

II. История на философията

Anselm of Canterbury and the beatific justice

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Abstract: Sometimes in the field of philosophy can be followed a conceptual line or a historical line that strongly opposes the notion of happiness and the notion of justice. However, it would be misleading to think of the problem in such a simplified way. Here I would like to propose a possible interpretation of this question, according to the teaching of Anselm of Canterbury. Through an analysis of the nature of happiness and justice, we I would like to trace the dynamic situation in which the human will finds itself when it constitutes its acts and thus, to show the inner connection between justice and happiness. In this way I not only demonstrate that justice and happiness are connected, but that they are unthinkable without one another. In addition, as part from a broader research on the anthropology of Anselm of Canterbury, I believe that this could bring a better understanding of the way the human nature is understood in the work of the author.

Key words: Anselm of Canterbury, beatitude, justice, happiness, human nature, free will, freedom.

Anselm of Canterbury is an author who is mainly known for his attempt to provide a proof for the existence of God, as well as with his works on redemption and the incarnation of Christ. Even though this is true these two fields do not represent the whole of his work. The current text represents a part from a broader research on Anselm and his teaching on human nature. Even if the question about the relation of the human will to beatitude and justice is not central for the anthropology itself, it is however a question which could influence a better understanding of the notion of the human as we find it in Anselm's thought.

In the beginning should be said that Anselm makes a distinction of the different meanings of “will”, saying that “will” means equivocally three different things.¹ Firstly this is the will understood as an instrument, i.e. this power of the human soul that is used, when one wills, in the same way the mind is the other power of the soul that is the instrument for thinking and is used when one thinks. This is the general understanding of the will as ability to do something and namely as the very ability for acting and with this the necessarily condition of the very acting of the human. Another understanding of “will” is the actual usage of the instrument will. This usage is thinking the concrete thing that one wills – for example to read, or to write. So when one thinks “I want to read”, or “I want to write”, one uses actually the will that one has only in potentiality.

The third, and most important for our topic distinction is the one that is made between the two inner inclinations of the will. These are the mediators through which the will as an instrument is actualized in its usage. The human soul has two inclinations of the will – towards something beneficial or towards something just. The will instrument wills either something beneficial, or something just and everything else that it wills, it wills it because of this two things. Through the inclination towards benefit one wills his own beatitude and happiness, whereas through the inclination towards justice one wills to be just and righteous.² And already here we see the opposition of duty and happiness. The will is actualized only through one of the two inclinations and with this the will-instrument becomes actual choice only for something beneficial or for something just. Thus one can will to grow plants in order to preserve his live and health and consequently to preserve his well-being – his happiness. On the other side one can will to learn so that one can be just and thus righteous.

Now if we turn to justice itself, we would find it defined in Anselm’s thought as “rightness of will kept for the sake of this rightness itself”³. The will has a specific type of rightness to which it should hold fast in order that it does what it has to do, i.e. to act in accordance with God’s will. This definition comes in the end of Anselm’s treatise “On truth” and uses the notion of rightness, developed throughout the text. Thanks to rightness each existing entity does what it should do. This counts for everything that is created – from speech, through the mind and the will, each action – whether it is volitional or by necessity – the senses, the very essence of things – everything keeps right and true thanks to rightness that preserves the being of things as it should be. So not just man, but the whole world is positioned in such a way, that it is in a constant debt to its creator and devotes its entire existence to pay its duty.⁴ Thus it is not only the man who has to do what he must – it seems as the whole world is put under the rules of deontology. All of the created entities are indebted with the very act of their creation and their own right existence repays this very debt.

¹ Cf. Anselm of Canterbury, “The harmony of the foreknowledge, the predestination, and the grace of God with free choice.” III, 11, 279-284 (All quotations of Anselm’s texts are made in accordance with “St. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi. Opera Omnia. Tomus Primus et Tomus Secundus”, published by Franciscus Salesius Schmitt, Stuttgart – Bad Cannstatt, 1968, Friedrich Frommann Verlag; translations are mine)

² Ibidem, p. 282

³ Anselm of Canterbury, “On Truth”, 12, 193

⁴ Cf. Kapriev, Georgi, “Id quo nihil maius cogitari possit. The philosophical world of Anselm from Aosta, archbishop of Canterbury.” Sofia University Publisher, “St. Kliment Ohridski”, Sofia, 2005, 138

Furthermore nothing should be less tolerated than the creature removing the honor owed to the Creator and with this not repaying what he owes. And removing the honor from the Creator is another way of describing the sin. Sinning is acting against the will of God and thus dishonoring God. And there is nothing God should tolerate less than the fact that the honor that the creation has to owe Him has been taken away from Him and it is even not given back. This is why men should be punished until he gives back what he owes.¹

The biggest problem of man is, however that he cannot by himself give back what he has taken away. If he could conquer the devil in order to redeem his sin, he could receive once again his blessed status. However from the condition that man is sinful, he cannot save himself, because a sinner cannot justify a sinner. Everything that man can give to God so that he could redeem himself is already something that man owes God even without sinning. Therefore after sinning man finds himself in a even worse situation – not only that he is already indebted with the act of his own creation, but he has sinned, so that now he owes even more. It is not just more than what he already owes, but also more than he even has. The man is left in a double indebted situation from which he cannot get out on his own.²

And even these circumstances are not enough to take away the power of justice. The inability of man to pay back what he owes cannot excuse him. This very inability is already his guilt. It is not that he is not obliged to have it; rather he is obliged not to have it. Anselm gives an example with a servant who is given a task and is also ordered not to go down a hole. However if the servant enters the hole he would be blame both for not accomplishing his task and for entering the hole he should not have entered.³ Therefore man seems to be under the unbearable burden of justice and debt, and avoiding justice only leads to more debt and the worst – to self-inflicted guilt. Thus not only that justice is the thing that should be kept, but not keeping it causes more pain and suffer.

The same situation of the human condition could be observed from the opposite point of view of pleasure and benefit. Sin is reckoned as the impulses and appetites to which the sinful man is subjected as a brute animal. Following the Gospel and apostle Paul Anselm refers to all these temptations as flesh and concupiscence. Thus without rightness of the will – i.e. without justice – man is condemned to chaotic willing towards beneficial things, which is however sin itself.⁴ Because of sin the body of the man was corrupted and it became like the body of the brute animals, i.e. subjected to corruptions and carnal appetites. Consequently the soul, because of the goods that it had lost, became infected with carnal desires. Thus, by losing the inclination towards justice man is left only with his inclination towards happiness and benefit. However without having a measure this inclination towards happiness does no good by itself and leads human nature to lower parts of the being levels. The man becomes an animal.⁵

However, is there any kind of necessity according to which the will should be both beneficial and just, i.e. is there a reason that the will has both of the inclinations –

¹ Cf Anselm of Canterbury, "Why God Became Man", I, 13

² Ibidem, I, 23

³ Ibidem, I, 24

⁴ Anselm of Canterbury, "The Harmony...", III, 7, p. 274

⁵ Ibidem, III, 7, p. 275

towards benefit and towards justice? Perhaps, it may be argued, that if man had only the inclination towards justice it would be enough. According to Anselm's definition man would still be free, because freedom is defined only as the ability to preserve rightness of the will, i.e. justice. And if this very rightness is crucial for the well-being of the man, than the man would be paying his debt and won't be blameful. However even if the man was only just and free, it does not mean that he was going to **deserve** the blessed status. And in order man to has merit for what he has done, he should have both of the inclinations.¹ Even though one is given only the inclination to will justice, one would will justice necessarily and therefore he would deserve neither reward, nor punishment. Consequently the will should have those two inclinations, so that it would have options from which to choose. The choice does not play part in the definition of freedom, but it is necessary if the rational soul should merit praise or blame. Reward requires not only that one desires and chooses the good but that one is genuinely able to choose otherwise.

Let us now consider the connection between the current thoughts and the notions of beatitude and justice from the perspective of the question how do the last two coexist within God. In "Proslogion", while discussing the nature and existence of God, Anselm deals with the problem how could it be that God is just both by punishing those who are evil and by sparing them. And here Anselm distinguishes two ways in which God is related – on the one hand to Himself and on the other – to human beings. When God punishes evil human beings justly for what they have done he is just because the punishment is according to their merit. However when He spares those who are evil he is just because this is according to His own goodness. So the punishment corresponds to evil men and the mercy corresponds to God's own nature. However both of these – even though they seem contradictive – are just. And in this we could recognize the dichotomy of just and beneficial but in God's perspective. God punishes because of justice but spares because of justice to Himself, i.e. because of His own good nature, i.e. because of beatitude.²

And even though this paragraph is noteworthy of what it says, we may say that it is even more noteworthy of what it does not say, i.e. of its implications. This very problem of being just and merciful at the same time is a problem only in the perspective of evil men. However when it comes to good men, there seems to be no possible way that God could act differently from giving the reward that good man deserve. This could be said is done both because of the fact that good men deserve the corresponding to their own deeds merit and also because of the good nature of God. Thus when God rewards the good man he acts both out of justice and out of beatitude. So in terms of evil men God is acting seemingly if not contradictive, than doubly – according to men themselves or according to His own nature. And in terms of good men such a division of the reason of rewarding good men is unnecessary. God has only one way to treat good

¹ Rogers, K., "The Anselmian Approach to God and Creation", The Edwin Mellen Press, 1997, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, p. 113-114

² Anselm of Canterbury, "Proslogion", 10, p. 109-110

men and therefore he acts simultaneously both in accordance of His nature and in accordance of the merit of men.

Now let us explain why that is so important and how it influences our understanding of Anselm's teaching on the position of the will between justice and beatitude. Let us then consider for what is the specific task given to men. We already said that this is namely to obey God and pay their own debt for the fact that they are created and they own this very creation to God. However this is just a formal sign. Its content however is named from Anselm in several occasions.¹ The rational creature was made to love God. The rational creature was made to love the supreme nature more than all other goods as far as it is the supreme good. And in order to do so, the rational creature ought to remember and understand the supreme nature and therefore to devote his entire ability and his entire will to remembering, understanding and loving the supreme good. Therefore what man has to do is to love God by using the faculties of his soul has – namely the will and the mind.

When men execute this, they are treated as good and they deserve a corresponding reward. "For if the rational creature, which without this love is useless to itself, is so eminent among all creatures, surely nothing can be this love's reward except what is pre-eminent among all natures. For the supreme good, which thus demands to be loved, requires equally that it be desired by the soul loving it. For who could love justice, truth, happiness and incorruptibility in such way as not to desire to **enjoy** them? Therefore, with what shall supreme goodness reward the soul which loves and desires it if not with itself?"² God Himself will be the reward for the good men.

And to make this even more explicit Anselm introduces another subtle distinction. Anselm devotes an entire chapter from Monologion just to make the distinction between striving towards God and striving in God. In order to conclude that it is possible and even more appropriate to say that men must not just have an attitude of faith **towards** God, but to have faith **in** God, Anselm argues that it is clearer to say that men do not strive **toward** God, but they strive **in** God, because "whoever striving for the supreme good will arrive, will remain **within it**, rather than remaining **outside it**."³

Furthermore Anselm concludes "Proslogion" with an analysis of what it would be when the man is actually going to be in God and here we can answer the question about the significance of the already cleared distinction between God as judging and sparing the bad and rewarding the good. When God rewards people with Himself he will also tie fast their wills to His own good and just will. Therefore men shall will nothing else than that what He shall will and respectively He shall will whatever men shall will. And what He shall will cannot fail to occur. And because of this Anselm strongly recommends to the reader: "Love the one Good in which are all goods, and it shall suffice you. Desire the simple Good which itself is every good, and it shall be enough for you. For what do you love, o my flesh? What do you desire, o my soul? It is there; all that both of you love is there, all that you desire."⁴

¹ Explicitly this is developed in "Monologion", LXVIII, 79, 1-9 and then again in "Why God Became Man", II, 1, 97, 4-15

² Anselm of Canterbury, "Monologion", LXX, 80-81

³ Anselm of Canterbury, "Monologion", LXXVI, 84-85

⁴ Anselm of Canterbury, "Proslogion", XXVI, 123

And right after Anselm enumerates all that man is going to be able to will through the will of God and consequently to have beauty, swiftness, strength, freedom of body, long and sound life, fullness, intoxication, melody, pleasure, wisdom, friendship – all of these things have their equivalents and even better substitutes in God. And as God has only one way to treat good people, because it is unnecessary the will to be split into a willing a benefit or willing something just, the same way good people when they are confirmed to justice are actually going to be confirmed to a state in which the two inclinations of the will are going to be well adjusted to one another and whatever would be willed, would be both just and beatific.¹

Back in “On the Fall of the Devil” we see that the devil sins because he has preferred to will something that he shouldn’t have willed and thus has replaced the good will with a bad one.² Thus the devil has abandoned justice for something else. However the will could only will either something just, or something beneficial. Therefore the devil sinned only because he has willed something beneficial that he should not have willed.³ However we have already said that both of the inclinations of the will are necessary in order that man has a merit for his actions. Also both of the wills are designed in such a manner that they not just co-exist, but act through one another. And in order that the will for justice and the will for beatitude are well adjusted to one another we should explain how exactly these two interact.

We stated that only one of these two wills would be insufficient, because then man would act out of necessity. The inclination towards benefit and happiness is created obviously so that the creature that has it would be happy. Creating the inclination towards justice is not only a creation for another option for the agent, so that his actions could be merited, but also creating the exact measure according to which the actions are going to be measured. The inclination towards justice is not orientated towards another entity that is opposed to benefit. Justice is only a sign for the quantity of benefit that should be willed. Thus the addition of justice only tempers the will for benefit. It does not restrict the will. It just shows a certain degree that could but should not be exceeded. So the inclination towards justice is not towards a different quality, but only towards a specific quantity of the existing quality. “And so, thus possessing a **just will for benefit** he could and **should be happy.**”⁴

The rational being was created not only to obey, but to obey in order to be happy. Thus – as we have already quoted it - in “Why God became a man” the formula that Anselm uses is exactly “man was created just in order to be happy”. Human nature is created rational with a purpose – to discriminate between just and unjust, good and evil, and – especially – between what is a greater good and what is a lesser good. Man of course should choose the best. And the best which is possible to be chosen is to love and enjoy God which is however possible only if one is just, i.e. if one follows the will of God, which means to be just, which in Anselm thought is another way to use one’s own freedom, i.e. to keep actually the rightness of the will.⁵

¹ Ibidem, p. 124

² Anselm of Canterbury, „On The Fall of The Devil“, III, 237-240

³ Cf Ibidem, IV, 241-243

⁴ Ibidem, XIV, 259

⁵ Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man”, II, 1, 97

We can conclude therefore that Anselm only seemingly describes the world and especially the human being as subjected only to a harsh and unforgiving law. Even if it is true, it is not only for the sake of humans that they should be subjected to this law. Justice was created only as a measure line for the beatitude. It is not leading to something beyond happiness and bliss, but just marks the distinctive feature of the happiness that should not be wished from the human nature. Therefore within Anselm's thought justice and beatitude are not contrasted, as it may seem to be. Justice is only the key that unlocks beatitude. Justice is not cold or unforgiving – it is rather blessed and beatific.

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