

WILL, DESIRE, AND NECESSITY

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Abstract. *Though much ink has been expended on writing about the will, in this paper, we return to two classical philosophers, Aristotle and Augustine, to examine the nature of the will. Both argue that human beings are the kind of creatures capable of conscious deliberation about their choices of actions. Aristotle develops an account of human action, describing what motivates physical movement and distinguishing it from voluntary and involuntary actions, which involve mental movements. Voluntary actions are those actions that are deliberately chosen and are done with some end in mind. Most notably, Aristotle asserts that human beings ought to choose actions that lead to happiness. He agrees with Augustine that human beings should choose virtuous actions and comes close to an account of the will. Augustine argues that we should conform our wills to the good will, stating that the good will involves willing to possess those unchangeable goods that cannot be lost. These are the virtues. Most human beings fail to will the good will because they are seduced by inordinate desires for material possessions and pleasures of various kinds. We discuss why Augustine believes this is the case and outline his argument regarding God's foreknowledge, which suggests that we do not act out of necessity. We provide a generalization of this argument and suggest that it also applies to fate.*

Key words: free will, Aristotle, Augustine, necessity, desire, good will

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Introduction

The present *Zeitgeist* has been described as a rejection of the Enlightenment's faith in reason. Though this is true, its root cause is a profound rejection of Christianity on which Western civilization, culture, and values have been based. As Nietzsche wrote in *The Gay Science*,

Where is God?" he [the madman] cried; "I'll tell you! We have killed him.
(Nietzsche [1887] 2001: 119)

As Nietzsche himself warned, there are profound consequences for humankind.¹ Some of these consequences can be recognized in the preoccupation with the subjective, the cult of individualism, and a complete rejection of human beings as made in the image and likeness of God. Since human beings are no longer made in the image and likeness of God, they are at liberty to make themselves into whatever they want themselves to be. There is no essence of human nature; human beings are infinitely malleable, as existentialists like Sartre asserted.² Extreme versions of this pernicious conception of the human being are evidenced by a preoccupation with self-fulfillment, self-identity, and self-satisfaction. The self is the center of attention, and what the will chooses serves the satisfaction of the desires of the self. The self can be whatever it wants to be, even change its gender. Paradoxically, and in contradiction to the reduction of human beings to the status of malleable, material physical beings, such conceptions of the human being retain the idea that there is a transcendent, non-physical ego which can decide for itself what it is. Reality is what the individual wills it to be. The human being has become a god. But of course, as St. Augustine writes, human beings cannot will to turn away from the unchangeable good which is God and suffer no penalty. If they do, they will be unhappy and justly so, because they have voluntarily turned to evil and to goods which are temporal and fleeting (Augustine ([395] 2001: 21, 70).

Although much has been written about the will, it remains, to some degree, mysterious. In this paper, we aim to shed light on the nature of the will by revisiting two classical sources that discuss conscious, voluntary human action. We will begin with Aristotle's account of human action, starting with his discussion of the movement of animals and progressing to those animals that move consciously. Apart from the mechanics of motion, which provides one explanation of how we come to move, we also want to explain what it is that motivates us to act. This is a different kind of movement, as it is a movement of the mind. Human beings are not like animals that act instinctively but are able to conceive of ends and reason about means. It is not only desire that motivates us to act, but beliefs can too. The will is none of these; it is the power to act. Aristotle's discussion of voluntary and involuntary action stops short of postulating the will but points us in its direction. In discussing the kinds of ends human beings should pursue, and which we should voluntarily choose, Aristotle recommends habituating ourselves to the virtues, since these will lead to a good and happy life.

¹ Nietzsche goes on to consider some of these consequences later in *The Gay Science* (Nietzsche [1887] 2001: 202ff.).

² But even Sartre did not think human beings were completely unrestricted in what they could choose to be. Much would depend on talents and circumstances (see: Sartre 1978).

The voluntariness of our actions, as raised by Aristotle, leads to a discussion of some of Augustine's arguments for the freedom of the will. In particular, we focus on the nature of the good will and argue that both Augustine and Aristotle are right to emphasize virtue as the end of human action. It is self-evident that it is not possible to speak about the will without also speaking about freedom. The conception of human beings as merely physical beings leads to the disappearance of the will, since human action is theoretically explicable in terms of psychological drives, desires, and beliefs, all of which are reducible to physico-chemical activities in the brain. Classically, we have three competing theories of the individual will: (i) compatibilism, (ii) incompatibilism, and (iii) determinism.¹ It is not our intention to adjudicate among these theories. We will assume that human beings possess free will and that this is compatible with determinism. The bulk of what we have to say will address the question of whether the will remains free in the face of the possibility of determinism.

There are two parts to this paper. In the first part, following Aristotle, we shall consider the relationship between beliefs, desires, and motivations that prompts us to act. Aristotle does not develop a theory of the will as such; nevertheless, providing an account of what moves us to act. He argues that human beings not only act consciously but also deliberate over their actions. In the second part, we shall consider the connection between the good will and inordinate desires, where we take the willful pursuit of the satisfaction of lust to be a vice in which an individual stubbornly insists on getting his or her own way. Crucially, we shall argue that the formation of a good will of the kind that Kant speaks of can only take place if we conform our wills to what is ultimately good, which Augustine recognizes as God. This means conforming our wills not to our passions and emotions, which express our appetites and desires, and which we might fleetingly regard as good, but to what is ultimately good. This involves recognizing our finiteness and limited understanding of the universe in which we live, and it demands humility. There are, as even Sartre recognizes, constraints on what we can will to be. It also imposes constraints on what we as a collective can do. Lévinas (1992) and Ricoeur (1998) argue that we cannot be ourselves without the other, and this means that, as Kant puts it, an imperative is to build the kingdom of ends (Kant [1785] 1997: 45–46). It is not enough to merely pursue the satisfaction of our individual desires. A critical element in this argument is the recognition of our agency in exercising our will through the choices we make. We are responsible for what we choose to do because we do not act from necessity, as Augustine argues. More significantly, as both Aristotle and Augustine argue, if we want to be happy, we must conform our will to the good will. Our wills are free, but the downside of this is that it enables us to choose what is morally wrong, and the bad will, as Augustine emphasizes, leads to unhappiness. Conforming our wills to the good will,

¹ Assuming that the act of will is a mental event in the mind, briefly, the compatibilist holds that human beings have free will and that this is compatible with determinism, that is, with the proposition that every physical event has an antecedent cause. Thus, mental events are compatible with physical events. The incompatibilist holds that the concept of free will is not compatible with determinism, so mental events are not compatible with physical events. The determinist holds that there is no free will, since every event is caused and there are no non-physical events, that is, mental events are reducible physical events. For an introduction to these theories, see: Beebe 2013: 1–23; Balaguer 2014: 11–33).

however, is not as easy or as simple as it sounds, despite Augustine making it seem like it is.

Aristotle on What Motivates Action

One of the first intimations of the will comes in Plato's dialogue *Phaedo*, where Socrates says,

... that the Athenians decided that it was best to condemn me, and therefore I have decided that it was best for me to sit here and that it is right for me to stay and undergo whatever penalty they order. For, by the Dog, I fancy these bones and sinews of mine would have been in Megara or Boeotia long ago, carried thither by an opinion of what was best, if I did not think it was better and nobler to endure any penalty the city may inflict rather than to escape and run away. But it is most absurd to call things of that sort causes. If anyone were to say that I could not have done what I thought proper if I had not bones and sinews and other things that I have, he would be right. But to say that those things are the cause of my doing what I do, and that I act with intelligence but not from the choice of what is best, would be an extremely careless way of talking. (Plato, *Phaedo*: 99A)

In this passage, it is clear that Socrates regards the idea that he is not choosing a course of action for himself as foolish and that, though it is the Athenian court that has condemned him to death, nevertheless, it is his choice to suffer death rather than give up his beliefs and principles. Socrates shows in a rather dramatic way that his choices are not caused by physical movements of his body, nor are they, in this case, coerced by the Athenian court. Socrates is motivated by his principles and his conviction that giving in to the demands of the Athenian court would be tantamount to admitting his guilt. This he refuses to do. What is salient is that his motivation is not driven by his desire to preserve his physical life, but a commitment to ideals which are not physical, but nevertheless have the effect of keeping Socrates where he is—in prison awaiting execution. His action is freely chosen and is an expression of his will. Moreover, Socrates implies that his will is not something located in his body. Otherwise, his bones and sinews would have carried him out of prison. Beliefs and motivations guide the choice of action, but it is through the will that the action is carried out. In what follows, we shall investigate the connections between beliefs, desires, motivations, the extent of our freedom to choose and to cast light on the nature of the will.

The connections between beliefs, desires, motivations, and choices are taken up by Aristotle in various places. In Book III of *De Anima* Aristotle considers the question of how animals—and human beings—are able to move of their own accord. In conscious beings, this seems to be initiated by the beings themselves in response to various stimuli. The discussion concerns what motivates us to act and demonstrates the significance of desire as a motivation for action. Desire, however, has its origin in not just the appetite, which has its origins in the body, but also in the intellect. Although Aristotle does not mention the will, it is alluded to in his comment that we do not always follow our desires, echoing Socrates.

Aristotle says, in *De Anima*, that the soul is divided by two distinct features, (i) motion with respect to place and (ii) thinking and understanding (Aristotle, *De Anima*: [427a20]).¹ In the passage that follows, Aristotle remarks that some of the ancients regarded thinking and understanding as similar to perception, as they also believed it was a bodily process. This, however, could not be correct, since it could not account for deception. Aristotle had previously argued that perception involves the recognition of like by like, that is, the organ of sight is the kind of organ that enables seeing but is unable to be used to hear (*De Anima*: Book I.2 and I.5). Like cannot perceive what is unlike, we cannot use our eyes to hear or our ears to see. Similarly, thinking is recognition of like by like. Aristotle means that thinking involves thoughts, and that part of the soul which deals with thinking is the intellect. However, in thinking, it is possible to be wrong, since our thought processes can make mistakes², and this would mean the apprehension of what is unlike. Deception is what is unlike, hence it would involve the recognition of what is unlike by what is like. Understanding—thinking—is not like perception. It is possible to think things through falsely. (*De Anima*: [427b10]). The intellect or the mind, by which we are able to think, is not bodily, but is something in potential until thinking is occurring (*De Anima*: [429a20–429a30]).

Later in *De Anima*, Aristotle raises the question of whether there are more parts of the soul besides perception and thought, since the ability to move also seems to be something that the soul can do. He recalls the tripartite soul of Plato's, noting that there is the reasoning part, the spirited, and the appetitive (*De Anima*: [432a10–432a30]). He observes that desiring seems to be in both *logos* and in potency to be different from the rest of the soul (*De Anima*: [432b10]). By this, he means that desire in the appetitive part of the soul is different from desire in the reasoning and spirited part of the soul. In discussing what moves us, Aristotle says that when we consider what actually initiates movement it is not desire, since those who have command of themselves despite craving and desiring, don't do the things that satisfy their desire, but follow what the intellect requires (*De Anima*: [433a1–433a10]). This accords with the observation that desiring in the intellect is different from desire in the appetitive soul. He concedes that both desire and the intellect are causes of movement. All desire is for the sake of something, says Aristotle, and the starting point for the practical intellect is the object of that desire, and the end of deliberation by the practical intellect is the beginning of action. Thinking causes movement because it begins with movement. Similarly, when imagination causes movement, it involves desire (*De Anima*: [433a11–433a20]). Aristotle concludes that what causes movement is desire (*De Anima*: [433a30]). This, however, is a necessary condition and, given his previous remarks, it is not a sufficient condition since we don't always do things to satisfy our desire. This raises the question of what else is required for us to act.

¹ Note that throughout, references to the classical texts of Aristotle Bekker numbers are used or where more easily found, the Book and chapter. This is because the relevant references can then be found in any edition of the works of Aristotle cited.

² Though Aristotle does not discuss these, there are many ways in which our thought processes can go wrong. For example, we can be confused about the meaning of a word, or we make errors in our reasoning and reach false conclusions. As a result, we don't understand something and are thereby deceived.

In discussing the general movement of animals, Aristotle says that the living creature is moved by intellect, imagination, purpose, wish, and appetite, but adds that these are reducible to thought and desire (*De Motu Animalium*: [700b4701a5]). The discussion centers largely on the causes of bodily movement, more generally how animals move, including human beings, rather than on questions about human freedom to choose to act. Aristotle observes that thought is sometimes followed by action, and sometimes not, and proposes that this is due to the endpoint of reasoning, which suggests a process of deliberation. For example, he says that if we think everyone ought to walk and that this applies to ourselves, then the conclusion is that we walk. He notes, however, that human beings often leave out the second step and proceed directly to action. Thus, if I want a drink, our sense perception identifies the drink, and we drink.¹ The same will apply to animals, a dog does not deliberate before eating a steak placed in front of him. No deliberation takes place, and hence, only desire seems to be involved. Desire, he says, is the last cause of movement. This means that in some of our movements, we are mostly moved by desire and appetite, without much thought. This is even more the case for animals. The movement of animals, he suggests, may be compared with those of automated puppets. This means he thinks that animals are caused to act as they do in a deterministic fashion. Though animals can act voluntarily, this is a kind of mechanical voluntariness that is fixed by nature. Human beings also seem to some extent behave in a mechanical kind of fashion. Freedom seems to be quite attenuated, and the will seems absent.

Aristotle analyses the distinctions between involuntary, voluntary, and non-voluntary actions in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, bringing us closer to an account of free will. These distinctions are important, since we do not blame or praise someone for their actions if they have been compelled. Virtue is lauded if it consistently involves actions that are freely and deliberately chosen. Raised in relation to the motion of animal bodies, voluntariness is restricted to the range of movements that could be carried out by a particular kind of animal. It is voluntary only to the extent that it is part of an animal's repertoire. Actions described as virtues (or vices) are not merely reactions to stimuli but are voluntary in a different sense. Aristotle argues that actions may be regarded as *involuntary* when they are performed under compulsion or through ignorance. Aristotle, however, puts conditions on this. He says that we regard an action as being compelled (or compulsory) when it has an external origin of such a kind that the agent or patient contributes nothing to it. For example, being blown somewhere by a strong wind. Aristotle considers actions that are forced on individuals as being involuntary, for instance, something done out of fear is compelled, not chosen by the individual. A tyrant who has a person's family in her power and threatens them with prison if he does not do as the tyrant wants him to, for example, is a compelled action and not freely chosen (*Nichomachean Ethics*: [1110a5]).

¹ The reasoning here is referred to as Aristotle's practical syllogism, which purports to explain why we sometimes act and why sometimes don't. Its interpretation is deemed controversial, but it allows Aristotle to conclude that at least at one level, it is desire which motivates. (*De Motu Animalium*: [701a33–[701a36])

Other actions may be considered involuntary because of circumstances. Aristotle provides the example of the sailors caught in a terrible storm that threatens to capsize their cargo-laden boat, being forced to throw their cargo overboard in order to prevent the boat from sinking. Such actions are a mixture of voluntariness and involuntariness, since circumstances are such that there is no option but to ditch the cargo. The sailors, in one sense, voluntarily throw the cargo overboard, but in another sense, they are compelled to throw the cargo overboard, and the action is forced upon them by circumstances. The action is voluntary to the extent that the sailors consented to throw cargo overboard. Aristotle allows that sometimes circumstances are such that we are left with unpalatable choices but are nevertheless forced to choose (*Nicomachean Ethics*: [1110a15–1110b20]). The recent pandemic, for example, forced vaccination on individuals, even though, given the possible side effects, they may have preferred not to be vaccinated. There was a similar level of compulsion.

We see that an action is *voluntary* if the person has the choice of determining whether to proceed with the action or not. Aristotle argues that although in cases in which there is compulsion the action might be classed as involuntary, if there is some contribution, via decision-making perhaps, then the action is not strictly involuntary. Actions are *strictly* involuntary when the cause of the action is external, and the agent contributes nothing to it. Aristotle dismisses the argument that most people would do acts which are pleasurable and so these would have to be compelled, whereas no one acts to cause themselves pain. He dismisses the argument because it would make all acts compulsory, and it would be open for the actors to blame external factors, not themselves. Nevertheless, there is an important point here about what motivates human beings to act, and pleasure is not merely appetitive, such as assuaging bodily desires of various types, but also includes internal pleasures, such as the enjoyment of intellectual pursuits or the satisfaction of virtuous actions.

Aristotle also provides a distinction between *non-voluntary* and *involuntary* acts. Any act that is done through ignorance is non-voluntary, but it is involuntary only when it causes the agent subsequent pain and repentance. An important aspect of actions is consciousness of the action that is being performed. A non-voluntary action, therefore, is one in which persons are unaware that they are performing the action, for instance, they could be unconsciously scratching their ears. It becomes an involuntary action when it causes agents subsequent pain, and they regret that they had performed the action, that is, they become suddenly aware of what they are doing. For example, if a person becomes aware that in scratching her ear she has drawn blood, she would regret the action, which is to say, she would wish she had not done it. It is involuntary because it is not willed, though Aristotle does not use this term. On the other hand, the person who does not regret the act done through lack of awareness, nevertheless has not acted voluntarily, but neither, says Aristotle, is it clear that he has acted involuntarily, since the action is not regretted. Aristotle thinks it is best to give such a person his own label, that of non-voluntary action. Although Aristotle does not explicitly state this, we can infer that non-voluntary actions are those that are not willed, since the agent is completely unaware of the action. If the person becomes aware of the act done non-voluntarily (a non-conscious

act) and assents to the action, then Aristotle rightly says that it cannot be classed as a voluntary action (*Nichomachean Ethics*: [1110b1–1111a1]).

There is another class of non-voluntary actions, which are not under the control of the agent. For instance, if we suddenly become aware that our eye is twitching, this is a non-voluntary action, and we may not really care that it is, so neither regret nor assent to it, but it is still a type of non-voluntary action, since we could possibly rub our eye to stop it twitching. It is doubtful, however, whether this is an action at all, since it seems to be closer to a bodily movement. Winking, as a kind of eye movement, like a twitch, is something we could choose to do. Aristotle's focus is a consideration of differences among the kinds of actions which are able to be freely chosen, so twitchings and unconscious head and hand movements as someone speaks are either non-voluntary or bodily movements that cannot ever be actions since there is no possibility of choosing them. Though he does not use the language of will, the kinds of actions he is talking about are those which we would normally consider the agent could will. Thus, we could will to scratch our ears, but also absent-mindedly do so, in which case it is non-voluntary if we never become aware of what we are doing so that we neither assent nor dissent from the action. In the involuntary case, we become aware of the absent-minded action, and wish we had not done it, so it is involuntary, because we never meant to do it.

A further important distinction that Aristotle draws is a difference between a person who acts *through* ignorance and one who acts *in* ignorance. A person acts *in* ignorance when his actions are the result of rage or drunkenness—the person does not act knowingly. The actions are those resulting from the condition in which the person finds himself. Aristotle observes that every bad person is ignorant of what he or she ought to do and refrain from doing, and it is generally just this sort of fault that makes people unjust and bad. What Aristotle means here is that an act is culpable when the person chooses to be wicked through deliberate ignoring of how to act well or ignorance of what is universally seen as good. On the other hand, if persons are led through ignorance of particular circumstances and objects of the act (the means) to act, they act involuntarily and so are subject to our pity or pardon (*Nichomachean Ethics*: [1110b7–1110b31]). Aristotle concludes that *voluntary acts* are those in which the originating cause lies in agents themselves, they are conscious of what they are doing, and have chosen the particular act. These distinctions that Aristotle provides enable us to see the variety of human actions and crucially prepare the ground for a theory of the will.

Choice is not merely concerned with what is pleasurable and painful, nor with acts due to temper, desires or wishes. We may wish for immortality, for example, but we cannot choose it. We wish to be happy, but we cannot choose to be, as it is not entirely in our hands. Aristotle thinks that if we want to be happy, we should pursue a virtuous life. Augustine, as we shall see below, agrees, saying that happiness is the result of the good will and that it is also dependent on the pursuit of virtue. Choice is not concerned with belief or opinion, either, since we cannot choose what is good or evil. Our characters are determined by the acts we choose, not our beliefs or opinions about them (*Eudemian Ethics*: [1226a1–1226a5]). Some people may be good at forming the right belief (about

what is good or bad) but not so good at choosing to do what is right. Aristotle says that choice implies a rational principle, that is, reason—it involves deliberation.

Deliberation, Aristotle says, must be about practical measures which are within our grasp—it is not much good deliberating about things over which we have no power. For example, we may wish for an end to war and for peace throughout the world but no matter how much we deliberate about how it is to be accomplished, there is little or no likelihood that we would be able to achieve this. In relation to the things which are within our power to do, deliberation is required in choosing to act in a particular way. Deliberation is not about the end of an action, since this is set first, but deliberation is required in order to determine the means to attain the chosen end. Aristotle says that we deliberate not about ends but about means. A physician does not deliberate about whether she will cure her patient; rather, she will deliberate about the means that she will use to cure. Deliberation is needed, moreover, in those cases where there is more than one means for accomplishing the end which has been chosen (*Nicomachean Ethics*: [1112b5–1112b26]). The object of choice can be defined as something within our power at which we aim after deliberation, so choice will be a deliberate strong desire of things which lie in our power.

Aristotle proposes that actions, which we initiate ourselves, whether they are good or bad, are voluntary. This, he says, is borne out by rewards for just actions and punishments for wrong or evil actions. Aristotle slates responsibility fully to the person in the performance of actions, arguing that ignorance is no excuse, especially where this is due to negligence. He also considers whether a person who acts unjustly or licentiously can stop himself and says that it is hard for such a person to cease behaving in the way that he or she does, but this does not make his or her behavior involuntary; it is still voluntary. Aristotle comments that a stone once thrown cannot be got back again, even if one wishes to retrieve it. We are still held responsible for throwing it.

In relation to actions which are chosen, Aristotle considers whether character plays a role in the choice of actions. It seems a truism that everyone aims at what appears to him or her to be good and since what appears good may depend on character, it may not be good at all. This concurs with Schopenhauer's argument in his discussion of free will, which suggests that character plays a significant role in determining the actions a person will choose.¹ Aristotle wonders how much influence a person's character will have on the choices he or she makes. For instance, the evil person would choose what appears good to him or her, but this would not be so and would lead to greater wickedness. Someone with a disposition to cruelty, for instance, will choose to be cruel because he derives satisfaction from seeing another's suffering. If weakness of character is innate, then it is salient to ask whether the person is responsible for choosing to do what is evil. Aristotle says that the person is at least partially responsible, since the means chosen are entirely the responsibility of the individual. Our actions, whether for good or evil, are voluntary, even though a good person might be disposed to act in a good way. That is, there is no

¹ Schopenhauer says that the will makes up the character of the individual. This is a much stronger claim than that advanced by Aristotle (Schopenhauer [1839] 2005: 72).

determinism here. A good person is disposed to act in a good way, but the choice of actions is voluntary and up to the individual (*Nichomachean Ethics*: [1114b1–1114b15]).

The wrongdoer might propose that the disposition to do good is a gift of nature, that is, a person may argue that he is not responsible for not knowing what is good, since he does not have this disposition. Aristotle argues that, on the contrary, this cannot excuse the wrongdoer, for otherwise he or she could never be condemned for choosing evil actions. It would also undermine the view that we are the originators of our actions, for it would imply that we would choose only according to our dispositions, and so, to that extent, we would not be free to act. Aristotle argues that our dispositions may not be voluntary, but our actions, which are what count, are. It remains within our power to choose to exercise our dispositions one way or another. Ignorance is no excuse either, since we punish someone who gets drunk and commits some blameworthy act. This is because the act of getting drunk is under our control, even if we have a disposition towards drunkenness (*Nichomachean Ethics*: [1114b20–1115a5]). Whatever the disposition we might have that is innate, since moral character is something gained through habit and custom, we are responsible for our actions (*Eudemian Ethics*: [1220a38–1220b1]).

Though Aristotle does not develop an account of the will, his account of human action assumes that human action is under the control of the individual person. Human beings are not merely animals that react to their environment and so are made to move by their bodies, but can choose whether to act or refrain from acting. Choice involves deliberating over the means of achieving the ends that we have chosen. Aristotle's understanding of human action is teleological: it is done for reasons and involves the use of reason to choose the means. The power to choose is located in the intellect. Though desire is a motivating factor in the choices that human beings make, both Aristotle and, as we shall see, Augustine have very clear conceptions of what good choices are. These will involve doing what is virtuous, since this is what leads to happiness. We turn now to Augustine's account of the will.

Augustine on Free Will

The distinction between the good person and the wicked person is, according to Aristotle, that the former acts from choice, while the latter is a slave to his passions (*Nichomachean Ethics*: [1111b1–1111b15]).¹ Another way of framing the distinction is proposed by Augustine, who takes up the question of the extent of the freedom of the will in *De Libero Arbitrio Voluntatis* (*The Free Choice of the Will*). Augustine says that the difference between evil people and good people is that good people pursue what is good by turning their love away from things that cannot be possessed without the risk of losing them. Evil

¹ Hume says that reason is the slave of the passions. Hume argues that in considering what are motives for the will to act, *reason* is never enough and furthermore, that *passion* is always more important. He says: "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." This, however, does not just apply to the wicked person, as it does for Aristotle. Hume is aware that his view of the will and the role of reason in motivating action is at odds with most accounts of the will to his time (Hume [1740] 2007: 265–266).

people, on the other hand, try to remove hindrances so that they may securely attach themselves to things to be enjoyed. Lust is the love of things one can lose against one's will (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.4.10.30–1.4.10.31]).¹ Wickedness on Augustine's account is not just a matter of being a slave to one's passions, since that allows for diminished responsibility. Augustine does not allow the evil-doer to evade responsibility.

What Augustine means by saying that the wicked person loves those things which cannot be possessed without the risk of losing them is not obvious, as there are many things which we love that we possess that can be lost.² The difference between the good person and the wicked person is that the latter is prepared to remove hindrances to the achievement of his or her aims through the use of force. Augustine uses the example of a slave who wants to live without fear of his master. The desire to live free from fear is not unreasonable and not evil in itself, the means chosen, such as killing his master, however, are evil. The slave who kills his master to be free from fear will quickly lose what he has gained, since he will be forced to live the life of a fugitive, fearing the loss of the freedom he has gained, or alternatively, will be convicted and condemned to imprisonment. In both cases, his freedom from fear of his master is replaced by fear of the consequences of his actions that themselves involve a loss of the very freedom he has committed murder to gain. The slave is characterized by Augustine as possessing an inordinate lust or overwhelming desire for things which can be lost against our will. A good person, on the other hand, would turn away from pursuing freedom from fear, because it cannot be possessed without killing the master, and while the desire to be free from fear is not evil in itself, the means to achieve the desired end are not only evil but also a succumbing to an overwhelming lust in which the slave acts like a wild beast and not a human being. Persons, who are overwhelmed by lust, cannot act freely. Augustine follows a Platonic account in which he proposes that human beings have reason, which enables them to control their irrational impulses. Reason accords with the eternal law (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.7.17.59–1.7.17.60]). The fool is someone in whom the mind does not have full power and the wise are those who have subjugated their lusts to the mind (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.9.19.67 and 1.10.20.71]).

Augustine directs us towards those things which are not ephemeral, but are, nevertheless, things of the spirit. This is why the good turn their love away from things which cannot be possessed without the risk of losing them to things which can be more permanently possessed. Love, it follows, is directed towards those things which can be possessed and not lost. Virtue can be possessed, and unless one ceases to practice virtue, it cannot be lost, as no one can take it away. Inordinate desire or lust is directed towards what can be possessed only temporarily, since sooner or later we will die, even if we

¹ Note that referencing of *De Libero Arbitrio* is given as Book number, chapter, paragraph and line for ease of finding the reference across different editions, including the edition being used here.

² There are several ways in which we can understand this idea of losing things we love. We lose people we love, but we do not possess them, we lose precious possessions, like photographs of our loved ones through a fire for instance, but we do not love them in the way we love persons. Augustine does not mean the kind of love we have for others, since they can never be possessions, rather, by love he seems to mean an inordinate and even unhealthy desire of worldly things, such as fame and fortune, which can be possessed, but can also be lost.

manage to keep possession of what we have.¹ Later, in a graphic illustration, Augustine in reflecting on whether it is just to kill someone who is about to rape another person, suggests that chastity cannot be lost in such a situation, since it is in the mind and spirit. Moreover, in this instance Augustine accepts that the rapist can be killed to prevent the rape, even if the person who kills the rapist has human blood on her hands. The person being attacked is justified in protecting her virtue. Augustine observes that the law is far from perfect and while it can and should punish misdeeds, there will be some evil deeds that only divine providence will be able to punish (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.5.32.41]).² A conscious choice and act of will is required to turn towards virtue, as well as to turn towards vice. We are free to do either.

Augustine holds that human beings are responsible for the choices that they make. Nothing makes the mind a devotee of desire but its own will and choice. Those who are slaves to their desires are unable to escape from their grip. This seems to Augustine to be a significant punishment. He says:

Lust dominates the mind and drags it back and forth, despoiled of the richness of virtue, poor and needy; at one moment taking falsehoods for truths and even making a practice of defending them, at another rejecting what it had previously accepted and nonetheless rushing to other falsehoods; now withholding its assent and often in dread of clear lines of argument; now despairing of the whole enterprise of finding the truth, lingering deep within the shadows of foolishness; now struggling towards the light of understanding but again falling back from it due to exhaustion. All the while, that reign of desires savagely tyrannizes and batters a person's whole life and mind with storms raging in all directions. On this side fear, on that desire; on this side anxiety, on that empty spurious enjoyment; on this side torment over the loss of something loved, on that ardour to acquire something not possessed; on this side sorrows for an injury received, on that the burning desire to redress it. Whichever way one turns, greed can pinch, extravagance squander, ambition enslave, pride puff up, envy twist, laziness overcome, stubbornness provoke, submissiveness oppress—these and countless others throng the realm of lust, having the run of it. (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.11.22.78])

This passage effectively describes the modern world, which is consumed by the satisfaction of various lusts and desires. Earlier, Augustine had asked why adultery was considered evil, and the reply by Evodius was that he would not tolerate someone wanting to commit adultery with his wife, and so regards it as evil. Augustine then asked whether someone who extolled the pleasures of adultery and whose desires were so great that he would be willing to offer his wife to another so that he could have sexual relations

¹ Arguably, death results in the loss of virtue too, Augustine holds that there is a life after death in which the virtuous are admitted to eternal life with God. Even without the promise of eternal happiness with God, the practice of virtue nevertheless is worth pursuing in the present life since it leads to a happier life. Augustine veers towards Stoicism here, since someone who is unconcerned with material possessions, fame, power or her own needs will remain happy even if she loses these. We should not attach ourselves to the impermanent.

² Although Augustine does not condemn someone who kills the rapist, he observes that human law cannot redress every wrong, since sometimes wrong-doers evade justice, but ultimately it is divine providence which provides justice.

with his wife in return was committing an evil. This sounds very like Kant's Categorical Imperative¹ since the first person is prepared to will that the rule—that adultery with another man's wife is permissible, as well as with his own—become a universal law. Augustine concludes that another argument is required to demonstrate that adultery is evil (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.3.5.14–1.3.8.21]). He adds that it cannot be because human law condemns adultery, since throughout history people have been condemned for doing what was right, such as Christians, who once were condemned for their beliefs by the law, and so it is not merely a matter of legislation which determines whether something is evil (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.3.7.18–1.3.7.19]). What he refers to is the existence of a universal moral law. Ironically, in some countries, including the West, Christian beliefs are once more being condemned through legislation. Generally, such legislation is couched in terms of protecting rights, but more frequently are used to prevent people for expressing contrary views about such matters as transgenderism, abortion and euthanasia.² The satisfaction of inordinate desires has become enshrined in statutes.

Being in the grip of inordinate desires, however, leaves human beings enslaved, since they cannot choose to be other than what their lusts dictate. Butler's notion of performativity makes a virtue out of the satisfaction of our desires, but leaves us with a fractured sense of identity that is dependent on our shifting desires (Butler 1990). In contrast to defining oneself through the satisfaction of desires, Augustine defines the good will as one that seeks to live rightly and honorably, and to attain the highest wisdom. The undesirable will is characterized in relation to goods such as wealth, power, and fame, which Augustine sees as fleeting, unlike the good will, which enables the individual to control herself. Holding fast to things which can be easily lost indicates the absence of the good will. The good will is formed through the virtues and Augustine discusses the cardinal virtues: bravery (courage), moderateness (temperance), justice and prudence. These are what the person with the good will cherishes and cannot be lost in the way that wealth, power, and fame can be (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.13.27.89–1.13.28.94]). Augustine argues that it is by our own will that we either have a happy or a miserable life, because having a good will is sufficient for a person to be happy with his or her life. Though this seems too strong, because sorrow can enter the life of a virtuous person, possession of the virtues provides an individual with the resources to deal with sorrow. Augustine does not say that the virtuous person will not face challenges, but rather that, in contrast to the person who indulges in his or her desires, he or she is better equipped to deal with them.

¹ "I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law" (Kant [1785]/1997: 15).

² There are numerous examples of such legislation. The first, seeks ostensibly to prevent women seeking to access abortion services from being harassed while doing so. This is understandable and not unreasonable; however, it extends now to people silently praying outside abortion clinics, even outside the mandated exclusion zone of 150 meters. See for example, Human Rights Law Centre. (2020). Similarly, no counselling can be given to anyone who might wish to curb or overcome their homosexual desires. It is a criminal offence (see Vic.gov.au 2023). Adultery, of course, was decriminalized long ago, as have been a variety of other sexual activities between consenting adults. Augustine's point, however, is that the human law does not determine what is morally good or morally evil. It is eternal law that determines what is morally good and which we ought to follow.

We can retain the good will simply by willing, according to Augustine, and this can be contrasted to things of which we have an inordinate desire. We cannot retain other things that we have an inordinate desire for just by willing, since these can be lost. The good will demands only that we will to have it. Augustine says,

The upshot is that anyone who wills to live rightly and honourably, if he wills himself to will this instead of transient goods, acquires so great a possession with such ease that having what he willed is nothing other for him than willing it. (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.13.29.98])

Observation tells us that this is too good to be true. If the good will leads to happiness and no one wants to be unhappy, then if it were so easy, no one would be unhappy. This is obviously not so.

Augustine acknowledges that this is a common observation. If it is so transparently obvious and easy to will to have a good will, then we need to ask ourselves why it is that most people fail. Augustine does not have much sympathy for those who fall by the wayside, since he thinks that people deserve what they get. One reason for this is that he thinks that people are responsible for their freely willed actions, something neo-Marxist ideologies deny and blame on oppressors, victimizers, and white privilege. No one wills to be unhappy, however. The difference is that those who are happy are happy not simply because they have willed to be happy, since everyone does that, but rather because they have willed to live rightly. Living rightly is a condition of living a happy life, and evil people are not willing to live rightly. As a result, Augustine says that they will neither be worthy of a happy life nor attain it (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.14.30.101]). Augustine asserts that the happy life is a matter of willing to have a good will, and moreover, this is attainable, even if most people fail in having the good will. Of course, it is not quite as simple as that, otherwise no one would fail, and willing to have a good will demands far greater effort than Augustine acknowledges.

The main reason that human beings fail to live happily is that they are seduced by their desires in the belief that achieving these will bring them happiness. Amongst these are the usual desires for wealth, beauty, success, fame, and power, but include a variety of other desires, the pursuit of which becomes an obsession. The good will, in contrast, is good because it invites the will to live according to the eternal law, that is, according to Divine law.¹ Those who pursue their own desires without restraint are no longer in control of themselves, and, argues Augustine, become entangled in shameful lusts and evil habits from which escape becomes very difficult (*Contra Faustum*: Book XXII.28–29). It also becomes clear that those who are trapped by their desires are no longer capable of exercising free will, let alone willing the good will. No one wills to be unhappy, but remarks Augustine, it is a condition of choosing the will that they have chosen that even against their will people will be unhappy (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.14.30.102]).

¹ Augustine says that eternal law is the divine order or will of God. See *Contra Faustum*, Book XXII, Section 27. Later in *Libero Arbitrio* Augustine argues that not only do we know that wisdom exists but also that we should prefer what is incorruptible to what is corruptible, and it should be obvious to us that the virtues are true and unchangeable. Since it should be apparent to us what is involved in a good will, there is no one else to blame but ourselves if we find ourselves unhappy. (*Libero Arbitrio*: [2.10.28.110--2.11.30.120]).

The things which most people desire are not in themselves things we should not desire. Some of these things will be:

- (1) care of our bodies, desiring good health, being concerned about our appearance, having keen senses, strength and fitness, having good skills and capacities;
- (2) freedom, which Augustine thinks is only genuine for those who adhere to the eternal law, but for many, it means freedom from the demands of employers and others who prevent us from doing what we want;
- (3) kinship of parents, siblings, relatives, a spouse, children, friendships of neighbors, friends, and colleagues;
- (4) the state, providing a regulatory political framework for our lives as citizens;
- (5) honors, praise, and respect;
- (6) possession of property which we can enjoy, own and give away if we want to (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.15.32.109–1.15.32.110]).

Desiring these things is not evil, since these are good things to desire and are important for our happiness. They are important human goods, the desiring of which accords with the eternal law of which Augustine speaks, and hence are what the good will wills to have. The fault is not in the things that are desired; rather, the fault is in those who use them in an evil way. Augustine says that we do not censure gold and silver because greedy people want to hoard it, nor blame attractive women for being the targets of sexual predators (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [1.16.33.113]).

Augustine concludes that what is evil is attaching ourselves to the goods that we desire. By this, he means that we become fixated on these goods and love them in themselves rather than as what supports us as human beings. For example, in caring for our bodies, we can become narcissistic and obsessed with our appearance to the extent that we harm ourselves through excessive dieting or fitness training. We can also harm our relationships with others, since we are unhealthily self-absorbed. The good of looking after our health becomes a barrier to our relationships with others. Similarly, an obsessive desire for freedom can lead to an inability to hold down a job, because persons cannot accept being directed to do something by employers. A desire for friendship or an intimate relationship with someone can also lead to problems if the desire is not reciprocated. In all these kinds of examples, the common denominator is a desire that is inwardly focused on the individual. The good desired becomes desired for the wrong reasons, not enhancing our overall fulfillment as human beings, but twisting it in such a way that it leads instead to diminution of ourselves as human beings. We become less human as our choices are no longer willed because they align with the eternal law that regulates our good (and hence is what the good will aligns with), but instead are aligned with an overwhelming desire, which has escaped the control of the will. Animals do not deliberate about their choices but act instinctively. They do not control their actions through an act of will, since we do not hold them responsible for their actions. A dog that steals a bone

is only doing what his nature makes him do. A human being who has degraded himself so that he is no longer in control of his actions has diminished himself as a human being. It is this, which is to be regarded as the ultimate evil and tragic for the individual person,¹ since that person has lost his dignity. Ultimately, each person is responsible for what he or she decides to do, and this is expressed through the action of the will. The conscious mind in the fully functioning human being remains in control, and what is right will be done through the operation of the good will.

That human beings become seduced by inordinate desires does not explain how it is that human beings will to indulge in their base desires, because this, as has been argued, turns out to be evil because it harms them and makes them unhappy. There are two ways in which this is evil:

- (i) Once in the grip of vice, it is very difficult for persons to extricate themselves and to turn to virtue. They lose their free will, at least in relation to the vice, since they cannot choose otherwise. Someone who is a drug addict, an alcoholic, or addicted to pornography has lost the ability to choose otherwise.
- (ii) They can harm others through their addictions. The drug addict and alcoholic might steal, for instance, to support their habits, and the pornography addict might develop an inability to form normal relationships with others.

No one wants to be unhappy, yet many still make wrong choices. Still to be explained is how wrong choices are possible if it is obvious that willing to be virtuous is what leads to happiness. There is also the question of those who enjoy their vices and do not want to turn to virtue. Some of these would claim to be happy. Augustine has argued that vice leads to unhappiness, but there can be no free will unless there is the possibility of freely choosing. One aspect of this is that despite deliberation, we choose to do what is evil, because it appears to be good. Another is that the possibility of choosing evil has to be a real choice. We can knowingly choose to do what is wrong.

Our choices are not always between evils or goods, nor are we gripped by great lusts but by weaknesses that lead us astray. The bulk of humanity is neither saintly nor wicked but characterized by petty vices and mediocre virtue. In short, we fall somewhere in between the virtuous person and the vicious person. Aristotle describes four types of human beings:

- (i) the *phronimos* (φρόνιμος), the person of perfect virtue, who delights in doing what is right;
- (ii) the continent (ἐγκρατής) person, who does what is right, but struggles to do so, and has not as yet attained perfect virtue;

¹ It goes without saying that the victims of evil persons are also affected by their actions. A murder victim suffers death and this a great evil, but the family of the victim will suffer greatly also. A drug addict who steals from his family does them great wrong, even as he becomes entangled in his own evil habits and begins to lose his dignity as a human being.

- (iii) the incontinent (ἀκρατής) person, who struggles to do what is right, failing often, but sometimes doing what is virtuous; and
- (iv) the beast, the self-indulgent person who is given over to vice and never does what is right.¹

Since everyone pursues what they see as leading to a happy life and everyone has the ability to reason, we would expect that everyone would make good choices, but it is evident that not everyone chooses wisely. The worse a person's situation is due to her poor choices, the less wise we deem her to be. Wisdom, however, is a rare commodity, and we are often wise only in hindsight.

There are several questions here that we will not pursue, which are nevertheless important to consider, such as the nature of wisdom, of truth, and their ultimate source. Augustine assumes that there is only one form of truth and only one form of wisdom, and this is because there are some things on which we will agree, implying that there are some universal values and concepts. Some of the things on which we agree are: (1) we should live justly; (2) what is lesser should be subordinate to what is better; (3) equals should be compared to equals; (4) to each his own (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [2.10.28.113]). Once we begin interpreting each of these universal values, however, agreement might not be so easily found. Augustine's further development of his argument leads him to assert that even where we do not agree, our impulse is to seek the truth. Otherwise, there is no point in discussing anything. Ultimately, the pursuit of truth leads to truth itself and wisdom itself, which is God. Augustine's argument, which is Platonic, though bolstered by his Christian faith, establishes that there is a transcendent and eternal wisdom that is superior to our minds. It is this unchangeable good which we should pursue. Indeed, it is this idea that runs through both Aristotle and Augustine in the discussion of the operation of the will.

Augustine raises the question of where the impulse to turn away from the unchangeable good to what is changeable comes from. It cannot come from God. In the modern world, which no longer believes in God, the idea of the absolute or of what is unchangeable is absent, and everything is changeable and revisable according to taste. Hence, the very idea of transcendent wisdom and an eternal law is dismissed. Of course, Augustine's world was not a Christian world either, so drawing on neo-Platonic sources, he argues for the existence of what is unchangeable, and which serves to orient us to the good and to will to have a good will. If we remove what is unchangeable from consideration as the source of our impulses to turn to what is changeable, then it either comes directly from ourselves or from others who either coerce us or influence us. In the latter case, if it is coercion, it does not involve the exercise of our free will. If it is influence, then it remains an act of our free will. Augustine describes free will as a movement of the mind (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [3.1.1.2 – 3.1.1.3]). If so, then the will is a natural action of the mind. If there is no God, then there is nothing unchangeable, nor an eternal law, and hence our choices are always going to be of what is changeable. If choosing changeable goods is natural because it is a natural and necessary movement of the mind,

¹ There is a very detailed discussion of the continent person and the incontinent person in *Eudemian Ethics* (*Eudemian Ethics*: [1145b10-1238b10]).

it needs to be explained how this can be evil. Thus, if we choose, for instance, to indulge our lusts, then this is perfectly natural and reasonable if the will is merely a natural movement of the mind. Though we might regard a natural movement of the mind as morally neutral, some choices will nevertheless be considered morally wrong and hence evil. The problem will be how to explain how some desires are morally wrong. In the absence of an eternal law, what is evil is conventional at best and subjective at worst.¹ Worse still, if our willed actions are merely natural movements of the mind, there is nothing free about free will since we are compelled by necessity to do certain things.

Augustine rejects the idea that we do not act by our will but by necessity. The argument from God's foreknowledge brings out why, when we will to do something, we do not act from necessity. The argument from God's foreknowledge is an argument against the charge that if God has foreknowledge of what we will then there is no free will because we cannot contradict what God knows. We act by necessity. It follows that if God knows what we will do, then we do not act independently and only have the illusion of freedom. Our act of will is determined, since it is not possible for us to will to act differently from what God has foreseen, we will to do.² The argument is important, since it directly addresses whether we have free will or are fated to act according to what has been pre-ordained and so cannot act otherwise. The inescapable conclusion, if our choices cannot be otherwise, is that we do not have free will.

Suppose we act from necessity. In the usual understanding of determinism, this means that every action can be determined if every antecedent cause of our action can be identified. Thus, if a person deliberates about whether to choose chocolate ice cream or vanilla ice cream, according to determinism, provided all the antecedent causes are known, the choice will necessarily be known. To be able to say that our actions are necessary, it has to be supposed that this is possible to know, at least by some omniscient observer. This is equivalent to God having foreknowledge of our actions.³ There are two possibilities: (i) either every antecedent cause theoretically can be known, or (ii) every antecedent cause cannot be known. If (ii), then human action cannot be determined with any certainty. If (i), it follows that the choice of the will cannot be determined either. The lack of predictability, however, does not allow the conclusion that we have free will, it merely means that we cannot determine what we will to choose with any degree of certainty. It does not allow us to conclude that there is no free will either. We cannot conclude this, since by (ii), every antecedent cause cannot be known. If the antecedent

¹ The absence of the eternal law results in the absence of divine and natural law on which human law is based. Western jurisprudence is based on the Judaeo-Christian natural law tradition. Once human law is no longer based on natural law it is subject to the vicissitudes of changeable public conventions. Some of this is already present in new laws which discriminate against white people. If a person of color vilifies a white person, this is excusable because of their cultural, historical and social context. See for example, what has been dubbed the "Sam Kerr defense," introduced into Antidiscrimination laws in the State of Victoria in Australia (Robbie 2025).

² One response to the foreknowledge argument is to propose that to guarantee our freedom, God limits himself. This is not Augustine's approach (see Lucas 1970: 71–77).

³ From another point of view, God's foreknowledge poses a similar problem to fate. If fate determines our actions, then we do not have free will. Because of this, Cicero in *De Fatu* rejects fate as determining human action (see Cicero 2014).

causes cannot be known, then it is inconclusive whether we have free will or not. This is a form of indeterminism, though a minimalist kind. This leaves us (i) to consider. That is, it is possible to know all the antecedent causes of what the will chooses to do. This would be possible for God or some other omniscient being.¹

Augustine points to the action of a stone falling under the influence of gravity (*Liberio Arbitrio*: [3.1.2.11]). This is a paradigmatic case of causal motion. The stone falls at a particular velocity, and its movement is predictable according to the laws of motion. Its motion is determined. If it is the case that the mind or soul is moved in the same way, then the act of the will is determined. Augustine makes a distinction between the movement of the stone, which he says is natural, while the movement of the mind, the act of will to do something, is voluntary. This is because the stone cannot stop itself from falling, whereas the mind can make the choice not to do something. If the will is not free to move us to act in a particular way, then we cannot be blamed for deciding on evil actions nor praised for good actions. Hence, if we are to have free will, it follows that we have to be able to choose.

Augustine argues that though God foreknows our future wills, it does not follow that we do not will something by our own will (*De Libero Arbitrio*: [3.3.7.28]). There is nothing particularly implausible about this. If we know someone well, we can know with a reasonable degree of certainty what he or she is going to say or do in the event of a particular occurrence. The better we know someone, the more certain we can be that she will make particular choices. This does not mean that the person has not acted out of her free will. If such predictability is available to human beings who are finite beings, it is not a great leap to attribute a more perfect knowledge of us to God, who, after all, made us. Augustine argues suppose that in a year's time, God knows that certain choices we make now will make us happy. Just because God knew that our choices would make us happy does not take away someone's will to be happy at some time when he or she becomes happy. If God knew that our choices would not make us happy in a year's time, he does not intervene to change our choices. Hence, a blameworthy will is not thereby not an individual person's will just because God knows what it is going to be. We are not made unhappy against our will.²

Augustine dismisses the objection that someone who says that if God has foreknowledge of how he will act, then he wills something out of necessity,³ and it is not really his will because the person must will what God has foreseen. This is nonsense, because what God has foreknowledge of is the person's will in the matter and is the will that brings about the action. This is clear in the following:

¹ La Place in his theory of probability postulates the idea of being able to access all events, someone who could this has come to be known as Laplace's demon. This idea comes about because La Place discusses how increasing the number of observations of some event leads to better and better estimations of the probability of an event (La Place [1825]1995).

² An interventionist God who loves us would ensure that we would always make the right choices so that we would be always happy. This would mean, however, that we would not have free will. Since it is evident that human beings are capable of choosing what leads to unhappiness, God is not an interventionist God.

³ Since it is not possible to act against what God knows will happen, otherwise God does not have foreknowledge.

Suppose God is omniscient.

God has foreknowledge that A will will to do p . (Where p is some action and A some person.)

It is certain, because of the causal chain C and A's will, that A will will to do p .

To will to do p is to do p .

If A does not do p then God is not omniscient.

But God is omniscient.

Hence, A does p since God is omniscient.

This is a simple case of *modus ponens*.

Knowing is not the same as causing, however.

God's omniscience is not part of causal chain C.

Assuming C remains the same, if A does not do p then it must be because A did not will to do p .

God would have foreknowledge that A will will not do p in this case also. It cannot be the case that God does not have foreknowledge of the event chosen, otherwise God would not have foreknowledge, but the preservation of God's foreknowledge is not a condition for A doing p .

If this was not the case, we would need to specify on what grounds the person wills when it is not his will. In addition, if we will from necessity, then we do not have the will in our power. This leads to the possibility that we could be made happy against our will. That this does not happen is because the problem is not that we do not will to be happy, but we lack the [will] power to be happy. Augustine argues that we have the power to will, but what we will might not be brought about, but it is not from lack of willing. He adds that when we will, if we lack the will itself, then we do not will. It does not make sense to say that it can happen that when we will, we do not will, since obviously the will is present in those who will. Neither is there anything in our [will]power other than what is present in those who will. Our will would not be a will if it were not in our power [to will]. Since it is in our power, it is free in us (*Liberio Arbitrio*: [3.3.8.31–3.3.5.34]).

Augustine's argument essentially depends on an understanding of will as a power to act. If we act from necessity, then clearly, we do not have a will, since our actions are compelled. The argument gains its plausibility by considering whether we can be made happy against our will. If this were to be so, then we would be happy, assuming a good God who decrees that we should be happy. On the other hand, if God was not good, he could decree that we should be miserable. This does not appear to be the case either. We want to be happy, and will to be happy, but simply willing to be happy does not of itself lead to happiness. We lack the power to bring this about just by willing. By power, Augustine means what we can accomplish through willing. We cannot will world peace or end all wars merely by willing, as mentioned previously, nor can we will to not grow old nor will to not die. These are beyond our power. It is obvious that we cannot become

happy by sheer willpower alone, so we can say we lack the power to make something happen that we desire, as it is not just a matter of willing. In one sense, we can say we do not have the power to make ourselves happy when happiness is not present in us – or anything else that we wish to will to have. This is easiest to see if we think about things that we might want that depend on factors other than ourselves. For instance, getting a good job will depend not just on us obtaining the right qualifications, but on an employer offering us a job. We might will to get the job, but this is not sufficient. Other kinds of things will depend on our willpower itself. For instance, a resolve to give up smoking or to lose weight will depend on our willpower. We need to discipline ourselves to accomplish the goal that we have set for ourselves. The question of whether different people have different strengths of will is important, as it raises the question of the virtues of perseverance and persistence, which are secondary virtues that fall under the cardinal virtue of courage. This brings us back to what we need in order to have an efficacious will, and it is no surprise that it brings us back to the virtues. God has foreknowledge of what we choose to do by our will, but in those instances in which we have the power, we will what we do will.

There are objections to the conclusion that God's foreknowledge does not mean that there is no free will. Some of these objections are discussed by Augustine himself. It suffices to say that a more elaborate response will be along the lines that have already been discussed. Because we know that someone is about to choose badly does not mean we intervene to stop her from making the choice, though it may mean that we warn her.¹ Respect for autonomy is an important value in our society. Augustine says that creatures that perpetually use their free will to choose what is evil are still better than creatures that have no free will at all.² Human beings through God's generosity have been given free will and despite the evils that they commit, are still of greater worthiness than those creatures lacking free will. (*Libero Arbitrio*: [3.5.15.56–3.5.15.59]) In this, Augustine echoes the division of Aristotle in which he differentiates between animals which act consciously and human beings, who not only act consciously, but deliberately.

Conclusion

We began with the observation that the death of God seemed to imply that human beings were now masters of their own destinies and were free to choose to be whatever or whoever they wanted to be. Modern human beings are free to remake themselves in whatever way they desire. With no God, there is no one above to tell human beings how to live, nor to constrain their power to choose whatever they want. While Sartre argued that there is no essence of human nature, he nevertheless acknowledged that human beings have constraints on what they can choose to be and do. Despite this caveat, human beings can create their own reality. Except this is self-evidently false, since our desires can remain unrealized, and our wills thwarted. This is a common experience. As a result,

¹ It is commonplace for parents to warn their sons and daughters about inappropriate girlfriends and boyfriends, even if it is not appreciated. Friends too might advise against particular relationships.

² This means that no matter how degraded a human being becomes, he or she can never completely lose their human dignity.

for many, happiness and contentment, not to mention optimism about the future, are not just elusive, but missing altogether. Add to this an unstable world in which old certainties were under challenge or in the process of being destroyed, and it is not surprising that many people are unhappy. For both Aristotle and Augustine, happiness involved the pursuit of virtue. Augustine's remedy to unhappiness was the pursuit of the good will, which meant willing to pursue those goods which were unchangeable and whose possession could not be lost. For Augustine, the will is an important power that human beings possess. We turned to the question of what the will is.

Although Aristotle never developed a theory of the will, he went a long way to explain the voluntary, deliberate actions of human beings, beginning with the simple movement of limbs that enabled animals to move and progressing to conscious decisions to move. In the case of human beings, deliberating on what action to choose involves movement in the mind, but this kind of movement is not like the movement of limbs, since it does not take place in the body. Though we did not pursue an account of this, we examined Aristotle's distinctions between voluntary and involuntary actions. The former involves ends and deliberation about means. The significance of the distinction is that human beings are responsible for their voluntary actions. This can only be so if we acknowledge that human beings are in control of what they choose to do and the actions that follow as a result of their choices. The significance of conscious deliberation in decision-making is brought out by Aristotle's distinction between acting in ignorance and acting through ignorance. In both instances, we do not evade responsibility. In acting through ignorance, individuals are culpable, especially if they deliberately ignore vital circumstances that they should have taken into account in acting as they did. Aristotle enjoins us to think about the ends of our actions and what we aim at by what we do. In his ethical writings, Aristotle argues that if we want to be happy, we should aim at what is good for us, and this is virtue. This is in clear contradiction to the claim that there is no essence of human nature and the view that happiness consists in the satisfaction of our desires.

This is even more strongly argued by Augustine. The difference between the good person and the wicked person is that the former wills the good will, which seeks to possess unchangeable or eternal goods, while the latter is mired in willing to possess those goods which are changeable and which can be lost. Augustine agrees with Aristotle that the virtues are unchangeable goods that cannot be lost. This is only so, however, if human beings will to acquire and keep the virtues. If they do so, they cannot be taken away. More strongly than Aristotle, Augustine says that the only reason human beings give in to their inordinate desires is through their will and their choice. As a result, they are fully responsible for what they will. The remedy for misery and unhappiness is to choose the good will, to seek virtue. The path to happiness is plain; the wonder is that most people fail to choose it.

One answer to why people fail to choose the path to happiness is to propose that people act through necessity. That is, human beings act on their desires and so do not act through choice. Augustine roundly rejects the proposition that we act through necessity. There are several arguments that can be put forward against this. It would allow human

beings to evade responsibility altogether, as they act out of necessity. Such a move, though we did not discuss it, would reduce human beings to automatons and can be swiftly rejected. Our experience of ourselves is that we deliberate, make choices, and will to act. That this is not illusory is the basis of the argument that God's foreknowledge of what we will to do does not mean that we act from necessity. Another name for God's foreknowledge might be fate. If fate has decreed that we will to do a particular action, then it seems we act from necessity. This, as was shown, conflates what is known with what brings about an action. Just because someone, through foresight (or clairvoyance), knows that a person will decide to do something and then that person does it, does not mean that the foresight has anything to do with bringing about the action. We cannot blame God or fate on what we choose to do. We are masters of our fate. It is the will that gives us that power.

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