anselm believes that while human punishment occurs because there is sin, this punishment is not the means to atonement; it is neither necessary nor sufficient in order to have God's plan fulfilled. Atonement is achieved in God's gift of his Son to us, in the Incarnation, and the Son's perfectly just will which is given freely to the Father. Thus, punishment is not a necessary condition for atonement. The objectors to Anselm's doctrine, not having heeded his complex argument, have failed to make a strong case against it.

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