

# **Philosophy of Religion: The Key Thinkers**

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## CHAPTER 1

# KEY THINKERS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION: AN INTRODUCTION

Jeff Jordan

Inquiries into the existence and nature of God have been frequent in the history of Western philosophy, with nearly every famous philosopher having his say. Often these discussions are difficult today to understand, whether due to style and vocabulary differences from hundreds of years of change, or due to issues that do not lend themselves to a quick and easy read. The chapters which follow explore many of the important arguments for or against the existence of God produced by some of the most influential philosophers in western thought. And they do so with the aim of accurately capturing the reasoning of the philosophers in a way that makes that reasoning accessible today.

The first chapter features a debate between two theists over the nature of God. A fundamental question in the philosophy of religion concerns the meaning of the term 'God'. Professor Katherine Rogers argues that the classical model of God found in thinkers such as Augustine and Thomas, and most pre-eminently in Anselm, is still today the model most appropriate for theistic belief and practice. Professor William Hasker argues that the classical model of God as an atemporal being who is omniscient and omnipotent does not adequately reflect the picture of God found in the Bible, and, moreover, the classical model is incompatible with significant human freedom. Rather than the classical or Anselmian view of God, Hasker suggests theists should accept what's known as the Open view of God.

The ontological argument developed by Anselm in the eleventh century is the topic of the Chapter 2. Anselm's ontological argument attempts to show that one cannot consistently hold both that God is

that than which no greater can be conceived, and that God does not exist, since to hold both results in a contradiction. Professor Graham Oppy examines the reasoning of Anselm's argument, as well as several contemporary versions of the Ontological argument, and concludes that a careful scrutiny leads to serious doubts about either the logical structure of ontological arguments, or serious doubts about the independence of the premises from the conclusion, or serious doubts whether the conclusion in fact supports the existence of God.

The cosmological argument is the focus of Chapter 3, with William Rowe expounding the first two of Thomas Aquinas's famous 'five ways' of proving that God exists. Professor Rowe argues that both of Thomas's arguments suffer from several problems. One problem is that Thomas seems to assume that something can qualitatively change from one state (say, being cold) to another state (being hot) only if it is caused to do so by something that is already in the second state. But this assumption seems obviously wrong, since, for example, women are not made pregnant by pregnant women. Another problem is that Thomas provides no reason to exclude the possibility that something can occur simply as a brute fact. That something can come from nothing, in other words. A third problem Rowe mentions is that Thomas provides no clear reason why a series involving causes or change must terminate with a first cause. What precludes an infinite series of things causing other things? Rowe suggests that Thomas distinguishes between *per se* series and *accidental* series, with the former requiring a first member, while the latter may proceed to infinity.

The design argument is the topic of Chapter 5, especially the design argument formulated by William Paley. Paley's argument is too often dismissed as either having been pre-empted by David Hume's objections to the design argument published nearly 30 years prior to Paley, or rendered obsolete by Darwin, some 60 years later. Professor Mark Wynn in a careful study of Paley's argument shows that this common dismissal is wrong. Paley's argument has interest despite Hume and Darwin. Wynn shows that Paley's argument is not an argument from analogy, but is better understood as an Abductive argument, or an inference to the best explanation. As such it avoids Hume's objections to analogical arguments. Paley's argument may elude Darwinian objections as well with its appeal to considerations which are presupposed by Darwin's theory, but are not explained by it.

The moral argument is the focus of Chapter 6, and in particular the version of the moral argument presented by its most famous proponent, Immanuel Kant. Peter Byrne notes that moral arguments generally come in two kinds: evidential moral arguments, and non-evidential ones. The former kind involves arguing that some alleged fact about morality provides reason for thinking that God exists. Professor Byrne takes an evidential argument offered by Robert Adams, and explores how a non-theist might respond to the argument. During this exploration Professor Byrne notes a bootstrapping problem with any view that holds that normative obligation flows from divine commands: there will always be at least one alleged normative fact which cannot be explained by appealing to the principle that one ought always to obey God – where would the normativity accompanying that principle arise? Professor Byrne also vets Kant's non-evidential moral argument. Non-evidential arguments do not appeal to evidence, but contend rather that our commitment to moral rationality, for instance, commits us to the existence of God. Professor Byrne's main judgement concerning moral arguments of either kind is that such arguments involve contested issues – whether there are moral facts for instance – which leave the critic ample room to deny the force of the argument.

It is not uncommon that persons report having had experiences in which they take themselves to have had a direct but nonsensory perception of God. Such reports range from the dramatic extreme that might be termed 'mystical' to the more ordinary of one having the sense of being forgiven, or being called to this or that vocation. Might a theistic argument be erected upon a foundation of such reports? One of the great American philosophers, William James, pursued this question, especially in his 1902 masterpiece, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. As Professor Richard Gale points out James is probably the first to develop a kind of argument that is often found among theistic thinkers today, an appeal to the strong similarities between ordinary sense perceptions and the reports of nonsensory perceptions offered by mystics. This kind of argument from analogy is found today, for instance, in works by the theistic philosophers William Alston, William Wainwright and Richard Swinburne. But, as Gale notes, James was not a classical theist, rejecting as he did the omnipotence of the divine, yet he was not a naturalistic or atheist either. James held that mystical experiences provided evidence that there was something more found in the universe

than is discerned by the ordinary senses. If James is right then certain religious and mystical experiences are properly considered cognitive in nature – they provide informative about reality. They provide more than feelings, as some can be taken as evidence of the supernatural. Professor Gale's chapter provides an informative survey of William James's important work on religious experience.

The ontological argument as well as the cosmological, and the design arguments are all clear examples of theistic evidential arguments: arguments intended to provide good reason for believing that the proposition that God exists is more likely than not. Besides theistic evidential arguments, there are also theistic non-evidential arguments, including pragmatic arguments. Pragmatic arguments for theism are designed to motivate and support belief even in the absence of strong evidential support. These arguments seek to show that theistic belief is permissible, even if one does not think that it is likely that God exists. Pragmatic arguments employ prudential reasons on behalf of their conclusions. The most famous theistic pragmatic argument was offered by Blaise Pascal in the 1600s, his famous wager. In Chapter 8 I examine Pascal's wager by examining the four versions of the wager that Pascal formulated, the logic of those wagers, and I explore the two objections that are thought by most to present the most serious challenge to Pascalian wagering: the many-gods objection, and the evidentialist objection.

Several of the historical religions of the world – think of Judaism, for example, or Christianity – are purported cases of revealed religion. Religions that depend on an alleged divinely disclosed set of propositions (think of the Bible) or some kind of inspired teaching, and on certain events which are reported miracles (the deliverance out of Egypt, or the resurrection of Jesus, for example). A miracle, one might say, is an event that violates a law of nature. In his 1748 essay 'On Miracles', Chapter 10 of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, David Hume argued that no rational person can accept testimony of miracles. If Hume is correct, then the superstructure of, say, Christianity would topple with the loss of its allegedly miraculous base – if the reports of Jesus' resurrection are a sham, so too would be any doctrines erected on those reports. Hume's essay has stirred controversy for over two hundred years, not just for its anti-religious implications but even regarding how

to interpret Hume's reasoning. David Johnson, in Chapter 9, argues trenchantly that a common way of interpreting Hume in fact misinterprets Hume, and further, that Hume's essay lacks the support of any cogent argument. Johnson's foil is the philosopher Robert Fogelin, who championed the standard way of interpreting Hume in his 2003 book, *A Defense of Hume on Miracles* (Princeton University Press). Professor Johnson, then, has two targets in his sights: Hume and Professor Fogelin.

The strongest challenge to theistic belief is the problem of evil, which deals with the pain and suffering of innocent beings. As summarized by the character Philo in Part X of Hume's 1779 work, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the problem of evil is:

Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?

Like his attack on the credibility of miracle reports, Hume's formulation of the problem of evil is historically influential, and philosophically significant. Professor Michael Tooley provides a careful reading of Hume's development of the problem of evil in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Evil*, and notes that Hume attempts to use the occurrence of evil to block any inference to the goodness of the cause or causes of the world, and as an argument contra the existence of God. Professor Tooley argues that Hume's formulation of the argument contra the existence of God, based on evil is significant in at least three ways. First, Hume, via the character of Philo, presents both an incompatibility version of the problem of evil, and an evidential version. An incompatible version argues that the occurrence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God; while an evidential version argues that evil, whether its variety, its quantity, or other facts about evil provides strong evidence against the existence of God. Second, Hume also focuses on concrete examples of evil, real cases of suffering, rather than treating suffering in the abstract. And third, Hume introduces discussion of four hypotheses regarding the origins of the universe – the cause or causes of the world are perfectly good, perfectly evil, a balance of good and evil, or are indifferent – and argues that experience of the amount and distribution



of good and evil strongly supports the fourth hypothesis over the other three.

Philosophy of religion is a vibrant and lively area of philosophy, with much debate and innovative developments employing new methodologies to explore old questions. It is also an area of philosophy that extends well beyond the theoretical, to encompass some of the most pressing existential questions, including does God exist? Does suffering provide strong evidence that God does not exist? How should one conceive of God? And is it ever permissible to believe when lacking conclusive evidence? The essays that follow provide a guided tour along the historic paths which great thinkers in the past trod in trying to answer those questions.

## CHAPTER 2

# ANSELM AND THE CLASSICAL IDEA OF GOD: A DEBATE

Katherin Rogers & William Hasker

### The classical view of God: Rogers

Before we proceed far in the philosophy of religion we should address the question of what we mean by the term 'God' and try to grasp, however haltingly, some understanding of the divine nature. Anselm of Canterbury speaks for the classical tradition of Christian philosophy which encompasses medieval philosophers like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas when, in his *Proslogion*, he defines God as 'that than which no greater can be conceived'.<sup>1</sup> He goes on in this work to attempt to prove the existence of God based on this definition and then to unpack the divine attributes in conformity with the definition. The present paper sketches Anselm's understanding of some of these attributes with an eye to disarming some contemporary criticisms.

But why adopt the *Proslogion* definition as our guiding principle when pondering the nature of God? Anselm believes that the Bible is the inerrant word of God and that the decisions of the Church Councils are guided by the Holy Spirit and so are absolutely trustworthy. Aren't these sufficient? In Anselm's view, reason can help us to further understand the Truth these sources deliver. And this is crucial for several reasons. One is expressed by Augustine's dictum that we cannot love what we do not know. The Christian is commanded to love God and the search for better understanding is also a journey towards a more profound love of God. The Christian is also commanded to love his neighbour.

While reasoned arguments can help the committed believer to better understand, they can also strengthen a faith that is weak, and bring the nonbeliever to belief. Anselm takes it that charity requires the philosopher to make the arguments which may help the neighbour.

But why insist on 'that than which no greater can be conceived'? Anselm himself simply assumes this as the correct definition and an appropriate starting point for philosophizing about God. In recent times, though, the Anselmian approach has been accused of presenting a God who is too remote, too 'hellenized', to be identified with the personal divinity of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and so it becomes important to defend the methodology. There are both religious and philosophical reasons for taking the *Proslogion* definition as a foundational and non-negotiable principle. On the religious side, the Judeo-Christian tradition holds that it is the very nature of God that He alone is worthy of worship. Lesser beings might rightly be esteemed or feared, but not worshipped. That is a unique response which may be directed only at God. Suppose now that you worship a being that you take to be a very great thing, perhaps the best thing in the universe, but than whom you *can* conceive of a greater. The powers of human conception are woefully limited. The being towards whom you direct your worship must be quite diminutive, if even your feeble powers are capable of conceiving of a greater. Is such a being really a proper object of worship? And worse, if you can conceive of a greater being – in fact, of a being than which no greater can be conceived – you cannot rule out the possibility that this greater being exists.<sup>2</sup> If this greater being exists, then *it* is the proper object of worship. It should be worshipped even by the lesser divinity to whom you have dedicated yourself. But in that case, the claim to being the appropriate object of worship is not a necessary trait of your lesser god. It might contingently happen to be the best thing in the universe, but it is not, by its very nature, worthy of worship. Only that than which no greater can be conceived can be, by nature, the uniquely appropriate object of worship and so only it can be the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

A second reason for beginning where Anselm begins is that, insofar as the Western tradition has marshalled philosophical reasons for belief in God in the form of arguments for His existence, many of these arguments point towards the existence of that than which no greater can be conceived. This is certainly true of the *Proslogion* argument, where the first

premise is that this is the proper definition of God. (Someone might respond that Anselm's argument is so obviously unsound that it need not be taken into account, but almost no discussion of the 'ontological' argument understands it in Anselm's original version. To my knowledge, this version has not been shown to be unsound.<sup>3</sup>) And many of the causal arguments point to a being who, as the source of the universe, transcends the limitations inherent in it. If our already limited cognitive capabilities conceive of a divinity whom we recognize to be limited, it is likely that we are imposing on this conception the sort of limitations inherent in created being. But the God to Whom the arguments argue is a God who transcends all of that, so it seems apt to insist that He is that than which no greater can be conceived.

In saying that God is that than which no greater can be conceived, Anselm does not intend to suggest that the limited human intellect is indeed capable of fully comprehending God. We can speak and think correctly about God, and our terms and concepts apply univocally to God and creatures, and yet the reality of the divine nature transcends what we can really grasp. Anselm adopts the time-honoured Platonic analogy: Although we can see the sunlight, we are blinded if we try to gaze directly at the Sun.<sup>4</sup> In attempting, in however limited a way, to understand the nature of God, we must not confine our conception to what the human intellect can imagine or picture to itself. And, if we see that something must *be* the case, we should not reject it just because we cannot grasp *how* it must be the case.<sup>5</sup>

What, then, are the attributes of that than which no greater can be conceived? Let us start with the more obvious ones. Anselm holds God is perfectly powerful, perfectly knowledgeable, and perfectly good. But Anselm's classic conception of these traits differs significantly from that of many contemporary philosophers of religion. Divine omnipotence certainly does not mean that God can do anything logically possible for *someone* to do. It means that God can do anything logically possible for *a perfect and unlimited being* to do. God cannot make a rock too heavy for Him to lift.<sup>6</sup> Omnipotence also entails that God is the absolute source of all that is not Himself and that really exists. That last phrase has to be added lest someone suppose that God is the source of evil. In the classic tradition evil is not any sort of substance or object. It is the lack of what ought to be there.<sup>7</sup> Even the laws of logic and mathematics exist in dependence upon God as a reflection of the divine nature.<sup>8</sup> And God

keeps all creation in being from moment to moment. What things *are* is what He thinks them to be, and if He were to stop thinking a thing, it would cease to be.<sup>9</sup> Regarding divine omniscience, God knows absolutely everything, including the future.<sup>10</sup> Regarding divine goodness, God's very nature is the standard for good, and all that is good or valuable is so through copying or reflecting the divine nature.<sup>11</sup>

Besides omnipotence, omniscience and perfect goodness, Anselm and the classic tradition defend other attributes less widely accepted today; simplicity, immutability and eternity. Anselm argues that, though triune, God is not composed of parts. A thing composed of parts is divisible, if only conceptually. But to be divided is to be destroyed. That than which no greater can be conceived cannot even be thought to be corruptible.<sup>12</sup> God's omnipotence, omniscience and goodness are not separate qualities. His nature *is* His act of doing all He does, which is identical with His act of knowing all He knows. And this act is the standard for value.<sup>13</sup> As simple, God cannot suffer change – no change at all! A thing which remains, while undergoing change, must be composite with an attribute which changes while the substrate does not.<sup>14</sup> But how could Anselm's God, the living God of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the God who makes the world and interacts with it moment by moment, *possibly* be immutable? Anselm, in fact, claims to show that God *had to* become incarnate. How could a God who actually enters into physical creation, changing human history in such a radical way, be immutable?

The question of the relationship between a changing world and an unchanging God was a perennial and vexed one in the Middle Ages. It motivated Augustine's famous meditation on time in *Confessions* 11.<sup>15</sup> It drove the debate between the Aristotelians and the more 'fundamentalist' Muslims which inspired a general distrust of philosophy in the Islamic world.<sup>16</sup> In order to solve the problem, Thomas Aquinas employs his extremely difficult point that, while creatures are really related to God, God is not really related to creatures; a view that can seem to isolate God from His creation.<sup>17</sup> Anselm, like other classical theists, holds that God is eternal, and proposes a theory of divine eternity which provides the metaphysical tools to solve the problem of an immutable God who is nonetheless an actor in His temporal creation. It all hinges on accepting the correct view of time.

Anselm is arguably the first philosopher in history to propound, in an explicit and conscious way, a four-dimensionalist or eternalist analysis of time.<sup>18</sup> (I prefer the former label because 'eternal' has traditionally been used to describe God's mode of being.) Four-dimensionalism is opposed to presentism. On a presentist theory of time, all that there is the present moment of time with all its contents. The past and future are absolutely non-existent. The four-dimensionalist view holds that all times and all their contents have equal ontological status. Past, present and future are indexed to the perspective of a given perceiver at a given point in time, rather like here and there are relative to a given perceiver at a given point in space. God is 'outside' of time in the sense that He does not exist as stretched out across the moments of time the way temporal creatures do. But He is not 'apart' from the temporal world. Rather all times and all they contain are immediately present to God, kept in being by His unified act of thinking.

Why does Anselm say this? The main alternative is presentism. All that exists is the present moment. That means that God exists only in the present moment, since that is all there is.<sup>19</sup> Anselm's starting point is the greatness of God, and so the questions are these: Which demonstrates greater power, to be able, at each moment, to act directly upon only that single moment of time and its contents, *or* to be able, in a single act, to act directly upon all times and all their contents? Surely the latter. Which demonstrates greater knowledge, to have an immediate cognition only of the present moment, such that you remember the past, and, if you know the future, know it indirectly from things in the present, *or* to 'see' all events at all times directly? Knowing directly is a better way of knowing than knowing indirectly.<sup>20</sup> And more knowledge is greater than less. Four-dimensionalism allows us to conceive of a God who directly knows what is to us the past, present and future. If we hold that God knows only the present and the past, we have abandoned the claim that God is that than which no greater can be conceived.

What if we insist that God, in His perfect goodness, has made creatures with libertarian free will, and that free will and divine fore-knowledge are incompatible? Anselm is the first Christian philosopher, and perhaps the first philosopher ever, to offer a systematic and metaphysically sophisticated analysis of libertarian freedom.<sup>21</sup> Anselm holds that the created agent must have open options. The agent

experiences competing motivations, and it is absolutely not determined which motivation will win out. His free choices arise from his own will.<sup>22</sup> If we do not insist upon this robust free will then we would have to say that, ultimately, God is the cause of sin. And that, says Anselm, is logically impossible, since to sin is to will what God wills that you not will. Period.<sup>23</sup> But if God knows today what you will choose *x* tomorrow, then, when tomorrow comes, you cannot do other than God knew today you would do, and so you do not have open options – or so it seems.

On Anselm's four-dimensionalist analysis, since it is all 'now' to God, it is your choosing *x* tomorrow that grounds God's knowledge today that you choose *x* tomorrow. True, you cannot do other than choose *x* tomorrow, but that is because you choose *x* tomorrow. The lack of options is the same as that involved in saying that, if you are reading this *now*, God knows that you are reading this *now*, and so you cannot be doing other than reading this *now*. But does that show that you are not reading freely? The open options required for libertarian freedom surely need not include the option to do, at a given time, other than one does at that time, since that would be logically impossible.<sup>24</sup> Thus four-dimensionalism allows Anselm to reconcile freedom with divine foreknowledge.

Are there reasons to reject four-dimensionalism? Some have said that it denies change in the created world, but so long as change means things being different from one time to another, four-dimensionalism is compatible with change. Some have said that four-dimensionalism conflicts with our ordinary experience. But no theory of time seems a comfortable fit with experience. For example, presentism holds that all that exists is the present moment, the unextended point at which the non-existent future becomes the non-existent past. Is that how things seem? More importantly, even if four-dimensionalism were more distant from ordinary experience than other theories, God's perfection is non-negotiable and trumps human experience. Adopting four-dimensionalism allows Anselm to reconcile freedom with divine foreknowledge and divine agency with divine immutability. It also allows him to defend the most robust conception of divine greatness, including the most extensive possible divine power and knowledge. Perhaps four-dimensionalism seems counter-intuitive, but that God might be that than which we *can* conceive a greater is impossible. Better to adopt the difficult theory of time than to abandon Anselm's God!

## **A non-classical alternative to Anselm: William Hasker**

My role in this discussion is to offer a non-classical alternative to Anselm's classical theism, as presented by Professor Rogers. In spite of the venerable tradition supporting the Anselmian view, not to mention its undeniable metaphysical elegance, I believe there is an alternative view which is superior both in its internal consistency and in its faithfulness to Scripture and Christian experience. I begin by setting out some of my disagreements with Anselm/Rogers,<sup>25</sup> and then present briefly the main lines of the alternative, non-classical option.

I am very happy, however, to express my agreement with much of what Rogers says early on in her piece. I agree that the Anselmian conception of God as 'that than which no greater can be conceived' needs to be fundamental for our reflections on God's nature. This is so, because only such an unsurpassably great being can be worthy of the absolute, unqualified love, worship and obedience that is demanded of us. And I also agree emphatically about the need for Christian philosophers and theologians to rigorously think through questions concerning the nature of God, so as to enable us to understand better (though still no doubt very inadequately) the One whom we love and worship.

Ironically, one major disagreement with Anselm/Rogers concerns what I take to be their over-confidence in human reason as it carries out this needed task of reflection. I call this ironic, because one would not usually expect a modern philosopher to chide a medieval theologian for being excessively rational! But I believe that Anselm and Rogers are far too optimistic about our ability to determine easily, almost by inspection, which attributes are fittingly ascribed to a God who is the greatest conceivable being. Rogers proceeds too quickly in concluding that, if we adopt certain conceptions of God's knowledge, 'we have abandoned the claim that God is that than which no greater can be conceived'. Before such conclusions can be warranted we need to have carefully scrutinized alternative views of the divine attributes for their internal logical consistency as well as their harmony or disharmony with all of the other things that need to be said about God. It is, unfortunately, all too easy for us to think up supposedly 'great-making'



attributes which turn out to be either incoherent or in conflict with other things that need to be said about God.<sup>26</sup> I also believe that Scripture needs to play a larger role in our understanding of the divine attributes than it is able to do in the Anselmian way of proceeding. Some of these 'great-making' attributes are exceedingly difficult to reconcile with the Biblical picture of God.

Our substantive disagreements begin with the 'less widely accepted' attributes of simplicity, immutability and (timeless) eternity. About simplicity I have little to say, since those who defend the doctrine can't seem to agree on exactly what it means. To be sure, God is not assembled out of parts; that much is agreed upon by all. The doctrine of divine simplicity, however, is supposed to mean a great deal more than this, but what that 'more' is remains in contention, so it is best to refrain from criticizing until there is a clear target for the criticism.

We turn next to a classical attribute not mentioned by Rogers, divine *impassibility*, which asserts that God cannot be affected by any negative emotion whatsoever. Anselm is quite explicit about this:

So how, Lord, are you both merciful and not merciful? Is it not because you are merciful in relation to us but not in relation to yourself? You are indeed merciful according to what we feel, but not according to what you feel. For when you look with favor upon us in our sorrow, we feel the effect [*effectum*] of mercy, but you do not feel the emotion [*affectum*] of mercy. So you are merciful, because you save the sorrowful and spare those who sin against you, but you are also not merciful because you are not afflicted with any feeling of compassion for sorrow (*Proslogion* 8).<sup>27</sup>

Nicely stated, to be sure, but I submit that this 'lack of affect' is not at all what most of us would expect of a being who is said to be perfectly loving! And it is also difficult to reconcile with the Scriptures, according to which 'As a father has compassion for his children, so the LORD has compassion for those who fear him' (Psalm 103: 13).<sup>28</sup>

My main attention, however, will be focused on two other attributes: absolute immutability and divine timeless eternity. I agree that if God is to be absolutely immutable, God must be timeless. Otherwise, if God is temporal, there must be at least minimal changes in God, so that God's knowledge can match the changes that occur in the world. I also agree with Rogers that the view of God as timeless requires that we

accept a four-dimensionalist view of time. If there is an objective, ever-changing temporal 'now', then there will be temporal facts – facts about what events have transpired up until the present moment – which a timeless God cannot know. For example, the events celebrated in the liturgy: 'Christ *has* died, Christ *has* risen, Christ *will* come again'.

Now, it is by no means clear that Anselm was a consistent four-dimensionalist in his view of time: as Rogers acknowledges, scholarly opinion is divided on this.<sup>29</sup> But let's suppose that she is right about Anselm's view, and consider the merits and demerits of that view. To begin with, it's not at all obvious that such a view is compatible with Scripture, which portrays throughout a 'living God . . . who makes the world and interacts with it moment by moment'.<sup>30</sup> There is quite a gap between the dynamically active God portrayed in Scripture and the timeless God of classical theism; that's why this was a 'perennial and vexed' question throughout the Middle Ages. Classical theists do not, of course, deny these Scriptural depictions of God; rather they develop elaborate theories, four-dimensionalism among them, showing how the two apparently conflicting conceptions of God can be reconciled. In the biblical stories, Calvin says, God 'lisp' to us – that is, talks baby-talk – as an accommodation to our limited understanding. But this raises a number of questions, these two among them: Just how did Calvin – or, for that matter, Anselm – get to be the 'adults' who are able to comprehend the 'deep truths' about God that apparently could not be revealed to the apostles and prophets? And why should we trust the philosophical sources of classical theism (among which Neoplatonism is prominent, as Rogers says) to be more accurate in their depiction of God than the Bible is?

The most important objection, however, is that divine timelessness and four-dimensionalism are inconsistent with the libertarian free will that it is essential, according to Anselm and Rogers, to attribute to human beings. According to Anselm/Rogers, free will requires that there be, for the agent, *alternative possibilities* at the time when she makes her choice.<sup>31</sup> That is to say, at the moment when she chooses it must be *really possible*, all things considered, for her to make a different choice than the one she actually makes. Now consider Annie, an agent who is in the process of making a libertarian choice between X and Y. Suppose she in fact chooses Y; this means that Annie's choice of Y exists

eternally as part of the four-dimensional continuum. But in order for her choice to be free it must have been really possible, and really within Annie's power, to choose X instead of Y. And of course, her choice of X would bring about that it is her choice of X rather than her choice of Y that eternally exists as part of the continuum. But this means that, at the time when Annie makes her choice, *'there are future actions of [Annie's] which timelessly exist in the divine eternity which are such that it is in [Annie's] power, now, to bring about that those actions do not exist in eternity'*. In her book on Anselm, Rogers quotes the italicized sentence from an earlier article of my own, and responds, 'Of course this condition cannot be met'.<sup>32</sup> I certainly agree that it cannot – but, *pace* Rogers, what this shows is that the Anselm/Rogers view does not, as they both claim, make it possible for libertarian free will to coexist with the presence of all future events in God's eternity.

But now, what is the alternative to Anselmian classical theism? The position taken here is that of 'open theism' or the 'openness of God', so called because it first came to prominence through the publication of a book by that name.<sup>33</sup> This is a version of orthodox Christian theism, according to which God is perfect in wisdom, goodness and power, and is the unique, self-sufficient creator of the universe, including all concrete entities other than God. God exists eternally as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit; God the Son became a human being as Jesus of Nazareth, and as such lived a human life, died and rose again from the dead for the salvation of humankind. Open theism, however, is not merely generic theism, not even generic Christian theism. Open theism has distinctive implications concerning the nature of God, and God's relationships with the world and with humankind, that distinguish it from other versions of theism. The central idea of open theism is that God is 'open', that is, affected by and responsive to the world God has made, and especially to free and rational creatures such as human beings. In contrast with Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, the God of open theism has been characterized by Clark Pinnock as the 'Most Moved Mover'; God is more deeply affected by what occurs in his creation than we can ever imagine. Also included is the idea that God is open to the future, which is itself open, indeterminate in many respects and waiting to be determined both by God and by human beings.

In several ways open theism is sharply distinguished from Anselmian classical theism. However, open theism agrees with Anselm in the insistence

that God is supremely perfect in power, knowledge and goodness. (The issue is not *whether* God is perfect, but rather in what this perfection consists.) God is temporal, not timeless; God's eternity does not mean that temporal categories are inapplicable to God, but rather that God is *everlasting*: unlike the creatures, God always has existed and always will exist. Time is not an alien medium within which God is 'trapped' or 'limited'; rather time, in the sense of a changeful succession of states, is inherent in God's own nature. God is unchanging in his nature and character; his wisdom, power and faithfulness to us never alter in the slightest degree. But God's experience does vary from time to time, as indeed it must if he is to be aware of what occurs and changes in the world, and if God is to respond to the creatures in the way the Bible and Christian tradition insist that he does. One of the most profound differences between open theism and classical theism concerns the doctrine of divine impassibility. Open theism insists that God, far from being impassible, is deeply affected by events in the lives of his creatures: he suffers with us when we are afflicted, and rejoices when we find true happiness. To be sure, God is not controlled or overpowered by emotion in the way that often happens to us; rather God has chosen to sympathize with us, to share our joys and sorrows. For Christians, the supreme instance of this is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, but open theists insist that God's 'openness' to sharing our experiences is not limited to this; rather, God's presence in Jesus is a revelation of what God in his essential nature truly is, and thinks, and feels.

Open theists recognize God as having the power that would enable him to exert his rule over the world by unilaterally controlling everything that takes place. They believe, however, that God has not chosen to do this, but has instead bestowed upon his creatures a genuine power to make decisions of their own, including decisions as to whether or not to cooperate with God's loving purposes towards them. (In this, to be sure, open theism agrees with the Anselmian view, and we salute Anselm/Rogers for insisting on genuine freedom for the creatures, in opposition to Augustine, Calvin and many other proponents of classical theism.) This creates a real possibility of tragedy in the world, as our actual history illustrates all too vividly, but also makes possible a genuine, spontaneous response of love towards God that would be precluded were we merely, so to speak, puppets dancing on the ends of the divinely manipulated strings.

One final position taken by open theists is at once the most clearly distinctive feature of their view and the most controversial. Open theism holds that creatures are 'free' in the libertarian sense, meaning that it is really possible, in a given situation, for the creature to do something different than the thing it actually does.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the choices of this sort that will be made in the future *do not now exist*, and as such are unknowable for any being, God included. It is not a matter of God's knowledge being less than perfect; rather, with regard to these undetermined future events, there is simply nothing for God to know. Open theists argue that the lack of this sort of knowledge does not impede God in his providential governance of the world, though it does lead us to understand that governance in a different way than is typical of classical theism.<sup>35</sup>

This, then, is the non-classical alternative that is offered for your consideration. I bring these remarks to a close here, to leave space for the discussion as Professor Rogers and I continue to explore both our differences and our points of agreement.

## An Anselmian response: Rogers

Thanks again to Professor Hasker. Anselm takes God to be the primary 'biblical writer', and so would hesitate to limit what might have 'been in the minds of the biblical authors'. He insists that God is *both* 'a timeless, utterly immutable God and a God who [from our perspective] lives and acts in time, and responds [with love] to what transpires in the world[.]' True, He does not change His mind. It is simply better not to make mistakes. On Hasker's reading the biblical God is just not 'that than which no greater can be conceived'.

And He knows future free choices. At  $t-1$  Annie has the power to do both X and Y at  $t$  in the sense that her choice is not determined. Her choice alone decides whether she does X or Y and so produces the contents of the divine knowledge at  $t-1$ . If she chooses X then God knows she chooses X. Similarly if she chooses Y. This seems a robust enough sense of alternatives being 'in her power' to allow libertarian freedom and yet to admit of divine foreknowledge and a God than Whom no greater can be conceived.

## A non-classical response: Hasker

If Annie's choice of Y exists timelessly as part of the four-dimensional continuum – or, alternatively, if God has always known that Annie chooses Y – then at the time when she chooses it is impossible that she will choose X instead of Y. But what it is impossible that a person should do is not in her power to do, so her choosing X is not an 'alternative possibility'. And causal indeterminacy by itself is not enough for free will.

There is no evidence that any of the biblical writers (including God, for that matter!) thought of God as timeless, and plenty of evidence that God responds to his creatures sometimes with sorrow and sometimes with anger – but yes, always with love. So in these respects, Anselm's view of God deviates from what we find in the Bible.

Yet in spite of these disagreements Anselm, Professor Rogers and I share a common faith and hope in a God who is incomparably greater than all we can say about him.

## Notes

- 1 *Proslogion*, 2.
- 2 This may seem a little hasty. You might believe that the fact of evil shows the existence of Anselm's God to be impossible, while leaving open the possibility of the existence of lesser divinities. The classical tradition has laboured long, hard and, in my view, successfully, to respond to this point.
- 3 I try to situate the *Proslogion* argument within Anselm's Neoplatonic thought in Chapter 6 of *The Neoplatonic Metaphysics and Epistemology of Anselm of Canterbury* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997).
- 4 See *Response to Gaunilo* 1, and *Proslogion* 14. See also Chapter 5 of *Neoplatonic Metaphysics*.
- 5 See *Why God Became Man* Book 1, 25. God cannot be or do anything logically impossible, and so there is some constraint on what we may attribute to God, but this is not a limitation on the divine nature, since the impossible is not really a thing to be or do.
- 6 *Proslogion* 7.
- 7 Nowadays evil is often identified with undeserved suffering. The classic tradition understands most human pain as the consequence of sin, and animal pain as an inevitable part of the causal system of nature which, in itself, is so valuable as to justify the pain. Real evil – what absolutely ought not be – is the privation or

corruption or destruction of some good, and/or the choice for the lesser and lower over what ought to be chosen.

- 8 Many contemporary philosophers of religion hold that there are abstracta of various sorts – necessary truths, for example – that exist independently of God. The classic tradition denies this.
- 9 See Anselm's *Monologion* 13–14. See also Chapter 7 of my *Perfect Being Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), hereafter *PBT*.
- 10 See Anselm's *On the Harmony of God's Foreknowledge, Predestination, and Grace with Human Freedom* Book 1. See also *PBT* 6.
- 11 *Monologion*, 1–2. See also *PBT* 9.
- 12 *Proslogion*, 18.
- 13 *Monologion*, 17. See also *PBT* 3.
- 14 *Monologion*, 25. See also *PBT* 4.
- 15 See my *Anselm on Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 165–6.
- 16 See my 'Anselm and His Islamic Contemporaries on Divine Necessity and Eternity,' *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2007), 373–93.
- 17 *Summa Theologiae*, Ia. q.13, a. 7.
- 18 *Anselm on Freedom*, 176–84.
- 19 Brian Leftow argues that Anselm is a presentist, believing in a temporal *and* an eternal present, in 'Anselmian Presentism', *Faith and Philosophy* (forthcoming). I respond in 'Back to Eternalism', *Faith and Philosophy* (forthcoming in the same volume).
- 20 William Alston, 'Does God Have Beliefs?', *Religious Studies* 22 (1987), 287–306.
- 21 This is the overall theme of *Anselm on Freedom*.
- 22 See Anselm's *On the Fall of the Devil*, especially Chapters 13–14, and 27. See also *Anselm on Freedom* 73–8.
- 23 See Anselm's *On Free Will*, Chapter 8. See also *Anselm on Freedom* 88–92.
- 24 *Anselm on Freedom* 169–76; see also my 'The Necessity of the Present and Anselm's Eternalist Response to the Problem of Theological Fatalism', *Religious Studies* 43 (2007), 25–47. Classical theists such as Augustine and Aquinas would worry that this entails that creatures have an effect upon God. Anselm takes that consequence as a necessary part of the system in which God has made free beings.
- 25 For present purposes it will be both convenient and appropriate to treat Anselm and Rogers as a single unit. There may be some points at which Rogers disagrees with Anselm, but they will not come into play in this discussion.
- 26 Rogers herself supplies an example of this, when she points out that classical theists such as Anselm and Aquinas would object to the idea that creatures can have an effect on God. I agree with Anselm/Rogers that our idea of God must allow for libertarian free will for creatures (lest God be said to be the author of sin), and that libertarianism, in turn, requires that creatures should have an effect on God. But this provides a clear example of an allegedly 'great-making'

attribute – that of the absolute, comprehensive independence of God from creatures – that upon further reflection it is better *not* to ascribe to God.

- 27 *Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. and ed. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co., 2007), 85.
- 28 For an even more powerful evocation of the divine pathos, see Hosea, Chapter 2.
- 29 For reasons why Anselm may not be a four-dimensionalist, see my review of Rogers' *Anselm on Freedom in Religious Studies* 45/4 (2009), 499–504.
- 30 In the past a few biblical texts have been interpreted as supporting the doctrine of timeless eternity, but it has become clear that the view is read into the texts rather than derived from them. For discussion see Alan G. Padgett, *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), Chapter 2.
- 31 The need for alternative possibilities is sometimes denied, on account of the 'Frankfurt counterexamples' that allegedly depict situations in which persons are free and responsible in spite of the lack of alternative possibilities. I do not believe the Frankfurt cases are successful, but it is not necessary to argue this here, since Anselm/Rogers agree on the need for alternatives.
- 32 *Anselm on Freedom*, 171. The quoted sentence is from 'The Absence of a Timeless God,' in Greg Ganssle and David Woodruff, eds., *God and Time*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 198.
- 33 For open theism see Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994). The theological implications of open theism are further developed in John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), and Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001). For a sustained argument in favour of the view of God's knowledge affirmed by open theism see William Hasker, *God, Time, and Knowledge* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).
- 34 But not, of course, in *all* situations. Sensible libertarians recognize that there are a great many limitations and obstructions to human action that prevent us from being entirely free.
- 35 However, the view of God held by classical theists such as Anselm, who combine libertarian free will with divine timeless knowledge of all events, allows God *exactly the same resources* for his providential governance as does open theism. For argument, see *God, Time, and Knowledge*, Chapter 3.