

singulars contained in an infused species, but the separated soul knows only those singular things to which it was disposed by knowledge or love while in this life, or is now disposed by the special ordination of God.

5. By natural knowledge, the separated soul does not know everything that takes place on earth, for it is now withdrawn from contact with mundane reality. In the *supernatural* knowledge of the beatific vision, however, the blessed can, according to God's disposition, know what goes on in the world.

5. THE WILL OF MAN

A. Nature of the Will

The **will** is an *intellective appetite*, that is, *the power which inclines us to seek the good known by the intellect*. Every being tends toward its own perfection by striving for the things congenial to its nature. The knowing subject is not content with the possession of objects as they exist in the mind, but desires to have them as they are in themselves. Just as sense knowledge is followed by sense appetite—the inclination to a sensible, concrete good—so intellectual cognition is followed by the intellective appetite, called the will, which is inclined to a universal good.

(1) *Characteristics of the Will*

The will is a spiritual faculty, of the same order as the intellect. It is not a cognitive faculty, and hence must depend on the intellect for its object. *Nothing can be desired unless it is first known*. Since the proper object of the intellect is universal, the object of the will is also universal, and therefore immaterial. Because it is a spiritual power, the will, like the intellect, resides in the soul itself.

(2) *The Object of the Will*

The *formal object* of the will is good in general. The goodness desired by the will must first be known by the intellect. The intellect,

however, knows the good as universal, and so the will must tend to the good as universal. In consequence, whatever the will desires, it desires under the aspect of goodness. The object of the will exists in the singular, and very often it is a concrete, material thing; but the will is moved to it, not precisely as it is concrete and material (this is the object of the sense appetites), but under the universal aspect of goodness. Everything the will desires must have, or appear to have, something of goodness about it.

From this it is evident that the will cannot act for evil as such; when it wills, it must will good. Just as the sight can see nothing but color, so the will can seek nothing but good. When the will performs an evil action, it does so because this action has the appearance of good. The thief does not steal because stealing is evil, but because it is good to have money. Everything the will desires, then, is either a genuine good or an apparent good.

(3) *The Passivity and Activity of the Will*

The will is essentially a *passive* power. It is undetermined and potential regarding its object, and it is moved to its act by that object as known by the intellect. In relation to its act, however, the will is an *active* power: it produces its own vital act and also moves the other powers of the soul.

B. The Relative Excellence of the Will

The intellect and the will are superior to all the other powers of the soul. Of the two, which is the more excellent, intellect or will?

The perfection of a power may be considered in two ways, absolutely or relatively. The *absolute* perfection of a thing is determined by its nature, independently of any other consideration. *Relative* perfection is judged on the relation of the power to something extrinsic and accidental. Thus, the sense of sight is, absolutely speaking, more excellent than the sense of hearing. But hearing may be relatively more perfect, insofar as it is better to hear a beautiful symphony than to view an ugly picture.

(1) The Absolute Perfection of the Intellect

Absolutely speaking, the intellect is more perfect than the will. Since the nature of a power is determined by its formal object, the power which has a more excellent object will be the more perfect. The object of the intellect is nobler than the object of the will, because it is simpler and less restricted. The notion of good, which is the object of the will, adds something to the notion of being, which is the object of the intellect. The notion of good includes the note of desirability, whereas the notion of being is independent of this relation. For this reason, the intellect is absolutely a more excellent faculty than the will.

(2) The Relative Perfection of the Will

Relatively, the will is sometimes more perfect than the intellect. The relative perfection of a power is determined not by its relation to its formal object but to a particular object; as *particular*, this object and the relation arising from it are accidental to the faculty. If a particular object of the will is more excellent than the soul itself, the will becomes relatively superior to the intellect. But if the object of the will is less perfect than the soul, then the intellect remains the superior faculty.

This is due to the way in which the intellect and the will operate. The intellect brings the object into itself in an immaterial way; the will goes out to the object as it exists in reality. Now things exist in the knower according to the manner of the knower. More excellent objects are thus brought down to the level of the intellect, while inferior things are raised up to that level. Thus an angel is more perfect in his own existence than as he exists in the mind of a man, but a material object has a more perfect mode of existence in the intellect, because it is there in an immaterial way.

If the object of the will is superior to the soul (e.g., God and the angels), the will excels the intellect, because the will goes out to its object as that exists in itself, whereas the intellect brings the object down to its own level. If, however, the object of the will is inferior to the soul, the intellect remains relatively the higher faculty,

for material things exist in a more excellent manner in the intellect than they do in themselves.

In this life, therefore, it is better to love God than to know him, because the will reaches up to God while the intellect draws God down to itself. Conversely, it is better to know a material object than to love it, for the will is drawn to the level of what it loves.

C. The Will and Necessity

(1) *The Notion of Necessity*

Necessity means *determination to one thing*. If this determination arises from an intrinsic principle, it is called *natural* necessity. Thus a tree is compelled by nature to grow upward. Necessity may also be caused by someone or something outside the subject, namely, by the final or the efficient cause. Necessity imposed by the final cause, or goal, is *hypothetical* necessity. It is concerned with the means necessary to attain a given goal. For example, on the hypothesis that a man wishes to live, it is necessary for him to eat. Necessity arising from an efficient cause, or agent, occurs when something is forced by the agent to act contrary to its inclination. This is called coercion or violence. For example, a man may be thrown overboard against his will by another.

Necessity	{	from an intrinsic principle: natural	
	{	from an extrinsic principle	{ from the end: hypothetical from the agent: violence

(2) *Necessity and the Will*

1. **Natural necessity and the will.** *By its very nature* the will is determined to seek the universal good in which man's happiness is to be found. Happiness is the ultimate reason for every human action. Just as the intellect necessarily accepts the first principles of its

knowledge, so the will necessarily seeks the end, the *universal good* which is happiness. The end is the principle of human actions, and happiness, the ultimate end, must be the first principle of action. Both the principles of knowledge and of action are natural to man, and therefore necessary. Just as all things tend naturally and necessarily to their end, so the will, as a natural entity, tends necessarily toward its end, which is happiness. Freedom of the will is not concerned with the ultimate end, but with the particular goods which are means to the end.

2. **Hypothetical necessity and the will.** The will may be hypothetically necessitated when, having efficaciously willed to reach a goal, it must will the means necessary to that end. If a man, for example, wishes to cross a river, and the only means at hand is a bridge, he is constrained to use the bridge. He is free to cross the river or not, but once he decides to cross he has no choice but to use the bridge.

3. **Violence and the will.** The will is not subject to violence. No outside agent whatsoever—neither worldly tyrant nor fallen angel nor God himself—can force the will to act. No one can force us to love, or desire, or choose. It is this astonishing fact of our dignity and self-responsibility and impregnability which St. Paul comments on in wonder in a memorable passage:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? Even as it is written, "For thy sake we are put to death all the day long, we are regarded as sheep for the slaughter." But in all these things we overcome because of him who has loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:35-39).

Violence proceeds from a source *outside* the will, and is *contrary* to the inclination of the will. The act of the will proceeds from an *inner* principle in *accordance* with the inclination of the will. The act of the will cannot be at the same time violent and voluntary, for these terms are mutually exclusive. Consequently, not even God can force the will, for he cannot do anything which involves a contradiction.

(3) *Dominion of the Will*

Besides having dominion over its own act, the will can also control the acts of the other powers. For example, the will can direct the eye to view some particular object. Acts which proceed from some power under the dominion of the will are called **commanded acts** of the will, e.g., walking, writing, etc. These commanded acts can be forced, as we know from experience. But the will cannot be forced to will them. A man may be confined to prison against his will, he may be forced to walk or run or look or write, but he cannot be forced to *want* to perform these actions.

D. Freedom of the Will

(1) *The Meaning of Free Will*

Freedom is opposed to necessity, and consists in immunity from necessity, or *lack of determination to one thing*. The will is free when it is indifferent or undetermined toward several things.

We have seen that the will is free from any force exerted from without. But that is not enough to constitute true freedom. Freedom must be essentially from within; the will must have the power within itself to determine when it will act or not act, what object it wants or does not want.

Man is not free with regard to his ultimate end. He cannot choose unhappiness as such, for nature prevents this. Freedom is concerned with *means* to the end. Freedom is the dominion of the will over its own action in relation to any object which does not completely satisfy its appetite for infinite good.

(2) *The Existence of Free Will*

That in this sense man's will is free is the clear teaching of faith as well as of reason.

1. **The doctrine of faith.** The Scriptures are replete with references to the existence of free will in man;⁶ their general tenor is well

⁶Cf. Gen. 1:26; Exod. 16:28; Levit. 26:21; Deut. 30:15; Jos. 24:15; Sirach 31:10; Isa. 1:19; Matt. 16:24, 19:17, 23:37; Lk. 9:23; I Cor. 7:36; Apoc. 2:21.

expressed in a passage from the Book of Sirach (15:14): "When God, in the beginning, created man, he made him subject to his own free choice."

The official doctrine of the Church on the existence of free will is expressed by the Council of Trent. It teaches that, as the result of original sin, man's ". . . free will, although weakened and inclined to evil, was by no means destroyed."⁷ The same council is equally explicit in condemning anyone who would deny this essential basis of man's dignity and the postulate of all morality:

"If anyone shall say that man's free will was lost and destroyed after the sin of Adam, or that it remains in word only, and indeed in word without any foundation in reality, and even that this fictitious notion was insinuated into the Church by Satan, let him be condemned."⁸

2. The teaching of St. Thomas. Is man free? This is a question philosophers have pondered for ages. The ancient Greeks, Socrates and Plato, thought that man's actions are determined by what he knows: sin is ignorance. Modern psychologists all too frequently preach a rigorous determinism, either *physical* (deriving from fixed and inexorable physical causes) or, as with the Freudians and behaviorists, *biological* (man's actions are the result of animal impulses or vegetable reflexes).

St. Thomas' argument, based on man's rational nature, is a refutation of the modern, as well as the ancient opponents of man's freedom:

I reply by saying that man is endowed with free will; otherwise counsels, exhortations, precepts, prohibitions, rewards and punishment would all be in vain.

In evidence of this fact we must consider the following. Some creatures act without judgment, as a stone falls downward; all things which lack knowledge behave in this way. But others, like brute animals, act with a judgment which is not free. Thus a sheep upon seeing a wolf judges that it is to be avoided; this is the result of a natural rather than a free judgment, because the sheep judges this not from reason but from a natural instinct. Such is also the case with any judgment of brute animals. Man acts from judgment: he

⁷Sess. VI, Jan. 13, 1547, *Decree on Justification*, Chap. 1; Denz. 793.

⁸*Ibid.*, Can. 5.

judges by his power of intelligence that something is to be shunned or sought. But because this judgment is not the result of natural instinct regarding only a particular situation but rather of an act of comparison made by the reason, man thus acts from a free judgment which is capable of being determined to different things. With regard to contingent matters, reason is able to pursue different paths, as is clear in dialectical syllogisms and rhetorical persuasions. Now individual acts are contingent matters, and therefore the judgment of reason may follow different courses concerning them; it is not determined to any single course.

From the very fact that man is rational, therefore, it is necessary that his will be free.⁹

3. **Arguments from reason.** Not only faith but even our unaided natural power of reason concludes to the same truth that the will is free. Consider the following arguments:

- 1) *From internal experience.* Everyone is aware that he performs many actions, not from any intrinsic, irresistible necessity, but with full dominion and control. While acting, a man has the power to cease to act; while doing one thing, he has the power to turn to something else. Thus, while walking, a man knows that he can stop walking; while sitting, he knows that he can stand; while reading one book, he knows that he can put it down and read another.
- 2) *From the common consent of all peoples.* Among the people of all nations and at all times, man is considered master of his actions. In every society laws are enacted which man is obliged to obey; punishment is imposed on transgressors; counsels, exhortations, commands are issued. There would be no reason for these things if man were determined to his action by blind and inescapable necessity. All morality would be destroyed, and man's actions would not be worthy of praise or blame, merit or demerit.
- 3) *From the nature of the intellect and will.* The will follows the judgment of reason. But the judgment of reason is indifferent in regard to particular good. Such goods do not exhaust the notion of goodness, they do not possess the totality of goodness, and

⁹*Summa*, I, q. 83, a. 1.

so they are *limited*. In comparison to the universal good, therefore, particular goods have an aspect of non-good. The intellect, then, proposes them to the will *indifferently*, not as necessarily to be chosen or to be rejected. Viewed under the aspect of good, they move the will to choose them; under their aspect of non-good or evil, the will rejects them. "In all particular goods [man] can consider the aspect of good and the defect of good which has the nature of evil; accordingly, he can apprehend any good of this kind as worthy to be chosen or rejected."¹⁰

(3) *The Workings of Free Will*

1. **Exemplification of free choice.** The practice of virtue is good, because of the beauty of virtue and its reward. But the exercise of virtue is often difficult, or inconvenient, or requires abstention from certain sense pleasures. If an act of virtue is recognized here and now as sufficiently appealing, the will chooses it; if it is considered an obstacle to the pursuit of other things desired, the note of desirability will be lacking to it and the will shuns it.

2. **Freedom and the last practical judgment.** Note that the will always follows a judgment of the intellect. This judgment, which decides that some good is to be chosen here and now, is called the *last practical judgment*. In conformity with that judgment, the will elicits its act of choice.

In order to be truly free, however, the will must have dominion over that judgment. Now the judgment of the intellect is indifferent, since of itself it neither chooses nor rejects the object it knows; for the intellect apprehends the double aspect of good and non-good in the object. In order to make a determined judgment (the last practical judgment), the intellect must be moved by the will to do so. The will always follows the last practical judgment, but it is not for that reason necessitated to its act by the intellect, for the will itself determines this judgment to be the last.

Thus in the preceding example, the intellect first apprehends both the good and the evil aspects of the practice of virtue. The will then

¹⁰*Summa*, I-II, q. 13, a. 6.

moves the intellect to consider only the good (or only the evil) features of the thing to be done, in virtue of which the intellect makes a final judgment: "this is to be done" (or to be avoided). Following upon this last judgment the will chooses to follow this (or that) course of action.

3. **Freedom and sin.** The power to commit sin does not pertain in any way to the essence of freedom. The object of the will is good, and any choice of evil is a defect of the will. Sin is an abuse, rather than a use of freedom. "It belongs to the perfection of its liberty that the free will is able to choose different objects, preserving the order of the end; but to choose something by turning away from the order to the end, which is to sin, comes from a defect of liberty. Hence, there is greater freedom in the angels, who cannot sin, than in us, who can sin."¹¹

(4) *The Objects of Freedom*

Freedom is of two kinds: freedom of exercise and freedom of specification. **Freedom of exercise** refers to the act of the will; it is *the indifference of the will to act or not to act*. **Freedom of specification** refers to the object of the will; it is *the indifference of the will to a number of diverse objects suitable as means to attain the end*. For example, I am free to read or not to read (freedom of exercise); having decided to read, I still have a choice, for I may read one book or another, a theology book or a novel (freedom of specification).

With these distinctions in mind, we can reach some conclusions of very great practical moment.

1. The will does not have freedom of specification in regard to good in general or happiness, for this constitutes the formal object of the will. Every power, however, has an essential relation to its formal object, so that it is unable to act outside the limits imposed by the object. When it acts, then, *if* it acts, the will necessarily moves to good in general, or happiness.

2. The will enjoys freedom of exercise in regard to good in general or happiness in general, because it is able to cease from its act. We

¹¹St. Thomas, *Summa*, I, q. 62, a. 8, ad 3.

know from experience that sometimes we cease from all mental and volitional activity, as, for example, in sleep.

3. The will enjoys both freedom of exercise and freedom of specification in regard to all particular goods. Since these goods are limited, the will can choose them or not, or choose one in preference to another: restricted to a particular aspect of goodness, no limited good realizes the fulness and perfection of unlimited (universal) goodness.

4. The will enjoys freedom of exercise and freedom of specification in regard to God as he is known in this life. Although God is the perfect and infinite good, our knowledge of him in this life is very imperfect, for we do not see him in his essence. Since he is an object inadequately proposed to the intellect, he can be apprehended under the aspect of non-good, as commanding certain acts, prohibiting others and punishing transgressors. Therefore, in this life, the will is not necessitated to choose God.

5. The will has neither freedom of exercise nor of specification in regard to God as he is clearly seen in the beatific vision. God is then known by the intellect as he really is in himself, the universal and infinite good. Since he cannot be apprehended under any aspect of non-good, the will is necessitated to loving him, and can choose no other object in preference to him. The will, however, remains free in regard to other objects outside of God.

These conclusions are summed up in the following diagram:

Object	The will has freedom:
Good in general	of exercise, but not of specification
Particular goods God in this life	both of exercise and specification
God clearly seen	neither of exercise nor specification