

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

I - Introduction

In my paper, I set out to face Augustine’s answer to the question “Is human will a free and good will?”

As a matter of fact, there is nothing original in asking such question; and the author is also far too well-known. Being this the case, why do I set out address it? There are a few reasons to do so. On the one hand, there is a personal reason to this choice. In fact, when writing my masters dissertation, this was the subject through which I acquired a more systematic acquaintance with the work and philosophical doctrines of Augustine. That youthful study has left its mark on me, for the extraordinary theoretical insight I found in the answers to the origin of evil and the will, given by Augustine. Actually, my first publication of Augustine’s work was a Portuguese translation of Augustine’s *De libero arbitrio*. On the other hand, because the influence exerted by his theories on the will and on free choice in Western philosophical tradition is well-known. Thus, grasping them in more detail will undoubtedly contribute to a better understanding of their successive interpretations.

However, precisely because Augustine’s theory of the will has long been discussed either by medieval philosophers, or contemporary Augustine’s scholars, my paper faces a methodological difficulty. First of all, because the texts in which Augustine examines this question are numerous, and the contexts are very diverse. Besides, it is known that throughout his life he made substantial changes to his theories on human will. Namely, it is consensual that his doctrine of grace and original sin have profoundly affected his understanding of the nature of human free will.

We find in literature the debate whether there is a definite disruption, between the first theories laid out by Augustine, mostly up to year 395/96, and the ones he will later adopt,

especially in the context of the Pelagian controversy. In this process of transformation, the work entitled “Questions to Simplicianus” is considered an important milestone.

So, in order to find out a coherent answer to my guide-question within the works and the thought of Augustine, I had to delimitate both the texts and the context of my research. In so doing, I decided to focus my analysis only on some relevant passages of the work by Augustine, *De libero arbitrio*.

In what concerns the extant literature on the question under scrutiny, it is in fact overwhelming and it is not feasible, nor would it be my purpose here, to outline a state of the art or a review of such literature. Within the extant literature, there is also a great diversity of approaches concerning the answer Augustine gave to my guide-question. Some studies bear the marks of the tendencies of their time and readings from school-specific perspectives, or pay special attention to the contrast debate around determinism and compatibilism, which today is mostly discussed within the purview of the philosophy of religion.

In the face of such a wide range of literature, it is legitimate to ask whether there is still room to say anything whatsoever about this question.

The aim of this paper is far more modest than that which is comprised by the literature. I simply intend to answer the question whether Augustine, in his analysis of the nature of human will, convincingly argues that it is effectively free. To this purpose, as I've mentioned, I will only focus on Augustine's *De libero arbitrio*, since the theories expounded there are sufficiently rich to serve it. In so doing, my purpose is to delimitate the analysis of Augustine's theory of the will within the borders of a philosophical analysis.

So, what I intend to do here is an analysis of the answer Augustine gave to the nature of the will outside of, or without bearing in mind, the theological debate about the original sin, the necessary restauration of human nature by the divine grace so that human nature can achieve its supernatural final end, divine predestination and so forth. While proposing this methodology, it is fair to ask if I am still commenting on Augustine, and being faithful to his mind and doctrines on the nature of free will. The answer is, of course, positive,

since it is given by Augustin himself. In a text that I will comment on after, Augustine itself says to Evodius that it is possible to answer on the nature of the will without answer the mysterious question of origin and life of the soul before living in the body (LA, I, 12, 22). And in his *Reconsiderations* (426/427), while comment on *De libero arbitrio* (387/388-395) he does two important things: he says that he was describing the nature of human will, and he confirms the main theories he developed many years before, in *De libero arbitrio*, and above all, many years before the Pelagian controversy. This allows us to conclude that the theories of the will explained in *De libero arbitrio* and confirmed as good theories in *Reconsiderations*, are coherent with those put forward by Augustine in the years of the Pelagian controversy and in the related works.

So, even if it is certainly hard to demonstrate, it is fair to suppose that Augustine's philosophical doctrine on the nature of human will, as explained in *De libero arbitrio* by means of reasoning and of what he calls a «vera ratio» (LA III, 3, 5) is compatible with the theological one. But this is not my point here, since my goal is to focus on the philosophical theory itself. This latter has a strong weight in the philosophical theories about the same subject in subsequent medieval philosophers. This is certainly the case of Anselm of Canterbury in his *De libertate arbitrii* or of Duns Scotus distinction between *voluntas ut natura* and *voluntas ut voluntas*, just to mention some relevant medieval authorities. However, as Augustine's doctrines on grace and sin have also strongly influenced the western intellectual history of theology and of ideas, my challenge here is to return to Augustine's philosophical doctrine on the will, trying to rescue it from the weight of theological western debates, and to shed, or to re-shed, some light on the doctrines themselves, and to prepare the way for further studying tracking its influence on the history of medieval philosophy.

II - Is human will a free and good will? Saint Augustine's answer.

1. Is human will a good will?

In his *De libero arbitrio* Augustine discusses the nature of the human will with an eye to answer the question on the origin of evil. We might expect, for that reason, that the answer will be given on the scope of a theory of action or in the ethical or political domain. But in fact, it is not so. Augustine's analysis of the nature of human will is at the core of his global ontology and is a fundamental feature of his theodicy. This aspect is very important to understand Augustine's answer to the guide-question I examine in this paper: «Is human will a free (and good) will?»

This Dialogue begins with a question addressed by Evodius to Augustine:

Text 1

LA I, 1, 1: «Evodius: Please tell me whether God is not the author of evil.» (De lib arb., I, 1, 1). As Augustine points out a few lines ahead in this text, this question is at the core of his discussion with the Manicheans on the nature of God and the origin of evil.

A few lines below, Augustine answers to the question put forward by Evodius, as such:

LA, I, 1, 1: 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.»

The explanation of this sentence - «*evil people are the authors of their evildoing*» - is at the core of the arguments of this dialogue. Augustine's main goal of all these arguments is to shift the causality of evil from God to human free will. While arguing in favour of this transfer of responsibility of the causality of evil, from God to individual authors, be they humans or not, Augustine wants to preserve the idea of God from mutability and weakness. If he can prove that God is the supreme good, then there will be no way to attribute to God the origin of evil. However, this solves only one part of the problem, that

related to the nature of God. But, it doesn't solve the question about the origin and nature of evil. And, if this question is not well-solved, the consistence of the first one will be always at risk. So, to solve the puzzles involved in the meaningless Manicheans theories about God and the origin of evil, Augustine is well aware that it is not sufficient to demonstrate that God is the Supreme Good. He still needs to prove both the goodness of the will, as a natural principle created by God as the Supreme good, and that the will is a not-determined free will. If this latter question isn't well-solved by means of a coherent demonstration of the sentence «*evil people are the authors of their evildoing*», the supreme goodness of God can be again called into question. This is because evil, as Augustine says at the very beginning of this work, can be understood in two main ways: that which is done and that which is suffered. And, even if Augustine is committed to demonstrating that God is not the author of evil – he cannot do evil things – this doesn't validate as true the sentence that affirms that "He is not the author of the evil someone can suffer". Moreover, it is necessary that evil people will suffer punishment and that good people will be rewarded. Otherwise God will not be just, and in that case He will not be the Supreme Good. So, it is crucial for the coherence of Augustine's reasoning against the Manicheans that he is able to prove that supreme justice is part of God's supreme goodness. Otherwise, there will be a weakness in God and in the universe he has created, and we will fall again in Manicheanism obscurity. But, in order to preserve that very practice of justice, be it that of God's or that of human laws, it is necessary to assure that human actions «*come about through the will.*» As Augustine states,

LA, I, 1, 1: «evildoings are redressed by God's justice. It would not be just to redress them unless they *come about through the will.*» (my italics)

Actually, in this dialogue Augustine is strongly committed to developing a very challenging cultural and philosophical change of paradigm concerning at least these two concepts: the notion of God and the notion of human will. At the end of this paper I hope to have shed some light on these crucial concepts and to have shown that this change of paradigm is mainly based on one and the same notion, that of the will.

At this point, although in a brief manner, and based only on the first lines on Augustine's *De libero arbitrio*, I have come to underline the relevance of our guide-question: «is human will a good and free will?»

The answer to this question is relevant because of both Augustine's statement about the nature of God as supreme good, and of the practice of justice itself, be that of human or divine nature. In this latter case, Augustine suggested, at the very beginning of *De libero arbitrio*, that even if God cannot be the cause of evil-doing, he is indeed the cause of the evil humans suffered as a punishment for evil-doings.

This statement, however, doesn't sound appropriate, as a part of the changing of paradigm I referred to. In fact, statements of this kind seem to be too close to both Plotinus and the Stoics views of the necessity of good and bad actions, so that the justice of God can effectively distribute awards and punishments. So, at the very end of his explanation, and in order to preserve the supreme goodness of God, Augustine owes us an explanation for this statement by means of which he admits that God causes, at least indirectly, the evil suffered by those who practice bad actions. He also owes us some explanation about the way this idea of the punishment of God is compatible with the demonstration of God's supreme goodness, argument which is at the core of all these statements and occupies the central part of Book II of the Dialogue.

In fact, rather than to a supreme goodness, the statement according to which «*God is the cause of the evil that evil-doing people suffer*» seems to be compatible with both the notion of destiny and fate, with that of blind fortune, or even with the causal influence of the stars in the destination of human life and happiness. Does Augustine's theory of God's supreme goodness and justice endorse the idea that the events of the world are pro or against human happiness and wellbeing according to their merits? Would Augustine subscribe the idea that the Boxing Day tsunami of January 2004, that killed 230.000 people was caused by the justice of God's supreme goodness? Would he agree with the idea that Covid-19 pandemics is the result of God's punishment? Again, a draft of what can be coherently deduced within Augustine's theodicy as an answer to this questions must be postponed until the end of this explanation. For the moment, it is important to hold in mind what Augustine requires from the very beginning as a condition for the

practice of God's justice toward humans, applying it either as a reward of good actions or as punishment for evildoings:

LA, 1, 1, 1: «It would not be just to redress them unless they *come about through the will.*»

If this is so, in order to grasp the central point of Augustine's theodicy it is definitely relevant to understand how Augustine defines human will. Such understanding will guide us to Augustine's answer to the question of this paper: «is human will a good and free will?». The answer to this question can now be redefined in the form of another question: what does it mean for a human will, to be free, or voluntary? Or rather, according to Augustine, what is the nature of human will?

Augustine begins to analyse the nature of the will by the end of Book I, exactly on I, 12, 24-25, after a long discussion on the origin of evil. It is not possible to analyse here the details of this discussion, in which Augustine develops his statement «evil people are the authors of their evildoing». He analyses the complex set of elements that get involved in human action and tries to isolate which of them is the cause of evil. Although the analysis isn't conclusive, it allows him to exclude many possible causes of the evil (such as human law, eternal law, the passions of the soul, the human mind or its virtues).

The main conclusion of this large discussion is summed up in Book I, 11, 21-22, as follows:

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.»

So, In Book I, 11, 24 the discussion returns to its departing point: the relation between human actions and the justice of God's punishment.

Nevertheless, Evodius seems not to be totally convinced yet of the rightness of this conclusion, since he claims:

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.»

Augustine's answer to this speech of Evodius is relevant insofar as it makes clear that, according to him, there is no necessary relation between these two questions: that of the original condition of human nature in a previous life and that of the justice of God's penalty as a consequence of man's own will and free choice. In fact, Augustine states, that ...

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?»

Augustine is asking Evodius for an empirical recognition of the existence of the will, without which this proper research will be out of sense. (This demanding opens up the way for Augustine's future explanations of the complex nature of human mind and of the priority of the will in the act of knowledge. That is to say that already in this Dialogue we can find aspects of Augustine's future doctrine on the nature of the mind and on the mutual relation between its powers, that will later mainly in *De trinitate*). Both recognize implicitly that the will is at the basis of every human action, including that of the search for science. So, for the sake of the continuity of the Dialogue, Evodius recognizes that he has a will and wants to know its nature. Augustine then wants to know if this will, which Evodius recognizes to have, is a good one. And in order to be able to answer, Evodius

asks for a definition of «good will». Augustine comes up with the following definition of good will:

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.»

However, in the quoted passage of LA I, 12, 25, the explanation of the nature of the good will is strongly ambiguous. It is not clear whether this good will is something that one simply has or something that one achieves, by means of good actions. Augustine says that this good will is the will to live righteously and honestly (LA, I, 12, 25); and, as we read, he immediately adds: « *at least when someone lives in this way, he has a good will .»*

[LA, I, 12, 26: «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.»]

Yet, one may ask if there is no difference at all between “having a good will” and “acting accordingly to the good will”. Because in this passage, Augustine seems to be aware of the existence of such difference, but he doesn’t analyse it.

However, without overcoming this ambiguity, we cannot properly answer our guide-question – “Is human will a free and good will?” While perhaps the latter part of the question – is human will a good will? – becomes solved, the first one is still in darkness. What is more, the idea of human will that necessarily wills good things, like «wisdom, or a honorable life», makes it difficult to see how this will is free, since it is determined to be a good will.

In Book I of the *De libero arbitrio*, the main explanations about the notion of human will (gathered from the paragraphs 25 to 31) include, without clarification, things of different kinds, such as:

- i) will is something which is at the basis of all human action - the experience of willing (LA, I, 12, 25);
- ii) will is the same as good will (LA, I, 12, 25);
- iii) will is a good thing that each human being has in his mind; among an overarching list of good things will is the best one:

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 (...)»

- iv) will is the power of choosing things among the aforementioned list of goods, among of which will is the best. The reason why it is the best among all things is because will is the only thing that «it is only necessary to will in order to have it».

Text 7

LA, I, 12, 26: « 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.*»

As all these different inferences are referred to under the same word «will», the explanation Augustine gave in Book I, paragraphs 25 to 31, of the nature of the will, is less than clear. The term «will» means either «good will», or «the will of good things». Among these good things, there are some kinds of things that will seems necessarily wills. And it is a good will by this exact reason – because it necessarily wills things of a certain

kind, such as wisdom and an honest life. Furthermore, by willing the kinds of things that it necessarily wills, the will makes use of itself in a wise and right way. Therefore, the rightness of the will seems to be something like the movement by means of which it wills voluntarily what it necessarily wills.

This balderdash is supported by the texts of Book I, 12-25/15-31. But, if at this moment of the text this sounds balderdash, at the end of his explanation one may conclude that Augustine's doctrine admits this kind of paradoxical sentence: «the rightness of the will, or the good will, if case both are the same thing, is the movement by means of which it wills voluntarily what it necessarily wills».

And, the changing of paradigm I referred to at the beginning of this paper, at least in what concerns the concept of will, is a consequence of Augustine's reasoning to clarify all these aspects of the will. He assumes this task starting at the beginning of Book II and achieves it at the middle of Book III.

2. Is human will a free will?

At the beginning of book II, Augustine points out what seems to be a reformulation of his initial plan of research in *De libero arbitrio*. In book I he planned to answer the question «whether God is the author of evil» and he was committed to demonstrating the supreme goodness and justice of God. At the end of the book I, he concluded that if there is a cause of evil, this has to be the free choice of the will. Evil occurs when human will, which is good in itself, and necessarily wills good things, doesn't use neither itself nor the things it makes use of rightly.

But, as we have shown, this reasoning is puzzling, and shrouded in darkness. As the main focus of the reasoning was the concept of God as supreme good and justice, the free choice of the will appears as an effect of this goodness and justice. However, Augustine was committed to demonstrating that this free choice is, at the same time, the cause of the evil and that evildoing is fairly punished by God as supreme Good. The reasoning is then somehow circular: God causes the free will and the free will causes the evil, so God, although merely indirectly, is the cause of evil, so he cannot punish it fairly. And so, he is not the supreme good.

At the beginning of Book II, Augustine states that, to solve these and other doubts, a new plan of research must be assumed. This plan explores the following relevant three questions:

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.»

Questions 1 and 2 are now, again, sub-questions whose answer is indispensable to correct answer our guide-question: «is human will a free and good will?»

Augustine's answer to question 1 takes it the largest part of Book II (from II, 3, 7 until II, II, 15, 39). It is out of the scope of this paper to analyse the analogical process Augustine builds to answer the question on «How is it clear that God exists». However, Augustine's answer to question 1 of his new research project is crucial to clearly answer to our guide-question. So, we have to sum up its main statements.

1. Showing «how it is clear that god exists» is, according to Augustine, showing that God is “the optimal idea” of reason (as he also stated in LA, I, 2, 5) or, in the formulation that occurs in LA, II, 6, 14, showing «how it is clear that god exists» is finding out, by means of the analysis of the nature of human reasoning, the notion of «that to which none is superior».

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.»

In my reading of Augustine’s work, this definition of God as “that to which none is superior” can even be considered as the fundamental principle driving Augustine’s whole philosophical analysis. Any argument about God and the universe that reason may build if it runs against the optimal idea one should have of God, is an argument that must be reviewed, because it is certainly unsound. Now, this principle must be followed in any explanation concerning the nature of human will, insofar as it is strictly connected with the idea of God. Any conclusion must be coherent with the idea of God as “that to which none is superior.”

This idea of God is totally compatible with the conclusions Augustine had already established in Book I for the cause of evil and the nature of human will: that every evildoing is the author of his own actions; and that this is only possible if human actions are voluntary. What really changed from Book I to Book II is the very idea of God as Supreme good. God is no more only a cosmic principle of good, order and justice. In Book II, the evidence of God as Supreme good, is that of the truth, as the common, and at the same time, inner principle of human reasoning. Every human reasoning is achieved by means of the relationship between each one faculty of reasoning and the common principle of truth, that illuminates reason. So, reasoning is the result of an asymmetric relationship, between truth as the immutable, higher principle or reasoning, and reason, an inferior one. As a consequence, all human judgements are, by their own nature, judgements rooted in a principle of evaluation, which is reason itself. To judge is to evaluate. This conclusion is relevant to answer our guide-question.

The answer to the second question of the aforementioned new «research plan»– «Do all things, insofar as they are good, come from God?» - is also important in order to surpass the puzzling statements arisen at the end of book I.

The relevant text for the argument is that of LA II, 17, 45 – II, 18, 47. Augustine’s reasoning is based on two main related ideas: that all reality is changeable and that everything that is changeable does not have in itself sufficient reason of its being.

As Augustine states in **Text 10 LA, II, 17, 45:**

“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.»

no reality can form itself because it cannot give itself that which it does not have - *Nulla res formare se potest*. So, all mutable thing receives its own form from «the eternal and unchangeable form» which is God.

Now, in Book I, 12, 25 the existence of human will was established as evident. Hence, it is certainly a kind of formable thing, that depends on the eternal form; and, because of this ontological dependence of God as supreme good, human will is necessarily good.

Again, it is only at the end of Book II, in the final pages of a large debate - that Augustine returns to the main question of the dialogue and to our guide-question: Is human will a free and good will? And, after the conclusions obtained by the explanations of questions 1 and 2, the answer to our guide-question must now be clear or at least much less puzzling. For the sake of coherency with those conclusions, the answer must be as such: Yes, there is a human will and it is a good one, since it is created by God and God is the supreme good. However, it still remains to show if this will is a free will. Or, in other words, if human actions can be voluntary, so that « *evil people are the authors of their evildoing*».

Let us go back to the puzzle originated at the end of book I: (LA, I, 12, 26). Facing the definition of good will, Augustine implicitly and in a very equivocal way, makes us think about a possible difference between “having a good will” and “acting according to the good will”. It was that difference that wasn’t sufficiently clarified and originated our balderdash statements.

Now, at this point of Augustine’s explanation, there are some additional inferences that make the balderdash puzzle a landscape almost evident.

Again, for the sake of coherence, one needs to conclude that, in the nature of human will, there is an element of determination and necessity, over which it has indeed no control.

It is the characteristic of the nature of will, that which constitutes, for the will, its natural form.

What characteristic is this? The fact that the will **cannot not want** the good; or, in other words, the will is **determined to always want the good**.

Augustine justifies this by the second proposition he considers necessary to the clarification of the nature of the will and the origin of evil, which was listed as proposition (2). That proposition was formulated in the following manner: “All nature depends on God and is a good”. In the case of human will, this natural dependency is manifested in the tendency of the will towards good. In light of the statements of Book I, this characteristic corresponds to the definition of will as [necessarily] good will. In the light of Augustine’s new research plan, developed in Book II, this natural desire towards good and happiness is described in terms of ontological dependence on being and form: *‘nulla res formare se potest’*. In Book III, this is confirmed, as the universal desire for happiness,

is reformulated as «a natural tendency towards being» (see v.eg., LA, III, 7, 20-21: « if you will to escape from being unhappy, love in yourself the very fact that you will to be. For if you will to be more and more, you will draw closer to Him Who supremely is.») Like the act of receiving form, or of being informed, that is to say, the act of coming into being, is out of the reach of human choice, also is its form or essence. In case of human will, its form of being is to be a natural tendency towards good. But, as well as this characteristic is out of the reach of human choice, this is not also the specific *way of being* of the will. In fact, this characteristic is common to human will (and even to all creatures). As all created forms are ontological dependent upon God as supreme good, they are all goods and ordered to the good. Otherwise, they will be ordered to the evil. But this later is not compatible neither with proposition 1 nor with prop. 2.

Consequently, a coherent answer to our guide-question: «Is human will a free and good will?», must be sub-divided. The human will is good to the extent that it comes into being from God. But, precisely in what concerns that fact, it is not free. It is determined by the natural order in which it was created. Such determination configures the human will in at least three aspects: it necessarily tends towards good; in the hierarchy of goods it is an intermediate good; as an intermediate good it is determined to achieve its own end by

means of its own choices. And this later is the exact sense in which human will is a free will.

Let us go back, again, to the end of Book I, and to the distinction between “having a good will” and “acting according to the good will”. The good action now appears as that in which, the free choice of the will is coincident with the natural end of the will.

By the end of Book II, 48 to 52, Augustine sums up his analysis of the two characteristics I just mentioned – the will is an intermediate good and it achieves its nature through the use of its own free choice, here described as a power of the spirit (*potential animi*). Through the exercise of this power, each actor (or author) fills the actually undetermined free space of, so to say, that finite field of choices, which is in fact only in its own power to fill. How is this choice achieved? Is it a real and effective choice? Augustine wants it to be as such and strives to convince us that it is so. In this Dialogue he does so by two main ways. First, the statement I previously mentioned, of the moral condition of all

judgement. In order to judge, reason is actualized by truth as its supreme light. So, reason understands simultaneously the goods and their different quality, since by its own nature, reason acts by the inner action of the higher good. Or, to say it clearly, to “understand” is to grasp things as differentiated and ordered. However, to know things as differentiated in order doesn’t coerce the will to join any of them, or any specific order of things. The way in which every will builds its own choices is determined by the choice between goods, by its tendency to the best order of goods that it is capable to grasp by means of its own mind, but it is actually free to order them, in every act of the will, at its own choice.

So, to the second part of our guide-question – “Is human will a free will?” Augustine’s answer is affirmative. However, the free choice of the will is not unlimited nor is it arbitrary. Augustine’s notion of human will is not that of an undetermined will of power. Or, in other words, the free choice of the will is a power of choice which is determined by its creator. Is human will a free will? Yes, but only insofar as it is in the power of humans to choose the order of goods by means of which they will fulfil their own way of being. In so doing, humans are able to determine their own nature in accord with the good,

which is the end towards which it necessarily tends. From this point of view, human choices are always options taken by a good, intermediate faculty, among things which are also good. Again, from this point of view, human choices will always be options taken by a good, intermediate faculty, which will choose (from) things that are also good. However, they only perform good choices if they are righteous and honest, that is, if the good each one chooses is that good which is discovered, in each case and by the reason of which one, as the “greatest among goods”. The quality of human actions, its greater or lower degree of goodness, depends on the order of goods to which the will, as an intermediate good, and by means of its free choice, freely adheres:

Text 11

LA II, 19, 53:«(...) 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.»

And, if my interpretation is correct, it is in this precise sense that, according to Augustine, one can say that human will is free. Through free-will, it is in his power to make use of all the goods and of itself.

Text 12

LA II, 19, 51: “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 (...)”.

Is the human will a good will? Augustine’s answer is positive, without conditions. By the fact of its existence, it is, like all that exists, will is a good that tends to preserve its being in conformity with the powers proper to its action. And, over this fact, it has no power of decision. The human will is, in fact, conditioned to act in conformity with its natural determination. It necessarily tends to the good, or, as Augustine puts it in another passage of the same work (**LA III, 17, 20: text 13**) it cannot want not to be and tend towards being.

Is human will a free will? Augustine’s answer is also positive; but this free choice of the will must be understood as a limited, conditioned power of finite creatures. However, the use that human will makes of such universe of conditions is wholly undetermined, free choice being charged with making of its own world the best among all possible worlds.

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