

Philosophy of the Human Person

Lecture #33

Aquinas on Free Choice

Aquinas distinguishes

the existence of voluntary actions

the freedom of voluntary actions

“free-will” — *liberum arbitrium*

note that the term is not just *voluntas* with an adjective attached

the contrast of freedom & necessity (Aquinas)

“of necessity”

necessity is a property of subject-predicate relations

a subject has some feature “of necessity” if it always has the feature

so, for example, in “the will desires something of necessity”

“the will” is the subject

“desiring that thing” is the predicate

the proposition is necessary if the will always desires that thing

i.e., if all human beings always will it

it has the feature contingently if it sometimes lacks the feature

(or on some accounts, it at least could lack the property)

conceptual clarification—distinction among three senses of the term necessity

(1) natural necessity

the necessity of features or actions of things that results from the natures of those things

this could be from the matter or from the form

Aquinas’ examples

matter—e.g., “everything composed of contraries is corruptible”

form—e.g., “three angles of a triangle equal two right angles”

other examples

gold is malleable

a kind of necessity due to something internal to the agent

two kinds of necessity due to something external to agent

(2) necessity of end (utility)

necessary in the sense of “without it the end is not to be attained or so well attained”

e.g., “a living thing needing food”

“a traveler [in the Middle Ages] needs a horse”

threats are necessary in this sense

(1) Some acts that are chosen as a response to a threat are acts without which a person's end is not to be attained or so well attained

(2) Any act without which a person's end is not to be attained or so well attained is chosen by necessity of end

So, (3) Some acts that are chosen as a response to a threat are chosen by necessity of end

(3) necessity of coercion

e.g., "a person being thrown out of a bar"

necessary in the sense of being "forced by some agent, so that one is not able to do the contrary"

threats are *not* necessary in this sense

(1) No acts that are chosen as a response to a threat are acts that are literally forced by some agent, so that one is not able to do the contrary

since (2) No acts that are chosen [at all] are acts that are literally forced by some agent, so that one is not able to do the contrary

(3) All acts that are done by necessity of coercion are acts that are literally forced by some agent, so that one is not able to do the contrary

So, (4) No acts that are chosen as a response to a threat are done by necessity of coercion

Does the will desire anything of necessity? (Q. 82, a. 1)

that depends—in some senses of necessity, yes; in others, no

Can “This person wills a certain action” show *necessity of coercion*?

preliminary distinction—two possible causes of motion in a thing

natural motion is motion in accordance with the thing’s inclinations

coerced (“violent”) motion is motion not in accordance with the thing’s inclinations

e.g., (for Aristotle & Aquinas) a stone being thrown upwards, since it has a natural inclination to fall

a drunk being thrown bodily out of a bar

since natural human motion is from the will

argument

All actions showing necessity of coercion are caused by something not internal (external) to the agent

All voluntary actions are caused by something (the will) internal to the agent

So, No voluntary actions show necessity of coercion

conclusion—voluntariness is incompatible with necessity of coercion

Can “This person wills a certain action” show *necessity of end*?

argument

All actions having necessity of end are actions without which the end is not to be attained or so well attained

Some voluntary actions are actions without which the end is not to be attained or so well attained

So, Some voluntary actions have necessity of end

conclusion—voluntariness is compatible with necessity of end

Can “This person wills a certain action” show *natural necessity*?

[the interesting case]

analogy

the intellect adheres to first principles by natural necessity

first principles (of speculative & practical reason)

of speculative reason—a thing cannot both be & not be in the same way at the same time

of practical reason—good is to be done & pursued; evil is to be avoided

once one understands the terms, one sees that they are true

similarly, the will adheres to the last end by natural necessity

the last end—happiness

argument

(1) Any action that befits a thing due to its form is an action done from natural necessity.

(2) The will's adherence to the last end is an action that befits a thing due to its form

So, (3) The will's adherence to the last end is an action done from natural necessity

objection & reply (#3)

objection

(4) No actions of which we are masters are actions which are of necessity

(5) All our own actions are actions of which we are masters.

So, (6) No actions of our own are things which are of necessity

(7) The will's adherence to the last end is an action of our own

So, (8) The will's adherence to the last end is not done from necessity

reply

P5 is too strong—it should be only

(5b) All our own choices are actions of which we are masters

“choices” won't go into P7 since the will's adherence to the last end is not a choice

the distinction

willing—desire for an end (whether ultimate or instrumental)

choice—desire for the means to the end

conclusion—voluntariness is compatible with natural necessity

summary

one contradictory pair

necessity of coercion & voluntareity

two compatible pairs

necessity of end & voluntareity

natural necessity & voluntareity

Kind of Necessity	Can Acts of Will be Necessary in this Sense?	Example	Explanation
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Natural Necessity	Yes	The choice of doing good in Heaven	Any act that is recognized as the only means to an end that is good in every respect is chosen by the will by natural necessity. Some acts is recognized as the only means to an end that is good in every respect.
Utility	Yes	(For human beings in ordinary conditions), the choice to eat.	The unique means to ends it has willed is chosen by the will by necessity of end (utility). Some acts are the unique means to ends the will has willed.
Coercion	No		The will cannot be coerced

Does the will desire everything that it desires out of necessity? (Q. 82, a. 2)

analogy

the intellect adheres to first principles (once the terms are understood) naturally and of necessity

... adheres to consequences of the first principles of necessity as soon as it is aware of their connection to the first principles

... does not of necessity assent to contingent propositions

similarly, the will adheres to the ultimate end (once it is recognized) naturally and of necessity

... adheres to necessary means to the ultimate end of necessity as soon as it is aware of their connection to the first principles

... does not *of necessity* will what is not necessary to happiness

though it may will what is not necessary as one of the several possible ways to attain happiness

argument

(1) Anything willed by natural necessity is either the ultimate end or a known necessary means to the ultimate end

(2) Some goods are neither the ultimate end or a known necessary means to the ultimate end

namely optional means (e.g., eating peas) which are good, but not the ultimate end, and not necessary to attain the last end

unknown (to some) necessary means (e.g., chastity) which are good, not the ultimate end, and not known to be necessary means to the ultimate end

(3) Some things are not willed by natural necessity.

summary

Kind of Necessity	Are all Acts of Will Necessary in this Sense?	Example of an act not necessary in this sense	Explanation
Natural Necessity	No	The choice of doing good on earth	All acts which we might choose on earth have good and bad aspects Any act which has both good and bad aspects is an act which might not be recognized as the only means to an end that is good in every respect
Utility	No	(For human beings in ordinary conditions), the choice to eat.	Some actions are not the unique means to ends one has willed. No act that is not the unique means to ends one has willed is chosen by necessity of end.
Coercion	No		The will cannot be coerced

Does man have free will (Q. 83, a. 1)

three kinds of things

those which act without judgment—stones

those which act with judgment, but without free judgment (i.e., not from reason, but from natural instinct)—animals

those which act from free judgment—man

argument

(1) If man did not have free-will, then counsels, &c. would be in vain.

(2) But counsels, &c. are not in vain.

So, (3) Man does have free-will.

comment

we do reward & punish animals

though we do not counsel them, &c.

but the concept of punishment is somewhat different

punishment is a part of training

it should never be simply “because they deserve it”

how free will works

ordinary goods (all except happiness with God in Heaven) have good & bad aspects

animal action is determined by what they most strongly desire

human beings can focus on either good or bad aspects of any good

they can be put under different concepts

stealing food can be seen as

violating the property rights of others, or

getting something to eat

and chosen or rejected on that basis

this ability to focus on any aspect of a good is a basic power & is not determined

in that sense, the will is free