

IS HUMAN WILL A FREE AND GOOD WILL?
SAINT AUGUSTINE’S ANSWER

Handout

I Bibliography: Augustine of Hippo

1.1 Latin texts:

De libero arbitrio, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina [CCL] 29 (ed. W.M. Green), Brepols, Turnholt, 1970, 221-231.

Retractionum I, 9 CCL 57 (ed. A. Mutzenbecher), Brepols, Turnholt, 1984, pp. 23-29.

1.2 English translation:

Augustine, *On the Free Choice of the Will, On Grace and Free Choice, and Other Writings*, edited and translated by Peter King. Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 3-126; 127-133.

1.3 Italian translations:

Agostino, *Il libero arbitrio*. Presentazione, traduzione e note di G. Catapano, in Agostino *Tutti i Dialoghi*. A cura di Giovanni Catapano. Bompiani, Milano, 2008, pp. 873-1220.

Sant’Agostino, *Dialoghi II: La grandezza dell’anima, Il libero arbitrio, La musica, Il maestro*, introd. Di A. Trapè; introd., trad. E nota di D. Gentile, NBA III/2, Città Nuova, Roma 1992².

Franco De Capitani, *Il “De libero arbitrio” di S. Agostino*, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milano, 1987.

II Texts of Augustine’s *De libero arbitrio* [LA]

(English translation by P. King)

Text 1

LA I, 1, 1: «Evodius: Please tell me whether God is not the author of evil. (...) Augustine - « (...) evil people are the authors of their evildoing. If you doubt this, pay attention to my earlier statement, that evildoings are redressed by God’s justice. It would not be just to redress them unless *they come about through the will.*» (my italics)

Text 2

LA I, 11, 21-22: «Augustine: (...) since anything equal or superior to a governing mind possessed of virtue does not make it the servant of lust, on account of justice, and since in addition anything inferior to it could not do this, on account of weakness, as the points we have agreed on between us establish, we are left with this conclusion: *Nothing makes the*

mind a devotee of desire [cupiditas] but its own will and free choice. (...) It follows (...) that such a mind justly pays the penalties for so great a sin.» (my italics)

Text 3

LA I, I, 12, 24: «Evodius: what bothers me the most is why *we*, who are certainly fools and have never been wise, should suffer such bitter penalties. Yet we are said to suffer these things deservedly, for abandoning the stronghold of virtue and choosing to be the slave of lust. Were you to clear this up through careful reasoning, should you be able, I would not allow you to postpone doing so.»

Text 4

LA I, 12, 24: «AUGUSTINE: (...) *there is a deep question (and a deep mystery) whether the mind had lived some other kind of life before its partnership with the body, and whether it lived wisely at some point.* This question should really be addressed in its proper place. In any event, *it does not prevent clarifying as much as possible what we now have on our hands.* So tell me: We have a will, do we not?» (my italics)

Text 5:

LA, I, 12, 25: «AUGUSTINE : (...) tell me whether you think you have a good will. EVODIUS : What is a good will? AUGUSTINE : A will by which we seek to live rightly and honourably, and to attain the highest wisdom. Now see whether you do not seek a right and honourable life, and whether you do not passionately want to be wise – or at least whether you would venture to deny that we have a good will when we want these things. EVODIUS : I deny none of these things. Accordingly, I grant not only that I have a will, but also that it is good.»

Text 6:

LA I, 12, 26 - « Should we then not rejoice a little that in the mind we have something – I am speaking of the good will itself – in comparison with which all the things we have mentioned are completely unimportant (...)»

Text 7

LA, I, 12, 26: « AUGUSTINE: Then I think you see now that it lies in our will to enjoy or to lack such a great and genuine good. For what is so much in the power of the will as the will itself? When anyone has a good will, he surely has something to be put far ahead of all earthly kingdoms and all bodily pleasures. Anyone who does not have a good will certainly lacks the very thing the will alone would provide through itself, something more excellent than all the goods not within our power. (...) Furthermore, he lacks a good will, which is not to be compared with these things – and, even though it is so great a good, *it is only necessary to will in order to have it.*»

Text 8

LA II, 3, 7: « AUGUSTINE: (...) Let us pursue our inquiry in this order, if you agree: [1]How is it clear that God exists? [2] Do all things, insofar as they are good, come from God? [3] Is free will to be counted among these goods? Once we have answers to [1]–[3], I think it will be quite apparent whether free will was given to humans rightly.»

Text 9

LA, II, 6, 14: «AUGUSTINE: (...) suppose we were able to find something that you had no doubt not only exists but also is more excellent than our reason. Would you hesitate to say that *this*, whatever it is, is God? EVODIUS : Even if I could find something better than what is best in my nature, I would not immediately say it was God. I do not call ‘God’ that to which my reason is inferior, but that to which none is superior.»

Text 10

LA, II, 17, 45: “[Augustine] Every changeable thing must also be formable. (Just as we call what can be changed “changeable,” I shall in like manner call what can be given form “formable.”) Yet no thing can give form to itself, for the following reason. No thing can give what it does not have, and surely something is given form in order to have form. Accordingly, if any given thing has form there is no need for it to receive what it [already] has. But if something does not have a form, it cannot receive from itself what it does not have. Therefore, no thing can give form to itself, as we said.»

Text 11

LA II, 19, 53:« [Augustine] (...) *when the will adheres to the common and unchangeable good, it achieves the great and fundamental goods of a human being, despite being an intermediate good.* But the will sins when it is turned away from the unchangeable and common good, towards its private good, or towards something external, or towards something lower. (...) Thus it turns out that the good things desired by sinners are not in any way evil, and neither is free will itself, which we established should be numbered among the intermediate goods. *Instead, evil is turning the will away from the unchangeable good and towards changeable.* Yet, since *this “turning away” and “towards” is not compelled but voluntary*, the deserved and just penalty of unhappiness follows upon it.» (my italics)

Text 12

LA II, 19, 51: «[Augustine] So, if it is through the free will that we make use of everything else, you should not be surprised that it is also through the free will itself that we can make use of it. In some way, it is the will that, in making use of everything else, makes use also of itself (...)».

Text 13

LA III, 17, 20: « [Augustine] Consider (...) how great a good it is *to be*, which the happy and the unhappy alike will. If you consider the matter well, you will see that you are unhappy to the extent that you are not close to Him Who supremely *is* (...). Hence *you nevertheless will to be, since you are from Him Who supremely is*».