

What is Freedom?

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WHAT IS FREEDOM?

We have multiple and contradictory notions of freedom. Our most common representation describes it as the faculty of acting without hindrance. Freedom seems to be an ability to act spontaneously. It implies a form of autonomy and rationality of the agent. It involves an ability to choose which action to take, between several possibilities.

For some, freedom means the ability to do what one wants, and thus to choose a thing or its contrary. The essence of freedom lies then in free will (*liberum arbitrium*). According to others, freedom is the condition of responsibility; I must answer only for actions that depend on me. According still to others, freedom consists in a resolute decision in favor of what appears to us good, and the free man is the one who can only do good, so much so that the dimension of choice seems to have disappeared. Ultimately, the moral free man would be determined to choose only what he sees fit. There is therefore a dialectical tension between freedom and free will, between the evidence of good and the indifference of choice, between the power towards opposites and the power towards a single possibility.

In order to explore this dialectical tension, I propose to organize it around four questions: 1. Is freedom the power to do what one wants? 2. Is freedom the power to choose good or evil? 3. Does freedom lie in the indifference of choice or in the evidence of goodness? 4. Does the key to freedom lie in contingency or necessity?

I. THE POWER TO DO WHAT WE WANT

For the Ancients, freedom did not mean an inner, invisible property of the self, but a social situation: a man who is not a slave is free. Freedom was equated with the right to live a happy life in a political society. According to this, a first approach to

freedom would be to define it as the ability to live and act as we want. I think that this remains a common representation of freedom; for most of us, to be free is to be able to do what we want.

This is the sophistic representation of freedom, which implies that all kinds of actions, all ways of life, are morally equal. This is for example the definition given by the Sophist, Polos, in the *Gorgias*. Polos praises the prosperity of rhetors and tyrants: “So, do not they do *what they want*?”¹ The powerful are free because they can do what they want.

In the *Lysis*, Socrates asks Lysis, who is still a child, why he cannot drive his father’s chariot. Socrates raises two questions: “According to you, is he happy, a man reduced to slavery, if he is not allowed to *do anything he desires*?”² Plato criticizes here our first definition of freedom, mirroring the social definition of slavery: the free man acts without hindrance. From that, he derives the definition of freedom and happiness as consisting in *doing what one wants*. But his spokesman, Socrates, insists on the paradox of Lysis as a child: he is supposed to be free, but it is a slave who leads his chariot, and even his mother does not let him touch her spindles!

This leads us to the second question: “They want to see you perfectly happy, and they prevent you from doing what you want?”³ The political dimension of freedom and slavery is still in the background of Plato’s reflection, but it is reversed by his irony: this son of a free man is a slave, and his slave is freer than him. The motive and the key of his slavery appear soon, and they indicate how to get rid of it; there are many things he does not know, and it is in the fields he knows that he can do what he wants. He will drive the chariot when he shall know how to drive. For Plato, only the one who knows can be free. The learning of freedom requires the acquisition of real skills. Therefore, the key to real freedom is science. In order to be free to

1. Plato, *Gorgias* 467 b: Οὐκ οὖν ποιούσιν ἃ βούλονται;

2. Plato, *Lysis*, 207 e: Δοκεῖ δέ σοι εὐδαίμων εἶναι ἄνθρωπος δουλεύων τε καὶ ᾧ μηδὲν ἐξείη ποιεῖν ὧν ἐπιθυμοῖ;

3. Plato, *Lysis*, 207 e-208 a: Βουλόμενοι σε μακάριον εἶναι διακωλύουσι τοῦτο ποιεῖν ὃ ἄν βούλη;

“do what we want (*ho ti an boulometha*),” we must “become wise,” acquire discernment; this is how we “will be free.”⁴ “In the areas where we have become wise [...] we will do what we want.”⁵

The sophistic definition of freedom is only a first definition. If freedom qualifies the form of life we lead, to say that freedom consists in doing what we want is a formal definition, a blind evidence, an empty tautology that can be filled with anything. The problem is: what content do we give to this form? And as Plato pointed out, the truth of freedom is wisdom.

The whole process of the *Gorgias* dialogue is to show that men act in order to acquire or to attain a good. They must therefore learn to discern the good they seek. Hence, for Plato, the key to freedom is contemplation of truth. But the limit of his answer is precisely there: how can we *act* according to what we *know*? How can we adjust our action on theory? Plato does not tell us. He neglects the proper logic of action; he ignores the autonomy of praxis.

Surprisingly, this first definition of freedom (as an ability to do what we want) is resumed by some great philosophers, and even the most ascetic of all, the Stoics. The famous beginning of Epictetus' *Discourse IV* says: “*He is free who lives as he likes (hōs boulêtai)*; who is not subject either to compulsion, to restraint, or to violence; whose pursuits are unhindered, his desires successful, his aversions unincurred.”⁶ A man's freedom is identified with the satisfaction of his desires. It is immediately defined as an ability to enjoy without hindrance and as an absence of constraints.

But we are here precisely in the same paradox as in Plato's *Lysis*: the free man is the contrary of a slave. To speak of an interior freedom is a metaphor. And the metaphor is above all an ironic reversal. For Epictetus shows us, a few lines below (§. 6), that neither

4. Plato, *Lysis*, 210 b.

5. Plato, *Lysis*, 210 a-b: εἰς μὲν ταῦτα, ἃ ἂν φρόνιμοι γενώμεθα [...] ποιήσομέν τε ἐν τούτοις ὅτι ἂν βουλώμεθα.

6. Epictetus, *Dissertationes IV*, 1, 1: Ἐλευθέρως ἐστὶν ὁ ζῶν ὡς βούλεται, ὃν οὐτ' ἀναγκάσαι ἔστιν οὔτε κωλύσαι οὔτε βιάσασθαι, οὐ αἱ ὀρμαὶ ἀνεμπόδιοι, αἱ ὀρέξεις ἐπιτευκτικαί, αἱ ἐκκλίσεις ἀπερίπτωτοι; transl. E. Carter, *Moral discourses IV*, 1, 1; London, New York, 1957 (1910), p. 200.

birth nor social rank constitute freedom. The nobles can be born free and be slaves of pleasures that do not depend on them, while he himself, a former freed slave, remains free even when he is in the irons. Thus, the metaphor becomes a concept; freedom becomes a positive attribute, a metaphysical property that can be ascribed to each individual according to “what depends on us” (*eph 'hmin*).

But the real problem remains: how can we get what we want? And the stoic answer is: by wanting only what is good and what depends on us. If we do not want what is beyond our means, we will be able to get it. And if it is good, we are sure to get what is good.

It is precisely what Cicero explains in his *Hortensius*, in a text transmitted by Augustine. “Here, not philosophers, but men who are well-versed in discussion, say that *those who live as they want* are happy. But it is wrong; in fact, to want what is not appropriate is what is most unfortunate in itself. And not getting what you want is less unfortunate than wanting to get what you should not. Indeed, the evil of the will affects a man more than fortune does him good.”⁷ Cicero’s knowledge of the beginnings of philosophy is accurate. Those who are not philosophers, but who are well-versed in discussions, are clearly the Sophists. Their formal definition of freedom leads us to a dilemma: is it better to get what we want, even when it is not good, or to pursue goodness, even when we don’t get it? Cicero, the Stoics and Augustine answer without any hesitation: freedom to will is not goodness in itself; therefore, it is better to will what is good (even if we do not get it) than to get what we want (even if it is evil). Happiness does not consist in obtaining what one wants, but in obtaining what is good, and therefore in wanting it. Those who want evil and have the power to do what they want become even worse.

7. Cicero, *Hortensius*, Fragment 39 B = Augustine, *De beata vita* 2, 10 (Bibliothèque Augustinienne [=BA], Paris, 4/1, 72): “Ecce autem, ait, non philosophi quidem, sed prompti tamen ad disputandum, omnes aiunt *esse beatos qui vivant ut ipsi velint*. Falsum id quidem: Velle enim quod non deceat, id est ipsum miserimum. Nec tam miserum est non adipisci quod velis, quam adipisci velle quod non oporteat. Plus enim mali pravitas voluntatis affert, quam fortuna cuiquam boni.”

The Augustinian answer to the questions appears thus as a synthesis of Platonism and Stoicism. “‘What then does a man have to get in order to be happy?’ said I. [...] — ‘According to me, he has to get *what we have when we want*’. — They said it was obvious. — ‘It must therefore be,’ said I, ‘something which always remains, and which does not depend on fortune, and must not be subjected to any accident (*casus*). For all that is mortal and decaying cannot be obtained by us when we want it, and as long as we want it’.”⁸ According to Augustine’s analysis, real freedom is happiness. And it is obtained when we wish only what is good, what depends on us, and what remains without decaying. This permanent good is God. In order to get what we want, we should want only God. The Platonic contemplation of science and ideas is superseded by the love of God. Wisdom is now ordained towards a precise object.

II. THE ABILITY TO CHOOSE GOOD OR EVIL

In his *Researches on Human Freedom*, Schelling defines freedom as the ability to choose good or evil: “the power of good and evil.”⁹ This looks like a classical definition of freedom. If freedom is a source of moral responsibility, it is responsible for our good and evil deeds. But, if we have a closer look, we will remember that this is precisely the definition Pelagius proposed for freedom. Pelagius supported the idea that our freedom is an ability to do right or wrong: “we can sin and not sin.”¹⁰ We are created by God with this dual possibility: to do right or wrong, to choose good or evil; and since it is in our nature, it is necessary for us; we cannot lose this innate ability. “But, because the power not to sin does not depend on us, and, even if we wanted not to be able

8. Augustine, *De beata vita* 2, 11 (BA 4/1, 74): “Quid ergo sibi homo comparare debet, ut beatus sit, inquam? [...] nam id, opinor, ei comparandum est, *quod cum vult, habet*. Manifestum esse dixerunt. Id ergo, inquam, semper manens, nec ex fortuna pendulum, nec ullis subiectum casibus esse debet. Nam quidquid mortale et caducum est, non potest a nobis quando volumus, et quamdiu volumus haberi.”

9. F. W. J. Schelling, *Über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit*, Reclam, Stuttgart, 1995, p. 64: “das Vermögen des Guten und des Bösen.” Cf. A. Roux (dir.), *Schelling en 1809, La liberté pour le bien et pour le mal*, Paris, Vrin, 2010.

10. Pelagius, *De natura*, (PL suppl. I) = Augustin, *De natura et gratia* XLIX, 57 (BA 21, 350-351): “Possumus peccare et non peccare.”

not to sin, we could not not be able not to sin."¹¹ According to Pelagius, even if we do wrong, we keep the power of acting rightly, because our double-sided freedom has been given to us by nature.

But for Augustine, this is the wrong account of freedom. Freedom means first and foremost that we choose between different goods and act accordingly. The whole of our life is a pursuit of happiness. Even if it depends on us to will happiness and to hate unhappiness, we cannot say that we can will happiness or not, because we cannot hate happiness. The whole action of our life is the desire of the whole goodness. Therefore, our freedom is not double-sided, or bivalent; it is not a freedom for good or evil. It is a freedom for good. Free choice is our way to get what is good for us. "What would he think, if someone else said: 'because it depends on us not to want [to fall in] unhappiness, we can as well want it as not want it'? And nevertheless, *we cannot absolutely want it.*"¹²

Our freedom is directed towards goodness, not towards good *and* evil. And if we choose evil, it is through a failure, by a lack of freedom. In this case, our freedom is a *causa deficiens*, not a *causa efficiens*. Our freedom has destroyed itself and we became slaves of our bad choice.

This is also why we can speak of a divine freedom. God has not the ability to sin and not to sin, he has a one-sided freedom, which is the ability not to sin. God is free, God cannot sin, therefore the power of evil is not essential to freedom. This idea will remain the cornerstone of Anselm's *De libertate arbitrii*: "the power to sin is neither freedom, nor a part of freedom."¹³

According to Augustine, the key of our action is our free will (*liberum arbitrium*). "If by it [i. e. free will] I act badly, to whom should this evil be attributed, if not to *me*?"¹⁴ The problem is that

11. Pelagius, *De natura* = Augustine, *De natura et gratia* XLIX, 57 (BA 21, 350-351): "Quia vero posse non peccare nostrum non est, et, si vulerimus non posse non peccare, non possumus non posse non peccare."

12. Augustine, *De natura et gratia* XLIX, 57 (BA 21, 350-351): "Quid, si alius dicat 'quia nolle infelicitatem nostrum est, possumus eam et velle et nolle'? Et tamen eam velle omnino non possumus."

13. Anselm, *De libertate arbitrii*, ch.1 (ed. F. S. Schmitt, p.208).

14. Augustine, *De Libero arbitrio* III, 1, 3 (BA 7, 386): "cui tribuendum est, si quid per illam male facio, nisi mihi?."

of attributing moral predicates: how can we go back from good or bad actions to the self as good or bad? — By focusing on what is in us the source of action: the will. If an action comes from the will, I can be praised or blamed for it. And the will itself can be praised or blamed as good or evil. Hence, the will becomes the support for actions whose merit is attributed to me. The will becomes the principle of all moral predication. For the whole history of metaphysics, it founds the *ethical identity* of man.

The will is superposed on desire, it is our will that allows us to consent to it or not, on the model of the Stoic assent. But why add a will to desire? Why is freedom assigned to the will? By associating free will (*liberum arbitrium*) and will (*voluntas*), Augustine succeeded in a synthesis between two traditions: the *liberum arbitrium* of the Fathers, and the metaphysical concept of *voluntas*.

Therefore, for Augustine, the will itself is not a power to choose between good and evil. We want something only insofar as it appears good to us. Free will is not primarily an ability to choose a good or an evil object, it is the ability to choose between various goods, which belongs to the will itself.¹⁵ The will desires goodness: “There is no will but in what is good, for when it is evil, one speaks properly of covetousness (*cupiditas*), and not of will.”¹⁶ To do evil is not a form of freedom, but a defect of freedom. Consequently, the capacity for evil acts flows from the will in so far as it can fail, in so far as it is nothing, a want of will; but not of the will when it is without blemish.

Even if this point is obliterated by translations, Augustine speaks of “badly willing” (*male velle*), and not of “willing bad things” (or “willing evil,” *malum velle*); for him, the expression *voluntas mali* has no sense. A search in the Library of Latin texts shows that the expression *voluntas mali* appears for the first time in an anonymous commentary of the ninth century¹⁷, it is repeated by Abelard¹⁸ and then Thomas Aquinas.

15. Augustine, *De Libero arbitrio* I, 15, 32(BA 6, 256) et 16, 35(BA 6, 260).

16. Augustine, *De Sermone Domini in monte* (II, 22, 74): “Voluntas non est nisi in bonis; nam in malis flagitiosisque factis cupiditas proprie dicitur, non voluntas.”

17. *Anonymi in Matthaeum*, ed. B. Lösfedt, CCCM 159, Turnhout, Brepols, 2003, p. 77 (on Matthew 7, 23): “non dixit: Qui operati estis aut fuistis, sed “qui operamini,” hoc est qui in uestris malis actibus perseuerastis, qui non uoluntas mali operis in uobis defuit.”

18. Abélard, *Ethica, seu liber dictus: Scito teipsum* 1, 4 (ed. D. E. Luscombe, *Peter*

But even Aquinas says that the “*voluntas mali*” is not a first principle of action, since it is always a will for goodness diverted by passion: “In him who sins through weakness, the *will for evil* (*voluntas mali*) is not the first principle of sin, but it is caused by passion: but in him who sins maliciously, the *will for evil* is the first principle of sin, because he is inclined by himself and his own habitus to the *will for evil*, and not by an external principle.”¹⁹ Moreover, we must remember that the term “free” does not mean an absolute term, but a relation, even if it is a negative one; to be “free” is to be “loosened from,” “detached from” something or someone else. Freedom has no absolute meaning or value in itself. Augustine, citing Paul (Romans 6:20), emphasizes that we may sometimes be “free from righteousness” and “slaves of sin,” and sometimes “free from sin,” and “slaves of righteousness.”²⁰ Freedom is relative, and changes its meaning according to the term to which it refers. As Pascal will say, man is “either a slave of sin, or a slave of righteousness,” [...] “and therefore never free from either.”²¹ Freedom is not neutral; it is not absolute independence; it is always mixed with detachment and attachment. The question is, where does our attachment go: towards good or evil?

The question is not, “do we have a free will?” (*liberum arbitrium*), since we are created with it. The question is: “do we have a freedom (*libertas*)?” that is: the *power* to enact what we want, for example to love God. Pelagius and Augustine grant that grace is a gift of God. But for Pelagius, sin is only an evil use of free will, it does not

Abelard's Ethics, Oxford, 1971, p. 4: “Set fortassis inquires, quia et uoluntas mali operis peccatum est, quae nos apud deum reos constituit, sicut uoluntas boni operis iustus facit, ut, quemadmodum uirtus in uoluntate bona, ita et peccatum in mala consistat, nec in non esse tantum, uerum etiam in esse sicut et illa.”

19. Thomas, *De malo* a.3, art.12 ad 5: “In eo autem qui peccat ex infirmitate, *voluntas mali* non est primum principium peccati, sed causatur ex passione: sed in eo qui peccat ex malitia, *voluntas mali* est primum principium peccati, quia ex se ipso et per habitum proprium inclinatur in *uoluntatem mali*, non ex aliquo exteriori principi.” (My emphasis).

20. Augustin, *De correptione et gratia* XIII, 42 (BA 24, 364), and XII, 35 (BA 24, 350).

21. Pascal, *Ecrits sur la grâce*, Œuvres complètes, II, ed. Le Guern, Paris, Pléiade, 2000, p.272.

diminish our free will nor our freedom. Hence, grace is reduced to the forgiveness of our evil deeds. On the contrary, Augustine takes Saint Paul literally: “to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good, I find not.”²² For Augustine, the will itself is corrupted by sin. It has become powerless. It needs grace to be itself, that is, to be a power.²³ Grace gives to the powerless will the power to act well. It renders its power to an impotent power.

God is not only the one who orders man to act rightly, he is also the one who enables him to act so. “*Da quod jubes et jube quod vis*” is the motto of Augustine (for example, *Confessiones* X, *De dono perseverantiae* 20, 53): “give what you order, and order what you want.”²⁴ Therefore, grace gives us the ability to perform what we will, when we will something good. It renders real the freedom of our will, which is freedom for goodness. We cannot seek goodness if we are not attracted by grace. Augustine links grace to pleasure; grace makes us find pleasure in such or such an action, that is why we will seek it, and perform it, freely.

Taking this argument to the extreme, the virtuous man is truly free, but his acts are almost necessary. Augustinian freedom looks akin to Aristotelian virtue. According to Aristotle, the virtuous person has the habit of doing good deeds, he possesses at the same time a right desire and a true reasoning. However, even though it is very rare, it remains possible that he might lose such a virtue.

Augustine and Aristotle agree on this point: freedom is precisely not contingency.

III. INDIFFERENCE?

At the same time, in freedom, there is always an element of choice. Is it the principal or the less important element?

22. Augustine, *De natura et gratia* 50, 58 (BA 21, 354), quoting Romans 7, 18: “*velle illi adiacet, perficere autem bonum non est.*”

23. Cf. E. Gilson, *Introduction à l'étude de saint Augustin*, Paris, 2003 (1929), p. 205-206.

24. Augustine, *Confessiones* X, 29, 40 (BA 14, 212); *De dono perseverantiae* 20, 53: “*Da quod jubes et jube quod vis.*”

We know the famous analysis of Descartes, in his *Fourth meditation*: “For in order that I should be free it is not necessary that I should be *indifferent as to the choice of one or the other of two contraries*; but contrariwise the more I lean to the one — whether I recognize clearly that the reasons of the good and true are to be found in it, or whether God so disposes my inward thought — *the more freely* do I choose and embrace it.”²⁵ Freedom is not only indifference, understood as the ability to choose the contraries (*in utramque partem*), it is also the movement through which I lean toward one or the other. This movement can be motivated (or caused) by the evidence of the object, or by the divine grace, it is nevertheless free. And the more it is caused by a reason, the more it is free (*tanto liberius eligo*).

Descartes distinguishes clearly between a negative and a positive sense of freedom as indifference: the negative sense of indifference is the situation of balance, when we are not inclined or impulsed toward one object more than the other; the positive sense of indifference is the ability to determine oneself towards one side more than the other. “It seems to me that the word ‘indifference’, when used properly, stands for the state will is in when *it isn’t* carried in any one direction by the person’s knowledge of what is true and what is good [...] But there may be people who understand ‘indifferent’ in another sense, namely as a *positive* faculty – or ability – to choose to do x or not to do x, to affirm P or to deny it. I have not denied that the will has this faculty.”²⁶

25. “Neque enim opus est me *in utramque partem* ferri posse, ut sim liber, sed contra, quo magis in unam propendeo, sive quia rationem veri et boni in ea evidenter intelligo, sive quia Deus intima cogitationis meae ita disponit, *tanto liberius* illam eligo” (*Meditationes de prima philosophia* IV, ed. C. Adam, P. Tannery, VII, p. 57-58; I am using E. S. Haldane’s English translation, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1911). — “Car, afin que je sois libre, il n’est pas nécessaire que je sois indifférent à choisir *l’un ou l’autre des deux contraires*; mais plutôt, d’autant plus que je penche vers l’un, soit que je connoisse évidemment que le bien & le vrai s’y rencontrent, soit que Dieu dispose ainsi l’intérieur de ma pensée, *d’autant plus librement* j’en fais choix & je l’embrasse” (transl. Luynes, *Méditations métaphysiques*, Adam- Tannery, IX, 46).

26. “L’indifférence me semble signifier proprement l’état dans lequel se trouve la volonté lorsqu’elle *n’est pas* poussée d’un côté plutôt que de l’autre par la perception du vrai ou du bien. [...] Mais peut-être d’autres entendent-ils par indifférence la faculté *positive* de se déterminer pour l’un ou l’autre de deux contraires, c’est-à-dire de poursuivre ou de fuir, d’affirmer ou de nier. Cette faculté positive, je n’ai pas nié qu’elle fût dans la volonté” (*Lettre* [to father Mesland?], 9 février 1645, AT III, 379;

The first indifference, a negative one, is the lowest degree of freedom, since it is not motivated by goodness, and goodness is the object of our choice. Here, Descartes remains Augustinian. But there is another meaning of indifference, it is the ability to determine oneself, it is freedom as self-determination. And the second indifference, a positive one, is present in all forms of freedom, not only when the state of affairs is balanced, but even when we choose what appears to be best. It is a dynamic and spontaneous power, a property of the will.

In which sense can we say that freedom is rooted in the indifference of the will? We must go back to scholasticism in order to understand this point.

For Aquinas, as for Augustine, the capacity to do wrong does not belong to the freedom of the will. It is rather “a characteristic of the deficient will.” The essence of freedom (*ratio libertatis*) is not the ability to do evil. But it is the ability “to do this or not to do it (*facere hoc vel non facere*) or to do this or that (*hoc vel aliud*).”²⁷ But Aquinas, more than Augustine, thinks in terms of consistent natures. Freedom is first and foremost an intrinsic and inalienable property of the will: the ability to do something or not to do it (the power of contradictories), and to do one thing or another (the power of opposites). In the *De malo*, q.6, he identifies the first with a freedom of exertion (*exercitium actus*) and the second with a freedom of determination (*determinatio actus*).²⁸ Freedom of the

I am using J. Bennett’s translation, *Selected correspondence of Descartes*, 2013, p. 175; http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/descartes1619_4.pdf.

27. Thomas, *Super Sententias* I, d.42, q.2, a.1 ad 3.: “in hoc attenditur ratio libertatis, quod possit hoc facere vel non facere, aut hoc vel aliud facere.”

28. Aquinas, *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* q.6: “potentia aliqua dupliciter movetur: uno modo ex parte subiecti; alio modo ex parte obiecti. Ex parte subiecti quidem, sicut visus per immutationem dispositionis organi movetur ad clarius vel minus clare videndum; ex parte vero obiecti, sicut visus nunc videt album nunc videt nigrum; et prima quidem immutatio pertinet ad ipsum exercitium actus, ut scilicet agatur vel non agatur aut melius vel debilius agatur: secunda vero immutatio pertinet ad specificationem actus, nam actus specificatur per obiectum. [...] Si ergo consideremus motum potentiarum animae ex parte obiecti specificantis actum, primum principium motionis est ex intellectu: hoc enim modo bonum intellectum movet etiam ipsam voluntatem. Si autem consideremus motus potentiarum animae ex parte exercitii actus, sic principium motionis est ex voluntate.”

will has a double aspect: the ability to act or not to act (the power of contradictories), and the ability to do such and such (the specification of our power). The first one, the triggering of action, comes from the will, which moves itself; the second one, the determination of the kind of action, comes from the object represented by the intellect. There is a double meaning of indifference: the indifference to acting or not acting, the indifference to doing this or that.

Once we agree that we have active powers, for Aquinas, “the whole concept of freedom (*ratio libertatis*) depends on the mode of knowledge.”²⁹ Animals have different behaviours, but they do not have freedom of judgment because they do not rise up to the consideration of the absent contradictories. Animals have “a certain indifference in their actions,” but one cannot say in the proper sense that they have “the freedom of actions, that is, the freedom to act or not to act.” For, in a particular situation, their judgement is naturally determined by a single term: they can do only what their particular judgment indicates to them as desirable. Animals have only “a certain freedom” (*libertas aliqua*) and not freedom as such because they have no reason, since they do not have access to language. They can choose, but they cannot represent equally the present possibility and its contrary, therefore they have only a restricted freedom.

On the contrary, man, who accesses through language the universal concept of goodness, can refer particular goods to it.³⁰ Hence, he can judge otherwise than he does, and therefore base his indifference on a rational alternative. It is a rational freedom, a freedom of the will.

Thomas, following Aristotle, has no reluctance to grant the animal a share of freedom, or a “conditioned freedom” (*conditionata libertas*)³¹, but he does not grant it plenary freedom (the essence of freedom). To reach this essence, it is necessary to possess the fullness of reason, which allows man to reflect on his own judgments by elevating them to the universal (through language), and at the same time, to contradiction, and ultimately, to trigger them or not.

29. Thomas, *De Veritate* q.24, a.2, resp. “tota ratio libertatis ex modo cognitionis dependet.”

30. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* I, q.59, a. 3 resp.

31. Thomas, *De Veritate* q.24, a.2, resp.

What is the “root of freedom”? Aquinas conceives this root in a way that articulates two aspects: “The root of freedom (*radix libertatis*) is the will as a subject, but as a cause, it is reason.”³² The place or the subject of freedom is the will as an ability to choose (“free will”), but it is rooted in reason, which is its cause and principle, because reason is the faculty of representing the contraries. Indeed, the choice is based on deliberation, that is, on a judgment, and judging is the proper act of reason, by which we reflect on our actions, “this is why the root of all freedom is established in reason.”³³ Man is free because he is rational. It is the representation of contraries that grounds the contingency of our action.

The expression “indifference of the will” (“*indifferentia voluntatis*”) is already attested in the works of pseudo-Roger Bacon (c. 1240-1247).³⁴ But the concept of indifference remains important for Thomas Aquinas when he characterizes free will as rooted in reason. Rationality is clearly the origin of indifference in our choice. Since we can represent a multiplicity of particular actions as falling under the aim we pursue, our reason represents indifferently many courses of action: “the form which is thought is universal, and under it a multiplicity can be understood; therefore, since acts are singular, and no universal power is adequate to them, the inclination of the will *indeterminately* relates to this multiplicity.”³⁵ The will relates indifferently to a multiplicity of actions. Human free will is comparable to a clean tablet, opened indifferently to all actions. Thus, the will is not determined to a single operation, but it “refers indifferently” to all.

32. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q.17, a.1 ad 2: “*radix libertatis est voluntas sicut subiectum, sed sicut causa, est ratio.*”

33. Thomas, *De Veritate* q.24, a.2, resp.: “*unde totius libertatis radix est in ratione constituta.*”

34. [Pseudo-]Roger Bacon, *Quaestiones altere supra libros prime philosophiae Aristotelis*, ed. R. Steele, M. Delorme, *Opera hactenus inedita* XI, Clarendon Press, Londres, 1932, *Supra Primum Metaphisice Aristotelis*, p.31: “*Liber est qui habet voluntatis indifferentiam, scilicet qui potest agere quaecunq; vult, sed liberalis qui indifferentiam sue voluntatis omnino in bonum ordinat, et in melius consentit, unde addit supra liberum, et plures sunt liberi quam liberales. Est igitur liberalis quia per istam consensus voluntatis ad bonum et malum indifferentis ordinantur.*”

35. Thomas, *De Malo*, q.6 resp.: “*forma intellecta est universalis sub qua multa possunt comprehendi; unde cum actus sint in singularibus, in quibus nullum est quod adaequet potentiam universalis, remanet inclinatio voluntatis indeterminate se habens ad multa.*”

Besides, Thomas maintains that the will is a desire for the apparent goods. Therefore, its object is the good. It implies thus an indifference between various goods. Can it be an indifference between good and evil? Thomas once seems to suggest it: "Free will refers indifferently (*indifferenter se habet*) to the acts of choosing well or badly."³⁶ But we must remember the context of this sentence. It is in a place where he wants to show why free will is a power and not a habitus. For it is by adding itself to free will that virtue (a good habit of free will) inclines us to good, or vice (a bad habit of free will) inclines us to evil. Here, free will is not only the ability to choose a bigger or smaller good, it has become the indifferent ability to choose well or badly, that is, to receive virtue or vice. But here, precisely Thomas does not say that we can "choose good or evil," even if he does so (only once) in a less technical text (clearly by a loss of focus).³⁷ It is clear that this ambivalence of free will rests on a definition of natural power as able to receive contrary dispositions.

On the other hand, in light of the evidence of goodness, Thomas Aquinas maintains that we have freedom without indifference; the love of God for Justice, the love of the blessed for the infinite goodness of God, the natural desire of man for happiness are free, but they necessarily lead us, and we have no hold on them. And if we have the ability to do right or wrong, it is not part of the *essential* definition of free will.³⁸

36. *Summa theologiae* I, q.83, a.2 resp.: "Liberum autem arbitrium indifferenter se habet ad bene eligendum vel male."

37. Contrary to what M. Corbin writes, "Du libre arbitre selon S. Thomas d'Aquin," *Archives de Philosophie* 54 (1991), p. 203: "le libre arbitre est indifférent au bien ou au mal" to translate "liberum arbitrium indifferenter se habet *ad bene eligendum vel male*" (I, q.83, a.2), which invalidates all his criticism of "naturalism" and Thomistic indifference. We find only five times "to choose evil" (*malum eligere*) under the pen of Thomas, twice in objections, once in a passage which refutes its possibility: "posse *eligere malum*, non est de ratione liberi arbitrii; sed consequitur liberum arbitrium, secundum quod est in natura creata possibili ad defectum" (*De veritate* q.24, a.3 ad 2). In both cases where the use is positive, Thomas places himself from the outside, from the point of view of an observer who finds that what has been chosen turns out to be evil, he does not mean that the will can consciously choose evil: "gratia desistente, liberum arbitrium per se potest *malum eligere*" (*De veritate* q.24, a.12 ad 14); "homo est suae voluntatis liber, potens bonum vel *malum eligere*" (*De rationibus fidei*, ch. 7).

38. Cf. Hoffmann, Tobias, "Liberté de qualité et liberté d'indifférence chez S. Thomas," in M. S. Sherwin, C. Titus (ed.), *Renouveler toutes choses en Christ, Vers*

So, the more our will adheres to goodness, the more our freedom grows.³⁹ Aquinas agrees with Augustine, “there is a happy necessity, that compels us to what is best.” To will necessarily does not diminish the freedom our will. Our freedom is not hindered by the restriction of our choice.

As Augustine, Aquinas maintains that perfect freedom is unable to do evil. It is not a power for right or wrong it is only a power for good: “Where free will is most perfect, it cannot aim towards evil.”⁴⁰ Thomas remains an Augustinian; we cannot consider free will as a neutral power with various fields of application, an ability to choose which could apply to good as well as to evil. To choose evil is to lose the freedom of the will. In every act of freedom, the agent seeks what seems to him best in these particular circumstances. “True freedom” is the pursuit of good through the contingency of goods, it is freedom from sin (*libertas a peccato*).⁴¹ That is why there is no opposition between free will and grace: the orientation towards goodness is confirmed by grace, or even given by it.⁴² Our free will can be “confirmed in goodness,” that is, necessitated through grace.⁴³

IV. CONTINGENCY

With Aquinas’ analysis of freedom, we understand why Descartes can describe negative freedom as freedom of

un renouveau thomiste de la théologie morale: hommage au P. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., Fribourg (Suisse), 2009, p. 57-76.

39. Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q.88, a.4, ad 1: “sicut non posse peccare non diminuit libertatem, ita etiam *necessitas* firmatae voluntatis in bonum non diminuit libertatem, ut patet in Deo et in beatis. Et talis est necessitas voti, similitudinem quandam habens cum confirmatione beatorum. Unde Augustinus in eadem epistola [ad Armentarium et Paulinam, PL 33, *Epistola* 127, §.8] dicit quod *felix necessitas est quae in meliora compellit*.”

40. Aquinas, *Sentences* II, d.25, q.1, a.1 ad 2: “ubi perfectissimum est liberum arbitrium, ibi in malum tendere non potest, quia imperfectum esse non potest.”

41. Thomas, *Summa theologiae* II-II, q.183, a.4 resp.

42. Thomas, *De veritate* q.24, a.8 ad 7: “bonum perfectum, quod est Deus, potest esse unitum menti humanae per gratiam, non autem per naturam; et ideo per gratiam liberum arbitrium potest confirmari in bono, non autem per naturam.”

43. Thomas, *De veritate* q.24, a.8 ad 7: “per gratiam liberum arbitrium potest confirmari in bono.”

indifference. But we must understand why there is another meaning of freedom, a positive one, linked to contingency.

Following the Aristotelian treatise, *On Interpretation*, Aquinas distinguishes two degrees of contingency: physical contingency, in which events are not necessarily determined in their causes, but occur most often, and those whose causes relate “indifferently” to one or the other party (“*ad utrumlibet*”): this category includes particularly the events that “depend on free will.”⁴⁴

Contingency of action rests on the indifference of the will. But does every act of free will involve a form of contingency? If free-will were defined in a libertarian sense, as a contingent power in itself, as a spiritual power of self-determination, or as an ability to will and not to will independently of the state of causes, it would not be possible to consider only one of its acts as determined by causes. But precisely, for Aquinas, contingency is not a universal property of the will. There are many cases where our choices and actions are necessary.

For Aquinas, it is clear that the will obeys a form of necessity, since it necessarily wants what appears to it as good :

The natural necessity, according to which the will is said to want something necessarily (for example bliss), does not contradict the freedom of the will, as Augustine teaches. Indeed, the freedom of the will is opposed to violence or coercion. Now, there is no violence or constraint when something is moved according to the order of its nature, but rather when its natural movement is prevented: thus a grave [body] is prevented from descending to its place; this is why the will freely desires bliss, even if it necessarily desires it. And so it is that God also loves himself by his will freely, even if he necessarily loves himself.⁴⁵

44. Thomas, *De Veritate* q.8, a. 12 resp.; Cf. Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 9, 19 a 19.

45. Thomas, *De potentia* q.10, a.2, ad 5: “naturalis necessitas secundum quam voluntas aliquid ex necessitate velle dicitur, ut felicitatem, libertati voluntatis non repugnat, ut Augustinus docet. Libertas enim voluntatis violentiae vel coactioni opponitur. Non est autem violentia vel coactio in hoc quod aliquid secundum ordinem suae naturae movetur, sed magis in hoc quod naturalis motus impeditur: sicut cum impeditur grave ne descendat ad medium; unde voluntas libere appetit felicitatem, licet necessario appetat illam. Sic autem et Deus sua voluntate libere amat seipsum, licet de necessitate amet seipsum.”

Thomas thinks of action on the model of the Aristotelian theory of motion. If a stone falls in free fall, it is because its natural movement is not prevented. A spontaneous movement is therefore free, and not constrained, but it may be necessary. It is through this power that we necessarily seek what appears to us as good; in this case, our will is determined to choose it. But we keep the freedom of exertion (of acting or not). Since Henry of Ghent (one generation later), freedom of determination is called freedom of the contraries (we want something or its contrary), while freedom of exertion is called freedom of the contradictories (acting and not acting are contradictories).

A turning point towards neutral contingency of the will appears with Duns Scotus. It is based on three fundamental theses.

1. The principle: "whatever is moved is moved by another" is only valid for natures.⁴⁶ But the will is not a nature, and it is self-propelled. It is independent of any external determination, therefore autonomous and self-determined.
2. It is the will, not the intellect, which is a rational power, that is, a power of contradictories.⁴⁷
3. The distinction between nature and will rests on the different ways of producing (*elicere*) their operation.

Within this framework, we can explain how the will is the origin of contingency. We must distinguish three components (*rationes*) within this freedom of the will.⁴⁸

46. Duns Scot, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* IX, q.14, §.45-62 (*Opera Philosophica*, ed. R. Andrews, G. Etzkorn, G. Gal, etc. Saint Bonaventure, New York, 1997, IV, 640-649).

47. Duns Scot, *Quaestiones in Metaphysicam* IX, q.15, §.21-23 (IV, 680-681).

48. Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* I, d.38-39 (*Opera omnia*, Vatican, 1950 sq., VI, p. 417). Cf. *Lectura* I, d.39, n.45-46 (Vatican, 1966, XVII, 493): "[45] Voluntas enim nostra libera est ad actus oppositos (ut ad volendum et nolendum, et amandum et odiendum), et secundo mediantibus actibus oppositis est libera ad obiecta opposita ut libere tendat in ea, et tertio est libera ad effectus quod producit sive immediate sive movendo alias potentias executivas. [46] Nunc autem in ista totali libertate voluntatis aliquid est imperfectionis et aliquid est perfectionis: quia quod habeat libertatem *ad actus oppositos*, hoc est *imperfectionis*, quia secundum hoc necessario est receptiva, et mutabilis per consequens (cum non simul habeat actus oppositos);

1. The will is free towards its opposite acts. It is able to will and to reject (or, if we translate technically, "to nill": *nolle*), it may want and hate. It has freedom towards contraries.
2. By these opposite acts, it is free to turn to opposite objects. It is able to want white or black.
3. The third is the freedom to produce opposite effects.

The first "concept of freedom," freedom towards our acts, is imperfect, because it implies a mutability in us (passing from willing to nilling, and vice versa). The second "concept of freedom (*ratio libertatis*),"⁴⁹ freedom towards objects, does not imply imperfection; on the contrary, it is necessary to perfection, for every power tends naturally towards all its objects. God's freedom is perfect and aiming towards all objects. The third kind of freedom corresponds to what Ockham will call "efficient will (*velle efficaciter*)":⁵⁰ it produces real effects in the world.

A threshold has been crossed: Thomas used to consider indetermination of the will as an imperfection (at least in its ability to choose between good and evil). For Duns Scotus, too, the ability to will or not to will, is still an imperfection. The first *indifference* of the will, its freedom towards contradictories, arises from an imperfection of the will.⁵¹ The divine will does not pass from one act to its contradictory, it would be for God an imperfection. But Scots adds one layer. There is a second indifference of the will: that the will may desire opposites, such as white and black, is part of its perfection. The divine will has the freedom, by a single infinite act, of willing opposite objects, and producing various effects.⁵² The freedom towards contraries *has become a perfection*.

libertas autem ad obiecta opposita est perfectionis, quia quod voluntas possit operari circa obiecta opposita, non est imperfectionis sed perfectionis, sicut quod intellectus possit intelligere obiecta opposita est perfectionis; tertia autem libertas non est prima, licet non dicat imperfectionem."

49. The expression is to be found in Duns Scot, *Ordinatio* I, d.38-39 (VI, 417).

50. Ockham, *Opera theologica* I, *Scriptum* I, d.1, q.6 (St Bonaventure, New York, ed. G. Gal, S. Brown, 1967, p. 505).

51. Duns Scot, *Ordinatio* I, d.38-39 (VI, 425).

52. Duns Scot, *Ordinatio* I, d.2, §. 79-88(II, 176-180).

Beside its negative meaning, indifference of the will has received a positive meaning. It is part of the immanent perfection of all acts of willing. Freedom designates now an essential property of the will, opposed to nature. That is why even the love of the blessed or the will for goodness in the wanderer on earth are contingent.

Moreover, the will is the source of all contingency: contingency among creatures comes from the divine will, and contingency in human affairs comes from the human will.⁵³ Necessity and contingency come from the relation between the subject and the object. Divine will is necessarily moved only when its object is infinite (when God contemplates and loves himself); but for external, finite, objects, God wills them in a contingent manner.⁵⁴

And so does our human will: it is finite, and “it wants in a contingent way its end as well in general as in particular.” It wants in a contingent way the abstract concept of goodness as well as God seen through beatific vision.⁵⁵ Although the traditional position consists in saying that the beatific enjoyment is free *but necessary*, Duns Scotus argues that it is both free *and contingent*.

Human will always acts in a contingent way. If the will of the wanderer on earth freely wants God by his charity, it loves him in a contingent manner, and in the hereafter it will not be transformed: it will still love him in a contingent manner. Even if God is seen with evidence, it does not change the way our power works.⁵⁶ Therefore, even when faced with the evidence of goodness, even in the face of God’s vision, man remains free not to love him, that is to say, free to hate him.

53. Duns Scot, *Ordinatio* I, d.38-39 (VI, 415 et 417).

54. Duns Scot, *Lectura* I, d.10, §.26 (Vatican, XVII, 124).

55. Duns Scot, *Reportationes parisienses* I, d.49, q.9, §. 8, *Opera Omnia*, ed. L. Wadding, Lyon, 1639, XI/2, p. 912 b: “Dico igitur quod contingenter vult finem et beatitudinem, tam in universali quam in particulari.”

56. Duns Scot, *Ordinatio* I, d.1, §. 136-137 (Vatican, II, p.91-92): “Quando principium elicivum non necessario elicit, habens illud principium non necessario agit. [...] Necessitas agendi non potest esse nisi per aliquid intrinsecum principio activo; per hoc autem quod intellectus nunc videt obiectum, nihil novum est intrinsecum principio activo in fruitione; ergo nec nova necessitas agendi.”

This raises the question of the grounding of contingency in the will. Are we free not to want what we want, and to want what we do not want? Can the will at the same time will and not will x (*velle et non velle*), or will x and will not- x (*velle et nolle*, which is technically translated *nill x*)? Aristotle, in *Metaphysics IX* proposes a matrix of questions and answers. On the one hand, rational powers are “powers of opposites,” but on the other hand, “it is impossible that the opposites are present at the same time.” Therefore, a power can only realize *successively* the contraries.

Does contingency exist? As Scotus remarked, we are experiencing it everyday; no one can prove it, but it is an immediate evidence. Its existence is a principle, in the same way as the principle of contradiction. Like it, it can not be demonstrated, but it can be manifested a posteriori by a *reductio ad absurdum*. Avicenna asserts that the stubborn who deny the principle of contradiction must be plunged into the fire: according to their theory, to suffer and not to suffer is the same thing, but in practice, we are sure they will agree it is different.⁵⁷ The same performative contradiction applies to one who denies contingency: if he is submitted to suffering, he will feel compelled to confess that he might not suffer — an alternative possibility is open to him. We cannot demonstrate contingency, but we can constrain the stubborn to recognize it through his action.⁵⁸

But how does contingency come to the will?

1. There is what S. Knuuttila has called a “diachronic contingency”⁵⁹: the will can aim successively at opposite objects. In this sense, “what is white can be black.” Contingency is a power to realize successively the contraries. But this contingency implies for the will a mutability and an imperfection (it does not apply to God).
2. Yet, there is a second kind of contingency, no longer temporal, but logical. We speak of a logical power

57. Avicenna, *Liber de philosophia prima sive scientia divina I*, 8 (ed. S. Van Riet, Louvain, Leyde, 1977, p. 62).

58. Duns Scot, *Lectura I*, d.39, §. 40 (XVII, 491).

59. According to S. Knuuttila, *Modalities in Medieval Philosophy*, Londres, New York, 1993.

when some terms are possible and compatible with one another.⁶⁰ For example, out of world and time, it is true that “the world may be” and that “the world may not be.”⁶¹ This logical constitution of essences, regardless of all existence and temporality, constitutes the logico-ontologic structure of all possibility. It is a “synchronic contingency”: the two opposites are logically possible at the same moment.

This synchronic contingency characterizes the will: “In the same moment when the will has an act of willing, [...] it *can* have the opposite act of willing.”⁶² Scotus has just established it: possibility is independent of actual reality, as of temporality. An experiment of thought proves it: we can imagine a will to be created only for an instant; this instantaneous will cannot will and nill in succession; but in order for it to be truly free (to be truly a will), precisely in the instant when it wills *x*, it *can* nill *x*.⁶³ If a will at time *t* decides to make *x* at time *t*, it also has the *power*, at the same time *t*, to decide to do the opposite of *x*. It can therefore, *at the same time*, will *x* and not will it (or nill it).

60. So, even when it did not exist, it was possible for the world to be In this moment before the world, if an intellect had been created, and if it had said “the world can be,” this proposition would have been true, whereas there was no corresponding reality yet. Even without the factual existence of their signified, the terms “the world” and “can be” are a true proposition. Cf. *Lectura I*, d.39, §. 49 (XVII, 494); and J. Duns Scotus, *Contingency and Freedom. Lectura I* 39, Introduction, Translation and Commentary by A. Vos Jaczn, H. Veldhuis, A. H. Looman-Graaskamp, E. Dekker, N.W. den Bok, Kluwer, Dordrecht, Boston, Londres, 1994, p. 117; see also M. Sylwanowicz, *Contingent causality and the foundation of Duns Scotus's Metaphysics*, Leyde, New York, Cologne, 1996, p. 19-42.

61. Cf. S. Knuutila, “Time and Modality in Scholasticism,” in *Reforging the Great Chain of Being. Studies of the History of Modal Theories*, Reidel, Dordrecht, 1981, 163-257.

62. *Lectura I*, d.39, §. 50 (XVII, 495).

63. This thought-experiment reveals Duns Scotus' source; as S. Dumont has shown (“The origin of Scotus's theory of synchronic contingency,” *Modern Schoolman* 72 (1995) 149-167), the theory of synchronic contingency was already invented by Olieu: if the angels were able to sin from the first moment of their creation, they are capable of opposites from this moment on (Olieu, *Quaestiones in secundum librum Sententiarum*, ed. B. Jansen, Quaracchi, 1926, q.42, t. I, p. 705-706). “Et respectu eiusdem nunc et secundum illam prioritatem naturalem in ipso eodem nunc fuit prius naturaliter potens ad exeundum in actum oppositum” (t.II, p. 348, my emphasis).

Consequently, in the precise moment when it elicits a volition, the will relates in a contingent way to its willing, but also in a contingent way to its nilling. So, when the will wills, *unlike all natural causes*, it produces its effect, *contingently*, not necessarily. For in the moment when it is a cause of the willing, it has a contingent relation to this act: “at the moment when it wills *x*, it can nill *x*.” In establishing this proposition, *Duns Scotus rejects the Aristotelian principle of the necessity of the present*: “what is, when it is, is necessary.” In the case of the will, *even the present is contingent*.

Hence, the definition of freedom is completely overturned: “the will wants freely only because it can nill (*nolle*).”⁶⁴ Freedom now rests on contingency, that is: on the synchronic possibility of contradictories, on the simultaneous coexistence of alternatives, and not on a succession of states of affairs in the same subject. Metaphysically, contingency is rooted in the mode of causality proper to the will. Scotus thus redefines the contingent: “for which the opposite could happen when it happens (*cuius oppositum posset fieri quando illud fit*).” What is produced by the will is contingent, *even when the opposite is equally possible*. Thus, for Scotus, the will is not, like Aristotelian prudence, inserted into a world of pre-existing natural contingency. The will is a principle of divergence of possibilities. From the same situation, two possible worlds can appear. *The will produces contingency, in a radical break with nature, subject to a radical necessity*.

For Scotus, the will has a freedom of modal indifference. Therefore, even if an infinite good is presented to us, we can still choose to abstain from willing it. Our freedom remains a contingent will in front of the absolute goodness. Freedom of the will is separated from desire.

Summarizing Scotus’s analyzes, Ockham can define freedom by indifference itself: “I call freedom the power by which I can, *indifferently and contingently*, pose various [acts], so that I can cause and not cause the same effect, without there being any difference (*diversitas*) elsewhere out of the power.”⁶⁵ In the will,

64. Duns Scot, *Lectura I*, d.39, §. 52 (XVII, 496).

65. Ockham, *Quodlibet I*, q.16, *Opera theologica*, t.9, ed. J. Wey, St Bonaventure,

indifference, which is the ability to cause or not to cause, and the ability to cause the contraries, makes contingency. Freedom becomes essentially independent of all inclination towards goodness, it is an absolutely indeterminate and self-determining power, capable of causing or not causing contingently, remaining independent of the state of the external world. With Scotus, freedom of the will takes on a purely libertarian meaning.

Pierre of Ailly, a nominalist of the end of the fourteenth century, takes stock of this history, when he interprets a famous expression of Saint Bernard: freedom is *libertas a necessitate*, the liberation from necessity. This liberation has a double meaning: 1. It is a liberation from any external constraint, which is equated with the faculty of acting spontaneously, according to one's own pleasure (*libertas complacentiae*); 2. It is a liberation from determinism, which is equated with the power to act contingently (*libertas contingentiae*). In its turn, freedom of contingency is subdivided into two: freedom of *contradiction* and freedom of *indifference*. A. Freedom of contradiction (*libertas contradictionis*) is the intrinsic dimension of freedom (implemented by Duns Scotus), its ability to act or not to act contingently. This is what Descartes calls positive indifference. And: B. According to Pierre d'Ailly, freedom of *indifference* implies an additional character: a "will [...] so indifferent that it is no more inclined to one part of the contradiction than to the other." It indicates a perfect balance between two opposing desires. This is what Descartes interprets as negative indifference.

(Positive) freedom of contradiction is a metaphysical power, identical with the will, while (negative) freedom of indifference is a state which depends on the external world. Thus, "*every freedom of indifference is a freedom of contradiction, but the reciprocal is not true.*" Freedom of contradiction does not imply that the agent has two equal and contrary inclinations. It is the essence of the will,

New York, 1980, p. 87. Ockham, *Quodlibet* I, q.16, *Opera theologica*, t.9, ed. J. Wey, St Bonaventure, New York, 1980, p. 87. "Voco libertatem potestatem qua possum indifferenter et contingenter diversa ponere, ita quod possum eundem effectum causare et non causare, nulla diversitate existente alibi extra illam potentiam" — I emphasize: it has become a hendiadys - in the will, indifference makes contingency.

while (negative) indifference is a special case of its exercise. It is therefore the power to will what I do not will, even if I am inclined towards what I will. Hence, it is possible that “someone who has acquired the habitus of a virtue like that of temperance has a freedom of contradiction, able of acting or not acting according to this virtue, but it is equally possible that he has not the freedom of indifference, because he is more prompt and inclined to the work of this virtue.”⁶⁶ This allows an articulation of metaphysical freedom and moral probability: an agent can be free in the absolute (he is capable of the contradictories) even though it is morally probable that he will act according to his habit and his inclination (without indifference).⁶⁷ In the words of Descartes, positive indifference of the will remains even when we do not have negative indifference.

At this stage of reflection, the modern concept of freedom of indifference is already built. This concept implies: 1. an absence of constraint; 2. an ability to decide whether to act or not (freedom of contradictories); 3. a balanced situation. But the second moment is more fundamental than the third: because our will is the power of contradictories, it can always be self-determined without any situation of balance. And reciprocally, if we have the power to determine ourselves against our habitus (to make a wrong act even if we have become virtuous, and vice versa), we can determine ourselves in a state of perfect balance.

WHAT IS THE ESSENCE OF FREEDOM?

To summarize what we have seen, freedom is marked by contradiction between two dimensions: freedom to do what we want, and freedom to want what seems good for us. There is an element of self-determination, as well as a desire for goodness. Therefore, we have the power to choose what appears to us as better, *or* what

66. Pierre d’Ailly, *Tractatus de anima*, p. 40.

67. The opposition between metaphysical necessity and moral necessity is at the heart of modern metaphysics. According to Leibniz, God has a freedom exempt from necessity: “I mean metaphysical necessity, because it is a moral necessity that the wisest is to choose the best” (*Essais de Théodicée II* §.230; éd. J. Brunschwig, Paris, 1989, p. 256).

appears as less good (and which will reveal itself to be wrong). But this does not mean that our freedom is the ability of doing right *and* wrong — the ability of doing wrong is not the essence of freedom, it is a manner in which we can lose our own freedom; it is a by-product, but it is not freedom itself. In our free will, the ability to choose good comes from freedom, and the ability to choose evil from a lack of freedom, as Augustine and Aquinas have shown.

The double meaning of indifference is linked to this tension: there is a negative freedom of indifference, unmotivated by goodness, or motivated by a balance between equal goods. But even in the face of equal goods, we have the ability to choose, which means that our free will is an active, positive power, able to act or not to act by itself — it has a freedom of contradiction. And this power remains directed towards goodness: as Descartes stated, when no other goodness can motivate it, the will chooses because it is good for it to choose.

In a word, freedom is the ability to choose among finite and contrary goods. Therefore, we may extend the span of freedom up to a radical indifference between contradictories, which is the source of contingency. But at the same time, our ability to choose is our way to attain supreme goodness. And if (as we have been reminded) goodness and wisdom belong to God, man has a share of them when he acts wisely, according to his own freedom.