ON FREE WILL, FREEDOM AND GRACE

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Abstract

God and man's contribution in the work of redemption, plus the agreement between grace and freedom forms the main part of Augustine's doctrine from a theological point of view. Here, his thinking is the most personal, most influential and most contested. The most personal because he is the first to synthesize the theories of fall, of grace and of freedom and offers, in order to reconcile them, an explanation really his. Otherwise, the word Augustinian ism is reserved to designate not the entire doctrine of Augustine, but the special interpretation of the bishop on grace. It is the most influential because through him it is insured the triumph of freedom against Manicheans and the triumph of grace against the Pelagians. It is, finally, the most contested. It is proven by the misunderstanding that accompanied him and that is still present even among Catholic theologians (they are grateful to Augustine, but are also divided when it comes to the nature of freedom and to the explanation of the divine action).

Keywords: free will, freedom, grace, Augustine, predestination

1. Liberty and responsibility

To fall into error, you must first exist and want something. 'I think', 'I am free', here are two fundamental perceptions, necessary and infallible. But to perceive the fact of freedom is not the same as explaining its nature. It is very important to make a clear distinction between free will and freedom. In *De Libero Arbitrio*, Book III, Augustine offers an explanation and uses at least six expressions for free will, all having one and the same value. The expressions are: *voluntatem*; *voluntas libera*; *voluntatis arbitrium*; *nostra potestate*; *liberum arbitrium*; *potestatem utrum vellent* [1]. In *De Libero Arbitrio* I also find the formulas: *libera voluntate* (I, 11, 21), *voluntate vitam* (I, 13, 27), *liberium arbitrium* (II, 2, 4), *libera voluntas* (II, 18, 47), *libera voluntatem* (III, 1, 3), *libera voluntate* (III, 3, 6), *voluntas* (III, 17, 47).

Free will is the faculty to choose and it cannot be lost. *Freedom* is the state of will oriented towards good which is God. If man resists this orientation, he loses the freedom, but keeps the free will. Free will is the mediator of freedom according to the principle: the more is freedom rooted in God, the less it is subject to the changes of free will. Therefore, Grace is not a *auxilium*

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(*adiutorium*) granted to freedom, but by means of grace free will reaches to the true freedom (*libertas vera est Christo servire*). After the fall, Adam does not lose free will, he loses the meaning of true freedom; he can no longer choose the field of good, which means that it is impossible for him to love God without the assistance of grace. Through sin, Adam lost freedom and the role of grace is not the one of replacing free will, the role of grace is to act like him, the free will, to be again able to exercise its freedom. But how? By restrain free will? No! For "the specific of grace is not to constrain us, but to make us act freely" [1].

From where to begin? From the fact that man needs salvation! What does it need? Because it had sinned in Adam, the sin passed into mankind and is inherited. Therefore, it would seem that man can only sin! But, in this case, he would sin being constrained. But if sins being constrained, how can he be punished? Responsibility and, thus, the freedom of man would be, in this case, both cancelled. From here Augustine begins, from the agreement of freedom to sin with man's responsibility for his sin. Freedom is, thus, the power to do exactly what you have chosen to do through free will, is the good use of free will. Therefore, by means of free will I decide, choose, deliberate and agree. It's not all about choice; everything is about acting; not everything is about acting; it's about acting good. Therefore, if free will is the power to choose between good and evil, *true freedom* has as its object the good. Augustine defines freedom as the free movement of the soul moving towards something that it does not want to lose or that it wants to acquire.

Very clearly: "freedom is a good use of free will and free will is will, always free to move towards good or evil, so not always in the good way" [2]. Freedom is approaching the more to perfection as it distances itself from bad. It is here the distinction between *free freedom* and *freed freedom* (will can choose the good and it can also make it).

God and man's contribution in the work of redemption, plus the agreement between grace and freedom forms the main part of Augustine's doctrine from a theological point of view (and only subsidiary philosophical). Here, his thinking is the most *personal*, most *influential* and most *contested*. The most *personal* because he is the first to synthesize the theories of fall, of grace and of freedom and offers, in order to reconcile them, an explanation really *his*. Otherwise, the word *Augustinianism* is reserved to designate not the entire doctrine of Augustine, but the special interpretation of the bishop on grace. It is the most *influential* because through him it is insured the triumph of freedom against Manicheans and the triumph of grace against the Pelagians. It is, finally, the most *contested*. It is proven by the misunderstanding that accompanied him and that is still present even among Catholic theologians (they are grateful to Augustine, but are also divided when it comes to the nature of freedom and to the explanation of the divine action [3]).

Let me see further how things are in the light of the historical development of Augustine's thinking.

2. The triple aspect of the issue of good: the philosophical, the theological, the Pauline aspect

After he condemns the Manicheans and solves the problem of evil through the role the human freedom plays, emerges for Augustine the problem of good under a triple aspect: philosophical, theological and Pauline [4, col. 2375-2407].

2.1. Philosophical

Philosophy is customary to ask itself on the two sovereignties, the divine one and the human one. It is about the divine foreknowledge especially that which the ancients removed in order to save freedom. This foreknowledge is not, however, contrary to the freedom of human. The fact that God foreknows my fore-action does not make me less free. Augustine mentions that God's foreknowledge does not affect my next action, the same as memory does not act (in the sense to change it) on the past; besides, Augustine makes a very clear distinction between predestination and foreknowledge. Sins are the object of foreknowledge, not the object of God's predestination, for divinity does not predestine anyone to sin. Evil is not an efficient cause, but a deficient cause. Our will is the cause, but the will of evil is nothing else but privative will that moves away from the truth and from being. The cause of this will we cannot investigate beyond will itself. It follows that God knows from the beginning the incorrect wills, but does not predetermine them in any way. God can have foreknowledge without predestination, but not predestination without foreknowledge. God does not make Himself the sin, He knows it from before, but He does not predestine as well. One thing is clear: neither the philosophy, nor the theology of Augustine like determinism. The foreknowledge of God does not cancel my free will. It even confirms it, either by that, or especially by choosing evil. The autonomy of decision is absolute regarding the possibility of choice. This is the essence of freedom in Augustine and its quite paradoxical expression is: *voluntas Dei de homine peccante impleta* (the very will of God is fulfilled regarding the man who sins). *De Libero Arbitrio* [III, 4, 11] warns that the secret consists in not confusing foreknowledge with predestination under the form of causality. Evodius, the interlocutor from *De Libero Arbitrio,* tells him: "our memory does not impose any necessity on things of the past; the same, God's foreknowledge does not impose any necessity on the things to come" (*Sicut enim tu memoria tua non cogis facta esse quae praeterierunt*; *sic Deus praescientia sua non cogit facienda quae futura sunt*). Augustine's conclusion is that *Deus praenoscens non cogit ad peccandum atque adeo peccata iuste punit* (even though God has this foreknowledge, we are not constrained to sin; therefore, He also justly punishes the sins). And Book III, 3, 6 tells us that God's foreknowledge does not act as not to sin by free will: *Dei praescientia non efficit ut non libera voluntate peccemus*. "In this context, that is being formed, it seems to me that wanting to assign Augustine a concept as the one of total predestination, completely opposed to the free will capable of self-determination, the absurd is eventually

revealed. Therefore, it is from the very beginning incorrect the interpretation that sees, in Augustine, that for salvation only faith is necessary, without facts; not even in the most difficult moment of the controversy with Pelagius, for its combat being necessary the great exaltation of the role of grace, Augustine does not forget that the only faith that saves man is that of Charity, from which good deeds come: that is why it can be said that without the facts and, therefore, without the active intervention of *bona voluntas*, there can be no salvation." [4]

2.2. Theological

The revelation complicates the issue of freedom by stating the mysterious and continuous influence of Christ in man - *Sine me nihil potestis facere* (*John* 15.5). I.e., to the issue of God's grace joins the over added grace; for this reason, Augustine distinguishes between "the grace of Adam" (*auxilium sine quo non*), which was the help without which Adam could not persevere in the good that he had been created, and "the grace of Christ" (*adiutorium quo*), which is not the power to persevere in good, but perseverance itself [1, p. 134], so that no one cannot be a spectator in the presence of grace. Grace activates and transforms man into an actor (about these things treats Augustine in *De Correptione et Gratia*, 12, 34; 12, 35). Grace is necessary for the renewal of man, for if man has not perished (sinned), the Son of Man would not have come. If we could not *make* ourselves all alone, we cannot *re-make* by ourselves. Man can, alone, only to fall; in order to stand up, he needs something that is not in him from him. To the theological space rests a threefold freedom: *libertas minor*, namely the freedom enjoyed by Adam before sin. It consists, as a sort of definition, of the possibility of not sinning and of the possibility of not dying – *posse non peccare et posse non mori*; to *libertas minor* follows *libertas maior*, *vera libertas* sau *libertas Christiana*. It is "the fruit of our redemption to Christ, the freedom which consists in the participation and gradual advance towards: the freedom from *radical evil* of sin, from the moral condemnation by God, a consequence of God's condemnation by us; the freedom from the *final evil of death*" [1, p. 134-135]. Finally, we have *libertas maxima*: *non posse peccare et non posse mori*. Extremes are made possible by *libertas Christiana* and, in summary, we have: the possibility to not sin and not die (minor freedom) and impossibility to sin and to die (maximum freedom). And if I am already freed from a curse, and I believe in the Son of God, I do not see how Adam could have known better times!

2.3. Saint Paul

Few places in the Pauline epistles serve Augustine in the issue of predestination, but add another: is not freedom somehow annulled by the fall of Adam and God's free predestination? The Pauline places are: "And if it is by grace, it no longer is from facts; otherwise grace is no longer grace" (*Romans* 11.6: *Si autem gratia, iam non ex operibus, alioquin gratia iam non est gratia*);

"To the one that makes deeds, the payment is not regarded by means of grace, but by means of debt" (*Romans* 4.4: *Ei autem, qui operatur merces non reputatur secundum gratiam sed secundum debitum*); "And what do you have, that you did not receive? And if you received it, why do you boast as though you did not receive?" (I *Corinthians* 4.7: *Quis enim te discernit? Quid autem habes, quod non accepisti? Si autem accepisti, quid gloriaris quasi non acceperis*?); all these, so that "every mouth may be closed and everyone to be guilty before God" (*Romans* 3.19: *Scimus autem quoniam, quaecumque lex loquitur, his, qui in lege sunt, loquitor, ut omnes os obstruatur, et obnoxius fiat omnis mundus Deo*). (Saint Paul is frequented from this perspective in *De gestis Pelagii*, 14, 33 where he is quoted with *Romans* 4.4, 11.6 and *De Correptione et Gratia*, 10, 28 where he uses again *Romans* 3.19.)

3. Predestination–liberty–grace: conclusions

It can be said that in 397 Augustine's system regarding predestination-freedom-grace is almost complete. It must be shaded the exaggeration according to which Augustine hesitates indefinitely when it comes to freedom and predestination. It is not less true that, pressed by the arguments of Pelagians, he did not cease to restrict the field of freedom (the exaggeration is that, towards the end of life, Augustine formulates the thesis of absolute predestination that cancels freedom). The shade is: the fact that predestination destroys freedom is denied by Augustine ever since 397, for from the beginning of his episcopate (15 years before the Pelagian controversy) he has formulated the system in *De Diversis Quaestionibus ad Simplicianum*.

Simplicianus, successor of Ambrose on the Bishop chair from Milan, among other questions asked to Augustine (who was his disciple during the time spent at Mediolanum), also asks him about Chapter IX of *Romans*. Augustine's response is exactly from *De Diversis Quaestionibus* (especially Book I, 2, 1: *Argumentum Epistolae ad Romanos*; 2, 2: *Gratia fidei precedit bona opera. Gratia fidei minor in cathecumenis, maior in renatis*; 2, 3: *Scopus Apostoli in exempla Iacob et Esau. Bona opera ex gratia, non gratia ex operibus*; 2, 5: *Electio Iacob an ex praescientia futura fidei*; 2, 6: *Electio ex gratia et propositio Dei*; 2, 7: *An fides inter dona gratiae numeretur*, and so on until the end of the book I), which is, by means of precision, clarity and rational explanation added to the dogma, the key to the Augustinian system. Augustine himself recommends his opponents to review this book and in *Retractationes* he does not change anything in it. The definitive formulas of Augustine are not reserved for the last period and predestination, at least, does not have anywhere a more exact form than in *ad Simplicianum* (I, 2, 8: *Quomodo iusta reprobatio Esau*; II, 2, 2: *Praescientia an proprie sit in Deo. Scientia quid, et quomodo in Deo. Ira, misericordia et zelus Dei, quo sensu dicitur*).

Pelagius makes from our will something absolute. He suppresses the original sin: Adam sent us only a bad example. He suppresses the work of salvation. Jesus acts on us only on the outside, by His examples and teachings,

and does not exercise within us an intimate action that would imply the supernatural will. If things were so, Christianity would be ruined. Pelagius, Augustine claims, acknowledges the grace by which God reveals to us what we need to do, but does not recognize the one by means of which God makes us act and help us in our action. The grace that makes us act is the grace of the New Testament or the grace of Christ. It opposes to what we call *law*, because the law is the simple manifestation of precepts. There is a difference between law and grace of nature, not just one of time. By means of the law of creation, God says: "Do what I command you"; by means of the law of grace, man says to God: "Give us what You commanded". By commandment we are warned (trained); by grace, the will is converted for the fulfilment of commandment. God crowns his gifts and this is not the human merit [S. Aurelii Augustini *Opera Omnia,* edition Latina, PL 44, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, 6, 15: *Donasua coronat Deus, non merita tua*].

Grace and free will cooperate. The apostle says: "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (*Romans* 12.21: *Noli vinci a malo, sed vinci in bono malum*). In *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* (3, 5), Augustine concludes: "Do not allow to be defeated» means that the referee of will is recognized, for to want and not want belongs to personal will" (*Et utique cui dicitur*: «*Noli vinci*», *arbitrium voluntatis eius sine dubio convenitur. Velle enim et nolle propriae voluntatis est*).

The problem is: how does the freedom of man, under the influence of grace, manage to preserve something from its own energy? For if it does not preserve anything, then we do not cooperate either; but if our cooperation means that we add something to the energy of grace (a pure humanly energy), then both energies, juxtaposed, produce the supernatural action. Giving credit to such versions means, however, being Pelagian. Augustine allows us to understand that God produces in man himself the will to believe, but to consent or not to consent to God's call, this only belongs to will. Human's merit comes from his good will supported by God; his undeserved merit comes from the perverse will. Either God, or any other substance outside of man does not produce in human the sin. However, Augustine does not explain how is it that a rational creature, capable to judge good, decides for evil! He believes that here it is, at the same time, an undeniable fact and a mystery whose complete solution we cannot see [5].

The opposing trends of Augustine's doctrine are clearly noticed. On the one hand, he does not doubt that the world has its origin in God, on the other hand, he finds evil in the world, and this presence makes from the problem of evil an enigma. Augustine does not dare to attribute evil to God, case in which he can see evil only as a human act. But since God perfects all that exists, Augustine cannot escape the consequence according to which the evil act is not also true. Moreover, evil will does not cease to occur otherwise than as a void in humanity. Corrupt will contradicts divine will, but there cannot be anything contrary to the divine will in the world!

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