

# Anselm on Truth and Beauty

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*For Saint Anselm, truth is analogical, rather than strictly deductive or inductive. Such a notion of truth suggests beauty as a criterion. In the first of four sections, this essay examines the notion of truth as analogical as it appears in the main argument for the existence of God in the Monologion. In the second, the essay considers how the Proslogion invokes this aesthetic notion of truth more explicitly and by way of the work's very structure. The third section focuses on the more systematic treatment of truth as analogical which Anselm presents in De Veritate. The final section addresses Anselm's invocation of beauty and hence of his analogical notion of truth in making his case for what he calls the necessity of the Incarnation in Cur Deus Homo.*

In the Prologue to his *Monologion*, Saint Anselm famously declares that he is going to discuss the essence of the divine and related topics without reference to Scripture, using merely “the necessity of reason.”<sup>1</sup> Again in his Preface to *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm expresses his intention to prove the necessity of the Incarnation without reference to Revelation. However, unlike in the *Monologion* where (except for the opening paragraph of Chapter 1) he never even uses the term God until the very last chapter, he brings in beautiful statements of the faith early in the work. Still, he does not allow that the fittingness of these statements of the Christian faith is sufficient to prove them true. Rather, as in the *Monologion*, he insists on proof provided by reason itself to provide the foundation for “all these things [that] are beautiful.”<sup>2</sup> Between the two works lie the *Proslogion* and *De Veritate*. These works help explain Anselm's notion of truth as analogical, rather than strictly linear (whether deductive or inductive), a notion of truth that suggests beauty as a criterion.

The paper will be divided into four sections. In the first, we shall examine the notion of truth as analogical as it appears in the main argument for the existence of God in the *Monologion*. In the second, we shall consider the *Proslogion* as invoking this aesthetic notion of truth more explicitly and by way of the work's very structure. In the third section, we shall discuss the more systematic treatment of truth as analogical which Anselm presents in *De Veritate*. In the last section, we shall see how Anselm invokes beauty in making his case in *Cur Deus Homo* for what he calls the necessity of the Incarnation.

## Section One

That Anselm is invoking a use of reason that includes an aesthetic dimension is evident even in the *Monologion*, in which there is an explicit refusal to consider Scripture and the faith,

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<sup>1</sup> Anselm, *Monologion*, in *Anselm: Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2007), Prologue, p. 1; *rationis necessitas*, *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, Volumen Primum (Seccovii, 1938), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, in *Basic Writings*, 1.4, p. 4; *haec pulchra*, *Opera Omnia*, Volumen Secundum, p. 51.

with all their appeals to the beauty of creation and of the story of our salvation to support his argument. The main argument he uses insists on the exercise of our powers of analogy. Following the Platonic insight into the hierarchy of analogous goods to be found in the world, Anselm concludes to the requirement that there be a first Good, what he will call the Supreme Essence, so as not to rely on the Christian sense of God.<sup>3</sup>

The argument can easily be framed by posing, as Anselm does, the following question: “Since there are countless goods, whose great diversity we both experience through our bodily senses and discern through the reasoning of our mind, are we to believe that there is some one thing through which all goods whatsoever are good?”<sup>4</sup> It is a rhetorical question to which the answer is yes, and which he makes clear in the logical clarification that follows. But even the insight into the truth that there are many good things, more or less or equally good, invokes our powers of analogy and hence calls into play aesthetic reason. For if the things are many, and more clearly if they are more or less good,<sup>5</sup> then they do not exist as good in exactly the same sense. Hence the word good is used analogically in describing the things we experience.

But every analogy works only according to some proportion guided by a prime analogate, in this case some one meaning of good which enters into every one of the things we call good. What exactly we mean by the ultimate good is hard to explain, as Plato says in the *Republic*. Perhaps it is impossible to explain, for one would have to transcend the limited good that is in one’s understanding to grasp the unlimited good which is the cause of every understanding and, indeed, of everything that is. This limit to the philosophical insight into the analogy of being does not deny the initial insight into the need for analogy, that is, for an aesthetic grasp of the harmony and balance of the simultaneity of sameness and difference. It does, however, suggest the reality of a first good that does not have this limit, one in which Anselm clearly believes—the God who freely creates and enters into a covenant with his creatures. Such a belief is certainly in play in the *Proslogion* and more subtly in the later *Cur Deus Homo*. Let us turn now to the *Proslogion* to see what light it can shed on our grasp on Anselm’s notion of truth as analogical and thus in some sense aesthetic.

## Section Two

The *Proslogion*, which contains Anselm’s famous simplified argument for the existence of God (later referred to as the ontological argument), opens and closes with an explicit appeal to faith. Anselm speaks about the dramatic tension between our desire for God and our turning away from God, which is reminiscent of Augustine’s *Confessions*. The language is highly

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<sup>3</sup> This arguing from different levels is also the preferred Augustinian approach to making God known and characteristic of the approach of Irenaeus. After Anselm, it is found in Bonaventure and Balthasar in particular, though it has its place in Thomas Aquinas, as well.

<sup>4</sup> *Monologion* 1, p. 7; Cum tam innumerabilia bona sint, quorum tam multam diversitatem et sensibus corporeis experiemur et ratione mentis discernimus: estne credendum esse unum aliquid, per quod unum sint bona quaecumque bona sunt (vol. 1, p. 14).

<sup>5</sup> This is Anselm’s second iteration of the argument in Ch. 4.

rhetorical and beautiful both in the prayers at the beginning and at the end of the work, and in the beautiful structure of the work as a whole.

In the beginning, Anselm's language expresses the tension between the desire to be with God and the sadness that he is separated from God. At the end, the language is imbued with the joy at having found and placed his trust in God. Here Anselm makes use of the "how much more" expression of analogical proportion. Things in God are like, but even better, than they are in our experience.

If created life is good, how good is the life that creates? If the salvation that has been brought about is joyful, how joyful is the salvation that brings about all salvation? If wisdom in the knowledge of created things is desirable, how desirable is the wisdom that created all things from nothing? In short, if there are many and great delights in delightful things, what kind and how great a delight is there in him who made those delightful things?<sup>6</sup>

The last comparison seems to refer to the content of beauty as well as the expression of it. As Thomas will later say, beauty is that which delights. This is made even more explicit in the next chapter where Anselm declares beauty to be an end possessed in heaven by the faithful. "If it is beauty that delights you, 'the righteous will shine like the sun' [Matt. 13:43]."<sup>7</sup> God, who is the prime analogate shedding light on the other analogates, informs our understanding, not by being contained by it, but by containing it. It is in revelation and even more in the very presence of God that we know beauty, love, and joy best. "The whole of that joy will therefore not enter into those who rejoice; instead, those who rejoice will enter wholly into that joy."<sup>8</sup> The knowledge, love and joy of God are not able to be contained in us, as in our concepts, judgments, or rational proofs. Rather, we are taken into God, who as prime analogate for knowledge, love, and joy, transcends all that is human while preserving it. The kind of knowledge of which Anselm speaks here is not that of clear concept, judgment, or logical conclusion (whether from deduction or induction); rather it is more analogical, with the only adequate analogate (one that could enter into the meaning of all the terms) being the God of revelation, the God-man who instantiates all divinity and humanity, and who creates and saves us. And so Anselm ends with a prayer of petition, as he began. "O God, I pray that I will know and love you that I might rejoice in you."<sup>9</sup> Our appreciation of beauty in things is a kind of contemplation. One enters into the presence of what is beautiful, as Anselm prays to enter into the knowledge of God.

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<sup>6</sup> Anselm, *Proslogion*, in *Basic Writings*, 24, pp. 94-95; Si enim bona est vita creata: quam bona est vita creatrix? Si iucunda est salus facta: quam iucunda est salus quae facit omnem salutem? Si amabilis est sapientia in cognitione rerum conditarum: quam amabilis est sapientia quae omnia condidit ex nihilo? Denique si multae et magnae delectationes sunt in rebus delectabilibus: qualis et quanta delectatio est in illo qui fecit ipsa delectabilia? (vol. 1, p. 118).

<sup>7</sup> *Proslogion*, 25, p. 95; Si delectat pulchritudo: 'fulgebunt iusti sicut sole' (vol. 1, p. 118). Notice the use of delight with beauty here.

<sup>8</sup> *Proslogion* 26, p. 97; Non ergo totum illud gaudium intrabit in gaudentes, sed toti gaudentes intrabunt in gaudium (vol. 1, p. 121).

<sup>9</sup> *Proslogion* 26, p. 97; Ora, deus, cognoscam te, amen te, ut gaudeam de te (vol. 1, p. 121).

As is true of Plato's dialogues (especially the early and middle ones) the *Proslogion* is itself an object of beauty insofar as it is an ordered and integrated whole. It opens and closes with prayer. More specifically, it opens with an address to "insignificant mortal," which exact phrase is repeated in Chapter 25. The work opens with an appeal to choose consciously to seek after God, which appeal is repeated in Chapter 24. In the first chapter, we read, "Come now insignificant mortal. Leave behind your concerns for a little while, and retreat for a short time from your restless thoughts."<sup>10</sup> In Chapter 24, we read, "Bestir yourself, O my soul! Lift up your whole understanding."<sup>11</sup> The ending of the work is an appeal to God for help in believing His promise: "Let my mind ponder on it, my tongue speak of it. Let my heart love it and my mouth preach it. Let my soul hunger for it, my flesh thirst for it, my whole being long for it, until I 'enter into the joy of my Lord.'"<sup>12</sup> This ending echoes the appeal at the end of the first chapter: "Let me seek you in desiring you; let me desire you in seeking you. Let me find you in loving you; let me love you in finding you."<sup>13</sup> This dramatic theme of paradoxical tension, repeated in beautiful rhetorical flourishes, is also echoed half-way through the work. Thus, at the beginning of the fourteenth of twenty-eight chapters, Anselm asks why, if he has found God by proving His existence, he does not experience God. "If you have found him, why do you not perceive what you have found? Why does my soul not perceive you, O Lord God, if it has found you? . . . O Lord my God, you who have fashioned and refashioned me, tell my longing soul what you are besides what it has seen, that it might see purely what it longs to see."<sup>14</sup> Interwoven with the more strictly logical analytical use of reason in his famous proof and supporting arguments, there is this appeal for a more intuitive grasp of God and God's plan. Thus, the work both appeals to something like our aesthetic grasp of beauty and, at the same time, presents itself as beautiful in its form and structure.

Still, these are indirect appeals to a truth that is not analytic but analogical. The more explicit expression of truth as analogical appears later in his treatise *De Veritate*. To that treatise, we now turn.

### Section Three

It is in his *De Veritate* that Anselm is most systematic in his explanation of truth as analogical. The work picks up on a discussion of truth in the *Monologion*. The student asks

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<sup>10</sup> *Proslogion* 1; Eia, homuncio, fuge paululum occupationes tuas, absconde te modicum a tumultuosis cogitationibus tuis (vol. 1, p. 97).

<sup>11</sup> *Proslogion* 24; Excita nunc, anima mea, et erige tuum intellectum tuum (vol. 1, p. 117).

<sup>12</sup> *Proslogion* 26, p. 98; Meditetur interim inde mens mea, loquatur inde lingua mea. Amet illud cor meum, sermocinetur os meum. Esuriant illud anima mea, sitiatur caro mea, desideret tota substantia mea, donec intrem 'in gaudium domini mei' (vol. 1, pp. 121-22).

<sup>13</sup> *Proslogion* 1, p. 81; Quaeram te desiderando, desiderem quaerendo. Inveniam amando, amem inveniando (vol. 1, p. 100).

<sup>14</sup> *Proslogion* 14, p. 89; Si vero invenisti: quid est, quod non sentis quod invenisti? Cur non te sentit, domine deus, anima mea, si invenit te? . . . Domine deus meus, formator et refomator meus, dic desideranti animae meae, quid aliud es, quam quod vidit, ut pure videat, quod desiderat (vol. 1, p. 111).

Anselm (the teacher) whether, when we speak of the truth, we are always speaking about God. Quoting a passage from the *Monologion*, the student asks for clarification: “I am eager for you to teach me a definition of truth.”<sup>15</sup> Anselm in his reply sets out the project for considering truth as analogical. “I don’t remember ever discovering a definition of truth; but if you like, let’s inquire what truth is by examining the variety of things in which we say there is truth.”<sup>16</sup> Such a project is far from a nominalist insistence on univocal meaning of terms and straightforward logical analysis, which is at work to some degree in Abelard, and brought to fruition in Ockham and the moderns. If there are different kinds of truth, then they must be related analogically, according to some prime analogate, which sheds light on them all.

Anselm refers to six distinct things that may be said to be true. Truth may be of speech, of opinion, of will, of action, of the senses, or of the essences of things. By analyzing the meaning of truth in all these cases, Anselm develops an understanding of truth as analogical rather than the univocal conclusion of a strictly deductive or inductive logical process.

Anselm begins by saying that truth is in speech. Obviously and most importantly, truth is in speech insofar as a statement refers to what is. Thus, truth is rectitude (*rectitudo*); it is found when the speech signifies as it should.<sup>17</sup> But there is also a kind of truth or rectitude in speech even if the statement does not refer to what really is, that is, when it is false. “Certainly it is not customary to call a statement true when it signifies that what-is-not is; nonetheless, it has truth and rectitude, in that it is doing what it ought to (*quia facit quod debet*).”<sup>18</sup> Notice the identity of truth and rectitude here. For Anselm truth has a normative character; it implies value and, insofar as it refers to things being as they should, some analogical notion of freedom.<sup>19</sup> Statements have a kind of truth (grammatical and rhetorical) whether or not they refer to things that truly exist. Thus, this first place where truth is found indicates a truth or rectitude that belongs to language in itself, and also one that belongs to language as it refers to things.

Truth of opinion is the first analytical stage of understanding the truth or rectitude of reference. When explaining this use of truth, Anselm invokes the purpose of reason. Unlike the thinkers of the Enlightenment who restrict truth to what can be formulated by mathematics/logic and empirical science (see Hume’s relations of ideas and matters of fact), Anselm sees truth as purposeful; that is, reason recognizes order and obligation as fundamental. “For the power of thinking that something is or is not was given to us in order that we might think that what-is is,

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<sup>15</sup> Anselm, *De Veritate* 1, *Basic Writings*, p. 119; veritatis definitionem a te discere exspecto (vol. 1, p. 176).

<sup>16</sup> *De Veritate* 1, p. 119; Non memini me invenisse definitionem vertiatis; sed si vis quaeramus per rerum diversitates in quibus veritatem dicimus esse, quid sit veritas (vol. 1, pp. 176-77).

<sup>17</sup> “So its truth is nothing other than its rectitude” (*De Veritate* 2, p. 121); Ergo non est illi aliud veritas quam rectitudo (vol. 1, p. 178).

<sup>18</sup> *De Veritate* 2, p. 121; Vera quidem non solet dici cum significant esse quod non est; veritatem tamen et rectitudinem habet, quia facit quod debet (vol. 1, p. 179).

<sup>19</sup> Freedom of choice is essential to moral and aesthetic judgments. But since truth as rectitude is analogically at play in all six applications of truth to things, so is freedom.

and that what-is-not is not.”<sup>20</sup> Reason, along with all things created by God, only exists as having purpose; it does not exist in the abstract, as if reason could perform its function without the will. The truth of opinion is correctness, that is, rectitude as applied to the order between statements and things that exist.

Immediately, Anselm turns to the truth of the will. On any univocal understanding of truth, such a notion would be absurd, for truth of the will must be a kind of free truth, not some necessary implication. Because of this univocal view of reason and truth, David Hume denies that reason has any primary part to play in morality. If true statements are those which refer to relations of ideas and matters of fact,<sup>21</sup> then true statements do not apply to the will and its object, which is what we ought to do. Morality must then be a matter of passion or feeling.<sup>22</sup> But truth of the will must be a kind of rectitude, one which speaks of what ought to be. Anselm quotes John 8:44, where it is said of the devil that he “did not remain steadfast in the truth.”<sup>23</sup> To do what is right—what one ought to do—is to stand in the truth. If one does not stand in the truth, this is because of a free choice not to do so. This sense of truth or rectitude is a free truth rather than a necessary consequence, and as such, it is incomprehensible to Enlightenment thought, and even to the thought of the great pagan philosophers Plato and Aristotle for whom truth is what is necessary; if it is not necessary, then it is mere opinion. But freely standing in the truth is, by definition, not necessary. Again, purpose is evident here. We have a will so that we may do what we ought. Concluding on the case of the devil, Anselm writes, “[W]e cannot understand truth in this case as anything other than rectitude, since both truth and rectitude in his will were nothing other than his willing what he ought.”<sup>24</sup>

Having declared that there is truth in willing, which is rectitude of the will, Anselm goes on to speak of truth or rectitude in all actions. Clearly, among things created, rectitude is said primarily about human beings and of them primarily in terms of their acts of will. But it is also found in all other human activities and also the activities of all other things. Thus, the rectitude of human will is the prime analogate according to which other things are said, analogically, to act rightly.

However, the ultimate prime analogate for truth of all actions, human and other, is God. Thus, when Anselm speaks about the rectitude of fire, the student affirms (and the master concurs) that if fire does what God wills for it to do, then it acts rightly. “If the fire received the power to heat from the one from whom it has being, then when it heats, it is doing what it ought to. So I don’t see what is inappropriate about saying that the fire does the truth and acts correctly

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<sup>20</sup> *De Veritate* 3, p. 123; Ad hoc namque nobis datum est posse cogitare esse vel non esse aliquid, ut cogitemus esse quod est, et non esse quod non est (vol. 1, p. 180).

<sup>21</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1977), Section IV.

<sup>22</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), Book III, Part I, Section I.

<sup>23</sup> *De Veritate* 4, p. 123; diabolus non stetit in veritate (vol. 1, p. 180).

<sup>24</sup> *De Veritate* 4, p. 124; non aliud ibi potest intelligi veritas quam rectitudo, quoniam sive veritas sive rectitudo non aliud in eius voluntate fuit quam velle quod debuit (vol. 1, p. 181).

when it does what it ought to.”<sup>25</sup> The “ought” here seems more of an aesthetic ought, the insight that in something beautiful, everything is where it should be. Likewise, the freedom invoked in this notion of ought or rightness is more aesthetic than moral. Just as we speak of moral and aesthetic values, so we can speak of moral and aesthetic freedom. The freedom of beauty is that each thing is exactly where it should be; nothing is forced; everything is as if freely created—which of course is true of all things that exist.

Anselm next takes up the truth of the senses. The student raises the standard skeptical objection, used by Sextus Empiricus, Montaigne, and Descartes, that the senses sometimes deceive us. Anselm’s reply is based on the obvious insight that the mistake is in the judgment, not in the senses. The senses report what they really sense; it is up to reason to understand the report in the context of whatever altering features are present. “Let it suffice to say that whatever the senses seem to report, whether they do so by their very nature or in virtue of some other cause, they are doing what they ought to. Hence they are acting correctly and doing the truth, and this truth is included in the truth of action.”<sup>26</sup> As Anselm allows that the truth of action is found in all verbs, passive as well as active, it is also to be found in the senses, which receive from the world what they report to the inner sense. All actions, whether self-initiated or not, fall under truth and rectitude.

It is when speaking of truth in the very being of things that Anselm most clearly affirms that the analogy of truth or rectitude is grounded in the highest truth, that is, in God. “So there is truth in the being of all things that are, since it is nothing other than what it is in the supreme truth.”<sup>27</sup> This might appear to be a Neo-Platonic conclusion of the identity of all things with the One. However, this cannot be the case, for the primary instance of truth as rectitude is the truth of the will, and the will, for Anselm, is free, not determined by the divine will.<sup>28</sup> Thus, whatever it means for things to be in the highest truth, it does not mean their absorption or distortion, which for a being with free will would be the suppression or negation of that free choice. “So whatever is, is correct.”<sup>29</sup>

At this point in the argument, Anselm returns to the truth of signification in order to relate it to the truth of being. The truth of words is more commonly understood, but the truth of being is more fundamental. “For everyone talks about the truth of signification, but few consider the truth that is in the being of things.”<sup>30</sup> Truth in action is actually more true than truth in word,

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<sup>25</sup> *De Veritate* 5, p. 125; Si ignis ab eo a quo habet esse accepit calefacere: cum calefacit, facit quod debet. Igitur non video quae inconvenientia sit ignem facere veritatem et rectitudinem, cum facit quod debet (vol. 1, p. 182).

<sup>26</sup> *De Veritate* 6, p. 127; Hoc tantum sufficiat diceri quia sensus, quicquid renuntiare videantur, sive ex sui natura hoc faciant sive ex alia aliqua causa: hoc faciunt quod debent, et ideo rectitudinem et veritatem faciunt; et continetur haec veritas sub illa veritate, quae est in actione (vol. 1, 184-85).

<sup>27</sup> *De Veritate* 7, p. 128; Est igitur veritas in omnium quae sunt essential, quia hoc sunt quod in summa veritate sunt (vol. 1, p. 185).

<sup>28</sup> See Katherin Rogers’ *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). She holds that Anselm’s position is radically libertarian.

<sup>29</sup> *De Veritate* 7; Igitur omne quod est, recte est (vol. 1, p. 185).

<sup>30</sup> *De Veritate* 9, p. 132; Omnis enim de veritate significationis loquuntur; veritatem vero quae est in rerum essential, pauci considerant (vol. 1, p. 188).

and the most fundamental action is that of making something to be. Such an action is only of God.

Thus, Anselm concludes that the highest truth, in which all other things are, is also the highest rectitude. However, this primary rectitude is different from all others. All things possess truth and rectitude insofar as they do what they ought. But it makes no sense to say that the highest truth possesses truth because it does what it ought, for there is no measure to which it ought to conform. Thus this highest truth is clearly a free truth. And to the extent that other things do what they ought, they too are free in a fashion. Human beings, Anselm will say, are free insofar as they are images of God. Other things are free insofar as they cooperate with divine providence. The very idea of truth as rectitude suggests this analogy of freedom. Only what is in some sense free can do what it ought. As truth is analogically in all things, so is freedom, for the prime analogate for truth is the free truth that is God.

After focusing in the next couple of sections on the rectitude that is in the mind alone, that is, the justice that is moral rectitude, Anselm returns to his analogy of truth and rectitude. “Let’s return to rectitude or, in other words, truth—since we are speaking of rectitude perceptible only to the mind, these two words ‘rectitude’ and ‘truth’, signify one thing, which is the genus of justice—and ask whether there is only one truth in all the things in which we say there is truth, or whether there are several truths, just as there are several things in which (as we have established) there is truth.”<sup>31</sup> Anselm answers that truth is in all things, but not as radically distinct in each. Rather, all things are true in so far as they are according to the first and primal truth and rectitude. “Then there is one and the same rectitude for all things,” he writes; and “there is one truth in all of them.”<sup>32</sup> How is this possible? It is only possible because the primary instance, the highest truth, is always beyond the things which it causes to be and thus to be true. “But when those things are according to it, which always excels them, they are as they should be.”<sup>33</sup> Truth as rectitude, analogically present in all creatures and in the Creator, is truth grasped in its unity and diversity, in its harmonious order within a whole. But the harmonious order of a whole integrating diverse parts is the intelligibility of beauty.

## Section Four

Beauty as a principle of interpretation is found most clearly in Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo*. Although beauty is implied in the analogical structure of Anselm’s proof in the *Monologion*, is

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<sup>31</sup>*De Veritate* 13, p. 141; Redeamus ad rectitudinem seu veritatem, quibus duobus nominibus, quoniam de rectitudine mente sola perceptibili loquimur, una res significatur quae genus est iustitiae; et quaeremus an sit una sola veritas in omnibus illis in quibus veritatem dicimus esse, an ita sint veritates plures, sicut plura sunt in quibus constat esse veritatem (vol. 1, pp. 196-97). “Justice is rectitude of will preserved for its own sake” (*De Veritate* 12, p. 139); Iustitia igitur est rectitudo voluntatis propter se servata (vol. 1, p. 194). Cf. paper on moral center in Anselm and Aquinas.

<sup>32</sup>*De Veritate* 13, p. 144; Una igitur et eadem est omnium rectitudo . . . . Una igitur est in illis omnibus veritas (vol. 1, p. 199).

<sup>33</sup>*De Veritate* 13 (my translation); Sed cum res ipsae secundum illam sunt, quae semper praesto est iis quae sunt sicut debent (vol. 1, p. 199).

used in the rhetoric and structure of the *Proslogion*, and is implicit in the notion of truth as rectitude as presented in *De Veritate*, only in the *Cur Deus Homo* is it explicitly invoked. Although Anselm proposes, as in the *Monologion*, to prove with no reference to revelation and faith the necessity that God should become man,<sup>34</sup> the beauty of the faith is invoked early and late in the work.

Anselm is hesitant to take up the challenge of defending the faith on this point since the things of the faith are so beautiful that he fears he cannot speak well (that is, beautifully) of them. Here he is invoking the beauty or rectitude of signification. He is afraid that what he can say will fail in style to measure up to the beauty of the subject matter.

I also shrink from your request because the subject matter is not merely precious but, just as it concerns one who is “beautiful in his appearance beyond the children of men” [Psalm 45:2 (44:3)], so too is it beautiful in its reasoning beyond the understanding of men. Hence, just as I am accustomed to grow indignant at incompetent painters when I see that the Lord himself is portrayed as ugly in his appearance, so too I am afraid that the same thing will happen to me if I presume to discuss such a beautiful subject in unworthy and inelegant language.<sup>35</sup>

Something beautiful should only be depicted beautifully. Jesus, the God-man, is “beyond the children of men.” Hence, to explain his beauty is “beyond the understanding of men.” No human expression can adequately capture the beauty of the central event of the faith—the Incarnation with all it entails (suffering, death, and resurrection). Boso tells Anselm to get on with it, as his effort does not claim to forbid other attempts to grasp the beauty of our salvation in a more beautiful (*pulchrius*) style.

Anselm also presents the content of the faith as beautiful early in the dialogue. In response to those who object that it is an insult to say that God has to demean himself by becoming man in order to save us, Anselm invokes the beauty of what the faith teaches. The beauty lies in the fittingness and just proportions between the human problems and the solutions the faith offers.

For it was fitting that just as death entered the human race through the disobedience of a human being, so too life should be restored by the obedience of a human being. It was fitting that just as the sin that was the cause of our damnation had its origin from a woman, so too the author of our justice and

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<sup>34</sup> See Preface, where Anselm claims that the arguments of both the first and second books assume no knowledge of Christ.

<sup>35</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 1.1, pp. 246-47; Hoc quoque multum me retrahit a petitione tua, quia materia non solum pretiosa, sed, sicut est de specioso “forma prae filiis hominum,” sic etiam est speciosa ratione super intellectus hominum. Unde timeo, ne, quemadmodum ego soleo indignari pravis pictoribus, cum ipsum dominum informi figura pingi video, ita mihi coningat, si tam decoram materiam incompto et contemptibili dictamine exarare praesumo (vol. 2, p. 49).

salvation should be born of a woman. And it was fitting that the devil, who through the tasting of a tree defeated the human being whom he persuaded, should be defeated by a human being through the suffering on a tree that he inflicted. And there are many other things that, if carefully considered, demonstrate the indescribable beauty that belongs to our redemption, accomplished in this way.<sup>36</sup>

Boso objects here that all these “beautiful notions” are well and good, but like pictures, they need a ground. To paint on water or air is futile, since the painting will disappear. What one needs is a solid foundation like paper, or canvas, or wood. So these beautiful notions of the faith need a solid foundation, one based in a more radical rationality—proven truth. To this objection, Anselm replies with an argument from fittingness, itself a reference, not to deductive or inductive proof, but to an analogical truth, namely, the rectitude of *De Veritate*. “Does not this seem to be a sufficiently necessary reason that God ought to have done the things we say: that the human race—such a precious work of God—had utterly perished, and that it was not fitting that God’s purpose for human beings should be completely annihilated, and that his purpose could not be brought to fulfillment unless the human race were liberated by its Creator himself?”<sup>37</sup> That God can only redeem us himself implies that the only adequate foundation for truth and beauty (what we have referred to as the prime analogate) is the God-man. Yes, we can give other reasons for the Incarnation besides the parallel beauties of the faith, but these other reasons, too, will be according to fittingness, to rectitude, and thus ultimately to beauty.

That the kind of necessary reason Anselm seeks cannot be the necessity of deductive implication is articulated in Chapters Eight and Nine in which Anselm insists that Christ died of his own free will. “It follows that God did not compel Christ, in whom there was no sin, to die. On the contrary, Christ endured death of his own accord. His obedience consisted not in abandoning his life, but in preserving justice; and he persevered in justice with such fortitude that he incurred death.”<sup>38</sup> Our salvation cannot be based on necessity if the savior did not act necessarily. The necessity for which Anselm searches, then, is not one which mirrors the deductive necessity of logical implication. He makes a similar point when discussing, in Book II, the issue of it being necessary that God bring to fulfillment his plan of happiness for humanity. “Finally, God does nothing out of necessity, since he is in no way compelled to do or prevented

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<sup>36</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 1.3, p. 248; Oportebat namque ut, sicut per hominis inoboedientiam mors in humanum genus intaverat, ita per hominis oboedientiam vita restitueretur. Et quemadmodum peccatum quod fuit causa nostrae damnationis, initium habuit a femina, sic nostrae iustitiae et salutis auctor nasceretur de femina. Et ut diabolus, qui per gustum ligni quem persuasit hominem vicerat, per passionem ligni quam intulit ab homine vinceretur. Sunt quoque multa alia quae studiose considerata, inenarrabilem quandam nostrae redemptionis hoc modo procuratae pulchritudinem ostendunt (vol. 2, p. 51).

<sup>37</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 1.4, p. 249; Nonne satis necessaria ratio videtur, cur deus ea quae dicimus facere debuerit: quia genus humanum, tam scilicet pretiosum opus eius, omnino perierat, nec decebat ut, quod deus de homine proposuerat, penitus annihilaretur, nec idem eius propositum ad effectum duci poterat, nisi genus hominum ab ipso creatore suo liberaretur? (vol. 2, p. 52)

<sup>38</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 1.9, p. 256; Non ergo coegit deus Christum mori, in quo nullum fuit peccatum; se ipse sponte sustinuit mortem, not per oboedientiam deserendi vitam, sed propter oboedientiam servandi iustitiam, in qua tam fortiter perserveravit, ut inde mortem incurreret (vol. 2, p. 62). On Christ’s freedom, see also *Cur Deus Homo* 1.10, 2.5, 2.11, and 2.17.

from doing anything. . . . This necessity is nothing other than the immutability of his honorableness, which he has from himself and not from another, and for that reason it is improperly called necessity.”<sup>39</sup> All God’s actions are free. He is certainly not constrained by another; and to speak of his nature constraining Him (if this is to be intelligible to us) suggests that we know God’s nature in a way which we surely do not. We simply cannot offer a deductively necessary reason for God becoming man for the simple reason that we have no clear understanding of God’s nature and so of his plan.

That Anselm does not mean for his “necessary reasons” to consist in such deductions is evidenced by what he says in explaining why Christ died for us. The reasons are all arguments of fittingness, not deductive proofs. Anselm is giving reasons why the most fitting act of Christ was the free gift of himself for our salvation.

Since man sinned through pleasure, is it not fitting for man to make recompense through pain? And since man was overcome by the devil so easily that it could not have been any easier, and thereby dishonored God by sinning, is it not just for the man who makes recompense for sin to overcome the devil with such great difficulty that it could not be any greater, and thereby honor God. And is it not appropriate that man, who in sinning took himself away from God as much as possible, should in making recompense give himself to God as much as possible?<sup>40</sup>

Thus, even in the heart of the argument, laying the foundations for the beautiful pictures of the faith, Anselm offers arguments from fittingness—beautiful in their analogical structure and insight.

In addition to the consistency of offering fitting arguments to provide the foundation for the faith, Anselm also invokes beauty explicitly. In Book I, when arguing for how God’s providence includes all actions and events, he speaks of the beauty and order of the universe and of God’s governance. Even the sins of mankind cannot defeat this order and beauty. “[A]lthough a human being or angel may be unwilling to be subject to God’s will and ordering, he has no power to escape it. . . . [S]upreme wisdom transforms the sinner’s perverse will or action into order and beauty for the universe.”<sup>41</sup> God transforms even our evil actions into the dramatic

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<sup>39</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 2. 5, p. 293; Denique deus nihil facit necessitate, quia nulla modo cogitur aut prohibetur facere aliquid; . . . Quae scilicet necessitas non est aliud quam immutabilitas honestatis eius, quam a se ipso et non ab alio habet, et ideo improprie dicatur necessitas (vol. 2, p. 100).

<sup>40</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 2.11, p. 303; Si homo per suavitatem peccavit: an non convenit ut per asperitatem satisfaciat? Et si tam facile victus est a diabolo ut deum peccando exhonoreret, ut facilius non posset: nonne iustum est ut homo satisfaciens pro peccato tanta difficultate vincat diabolum ad honorem dei, ut maiori non possit? An non est dignum quatenus, qui se sic abstulit deo peccando, ut se plus auferre non posset, sic se deo satisfaciendo, ut magis se non possit dare? (vol. 2, p. 111). I have substituted the personal “man” for the abstract “humanity” in the translation since humanity does not act.

<sup>41</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 1.15, p. 266; Ita quamvis homo vel malus angelus divinae voluntati et ordinationi subiacere nolit, non tamen eam fugere valet. . . . [H]oc ipsum quod perverse vult aut agit, in universitatis praefatae ordinem et pulchritudinem summa sapientia convertit (vol. 2, p. 73).

beauty of his wise plan. This is what the faith reveals: a wisdom whose truth is rectitude and fittingness, not the conclusions of natural reason.

Just as Anselm refers explicitly to beauty midway through Book I, so does he midway through Book II. Having revealed the fittingness of the Incarnation and of God taking Christ from a woman without a man (the way never done before) rather than from the other three options open to Him, Anselm refers explicitly to the opening discussion, where Boso demands foundations for the beautiful notions of the faith. “Is what we have said solid? Or is it something insubstantial, like clouds, as you said unbelievers claim in their objections against us of us?” To which Boso replies, “Nothing could be more solid.”<sup>42</sup> The kinds of proofs Anselm has provided are those of fittingness. Thus, rather than God creating a human being from a man and woman (the most common way), or without a man and a woman as he created Adam, or from a man without a woman (as Eve comes from Adam’s rib), it is fitting that he should do what has never been done before—create a man from a woman without a man. There is no inductive or deductive reason for this being the best plan. Rather it is fitting, because it is wonderful, unexpected, and free, as are our creation and salvation.

Thus, Anselm tells Boso to go ahead and paint the pictures now that the foundation is prepared.

Then paint, not on an insubstantial fiction, but on solid truth, and say that it is altogether fitting that just as human sin and the cause of our damnation had its beginning from a woman, so too the cure for sin and the cause of our salvation should be born from a woman. And so that women will not despair of membership in the company of the blessed because so great an evil proceeded from a woman, it is fitting that so great a good should proceed from a woman so that their hope might be restored.<sup>43</sup>

Here again, the balance, proportion, and fittingness of our salvation is stressed. “An equivalent great good” should come from woman to balance the great evil attributed to Eve. The dramatic beauty of our salvation is the leading light in Anselm’s argument for the necessity of the Incarnation. To all this Boso replies, “These pictures are exceedingly beautiful and reasonable.”<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>42</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 2.8, p. 296; Estne hoc solidum quod diximus, aut vanum aliquid sicut nubes, quod dixisti nobis infideles obicere? Nihil solidius (vol. 2, p. 104).

<sup>43</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 2.8, p. 296-97 Pingere igitur non super fictam vanitatem, sed super solidam veritatem, et dic quia valde convenit ut, quemadmodum hominis peccatum et causa nostrae damnationis principium sumpsit a femina, ita medicina peccati et causa nostrae salvationis nascatur de femina. Ac ne mulieres desperent se pertinere ad sortem beatorum, quoniam de femina tantum malum processit, oportet ut ad reformandam spem earum de muliere tantum bonum procedat (vol. 2, p. 104).

<sup>44</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 2.8, p. 297; Valde pulchrae et rationabiles sunt istae picturae (vol. 2, p. 104).

Near the end of *Cur Deus Homo*, after Anselm has spoken of the wonder and fittingness that Christ should give the recompense for his act of sacrifice to us, Boso replies: “The world can hear nothing more reasonable, nothing sweeter, nothing more desirable.”<sup>45</sup> This statement sums up our discussion about truth and its relation to beauty. The faith, in all its dramatic beauty, is more reasonable and hence truer than anything else one could hear. Truth, for Anselm, is equivalent to rectitude, and so we have the value element front and center here: no good news could be more desirable than this. And implicit in the idea of rectitude is the proper order and harmony of the faith, than which nothing is sweeter or more delightful. This is the richness of analogical truth—the free truth that is at once responsible (as ordered to the good) and delightful (as beautifully ordered).

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<sup>45</sup> *Cur Deus Homo* 2.19, p. 323; *Nihil rationabilius, nihil dulchius, nihil desiderabilius mundus audire potest* (vol. 2, p. 131).