

# Philosophy of the Human Person

## Lecture #15

### Freedom & Necessity in the Will

terms

“will” = Latin *voluntas*

so, voluntary is, as a matter of etymology, “of the will”  
in Aquinas, “free-will”—*liberum arbitrium*

note that the term is not just *voluntas* with an adjective attached  
central question—*are the choices made by the will free actions?*

two views

determinism (the doctrine of necessity)

all human actions are completely determined by law

libertarianism

some human actions are determined by human choice, a power not  
governed by (= free from determination by) the laws of nature

the significance of the question

it could just be seen as another way to approach the difference between man  
and animal

(1) All human beings are capable of freely chosen action

(2) No animals are capable of freely chosen action

(3) If [1] & [2], then man has a power that animals lack altogether [4].

So, (4) man has a power that animals lack altogether

(5) If man has a power that animals lack altogether, then man and animal  
are different in kind [6]

So, (6) man and animal are different in kind

note

this same argument could be used to make the case that man and machine  
are different in kind

but if

choice is an act of the will

acts of will are acts of a distinctively human power

then, the argument for the distinctive human character of the will  
would already settle that argument

on the other hand the argument for the existence of the will (as a human  
power) and choice (as a human act) does not settle the question of  
whether these acts (i.e., choices) are free

what it is for an action to be *voluntary* (= from the will, *voluntas*)

contrast leaving a bar voluntarily and being thrown out

what it is for an action to be free

being voluntary does not automatically mean being free

there might be laws which determine the will, just as there are laws about other things

so, just as any gas with a certain volume at a certain temperature will exert a certain pressure on the walls of its container

any person with a certain character and a certain motive will do a certain thing (see Mill)

the question of *freedom* of the will is the question of whether our actions are no less determined by law than are any other events

here is one of the basic natural questions mentioned at the start of the course

are human actions free of causal determination?

or, is what we do, in some distinctive sense, up to us?

four fundamental alternatives in the explanation of actions and events

law of nature

the doctrine that this is the explanation of all events is determinism (or, the doctrine of necessity)

divine or angelic agency

the doctrine of special providence (miracles, &c.) is an example of this

this could also be a kind of determinism

we will set this aside as a matter for theologians

free human choice

the doctrine that some actions are explained by this is libertarianism

chance

Peirce's "tychism" is an example of this

so is quantum indeterminacy (or the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle) of quantum mechanics

acceptance of either is a rejection of determinism, but not a defense of the doctrine of freedom in human choices