

**An analysis of St. Anselm's *De Casu Diaboli* in Light of the
Evolution of Thought on the Conceptualization of Satan & Demons
Throughout History**

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the evolution of thought concerning the conceptions of Satan, the devil and demons throughout the past 3,000 years in light of an in depth study of St. Anselm of Canterbury's text, *The Fall of Satan (De Casu Diaboli)*. Anselm's brilliant work on *De Casu Diaboli* inspires much deep reflection and thought while also inciting a number of questions revolving the many different historical periods. Furthermore, this paper seeks to examine the distinct periods and their evolution on the conceptions of Satan and demons throughout history and their relations to Anselm's views as expounded in his relevant text. It is impossible to exhaustively cover a 3,000 year period on such a major topic but I'll provide a brief overview of the significant periods involving conceptualization of demonology before I focus my attention on Anselm's text of *De Casu Diaboli* which will be referred to as DCD here onwards.

The pre-monotheistic period (until the 6th century B.C.E.) of the Old Testament witnessed dealing with ancient demonic figures such as Asmodeus, Azazel, and Belial. Throughout such a period, at times, these demonic figures were also worshipped as Gods for other people. An example would be the worship of a false God, such as Ba'al during the Jews' monolatrist period who in this particular context was the Canaanite God of fertility.¹ Ba'al was also used to signify Gods for the Phoenicians and the Arameans.² Nonetheless, the connection between some demons and deities remain unclear and vague.³ It is important to note that the Hebrews during

¹ W. Herrmann, "Ba'al," In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd edition, ed. Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking and Peter W. Van Der Horst (Boston: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 137.

² Herrmann, "Ba'al," 132.

³ Although not explicitly referred to as a demon in the Old Testament, there were perhaps correlations to the false God figure known as Ba'al that morphed/evolved into such. The line between deities and demons can become quite blurred (especially through the passage of history and linguistic manipulations). The saying "one man's freedom fighter is another man's terrorist", in our context it would be akin to saying: one person or group's god is another person or group's demon. In the New Testament Ba'al had morphed into Ba'al Zebub a demon of high rank in the Synoptic gospels.

this pre-monotheistic period had a tendency to personify physical forces and abstract concepts,⁴ Belial which means “wickedness” in Hebrew would be an example.⁵ The Hebrew tradition of personification is brought to the fore with the transliteration of Belial in several Old Testament passages including that of Deuteronomy 13:13; Judges 19:22; 1 Samuel 1:16; 2:12; 10:27; 25:17; 2 Samuel 16:7; Nahum 1:15.⁶

Throughout the Monotheistic period we get a glimpse of a “prototypic” type satanic figure in the book of Job. We move from various demons that were at times deified to focussing on a singular type character like in the book Job. However, it is definitely not the full-blown picture of the Satan of the New Testament. In the context of Job, the word Satan which in Hebrew is a common noun that signifies adversary but when translated into Greek is *diabolos*, that is devil.⁷ Interesting peculiarities occur between Hebrew and Greek and the definite articles which come to mean opposite things with respect to each language.⁸ In the book of Job we have the satan occupying the role of tester, testing the integrity of Job to demonstrate how much strength and faith in God Job actually possesses. For instance in Job 1:13-19, we witness all of Job’s possessions and fortune taken from him including the lives of his 10 children. Once Job passes this first test, God permits the satan to inflict bodily harm to Job to test him again, Job passes the two tests. It is interesting to note that for the first time in the Old Testament we witness God using someone to administer his tests and punishment as opposed to doing it himself. Another interesting thing to note that is relevant to our study, that although, this figure

⁴ S.D. Sperling, “Belial,” In *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd edition, ed. Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking and Peter W. Van Der Horst (Boston: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 169.

⁵ Sperling, “Belial,” 169.

⁶ Sperling, “Belial,” 169.

⁷ Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Satan: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 2-3.

⁸ Kelly, *Satan: A Biography*, 2-3.

of the satan is part of the heavenly court he can freely roam on earth and inflict pain on human subjects while also even daring God himself (Job 1:10).

The demons and Satan of the New Testament vary significantly with that of the conceptions of the pre-monotheistic and monotheistic periods of the Old Testament. We finally see the development of a singular character of evil, namely that of Satan or the devil with the accompaniment of a series of subordinates known as demons who he rules over. It is important to note that the word demon translates to that of *daimon* where among pagan Greek is suggestive of an inferior deity which could be either good or bad⁹ – which lends support to what was aforementioned regarding demons and deities being used interchangeably depending on the contexts. Within the context of the New Testament it denotes an evil spirit.¹⁰ The word *daimonion*¹¹ with the meaning, “demon” occurs over 50 times in the gospels and acts but only 9 times in the rest of the New Testament.¹² One thing that is a striking contrast between the Synoptic gospels and the Old Testament are that references to Satan and demons do not appear together in a single passage but do so in the New Testament.¹³ Satan in the Synoptics is referred to as “the prince of demons” – such references can be found in the Beelzebul controversies in Matthew 12:22-32, Mark 3:22-30 and Luke 11:14-26. Demons alone in the Synoptic gospels are responsible for possessions.¹⁴

⁹ W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words with their Precise Meanings for English Readers* (London: Oliphants Ltd., 1957), 291.

¹⁰ W.E. Vince, *An Expository Dictionary*, 291.

¹¹ Has the same meaning as *daimon*, meaning demon. Interestingly though in Acts 17:18 it denotes an inferior pagan deity just as *daimon*.

¹² Sydney T. Page, *Powers of Evil: A Biblical Study of Satan & Demons* (Grand Rapids, Mich: BakerBooks, 1995), 98.

¹³ Page, *Powers of Evil*, 99.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that in modern times whether portrayed in novels, cartoons, Hollywood motion pictures or other mediums when Satan is attributed in possessing someone, it is unbiblical since in the New Testament demons alone possess humans, there is no account of Satan actually possession. One should be cautious in interpreting Luke 22:3 and John 13:27, where it is said that Satan entered Judas to mean possession but such an example seems to signify more of an influence over someone not an actual possession. Moreover, the verb, *daimonizomai* signifying demon possession is not utilized in either of the passages.

The book of Revelation, out of any biblical book, mentions Satan or the devil most frequently. In this book there is the mention of 3 beasts, one of the beasts that of the Dragon is clearly identified in Revelation of 12:9 “that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.” So, we see the concepts of Satan, demons and the devil as transforming throughout time. The New Testament depictions have led scholars to a number of different interpretations of these demonic figures and retroactive interpretations of Old Testament texts in light of some of these interpretations. Other ancient apocalyptic texts seem to have had large impacts on the book of Revelation such as the book of Enoch although there is no clear connection with the figure of Satan.¹⁵ Here one can witness a sharp contrast with the functions of the Satan of Zechariah and Job who work within a divine council.¹⁶ One wonders what the connection between the book of Enoch and the views of scholastic thinkers such as Anselm and Aquinas was on their views of the demonic, it is not precisely clear except for the occurrence of a fallen angel myth (1 Enoch 6-11) which seems to have influenced the book of Revelation and subsequent interpretations by later Christian thinkers.¹⁷

The Desert Fathers particularly that of St. Anthony had a rather intimate relationship with Satan and demons. The Desert Fathers would deliberately go to the desert to confront temptation and the devil, head on, as Jesus did in the Synoptic gospels. However, the vivid accounts of the monks’ experiences with Satan’s temptations, historically added a new dimension to the view of

¹⁵ The characters of Semyaza and Azaz’el act as head figures of the rebellious angels, in the book of Enoch they function as Satan like character because of their leadership roles. It seems to be a very obscure and prototypic resemblance to the devil found within the New Testament.

¹⁶ Derek R. Brown, “The Devil in the Details: A Survey of Research on Satan in Biblical Studies,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 9, no. 2 (2011): 200-27.

¹⁷ A number of scholars agree that the primary function of the fallen angel myth occurring through 1 Enoch 6 to 11 is to explain and describe the origin of evil in the world. It is difficult to precisely trace the connection and impact such a myth had on St. Anselm and his DCD. However, one can argue that in a sense, both are attempts to explain the origin of evil in the world from their differing respective contexts.

Satan and his personality.¹⁸ In *The Life of St. Anthony*, St. Athanasius describes Anthony's life as permeated with unceasing tribulations with demons and the devil including heavy physical and psychological abuses. Are we to understand the accounts of St. Anthony as portrayed by St. Athanasius as historical occurrences or narratives envisioned by St. Anthony about his struggles in his pious imitation of the life of Christ? The physical attacks endured by Anthony are they biblical? In Job, we witness, *the* Satan, able to administer psychological, financial and physical torment but in the New Testament, Jesus, the apostles and disciples who have viable and strong faith were able to exorcise humans with one word, why could the church fathers not do the same in physical attacks? Next we turn to Origen.

Origen, although historically prior to the Desert Fathers, will now be examined. Origen had a peculiar view on Satan and asked questions that were deemed heretical to others at the time and even in subsequent centuries. Origen had the audacity to pose the question of whether Satan could be saved through Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and be forgiven for his sins. Although he does admit he does not know the answer to such a question, Origen's question and thought stands out from the rest of thinkers examined for its boldness and uniqueness. Despite the uniqueness of his question Origen blurred the lines between moral and ontological scales creating unnecessary overlapping and confusions between the two scales in an attempt to reconcile two irreconcilable scales since they speak of very distinct things.¹⁹ The Devil would be very high on the ontological scale but at the lowest end of the moral scale.

In Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, particularly in his *Treatise on Angels* and *On the Assault of the Demons*, he addresses a number of questions revolving around the

¹⁸ Jeffrey Burton Russell, *The Prince of Darkness: Radical Evil and the Power of Good in History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 86.

¹⁹ Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, 79.

metaphysical and ethical nature of Satan and demons. He does so by making extensive references to biblical passages while utilizing philosophical tools to understand them in light of angels, demons and Satan. Some of the questions Aquinas poses continue from and are in line with Anselm's thought in DCD including that of asking "whether the devil desired to be as God?" and "whether any demons are natural wicked?" Let us turn to Martin Luther.

For Martin Luther, Satan was a very real experiential reality.²⁰ His understanding of the devil was a combination of his scriptural interpretation and his personal experience.²¹ His views on Satan and his ways affected his view of the reformation and Roman Catholic Church's corruption. He believed Satan affected the interpretation of Scripture among many other humanly affairs. Martin Luther also supposed that Satan was the greatest enemy that a Christian can and would face. In essence, Luther saw, the figure of Satan in the New Testament as being understandable only when seen as the counter-principle to Christ and failing to understand this would bring great harm to the essence of Christianity.²² Let us now turn to the last thinker examined with respect to his views on Satan and demons, that of Rene Girard.

Rene Girard although not a theologian, had some interesting insights concerning Satan that sprung forth from his background as a literary critic and anthropological philosopher of sorts. Girard expounds his theory of mimesis built around human psychology whereby people learn by imitation but can almost unavoidably lead to the occurrence of mimetic rivalry where two or more people desire the same thing. Inevitably, mimetic rivalry leads to conflict which can

²⁰ It is worth nothing that Luther's intimacy and concern with the devil was the most defined on an experiential level since the Desert Fathers.

²¹ It is difficult to discern which took precedence since the two seemed to influence each other. It seems to me that if Luther was not so adverse to scholastic thought it would have resolved many of the contradictions and shortcomings in his theological thinking regarding the interrelations between faith and reason. Moreover, if he looked to Anselm's thought it seems that it perhaps would have helped relieve his tensions on the conceptions of free will concerning the relations between God and Satan, God and man and Satan and man.

²² Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, 79.

build up to violence and eventually can only be relieved by the targeting of a scapegoat who is blamed for this mimetic “rivalistic build-up”. For Girard, the figure of Satan utilizes as a principle, a cycle that leads to the death of innocent people, specifically what is termed the “single victim mechanism.”²³ Girard holds that Satan paradoxically acts as a principle of both disorder and order within a community.²⁴ In terms of disorder, Satan sparks and incites mimetic cycles that lead to violence, whereas, in terms of order, Satan restores order when chaos reaches its pinnacle within a community. Interesting as these concepts are, Girard, is not very clear on the ontological status of Satan’s existence, as he says in one instance “He is totally mimetic, which amounts to saying nonexistence as an individual self”²⁵ while in another instance he states: “Christianity does not oblige us to see him as someone who really exists...traditional theology has rightly refused to do the latter”²⁶ – namely denying Satan’s existence, this is what it seems to be saying there. Be that as it may, Girard’s views certainly have interesting consequences when applied to Anselm’s methodology and understanding of Satan’s will and responsibility in DCD.²⁷ We now turn to the main focus of this paper that of Anselm’s text of DCD.

²³ Rene Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning* trans. James G. Williams (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 35.

²⁴ Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 34.

²⁵ Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 42.

²⁶ Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*, 45.

²⁷ Depending whether Girard views Satan ultimately as a personal source of evil or that Satan is more of a process of violence symbolized as a figure of evil – the following notions may be of applicable interest. Furthermore, if one were to refer to the work of Anselm and Aquinas in terms of Satan’s will before his fall a series of questions revolving around Girard’s mimesis theory arises. Girard refers to John 8:42-44. He suggests that Jesus speaks of desire by imitation that either one imitates God’s or the devil’s desires. According to Girard’s view then how would we describe mimetic desire to Satan with respect to his ‘original’ sin since ultimately Satan did not mimic God’s will or desires but went against them. He desired to be equal to God but there in essence is no mimetic rivalry to be had since God is the greatest being by His own very nature and is not in competition with anyone, yet Satan is cast out because of desiring something that is not proper to him. Does this support or contradict Girard’s mimetic theory? Since ultimately what should have been mimicked, was that of God’s will and desires which was not. He’s willing to be like God but not willing of his father’s desire? Does Satan function as an ultimate scapegoat for humanity – as an ultimate single victim mechanism? Moreover, can one argue that Satan’s expulsion from heaven is an example of the single victim mechanism, in order to maintain order in the heavenly court amongst the other angels? Or was Satan’s fall an example of a self-expulsion since it was done through his own volition?

The purpose of analyzing *DCD* is to understand the logic behind it. Throughout the remaining sections of this paper I will focus on very specific aspects which I believe are the most significant to understanding the philosophy and theology present within *DCD*. The sequencing of the main themes is also relevant to try to gradually grasp the logic behind Anselm's argumentation in its totality with respect to *DCD*.

Eadmer, a contemporary and biographer of Anselm and his works lists Anselm's three works in the following order without providing dates of their production: Concerning Truth (*De Veritate*), On Freedom of Choice (*De Libertate Arbitrii*) and *DCD* last – the precise dates are unknown to the works, although rough estimates have been proposed.²⁸ Anselm in the preface to the three works suggests that they are all related to one another with respect to both their content and style. Moreover, Anselm recommends that they be read together.²⁹ All three treatises are composed in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and student where the student poses a question typically involving an objection of sorts and the teacher replies with an answer to the student's question. These dialogues which involve a presentation of classical problems in theology and philosophy function as an excellent pedagogical tool for analyzing a demonstration of some of the best medieval Christian philosophy and theology up until Saint Thomas Aquinas.

It is also vital to note that *DCD* operates well as a thought experiment for the concept of the finite free will.³⁰ This is true whether or not Satan and/or demons exist, even though Anselm did believe in such beings, the book functions well in such a way. The problem with respect to human will is that it possesses an entrenched existence in the material world which presents a

²⁸ Jasper Hopkins, *A Companion to the Study of St. Anselm* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), 11.

²⁹ St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Three Philosophical Dialogues: On Truth, On Freedom of Choice, and On the Fall of the Devil* Trans. With notes Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2002), page 2 of preface written by Anselm.

³⁰ Anselm of Canterbury, *Truth, Freedom, and Evil: Three Philosophical Dialogues* ed. and trans. Jasper Hopkins and Herbert Richardson (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 45.

host of difficulties for the analysis including things like food intake, physical and mental ailments, disabilities, differing mental and physical capacities, differing life circumstances, reproduction and material desires which all profoundly complicate such an analysis. Moreover, human beings with respect to the Christian doctrine of the Fall are broken down and imperfect and are in dire need of repair and reconciliation.³¹ God's repair work involves grace and the action of human free will which is a horribly complicated relationship. However, within the angelic realm this question of grace never arises since they were in perfect condition when they made their decision to be with God.³² Furthermore, there exists a high level of simplicity within the angelic realm because they exist in a transcendent reality beyond the complications of the material world, so, that an analysis of finite free will can be carried forth with much more ease. Yet, there is the caveat that it is not fully applicable to finite human free will but nonetheless seems to be a heuristically fruitful thought experiment to contemplate finite free will.

First off, it is interesting to realize the prominence of certain relevant terms throughout *DCD* excluding chapter titles. The term devil is mentioned 21 times, while the term Satan is mentioned 10 times and the term evil angel figures 30 times. What's more is that there is no mention of demons. Satan or the devil is examined as a singular evil character in Anselm's work.³³ Now let's contrast this with the occurrence of the term God which equates to 142 times and Son of God twice. The term good angel occurs 28 times which is close to that of 30 times of the evil angel. So, despite the title of the book, the content of the book seems to have God as the central focus, even though Satan's role is important in order to flush out many of the

³¹ St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Three Philosophical Dialogues: On Truth, On Freedom of Choice, and On the Fall of the Devil* Trans. With notes Thomas Williams (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2002), x.

³² Williams, *Three Philosophical Dialogues*, x.

³³ This seems to be suggestive of medieval period and the fixation on the singular character of evil over that of his subordinates. To explain much of Satan would be to explain much of the origin and nature of evil.

philosophical and theological themes. This is especially noticed when a simple comparison between the terms associated with the devil and that of God are carried out – God figures substantially more than twice as many times. If anything, Anselm helped reduce the role of Satan in theology and the prominence of diabolology – precisely because of his logical methodology in *DCD*.³⁴ In a sense, the analysis, in *DCD* with respect to the fall of the devil, is a discussion of the origin and nature of evil. Jeffrey Burton Russell illuminates this by indicating that:

“In explaining the Devil’s fall, Anselm cut through the old knot that had stuck at the center of the question since the time of Augustine. The conditions that surround an evil are in no way its cause. No preconditions caused Lucifer’s fall, none at all. Why did Lucifer sin? For the reason that he willed to. If any condition causing a free-will choice existed, the choice would not be entirely free. Free will is not a mere appearance; it is not compelled; it is not caused; it is really, truly and absolutely free.”³⁵

Anselm seems to rely on tradition with the infusion of scripture given his understanding of the evil angels’ fall since it is presupposed within *DCD*.³⁶ It will be of great aid to keep all of this in mind as I develop what I see to be the most vital elements to Anselm’s argument. I will enumerate some of the main ones that will be examined in some depth. These notions include God as the source of being and goodness, God as being the source of possibility to be, the distinction between necessary and contingent beings, the meaning of “nothing and “evil”, giving and receiving uprightness, Satan’s responsibility in sinning, and Satan’s desire in being God.³⁷

³⁴ Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, 131.

³⁵ Russell, *Prince of Darkness*, 132.

³⁶ One cannot help but wonder if the Book of Enoch indirectly played a role in influencing Anselm’s views on fallen angels. Although the Book of Enoch was not directly accessible to medieval scholars remnants of it through the writings of early church fathers were available.

³⁷ The titles of the significant elements, for the most part, are taken from the editor’s introduction of Jasper Hopkins & Herbert Richardson’s edited and translated version of Anselm of Canterbury’s *Truth, Freedom, and Evil: Three Philosophical Dialogues*. Moreover, some of the notions with respect to the titles aforementioned, that are considered in their introduction are utilized and further explored within this paper.

Before proceeding to these key elements that are found in *DCD* it is worth mentioning the relevant biblical passages that Anselm utilizes. Scripture for Anselm's argumentation in *DCD* and in fact all of his works is quite important. Anselm utilizes biblical passages either through alluding to them or quoting them in order to ground his philosophical and theological argumentation in biblical truth. The relevant passages Anselm refers to include 1 Corinthians 4:7, John 8:44 and Genesis 3:5 since they all seem to deal with an aspect of Satan or the devil directly or even indirectly. Let us now discuss God as the source of being and goodness.

God as the source of being and goodness

Anselm begins the first chapter of *DCD* with a biblical question taken from 1 Corinthians 4:7 – “What do you have that you have not received?” This gets at the heart of God as the source of being and goodness. Anselm iterates that creatures and everything that exist, receive everything that they possess ultimately from God. So, that all creatures (including humans and angels) that exist receive their entire being and goodness from God where God is the greatest conceivable being therefore the Highest being who is the cause of all beings and also is the Highest good and the cause of all goodness. This question, according to Anselm is addressed to all but for the purpose of his study he wants to focus on that of angels and angelic freedom. Modern biblical scholars may scoff at framing Paul's question in such a way suggesting that Paul is not addressing the question to angels and just to a particular set of human beings, that of first-century Christians in the new church at Corinth in the context of being humble about their received spiritual gifts.³⁸ Regardless for whom the question was written for it stimulates major philosophical and theological questions in terms of creaturely freedom and responsibility. What is crucial to realize which was iterated in the introduction is that the angelic realm functions as a

³⁸ Williams, *Three Philosophical Dialogues*, viii.

good thought experiment because many of the complications of the material world are removed when speaking of freedom of the will. Moreover, humans have freedom in certain ways that may not affect their salvation directly, such as deciding what to eat at a certain meal. The only thing we know with respect to Anselm's study is that some angels fell and other didn't.³⁹ So the choice they make with respect to this fundamental decision affects their eternal destiny.⁴⁰ This makes the study all the more vital and even dramatic but at least lucid and comprehensible.

The student in the dialogue, in the first chapter, raises an important objection that begins to set the ball rolling for the work's major argumentation with respect to evil. The student suggests that God is also the cause of all non-being. By suggesting this, consequently, one can then ascribe evil to God, as being the cause and creator of evil. This argument is rather significant to Anselm's philosophy and theology. Anselm wants to demonstrate that evil has no ontological standing, that it is a privation of goodness, not an actual thing in and of itself. This will be discussed in more explicit detail later on. Anselm replies to the student by explaining two distinct meanings of the word "cause". Anselm here explains that something can be caused to be and something can be caused not to be. He also makes a distinction between someone who *could* cause something not to be but does not and someone who *could* cause something to be but does not. God, at times, is said to be the cause of the non-existence of things, either by bringing them out of existence or by not creating them. What Anselm considers an improper use of the word cause is that of the second sense, that of causing the non-existence of something by not creating it or by not preventing something from occurring. He suggests that cause in this particular sense has nothing really to do with action but that of inaction that of not doing a particular thing thus such a thing cannot be accurately deemed as acting, causing or doing

³⁹ Williams, *Three Philosophical Dialogues*, x.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Three Philosophical Dialogues*, x.

something. For example, Anselm alludes to our Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:13 and Luke 11:4 – that of “lead us not into temptation” when he states “It is in this way that God is said to do many things that he does not do, as when he is said to lead us into temptation because he does not spare us from temptation even though he could.” (DCD, Ch. 1) If anything within this context it is not that God is performing the action or that God is directly responsible for causing one to be lead into temptation but rather God is deemed responsible for not doing a particular thing, namely, not leading one into temptation. So, there is an indirect responsibility ascribed to God. In an attempt to demonstrate that God does not cause things into a state of non-being when God stops causing them to exist, he argues that the original state of not being they possessed before being was not something God had caused it was something that came from the particular thing itself and not from God. This is evident when Anselm states: “He is not the cause of its not being; but by His reclaiming what he had bestowed, then that thing which He had made and was keeping in existence returns into not-being. It had this not being before it was made, and hence had it from itself and not from Him.” (DCD, Ch.1) However, it is unclear how a particular thing would possess a property of non-being from itself; if it has no-being it effectively possesses and is nothing but the difficulty encompasses envisioning how one can possess nothing since it is not a thing to be possessed. Moreover, it is hard to conceive since we never witness such a thing, one can witness particular things change states but not the composition of a particular object completely ceasing to exist.

God as Being the Source of the Possibility to Be

Through continuing this logic of God being the cause of all existence, then God would also be the cause of all possibility to be. Moreover, if God does not cause non-being then also the possibility of not being cannot be derived from God as well. The words “possibility” and

“ability” through the translation of the Latin word “potestas” are both used.⁴¹ For Anselm, essentially, there exist four possible modes for possibility⁴²: (1) possible to be, (2) possible not to be, (3) not possible to be and (4) not possible not to be. (1) and (2) exist contingently while (3) and (4) exist necessarily. Moreover, (1) and (4) represent a sort of being while (2) and (3) represent a sort of not-being.

In chapter 12 of *De Casu*, Anselm seems to continue his argument from God being the source of being and goodness to God being the source of the possibility to be. Here Anselm is referring to “ability to be”. He really wants to make sure that the world possessed no ability to exist before it actually existed. So, as the “teacher” states in response to the “student”: “Before there was a world, it was both possible and impossible for it to be. It was impossible for the world, since the world had no ability to be. It was impossible for the world, since the world had no ability to be; but it was possible for God, since it was in God’s power to make the world be. Therefore, the world exists because God had the ability to make a world before there was a world, and not because the world itself possessed an ability to be, before it was.” (DCD, Ch. 12)

Anselm is candid about admitting that there must be a possibility for the world to exist but ascribes this possibility to God not the world itself. So, it is possible for God to make the world before the world existed since he has the ability to create it but impossible for the world itself to be before the world existed. This is seems to me, to be a relevant argument in the face of modern physics as how some physicists are attempting to ascribe the world with just that potentiality to bring itself into existence which leads to all kinds problems and absurdities. Anselm’s argument functions as an argument against materialism as well. So, essentially all things are causally effete before they exist – nothingness is causally effete unless God brings something from

⁴¹ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 49.

⁴² Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 49.

nothingness into being. In other words, God is the only capable being able to do such a thing through mind without pre-existing matter. Anselm's conclusion being that no created thing possesses the possibility to be before it is actually created. The "student" responds to the "teacher" after accepting Anselm's conclusion because he cannot refute it but suggests that language permits us to say otherwise. Anselm indicates that language may permit us to say many things that have no ontological basis and are "improper" uses of language (DCD, Ch. 12).

Distinction between Necessary and Contingent Beings

Quite simply put, Anselm used the distinction between necessity and contingency to separate God from His creation. Some scholars speculate that Anselm's focus on the distinction between necessity and contingency was heavily influenced by the focus on the problem of death as opposed to sin and this directly played an influence in the depiction of the nature of God.⁴³ Anselm's interpretation of God had the characteristic of necessity as something that distinguished God from all other things and which was the basis for his famous ontological argument. Let us examine Anselm's view concerning the meaning of "nothing" and "evil".

The Meaning of "Nothing" and "Evil"

As you recall, we have already examined Anselm's defence of the position that God causes only being and not that of non-being. So, God is not the direct cause of not-being or the ability for a thing not to be. Anselm held to the Augustinian view that evil was a privation or corruption of a good not a thing in and of itself. By holding the view he held with respect to God and causation this allowed him to absolve God as it were from being implicated in the causation of evil.

⁴³ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 54.

In chapter 10 and 11, the student is not satisfied with such definitions and objects to evil signifying nothing and attempts to argue that it is an actual thing. Essentially what Anselm was trying to resolve here were ancient dilemmas that were portrayed in both Parmenides' poem and Plato's *Sophist*.⁴⁴ Inherent to Parmenides' poem was this notion that to deny the existence of a particular thing, involved a contradiction, so one cannot talk logically about non-being. Then Plato in his *Sophist* moves away from the idea that such contradictions exist, by suggesting that there are just different set of affairs – this allowed him to suggest that negative statements did not refer to not-being.⁴⁵ This is tied into Plato's notions of Forms, negation is but just one Form amongst the multiplicity that could exist, so it is not an indicator of non-being just a different kind of being. Within *DCD* we witness Anselm, alluding to these ancient difficulties in the voice of the student and shrewdly providing a two pronged response. Firstly, the word “nothing” means both that of nothing and something but in different contexts. Secondly, there is a thing which is both something and nothing. He states: “For it is not necessary that nothing be something simply because its name somehow signifies something; rather, nothing must be nothing, because the word ‘nothing’ signifies something only in the sense we’ve mentioned” (*DCD*, Ch.11). So, the word nothing is only something in terms of its signification. In other words, what is properly meant by nothing - that nothing is actually not-something but of course this “not-something” signifies something even if it is indicating the absence of whatever is something.

Anselm provides the example of blindness or non-vision, explaining that blindness is not actually a thing but the lack or absence of something as he states, “Therefore, blindness is not something in the eye, just because there ought to be vision in the eye, any more than non-vision

⁴⁴ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 55

⁴⁵ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 56

or the absence of vision is something in a stone, where there ought not to be vision” (DCD, Ch.11). In the same sense, he refers to both “nothing” and “evil”.

Hopkins and Richardson, put it succinctly in terms of what Anselm accomplishes with his delineations of “nothing” and “evil”, when he states: “The importance of Anselm’s line of thinking lies in its awareness that “nothing” is a peculiar semantical operator, whose meaning does not depend upon a unique referring relationship.”⁴⁶ So, in essence, “nothing” is an actual functional name, the bizarre thing is it does not really obtain any real meaning from what it is naming since such a thing does not exist. Even to this day, the concept of “nothing” and the word nothing require much more clarity. It seems as though the sort of clarity that a thinker like Anselm was trying bring forth in his day is completely lost amongst modern physicists. The word “nothing” has been abused, particularly in modern big bang cosmology and has essentially come to mean a particular thing such as a quantum fluctuation or virtual particle as opposed to “not-something” or “not-anything”. It seems as though modern physicists could use the aid of some philosophical reasoning to sort out these confusions or language abuses, that is, of course assuming that philosophy is not dead as boldly declared by some.

I believe the key to Anselm’s thought regarding “nothing” and “evil” is with respect to the very simple insight that language and expression do not correspond to how things are in reality. (DCD, Ch. 11)

Another important point regarding the ontological status of evil is with respect to what it is one fears or dreads about evil if it is not anything. The student wonders what causes injustices that evil seems to cause like robbery. Anselm brings precision on to what he believes it is that one fears or dreads concerning evil. He believes the answer lies in the fact that certain

⁴⁶ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 58.

disadvantages proceed from certain evils even though the evil or injustice itself is not anything. He illustrates this through an example by indicating that blindness is not a thing but if sight was in place within an individual they would not fall into a pit and suffer the consequential bodily pain that comes along with falling in a pit. (*DCD*, Ch. 26)

Giving and Receiving Uprightness

At the beginning of chapter 2 the student elucidates his objection by suggesting that the good angels persevered because God had given them perseverance but that the evil angel, that is Satan, never persevered because he never received it, so Satan would not be responsible or blameworthy with this line of thinking. In the student's objection there is a quote taken from John 8:44, that of "did not remain steadfast in truth" which is a reference to Satan and his lies. Moreover, it refers to Jesus' words concerning those who do not follow Jesus and prefer to follow Satan and oppose the will of God, this touches upon the freedom of humankind who choose to oppose God, much in the same way Satan chose to oppose God, as is presupposed in *DCD*. The fact that Satan did sin seems to suppose there was something inadequate within God and his ability to create a being that can receive uprightiness.

Obviously, Anselm is starkly opposed to any position that wants to deem God as inadequate or his Creation as inadequate on grounds for creating things imperfectly. Anselm points out that God did not cause or create Satan with any imperfections in either his will or his perseverance of uprightiness. This is true according to Anselm because God gave Satan the ability to persevere in uprightiness while also offering him the gift of perseverance – yet the key is that Satan refused such a gift. The other important point Anselm makes is that Satan chose evil not because of any deficiency in his will in terms of goodness but because he perceived and preferred another good as opposed to the one God had given him. Given this line of thought, as

Anselm presents it, one can see God as offering a gift to Satan that of persevering in uprightness with Satan not lacking anything since God gave him an originally perfect nature. So, in this sense we can say that Satan is blameworthy and responsible for his action of not persevering in uprightness since he was given the perfect ability to do so. Anselm therefore absolves God through this line of logic, the accusation that he created Satan in a less than perfect nature. Anselm essentially points out that the student commits a basic fallacy. The student believes that if person A receives a particular thing then person B gave it but wrongfully believes that if person A did not receive a particular thing then person B did not give it, such logic can only operate assuming that if person B did not give the particular thing then person A did not receive it. (DCD, Ch.3) Anselm demonstrates that God may have given perseverance but Satan did not receive because of his refusal. It is important to realize that Anselm's view of "not-receiving" is not caused by the "not-giving" a particular thing as he states: "even if giving were always the cause of receiving, not giving would not always be the cause of not receiving." (DCD, Ch. 3) Let us now look at Satan's responsibility in sinning.

Satan's Responsibility in Sinning

Anselm argues that the cause of Satan's sin lies in his will to desert uprightness not in his unwillingness to uphold it. So, it is anything but imperfection that caused Satan to sin. It is because of his willingness to rebel as opposed to a weakness of the will. In support of this argument, Anselm, provides, the example of a miser who is willing to give up money to get bread but he does this before he is unwilling to keep the money. (DCD, Ch. 3)

Hopkins suggests that the only way we could “know this [is] if we could actually specify what it was that Satan preferred to the uprightness of the will he received. So the student challenges Anselm to show what the analogue to the miser’s bread is in the case of Satan’s fall, “Show me what Satan willed to have that he didn’t have ... Then, if nothing can contradict it, I will agree that it is true.”⁴⁷ Nonetheless, it is thought-provoking to note that Anselm argues as was aforementioned in the introduction with respect to the origin of evil and what caused Satan to sin, at the end of chapter 27, the responsibility of sinning is put fully on Satan’s shoulders in the sense that he is the own cause and effect of his will that led him to sin., as Anselm states: “Only because he willed [it]. For this willing had no other cause (*causa*) by which in any respect to be driven or drawn; rather, it was an efficient cause of itself—if this can be said—and its own effect.” So, in this sense through purely his own volition which was uncaused by anything else than his own will, Satan becomes responsible for his own decision to desert perseverance in uprightness and willing what he ought to not have willed. In this sense Satan becomes blameworthy for this decision and the good angels are praiseworthy for not following such a sinful pathway.

Willing To Be Like God

Anselm must now explain what Satan chose over maintaining uprightness that he received from God upon his creation. Anselm argues whatever it was that Satan must have preferred over maintaining uprightness must have been good in itself since Satan would have not chosen a thing that was not-a-good to the good of justice. Yet, it is possible that Satan chose an alternative good to that of the good of justice, as Anselm remarks at the end of chapter 12.

⁴⁷ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 63.

Happiness that is desired by rational beings involves attaining good and things that benefit one. According to Anselm, Satan could not have sinned by desiring or willing the good of justice, it must have been something else, since willing justice cannot entail sinning. (DCD, Ch. 4) The thing that Satan willed may have increased his happiness even though he didn't possess and was not supposed to possess it. (DCD, Ch. 4)

What is it that Satan willed? It's something that could make him happy to will it but it was willed unjustly that made it a sin. Anselm must demonstrate in a convincing manner that the cause of Satan's sin is based on his "willingness to desert" as opposed to his "unwillingness to keep" in terms of his perseverance of uprightness. The dilemma lies in figuring out precisely what it was that Satan preferred. Anselm further indicates that Satan chose something that was not just but still advantageous since he went beyond the confines of what is entailed within justice.

Anselm derives his argument from both reason and revelation as is found in the scripture of the Old Testament. The response from scripture is that of electing to be "like God." It is precisely here that Anselm makes reference to Genesis 3:5, where the serpent says to Eve, "You will be like the gods, knowing good and evil." Through utilizing scripture Anselm invents an a priori argument in order to demonstrate that the original sin was that of wanting to be "like God."⁴⁸ What was carried forth by Adam and Even in the book of Genesis is being applied to Satan and his fall. In order for the argument to function it's not necessary to presuppose that Anselm equated the serpent with Satan or a manifestation of. Or that Satan was attempting to make humanity fall by the same sin that made him fall beforehand. The only thing that seems somewhat clear is that Anselm is trying to suggest that this would be the original sin for both

⁴⁸ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 64.

humans and angels. But is such an argument sound? Does Anselm have any warrant or justification for making such a move? Anselm needs to be very specific in what this original sin really entails.

The student immediately objects to such a move by saying that: “If God cannot be conceived except as a unique being, so that nothing else can be conceived to be like Him, how was Satan able to will what he could not conceive? He was not so obtuse that he thought something else could be conceived to be like God.” (DCD, Ch. 4) It is evident here that the student is alluding to Anselm’s ontological argument that was formulated roughly 10 years prior in *Proslogion*, to contradict Anselm’s view that Satan willed to be like God.⁴⁹

In an attempt to save his argument, Anselm provides two distinct definitions of the term “like God.” Anselm suggests that perhaps Satan did not necessarily will to be “like God” as the object of his action but willed to be something less than God. Then Anselm suggests that what Satan willed, was something that was contrary to God’s will. And as long as this object of his will was not something that God willed for him he willed to be “like God.” This is important to Anselm since God is the only one that can “will something by his own will and to obey no higher will.” (DCD, Ch. 4) Then in the following statement Anselm indicates that in fact Satan did not want to be equal to God but wanted to be even greater than God this was done by placing “his own will above God’s will by willing what God didn’t want him to will.” (DCD, Ch. 4) So, it seems the distinction is between willing to be like God and willing what one wants to will while running contrary to God’s will. It could be that Satan did not will to be like God as the object of his willing but willed to be like God in the way or fashion of his willing. The problem lies in

⁴⁹ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 64.

Anselm's lack of specification as to precisely what this good was that Satan wanted that became the object of his evil willing.

It seems that Anselm's argument may have worked if he identified Satan's sin and the object of his evil choice with that of being "like God". Yet, instead, he offers another meaning of "like God" equating it to the manner of Satan's will – this move seems to complicate the matter because there is no precision as to exactly what Satan willed it is just a vague argument about Satan's method of willing. This is where the argument is said to have suffered because Anselm has not convincingly demonstrated with certainty that God did not cause, Satan to have an imperfect will.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The evolution of the conceptions of Satan, the devil and demons throughout history is indeed a complicated issue. Different societies with different cultural backgrounds have had differing views. Moreover, differing thinkers and scholars from the period of the New Testament and forward have had a number of distinct approaches to tackle diverse issues regarding the aforementioned entities. Some questions remain open after such an analysis. I think it would be prudent to include a portion on the examination of the actual existence of a being such as we have come to understand Satan with respect to Christianity – with the provision of arguments for and against. This of course, must be done after such a proposed being is clearly and precisely defined, otherwise the endeavour will not be fruitful. How can we propose to understand such entities without even tackling the metaphysical issue regarding their existence?

⁵⁰ Hopkins and Richardson, *Truth, Freedom and Evil*, 65.

Another important issue is the question of cruelty and torture and how that corresponds to Satan/demons and their relation with humanity.⁵¹

Throughout different portions of *DCD*, Anselm makes use of certain passages of scripture to justify his arguments. 1 Corinthians 4:7 is a reference made about angels in general which would encompass Satan under Anselm's view. John 8:44, makes reference to the devil and Genesis 3:5 to the ancient serpent which certain interpretations particularly the medieval tradition which applies to Anselm, has equated with the devil. We can witness that Anselm's utilization of scripture in terms of referring to Satan or the devil seems to be heavily influenced by the traditional views regarding Satan in the medieval period. As was aforementioned these have been presupposed within the text itself. So the fallen angel myth is presupposed within the text.⁵² It seems as though his traditional conception of Satan came to influence his view of scripture and his utilization of such in *DCD* – particularly as we witness him develop an *a priori* argument of Satan's original sin being that of wanting to be "like God." Yet, one is left a bit frazzled as to why there is not more of an emphasis on scripture, particularly passages concerning Satan or the devil, since as Anselm himself mentions in the preface to all three dialogues that they are treatises on Holy Scripture. What is that Anselm has in mind when he says this? It seems obvious it something very distinct to that of how we understand biblical exegesis to be.

Nonetheless, as abovementioned in the introduction and as has been witnessed through an analysis of Anselm's text we can see that Anselm does a good job of resolving the ancient

⁵¹ It would be interesting to also look at how sometimes murderers have claimed to have been used by demons/Satan as instruments/pawns to carry out such acts of cruelty and torture. On the converse, some murderers have justified their actions in the name of God for other reasons.

⁵² The relationship of Anselm's views on Satan's fall was explored above with respect to the potential correlation with that of the book of Enoch.

dilemma that suggested that the conditions of evil were its cause. And that it was all done through Satan's own free volition. So, it's a simple resolution, the reason Satan sinned was because he willed to do so by wanting to be "like God" not because of any antecedent causes as previously believed. Despite this apparent disentanglement of an old dilemma Anselm remains with other problems. It seems that although Anselm makes some clever arguments to remove God's direct responsibility from Satan's fall because he gave him sufficient perseverance and strong enough will to avoid choosing the wrong type of good that perhaps what God had provided Satan was insufficient to prevent him from falling. The problem seems to still remain concerning at least God's indirect involvement in the causation of evil because of its inevitability. What's interesting is Anselm's reasoning behind God's permission of Satan carrying forth his evil deed. If one wants to hold God accountable to Satan's will to sin, it must be done by understanding God's granting power through permission by allowing the possibility of Satan's will to sin and its actual occurrence. Yet, in no way shape or form is God approving of Satan's choice to sin nor is God effecting or influencing its occurrence.

One may wonder why in the portion regarding *DCD* was there such an emphasis on God. If this paper intended to be an exploration of Satan and demons. Well, it would be very difficult to understand Satan in the light he is portrayed within *DCD* if one were to detach God's central role particularly with respect to being the source of being, goodness, the possibility to be, a necessarily existent being distinguished with the contingent world and not being a direct cause of evil. A careful reading of *DCD* shows that even though it deals with the fall of the devil it certainly is a deep reflection upon the question of finite free will and also that of God's nature. Free will and how it affects Satan's decision to persevere and maintain in uprightness or not, says a lot about God in terms of what type of free will he has granted his finite creatures and his

involvement in Satan's decision. Dare I say that *DCD* has particular elements that make it into a sort of prototypic theodicy? In it Anselm defends particular aspects of the nature of the Christian God against, what he would believe as a Christian medieval philosopher/theologian, to be one of the most unfortunate rebellions and tragedies that occurred throughout the history of God's creation – the fall of Satan which would in turn lead to origin of evil. He sought to demonstrate that there is a coherency with God's nature particularly with respect to being a necessarily existing being who is the source of all being and goodness and who is also omniscient. The chief preoccupation of Anselm in *DCD* was to demonstrate that evil really has no ontological status and that God is not the source of evil. I will conclude with a question to incite further reflection: does *DCD* stand as a coherent text or are their irreconcilable contradictions inherent within the text which undermines his argumentation and his depiction of God's nature?