

QUESTION 83

Free Choice

Next we ask about free choice (*liberum arbitrium*). And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Does man have free choice? (2) What is free choice: a power, an act, or a habit? (3) If it is a power, is it an appetitive power or an intellectual power? (4) If it is an appetitive power, is it the same power as the will, or a distinct power?

Article 1

Does man have free choice?

It seems that man does not have free choice (*liberum arbitrium*):

Objection 1: Anyone who has free choice does what he wants to. But a man does not do what he wants to; for Romans 7:15 says, “For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do.” Therefore, man does not have free choice.

Objection 2: Anyone who has free choice is such that it is up to him to will or not to will, to act or not to act. But this is not the way it is with man; for Romans 9:16 says, “It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs” Therefore, man does not have free choice.

Objection 3: As *Metaphysics* 1 says, “The free is that which is a cause of itself.” Therefore, that which is moved by another is not free. But God moves the will; for Proverbs 21:1 says, “The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord; wherever He will He shall turn it.” Therefore, man does not have free choice.

Objection 4: Anyone who has free choice is the master of his own acts. But man is not the master of his own acts, since, as Jeremiah 10:23 says, “The way of a man is not his; neither is it in a man to direct his own steps.” Therefore, man does not have free choice.

Objection 5: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “Each man is such that the end appears to him in a way that corresponds to what he is like (*qualis est*).” But what we are like is not within our power; rather, it is ours by nature. Therefore, it is natural to us that we should follow a given end. Therefore, this does not come from free choice.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiasticus 15:14 says, “God made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his own counsel”—and the Gloss adds, “..... that is, left him with freedom of choice.”

I respond: Man has free choice. Otherwise, deliberations, exhortations, precepts, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments would make no sense (*frustra essent*).

To see this clearly, note that some things act without judgment, e.g., a rock moving downward and, similarly, all things that lack cognition.

Other things act with judgment, but not with free judgment, viz., brute animals. For instance, a sheep, seeing a wolf, judges that it should run away from the wolf by a natural judgment and not a free judgment, since it makes this judgment by natural instinct (*ex naturali instinctu*) and not by comparing alternatives (*non ex collatione*). And the same holds for every judgment made by brute animals.

Now man acts by judgment because it is through his cognitive power that he judges that something should be pursued or avoided. But the reason why he acts by free judgment and is able to go in alternative ways (*potens in diversa ferri*) is that in the case of a particular action this judgment arises from a comparison made by reason (*ex collatione quadam rationis*) and not from natural instinct. For with respect to contingent matters, reason has an openness to opposites (*ratio habet viam ad opposita*), as is clear from dialectical syllogisms and rhetorical persuasions. But actions (*operabilia*) are contingent matters, and so with respect to them the judgment of reason is related to different alternatives and is not

determined to just one (*ad diversa habet se et non est determinatum ad unum*). Accordingly, by the very fact that he is rational, man must have free choice.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (q. 81, art. 3), even though the sentient appetite obeys reason, it is still able to fight against it in some cases by having desires that are contrary to what reason dictates. This, then, is the good that a man does not do when he wants to, viz., not to have a desire contrary to reason—as Augustine’s gloss on the same passage explains.

Reply to objection 2: This passage from the Apostle should not be interpreted to mean that man does not will by free choice or that he does not run by free choice. Rather, it should be interpreted to mean that free choice is not sufficient for these things unless it is moved and assisted by God.

Reply to objection 3: Free choice is a cause of its own movement in the sense that through free choice a man moves himself to act. However, freedom does not require that what is free should be the first cause of itself—just as, in order for something to be a cause of another, it is not required that it be the first cause of that thing. Therefore, God is the first cause and moves both natural causes and voluntary causes. And just as, in the case of natural causes, He does not, by moving them, deprive their acts of being natural, so too He does not, by moving voluntary causes, deprive their actions of being voluntary, but instead He brings this very thing about in them (*sed potius hoc in eis facit*). For within each thing He operates in accord with what is proper to that thing (*secundum eius proprietatem*).

Reply to objection 4: Man’s way is said not to be in his power with respect to the *execution* of his choices, in which a man can be impeded, whether he wants to be or not. However, the choices themselves exist within us, assuming God’s assistance.

Reply to objection 5: There are two senses of ‘what a man is like’ (*qualitas hominis*): (a) natural and (b) subsequent (*superveniens*).

The *natural* sense of what a man is like can be understood either with respect to the *intellective part of the soul* or with respect to *the body and the powers associated with the body*. Thus, given what man is naturally like because of the intellective part of the soul, a man naturally desires his ultimate end, viz., beatitude. As was explained above (q. 82, art. 1 and 2), this is a natural appetite and is not subject to free choice. On the other hand, as regards the body and the powers associated with the body, a man can be what he is like naturally insofar as he has a certain temperament (*complexio*) or disposition because of the influence of corporeal causes which cannot affect the intellective part of the soul, since it is not the act of a body. So, then, given what each man is like according to his corporeal makeup (*secundum corpoream qualitatem*), the end will strike him in a certain way, since a man is inclined by this sort of disposition to choose something or to reject it. However, inclinations of this sort are subject to the judgment of reason, which, as was explained above (q. 81, a. 3), the lower appetite obeys. Hence, this is not prejudicial to freedom of choice.

Now the *subsequent* qualities (*qualitates supervenientes*) are those such as habits and passions, in accord with which someone is more inclined toward one alternative than the other. Yet even these inclinations are subject to the judgment of reason, and the qualities themselves are also subject to reason, since it is within our power (a) to acquire such qualities, either by causing them or disposing ourselves to them (*vel causiter vel dispositivè*), or (b) to exclude them from ourselves. And there is nothing here that is incompatible with freedom of choice.

Article 2

Is free choice a power?

It seems that free choice is not a power:

Objection 1: Free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) is nothing other than free judgment (*liberum iudicium*). But ‘judgment’ names an act and not a power. Therefore, free choice is not a power.

Objection 2: Free choice is said to be “a faculty of will and reason.” But ‘faculty’ names a facility with respect to a power, and this sort of facility occurs through a habit. Therefore, free choice is a habit. Also, Bernard says that free choice “is a habit of the soul, free for itself.” Therefore, it is not a power.

Objection 3: No natural power is destroyed by sin (*tollitur per peccatum*). But free choice is destroyed by sin; for Augustine says, “A man who uses free choice badly loses both himself and free choice.” Therefore, free choice is not a power.

But contrary to this: Nothing except a power, it seems, is the subject of a habit. But free choice is the subject of grace, with the assistance of which it chooses the good. Therefore, free choice is a power.

I respond: Even though, according to the proper signification of the term, ‘free choice’ names a certain act, nevertheless, in the common usage of speakers, what we call free choice is the principle of this act, viz., that by which a man judges freely.

Now the principles of our acts include both powers and habits; for we are said to have cognition both through [the habit of] knowledge (*per scientiam*) and through the intellective power (*per intellectivam potentiam*). Therefore, free choice has to be either a power or a habit or a power along with a habit.

But there are two ways in which it is clear that free choice is neither a habit nor a power along with a habit.

First, if it were a habit, it would have to be a natural habit, since it is natural to man to have free choice. But there is no natural habit available to us for the things that fall under free choice, since the things with respect to which we have natural habits, e.g., assenting to first principles, are such that we are inclined to them naturally, and things that we are inclined to naturally do not fall under free choice—as has already been explained in the case of the desire for beatitude (q. 87, a. 1 and 2). Hence, it is contrary to the proper notion of free choice that it be a natural habit. And so it follows that free choice is in no way a habit.

Second, as *Ethics 3* says, a habit is something according to which we are related either in the right way or in the wrong way (*bene vel male*) to passions or actions. For instance, through temperance we are related in the right way to sense desires (*bene ad concupiscentias*), whereas through intemperance we are related to them in the wrong way; again, through knowledge we are related in the right way to acts of understanding, whereas through the contrary habit we do badly with respect to the cognition of truth. But free choice is related indifferently to both choosing well and choosing badly (*indifferenter se habet ad bene eligendum vel male*). Hence, it is impossible for free choice to be a habit.

Therefore, it follows that free choice is a power.

Reply to objection 1: It is customary for a power to be signified by the name of its act. And so the power which is the principle of the act of free judgment is signified by the act. Otherwise, if ‘free choice’ named an act, then it would not always be present (*non semper maneret*) in a man.

Reply to objection 2: ‘Faculty’ sometimes names a power that stands ready to operate. And this is the sense in which ‘faculty’ occurs in the definition of free choice.

Now Bernard is taking ‘habit’ not in the sense in which it is divided off against ‘power’, but rather

insofar as it signifies a relation (*habitus*) by which someone is in some way related to an act—and this is either through a power or through a habit. For through a power a man is related as one who is able to act, whereas through a habit he is related as one who is ready to act well or as one who is ready to act badly.

Reply to objection 3: By sinning, a man is said to have lost free choice not with respect to his natural freedom, i.e., freedom from coercion, but with respect to that freedom which is freedom from guilt and misery (*a culpa et a miseria*). This will be treated below in the tract on morals, in the second part of this work (*ST* 1-2, q. 85-89 and q. 109).

Article 3

Is free choice an appetitive power?

It seems that free choice is not an appetitive power:

Objection 1: Damascene says, “Free choice immediately accompanies the rational (*rationali*).” But reason (*ratio*) is a cognitive power. Therefore, free choice is a cognitive power.

Objection 2: Free choice is, as it were, free judgment. But judging is an act of a cognitive power (*cognitiva virtus*). Therefore, free choice is a cognitive power.

Objection 3: Free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) mainly involves the act of choosing (*electio*). But the act of choosing seems to involve cognition, since choosing implies a sort of comparison of one alternative to the other, and this is proper to a cognitive power (*proprium cognitivae virtutis*). Therefore, free choice is a cognitive power (*potentia*).

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says that choice (*electio*) is “a desire for those things that are in our power (*desiderium eorum quae sunt in nobis*).” But desire is an act of an appetitive power. Therefore, so is the act of choosing. But free choice (*liberum arbitrium*) exists insofar as we choose. Therefore, free choice is an appetitive power (*virtus appetitiva*).

I respond: The act of choosing is what is proper to free choice (*proprium liberi arbitrii est electio*); for we are said to have free choice because we are able to take one thing while rejecting another, and this is what it is to choose. And so it is on the basis of the act of choosing that one must inquire into the nature of free choice.

Now in an act of choosing, something from a cognitive power comes together with something from an appetitive power. On the part of the cognitive power it is required that there be deliberation (*consilium*), through which one judges which of the alternatives is to be preferred, whereas on the part of the appetitive power it is required that the judgment made through deliberation be accepted by desiring it. And so in *Ethics* 6 Aristotle leaves it in doubt whether the act of choosing belongs mainly to the appetitive power or the intellectual power; for he says that choice “is either an appetitive understanding or an intellectual appetite (*intellectus appetitivus vel appetitus intellectivus*).”

However, in *Ethics* 3 he leans more to the view that it is an intellectual appetite, when he calls choice a ‘deliberative desire’ (*desiderium consiliabile*). The reason for this is that the proper object of an act of choosing is the means to an end. But the means to an end has, as such, the character of the sort of good called ‘useful’ (*bonum utile*). And so, since it is the good as such that is the object of the appetite, it follows that an act of choosing is mainly an act of the appetitive power. And so free choice is an appetitive power.

Reply to objection 1: Appetitive powers accompany apprehensive powers. And this is why Damascene says, “Free choice immediately accompanies the rational.”

Reply to objection 2: Judgment is, as it were, the conclusion and determination of deliberation. But deliberation is made determinate, first of all, by the decision of reason (*per sententiam rationis*) and, secondly, by the approval of appetite (*per acceptationem appetitus*). That is why in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “When we have judged on the basis of deliberating, we desire in accord with the deliberation.” This is the sense in which the act of choosing is itself called a sort of judgment, from which comes the name ‘free decision’ (*liberum arbitrium*).

Reply to objection 3: The comparison that is implied by the name ‘choice’ pertains to the antecedent deliberation, which belongs to reason. For even though the appetite does not itself carry out a comparison, still, insofar as it is moved by a cognitive power that does carry out comparisons, it has a certain likeness to a comparison when it opts for one alternative over the other (*dum unum alteri praeoptat*).

Article 4

Is free choice a power distinct from the will?

It seems that free choice is a power distinct from the will:

Objection 1: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 2 Damascene says that *thelesis* (θέλησις) is one thing and *bulesis* (βούλησις) another. But *thelesis* is the will (*voluntas*) and *bulesis* seems to be free choice (*liberum arbitrium*), since *bulesis*, according to Damascene, is a willing (*voluntas*) with respect to some aspect of one thing in comparison to another. Therefore, it seems that free choice is a power distinct from the will.

Objection 2: Powers are known through their acts. But choosing (*electio*), which is the act of free choice, is distinct from the will, as *Ethics* 3 says. For the will (*voluntas*) has to do with the end, whereas choosing has to do with the means to the end. Therefore, free choice is a power distinct from the will.

Objection 3: The will is an intellectual appetite. But the intellect has two powers, viz., the active intellect and the passive intellect (*agens et possibilis*). Therefore, the intellectual appetite should likewise have another power besides the will. And there does not seem to be such a power except for free choice. Therefore, free choice is a separate power over and beyond the will (*alia potentia praeter voluntatem*).

But contrary to this: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says that free choice is nothing other than the will.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 80, a. 2), the appetitive powers have to be proportioned to the apprehensive powers. But, within the intellectual appetite, the will and free choice, which is nothing other than the power of choosing (*vis electiva*), bear the same relation to one another that, within intellectual apprehension, the intellect and reason bear to one another.

This is clear from the relations among their objects and acts.

For understanding intellectually (*intelligere*) implies a simple acceptance (*importat simplicem acceptationem*) of something, and so what are said to be understood intellectually are, properly speaking, principles, which are known in their own right without any comparisons (*sine collatione per seipsa cognoscuntur*). On the other hand, reasoning discursively (*ratiocinari*) is, properly speaking, to come on the basis of one thing to the cognition of another, and so, properly speaking, we reason discursively with respect to conclusions that are known from principles.

It is similar with the appetite. Willing (*velle*) implies a simple desire (*importat simplicem appetitum*) for something, and so the will (*voluntas*) is said to be concerned with the end, which is

desired for its own sake (*propter se appetitur*). On the other hand, choosing (*eligere*) is to desire something for the sake of attaining something else, and so, properly speaking, choice is directed to the means to the end.

Now, in appetitive matters, the end is related to the means to the end, which are desired for the sake of the end, in the same way that, in cognitive matters, the principle is related to the conclusion, to which we assent because of the principles. Hence, it is clear that the will is related to the power to choose, i.e., to free choice, in the same way that the intellect is related to reason. But it was shown above (q. 79, a. 8) that understanding intellectually and reasoning discursively belong to the same power, just as coming to rest and moving belong to the same power. Hence, willing and choosing likewise belong to the same power. Because of this, the will and free choice are a single power and not two powers.

Reply to objection 1: *Bulesis* is distinguished from *thelesis* because of a difference between the acts and not because of a diversity of powers.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, choosing (*electio*) and willing (*voluntas*), i.e., the act itself of willing (*ipsum velle*), are diverse acts, and yet they belong to a single power, just as understanding intellectually (*intelligere*) and reasoning discursively (*ratiocinari*) likewise belong to the same power.

Reply to objection 3: The intellect is related to the will as its mover. And so there is no need to distinguish the active and the passive in the will.