

Contemporary Lessons from the *Proslogion*

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THE MARKED emphasis in contemporary philosophy and theology is squarely on the fact that, as human beings, we are deeply shaped and conditioned by the intricacies and practices of our societies, cultures, and languages. Human rationality is profoundly contextualized and circumscribed, rather than autonomous and neutral. As such, we only know ourselves and the world in and through antecedent norms and suppositions; there exist no pre-linguistic givens. We should avoid speaking, then, of “universal reason” or of “autonomous reason” as if there subsisted some pocket of reality not deeply defined by all of these interlacing emphases.

This insistence on human embeddedness in culture, language, and tradition finds support in a broad variety of philosophical perspectives. For a long time now, Hans-Georg Gadamer and his disciples have been involved in unmasking the worldless, traditionless, Cartesian subject of the Enlightenment, with its truncated understanding of historicity and the nature of interpretation. Gadamer himself, of course, was hermeneutically developing many of the themes first broached by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, especially the latter’s jeremiad against those ignoring our enmeshment in the “worldhood of the world,” the profound embeddedness that *Dasein* is always tempted to bury in the unrelenting search for absolute and unencumbered certitude and first principles. Wittgenstein, too, reacting against an untenable positivism, stressed our culturally constituted norms and language-games, hoping to press the point that reality is linguistically and socially mediated; that is, meanings are determined by forms of life and particular practices rather than by neutral, autarkic, universal standards. Thomas Kuhn’s influential manifesto, *The*

Structure of Scientific Revolutions, introduced many of these same themes into the philosophy of science: we are profoundly theory-laden; different standards lead inexorably to incommensurable paradigms; words are not attached to objects in ways that are unproblematic; and there is no neutral, sub-linguistic way of describing evidence.¹ All of these thinkers, of course, were responding to the pretensions of Enlightenment modernity, with its positivistic notion of rationality, with its imperious Cartesian/Kantian subject taken as the *fundamentum inconcussum* for knowing, and with its naïve and insolent claims to unsullied objectivity.

This view, deeply accenting our contingency and “situatedness,” our immersion in tradition, culture, history, society, and language, has served to expose the inadequacies of positivism and radical empiricism, to overturn the Enlightenment notion of unconditioned reason, and to dethrone the idea that human rationality is exercised “apart” from a world of historical contingencies. This stress on human embeddedness has also given rise to the now frequently encountered phrase “it’s interpretation all the way down.”² By this is meant that one never has bare facts or *facta bruta*; reality, rather, is always interpreted reality, every seeing is an appropriate “seeing as,” and there exists no purely neutral level of observation, nor any unconditioned exercise of human rationality. Kuhn, one of the foremost proponents of the maxim, interpreted it in a very strong sense, arguing that, since every interpreter is deeply theory-laden, we cannot know the world “in itself.” The phrase “in itself” is, in fact, meaningless, Kuhn contended, because there is no “higher viewpoint” or neutral Archimedean platform surpassing the theory-ladenness and embedded status of actual observers.³ Insofar as the scientist has access

¹ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). Kuhn has discussed many of these themes more recently in *The Road Since Structure*, ed. James Conant and John Haugeland (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

² For example, Brice Wachterhauser avers, “We seem to be in the uneasy position of having to admit that interpretation goes, as it were, ‘all the way down.’” “Getting it Right: Relativism, Realism and Truth,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, ed. Robert J. Dostal (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 52–78, at 53. Stanley Hauerwas says similarly, “[I]t is contingency all the way down,” taking this phrase as indicating that we cannot “... secure truth against the contingency of our existence.” *Performing the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 21. Gianni Vattimo goes to the root of the maxim, eulogistically citing Nietzsche’s well-known comment: “There are no facts, only interpretations.” *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D’Isanto (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 49.

³ Since the phrase “in itself” is meaningless for Kuhn, he rejects the correspondence notion of truth as implausible. See *The Road Since Structure*, 95, 99. Of course, there is a sense to the phrase “it’s interpretation all the way down” that

only to interpretations, he or she is dealing with the world as a constructed entity, that is, the world as it appears, rather than the noumenal world itself. It is no surprise, then, that Kuhn has referred to himself as a “dynamic Kantian,” and, at times, approximates a position close to relativism, without committing himself to it.⁴

When *theologically* utilized and applied, these issues—the embeddedness of reason, our socio-cultural conditioning, our situated and “traditioned” status, and the invocation of the phrase “it’s interpretation all the way down”—have a determinate goal. With Kuhn, Gadamer, and others, this theological position wants to discredit the autonomous, worldless knowing championed by modernity. But it does this, often enough, in service to the affirmation that claims to scientific “objectivity,” to “rigorous” rationality, are just as contingent, embedded, and “traditioned” as claims made by the Christian faith. There is, in other words, no “higher perspective” or, to use a different metaphor, no “fundamental ground” from which Christianity can be judged. There exist only different, culturally and linguistically constituted paradigms and points of view. One cannot apply Enlightenment criteria in judging truth and falsehood, as if they alone represent “objectivity” while religious claims are “sectarian” because, in point of fact, all truth emerges from the tightly woven bonds of culture, history, and language. All claims to truth, then, reflect contingent perspectives; there exist no universal, neutral, non-contextual warrants to which one may appeal. Any attempted imperialism by Enlightenment criteria is here exposed as philosophically unfounded, illusory, and even coercive. Varying theological approaches, even while differing among themselves, agree on several of these fundamental principles.

Now in this argument for human embeddedness, and in this legitimate reaction against a universal, neutral philosophy, there appear to be certain casualties or, at least, forgotten dimensions. Among these are ideas such as “nature” or, perhaps better, “universal natural realities.” Does the idea of nature not take a backseat if we are deeply, if not entirely, embedded in and conditioned by history, culture, and tradition? How would one

does not convey the idealistic connotations found in Kuhn’s work. For the maxim can also mean that all knowing is inexorably exercised in determinate circumstances, that one indefeasibly sees the world “in and through” one’s own language and culture and that knowing, therefore, is necessarily within a distinct visual angle, a particular perspective that allows a limited but actual grasp of states of affairs. The phrase, then, can be taken as equivalent to the unobjectionable position that all understanding involves interpretation. For a more extended discussion, see Thomas G. Guarino, *Foundations of Systematic Theology* (New York: T. & T. Clark, 2005), 176–79 and 188–90.

⁴ See *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 206–7.

discern such a nature, even if it existed? One wonders, too, about warrants for arguments. Can there be any universal appeals, even in principle? Or must all appeals be offered within local, contextualized, “background” knowledge? Natural theology is also a likely casualty here because it contends that some arguments are available to all observers, at least potentially, regardless of their contingent circumstances. But given this strong emphasis on our “situated” milieu, can one adduce the kind of universal warrants that natural theology has traditionally needed? A reading of natural law, too, seems to be here impaired, since the norms it implies could only with great difficulty be accorded an integrity and relative autonomy beyond their particularized socio-cultural context. If not proscribed entirely, these elements are at least considerably weakened or obscured precisely because they seem to imply a sphere of *universality*, a sphere common to all, or open to all even apart from, or better, even within, the enveloping dimensions of historical contingency and socio-cultural embeddedness.

Anselm's Achievement: A Recent View

A good argument colligating several threads indicating the historical, cultural, social, and linguistic circumscription of human life and thought is offered by Brad Kallenberg's insightful reflections on Anselm's argument for God in the *Proslogion*.⁵ Anselm is a good choice for this discussion because the Benedictine's work has sparked generations of controversy. Surely he must be one of the few thinkers simultaneously characterized as having both rationalist and fideist tendencies.⁶ I would like first to discuss Kallenberg's article, itself representative of several recent theological trends, then offer an alternative reading of Anselm's work, and, finally, show why Anselm's careful balancing of nature and embeddedness has been important to the Catholic tradition in the past and remains relevant for theology today.

I will briefly summarize Kallenberg's essay, hoping to do justice to his legitimate concerns. Kallenberg contends that Anselm is best read through Wittgenstein. By this he means that Anselm offers a good example of the

⁵ Brad J. Kallenberg, “Praying for Understanding: Reading Anselm through Wittgenstein,” *Modern Theology* 20 (October 2004): 527–46. Page numbers in the text refer to this essay.

⁶ For the charge of rationalism, see Gilson's indictment of Anselm's “recklessness” in his attempt to give a rational demonstration for revealed truths (targeting Anselm's *rationes necessariae*): Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), 26. For Anselm as fideist, see the sustained argument in Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960).

Wittgensteinian claim that knowledge and practice are internally related. His brief, then, is that Anselm's proof for God, as proposed in the *Proslogion*, "works," that is, is convincing, only if one shares something of Anselm's embeddedness, his religious context, that is to say, if one enters Anselm's prayerful circle (527). The crucial point here is that rationality is deeply related to one's epistemic context; that is, one's embeddedness, one's practice, one's way of life, will deeply condition, if not entirely determine, one's ability to grasp an argument, including the one tendered by the monk of Bec. Only those who share the practice of prayer can be rightly said to share the sense of Anselm's words (528), for knowing is a "rule ordered skill"; that is, one knows from within a particular tradition, where one is already an "insider" in its linguistic conventions. Since meaning is deeply related to context and use, only those with a certain fluency in terminology can properly understand Anselm's discussion. Consequently, the warrants Anselm adduces in his well-known argument for God are only understandable by those who share something of his life, language, and practice. Claims to, and warrants for, knowledge are necessarily context-specific. Our human socio-cultural-linguistic contingency necessarily militates against warrants that are universally applicable. It is for this reason that Kallenberg opens his article by noting that he found it "appalling" when an (unnamed) professor said he was interested only in "publicly accessible" arguments for God's existence (527). Kallenberg wishes to make clear that this notion of "publicness" is philosophically naïve since we are deeply embedded observers. Appealing to public warrants, thereby bypassing particular forms of life, makes little sense since we cannot appeal to subjects in isolation from their lived contexts.

Kallenberg adduces the plentiful evidence offered by Anselm in order to buttress this strong emphasis on the interrelationship among practice, language, and knowledge. For example, Anselm says in the preface to the *Proslogion* that the title he originally gave to his argument was "Faith Seeking Understanding," a fit indication of the nature of the work.⁷ Then, too, one must take account of the unmistakable context of Anselm's "proof": his asceticism, his regimen of prayer and fasting, his imploring God about his vices. To the claim that Anselm's argument is, indeed, meant to convince the "fool" of Psalm 53, Kallenberg responds by transforming Karl Barth's earlier argument that Gaunilon is not, in fact, the *insipiens* of the psalm, but is, in actuality, *catholicus pro insipiente*,

⁷ Anselm, *Proslogion*, in *S. Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. Franciscus Salesius Schmitt (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1946), I, p. 94, line 7. All citations will be given from Schmitt's critical edition of Anselm's works, citing volume, page, and line. Translations are my own.

that is, a monk entirely fluent in Christian life, thought, and language.⁸ Essential here is the claim that the particularity of Christian belief and practice determines one's understanding of the argument and thus any knowledge of God that it may yield.

What may be concluded after briefly reviewing Kallenberg's perceptive discussion? The author is, from a theological point of view, clearly rejecting the modern project wherein faith needs to be legitimated by reason, particularly an imperious and autonomous reason. In this sense, Kallenberg is rejecting the project which has affinities with the medieval movement known as Radical Aristotelianism, one of the motivating forces for Gregory IX's letter to the theology masters at Paris in 1228 and for the condemnations by Etienne Tempier of 1277.⁹ Reason cannot be a "wider" or "broader" context than faith itself, as if human rationality could see matters, to keep the spatial image, from a "higher" perspective. Christian faith does not need "alien" norms, or an "autonomous" reason (even if such existed) separated from the life of Scripture and the Church, to provide validation for its belief in God. Faith is under no obligation to meet foreign epistemic requirements which ultimately seek to tie the Church to an extrinsic bed of Procrustes. Trying to legitimate the truth of the biblical narrative by reason is especially futile now that universal and unconditioned rationality has itself been philosophically discredited. Here we see a certain convergence between present-day philosophical themes on embeddedness and neo-Barthian concerns that philosophy not seek to colonize theology by means of an overarching, non-biblical narrative.¹⁰ Both currents of thought have reservations about universal

⁸ Anselm himself notes that Gaunilon is no actual fool but *catholicus pro insipiente* in I, p. 130, lines 4–5. Kallenberg argues that while the psalm does indeed aver that the fool thinks there is no God, it does not necessarily mean the fool does not have conceptual fluency with the term "God" but only that he acts in such a way that bespeaks God's inexistence.

⁹ For a recent commentary on Tempier's letter and the condemned propositions, see David Piché and Claude LaFleur, *La condamnation parisienne de 1277* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1999). For Gregory IX's letter, see *Enchiridion symbolorum*, ed. Heinrich Denzinger and Peter Hünermann, 37th ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1991), n. 824. Also, John Wippel, *Mediaeval Reactions to the Encounter Between Faith and Reason*, The Aquinas Lecture (Milwaukee: Marquette University, 1995), 14–28.

¹⁰ It is unsurprising that throughout Kallenberg's essay, one hears strong Barthian echoes. Barth, too, wants to discourage any reading of Anselm that allows for the knowability of God isolated from the specific context of faith. As he remarks, one cannot seek the *intellectus fidei* "anywhere outside of or apart from the revealed *Credo* of the Church and certainly not apart from or outside of Holy Scripture." Barth, *Anselm*, 41.

dimensions of rationality and nature, with one emphasizing human “situatedness,” the other railing against “alien” warrants apart from the Church. The contemporary accent on the riveting influence of humanity’s historical, socio-cultural, and linguistic circumscription here licenses a *tu quoque* argument: all are situated and contextualized, both rationalists and Christians. There exists only faith-guided rationality (whatever that faith may be); participatory commitment is intrinsic to all understanding. So our holding onto validating norms specific to Christian faith is no more “sectarian” than the alleged “neutrality” of modernity.

Kallenberg, moreover, rightly calls attention to Wittgenstein’s claim that knowledge and practice are internally related. One part of this assertion is that the anterior subjective disposition of the knower necessarily affects the known. Kallenberg wishes to overcome here, as Kuhn and Gadamer earlier had, Enlightenment positivism’s obscuring of just this point. Surely a congeries of elements—education, prior tradition, personal interests, natural talent, cultural background, ideological predisposition, a life of sinfulness or holiness—all have some purchase on any knower, thereby entering the cognitive equation. John Henry Newman, for example, clearly recognized this in apologetics, claiming that any argument will necessarily be affected by the disposition of the one addressed.¹¹ But how far do we push this notion that the subjective disposition of the knower, the theory-laden subject, determines the known? Do we push it as far as Kuhn (whose affinities with Wittgenstein were self-noted), where one must make a distinction between the noumenal world in itself and the constructed world in which scientists (and by extension theologians) work? Are there not elements that are open to all rational observers, even if such observation will, necessarily, be accommodated within particular horizons? Are there not elements of “presentation” open to all?

Is there, then, in this reading of Anselm, something of a devaluation of the autonomy and integrity of human reason? It can legitimately be protested that there is no such devaluation. It is simply a matter of pointing to the *conditioned subject* as opposed to the neutral *Cartesian subject*. But Anselm is clearly not defending an autarkic, Cartesian being. He is defending a *humanum*, that is, a universal human nature and reason, which, in principle, is able to grasp his argument. Can we speak of such

¹¹ “A mutilated and defective evidence suffices for persuasion where the heart is alive; but dead evidences, however imperfect, can but create a dead faith.” John Henry Newman, “Faith and Reason Contrasted,” in *Fifteen Sermons Preached Before the University of Oxford*, sermon X, 200, cited in Avery Dulles, *Newman* (London: Continuum, 2002), 30. For a fuller discussion of the role of the anterior disposition in Newman, see Dulles, 48–63.

a nature, with certain formal dimensions of constancy across history and culture even in and through embeddedness? And does Kallenberg's reading of Anselm eclipse the concept of a universal human nature, even if it rightly points to our embedded existence?

Taking a cue from Kallenberg's study, I would like to examine certain aspects of Anselm's work, with an eye to the monk's understanding of how nature and practice are interlaced. While Kallenberg is surely correct to accent Anselm's religious context and so is legitimately attentive to the connections between his life and discourse, his practice and knowledge, I will argue that the monk of Bec subtly interweaves culture and nature so that the latter is not dissolved in the maw of socio-cultural-linguistic-religious particularity and practice.

Anselm's Argument

There is no need to recount Anselm's proof. It is well-known to all and has been the subject of countless commentaries.¹² Further, what essentially interests us is not its validity as a general argument, but its approach or method, which has direct relevance to contemporary debates on human nature and rationality. My contention is that Anselm carefully balances the relationship of knowledge to beliefs, practices, and prior commitments with the concomitant recognition that some arguments are available to all, at least in principle, on the basis of the universality of human nature.

Of the religious context of Anselm's proof, there can be little argument. Not only is the *Proslogion* entitled *Fides quaerens intellectum*, it begins with a long prayer to the living God, before whom Anselm prays in confidence, even while acutely aware of his sins. God is glowingly alive for Anselm, near to him in his immensity, even though the Benedictine is acutely conscious of both his own finitude and sinfulness. At the end of chapter one, Anselm utters his famous Augustinian plea, ultimately drawn from the *Vetus Latina* edition of Isaiah 7:9, part theological manifesto, part imploring prayer: "For I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe that I may understand. For this I believe, that 'unless I believed, I would not understand'" (I, p. 100, lines 18–19). One cannot doubt, then, Anselm's situation: his immersion in Christian faith; his embeddedness in a monastic, contemplative setting; his ordered and rigorous life of prayer; his interlocutors who are fellow Benedictines sharing his easy fluency with Christian ideas and

¹² For classical and recent exegeses, see Brian Davies and Brian Leftow, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Anselm* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Also, Michel Corbin, *Prière et raison de la foi: Introduction à l'oeuvre de saint Anselme de Cantorbéry* (Paris: Cerf, 1992).

concepts. It is concrete Christian faith and life that clearly determine every aspect of Anselm's existence. He prays that God give him some knowledge, despite the smoke of vice that assails him. Anselm, we can fully agree, is reasoning *within*, not outside of the house of faith. He moves within a living tradition, indwells a thick culture of Christian life and discourse. And this heritage yields deeply fruitful knowledge. But can one conclude baldly, as Barth earlier insisted and as Kallenberg appears to concur, "When we consider the connection which Anselm held to be necessary between theology and prayer, we put our finger on the condition of the *intelligere*. . . ."?¹³ For isn't it exactly Anselm's brief that some (formal) knowledge of God is possible by all, even those not engaged in the life of prayer? That some knowledge of God is available, at least potentially, to all inquirers, even to those unaware of the name "God"?¹⁴

Anselm's argument has an integrity and logical structure which, in principle, are available to those who share neither a life of prayer nor faith itself. So while it is true that philosophy is not the foundation of Anselm's life, it is equally true that his faith gives rise to philosophical reflection, a reflection that has its own relative autonomy and integrity, that is, always ultimately related to God but meant to appeal to human reason apart from specific belief, apart from an "insider's" intrasystemic knowledge.¹⁵ The proof arises from within faith, as virtually every proof for God does, but it seeks to stand on its own, *sola ratione*, on the basis of the relative autonomy of human nature.¹⁶

¹³ Barth, *Anselm*, 35.

¹⁴ In chapter one of the *Monologion*, for example, Anselm envisions a person who has never even heard about God, much less has conceptual fluency with the term, but is, nonetheless, able to convince himself or herself about many issues concerning the divine nature, even *sola ratione* (I, p. 13, lines 1–11).

¹⁵ John D. Caputo is surely right when he says that Anselm's argument does not move from "cognitive degree zero to infinity" and that Anselm offers his argument "on his knees"; however, by accenting only the circular movement of Anselm's thought, Caputo obscures the fact that the *Proslogion's* argument has an independent integrity intended to be available even to those without faith. See his *On Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 39 and, with similar intent, his *Philosophy and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2006), 15.

¹⁶ The integrity of Anselm's argument was earlier defended by Henri Bouillard and by Hans Urs von Balthasar, who were engaged with Barth's interpretation of the *Proslogion*. Both theologians were dissatisfied with Barth's exegesis of Anselm; at the same time, they wished to place a decided accent on what Balthasar calls "the full realization of the true philosophical act," which is found only in theology. This "realization" will be discussed below. See Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, v. 2, trans. Andrew Louth, et al. (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984), 233. For Bouillard on the relative autonomy of the argument, see *Karl Barth: Parole de Dieu et Existence*

It is true that the context of Anselm's argument is always faith. But it should not be forgotten that at the very outset of the *Proslogion* Anselm states,

I began to ask myself if one could discover a single argument which is *ad se probandum*, i.e., an argument requiring no other proof than itself alone and which by itself would demonstrate that God truly is. (I, p. 93, lines 6–7)

The point of the proof is to demonstrate, as Anselm says, that *Deus vere est*, that God truly exists. He is seeking a single argument apart from Scripture and tradition, appealing to us on the basis of our common humanity.¹⁷ The criteria of legitimation for Anselm's argument are meant to be universal; they are not to be restricted to a particular context or language game. Just here, one is reminded of Anselm's earlier comment in his prologue to the *Monologion*: his Benedictine confreres have asked for an argument which does not rely on the authority of Scripture, but only on the "necessity of reason" (I, p. 7, lines 7–10).

The fool, as Anselm observes in chapter two of the *Proslogion*, says in his heart there is no God, as Psalms 14 and 53 attest. But even the *insipiens* must understand the phrase "someone greater than which cannot be thought," even if he denies that such a being exists (I, p. 101, lines 7–9). Of course, at just this point, Anselm makes his appeal for the necessary existence of *id quo maius cogitari nequit* (I, p. 102, line 10). However one judges the argument's validity, it is clearly meant to be available to all, even those not inducted into the particularities of Christian life, thought, and prayer. As Anselm says at the conclusion of chapter three: "Why does 'the fool say in his heart that there is no God,' when it is manifested to the rational mind that you are the greatest of all that exists? Why unless he is simple and a fool?" (I, p. 103, lines 9–11). Later in the dialogue, Gaunilon, speaking on behalf of the *insipiens*, insists that he cannot form the idea of a being than which a greater cannot be conceived. To this objection Anselm sharply replies that the matter is clearly otherwise, appealing to participationist thought: Everyone can see that a lesser good is similar to a greater good, insofar as it is good. Indeed, *it is open to every*

Humaine, 2 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1957), vol. 2, 152–54. In this essay, I try to advance and re-contextualize their analyses.

¹⁷ Of course, Anselm is not naïve about nature, as if it exists in a state of undiluted autonomy, for he says that the image of God, which has been effaced by vice and the smoke of sin, must be "renewed and reformed within me" (I, p. 100, lines 14–15). And in a striking chapter seventeen, he tells us that the "senses of his soul have become dulled and brittle by the weaknesses of sin" (I, p. 113, lines 14–15).

rational mind that by ascending from the lesser goods to the greater goods, we can form a notion of a being greater than which cannot be thought (I, p. 137, lines 14–18). Anselm intends his argument to have a philosophical force clearly open to all. It is no surprise, then, that at the end of chapter four, Anselm concludes, “If I were unwilling to believe you exist, I would not be able not to understand that it is so” (I, p. 104, lines 5–7).

Anselm is transparently appealing to reason as it exists in all human beings. Even if reason is necessarily embedded in particular circumstances, he thinks his argument addresses universal dimensions of human nature.¹⁸ Anselm is not, let us hasten to add, legitimating faith by neutral or disengaged reason, in the sense that reason now sublates faith in a kind of philosophical *Aufhebung*. Though clearly proceeding from faith, he offers an argument that possesses its own integrity. He does not limit his proof to those who offer praise to the biblical God or even simply to those who are aware of him; he is saying that philosophy has a relative autonomy which exists even apart from belief. And Anselm is clearly citing warrants attainable, at least potentially, by all, even if, as we shall see, specific contexts are not without considerable importance. Anselm’s argument, then, occurs in a “second moment,” reflecting in faith on what can be known without faith. There is an integrity, autonomy, and logical structure of the argument that is intelligible on the basis of universal realities with trans-cultural dimensions. One does not need the “insider” knowledge of Anselm’s unique monastic context to see the structure of the proof; what holds the argument together, rather, is the very *humanum*, the nature of humanity. He refers to the formal structures of human existence, *remoto Christo* or *sola ratione*, not to deduce revealed truths, of course, but to provide an argument that is publicly and intersubjectively available.

Even though Anselm is insisting that his argument for the existence of *id quo maius cogitari nequit* is accessible to those who do not share intrasystemic Christian belief, who do not have conceptual fluency with Christian terms, who are not cultural-linguistic “insiders,” nonetheless he *does* place a decided accent on experiential embeddedness, thus indicating the close relationship between knowledge and epistemic context. While Anselm would argue that there are formal dimensions of reasoning characteristic of human nature, he recognizes that these elements are deeply affected by contingent circumstances. In a well known passage Anselm asserts that the one who does not believe will *not* understand, thereby

¹⁸ To the argument that reason itself is simply another language game, itself shaped by founding commitments and background beliefs, Anselm would answer, I believe, that there continue to exist discernable universal elements in and through human embeddedness.

indicating that social context and participated practice is intrinsically related to, deeply internal to, knowledge:

Whoever does not believe will not understand. For the one who does not believe will have no experience and the one who has no experience will not know. For, indeed, just as experience surpasses the hearing about things so, in the same way, the knowledge of one who experiences surpasses the knowledge of one simply hearing about things.¹⁹

In this passage, we see Anselm's insistence on performative knowledge, a knowledge yielded by one immersed in a unique way of life. Experience, for Anselm, offers a vigorous, participated knowledge that enfleshes, enriches, and ripens the weaker knowledge available through argument alone. Appeals to natural human realities may offer a certain formal knowledge of God, but it is only within the house of faith, within the experience of concrete discipline, within the thick culture of Christian life, that one comes to know God in a vigorous and robust way. One recognizes here a self-involving knowing at work, a knowing understood as performance, practice, appropriation, and self-involvement superseding that which is available by way of arguments appealing to universal dimensions of rationality.

Henri Bouillard argued that this accent on experiential knowing in Anselm has affinities with observations made by Maurice Blondel. As Blondel says in his classic work *L'Action*, "We cannot arrive at God, affirm him truly . . . have Him for ourselves, except by belonging to Him and by sacrificing all the rest to Him. . . ." ²⁰ Here, Blondel wishes to accent the experiential, participative, performative dimensions of knowing. R. Garrigou-Lagrange denounced this as a non-cognitive approach to knowledge, veering toward voluntarism and depriving truth of a sufficient foundation in the purely intellectual order.²¹ But Anselm (and

¹⁹ *Epistola de incarnatione Verbi* (II, p. 9, lines 5–8). This passage was important to the investigations of both Balthasar and Bouillard, particularly in their attempts to overcome, by accenting the cognitive significance of "living faith," a certain species of apologetical rationalism. For Balthasar, see *The Glory of the Lord*, vol. 2, 216–17. For Bouillard, see *Karl Barth: Parole de Dieu et Existence Humaine*, vol. 2, 166.

²⁰ Maurice Blondel, *Action* (1893: *Essay on a Critique of Life and a Science of Practice*), trans. Oliva Blanchette (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 404. The relationship between Anselm and Blondel was explored by Bouillard in *Blondel and Christianity*, trans. James M. Somerville (Washington: Corpus Books, 1969), 196–201.

²¹ For a recent account of the exchange between Blondel and Garrigou-Lagrange on truth and knowledge, see Richard Peddicord, *The Sacred Monster of Thomism* (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2005), 61–79.

perhaps Blondel as well) intends to protect a knowledge of God potentially open to all, however formal, together with a fuller moment that resonates more clearly with the claim that epistemic warrants for truth are answerable to particular forms of life. Anselm preserves, then, the moment of “nature,” of universal, human realities, even while insisting that a “performative” and “vital” understanding of God requires something more than discursive argument. We may say that this embedded, experiential dimension “enfleshes” and renders “living” the formal autonomy of the proof itself. Natural theology is here brought to fruition in religious and even mystical experience.

The citation from Blondel makes us think, perforce, of the anterior disposition of the inquirer in knowing, raising again the knotty question of the relationship between practice and knowledge. This is the recognition that human rationality is necessarily shaped and tutored by many factors, that knowledge and experience have some internal relationship. It is the motivating force behind Pascal’s well-known aphorism, “The heart has its reasons which reason does not know,” his contrast between *l’esprit de finesse* and *l’esprit de géométrie*, and his distinction, if not cleavage, between *le Dieu d’Abraham, d’Isaac et de Jacob* and *le Dieu des philosophes*.²² Newman, Pascal, and Blondel rightly found the prevailing tenets of modernity unable to account for the fullness of human experience. But while their insights helped to unmask an illegitimate rationalism, they do not overturn the Anselmian notion that all persons are potentially able to recognize an argument for God’s existence *sola ratione*. I say potentially because subjective disposition, as noted earlier, will by necessity have some effect on the extent to which any argument is grasped as compelling; surely this is the case when we are speaking of an argument for God’s existence or a discussion of natural law. Is the intelligibility of arguments such as these necessarily tied, then, to performative, existential commitment? Anselm would surely hesitate before offering an unqualifiedly affirmative answer precisely because to do so would jeopardize the very notion of an argument theoretically available to all on the basis of a universal *humanum*. For Anselm insists that his argument is, indeed, open to all rational creatures, sternly rebuking Gaunilon for claiming he cannot see the logic of the proof. But Anselm would also recognize, with Newman and Blondel, that the efficacy of such arguments has some profound relationship with humanity’s spiritual sensibility.

What is clearly evident here is the very tight nexus conjoining nature, culture, and history. There exists, undoubtedly, a web of suppositions,

²² Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. W. F. Trotter (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2003), n. 277.

background beliefs, historical conditions, and ideological commitments that affect the noetic situation—what Kuhn short-handedly called theory-laden observation. But amidst this welter of contingencies, are we still able to have universal arguments open to all? Is some connaturality required between the warrant and the inquirer? And if so, does this entirely eviscerate Anselm's "public" claims? Arguments for God's existence, whether Anselmian, Thomistic, Cartesian, or Lonerganian, seem not to be demonstrative in a mathematical sense. The same may be said of natural law reasoning. At the same time, these exercises in discursive logic are intended to be publicly available, possessing a legitimate, if relative, autonomy. I think it is correct to conclude that Anselm's proof, and others like it, while retaining a formal validity, have a "performative" dimension only within the circle of faith. In and of themselves, they lack the more efficacious and comprehensive knowledge yielded by experience, praxis, and action. This does not, however, denigrate the cognitive penetration which the arguments attain, but recognizes that their effectiveness may only be fully acknowledged by those exercising a reason tutored by practice and experience. Perhaps one finds something similar to this in Lonergan's own proof for God's existence. In chapter nineteen of *Insight*, he offers a finely proportioned argument for God's actuality based on the intelligibility of the existing real.²³ In a later work, Lonergan states that Vatican I's famous definition argues for a human potency rather than an actuality, a *quaestio juris* rather than a *quaestio facti*. He concludes, "I do not think that in this life people arrive at natural knowledge of God without God's grace, but what I do not doubt is that the knowledge they so attain is natural."²⁴ This seemingly enigmatic phrase resonates with the Anselmian insight that there is a structure of the argument that has its own integrity and autonomy, even if the argument only fully "lives" for those within the participated Christian life.

Because of this careful balance in Anselm, between the relative autonomy of the philosophical argument and the self-involving, "performative" knowledge gained by experience, we can say that Anselm would not likely endorse Stanley Hauerwas's strong Barthian claim that "natural theology is unintelligible divorced from a full doctrine of God."²⁵ Nor

²³ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 3 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 692–99.

²⁴ Ibid., "Natural Knowledge of God," in *A Second Collection*, ed. William F. J. Ryan and Bernard J. Tyrrell (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1996), 133.

²⁵ Stanley Hauerwas, "Connections Created and Contingent," in *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein*, ed. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain

would Anselm agree with the claim that one needs insider, religious knowledge to know something of the divine existence. Of course, Hauerwas, with Barth, appears unwilling to make any commitment to “nature,” fearful that this will introduce into theology a foreign, secular element determinative of revelation, sanctioning, in the process, a realm of religious truth “beyond” the one explicitly revealed by Christ and so, finally, marginalizing central Christian teachings.²⁶ But Anselm does not intend to ground Christianity in a neutral, autonomous reason. His project is clearly rooted in the *fides quaerens intellectum*, as he insists at the outset of the *Proslogion*. At the same time, he recognizes that there exists a relative autonomy of philosophical argument which retains its integrity even when originally formulated within the context of explicit faith.²⁷

What is clearly visible in Anselm, then, is the attempt to balance his prayerful context, his thick Christian and monastic tradition, with a publicly available argument. He neither reduces his argument to those who share his life of prayer and discourse, nor does he make Christian

(London: SCM Press, 2004), 75–102, at 75. See also Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2001), 15. At the same time, we can fully agree with Hauerwas’s statement that those who have invoked Aquinas to argue that “‘natural theology’ is a necessary first step to sustain theology based on revelation have distorted Aquinas’ understanding of Christian theology.” Both Aquinas and Anselm begin with the *fides quaerens* even if their arguments are meant to have a *relative* autonomy and integrity. I am also sympathetic with Hauerwas’s larger point that “natural” reasoning, improperly utilized, leads to a pale civic Deism and civic morality far from the vibrant faith of Israel and the Church. But can we conclude that deficiencies in cultural practice necessarily mean that the insights of natural theology and natural law offer only an *essential disparity* with revealed truth?

²⁶ This, of course, is the Barthian objection that Catholic theology substitutes “being in general” for God’s revelation, thereby offering knowledge of God otherwise than in faith. See, for example, Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, trans. G. T. Thomson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1949), 39–44, and II/1, trans. T. H. L. Parker, et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957), 168–69 and 231. For a nuanced update of the Barthian position, see Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 4–6. This hesitancy about nature extends, logically, to natural law. For a recent analysis offering a positive account of the Protestant, and particularly Reformed, tradition on natural law reasoning (despite Barthian claims to the contrary) see Stephen J. Grabill, *Rediscovering the Natural Law in Reformed Theological Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

²⁷ Hauerwas does say, “Like Anselm, Aquinas knew that revelation comes first and that provability and the insights gained from the proofs only second.” This statement indicates that Hauerwas is well aware of the primacy of revelation in the medieval construal of the faith/reason relationship; it is not clear to me, however, that Hauerwas recognizes that the proofs are intended to possess a relative autonomy and integrity even apart from explicit Christian faith. See Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe*, 165.

practice incidental to a living knowledge of God. I think one can safely say that Anselm is cautious on the relationship between practice and knowledge, without denying its importance. Anselm recognizes the relative autonomy of human reason, without turning reason into a neutral epistemological platform.

Nature, Relative Autonomy, and the Tradition

Like Anselm, Catholic theology has held for the *possibility* of knowledge of God that is available to all inquirers apart from participation in the life of faith, apart from “insider” knowledge, even if this falls short of performative knowing.²⁸ Anselm’s defense of this human potentiality is itself representative of a traditional Catholic emphasis on “nature” or natural human realities, on the relative autonomy of philosophy, and on the possibility of warrants that are publicly available. This customary accent has been simultaneously combined with the recognition that the life of embedded, participatory faith opens up a world of understanding that reason alone cannot penetrate. More recently, the traditional approach has also become cognizant of the profound effects of society, culture, and history on human life, being, and knowing. Let us hasten to add, therefore, that a distinction between nature and culture or nature and grace is not intended to inscribe two easily separable tiers. One finds, rather, tightly entwined strands of history, nature, culture, and grace.

Examples of this relationship between universal realities and human embeddedness are drawn in a pointed way in several statements of John Paul II. In the encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, for example, the pope argues that philosophy and reason have an autonomy that cannot be suppressed (*comprimere*) by the content of revelation (§79).²⁹ His intention here is

²⁸ On the difficulty of *actually* knowing something of God by way of human reasoning, one need only consult the comments of Aquinas in *Summa contra Gentiles* I, ch. 4 and *Summa theologiae* I, 1, c. The precise affirmation of Vatican I on this question has long been the subject of debate. Still important is Hermann Pottmeyer’s classic exegesis of the conciliar definition, *Der Glaube vor dem Anspruch der Wissenschaft* (Freiburg: Herder, 1968). The relator of *Dei Filius*, Vinzenz Gasser, emphasized that the definition regarded a human potency (*posse*), not an actuality, although Gasser himself claimed it would be difficult to identify a human possibility that had never been actualized (*Mansi*, 51, 278D). Denys Turner has recently offered an exegesis of Vatican I, arguing that it is a matter of Christian faith that God’s existence is rationally demonstrable, although he, too, accents possibility over actuality. See *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

²⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, in *Acta apostolicae sedis*, 91 (1999), 5–88; English translation in *Origins* 28 (October 22, 1998), 317–47. See the supporting comments found at §§48 and 67. Of course, John Paul II also makes clear that philosophy

transparent: the philosophical order has a relative autonomy in and of itself, even “apart from” revelation. So ardently does the pope defend this position that he eschews, at least theoretically, the traditional term for philosophy as the *ancilla theologiae*, not because it is mistaken, but lest it give the impression that nature and philosophy do not have a legitimate sovereignty within their own estate (§77). Reason, even as wounded, has an authentic, if not total, independence. The pope strongly defends this position, I think, because he wants to uphold the capabilities of human nature, precisely in recognition of the universal *humanum* which characterizes the being of men and women. The implications of this defense become clear in the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* wherein the pope insists that the person, while embedded in various dimensions of society and culture, is not exhausted by those elements. There is, in fact, a universal *humanum* which is distinct from socio-cultural mores or customs:

It must certainly be admitted that the person always exists in a particular culture, but it must also be admitted that he or she is not exhaustively defined by that same culture. Moreover, the very progress of cultures demonstrates that there is something in humanity which transcends those cultures. This “something” is precisely human nature: this nature is itself the measure of culture and the condition ensuring that human beings do not become the prisoner of any culture, but assert their personal dignity by living in accordance with the profound truth of their being. (§53)³⁰

The universality and relative autonomy of nature, of a metaphysical dimension of humanity, is here clearly affirmed without denying, of course, our embedded and conditioned existence. A similar point may be found in the pope’s 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*. This document teaches that the gospel of Jesus Christ is intrinsically linked to certain conclusions in the moral order even if many of the same conclusions may be reached on the basis of arguments disengaged from the context of faith. So the encyclical states that the gospel of life “despite the negative consequences of sin . . . can also be known in its essential traits by human reason” (§29).³¹ This is not to make the untenable claim that reason subsists within a *natura pura* outside of the domain of grace (or culture);

has no *ultimate* “self-sufficiency” and must itself undergo “profound transformations” in light of the truths of faith (§§75, 77). This is why one most fittingly refers to philosophy’s *real but relative autonomy*.

³⁰ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, in AAS 85 (1993), 1133–1228, at 1176, §53 English translation in *Origins*, 23 (October 14, 1993), 297–334, at 314.

³¹ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, in AAS 87 (1995), 401–522, at 434, §29 (emphasis in the original); English translation in *Origins*, 24 (April 6, 1995), 689–727, at 700.

it is to affirm that arguments may be made regarding the moral order which have a rational validity even apart from full-blooded, intrasystemic Christian belief. Of course, these arguments would surely be strengthened by belief, but they are neither unintelligible nor lacking in cogency without them. In other words, we may affirm that there exists only one supernatural order of grace. But within this order, “natural” arguments can be made on the basis of reason alone, that is, arguments having a logical structure, a universal value, and a rational validity independent of faith, even though never independent, ultimately, of the estate of grace.

Evangelium Vitae, of course, is relying on aspects of natural law reasoning. Just here, however, we must acknowledge the careful symbiosis between universal human realities and “participatory” thought. Natural law cannot be reduced to a kind of rationalism that fails to take account of either the embeddedness of the inquirer or the anterior subjective disposition and inclinations of the knowing person. As noted earlier, these elements will necessarily have some purchase on the success of any argument, including those concerning God’s existence and natural law. Faith itself will serve to strengthen, concentrate, and illuminate one’s grip on what is provided on the basis of natural human reason.³² The Anselmian oscillation between universal natural realities and human embeddedness offers a model, perhaps, of what *Evangelium Vitae* intends. For the *Proslogion* is elaborated within a robustly theological context, but presents an argument having its own integrity in the natural order, apart from explicit faith. It is intended to have a universal validity, without relying upon “insider” knowledge. It is on the basis of natural human realities that one can invoke arguments that are, in principle, available to all even while realizing, to mark the essential Anselmian caveat, that experience, that is, embeddedness in Christian life and faith, will offer a performative, enfleshed knowledge surpassing what is attained on the basis of nature alone.³³ The encyclical then, like Anselm, is

The *Origins* translation, however, does not italicize the remarks found in the authentic Latin text.

³² It is no surprise that in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict XVI affirms that the Church “argues on the basis of reason and natural law,” that is, on the basis “of what is in accord with the nature of every human being.” *Deus Caritas Est*, in *AAS* 98 (2006), 217–52, at 239, §28; English translation in *Origins* 35 (February 2, 2006), 541–57. Serge-Thomas Bonino, in his fine analysis of the encyclical, argues persuasively that the entire document reflects an attempt to balance properly the interrelated spheres of nature and grace, eros and agape, justice and charity, state and Church. See “‘Nature et grâce’ dans l’encyclique *Deus caritas est*,” *Revue Thomiste* 105 (2005): 531–49.

³³ Robert Sokolowski subtly expresses the kind of relative autonomy that is proper to natural law reasoning: “We might also tend to look to revelation for the more

saying that epistemic warrants for particular moral teachings are not limited only to specific forms of life, even if the “traditioned” life of grace and Christian practice would surely strengthen one’s grasp on its teaching.

This entire Anselmian dynamic between the universality of nature and human embeddedness within tradition brings to mind the dialogue between Karl Barth and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Though the debate is over fifty years old, its lessons remain instructive. For the core issue was the balancing of natural human realities with historical embeddedness, which played itself out under the rubric of nature and grace. To summarize briefly: Barth severely criticized the entire Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Hermann axis of liberal Protestantism, as well as the *analogia entis* of Catholicism because both, he alleged, seek to establish a philosophical starting point outside of faith that, in turn, becomes determinative of the content of faith.³⁴ The fear was that some “universal,” some “context,” broader and deeper—to use spatial metaphors—than the faith itself was being preliminarily established. The perceived danger was that some philosophical concept of nature constituted a general prolegomenon into which “faith” was inserted at just the proper point. Church teaching, in this instance, becomes secondary to philosophical positions that now imperiously claim to warrant the legitimacy of Christian beliefs. The transparent concern here is that a generic “common nature” becomes the properly “foundational” idea, with revelation taken simply as a subset of a pre-existing philosophical category. Athens, then, is taken as normative, while Jerusalem is simply a religious manifestation of a wider “Athenian” culture. Barth’s fear was of an alien, philosophical *a priori* setting the agenda, so to speak, for Christian faith.

Balthasar answered Barth by conceding to him every point about the priority of grace; there exists only the *unicus ordo supernaturalis*, the one and only supernatural order of sin and grace in which humanity is embedded. At the same time, Balthasar defended at length the *relative autonomy* of the natural order, meaning by this phrase that inscribed within the supernatural sphere is the order of creation. It is only “relatively” autonomous because it always exists within the one estate of God’s graciousness; but it is, indeed, autonomous because it possesses a certain freedom, a certain

definitive communication of the true ends of things. . . . [And] it is true, of course, that revelation will often declare certain natural human practices to be good and others to be bad, but these things also have their *natural visibility*, and one can argue more persuasively about them if one brings out their *intrinsic* nobility or unworthiness, their *intrinsic* rightness or wrongness, as well as the confirmation they receive from revelation.” Sokolowski, “What is Natural Law? Human Purposes and Natural Ends,” *The Thomist*, 68 (2004): 507–29, at 524 (emphasis added).

³⁴ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, x.

“nature” in and of itself and distinct from God. Balthasar conceded that nature is always, to some extent, a theological concept because the beatific vision is the goal of creation and all nature is oriented towards this *telos*. Further, there exists no surgical procedure for “removing” the order of creation from its embeddedness in the singular, concrete order of grace. But a certain autonomy of nature is necessary in order to protect the realm of creatureliness, which itself is the baseline concept for the very possibility of revelation. It is true, Balthasar agreed, that theology is always a *scientia de singularis*, a reflection on the concrete events of salvation history. But within this concrete order we find room for universal concepts, categories, and being itself.³⁵ Natural human realities constitute one of these concepts, even if nature must always be thought of as a “second moment” within the *fides quaerens intellectum*, but which nonetheless possesses its own comparative autonomy. It is no surprise that Balthasar defended the universality and integrity of nature even while reserving particular venom for Hegel and Idealism, with their attempts to overcome speculatively the *concretissimum* of salvation history. For Balthasar saw clearly that the emphasis on nature is not, as Barth feared, an attempt at the conceptual integration of Christianity by something other than revelation itself. It is hardly the philosophical imperialism reminiscent of an earlier Radical Aristotelianism, which Balthasar strongly opposed in its later philosophical incarnations.³⁶

But if both popes and theologians have emphasized, with Anselm, the relative autonomy of philosophy and nature as well as the integrity of argumentation not requiring specific induction into the Christian community, then why, we may ask, has this defense been so important to Catholicism? One significant reason for this advocacy of universal human realities is the necessary convergence of philosophy with theological truth. Christian doctrine, in its most authoritative statements, is understood by the Church as universally, trans-culturally, and trans-generationally true. But if, in fact, Christian affirmations are enduringly true amidst very different societies, cultures, worldviews, and perspectives, then what notion philosophically supports this doctrinal constancy and meaning invariance over the course of cultures and centuries? How, in other words, does one find in the “natural” order a proper resonance with what the Church holds by faith, namely,

³⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1991), 384.

³⁶ Balthasar argues, for example, that God can never be assigned a place within a pre-existing system as he is with Hegel’s *Geist*, Schopenhauer’s *Wille* or Schelling’s *intellektuelle Anschauung*. Revelation, on the contrary, in the words of Mary’s *Magnificat*, “*deposuit potentes de sede*.” Balthasar, *Love Alone*, trans. A. Dru (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969), 34.

the substantial continuity of Christian teaching in and through historicity, change, difference, and socio-cultural “otherness”? It is precisely because of the Church’s belief that faith and reason are deeply conjunctive realities that John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* argued that theology needs philosophy to “confirm the intelligibility and universal truth of its claims” (§77). Such philosophies are required because they must substantiate in the *philosophical* order (such as the very *possibility* of the universally and abidingly true and the very *possibility* of meaning invariance) the logic of Catholicism’s doctrinal affirmations by way of revelation. This is to suggest that reason, in its own relatively autonomous domain, must be able to confirm certain aspects of the universal truth of revelation. If it were unable to do so, then Christian doctrine and theology would appear irrational, thereby violating nature and transforming faith into merely authoritarian belief.³⁷ It is no surprise, then, that the pope called for a philosophy with a commodious “metaphysical horizon,” one that is able to fulfill its *officium congruum*, or “proper stewardship,” precisely because this kind of philosophy has at its center an ability to account for unity within multiplicity, identity within difference, continuity within change. How else to explain, in the philosophical order, doctrinal constancy, universality, and perdurance (which stand at the very heart of Catholicism) in a world of incommensurable and highly variable customs, norms, and mores?

This traditional defense of the relative autonomy of philosophy and nature helps to explain Benedict XVI’s direct and sustained attack on “dehellenization” in his Regensburg lecture of September, 2006. Against a certain anti-metaphysical sentiment emerging from the Reformation and against a Hebraic/Hellenistic split championed by Adolf von Harnack in *Das Wesen des Christentums*, the pope strongly insists that Christianity cannot be severed from the heritage of Hellenistic inquiry. Benedict wishes to argue, like Anselm, that reason retains something of its independence and autonomy, precisely as a faculty of human nature, apart from explicit Christian belief. How else could there exist, as he states, “mutual enrichment” between the Christian faith and philosophy?³⁸ How else could he

³⁷ In other words, one cannot simply argue for the substantial continuity of Christian truth on the basis of the gospel of grace, absent confirming philosophical warrants, without lapsing into an untenable fideism. The other option, intelligible on its own grounds but a significant departure from the prior tradition, is to claim that the teachings of the Church are, in fact, limited in their socio-cultural scope and necessarily have wide meaning-variance over the course of times and cultures.

³⁸ See Benedict XVI, “Regensburg Academic Lecture,” *Origins* 36 (September 28, 2006), 248–52, at 250. Benedict’s comment recalls the claim of *Fides et Ratio* that faith and reason offer each other mutual support as well as mutually purifying critiques (§100).

so ardently insist on the conjunctive confluence between the language of being of ancient philosophy and the language of faith of revelation?³⁹ The legitimate assertion of human embeddedness in socio-cultural networks, as well as within the *unicus ordo supernaturalis*, does not mean the loss of the autonomy and integrity of nature, even if universal natural realities participate in this tightly-knit web of human and divine dimensions. As earlier noted, to recognize the relative autonomy of philosophy and nature is not to assert that the truth of the gospel is now “secured” by an “alien” philosophical integration, the secular *Aufhebung* that neo-Barthians fear. Anselm’s emphasis is on the “second moment” of philosophical integrity *within* the *fides quaerens*. It recognizes, as John Paul II insists in *Fides et Ratio*, the legitimate autonomy of philosophy even while indicating that such thinking has no ultimate self-sufficiency.⁴⁰ This lack of self-sufficiency means that philosophy must, in the last analysis, be theologically measured. Insofar as theology is a *scientia de singularis* (and surely the Incarnation is preeminently illustrative of this), Christian embeddedness always has prior-

³⁹ One finds this confluence in the Regensburg lecture and even more transparently in Ratzinger’s earlier work *Introduction to Christianity*, trans. J. R. Foster (London: Search Press, 1969), 94–104 (which appears in the footnotes of the redacted Regensburg text). In this earlier work, Ratzinger speaks of belief as “wedded to ontology.” The “I am” of Exodus 3:13 finds resonance in the “I am” texts of the Gospel of John (8:24; 8:58); here, the primacy of the existing real, of being itself, so prized by ancient philosophy, comes to fulfillment in Christ. Ratzinger, then, would have little interest in a facile condemnation of “ontotheology” if this term is understood simply as the invocation of being-language within theological reflection. Ontotheology is properly condemned if the philosophical notion of being is taken as an a priori and univocal horizon which limits the appearance of God. But Ratzinger is arguing here, as much of the tradition before him, for a proper reciprocity between *ontos* and *theos*, with revelation, of course, as the leading partner and with God understood as analogically related to created being.

⁴⁰ See *Fides et Ratio*, §75. Bruce Marshall recently has written, “When Aquinas speaks as a teacher of Catholic truth, which is to say all the time, he rejects the very idea of an autonomous philosophy.” Marshall, “In Search of an Analytic Aquinas,” in *Grammar and Grace: Reformulations of Aquinas and Wittgenstein*, ed. Jeffrey Stout and Robert MacSwain (London: SCM Press, 2004), 55–74, at 55. With this we can agree but with a few further words of explanation. It is undeniable that Aquinas begins from the *auditus fidei* and so from the *fides quaerens*. But he also thinks that philosophy has a certain *real but relative autonomy* (paralleling the kind of quasi-autonomy found in the *Proslogion*) as indicated by his strong respect for philosophy in its own order and his concern that Christian faith not be *repugnans ad rationem*. Thus, while Aquinas is undoubtedly always a teacher of Catholic truth, he believes that philosophy may marshal arguments for God’s existence on the basis of causal and participationist metaphysics, absent any “insider” knowledge of Christian faith.

ity in the order of truth. Jerusalem, indeed, takes precedence over Athens. But there needs to be ancillary scaffolding in the philosophical order to ensure that there exists a conjunctive coherence between faith and reason.⁴¹ For philosophy, in its own order, must offer support for theological conclusions lest theology appear simply to be a free-floating act of faith, unrelated to human reason and dependent, therefore, on authority alone. To say this is to recognize that knowledge and practice are related, but without undermining the kind of understanding available to nature, precisely as Anselm had argued. George Lindbeck, for example, speaks of the world absorbed into the biblical narrative, rather than the Bible being absorbed by the heteronomous standards of secular thought. In one sense this is surely true, for philosophy cannot seek to be the aggressively hegemonic partner in the faith/reason relationship.⁴² But neither can philosophy lose its proper autonomy by being absorbed into theology—just as nature cannot be entirely absorbed into culture.

Another issue importantly related to the defense of natural human realities and the integrity of philosophical reasoning is the existence of an area which may be shared by Christians, by people of other faiths, and by those of no faith at all, an area that we may call the relatively autonomous secular. By this is meant the *agora* in which natural virtue is cultivated, in which publicly available arguments may be made from natural law as well as from natural theology. Anselm himself, of course, is quick to call attention to how vice obscures his own intellect and leads to faulty reasoning. Even here, however, he offers a discourse with its own integrity, an argument intended to be accessible to all reasonable inquirers, even if those with experience, that is, with participatory knowledge, walk in a brighter light. But the secular can only exist as a comparatively autonomous arena of shared theory and science, if, in fact, philosophy and nature themselves

⁴¹ One thinks, in just this regard, of Aquinas's campaign against Radical Aristotelianism on the question of the nature of the intellect (which dispute centers, ultimately, on the faith/reason issue). Against the monopsychism of Siger of Brabant, Aquinas intends to show that there is a diversity of intellect in diverse beings. In his forward to the work, Thomas states that this could easily be shown simply by relying on the truth of the Christian faith (which is always normative). But he will display the nature of the error by arguing on philosophical grounds alone. Here we have a strict parallel with Anselm: the context is surely Christian belief, but the argument has a philosophical integrity and quasi-autonomy in and of itself. See Thomas Aquinas, *On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists*, trans. Beatrice H. Zedler (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968), 22.

⁴² George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 135. I have discussed how faith must "measure" philosophy in "'Spoils from Egypt' Yesterday and Today," *Pro Ecclesia* 15 (Fall 2006): 403–17.

have a quasi-autonomy. The vitality of situated faith cannot exclude the realm of the secular, even if it enfleshes and supersedes it. Jürgen Habermas recognized this aspect of Catholic thought when he noted that Catholic theologians have traditionally had a less troubled relationship with the *lumen naturale*.⁴³ And it is precisely because of this “natural light” of reason that Catholics have been able to offer arguments in the public square for the intelligibility of God and for the natural visibility of universal moral principles. Insofar as we live in a society far more pluralistic and multivalent than that of Anselm, we need to ask if arguments that are not context specific, that have public, intersubjective warrants, are not even more necessary today.⁴⁴

As noted at the outset of this essay, many contemporary thinkers wish to emphasize that meaning is mediated by one’s participation in a cultural-linguistic community. All knowledge gained by individuals, therefore, is deeply informed by social practice and local custom. Further, the criteria by which such knowledge is judged, the epistemic warrants for truth, are internal to the communities themselves. Since modes of social life and discourse possess an internal logic, they are not subject to external criteria and verification. It is a deep affinity with just these themes that one sees in the interpretation of Anselm tendered by Kallenberg and that one detects throughout Hauerwas’s thought. For both, the accent is on the meaning and identity given within the *practices* of the robust, engaged, and participated life of the Christian Church. This approach has the significant merit of repairing some of the damage caused by the bloodless subject of modernity. The danger, however, is that it obscures the relative autonomy of nature and of philosophy; it also appears to abandon the notion of a *humanum*, of a universal human nature, and of arguments that appeal, in principle, to all human beings. The tension that Anselm keeps alive in his own thought and that is defended in the later tradition (even if this devolves, at times, into a strict disjunction) between the ontological constancy of nature and the specificity

⁴³ See Jürgen Habermas, “Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World,” in *Habermas, Modernity and Public Theology*, ed. Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 231.

⁴⁴ Of course, Habermas, too, is a great defender of public reason. But inasmuch as Habermas wants all validity claims to be cognitively redeemed by public warrant, he would have little use for Anselm’s attempt both on the grounds that religious discourse (even when speaking philosophically) has an a priori teleological view and arguments resting on elements of a universal *humanum* (which Habermas generally associates with the untenable Kantian being deconstructed by Heidegger) do not adequately account for the historically, culturally, and linguistically embedded subject of our post-transcendental, post-metaphysical age.

of embeddedness is thereby impaired. Anselm recognizes that the fullness of meaning and knowledge is mediated through experience, through the life and practices of the community, but he also argues that there is a prior givenness of meaning available through the *humanum* itself. The universal order of natural human realities and the embedded orders of salvation and culture are thereby kept in delicate balance and strict tension. By arguing on the basis of evidence available to all inquirers, even while speaking of the vital, enfleshed knowledge available through experience, Anselm is acknowledging the relative autonomy of the natural order; reason has an integrity and universality in its own sphere. Does this mean reason and nature are “unconditioned?” Surely this cannot be the case insofar as every person is necessarily embedded in socio-cultural-linguistic traditions. But can there be universals that are operative in and through perspective and situatedness? Anselm is an example of one who seeks to appeal to a universal *humanum* even while his careful approach is far distant from the Enlightenment subject of absolute autonomy.

Conclusion

There is a legitimate attempt on the part of many thinkers today to redeem reason from Enlightenment rationalism, to repair the damage wrought by modernity with its misguided defense of a neutral, autarkic subject, a subject existing apart from the embeddedness of human traditions and socio-cultural conditions, what Charles Taylor has described as the “ontologizing of the disengaged perspective.”⁴⁵ In actual fact, there is no irreducible ahistorical rationality, no Archimedean platform outside time and history; there exists neither life nor consciousness without protention and retention, without presuppositions and anticipations. Much contemporary philosophy, then, is a therapeutic attempt to unmask this neutral subject of modernity, thereby recognizing the conditioned, situated, embedded, traditioned nature of human existence. Postmodern and hermeneutical thought (both philosophical and theological) have rebelled against this rationalist, Enlightenment point of view. It is reflected, for example, in John Milbank’s representative comment that one cannot now contrast the alleged “particularist obscurantism of religion” with the universality of the human.⁴⁶ One cannot do so because postmodernity has exposed *this* kind of universality as nothing more than the allegedly unconditioned subject of modernity.

⁴⁵ Charles Taylor, “Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 317–36, at 323.

⁴⁶ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 260.

But should this legitimate exposure of the implausible worldless subject of the Enlightenment, hammered home by Heidegger's insistence that history cannot be buried under the cloak of immutability and by Wittgenstein's accent on the subject who participates in a cultural-linguistic community, demand a flight from the kind of metaphysical reasoning that accents a universal *humanum* or *physis* characteristic of Anselm and a significant part of the tradition? Should the emphasis on participatory reasoning exclude a common essence or eidetic (*eidos*) form? Should the excesses of modernity mean that Catholicism abandons universal natural human realities? And does jettisoning the Enlightenment subject mean we should also jettison the relative autonomy of philosophy?

Anselm seeks to circumvent the Scylla and Charybdis that threaten to overcome the proper balance between nature and culture, between nature and grace by avoiding, on the one hand, a devaluation of the relative autonomy of philosophy and natural human realities and, on the other, a rationalism that fails to understand the intimate relationship between knowledge and practice. While recognizing the unique knowledge given through the life and culture of the Church, Anselm holds that the Church herself is not the only locus of meaning and intelligibility. He suggests that there is some (formal) knowledge of God potentially available to all rational observers (even if this lacks the performative vigor of experience) beyond explicitly Christian sources. Warrants for the truth about God (and, in the case of natural law, for the intrinsic worthiness of actions) are available on the basis of reason as well as through the participated life of the Church. This is not to say, it bears repeating, that one seeks warrants outside faith to justify faith. It is to say that some knowledge of God is, in principle, available to all, even if the practices of the Church enfold this knowledge, making it vital, robust, and performative. One states this even while acknowledging the profound interlacing of nature and culture, of natural human realities with their embedded and situated character. *Gaudium et Spes* recognized this when teaching that "wherever human life is involved . . . nature and culture are quite intimately connected" (§53). A distinction is possible between the two even if one may also legitimately speak of an ontological reciprocity.

I address this question, a traditional one in Catholic theology, because of the contemporary emphasis, displayed in writers such as Hauerwas, Kallenberg, and many others, of the strong relationship between knowledge and practice, fueled, often enough, by the contemporary philosophical accent on the embedded, traditioned subject. Surely what is right in this is the vigorous reclamation of Christian identity as opposed to the pallid universalism of modernity. But this decided accent has brought a

reaction against the traditional Catholic stress on a universal *humanum* as well as the relative autonomy of philosophy. The reaction is understandable. For if hermeneutical and postmodern thought (in its manifold variations) has taught one lesson well, it is the danger of a rationalist, conceptualizing objectivism that devalues the heteromorphous nature of life and discourse, the enveloping dimensions of historicity and culture, of alterity and difference.

But the correlative danger is a lapse into a contemporary either/or: either universalist modernity or situated postmodernity. But such an antinomy is too starkly posed. As everyone knows, Catholic theology cast off a wooden neo-scholasticism that too sharply divided nature/grace, reason/faith, and philosophy/theology, a thinking itself abducted by Enlightenment themes, strictly separating the two spheres. Theology eventually rebelled against this modality which ignored not only the congeries of elements involved in human knowing, but also the circum-insession of nature and grace. This is the stream of thought represented by Pascal, Newman, Blondel (and later de Lubac), who reacted against an untenable rationalism by displaying dimensions and horizons of human being and knowing that modernity (and its theological *Doppelgänger*) overlooked and devalued. But if, at one time, theology needed to be rescued from manualist rationalism, evacuated of ideas such as theory-laden interpretation and situated reason, the danger today may be that by accenting just these dimensions, the truth offered by reason to all inquirers, available on the basis of a shared nature, is obscured. In jettisoning the excesses of modernity, then, we must beware the danger of jettisoning universal natural realities whose defense long predates the Enlightenment. Anselm may stand on the precipice between the early Church and the high Middle Ages, but he can hardly be understood as a harbinger of modernity or of Cartesian rationality except in the most attenuated sense. As with many therapeutic remedies in theology, a reparative counter-narrative may list too far in the other direction. Does the contemporary accent on human embeddedness, at least in some of its formulations, eclipse a proper understanding of natural human realities?

The rationality proper to Catholic theology is a careful interweaving of universal and contingent elements, of nature and grace, of reason and revelation, of human potentiality and participatory knowing. Anselm's argument in the *Proslogion* is a model of balance and proportion on just these matters. Does this contemporary invocation of Anselm constitute another flight to the pre-modern, a flight (and recovery) visible, for example, in the keen interest in Pseudo-Dionysius found in thinkers such as John Milbank and Jean-Luc Marion, and discernible in the return to

patristic exegesis championed by various present-day projects? Does offering a medieval thinker's reflections as a significant model for understanding the relationship between the universal *humanum* and contextual embeddedness not also smack of antiquarianism? I do not think this is the case. It is, rather, the recognition that there has been in the tradition of Catholic theology a great respect for the *relative* autonomy of nature, creation, and reason, an autonomy that, properly understood, protects the proper integrity of natural human knowledge as well as the distinctions between philosophy and theology, nature and grace, nature and culture. Anselm, I suggest, offers substantial theological lessons on these points, even (and perhaps especially) today. N·V