6.
Thomas Aquinas on Free Will

The previous two chapters have highlighted Aquinas' method in, first, establishing divine/pre-Fall concepts thoroughly before, then, seeking to move on to the effects of sin and grace on the nature and experience of humankind in itself and its relationship with God, angels and each other. This method is in greater evidence in his approach to free will than the other two concepts because it is foundational to the nature of a being – divine, angelic or human – and is worked out in the sins that are committed or helped to resist by the grace that is experienced. The will is therefore not something that is fundamentally in flux but is rather more fixed; this is consistent with the Latin tradition that distinguishes between the will as the core orientation of a person and the realisation of that will in the choice that is made.

In terms of the structure of the *Summa*, almost all of the significant material on free will therefore appears in Book One, which deals with the original nature of God, angels and humankind, and then in the early sections of the first part of Book Two, in which the effects of sin on human nature are discussed. These effects are then worked out in the lengthy treatises on the passions, habits, virtues and vices that cover the manifestation of the will in sins and the restorative effects of the graces of salvation and sanctification, the latter of course being primarily embodied in the sanctifying grace of the sacraments. There is some additional work on the freedom of the will in sections on sin and grace at the end of the first part of Book Two, and then in relationship to Christ and the final condition of humanity after judgement day.

This presentation will largely follow Aquinas' order, certainly in beginning with the nature of God that is the basis for understanding all that is created by God. This includes sections on the providence, predestination and foreknowledge of God that are crucially important for the nature of the will of something created that should always

understand its existence as derived from a higher, supreme being, who is sovereign and orders all things according to his will, and whose nature and will are beyond our comprehension. Following this there will be a short look at angelic will before a more lengthy exploration of human will in its original state. In looking at the will after the Fall, as indicated above, the first presentation of the fundamental effects on human nature will take up the bulk of this section before highlighting a few other passages, ending with short sections on the will of Christ and of the redeemed and the damned. Some of this later material has already been engaged with to some extent in the chapters on sin and grace.

Free Will and God

Given the comment above that the Latin understanding of the will is that it is the 'core orientation' of a person, rather than the choices they make, there is an immediate need to establish the nature of will in the divine before one can explore the extent to which such a will might be 'free'. Given that the early Questions of the *Summa* concerning the nature of God include discussions of the simplicity, perfection and immutability of God, it would seem to be difficult to attach a modern notion of free will to such a being.

In this respect, it is significant that Aquinas looks first at the knowledge of God before looking at the will of God, since the universality of the former will necessarily affect the nature and impact of the latter. In discussing the knowledge of God, Aquinas asks whether this knowledge is the cause of things and states that they can be considered the cause by consequence, but not by essence.[1]

> The knowledge of God is the cause of things because this knowledge relates to all creatures in the same way that a craftsman's knowledge relates to the things he makes. The craftsman's knowledge causes the things that he makes because he works using his intellect. . . . When he [Origen] says that the reason God foreknows things is because they are in the future, this must be understood as a cause of consequence, not a cause of essence.[2]

Crucially for what follows, Aquinas then relates the knowledge of God to the being of God in its infinite immensity, meaning that there

1. This point was mentioned in chapter four, above, on sin, and Aquinas' position allows God's complete knowledge without making God the cause of sin.
2. *Summa*, 1.14.8, 8, Reply to 1.

is no past, present and future for God as there is for us, and this will be important when Aquinas moves on to questions relating to providence and predestination.

> As was shown above, God knows all things, not only actual things but also whatever is possible for him and for his creatures. Since some of these for us are dependent on the future, it follows that God knows things that are contingent on the future. As evidence of this, we can see that something that is contingent can be considered in two ways. Firstly, it can be considered in itself, insofar as it currently exists, and in this sense it is not considered to be future, but present . . . Secondly, it can be considered in terms of its cause, and in this sense it is considered to be future and as something not yet absolutely determined. This is because a contingent cause relates to opposite things, and thus cannot be the subject of certain knowledge. In this understanding, a person's knowledge only of the cause of something that has not yet come about only conjectures concerning their knowledge of it. God knows all contingent things not only in terms of their causes, but also as they each actually exist. Despite the fact that contingent things become actual in succession, God still knows them as they exist simultaneously, rather than successively as we know them. The reason for this is that his knowledge is measured by eternity, as his being is. Eternity comprises the whole of time being simultaneously complete, as we said above, and therefore everything that exists in time is present to God in this eternity. This is not simply because he has types of things present with him, as some say, but because his gaze from eternity covers all things as they exist in any present form. Therefore it is clear that God infallibly knows future contingent things because they are in the divine sight in a present form; however, they are future contingencies in terms of their own causes.[1]

A few Questions later, Aquinas moves on to the subject of the will of God with this understanding of God's knowledge at its base. Before moving on to the freedom or even movement of the will of God, Aquinas asserts that there is a will in God and seeks to present its nature.

> There is will in God, just as there is intellect, because will results from the intellect. In the same way that the form of natural things gives them their actual existence, so we can understand the

1. *Summa*, 1.14.13.

> intellect through the form of its communication. . . . Intellectual natures have a natural inclination to their natural good that can be understood from their form of communication. This encourages them to rest in that good when it is achieved, and to seek it when the nature does not have it, both of which pertain to the will. Therefore, there is will in every intellectual being, just as there is an animal appetite in every sensible being. There must be will in God, therefore, because there is intellect in him, and just as his intellect is his existence, so is his will.[1]

This equation of will with intellect and being in God means that the will is immutable, as God is.

> The will of God is completely unchangeable. In this regard, we must acknowledge that changing the will is one thing, but it is another thing to will that certain things should be changed. It is possible to will that something be done now and later the opposite thing, and yet the will can forever remain the same. However, there would be a change in the will if one began to will what had not before been willed, or stop willing what had previously been willed. This in the will cannot occur unless there is a change in either the knowledge or the disposition of the willing being's substance.[2]

We saw above that Aquinas held that God's absolute knowledge did not necessarily cause things to occur, in his view, and the same question comes up concerning God's will. If this is unchangeable, then surely everything that God wills must happen or alternatively God's will can be ineffective. Again, Aquinas does not want to allow either position – the first would seem to have God willing evil, the second a weak God – and thus he argues that it can be God's will that some things be contingent on other factors.

> God's will imposes a necessity on some things that are willed, but not on all things. Some believe that the reason for this is the creation of intermediate causes, that God creates what is necessary through necessary causes and contingency through contingent causes. This seems to be an insufficient explanation for two reasons. Firstly, because the effect of a necessary cause would become contingent due to the secondary cause, since its effect would be limited by the deficiency in the contingent cause, just as the power of the sun can

1. *Summa*, 1.19.1.
2. *Summa*, 1.19.7.

> be ineffective because of a defect in a plant. However, no defect in a secondary cause could prevent God's will from producing the desired effect. Secondly, because, if the distinction between necessary and contingent only relates to secondary causes, the separation must occur independently of the divine intention and will, which cannot be accepted. Therefore, it is better to say that this happens from the power of the divine will. . . . Since the divine will is perfect in power, it not only follows that things are done that God wills, but also that things are done in the way that God wills. God wills that some things are done necessarily and some contingently, all to create a right order and to build up the universe. Therefore, for some things God has created necessary causes that cannot fail, but to other things he gives defective and contingent causes that lead to contingent effects. Therefore, it is not because the immediate causes are contingent that the results that God willed happen contingently, but because God prepared contingent causes for them since it was his will that they happen contingently.[1]

In this way, Aquinas seeks to argue that God's unchanging will includes provision for the exercise of free will in his creation, but what freedom is left for God's will?

> We have free will in those areas where we do not will from necessity or from natural instinct. The will to be blessed does not concern free will, but natural instinct. So other animals whose natural instinct stimulates action are not said to be moved by free will. God necessarily wills his own goodness, but does not will other things necessarily, as shown above, and he therefore has free will in those things that he does not necessarily will.[2]

Having analysed the will of God, Aquinas does not move on immediately to topics that flow naturally from this discussion – providence, predestination, the Book of Life – but first deals with Questions on the love of God and on the justice and mercy of God because these are more fundamental to our understanding of God. Following this, Aquinas takes up the issue of providence and the fact that everything must come under the order of God.

> We must say that everything is subject to divine providence, not only in general but also in each individual case. This is clear because every agent works for a purpose, and the ordering of

1. *Summa*, 1.19.8.
2. *Summa*, 1.19.10.

> actions towards that purpose is effective to the extent that the causality of the first agent reaches. . . . The causality of God, the first agent, extends to everything that exists, not only in terms of the basic principles that comprise species, but also to those principles that form individuals; not only for incorruptible things, but also corruptible things. . . . Therefore, because the providence of God is nothing less than the archetypal ordering of things towards an end, as said above, it follows that everything, to the extent that it participates in existence, must to that degree be subject to divine providence. We have also shown that God knows everything, both the universal and the particular. Since his knowledge can be compared to things in themselves . . . everything must necessarily be ordered by him.[1]

In the next Article, Aquinas notes that, while the order of every single thing in creation is directed by God, the working out of that order – what he terms 'government' – is carried out through intermediaries including humans.

> Providence comprises two things: the type of order of things that is directed in advance towards an end; and the working out of this order, which is called government. In the first of these, God has immediate providence over everything because the type of everything, even the smallest thing, is in his intellect and he gives everything the power to carry out whatever particular effects he assigns to each thing. Therefore he must have the type of all those effects always present in his mind. For the second aspect of providence, God works through certain intermediaries, governing inferior things by things that are superior, not because of any defect in his power but because of the abundance of his goodness, which means that even creatures are given the dignity of causality.[2]

The result of this employment of intermediaries in God's providence is that the order of everything is not necessarily achieved since there is a contingency that results from this 'dignity of causality' as finite creatures do not necessarily cause the best results by their actions.

> Divine providence imposes a necessity on some things, but not on all as was previously believed by some people. Providence involves ordering things towards an end. The main good for all things (after divine goodness, which is the ultimate purpose of

1. *Summa*, 1.22.2.
2. *Summa*, 1.22.3.

> everything) is the perfection of the universe, which could not exist unless creation contained all grades of being. Divine providence must therefore produce every grade of being. As a result, divine providence prepared necessary causes for some things, so that they happen necessarily, and contingent causes for other things, so that they happen contingently, depending on the nature of their immediate causes.[1]

Aquinas holds to a high view of the providence of God in the ultimate direction of all things, but through the concept of government that involves creation in causation he does not see that God is responsible for evil as part of the working out of His plan for creation. This idea is built on later in Book One as Aquinas returns to providence and the government of God.

> We can consider the ordering of divine providence in two ways: generally, as it proceeds from the governing cause of all things; and, in the particular, when it proceeds from a particular cause that carries out the order of divine government. In terms of the first way, nothing can resist the order of divine government as can be proved in two ways: firstly, because the order of divine government is completely directed towards the good and, therefore, everything in its own operation and work only tends towards the good . . . secondly, because, as was said above, every inclination of anything, whether natural or voluntary, is merely the result of an impression from the first mover, as the arrow is directed at a target purely due to the impulse received from the archer. Therefore, every agent, whether natural or free, achieves its divinely appointed end as though of its own accord. It is for this reason that God is said 'to order all things sweetly'.[2]

Aquinas next considers predestination, which he believes is a part of providence. The first Article therefore looks at this relationship.

> It is right that God should predestine people because everything is subject to his providence, as was shown above, and providence directs things towards their end, as was also shown. God directs created things towards a twofold end. One of these exceeds all extent and faculty of any created nature, which end is life eternal. This consists in seeing God, which is above the nature of every creature, as shown above. The second end, however, is proportionate to the created nature, and any created being can attain this end according

1. *Summa*, 1.22.4.
2. *Summa*, 1.103.8.

> to the power of its nature. If something cannot attain something through the power of its nature, it needs another to direct it to this, as an archer directs an arrow towards the target. Properly speaking, a rational creature that is capable of eternal life is led or directed towards this by God. The reason for such direction pre-exists in God, since the type of the order of everything towards an end is in him, and this we showed above to be providence. . . . The type of the aforementioned direction of a rational creature towards an end of life eternal is called predestination, since to destine is to direct or to send. Therefore, it is clear that predestination is a part of providence in terms of its purpose.[1]

We looked at predestination in the previous chapter on grace as part of the activity of God towards humankind. In this context, we focus on how this relates to the free will and activity of God, with the implications for human free will a secondary factor.

> Predestination is not something in the predestined, but only in the one who predestines. Predestination is a part of providence, which is not something in that which receives provision . . . The working out of providence, which is called government, is passive in what is governed and active in the one governing. From this it is clear that predestination is a type of ordering in which some persons are directed towards eternal salvation, and this exists in the divine mind. The working out of this order is active in God, but passive in the predestined.[2]

Here we see the will of God free in its action to direct or not direct people towards salvation, while as the subject of predestination the human will is passive in needing to be granted this grace. The later Articles on predestination in the *Summa* were covered in the previous chapter on grace and here we need only repeat a short, most explicit comment on the relationship between predestination and will.

> There can be no distinction between what results from free will and what from predestination, since there can be no distinction between what results from a secondary cause and what from a first cause. The providence of God produces effects through secondary causes, as was shown above, and so that which results from free will is also from predestination.[3]

1. *Summa*, 1.23.1.
2. *Summa*, 1.23.2.
3. *Summa*, 1.23.5.

What comes through again here is the paramount importance of the will, direction and action of God far above the temporary, created will of humankind. The will of God, linked into his infinite nature, is thus the supreme factor in all that occurs in creation, although, because it is worked out in and through created beings, it does contain contingencies that allow evil to occur and the effects of this evil to affect creation. There is an element of freedom to God's will, but it is not a free will as we would naturally use the term and this will then affect the nature of the free will of created beings.

Angels and Free Will

As with sin, when considering the will and its freedom, Aquinas chooses to look at God, then angels, and only then humankind since this is the order of being. That angels have a will is necessarily admitted because Aquinas holds that there is a link between intellect and will, as shown above in the section on God. If there is a will in the angels, is it free? The initial response is clear in the 'On the contrary' section of the relevant Article:

> Free will is part of the dignity of humankind, but the dignity of angels is far greater than that of humans. Therefore, since humans have free will, it is highly reasonable to say that angels have free will.[1]

This is then expanded on in the main response.

> There are some things that do not act based on any previous judgement, but seem to be moved and made to act by others, as an archer aims an arrow at the target. Others such as irrational animals act with some kind of judgement, but not from a free will. For example, a sheep flees from a wolf due to a judgement that seeks to avoid hurt to itself. This kind of judgement is not free, but rather one implanted in their nature. Only a being that has an intellect can act through a free judgement insofar as this comprehends the notion of goodness, from which the intellect can assess whether one or another thing is good. Therefore, whatever has an intellect has free will. It is therefore clear that, because the angels have intellect, so also they have free will, and this to a greater level of perfection than it is in humans.[2]

1. *Summa*, 1.59.3. On the contrary.
2. *Summa*, 1.59.3.

This is one of the Articles in which Aquinas disagrees to some extent with Aristotle, who is usually an authority for him in understanding nature and being. However, Aristotle had taught that the act of a free will is choice, which does not seem to be present in angels. Aquinas allows Aristotle's definition to apply to humankind but redefines choice in relation to angels: 'There is choice in the angels, but this does not involve a considered inquiry of options, but rather an immediate acceptance of the truth.'[1]

The one exception to this teaching is the moment after creation, highlighted in the chapter above on sin, in which there is the single choice to follow the natural good, which the devil refused:

> The will of an angel is inflexible after making its first choice, and therefore if the devil had not immediately placed a barrier to the blessed state after the first moment of his existence, when he had a natural movement to the good, he would have been confirmed in goodness.[2]

This is obviously a very brief treatment, but it is important background material on the nature of a created will and the fact that a right will does not need the option to choose evil to have a freedom. This understanding acts as a bridge between the will of God and the will of humankind.

Pre-Fall Human Will

In dealing with the human will, Aquinas looks first at the nature of the will in itself before questioning whether it can be considered free. There is a link in the first Article on the will in that it asks whether the will can desire something necessarily.

> The word 'necessity' can be used in many ways, since whatever must be is necessary. Now in order that a thing must be may be due to an intrinsic principle, either from its matter, so we say that a thing composed of different parts is necessarily corruptible; or from its form, as the three angles of a triangle are necessarily equal to two right angles. These are 'natural' and 'absolutely necessary'. Alternatively, a thing must be because of something outside its nature, either the end or an agent. In terms of the end, it may be necessary if, without it, the end could not to be achieved, or not so well attained. For example, food is necessary for life and a horse

1. *Summa*, 1.59.3. Reply to 1.
2. *Summa*, 1.63.6. Reply to 3.

> is necessary for a journey. This is called 'necessity of end', and sometimes also 'utility'. In terms of an agent, something must be when an agent forces someone such that they cannot do anything else. This is called the 'necessity of coercion'. This necessity is completely hateful to the will because this violence goes against something's natural inclination. . . . Just as it is impossible for something to be both violent and natural, so it is impossible for something to be absolutely coerced or violent and at the same time voluntary.[1]

Later in this first Question on the will is a brief and useful summary of the work of the will as Aquinas understands it: 'The will as an agent moves all the soul's powers to carry out their respective work, excepting only the natural powers of our biological self, which are not subject to our will.'[2]

After clarifying that humankind has will, which must be linked to the intellect as we saw with God and the angels, Aquinas then discusses whether this will is free. It is important to note that there is an important change in the Latin here, with the previous Question dealing with '*voluntas*' (will at the core of the person) and this next Question moving onto '*liberum arbitrium*' (literally, 'free choice' or 'free judgement'). We are still not yet at the surface, decision part of humanity but this free judgement has a greater activity than the pure will that was just looked at. The first point that Aquinas makes is that rationality implies a free judgement.

> Humans have free judgement as otherwise advice, encouragement, commands, prohibitions, rewards and punishments would be pointless. . . . Humans act on judgements, since they apprehend a situation and then judge whether something should be avoided or sought. Because such a judgement for a particular act is not the result of natural instincts but through reason engaging in an act of comparison, people act through their free judgement and retain the ability to be inclined to different things. The use of reason in such unclear circumstances may lead to different courses of action, as we can see in disputing syllogisms and rhetorical arguments. . . . Therefore, because humans are rational, is it necessary that they have free judgement.[3]

1. *Summa*, 1.82.1.
2. *Summa*, 1.82.4.
3. *Summa*, 1.83.1.

In the next Article, Thomas develops his understanding of where this judgement sits in this middle place between being and action, discussing whether it is a power or a habit.

> Although free judgement strictly denotes an action, we are accustomed to call free judgement the principle of the action through which a person judges freely. This principle of an action in us is both power and habit . . . Therefore, free judgement must be either a power or a habit, or a power with a habit, but it can clearly be proved that it is neither a habit nor a power with a habit . . . The free judgement is indifferent to good and evil choices, and so it is impossible that free judgement is a habit and therefore it is a power.[1]

In the final Article on free judgement, Aquinas shows that he understands this as closely related to the will that he had previously described.

> It is clear that the relationship of the intellect to the reason is mirrored by that of the will to the power of choice ['*electio*', another Latin word for choice], which is free judgement. It has been shown above that same power both understands and reasons, just as the same power can be at rest and be in movement. In this way, the same power both wills and chooses, and thus the will and free judgement are not two powers, but one.[2]

This is the end of the initial presentation of will, with the next Question moving onto the relationship of soul and body in comprehension. For modern discussions on free will, it is noteworthy that Aquinas doesn't engage deeply with the choices that we make, concentrating more on the nature of the self that is realised in those choices.

We saw in the chapter on sin some of the results of this teaching in the initial, pre-Fall state of humankind when in submission to God the will and therefore judgement were completely free and incapable of being deceived. It is interesting that when discussing the will of Adam (Book One, Question 95), the focus is on grace and righteousness rather than freedom.

The last sections that are relevant in the basic nature of the human will and its freedom come in the last treatise of Book One of the *Summa* concerning the government of creatures. In these Questions, Aquinas looks at how the human will is impacted by various external factors:

1. *Summa*, 1.83.2.
2. *Summa*, 1.83.4.

God, angels, demons and fate. In considering how God interacts with creatures, Aquinas considers whether this includes moving the will, concluding that God as the creator of the will naturally moves it from first and secondary causes but not through force, given that his work is always towards the intended purpose of the will.

> The will is moved by its purpose, which is good, and by the one who creates the power of willing. Now, while the will can be moved by the good that it is seeking, God alone can move it sufficiently and effectively. . . . While every created good is particular, God alone is the universal good. Therefore, he alone fills the capacity of the will and moves it sufficiently as the object of the will. In the same way, God alone causes the power of willing because willing is nothing but an inclination towards the object of the will, which is universal good. This inclination towards the universal good belongs to the first mover . . . Therefore, in both ways it is right that God moves the will, but especially in the second way through an internal inclination of the will.[1]

God thus moves the will in creating it and as the end that the will should seek. However, does this mean that the will is forced by God? Aquinas thinks not.

> Something is forced to move by another if this goes against its natural inclination, but if the other moves it to the proper and natural inclination, it is not forced. . . . God does not force the will when he moves it because he is giving the will its natural inclination.[2]

For our independent minds, even this level of engagement of God with the will may seem restrictive of human nature, but Aquinas has sought to show that this is the natural result of the Christian doctrine of God and creation. A few Questions later, Aquinas discusses the extent to which angels may be said to move the will.

> The will can be changed in two ways. Firstly, from within, in which the movement of the will is only inclining it to what is willed and, therefore, only God can change the will in this way because he gives the power for such an inclination to the intellectual nature. . . . Secondly, the will is moved from outside and, regarding an angel, this can only be in one way as the intellect is made aware of

1. *Summa*, 1.105.4.
2. *Summa*, 1.105.4. Reply to 1.

> the good. . . . An angel or a person can move the will by persuasion, as above explained. . . . In this manner the angels, being able to stir human desires, can move the will, but not by necessity because the will always remains free to consent to or to resist a desire.[1]

In dealing with demons and the devil and their effect on the human will, Aquinas first distinguishes between their influence and that of angels, the latter wholly directed to the service of God while the demons work their own separate will.

> We can consider two things in the attack of the demons: the attack itself and the ordering of the attack. The attack itself come from the evil will of the demons, whose envy seeks to prevent human progress and whose pride takes on an aspect of divine power by assigning certain ministers to attack people, just as the angels of God in their various offices minister to people's salvation. However, the ordering of the attack is from God who knows that he can use evil well by directing it to a good end. On the other hand, both the guardianship and ordering of angels are the work of God as first author.[2]

Given this distinction, to what extent are the devil and demons responsible for human sin? Aquinas' answer is that the devil is behind all sin, but humans are primarily responsible for the sins they commit, and may be solely responsible. However, the devil and demons may also play a role.

> One thing can cause another in two ways: directly and indirectly. It is indirect when an agent causes one to be disposed to a certain action, and then it is an occasional and indirect cause of that action. For example, we might say that the person who dries the wood is the cause of the wood burning. In this sense, we say that the devil is the cause of all our sins because he encouraged the first man to sin, from whose sin resulted a tendency to sin in the whole human race. . . . But something is the direct cause of another when its work leads directly to that action. In this sense the devil is not the cause of every sin because all sins are not the result of the devil's encouragement, but some result from free judgement and the corruption of the flesh. As Origen says, even if the devil did not exist, people would still desire food and love and such pleasures and many disorders arise from these unless those desires

1. *Summa*, 1.111.2.
2. *Summa*, 1.114.1.

> are restrained by reason, especially if we presuppose the corruption of our nature. It is within the power of the free judgement to restrain the appetite and keep it in order. Therefore, there is no need for all sins to be the result of the work of the devil.[1]

The external nature of the influence of angels and demons is emphasised indirectly in the discussion of fate when Aquinas repeats that the only effective influence on the human will comes from God.

> Nothing prevents what happens here by accident, luck or chance, because everything results from an ordering cause that comes from the intellect, especially the divine intellect since only God can change the will, as shown above. Therefore, the ordering of human actions, which result from the will, must only be the result of God's work. Therefore, since everything that happens here on earth is subject to divine providence, because it is pre-ordained or foretold, we can admit the existence of fate. However, the holy doctors avoided the use of this word because of those who twisted its application to imply a degree of force in the position of the stars.[2]

This concludes the presentation of Aquinas' thought on the nature and freedom of the will in the created state that is foundational to all that follows. At times, as Aquinas develops this in the context of sin and grace, these original ideas come to the fore, while, at others, they fade somewhat due to the influence of the effects of sin and salvation on humankind.

Post-Fall Human Will

Aquinas returns to the matter of the human will in the first part of Book Two at the beginning of his consideration of human actions (which mainly covers the issues of passions, habits, virtues and vices presented in the chapter on sin). First, however, Aquinas has a basic Question on the voluntary and involuntary in humans, discussing the effects of various factors on the activity of the will, but beginning with a statement that there is a voluntary element in human action.

> There must be something voluntary in human actions. In order to make this clear, we state that the principle of some actions or movements is inside the agent, or that which is moved, while

1. *Summa*, 1.114.3.
2. *Summa*, 1.116.1.

> the principle of other movements or actions is external . . . But whatever has a knowledge of the result is said to move itself because there is a principle that leads to an action but also a desired result. Therefore, since both these elements are intrinsic, *i.e.* that they act and that they act for a purpose, such movements are said to be voluntary. The word 'voluntary' implies that movements and actions result from a person's inclination. . . . Therefore, since humans especially know the result of their work and move themselves, their actions are found to be voluntary[1].

This intrinsic nature of a voluntary action is highlighted when Thomas discusses violence and the will, holding that whatever is committed due to external force cannot be considered voluntary.

> Violence is directly opposed to both what is voluntary and to what is natural. The voluntary and the natural are alike in that both result from an intrinsic principle. Violence, however, is from an extrinsic principle. Just as violence works against nature in beings without knowledge, so violence works against the will in beings endowed with knowledge. Whatever is against nature is called 'unnatural', and similarly whatever is against the will is called 'involuntary'. Therefore, violence causes involuntariness.[2]

This is the first of a series of Articles that seek to explore the extent to which various factors reduce the voluntary character of human actions. The next area to be discussed is fear.

> Things that are done through fear 'are of a mixed character', being partly voluntary and partly involuntary. Something that is done through fear is not considered voluntary itself, but it becomes voluntary in this particular case, for instance to avoid the evil that is feared. . . . What is done through fear is voluntary in that it happens here and now, that is to say, in these circumstances it suffices to prevent the greater evil that was feared . . . therefore what is done through fear is essentially voluntary because the principle is within the person. But, if we consider what is done through fear outside this particular case, it is simply a consideration of the mind and such goes against the will. Therefore, what is done through fear is involuntary, considering the general aspect or what is outside the actual circumstances of any case.[3]

1. *Summa*, 2:1.6.1.
2. *Summa*, 2:1.6.5.
3. *Summa*, 2:1.6.6.

After fear Aquinas moves on to concupiscence, a loaded term theologically because of the work of Augustine who focuses on the desire as that for evil, although the Latin term is not necessarily negative. Aquinas at this point in the *Summa* actually grants it a positive aspect: 'Fear looks at evil but concupiscence looks at the good. Evil naturally goes against the will, whereas good harmonises with the will.'[1] Because desire rises within a person, Aquinas does not believe that it leads to involuntary action.

> Concupiscence does not cause involuntariness, but rather makes an action voluntary. Something is said to be voluntary because the will is moved to it, and concupiscence inclines the will to desire the object of concupiscence. Therefore, the effect of concupiscence is to make something voluntary rather than involuntary.[2]

Far more complex is the last of the potentially mitigating factors: ignorance.

> If ignorance causes involuntariness, this is because it deprives a person of the knowledge that is a necessary condition of voluntariness, as was declared above. However, not every ignorance deprives a person of this knowledge and so we note that ignorance has a threefold relationship to actions arising from the will: firstly, alongside the will, concomitantly; secondly, consequently; and thirdly, antecedently. Ignorance works alongside the will when there is ignorance of what is done but, even if a person had the knowledge, they would have done the thing anyway. In this case ignorance does not cause a person to wish to do something, but it just happens that something is done and not known at the same time. . . . Ignorance is consequent to an act of the will when ignorance itself is voluntary, which can happen happens in two ways . . . Firstly, when the will acts to cause the ignorance, such as when a person does not want the knowledge so that they have an excuse for a sin, or so that they are not restrained from sinning . . . and this is called 'affected ignorance'. Secondly, ignorance is said to be voluntary concerning something that one can and ought to know, and in this sense 'not acting' and 'not willing' are voluntary, as stated above. This kind of ignorance happens either, when someone does not actually consider what they can and ought to consider,

1. *Summa*, 2:1.6.7. Reply to 1.
2. *Summa*, 2:1.6.7.

> which is called 'ignorance of evil choice', and results from a passion or habit; or, when someone does not take the trouble to acquire the knowledge they ought to have, and so ignorance of the general principles of law that a person ought to know is voluntary, resulting from negligence. If ignorance is the result of either of these ways, it is voluntary and cannot simply cause involuntariness. However, it does cause involuntariness in one respect since it precedes the movement of the will towards the action, and the will would not move if the person had knowledge. Ignorance is antecedent to an act of the will when it is not voluntary and yet causes a person to will what they would not otherwise will. In this sense, a person may be ignorant of some circumstance related to their action that they are not bound to know, with the result that they do what they would not have done if they had that knowledge. For example, even if a person took proper precautions before shooting an arrow, they may still not know that someone is coming along the road, and therefore kill that person. Such ignorance simply causes involuntariness.[1]

Again, it is Aquinas' method that comes through notably in this theology since the decision to act cannot be considered except as the manifestation of the knowledge and will (and even the will to have knowledge). The 'free' aspect of the will is shown in these examples to be far more complex than might at first appear. A couple of Questions later, Aquinas looks again at the will and agrees with Aristotle that the natural desire (or 'appetite') is for good, but that voluntary desire is only good insofar as this is perceived in the object rather than the existence behind the perception.

> The will is the rational desire. Every desire is only for something good because it is simply the inclination of a person towards something that they want. . . . But we must note that every inclination results from a form, natural desires resulting from a form existing in the nature of things, while the desires of our senses (and intellectual or rational desires), which we call the will, result from the form as it is apprehended. Therefore, just as natural desires are for the good that exists in a thing, so animal or voluntary desires are for a good that is apprehended. Therefore, for the will to desire something, it is necessary that it is apprehended as good, not that it is good in truth.[2]

1. *Summa*, 2:1.6.8.
2. *Summa*, 2:1.8.1.

The Question that follows this returns to the question of what can move the will that was discussed in the Treatise on the government of creation. Here, Aquinas repeats that only God can immediately move the will, with a further Article that denies the possibility of heavenly bodies affecting the will building on the Question looking at fate. Following this, Aquinas considers whether the will is moved of necessity by its desires or by God. Regarding the former, he does allow that sometimes our will can be consumed by circumstances.

> The passion of the desires of our senses moves the will . . . in two ways. Firstly, so that the reason is completely bound and a person does not have the use of their reason. This happens in people who become furious or insane because of a violent excess of anger or concupiscence. . . . Such are like irrational animals, which necessarily follow the impulse of their passions; in them there is no movement of reason, and therefore no movement of will. Sometimes, however, reason is not entirely consumed by a passion and the judgement of reason retains a freedom, to a certain extent, and then the movement of the will remains to that degree. Therefore, the extent to which the reason remains free and is not controlled by the passion, the will's movement that remains does not necessarily move towards the passion's inclination. Consequently, there is either no movement of the will in a person, and only the passion is at work, or there is a movement of the will in which case it does not necessarily follow the passion.[1]

Regarding God moving the will, Aquinas repeats his position that this is sometimes necessary and sometimes contingent, the latter depending on the circumstances and the relationship between these and the will.

> Since the will is an active principle and is not determined to one end, having diverse relations to many things, God moves it so that he does not determine it necessarily to one end; rather the will's movement remains contingent and not determined, except for those things to which it is moved naturally.[2]

The extent of the difficulty in assessing free will is then shown in the next five Questions that discuss elements of the human experience associated with the will: intention, choice, counsel, consent and use. Something of the complexity of these Questions can be seen in that on choice, as an

1. *Summa*, 2:1.10.3.
2. *Summa*, 2:1.10.4.

example, which Aquinas holds is 'materially an act of the will but formally an act of the reason'.[1] Since the will is a product of the reason and the choice stems from this, choice in its substance is an act of the will. This is developed in a later Article that discusses whether choice is necessary.

> People do not choose from necessity because whatever can not be is not necessary. The reason why people can not choose or choose can be seen in a twofold power of people, in which we can will and not will, act and not act. Again, we can will this or that, and do this or that. The reason for this is found in the power of the reason because the will can move towards whatever the reason apprehends as good.[2]

These discussions form the basis for the examinations highlighted in the chapter on sin on good and evil in human actions, both the inner attitudes and thoughts and external acts. The extent of evil in an action is thus not solely based on the nature of the action itself, but is affected by the state of reason, the relevant knowledge and the ability of the will to move itself freely, among other things.

Free Will after Judgement

This short final section of the chapter looks at the concept of free will in those who are redeemed and those who are damned in Aquinas' thought. In terms of the redeemed, we must look at the Article on free will in Christ, since this is linked into the state of free will in the blessed. In the 'Treatise on the Last Things', found in the Supplement, there is no Article dealing with the nature of the will.

In examining the nature of Christ's will, Aquinas states that there is one human will in Christ but that the will in acting can be discerned as both 'nature' and 'reason'; the first is the 'simple will' and concerns those things that were necessary in themselves (like health); the second concerns anything that is desirable for a good end (like medicines).[3] Aquinas builds on this to state that there was free will in Christ.

> Simple will is the same as the 'will as nature', but choice is the same as the 'will as reason', which is the proper act of free will as we saw above. Therefore because 'will as reason' is in Christ, we must also say that Christ had choice and therefore free will, whose act is choice.[4]

1. *Summa*, 2:1.12.1.
2. *Summa*, 2:1.12.6.
3. *Summa*, 3.18.3.
4. *Summa*, 3.18.4.

One of the Objections initially raised in this Question is whether Christ could have free will, given that his will could only be for good things. Aquinas replies:

> The will of Christ, although it is determined to good, is not determined to any particular good. Therefore Christ, as is the case with the blessed, is able to choose with a free will that is confirmed in goodness.[1]

In terms of the damned, the nature of the will that they will have is discussed in the first Article of the Question concerning their will and intellect.

> A twofold will can be considered in the damned: the deliberating will and the natural will. Their natural will is not their own but comes from the author of nature, who gave human nature this inclination that is called the natural will. Therefore, since they retain their human nature, it follows that their natural will can be good. However, their deliberating will is truly their own since it is in their power to be turned by their affections to this or to that. This deliberating will is always evil in them because they are completely turned away from the final end of a right will, and a will cannot be good unless something directs it to that end. Therefore, although they will some good, they do not will it well and one cannot call their will good on that basis.[2]

This is the final, logical end of the corrupted human will that, as we saw in the chapter on grace, needed a work of God to turn it towards a consideration of the good, before further grace was needed to achieve what the awakened will desired. With grace no longer operating, the damned can no longer be raised to consider the good in their deliberations.

Conclusion

Some of the key teaching on the extent of freedom of the human will has already been covered in chapters four and five, above, on sin and grace and their relationship to human nature in its fallen state, and these sections have not been repeated here. Ordering these three chapters in considering Aquinas' thought is particularly difficult because he integrates his thinking and considers concepts at times in their finest

1. *Summa*, 3.18.4. Reply to 3.
2. *Summa*, Supplement.98.1.

nuances, and some of the discussions in this chapter become foundational for material found in the previous two chapters. One feels that to gain an appreciation of Aquinas, one must go in circles of understanding ideas in order to spiral towards a height of appreciation, with each stage needing careful concentration to grasp details that become important as terms and concepts are used in different contexts.

Aquinas' concept of free will and its inter-relationship with sin and grace, and the location of the will in intellect and reason, worked out in judgements, choices, intentions, temptations, thoughts and actions, is very complex and thus is perhaps not as great an issue to other writers. The result is that to answer the question of whether humans have free will in any given context requires pages of consideration, as we see in the Questions that look at particular sins and those examining the receipt of grace. Perhaps more than any other writer, Aquinas therefore calls us to a hesitancy in answering questions about free will without first considering what we mean when we use the term.

As in the previous chapter, the reader is directed to the conclusion of chapter four on Aquinas and sin for links to the *Summa Theologiae* and a couple of useful secondary sources.