

THE THOMIST

A SPECULATIVE QUARTERLY REVIEW

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THE THOMIST PRESS

Publishers

Will There Be Free Will in Heaven? Freedom, Impeccability, and Beatitude. By SIMON FRANCIS GAINÉ. London and New York: T & T Clark, 2003. Pp 141. \$40.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-567-08950-9.

The beatific vision excludes the possibility of sin. Thus George Wall concludes that the blessed are unfree. John Donnelly, conversely, sacrifices the impeccability of the blessed in favor of their freedom (3-7). According to Simon Francis Gainé, Wall and Donnelly are led to these unorthodox views because of an inadequate conception of freedom. Gainé intends to show not only that the freedom of the blessed is coherent with the beatific vision, but that freedom, correctly understood, has its fullest development when the blessed are in complete possession of God and when they are no longer subject to sin. What leads one to see a tension between freedom and impeccability is the understanding of freedom as "freedom of indifference." The tension is solved, however, when one adopts the patristic and Thomistic conception of freedom, which the author, borrowing an expression from Pinckaers, calls "freedom for excellence."

Gainé investigates the problem of freedom in heaven mostly from the theological perspective. His main interest is seemingly to defend the orthodox view of eschatology according to which freedom is supremely possessed by the blessed. The framework of the problem of freedom in the presence of the universal good is clearly theological, yet it is also of great philosophical relevance: what is at stake is the understanding of the perfect mode of freedom and the definition of freedom. The question of the freedom of the blessed thus becomes a litmus test for an author's understanding of freedom and a test case for the coherence of his psychology and moral theory. The historical approach to this question gives rise to an interesting observation: "It seems that the more voluntarist a theologian becomes, the more he must perhaps limit the freedom of the blessed in order to maintain an orthodox position on impeccability" (84).

The main authors Gainé studies are Aquinas, Scotus, Ockham, and Suárez. He first examines Suárez, who is significant as an historian, as it were, of medieval philosophy, and as one of the most influential thinkers to transmit medieval thought to modernity. Suárez provides us with a helpful conceptual tool by distinguishing between an intrinsic cause (i.e., the vision of God) of impeccability and an extrinsic cause (i.e., God's providence or grace). Suárez attributes the intrinsic view, a position he himself adopts, to Thomas, while he classifies Scotus's and Ockham's views as extrinsic (16-21). Regarding the question of how there is freedom in the blessed, Suárez reviews the classical solutions of Augustine and Anselm of Canterbury for whom freedom, understood as freedom from the slavery of sin (Augustine) and as the power to preserve rectitude (Anselm), is fully realized in heaven. But Suárez considers this an equivocal use of the notion of freedom, since in its core, freedom means for him not freedom from sin, but freedom from obligation and absence of necessity. In this regard, Suárez admits that the blessed are free to a certain extent, but due

to the necessitating character of the divine vision, this freedom is diminished (21-32).

On Scotus's account, the finite will of a creature has essentially the power to do otherwise than it does. This does not change in the vision of God. Though one cannot unwill or "nill" (*nolle*) happiness, one can always turn one's attention away from happiness and thus "not will" it (*non velle*). The vision of God does not by itself alter the will's capacity to turn away from God. It is God, not as beheld, but as providing a special grace, who prevents the blessed from sinning. God extrinsically determines the will so as to remain steadfast in the free enjoyment of the beatific vision (35-68).

Ockham understands freedom as freedom of indifference: whatever the practical intellect dictates, the will has the power to will its opposite. The will does not necessarily will the good in general and it is capable of willing evil as such. The will is thus equally free to will or to nill beatitude and to will or nill God. Even when God is clearly seen, there is no necessary beatific act of fruition. Precisely because the beatific act is entirely caused by God, the blessed cannot nill God: this is what guarantees the perpetuity of beatitude and the impeccability of the blessed. Freedom of indifference remains in the blessed with regard to those acts which are not sinful. Ockham extends the scope of freedom toward evil under the aspect of evil, and yet limits the self-determination of free acts in heaven: he safeguards the impeccability of the blessed only by assuming that the acts of fruition of the blessed are not caused by them but by God (71-84).

If the conception of freedom as something completely unlimited results in the denial or reduction of freedom in the state of perfection, we may have to rethink what freedom really is. Gaine's discussion of an adequate understanding of freedom is dependent on Pinckaers's analysis of the discrepancy between freedom of indifference and freedom for excellence. Freedom of indifference is detached from the natural inclination to the good and to happiness. The desire for happiness as the ultimate end is no longer what gives unity to the moral life; rather, morality is seen as the continual subordination to law, the law being an expression of the will of the lawgiver (God or political authority). Freedom for excellence, conversely, is the development of the natural inclinations to the good, the true, etc., by means of the moral virtues. It is a freedom that grows in proportion to the stable adherence to the true good. The closer one comes to God, who is the fulfillment of all desire, the more perfect is one's freedom for excellence (87-102).

The test case of the beatific vision does not jeopardize the freedom for excellence, but rather confirms the adequacy of this understanding of freedom. In the possession of God, freedom is fulfilled. There is no tension between freedom and impeccability. In its consummation, freedom is a gift of grace. Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it (119-28). But if freedom for excellence in its completion is essentially the unfailing adherence to the good, in which sense do the blessed still enjoy free choice (*liberum arbitrium*)? Aquinas offers an answer to this question. God, though necessarily willing his own

goodness, freely decides to share his goodness with creatures. The blessed angels have no tendency to opposites with regard to God; rather, they freely exercise a role in divine providence with regard to humans. They are no longer free to sin (which constitutes not a perfection but rather a defect of the will), but they are free to choose among opposites, with the order of the end kept in view. In similar fashion, the saints in heaven can still exercise free choice, though they cannot depart from God (128-34).

Gaine offers us an elegant solution to the theological problem of freedom in its eschatological dimension. He does not neglect the philosophical relevance of this question, since he is interested in elaborating an adequate definition of freedom. Yet he does not exhaust the rich philosophical potential implied in the problem: while he examines at length the relation between free choice and impeccability, he could have addressed other important topics in more detail, (e.g., the relation between freedom and necessity and the compatibility of freedom and determination). In order to achieve this goal, a more detailed discussion of each author's notion of freedom or free choice outside of the contexts of eschatology would have been necessary. A closer look at medieval conceptions of free choice and of freedom reveals that the opposition between freedom of indifference and freedom for excellence is inadequate to describe the problems at hand. Medieval authors developed the two notions of freedom in order to solve different difficulties, and these two notions are in fact not incompatible: freedom of indifference focuses on the contingency of the act of free choice, whereas freedom for excellence accounts for the relation between freedom and the attainment of one's end. The real question, which Gaine does indeed to some extent address, is the place of natural inclinations in an author's psychology and ethical theory: are acts of free choice elicited independently from inclinations to happiness or not? A greater philosophical awareness could also have rendered Gaine more attentive regarding his use of the notion of "free will." Does he consistently intend *liberum arbitrium*? If so, then "free choice" or "free decision" would have been a better translation, because whether freedom is rooted in the intellect or in the will or in both is a matter of debate. Perhaps some of these limitations could have been avoided had Gaine made more use of secondary sources, including important non-English literature. These reservations set aside, Gaine offers us an interesting and engaging study that uses a specific theological problem to investigate a problem of general relevance: the correct understanding of freedom.

TOBIAS HOFFMANN

The Catholic University of America
Washington, D.C.