

Anselm, God, and the Act of Sin: Interpretive Difficulties

**W. Matthews Grant
University of St. Thomas**

In the writings of Anselm, we find what appear to be conflicting accounts of God's relationship to creaturely acts of sin. In some passages, acts of sin, insofar as they are real, are said to have God as a cause. In other passages, sinful acts are said to be contrary to God's will, with the result that God's causing them appears logically impossible. I consider two solutions for resolving the conflict, arguing that neither solution is entirely successful.

Introduction

In the writings of Saint Anselm, we find diverse and what appear to be conflicting accounts of the relationship between God and creaturely acts of sin. In a first set of passages, Anselm teaches that acts of sin, insofar as they are real, have God as a cause. In a second set, Anselm characterizes sin as contrary to God's will, a characterization that makes God's causing the act of sin appear logically impossible. The purpose of this paper is to discover whether these two sets of passages can be rendered consistent with one another. After considering passages from both sets, I propose two solutions for resolving the conflict. While both solutions enjoy some support from the texts of Anselm, neither solution is entirely satisfactory from an interpretive standpoint.¹

Preliminaries: Anselm on acts of will

Before continuing with our discussion of how Anselm understands the relationship between God and acts of sin, we should first review what Anselm means by an act of will, since presumably, an act of sin is a certain type of act of will.

Anselm distinguishes three senses of "will."² The will as "instrument" or "tool" is the power of the soul we use for willing. The will as "affection" is that by virtue of which the will as tool is inclined or disposed to willing something or to willing something of a particular sort. The will as "use" or "employment" occurs when, with the will as tool, we actually and consciously turn toward and will something to which we are disposed by will as affection. According to Anselm, if the will as tool were not equipped with an affection to will a certain sort of thing, it would not be able actually to will a thing of that sort. Nevertheless, the will as affection must be distinguished from the will as use. By our affections we are disposed to will a certain sort of thing even when we are not thinking about it, even when we are asleep. By contrast, the use of

¹ Although I do not argue this point in the paper, Anselm's seemingly conflicting statements concerning God's relationship to acts of sin do not appear explicable in terms of a development in Anselm's thought over the course of time.

² See, for instance, *De Concordia*, 3.11. For discussion, see Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams, "Anselm's account of freedom," in Brian Davies and Brian Leftow (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 179–203.

the will occurs only when we are actually willing something that we are consciously thinking about. Thus, even when we are asleep we have an affection for health. But this affection is to be distinguished from the actual use of the will in consciously willing health, or in willing to eat, say, a carrot rather than an ice cream sundae, for the sake of health.

Given these three senses of will, in what does an act of will consist for Anselm? It would appear to consist in an instance of will as use, that is, in our actually, consciously willing something, with will as instrument, to which we are disposed by will as affection. Thus, at *De libertate arbitrii*, 7, Anselm distinguishes will as instrument from will as use as follows:

The will means both the instrument of willing which is in the soul and our turning will to this or that as we turn sight to see different things. And this use of the will, which is the instrument of willing, is also called will, just as sight means both the use of sight and that which is the instrument of seeing.³

Having made this distinction, Anselm goes on to say that the will as instrument “performs its act when it wills something,” apparently identifying the will’s act with its use. In what follows, I will assume that for Anselm an act of will is will as use, an actual willing or turning of the will toward something. What, then, is God’s relationship to such acts when they are sinful? Let us turn to consider the answer Anselm gives in our first set of passages.

God as cause of the act of sin

Like Augustine before him and Aquinas after, Anselm affirms what for convenience can be called the “doctrine of divine universal causality,” a doctrine according to which God is the source and cause of all being other than himself. Anselm’s commitment to this doctrine can be discovered early on in the *Monologion*. There Anselm concludes:

With the exception of the supreme essence itself, nothing exists that is not made by the supreme essence. The only things that exist, or have existed, are the supreme essence and the things made by the supreme essence (*Monologion*, 7).

Since free creaturely actions exist and are distinct from God, it follows from the doctrine of divine universal causality that they too are caused by God. In a number of locations we find Anselm embracing this implication. For Anselm, all that is real even in sinful actions has God as a cause. To be sure, God is not the cause of the lack of rectitude or justice in virtue of which such actions are sinful. Since lacks or absences are not real entities, they are not among those things to which God’s causality extends. Nevertheless, God does cause the act of sin considered as a positively existing entity. The following passages are representative of Anselm’s teaching:

³ All quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

When the devil turned his will to what he should not, both his will and his turning were something real... Insofar as the will and its movement or turning are real they are good and come from God. But insofar as they are deprived of some justice that they ought to have, they are not absolutely bad but bad in a sense, and what is bad in them does not come from the will of God or from God insofar as he moves the will. Evil is injustice, which is only evil and evil is nothing (*De casu diaboli*, 20).

For unrighteousness is not a quality nor an action nor a being but merely the absence of something which ought to be present and occurs only in the will where righteousness ought to exist. It is owing to that righteous or unrighteous will that every rational creature and each and every one of its deeds is called righteous or unrighteous. Of course every quality, every action, everything that has existence owes its being at all to God, who is the source of all uprightness but not of unrighteousness. Therefore, although God is a factor in all that is done by a righteous or unrighteous will in its good and evil acts, nevertheless, in the case of its good acts he effects both their existence and their goodness, whereas in the case of its evil acts he causes them to be, not to be evil (*De concordia*, 7).

The very act of willing, which is sometimes righteous, sometimes unrighteous, and is nothing other than the employment of the will and power given by God, insofar as it exists, is something good and proceeds from God. And in this case when its existence is upright, it is both good and upright; but when its existence is unrighteous, it is evil and unrighteous solely because of its unrighteousness. However, existing rightly is something and is owed to God, but not existing rightly is not something and is not due to God (*De concordia*, 7).

Since every being comes from God, from whom comes nothing unjust, no being is in itself evil. ... Injustice has no being, although we are accustomed to give this name to the effects and acts of the unjust will, which considered in themselves are something. ... My treatise *On the Fall of the Devil* has, I think, adequately shown that justice is uprightness of the will kept for its own sake, and that injustice is nothing but the absence of justice that should be there, and has no being: that every being comes from God, and that nothing that is not good comes from God (*De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato*, 4–5).

Based on the foregoing passages it would seem clear that Anselm holds God to be the cause of all acts of will, whether righteous or unrighteous, good or evil. Perhaps, it goes without saying that in claiming God as cause of human actions Anselm does not mean to deny that those actions are also brought about by the creaturely agents whose actions they are. Anselm is not occasionalist. He takes divine universal causality to be consistent with creatures enjoying genuine agency and freedom. Given his commitment to both divine universal causality and

creaturely agency, Anselm would seem committed to a free creaturely act's proceeding from both God and the creature.⁴

But how firm is Anselm's commitment to divine universal causality when it comes to free creaturely acts? In particular, does Anselm consistently affirm that God is the cause of creaturely acts of sin?

God's causing acts of sin: A logical impossibility?

Katherin A. Rogers has recently argued that in Anselm's view, "It is logically impossible that God be the cause of every human choice, since humans sin and it is logically impossible for God to will that someone should sin."⁵ As a basis for her judgment, Rogers refers the reader to an argument that Anselm gives at *De libertate arbitrii*, 8.⁶ In the immediate context leading up to Chapter 8, Anselm argues that it is impossible for the will to lose its rectitude unwillingly, or against its will. Chapter 8 poses the question whether God could take away rectitude from the will. Anselm concludes that God could not, and it is his argument for this conclusion that Rogers interprets as saying that God's causing the act of sin is logically impossible.

According to Anselm,⁷ if God removes rectitude from someone's will, then God wills to do what he does. As a result, if God removes the rectitude from someone's will, then "he does not want the one from whom he removes this rectitude to preserve the rectitude of will for its own sake." But "to preserve rectitude of will for its own sake is, for everyone who does it, to will what God wants him to will." Consequently, if God removes one's rectitude, "he does not will one to will what he wills one to will" (*non vult eum velle quod vult eum velle*).⁸ Since that implication is an "impossible consequence," "nothing is more impossible than that God should take away the rectitude of will."

Does the foregoing argument show that God's causing the act of sin results in a logical impossibility? Notice that, strictly speaking, that is not what the argument claims to show. Rather, the argument claims to show that what results in contradiction is *God's removing rectitude* from the will. In order to reach the conclusion that *God's causing the act of sin* results

⁴ That Anselm is no occasionalist is clear from his insistence at *De casu diaboli*, 13 ff., that God gave the angel the faculties and affections needed for the angel to move himself to will happiness and justice. That the same faculties and affections were given to human beings Anselm tells us at, among other places, *De concordia*, 3.11–13. A creature that acts of itself exercises genuine agency. However, it would be a mistake to infer from Anselm's insistence that the creature acts of itself that its acts are not also caused by God. Since we find Anselm teaching that creaturely acts come from the creature and that creaturely acts come from God, we would better suppose that, like other medieval thinkers, Anselm thinks that creaturely acts come from both the creature and God.

⁵ Katherin A. Rogers, "The necessity of the present and Anselm's eternalist response to the problem of theological fatalism," *Religious Studies* 43, (2007), p. 27. See also Katherin A. Rogers, "Does God Cause Sin? Anselm of Canterbury versus Jonathan Edwards on Human Freedom and Divine Sovereignty," *Faith and Philosophy* Vol. 20, No. 3, (2003), pp. 372–373.

⁶ The argument can be found again at *De concordia*, 1.6.

⁷ All paraphrasing and direct quotation in this paragraph come from *De libertate arbitrii*, 8.

⁸ My translation from *Anselmi opera omnia*.

in contradiction, one would need to modify the argument. One possibility would be to add to Anselm's argument the premises that "if God causes a person's act of sin, then God willingly causes the person's act of sin," and that "if God willingly causes the person's act of sin, then God wills to remove rectitude from that person's will." The rest of the argument would follow just as Anselm offers it, but with the additional implication that God's causing the act of sin results in contradiction every bit as much as God's willingly removing a person's rectitude.

Perhaps, Anselm would reject the added premise that "if God willingly causes a person's act of sin, then he willingly removes that person's rectitude." But, before pursuing this possibility, we might ask, "Why not just leave well enough alone?" As it stands, the argument at *De libertate arbitrii*, 8 does not show or claim to show that God's causing the act of sin is logically impossible. Thus, as it stands, it is not inconsistent with what Anselm says in the passages we looked at in the previous section. Have we found an easy solution to our problem?

Unfortunately, though to my knowledge Anselm never offers an explicit argument to the effect that God's causing the act of sin is logically impossible, he does offer a characterization of sin from which such an argument, very similar to the one at *De libertate arbitrii*, 8, can easily be constructed. Rogers no doubt has this conception of sin in mind in judging that, for Anselm, it is logically impossible for God to cause sinful choices.

The account of sin suggested in those passages where Anselm speaks of God as cause of the act of sin is that of an act of will to which is attached a deprivation of rectitude or justice. In *Cur deus homo*, however, Anselm characterizes sin primarily as acting contrary to the will of God. Thus, at *Cur deus homo*, 1.11, we learn that "to sin is nothing other than not to give God what is owed to him." What, then, is owed to him? "All the will of a rational creature ought to be subject to the will of God." It looks here as if to sin is simply not to subject one's will to God's will. This characterization of sin is even more explicit at 1.21. In asking, "How heavy is the weight of sin?" Anselm uses as an example of sin "one glance contrary to the will of God."

If you were to see yourself in the sight of God, and someone were to say to you, "Look over there," and God were to interject, "It is totally against my will that you should look," consider for yourself in your own heart what contingency there is, in the totality of things which exist, on account of which you are obliged to take that look contrary to the will of God.

How weighty a matter would such a sin be for Anselm?

I have no alternative but to admit that, for the sake even of preserving the whole of creation, there is nothing which I ought to do contrary to the will of God.

From this characterization of sin as acting contrary to the will of God, we can easily construct an argument to the effect that it is logically impossible for God to cause the act of sin. Consider the following:

- (1) If God causes the act of sin, then God willingly causes the act of sin (premise).
- (2) If God willingly causes the act of sin, then God wills the sinful act (premise).
- (3) But a sinful act is contrary to God's will (premise).
- (4) And an act contrary to God's will is an act God does not will (premise).
- (5) Therefore, if God causes the act of sin, then God wills the sinful act and does not will the sinful act (from 1–4).
- (6) If (5), then God's causing the act of sin is logically impossible (premise).
- (7) Therefore, God's causing the act of sin is logically impossible (from 5 and 6).

It appears, then, that Anselm has an understanding of sin on which God could not possibly cause the act of sin. Does Anselm simply have irreconcilable accounts of the relationship between God and sinful acts? Let us consider some possible solutions to the apparent conflict.

First Solution: God causes only the power to perform sinful acts

In certain passages, Anselm gives as a reason for thinking that God is cause of creaturely acts of will that God is the cause or giver of the power or capacity by which those acts are performed. Consider the following:

Just as God does not cause unrighteousness, so too he does not cause something to be unrighteous. On the other hand he does cause all actions and movements since he causes the things by which, from which, through which, and in which they are done. Nothing has any power to will or act unless God bestows it (*De concordia*, 1.7).

The will as a tool moves all the other tools which we freely use ... It also produces all the movements of the will even as it moves itself by its own dispositions. It can therefore be called a tool that moves itself. I say that the will as tool causes all the movements of the will. Yet on deeper reflection, God is more truly said to produce all that nature or human will produce, for God creates nature and the will as tool along with its dispositions—without which it accomplishes nothing (*De concordia*, 3.11).

Such passages suggest a first solution for reconciling texts where Anselm identifies God as cause of creaturely acts of sin with texts where Anselm says that to sin is to act contrary to God's will. For, perhaps, in those passages where Anselm identifies God as cause of the act of sin, he means nothing more than that God is the cause of the powers, capacities, dispositions and affections by virtue of which the creature performs the act. How does this reading afford a solution to our problem?

Saying that God is cause of acts of sin in the sense of causing the powers and dispositions by which those acts are performed preserves some meaning for those passages in which Anselm teaches that God is cause of these acts. For, since these acts depend on the powers and

dispositions by which they are performed, and since these powers and dispositions depend on God, so will these acts depend on God. We could even say that these acts depend causally on God, since they depend for their existence on an exercise of divine causality in causing the requisite powers and dispositions. On the other hand, since an actual act is something more than and distinct from the powers and dispositions by which it is performed, and since it is possible for a creature to have the powers and dispositions without performing the act, in causing the powers and dispositions by which the creature commits the sinful act, it will not follow that God has caused the sinful act itself. Thus, even though the act of sin depends on an exercise of divine causality, it will not follow strictly that God causes the act of sin. As a result, the act of sin can be contrary to God's will just as Anselm sometimes describes it.

The solution just considered has the added advantage of allowing a straightforward reading of certain passages where Anselm describes sinful acts as something God permits rather than causes. Thus, for instance, at *De libertate arbitrii*, 8, Anselm's teacher divides what exists into things God makes and things God permits, and he goes on to categorize bad deeds as permitted, rather than made, by God:

Surely you do not think that anything could exist in any way if God did not either make it or permit it? ... But God permits some to do badly what they badly will.

We typically think that an act permitted is something not actually brought about or caused by the one permitting, even if the one permitting could have done something that would have prevented the act from occurring. This first solution accords well with the way we normally think of permitting, and with Anselm's classifying bad deeds as permitted rather than made by God. On the first solution, God could have prevented sinful acts by not giving the creature the powers needed to perform them. Yet, in giving these powers, God does not make the sinful acts, since he does not, strictly speaking, cause them.

Finally, the first solution accords well with a few passages where Anselm seems to say not just that the creature is cause of the act of sin—a claim compatible with God's also being the cause—but rather that the creature *alone* is cause of the sinful act. When at *De casu diaboli*, 27 Anselm's student asks why the angel willed what he ought not, Anselm's teacher responds:

No cause precedes this will except that he can will. ... This will has no other cause by which it is forced or attracted, but it was its own efficient cause, so to speak, as well as its own effect.

Similarly, at *De concordia*, 3.14:

In the case of evil deeds people are the sole cause of their evilness because they do them by their independent, unjust choice alone.

Passages such as these are most easily read as teaching that only the creature causes the act of sin. Although such passages are exceptional, occurring less frequently than passages where Anselm maintains that the act of sin is from God as well as the creature, we can credit the first solution with being able to accommodate them. Since the first solution denies that God causes the act of sin, it harmonizes well with such passages.

Despite the merits of this first solution, it is still not entirely satisfying as a means of resolving the seeming conflict between Anselm's various statements concerning God's relationship to acts of sin. For, it seems a strained reading to interpret all of the texts where Anselm identifies God as cause of creaturely acts as meaning simply that God causes the powers and dispositions by which those acts are performed. This is especially the case in passages such as the following:

When the devil turned his will to what he should not, both his will and his turning were something real... Insofar as the will and its movement or turning are real they are good and come from God (*De casu diaboli*, 20).

Of course every quality, every action, everything that has existence owes its being at all to God (*De concordia*, 1.7).

If the power to will and the willing itself are something real, they are good and come from God. Both the one and the other are something real. And the power was only a good and spontaneous gift of God; the willing was good with respect to its being, but since it was made unjustly it was evil; and nevertheless it was from God from whom is everything that is something (*De casu diaboli*, 28).

In these passages we find (1) that Anselm clearly distinguishes willings or acts of will from the will and its powers, (2) that he regards acts of will, and not only the will and its powers, as real, and (3) that in virtue of being real, acts of will, and not only the will and its powers, come from God.⁹ Anselm here roots his teaching that creaturely acts of will come from God in his commitment to the doctrine of divine universal causality. Given his commitment to divine universal causality, and given his recognition that acts of will are realities distinct from the powers by which creatures perform them, we should not be surprised to find Anselm arguing that the acts have God as their cause every bit as much as the powers. But, then, the first solution, since it denies that acts of sin are caused by God, appears inharmonious not only with those texts in which Anselm identifies God as cause of acts of sin, but also with Anselm's primary reason for so identifying Him.

⁹ The second of these passages, where it says that every action "owes its being at all to God," is easier to reconcile with the first solution than are the first and third passages, where the action is said to "come from God." For, an action might "owe its being to God" simply in virtue of God's causing the powers without which the action could not have been performed. Yet, to say that the action "comes from God" suggests that God is, in fact, cause of the action, which is not strictly the case on the first solution.

Second Solution: Diverse senses of “sinful act”

The second solution attempts to show how Anselm might reject the argument that God’s causing the act of sin is logically impossible, even while maintaining that to act sinfully is to act contrary to the will of God. Recall that that argument runs as follows:

- (1) If God causes the act of sin, then God willingly causes the act of sin (premise).
- (2) If God willingly causes the act of sin, then God wills the sinful act (premise).
- (3) But a sinful act is contrary to God’s will (premise).
- (4) And an act contrary to God’s will is an act God does not will (premise).
- (5) Therefore, if God causes the act of sin, then God wills the sinful act and does not will the sinful act (from 1–4).
- (6) If (5), then God’s causing the act of sin is logically impossible (premise).
- (7) Therefore, God’s causing the act of sin is logically impossible (from 5 and 6).

I will assume that Anselm would agree that God’s will extends to whatever he causes, and thus, that if God causes acts of sin, then they are willed by God. Still, Anselm is at pains to make three critical points about sinful acts. First, the existing act of sin is not itself something bad, evil, or sinful, but rather something good. Second, as good and existing, the act of sin is caused by God. Third, the evil that attaches to acts of sin is neither willed nor caused by God. Consider the following passages that further illustrate Anselm’s teaching on these points:

Neither a bad will nor a depraved conversion of will is the very evil whereby an angel or man becomes evil, which we say is nothing, nor a good will or a good conversion of will the good whereby they become good (*De casu diaboli*, 8).

Nothing is considered just in itself but justice, and nothing is thought unjust or sinful but injustice: not substance nor action, nor even the will in which justice and injustice reside (*De conceptu virginali et de originali peccato*, 4).

No will insofar as it exists is evil but is good because it is the work of God, nor is it evil except insofar as it is unjust (*De casu diaboli*, 19).

If the power to will and the willing itself are something real, they are good and come from God. Both the one and the other are something real. And the power was only a good and spontaneous gift of God; the willing was good with respect to its being, but since it was made unjustly it was evil; and nevertheless it was from God from whom is everything that is something (*De casu diaboli*, 28).¹⁰

¹⁰ The translation of the last sentence of this passage in Davies and Evans differs significantly from the Latin in *Anselmi opera omnia*. The last sentence is my own translation.

Insofar as the will and its movement or turning are real they are good and come from God. But insofar as they are deprived of some justice that they ought to have, they are not absolutely bad but bad in a sense and what is bad in them does not come from the will of God or from God insofar as he moves the will. Evil is injustice, which is only evil and evil is nothing (*De casu diabolil*, 20).

The will because of which a person or an action is termed righteous or unrighteous is neither more nor less precisely what it is existentially, when it is righteous or unrighteous. So in this fashion God causes in all volitions and good actions both that they actually exist and that they are good, while in evil actions he is not the cause of their evil but only that they exist (*De concordia*, 1.7).

In these passages, a sinful act is thought of primarily as an act of will to which is attached a lack or absence of rectitude or justice. It might best be thought of as a sort of composite made up of the existing act itself and the lack or absence adjoined to the act. Considered only insofar as it is an existing act, the act is good, and something caused and willed by God. By contrast, the deprivation attached to the act is evil and not willed or caused by God. How Anselm would answer the question, “Does God cause and will sinful acts?” will therefore depend on whether by “sinful acts” one means only the existing act, or whether one means the existing act together with the adjoining deprivation. If one means just the existing act, then Anselm would answer the question in the affirmative. If one means both the existing act and the deprivation, then Anselm would answer in the negative. “Are sinful acts contrary to God’s will?” If by “sinful act” one means the existing act taken by itself, then Anselm would answer “no,” since the existing act is caused and willed by God. If by “sinful act” one means the act with respect to its deprivation, then Anselm would answer “yes.” Just as when we say that it is contrary to the will of a coach that his players “play poorly,” we do not mean that it is contrary to his will that they play, but only contrary to his will that the play lacks the quality it ought to have; so Anselm might say that the sinful act is contrary to God’s will, not because the existing act itself is so contrary, but because it is contrary to God’s will that the act lack the rectitude or justice it ought to have. There is, then, according to this second solution, a perfectly good sense in which we can say that sinful acts are contrary to God’s will, while allowing that the existing act of sin is caused, even willed, by God.

We can now turn to see how the current approach would enable Anselm, while affirming that sinful acts are contrary to God’s will, nevertheless to reject the argument that God’s causing the act of sin is logically impossible. For, given the current approach, it seems that Anselm would reject either premise (2) or premise (3) of the argument, depending on how the critical phrases “act of sin” and “sinful act” are understood in these premises. The sense of “act of sin” on which Anselm would affirm the antecedent of premise (2), that “God willingly causes the act of sin,” is the sense that includes only the existing act of will. “Sinful act” in the consequent of (2) and in premise (3) can then be interpreted in one of two ways. On a first way, “sinful act” refers only to the existing act of will. On a second way, “sinful act” refers to both the existing act and the adjoining deprivation. If “sinful act” is understood in the first way, then Anselm would

accept (2) but reject (3). He would accept (2) because it would amount to the simple tautology that if God wills the existing act of sin, then he wills the agent's existing act. Yet, on this interpretation of "sinful act" he would reject (3) because Anselm thinks that God wills the existing act of sin, and therefore, he does not think that the existing act is contrary to God's will. On the other hand, if "sinful act" is understood according to the second way, where it includes both the existing act and the deprivation, then while Anselm could accept premise (3), he would reject (2). Anselm could accept (3) because sinful acts are contrary to God's will in the sense that it is contrary to God's will that an agent's act lack the rectitude or justice it ought to have. Yet, Anselm would reject (2); for, while he would agree with the antecedent—that God willingly causes the existing act of sin—he would disagree with the consequent understood as God's willing both the existing act of sin and the adjoining deprivation. However we interpret "sinful act," therefore, Anselm could reject one of the premises of the argument.

The second solution shows how Anselm could affirm both that God causes the existing act of sin, and that acting sinfully is contrary to God's will, thus reconciling the two sets of passages that appeared to be in conflict. The second solution also enables us to reconcile Anselm's talk of God's causing the act of sin with those passages where Anselm speaks of sinful acts as being "permitted" by God. For, we could say that what God permits is that the sinful act be deprived of the rectitude or justice it ought to have, though the existing act itself God causes and not merely permits. In at least one location that may offer some support for this reading, Anselm speaks of God as cause of the existence of evil actions in close proximity to his speaking of those same actions as being permitted by God:

God's predestination attaches not only to our good actions but, it is possible to say, to our evil ones in the sense that it is by permitting the latter that God is said to be the cause of evils which he does not actually cause. ... He is, however, more precisely said to foreknow and predestine their good works because in their case he causes both that they exist and that they are good, whereas in the case of the evil ones he is only the cause that they simply exist and not that they are evil (*De concordia*, 2.2).

Since evil actions are here spoken of as being caused as well as permitted by God, the passage suggests that Anselm would deny for any sinful act the inference from "God permits this sinful act" to "God does not cause the existence of this act."

Despite the merits of the second solution, it is not obvious that it will work as an interpretation of Anselm. Clearly, since the solution holds that the existing act of sin is caused by God, it will not accommodate the passages looked at in the previous section, where Anselm seems to say that the act of sin comes from the creature alone. We noted that these passages are exceptional, that more frequently Anselm tells us that the act of sin, as real, has God too as

cause. Still, the passages are there, and it should be noted that the second solution will not accommodate them.¹¹

Yet, even if we put aside the exceptional passages, the viability of the second solution depends on our having an answer to a question, which answer it is difficult to extract from Anselm's corpus. The question concerns the precise nature of the deprivation that makes an act sinful. If that deprivation just is the existing act's lack of conformity to God's will, then the second solution fails. For, the second solution holds that the existing act itself is caused and willed by God, and that only the deprivation in the act is contrary to God's will. This solution would work, for example, if the deprivation turned out to be something like a lack of conduciveness to the creature's flourishing or an inability of the maxim behind the creature's act to be willed by the creature into universal law. For, there would be no contradiction in God's causing and willing the existing act itself, even though the act's non-conduciveness to the creature's flourishing or inability to be universalized lacks conformity to God's will. If, on the other hand, the deprivation in the existing act is simply the act's lack of conformity to God's will, that means this very act would not be willed by God. But, then, given the second solution, the very same thing, the existing act of sin, would be willed by God and not willed by God, which is impossible.¹²

As we have seen, Anselm normally identifies the deprivation that makes an act sinful with a lack or absence of rectitude or justice. So, in order to determine whether the second solution works, we need to know what such an absence amounts to. In particular, does it amount simply to the existing act's lack of conformity to God's will, or does it constitute some other sort of absence that is logically consistent with God's causing and willing the existing act of sin.

Anselm tells us that a thing has "rectitude" when it is or does what it ought to be or do.¹³ A will's rectitude consists in its willing what it ought. An act has rectitude when the agent acts as he ought. "Justice" Anselm famously defines as preserving rectitude of the will for the sake of

¹¹ At least the second solution cannot accommodate these passages unless there can be found some way of interpreting them consistent with God's being cause of the existing act of sin.

¹² One might argue that the very same thing could be both willed by God and not willed by God, if it were willed by God in one way and not willed by God in another. So, for instance, one might distinguish a will by which God makes things to be from a will by which God issues commands. One could then hold without contradiction that the very same act was willed by God with the first of these wills, but not with the second. At *Cur deus homo*, 1.15, Anselm talks of God's having a will that issues orders, a will that inflicts punishment, and a will that permits, although it is unclear whether he thinks these are, in fact, different wills, even conceptually. At any rate, I will not consider further the solution that would introduce diverse wills in God. The textual support for this solution appears weaker than that for the two I have proposed.

¹³ *De veritate*, 10. In keeping with the translation found in Oxford's *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, I let "rectitude" translate Anselm's *rectitudo*. For some reservations about this translation, as well as helpful discussion of Anselm's understanding of rectitude and justice, see Katherin A. Rogers, "Anselm on Eudaemonism and the hierarchical structure of moral choice," *Religious Studies* 41:3 (2005), 249–268. For further discussion of Anselm on rectitude and justice, see Sandra Visser and Thomas Williams' "Anselm on truth," and Jeffrey E. Brower's "Anselm on ethics," both in *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm*. See, also, Montague Brown, "Augustine and Anselm on the Essence of Moral Responsibility," *The Saint Anselm Journal* 4.2 (Spring 2007), 1–10.

rectitude, or willing what one ought for the reason that it is what one ought to will.¹⁴ Given these definitions, a will or act lacks rectitude when it does not will or act as it ought. A will or act can lack justice in two ways: Either the one willing or acting does not will or act as he ought, or, though he wills or acts as he ought, he does not do so for the very reason that so willing or acting is how he ought to will or act.

Even with these characterizations of rectitude and justice, and what it would be for an act to be deprived of rectitude or justice, we still do not know precisely what such deprivations amount to without Anselm's account of what it means for an agent to act as he ought. What matters especially for the purposes of evaluating the second solution is whether Anselm thinks that to act as one ought means simply that one's act is willed by God. If that is what it means, then for an act to lack rectitude would mean simply that the act is not willed by God, a fatal result for the second solution, as we have seen.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to say with confidence what Anselm means by an act's being as it ought, since he does not offer a formal analysis of the concepts "ought" and "ought not." Indeed, we are left with something of an interpretive conundrum, where some passages suggest, without requiring us to say, that Anselm thought the deprivation in the act of sin simply a lack of conformity to God's will; while other passages suggest, without requiring us to say, that Anselm thought the deprivation not simply reducible to such a lack of conformity.

Thus, at *De libertate arbitrii*, 8 and *De concordia*, 1.6, Anselm respectively tells us that justice and uprightness are present only when one wills what God wants one to will.¹⁵ Though Anselm does not here unambiguously identify justice and rectitude with willing what God wants, the reader may speculate that Anselm accepts this identification, especially when at *De casu diaboli*, 4 he characterizes the angel's sin as his willing what God did not want him to will.¹⁶ There is some reason to think, then, that for Anselm an act's rectitude or justice simply is its conforming to God's will, and that the deprivation in sinful acts is nothing more than a lack of conformity to God's will.

Yet, passages such as the ones just cited do not absolutely require the foregoing interpretation. For, it is consistent with these passages that rectitude or justice be something else than the existing act's mere conformity to God's will. For convenience, let us label this something else 'x'. Suppose that there is some x, besides mere conformity to God's will, that justice or rectitude consists in, and suppose further that God wills that one's actions have x. To

¹⁴ *De veritate*, 12.

¹⁵ Thus, at *De libertate arbitrii*, 8: "No will is just unless it wills what God wants it to will," and at *De concordia*, 1.6: "The state of justice that constitutes the just person is precisely that uprightness of will I have described—an uprightness which is present in people only when they, for their part, will what God wants them to will."

¹⁶ *De casu diaboli*, 4: "So he sinned by willing something that pleased him and that he did not have and should not then have willed ... And when he willed what God did not want him to will, he inordinately willed to be like God. ... Even if he did not will to be wholly equal to God, but something less than God against the will of God, by that very fact he inordinately willed to be like God ... Not only did he will to be equal to God in presuming to have his own will, but he even willed to be greater by willing what God did not want him to will ..."

say, as the foregoing passages do, that justice and rectitude are present only when one wills what God wants could then be interpreted to mean, not that justice and rectitude are present only when one's existing acts conform to God's will, but rather that justice and rectitude are present only when one wills acts that have x. Similarly, one could say that the angel willed what God did not want him to will, not because the angel's existing act was contrary to God's will, but because the angel willed an act that lacked the x that God wanted it to have.

Despite the fact that it would save the second solution, one reason to doubt this last interpretation is that, if Anselm really did think that an act's rectitude, or justice, or being as it ought, consisted in something other than its being willed by God, then one would expect Anselm to have given an account of what this something else is. Yet, Anselm provides no such account. On the other hand, there is at least one passage that suggests that Anselm did not simply identify an act's justice with its being willed by God. At *Cur deus homo*, 1.12, Anselm states,

A statement, 'What God wills is just and what he does not will is unjust', is not to be understood as meaning that, 'If God wishes anything whatsoever that is unfitting, it is just, since it is he who wills it.' For the argument, 'If it is God's will to tell a lie, it is just to tell a lie', is a *non sequitur*.

According to Jeffrey Brower, "this passage certainly suggests that Anselm rejects any straightforward identification of justice or rightness with what God wills."¹⁷ Yet, if for an act to be just or right is not simply for it to be willed by God, and, therefore, if its lacking justice or rectitude is not simply for it not to be willed by God, then, even though we still want an answer to the question what it is for an act to have or to lack justice and rectitude, nevertheless, the second solution might be salvaged.

Unfortunately, the passage just cited does not show decisively that Anselm does not identify a creaturely act's justice or rectitude with its being willed by God. In the first place, the issue at stake in the passage is not whether a creaturely act's justice consists in its being willed by God, but rather whether an action on God's part would be just simply because God willed it. Second, if one reads on, it is clear that the main reason Anselm thinks that God's telling a lie could not be just simply by God willing it is that Anselm thinks it unfitting, perhaps even impossible, for God to will to lie. Perhaps, this reasoning suggests that Anselm thinks there is some standard of justice other than God's will, to which God's will necessarily conforms, and by reason of which God could not will to tell a lie.¹⁸ And, perhaps, one could then say that creaturely acts of sin are deprived of rectitude or justice, not because the existing acts lack conformity to God's will, but because they lack conformity to this non-voluntarist standard. Yet, to develop an approach along these lines is to go further than Anselm goes in the passage in question. Allowing that there may be some things it is impossible for God to will, the passage is

¹⁷ Brower, 231.

¹⁸ Brower suggests that this standard is God's nature. See Brower, 231. As Brower is undoubtedly aware, the extent to which we can speak of God's nature as being other than God's will is complicated by Anselm's acceptance of divine simplicity.

still consistent with the claim that creaturely acts have justice and rectitude by being willed by God, and lack justice and rectitude by not being so willed.

In the end, then, it is difficult to determine whether the second solution works as a means of resolving the tension between those passages where Anselm maintains that God causes the act of sin and those passages where Anselm characterizes sinful acts as contrary to God's will. The second solution works only if the deprivation in sinful acts amounts to something other than a mere lack of conformity to God's will. Yet, from what Anselm tells us, we cannot be sure what he takes this deprivation to consist in. Thus, the second solution, like the first, is not entirely satisfying as an interpretation of Saint Anselm.