

## Freedom of Indifference: The Origin of Obligational Moral Theory

### INTRODUCTION: THE NEED FOR A STUDY OF FREEDOM IN MORAL THEOLOGY; ITS DIFFICULTY; HOW IT IS KNOWN

#### The Presence and Mystery of Freedom

In the construction or restoration of a building the foundations need to be examined first, so as to guarantee stability and determine on an architectural plan and dimensions. One of the first foundations of moral theory is the concept of freedom, together with some idea of human nature and human powers. St. Thomas's moral theory elaborated in the *Summa* is based on his study of the human person (1a, qq 75–76), who possesses cognitive (q 79) and appetitive powers (qq 80–83). These powers focus on the exercise of free will. It is in our free will that St. Thomas perceives the true image of God within us, for it is in our mastery over our actions that we show forth his image (Prologue, lallae). We may even say that our idea of God and of our relationship with him depends largely on our concept of freedom. This is not to say that we necessarily conceive God in our own image, but our ideas about God and our relationship with him are inevitably influenced by our concept of human freedom. Surely the human person is the best mirror in which to catch a glimpse of God.

Freedom is at the heart of our existence. It is at the core of our experience and is the source of our willing and acting. It is who we are, at our most personal. It would seem that there is nothing about ourselves that we are more aware of. To hear us speak of freedom, to hear us incessantly defending it, it would seem to be quite familiar to all as a birthright and inalienable possession.

And yet, when we question ourselves about the nature of human freedom, when we attempt to grasp, describe, and define it, it always escapes us. We are left clutching at traces and reflections. Freedom is always just beyond the horizon of our thoughts and actions. It is an amazing capacity for innovation and change, but also for destruction and contradiction.

Freedom is, therefore, what we know best, since it is at the heart of our most personal actions. At the same time, freedom is what we know least, for no idea can encompass it, no piling up of concepts reveal it adequately. The only possible definition, if there is one at all, would be to say that freedom always transcends the action it causes or the thought in which it is reflected.

## Two Ways of Knowing Freedom

If it is vain to hope for an adequate definition of freedom, which will not fail by excess or by defect, still there are several fairly sure avenues of approach, which will lead us to recognize some of freedom's characteristics clearly enough to be able to use them in shaping moral theory. The first and principal method is reflection on our actions and feelings, which are the direct results of our freedom. Regardless of cultural background, everyone is led, sooner or later, by experience and life's problems, to reflect on freedom and the moral realities it generates: responsibility, good and evil, virtue and duty, truth and falsehood, reward and punishment, and so forth. A candid glance at our own conduct leads us to the personal interiority where freedom resides. This search is a form of the self-knowledge recommended by Socrates as the very source of moral understanding.

There is, however, another way of discovering freedom, less immediate but very enlightening. It is provided for us by moral science and consists in the analysis of the development and structuring of moral theory from the point of view of a certain concept of freedom. As a tree bears fruit, freedom not only forms our personal actions but has produced through the centuries systems of moral theory which, in their structure, principal features, particularities, logic, and dynamics reveal freedom.

These two methods, reflection on our individual actions and on moral systems, are complementary and mutually enlightening. Books on moral theory express the author's freely formed thought, or that of a given period, together with moral experience, which is, in the end, always personal.

In studying the history of Catholic moral theology, we have observed the two broad types of organization of moral material. Moral theories based on the question of happiness and the virtues are characteristic of the patristic and great scholastic periods, while theories of obligation and commandments predominate in the modern era. In attempting to reconstruct and trace the internal logic animating these theories and ordering their elements, we are inevitably led, as to the tap root, to varying concepts of freedom. For morality of obligation, it is freedom of indifference; for moral systems based on happiness and virtue, it is what we call freedom for excellence. We note here a remarkable convergence of history and systems, indicating that a certain logic is imposed on the reflections of authors and has influenced the historical transmission of works and ideas. Thus it can be said that two different concepts of freedom have given rise to two different systematizations of moral theology.

Historically, the crucial and decisive moment came at the beginning of the fourteenth century when William of Ockham, in critiquing St. Thomas, worked out his new concept of freedom. But we would be wrong to see in this merely an isolated event, an error of far-off times, or a simple dispute between the Franciscan and Dominican schools. In his teaching on freedom and moral theory, St. Thomas was the faithful interpreter of the patristic tradition, which had nourished his thought and the Greek philosophy he exploited. Ockham, on the other hand, was the initiator of a certain concept of freedom and morality that would be adopted by many theologians and philosophers who came after him, even when they opposed or simply ignored nominalism.

The debate cannot be reduced to a confrontation between ancients and moderns, for, beyond ideas and books, the very exercise of freedom and the experience of action have maintained the coexistence of these two great currents of moral thought, one plunging underground when the other appears on the surface. Today we can still find them and recognize them in ourselves, in the depths of our consciousness and memory, if we are able to penetrate within. The present crisis in Christian ethics, with the upheavals it is causing, could actually be a favorable moment for bringing to the fore once again the doctrine of freedom for excellence, which seems to us richer and more adequate than freedom of indifference. Constant study of moralists—St. Thomas, Ockham, and

the rest—can be very revealing, offering us guides and models for our research. Ultimately, however, the question of freedom confronts us with a choice here and now that will be a determining factor in the coming renewal of Christian moral theology.

In our study we shall expound the two concepts, freedom of indifference and freedom for excellence, with their characteristic features, and we shall show the logic they engender in the forming of moral systems. We shall use the data provided by our historical research, developing and refining it, with apologies for any inevitable redundancy. But our perspective will be mainly systematic or architectonic: How was freedom conceived? How did the concept influence the elaboration of moral theory? Obviously we are working from our position within the Catholic tradition, but we shall frequently be in touch with modern philosophy, which also and more than we might suspect flows from the ideological currents that developed from the medieval period onward.

We shall begin with a study of freedom of indifference, even though it came later historically, because it is the most widespread concept today. It so fills the horizon of thought and experience that an approach to freedom for excellence necessitates a process of veritable rediscovery. We shall describe freedom of indifference first, therefore, with its characteristics and limitations. This done, we will be in a better position to understand by contrast the nature of freedom for excellence.

Historically our work presents a special difficulty in that neither St. Thomas nor the Fathers of the Church were acquainted with the nominalist concept of freedom, and therefore neither addressed it with the power and precision of a critical confrontation. So it is up to us to explore their concept of freedom for ourselves. Fortunately, human experience, which persists through varying intellectual debates, can provide us with all the data we need.

## FREEDOM OF INDIFFERENCE

### Two Interpretations of the Definition of Free Will

The line of demarcation between the two concepts of freedom we are studying is determined, historically and systematically, by the interpretation of the first part of the definition of free will bequeathed to Western theology by Peter Lombard: "Free will is that faculty of reason and will

whereby one chooses the good with the help of grace, or evil without this help."<sup>1</sup>

The first part of this definition can be given two diametrically opposed interpretations. Basing his thought on the Aristotelian analysis of choice, St. Thomas explained freedom as a faculty *proceeding from* reason and will, which unite to make the act of choice. This act of choice is thus formed by practical judgment and willing. For him, free will was not a prime or originating faculty; it presupposed intelligence and will.<sup>2</sup> It was rooted, therefore, in the inclinations to truth and goodness that constituted these faculties.

Ockham, on the contrary, maintained that free will *preceded* reason and will in such a way as to move them to their acts. "For I can freely choose," he said, "to know or not to know, to will or not to will." For him, free will was the prime faculty, anterior to intelligence and will as well as to their acts.

This interpretation had already been formulated in the Franciscan school. St. Bonaventure reported it as a first opinion on the distinction among free will, reason, and will: "[Free will] is the power that commands the will and reason, rules them and moves them both; its first act is not discernment and willing but a reflective action upon them both, moving and ruling them, that is, the action expressed when we say we wish to discern and we wish to will. This act precedes reason and will, and its power corresponds to the Father, for his is the most powerful of acts and it is primary, not being moved, but moving."<sup>3</sup>

Being primary to such a degree, freedom clearly could not be demonstrated, since any reason advanced to prove it would include elements at least as doubtful and unknown as the conclusion drawn in its favor (Ockham, *Quodl.* I, q 16). Freedom was postulated as a first fact of human experience. It was affirmed that, whatever the decision dictated by reason, the will could follow it or not (*Quodl.* I, q 16).

In view of this experience, how could freedom be described? Freedom

1. "Liberum vero arbitrarium est facultas rationis et voluntatis, qua bonum eligitur gratia assistente, vel malum eadem desistente" (In II *Sent.*, dist. 24 c. 3).

2. Cf. Ia q 83. This question, devoted to free will, is logically preceded by the study of the intellect, of reason (q 79), and of will (q 82).

3. "... et est virtus imperans rationi et voluntati et utramque regens et movens, cuius actus primus non est discernere et velle, sed actus reflexus; super haec duo et haec duo movens et regens, ille videlicet quo dicitur quis velle discernere vel velle se velle. Et iste actus praecambulus est ad rationem et voluntatem, et ista potentia correspondet Patri, pro eo quod actus eius maxime potens est et primus est, cum non moveatur, sed moveat" (In II *Sent.*, dist. 25, p 1, a 1, q 2).

lay entirely in the power of the will to choose between contraries, and this power resided in the will alone. It was the power to opt for the *yes* or the *no*, to choose between what reason dictated and its contrary, between willing and not willing, acting and not acting, between what the law prescribed and its contrary. Thus freedom consisted in an indetermination or a radical indifference in the will regarding contraries, in such a way that actions were produced in a wholly contingent way. As Gabriel Biel was to say, freedom was essentially the power to move in two opposite directions. It was qualified by an indifference to the opposites.

Thus understood, freedom was practically identified with the will, as the origin of willing and acting, as a power of self-determination. In this way it came to constitute, in some way, by itself alone, the very being of the person, at the source of all action. It was in this sense that Sartre could write: "My freedom is not an added quality or a property of my nature; it is the very stuff of my being."

The will issued from this interpretation transformed. It was no longer defined as an attraction toward the good, exercised in love and desire, as in St. Thomas and the Fathers. It became a radical indifference, whence proceeded a pure will, actually an imposition of will on itself or others, "a conscious pressure of self upon self," to use E. Mounier's definition. This was to become the modern understanding of will. Spiritual spontaneity was no longer first; it was overshadowed by the claims of freedom, achieved through indifference. As Nietzsche put it, "To will is to command obedience, or at the least apparent obedience."<sup>4</sup> Willing was no longer characterized by love but by the relationship of command (*befehlen*) and obedience (*gehörchen*).

### The Break with Natural Inclinations

The most decisive point of Ockham's critique of St. Thomas's teaching on freedom was the breach between freedom and the natural inclinations, which were rejected from the essential core of freedom. According to St. Thomas, freedom was rooted in the soul's spontaneous inclinations to the true and the good. His entire moral doctrine was based on the natural human disposition toward beatitude and the perfection of good, as to an ultimate end. A person can never renounce this natural order

4. "Ein Mensch der Will befiehlt einem Erwas in sich, das gehorcht oder von dem et glaubt, dass es gehorcht." *Beyond Good and Evil*, part n. 19.

of things, nor be prevented from desiring it. For Ockham, the state of being ordered to happiness, however natural and general, was subject to the free and contingent choice of human freedom. This meant that I could freely choose or refuse happiness, either in particular matters presented to me or in general, in the very desire which attracted me to it, owing to the radical indifference of my freedom.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, I could choose to preserve my life or to loathe my existence. All natural inclinations, summed up in the inclination toward good or happiness, were thus subject to choice and to the will's free determination. It was as though they were uprooted from the will's depths, to be placed before it, beneath it, and subjected to its choice. They were no longer a part of the essence of freedom.

This displacement of inclinations contributed to a modification of their nature. Placed below freedom, they came to be regarded as impulses of a lower order, on the psychosomatic plane. In fact, the total concept of nature was being transformed. The harmony between humanity and nature was destroyed by a freedom that claimed to be "indifferent" to nature and defined itself as "non-nature." The consideration of the nature and spiritual spontaneity of the human person was banished from the horizons of thought. It is small wonder that the treatise on human happiness was so often struck out of the manuals of fundamental moral theology, and that this question was frequently omitted in philosophical studies.

We can note, too, the creation of a profound opposition between freedom and natural inclinations in moral systems based on the freedom of indifference, observable in modern thought. These inclinations appeared as the most insidious threat to the freedom and morality of actions, because they were interior and influenced us from within. This is doubtless the origin of the divorce between moral theory and the desire for happiness, which has been effected in our times.

### The Break with the Philosophers and the Fathers

The separation effected by Ockham between freedom and natural inclinations touched all of ancient thought in depth, both philosophers and Fathers of the Church, through St. Thomas. This is very apparent when we study the disputes carried on between the great schools of antiquity, as described for example by Cicero in his *De finibus bonorum*

5. See Chapter 10, section "The Nominalist Revolution."

*et malorum* and his *De officiis*. We can easily discern the two principles that formed the common basis for discussions between Peripatetics, Stoics, Academicians, Epicurians and others.

There was first of all the famous principle *sequi naturam*, or conformity with nature, which must positively not be understood as a biological inclination, for it chiefly concerned rational nature, which was characterized by a longing for the enjoyment of the good, of truth, and of communication with others. All moral research had for its object the determination of what conformed to human nature: pleasure, the fulfillment of needs, various kinds of goods, virtue and so forth. The schools were distinguished by their different answers, depending on their concept of the human person, but all pronounced themselves in favor of the principle *sequi naturam*.

The second principle matched this. All moral discussion revolved around the question of "the happy life": In what did human happiness consist, and how was it to be attained? Happiness was the first desire of human nature as well as its perfection. If one followed nature, it was in order to obtain the happiness that nature itself proposed as the final end of human beings and their crowning achievement. There was no discussion on this point. All the divergencies sprang from the manner in which this universally human question was answered.

The Fathers of the Church were not content with adopting these philosophical principles. They deepened and intensified them in the light of Christian revelation. They saw in nature the direct work of God, the creator of Genesis, and the work of the Word of John's Gospel. To their minds, the following of nature harmonized with the scriptural following of God and of Christ; in this new light it became more personal. Thus we can understand St. Thomas's method, so foreign to us, his marked preference for examples taken from the physical order, even when explaining realities of the spiritual order. For him, God's action was manifested in a particularly luminous way in the movements of beings completely subject to nature, that is, to the divine rule, untroubled as they were by the intervention of an often-deficient freedom. We can therefore find in them our models for human action, providing always that we realize the role played by analogy.

As to the question of happiness, oriented to beatitude, our final end and perfection, it was always, beyond any doubt or discussion, the first moral question for the Fathers. But they found their answer in the Gospel, especially in St. Matthew's Beatitudes, which ordered our longing for happiness to the vision of God, through active faith in the word of Christ. The problematic was to be transformed. Thinking in regard to

happiness became more personal and more objective. Happiness no longer consisted, for the Fathers or St. Thomas, in merely human virtue as a subjective quality, but rather in openness to the divine goodness, to the reality of God himself, through love which came to us from God, through Christ.

It was true nonetheless that the entire tradition of the Fathers adopted and fully maintained the two principles of *sequi naturam* and the primal longing for happiness. Indeed, the tradition confirmed them by founding them in God.

It was precisely these basic principles, undisputed up to his time, that Ockham wrested from the heart of freedom and ranked as inferior to the choice of contraries. In so doing, he achieved a veritable rupture in the most profound depths of the human soul, on the level of principles, at the source of action. It should not, therefore, cause surprise that this "revolution" in the depths where activity rises should result in the upheaval of all moral ideas and their systematic organization.

### Rejection of Sensibility

The relation between free will and human sensibility were to be similarly transformed. In his remarkable study of the passions (or sentiments), St. Thomas held that they could be good, could acquire a positive moral value. From the viewpoint of freedom of indifference, the passions first appeared as proceeding from a lower order and reducing the scope of freedom open to contraries. They next became a threat or obstacle to freedom. Doubtless, the will might use the impulse of the passions as an aid in performing actions, but it felt them mainly as a diminution of its freedom of choice.

It even seemed that freedom could find no better way of asserting itself than to struggle against sensibility. Indeed, the combat against an excess of passions is inevitable and necessary, but the idea took hold that moral valor could establish itself in no surer, clearer way than by going counter to sensibility. This was rigorism.

### Rejection of *Habitus* and Virtues

St. Thomas had worked out a remarkable analysis of *habitus* and built his moral doctrine upon the foundation of the seven great theological and moral virtues. According to him, the virtues developed the natural

inclinations and brought them to perfection; they became like a second nature.

It was to be expected that, having banished natural inclinations from the heart of human freedom, nominalism would also dispense with *habitus* and virtues. The very idea of a *habitus* was opposed to freedom of indifference, for in a sense *habitus* took for granted the idea of a stable determination of actions. A *habitus* required the exercise of action in order to be formed, doubtless, but it preceded the actions issuing from it and deprived them of the complete latitude implied by the power to choose between contraries. The stronger a *habitus* grew, the more it influenced actions and the more it seemed to reduce freedom's scope. If total freedom was to be maintained, *habitus* must be removed from the level of freedom and placed below it. They would then become psychological mechanisms of a sort, created by repeated acts—or habitual procedures—which freedom could use as aids to further action. But one must always mistrust them, lest they acquire too much importance in the moral order and so diminish the free quality of actions. In this connection it is very significant that the translators of St. Thomas used *habitude* for *habitus*, without realizing the difference.<sup>6</sup>

Obviously, no Christian moral theory could dispense with giving the virtues their place; too many authorities treat of them. From the viewpoint of freedom of indifference, however, the concept of virtue was to be changed and reduced. For ethicists, virtue became simply a traditional, convenient category for listing moral obligations. Within the domain of freedom of indifference, there was no longer the need for virtue; in fact, the logical thing to do was to remove it. This is what the textbooks of moral theory did when they suppressed the treatise on virtues in fundamental moral theology and divided the subject matter of specialized moral theology according to the commandments rather than the virtues. There must surely have been many virtuous people at the time, but the concept of virtue was practically dead. Only the shadow remained.

### The Break with Continuity and Finality; The Atomic Age of Moral Action

In banishing natural inclinations and virtues from the heart of freedom, nominalism broke the bonds that had united them with moral ac-

6. Cf. my book *Le Renouveau de la morale*, II, chap. 4, "La vertu est tout autre chose qu'une habitude" (Paris, 1964 and 1979), 144-64.

tion and had established them in a pattern of continuity ordered to finality. St. Thomas had considered human acts within the perspective of a final end, which would crown human happiness, and of the virtues, which would assure progress toward this end. Human acts were thus linked from within (from interior acts), to form an organic, permanent whole, where the present flowed from the past and opened onto the future.

Nominalism shattered this beautiful progression. If freedom consisted wholly in a choice between contraries, and was possessed sovereignly by our will alone, then each of our actions was held fixed in the instant of choice and separated from all the actions preceding or following it. Under pain of losing our freedom of indifference, we could not allow our past actions to determine an action of the present moment, nor could the latter have any bearing upon what we might do in the future. Freedom was thus caught and held captive in the present moment, which it created and cut off from past and future. Continuity was broken up into a succession of instants, like the perforated line made by an unthreaded sewing machine. Each moral action was forever isolated, like an island, an atom, a monad. Moral theology's atomic age was upon us.

Freedom of indifference was conceived as a given, in principle at least, from the first moment of conscious life. It could undoubtedly be limited by obstacles of all kinds, interior or exterior, or hampered in the performance of an action; but it was integral in its voluntary source and demonstrated this by its protest against all limitation. This type of freedom had no need to grow. Any increase that might be mentioned in its regard would refer to the diminution of exterior limitations that it succeeded in overcoming, not to any interior growth.

The vision of human life and moral theory was totally transformed. Free actions followed one upon another in a person's life without any bond of unity to weld them into a basic whole, as the vision of a last end or even personal sentiment might have done. The consideration of one's final end probably played its part as one weighed the morality of an action, but from this time on it was reduced to the dimensions of the one isolated action. The finality was short-term rather than long-term as St. Thomas had seen it. The end was no longer an essential part of the action; it became circumstantial, qualifying it from the outside. Personality, seen as the permanent substance underlying the flow of accidentals that it tended to unify, disappeared behind the aggregate of actions performed in isolated succession.

Let me quote a scholar who specialized in the study of Ockham. "If it is true that the essential note of personality is independence, and that

the human person's basic dignity lies in the power to act at any given moment in the way he chooses, then personality is something we cannot grasp. Only the successive, varying actions of the person matter. They are like small, isolated fruits, each with its own value. . . . What we call personality is no more than the laborious reconstruction of a jigsaw puzzle. Actions continue, each with its bizarre, uncoordinated contours. We try to classify them. None of this makes for unity and orientation. Human discontinuity is one of the basic tenets of Ockham's psychology, and this psychology leads directly to a moral system in which only actions are taken into consideration."

The field of moral theory had been disrupted. It no longer dealt with the study of virtues but focused on isolated actions. Henceforth each action was studied in itself, according to the particular circumstances. In the seventeenth century this would be called the study of cases of conscience, whence the name casuistry.

### The Passion for Freedom

Make no mistake: the demolition—and the word is chosen with precision—of St. Thomas's moral teaching by Ockham and the nominalists was no unfortunate accident, no regrettable error stemming from weakness of intellect and of moral concepts. We can see in it the direct, clearly deduced, and fully deliberate result of placing humanity in a central position. This was the core of freedom of indifference. Its results and manifestations might be negative, but they flowed from an initial determination to affirm freedom in the face of all else. Personality might disappear behind the disparate actions it generated, but the point of this was to concentrate on itself and to escape, through the very diversity and contrariety of successive actions, the traps they might lay for freedom.

Freedom of indifference was therefore not so neutral and serene as its name might indicate. It was a far cry from the *apatheia* sought by the Stoics and adopted by the Fathers of the Church in their own manner to designate a calm mastery over the passions. Beneath freedom of indifference lay hidden a primitive passion—we dare not call it natural: the human will to self-affirmation, to the assertion of a radical difference between itself and all else that existed.

7. G. de Lagarde, *La naissance de l'esprit laïque au déclin du moyen âge*, vol. 6, *L'individualisme ockhamiste* (Paris, 1946), 46–47.

This was the origin of the force and dynamism of this concept of freedom, regardless of how negative its results might be and how disruptive its manifestations. Freedom of indifference was first a defense of the human power to choose between contraries sheerly by its own volition. This autonomy included the rejection of all dependence whatsoever, and of any norm or law not made by itself. The power was most clearly evidenced in negation, in all its forms: refusal, criticism, contradiction, confrontation.

Such was the first characteristic manifestation of this sort of passion. It could be encapsulated in the formula, "against the positive and for the negative," or, in other words, an insistence on the freedom to take a negative stand, for this was the very heart of freedom. Freedom of indifference also expressed itself in being arbitrary for the sheer pleasure of it.

A sentence in Sartre's *Les Mots* clearly expresses this passion for freedom joined with fragmentation in time: "I become a traitor and I remain one. Useless to put my whole self into my undertakings, to give myself unreservedly to work, to anger, to friendship. The next minute I will deny myself. I know it, I wish it so, and I already betray myself passionately, anticipating my future betrayal with joy." One single passion has driven out all others: the passion for freedom, operating here through "betrayal."

Montherlant's passage in *The Young Girls* also merits quotation: "Costal's humanity did not lie in the fact that he could not feel human sentiments, but that, on the contrary, he could experience them all indifferently, at will, by pressing the appropriate button, so to speak. A limitless capriciousness rules human lives, some struggling in confrontation, others unaware of it. Costals was aware, and rather than suffer the consequences he preferred to worship it." Indifference and caprice are indeed typical notes of this kind of freedom; worship reveals the passion it can arouse.

Freedom of indifference was thus impregnated with a secret passion for self-affirmation, deeper than any of its manifestations and expressions. We might wonder, in this connection, whether Kantian rigorism, with its scrupulous demand for moral disinterestedness, might have been the result of a desperate effort to escape the fundamental self-interest that was the province of this concept of humanity and freedom.

### Loyalties Reversed

As the quotation from Sartre would imply, there was a complete shift in loyalties. Loyalty, usually understood as the recognized bond between the will and a good, an ideal, a person, a way of life, an institution or a previous choice, insured the permanence of this will in a determined sense. Now its value shifted. Loyalty became a threat precisely because it was a bond, detrimental to the freedom of choice between contraries. Betrayal became the good thing, because it alone left the field open to the passion of self-affirmation.

Admittedly, things rarely came to such a pass. It would have been impossible to live one's life or to take one's place in society without retaining a minimum of continuity and loyalty. Many would retain interior faithfulness, but they would see it as repetitive, an adaptation renewed day by day, if not minute by minute, of a similar choice. This faithfulness would be only the semblance of continuity, constantly threatened from within by the temptation to affirm one's freedom by breaking away from it. At bottom, the only loyalty compatible with freedom of indifference was loyalty to oneself, expressed by refusing loyalty to everything but this very freedom. Thus loyalty became entirely subjective.

### The Break between Freedom and Reason

We have reviewed successive ruptures effected by the concept of freedom of indifference: a breaking away from natural inclinations and sensibility, *habitus* and virtues, finality, continuity, and loyalty. All these ruptures meet in the final break between free will and reason.

For St. Thomas, freedom and will united to make a free choice. The coordination between the practical judgment and the voluntary decision was so intimate that they were scarcely distinguishable.

With Ockham this unity, beautiful and difficult to achieve, was necessarily and completely destroyed. If freedom consisted in the ability to choose between the *yes* and the *no*, it would have to affirm itself primarily against reason, against the "reasons" proposed for determining its choice and requiring of it a *yes*. Before the rigorous flow of reasons, freedom recoiled as if before prison bars. It escaped by way of negations, and it took refuge in the power to choose between contraries residing in pure will. Because of the ruptures mentioned above, reason no longer had a direct hold on freedom; it could not penetrate the will. No longer

could it say with any effect, If you wish to be happy, to live well, then be virtuous and loyal; for all the yearnings thus designated had now been subjected to the choice of contraries. Interior bonds of interpenetration between reason and will were no longer possible. Each faculty acted independently and did its own thing. Radical tension succeeded to the former effort toward harmony. Reason began to fabricate a universal determinism which enveloped the human person and led to the negation of freedom, while the will defended itself by setting itself up as the center of the universe, even to the point of pure caprice if need be. Freedom of indifference gave birth to twin forces forever at enmity, voluntarism and rationalism, which simultaneously attracted and repelled each other. From this time onward, authors, theologians, and philosophers would be either voluntarists or rationalists, particularly in moral theology.

It is true that the power to say *no* to reason had always been recognized as a part of human freedom. In question 6 of his *De malo*, dealing with freedom, St. Thomas had even admitted, at risk of a determinism through rational motives that provoked some objections to his theory, that the human person remained free to refuse beatitude, in general as well as in particular. But for him this was a weakness of human nature, like the possibility of demeaning oneself and falling captive to sin. According to the doctrine of freedom of indifference, on the contrary, the power to say no to reason itself was essential to freedom. Herein lay its force.

We should note here several important consequences for the concept of moral theology that stem from the divorce between reason and free will. Since morality is the proper domain of freedom, its main elements would be taken over by the will and would be ordered according to their relationships of power over various desires. Law, commandments, obedience, all that determined moral action, would flow henceforth from the will alone. The rational content of precepts would have no interest for us; we would be concerned no longer with understanding them, but only with knowing that they had been promulgated by an authority empowered to do so. Reason's role would be progressively limited to declaring that a precept existed in a given instance; no longer would it extend to research and comprehension. We would begin to distrust a reason which sought the why and wherefore of laws and commands.

### The Absolute Freedom of God

We are familiar with freedom of indifference as a fact and a postulate of our human existence. For the nominalist theologian, however, it was

in God that it achieved its fullest realization. Only in the creator was freedom joined to omnipotence, to become absolute. Thus the very image of God and his work was changed. Reflection on him would focus henceforth on his free and sovereign will far more than on his wisdom, truth, and goodness. A foreshadowing of this can be seen in the Franciscan opinion formulated by St. Bonaventure, that freedom preceded intelligence and will and was attributed to the Father, the origin of the Trinity (*In II Sent.*, d. 24, p. 1, a 1, q 2).

We shall rediscover in the nominalist teaching on God all the characteristics of freedom of indifference. They take on a special, marked emphasis in Ockham, who had the lucidity and audacity to push the logic of his system to its extreme consequences.

God's freedom was sovereign, absolute, and identified, so to speak, with his being. For God, it was one thing to be and to be free. Nothing could limit this freedom except the principle of contradiction. Nothing, and especially not any nature. God being creator through the sheer power of his will, there could not exist in creation, or even within man, any nature or natural inclination that might impose on God or restrain or orient his action. Furthermore, one could not speak of a nature or natural qualities in God which would call for our respect, since freedom was his supreme quality.

God's freedom was expressed most particularly in relation to the moral law, and this in two ways: the moral law was the manifestation of God's will; but also, God remained perfectly free in regard to this law and its precepts.

#### MORAL LAW, THE EXPRESSION OF GOD'S WILL AND THE SOURCE OF OBLIGATION

St. Thomas had defined law as an *ordinatio rationis ad bonum commune*, that is, the work of the wisdom of the lawgiver, human or divine, together with an impulse of the will. It was effected with authority but was done in an ordered manner. For Ockham, all legislative work proceeded from the will, and first from the will of God, the author of law and source of moral obligation.

The rupture of the natural bonds linking man and God placed them in confrontation, like two freedoms fixed in radical isolation, "indifferent" to each other. To this division was added the chasm separating divine transcendence from the contingency of creatures drawn from

nothingness and always needing to be sustained in existence. As G. de Lagarde writes: "For Ockham, there was an absolute separation between God and the world. God created the world, but remained alien to it. There was no symbiosis between the world and God. The two realities were isolated in their respective being. This was no more than the result of the radical insularity of all beings."<sup>8</sup>

In this situation, man had absolutely no natural way of reaching God or of knowing his will. Yet the radical dependence of the creature gave rise to the only possible bond between man and God.

Human freedom was total, granted; but the condition of creaturehood subjected it to the omnipotence of the divine will. God's sovereign power over man created the moral bond. This bond had no other source than God's will, manifested with the force of obligation. A higher will thus exerted pressure and constraint upon a lower one. The expression of God's will imposed itself upon human freedom as an obligation and a limitation. Moral teaching expressed essentially, therefore, a relationship of the will. It focused on the idea and sentiment of obligation, which was henceforth to be the fundamental assumption of moral theory. Freedom of indifference, law, and obligation became inseparable.

Let us note in passing that this introduced a profound transformation and rigidity into the understanding of the word *law* and related terms such as *commandment*, *precept*, and *order*. This was true regarding not only St. Thomas but also Scripture and the Fathers, where these expressions took on a sapiential connotation and were far richer in content.

This concept of law was to dominate the entire field of moral teaching. It no longer required any reference to natural inclinations, *habitus*, or virtues. On the contrary, it judged them and accorded them value if they conformed to it. Moral law had no other foundation than the pure will of God, from which it issued. From this time on, the law would mark the limits of the scope of moral theology according to its obligations and would divide the material according to the commandments it included. These would be mainly the commandments of God, the Decalogue. We shall see later how God's will and precepts might be known by us.

Since morality drew its origin from the divine will alone, human actions, considered in isolation as we have seen, would be evaluated morally only and precisely as they related to law. In themselves they could be called indifferent, like the freedom that formed them. They became

8. *Ibid.*, 56.

moral through the intervention of the law: good if they conformed to it, bad if contrary to it. Morality thus studied actions from the outside. As the nominalists were to say, the relationship was accidental.

The relationship between freedom of indifference and law was not as peaceful as the abstract discussions of scholastics would lead us to believe. In reality, the tension between them resulted in freedom's being limited and constrained by obligations. This tension was irreducible, regardless of all attempts to lessen it. It often led to the reduction of obligations to a minimum so as not to overburden consciences; but it also happened at times that demands were pushed to the limit, insisting on formal as well as material conformity of actions to the law. They must be performed with a sole, pure motive of respect for the law, for submission to obligations, for duty. In Ockham's time there were already formulas corresponding to Kant's categorical imperative. In any case, the tension between freedom and law never disappeared, whether the law was drawn from pure reason or from revelation.

### God's Freedom in Relation to Moral Law

Such was the human view of the moral law. It appeared as a divine, all-powerful absolute, standing over against human freedom. However, when considered from God's point of view, its aspect changed completely. It became extremely relative. Moral law, being dependent upon God's will, could in no way restrict his freedom. God transcended the law and the moral order he had established for man. Morality was for man's sake, not God's. He could freely modify the moral order and even command what was diametrically opposed to his precepts. On this subject, Ockham was very clear in the examples he gave, and he did not hesitate to push his conclusions to the limit. According to him, God could even command the contrary of the first commandment: that a human being should hate him. Such hatred would be good in this case, being an act of obedience to God's will.

It is clear from this that obedience to the law outweighed even love of self. Consequently, legal obedience replaced charity and became the true "form of all the virtues," to use the traditional expression. Like law, obedience became "voluntaristic."

Obviously, the same logic could be applied to the other commandments regarding love of neighbor, murder, adultery, and the rest. A generalized relativism was in place, since every precept, however explicit, was always subject to divine caprice. Moral law was like a suspension

bridge over the abyss of divine freedom; it might collapse at any moment. Relativism would be the besetting temptation of every moral system based on freedom of indifference. There was only one fixed point, only one absolute: conformity to the divine will or to sheer obligation. The question would be how to determine this imperative in the concrete situation. No law was capable in itself of supplying sure and definitive direction.

In actual fact, a position such as this would be untenable. Human experience would give it the lie, as would the tradition of the Church, which a theologian would have to take into account. Ockham had too great a sense of concrete reality and too much intellectual ingenuity to stop here. He clarified his position by means of a twofold distinction. What he had affirmed about God's freedom in regard to the moral law was valid in light of "the absolute power of God" (*de potentia Dei absoluta*). But God ordinarily exercised his freedom according to his "ordered power" (*potentia Dei ordinata*). The latter, without suppressing the former, guaranteed the permanence of the divine will in conformity with the precepts of the moral law. This led to a complementary distinction between the *cursus ordinarius rerum*, or ordinary course of things, where the precepts of the law retained their validity, and the *cursus extraordinarius rerum*, the extraordinary state of affairs where, in a totally unpredictable way, the divine arbitrariness could operate. Now the bridge over the abyss was strong enough to answer to the needs of ordinary Christian conduct. Clearly, however, its radical fragility perdured.

Freedom of indifference on one side, and the law, as the expression of the divine will, on the other; between them, isolated human actions carried out under the aegis of obligation: here we have all the elements of moral theory that were to serve as the basis for moral treatises in the centuries to follow. Only the treatise on conscience is lacking; we shall examine its origin in our study of the question of knowledge of God's will. Very logically, therefore, beginning with freedom of indifference, obligatory or duty-driven moral theory was formed and began to develop.

## Knowledge of the Divine Will

### I. Knowledge through Revelation

If all morality depends solely upon the will of God, the problem of knowing his will takes on a decisive importance. Nominalism made this

particularly difficult because it denied the possibility of discovering God's will through human nature or through knowledge of God. And yet it presented two means of knowing the divine will: scriptural revelation and—surprisingly—human reason. These two sources were traditional, but the important thing to be grasped is the manner in which this communication was made, since the entire history of modern theology was to be determined largely by nominalist positions.

We shall not go into the details and nuances of Ockham's response to the question of knowing the divine will with the help of Scripture. For this, I refer the reader to G. de Lagarde's presentation,<sup>9</sup> which shows the occasionally contrasting aspects of his thought. Briefly, it ran as follows: "Divine law is the aggregate of stable and *universal* precepts that God has *expressly promulgated*, of rules *implicitly contained* therein, and of the consequences that *logically follow from them*.<sup>10</sup> Scripture alone was true and infallible and manifested God's will directly through his precepts. This revelation needed, however, to be developed through explanations and deduction. The work could be done in two ways: on the one hand, there were laws deduced by the apostles and their successors, or again, regulations and interpretations inspired by Christians endowed with the spirit of prophecy; on the other hand, there were the deductions of clear reasoning.

We shall note some characteristics that seem to follow from the logic of the nominalist system concerning the ethicist's reading of Scripture. These were to have notable consequences in the future. The ethicist's scriptural reading focused on "the divine law" and was limited to searching for those "stable and universal precepts" that might be found in Scripture. These were sources of strict obligation for all—today we would call them imperatives. Thus the ethicist could ignore whole books of Scripture not containing such precepts, in contrast to the Fathers of the Church, who found a moral sense pervading all of Scripture. The passages that were retained, moreover, were understood in a predominantly juridical sense consonant with morality of obligation. This often gave them a rigid, impoverished quality.

Special stress was laid on the literal meaning of the text, as in the promulgation of a law, for everything depended on the expression of the divine lawgiver's will. "[Divine law] presupposed an *express* manifestation. Doubtless the expression could be presented in the most diverse forms: direct revelation, oral tradition, or codified prescriptions. But

9. *Ibid.*, 124ff. See also L. Vereecke, "Loi et Evangile selon Guillaume d'Ockham," in *Loi et Evangile* (Geneva, 1981).

10. Italics are those of G. de Lagarde.

most often, if not always, they took the form of a text. In the strict sense of the word, divine law remained a *written* law, as opposed to the kind of law that might precede any written formulation (*naturaliter notus notus*).<sup>11</sup> This clinging to the literal sense of the text, and the special attention to the question of the promulgation of the law, would reappear in casuistry.

An important role was also assigned to reason, for deduction was required to make explicit the content of Scripture. The texts chosen were to be set within the context of the logical reasoning of scholasticism and would be viewed as universal and relatively abstract principles, from which a succession of conclusions could be deduced. These were then applied to concrete actions. Scripture, however, did not lend itself well to this role, for its language was of quite a different kind. It was concrete, experiential, and many-faceted, and its thought followed the logic of lived reality rather than that of deductive reasoning.

The result of these several characteristics was to distance ethicists from Scripture or, at the least, to limit their access to it and their interest. It was as if duty-driven morality, stemming from freedom of indifference, operated as a filter and screen separating ethicists from Scripture.

## 2. Knowledge of God's Will through Reason

We have seen the rupture between the will and reason effected by the doctrine of freedom of indifference. The mind, with its logical ability to tie reasons to reasons as one would braid the knots of an immense net, seemed to be the most direct and forceful opponent to the will. In order to safeguard the will's freedom, there seemed no other option than a violent break with the reasoning process. This was achieved by affirming as a given the power of contraries, the ability to say yes or no regardless of all reason.

One might think from the foregoing that reason and will would fly apart like a divorced couple—that the will would take over the moral field while reason ruled the sciences. But this would be too simplistic. Ockham, in spite of what we might call his voluntarism in moral theory, had already given reason a considerable role in moral judgment, precisely for the discovery of the will of God, which was the foundation of morality.

We have just seen that reason had a part to play in deducing moral laws from scriptural texts, contributing the certitude that is clear rea-

11. G. de Lagarde, *La naissance*, 127.

soning's gift. Yet it possessed a still more direct and fundamental role in moral theory. The will of God was manifested to human reason itself, in the form of a clear moral obligation, before it confronted the free will. All human beings have a spontaneous feeling, when we come down to it, that certain actions merit praise or blame. This is a primal experience indissociably linking freedom to the law transmitted by reason. Right reason or conscience is a privileged place, the nearest and most natural where the moral law is revealed to us. Ockham, too, saw in reason the foundation of natural law. For him, a first principle of moral theory would be the duty of acting in conformity with the dictates of reason, even should reason occasionally err. "God wills that we should always follow the dictates of reason, even if, due to some inevitable error, it leads us astray."<sup>12</sup> For Ockham, an action done in conformity with an erroneous conscience was in itself good and meritorious.

It is surprising to see reason recapturing so important a function in moral theory after all its skirmishes with the will. But this is more understandable when we realize that reason's role had changed profoundly. It no longer proposed reasons drawn from the nature of things, of human beings, of God, which would lead to enlightened action. It was content to deliver commands, proclaim precepts, and make known obligations that expressed the divine will. Reason's imperatives needed no support from reasoning; they were imposed just as they stood. Thus G. de Lagarde could define natural law, according to Ockham, as "*reason's categorical imperative*." It included the sum total of precepts, which obliged every rational human being with "a blinding evidence, and which formed the foundation of the moral life." And he added this paradoxical yet totally typical note: "*The chief characteristic of this imperative is to be irrational. I say irrational advisedly, even though we are dealing with 'an imperative of reason.'* For the reason that gives commands is incapable of justifying them. One must accept them as indemonstrable postulates, analagous to those we find at the threshold of any science."<sup>13</sup>

The change was profound. Moral reason no longer weighed the content of precepts in order to justify them and make them understood. It limited itself to making the existence of the obligatory precept known, and it crowned its work by showing that the precept ought to be observed for its own sake, out of pure obedience to the obligation: as a categorical imperative. The very ideas and formulas of Ockham presaged those of Kant. We are dealing with a "rationalism," at the foun-

12. *Ibid.*, 66.

13. *Ibid.*, 143-44.

dation of moral law, that is perfectly compatible with voluntarism joined to freedom of indifference.

But if reason sufficed to establish all the imperatives that constituted natural or moral law, as Ockham thought, some surprising consequences would follow. We began with a concept, called "heteronomous" by contemporary ethicists, in which God's will, apart from man, was the sole source of law and obligation. If this will expressed itself clearly enough to moral reason, which was natural and common to everyone, it would be valid even for those who did not know God or who denied his existence. We could conclude from this that it would have retained its value even if God had not existed. "After having appeared to sum up all morality in the arbitrary will of God, [Ockham] urged us to believe that, even if God had not existed, the category of morality would have obligated the human person, who always experienced interiorly the coexistence of the two elements that made up morality: reason, asserting categorical imperatives, and a will free to submit or rebel."<sup>14</sup>

The separation between humanity and God created by freedom of indifference had repercussions in moral theory. The latter could be worked out independently of God, and all the more easily in that the moral domain had no relevance for God, according to Ockham. Reason of itself could suffice to pronounce the imperatives that shaped morality. These views were to reappear later in philosophy as well as theology. It is not difficult to recognize the elements that go to make up various modern theories of autonomy and secular ethics.

This manner of thinking prepared the way for humanity's grasp on the power that theology had formerly attributed to God by affirming that his will alone was the foundation of morality. Soon, in the name of reason, human will would be substituted for God's as the source of law: the will of the individual and of conscience, the will of society, of authority, of the state, or of the people.

#### A SIGNIFICANT TENSION RESULTING FROM FREEDOM OF INDIFFERENCE

The theory of freedom of indifference, which was at the heart of nominalism, together with nominalism itself, influenced all Western thought. It was found almost everywhere, even among those who scarcely knew

14. *Ibid.*, 66.

its name. It did not remain at the level of ideas and doctrines; it penetrated life and its deepest experiences.

One of the surest signs of the active presence of freedom of indifference was the tension it engendered, tension that posed problems of a disjunctive sort, expressed by the "either . . . or" formula. A few samplings of this characteristic disconnectedness follow.

—Either freedom or law. This opposition dominated casuistry and found expression in the comparison of freedom and law to two landowners disputing the field of human actions. Ethicists would say, this action pertains to law, that to freedom.

—Either freedom or reason. Reason opposed law just as the determinism it engendered opposed voluntary choice, or again, as the law it proclaimed opposed freedom of action and limited it.

—Either freedom or nature. Freedom was defined as opposed to nature. It was non-nature. It sought to dominate and exploit nature, understood as subrational or irrational, blind and enslaved to its impulses.

—Either freedom or grace. In theology, freedom and grace were opposed in the manner of the two landowners disputing over human actions. What was ascribed to grace seemed by that very fact taken away from freedom; what was attributed to freedom as merit seemed to diminish grace.

—Either man was free, or God. This opposition led to and culminated in the relationship between God and humanity. From now on, a choice had to be made: one could not exalt man without slighting God, nor exalt God without diminishing man. As E. Borne writes, "Contemporary atheism seeks a total affirmation of man by negating God. . . . Whence the presupposition that belief in God dehumanizes man."<sup>15</sup>

—Either subject or object. These basic terms came to signify on the one hand the person, changeable in will and feelings to the point of caprice, and on the other hand the external world, an apersonal reality with its firm, hard, opaque quality. The worst failure in regard to the person was to treat him as a thing; the greatest danger in science was subjectivity. Subjectivism ended in solipsism; objectivism became materialism.

—Either freedom or sensibility. Freedom became indifferent in order to fulfill itself, and it stiffened against sensibility; or else it identified with the passions and claimed total freedom for them.

—Either my freedom or the freedom of others. The freedom of others appeared as a limitation and a threat, since my idea of freedom was self-

15. E. Borne, "God Is Not Dead," in *Foi vivante* (Paris, 1974), 36.

affirmation in the face of all others. From this issued a struggle with everyone; this was at the root of the dialectic between master and slave.

—Either the individual or society. Freedom of indifference created individualism. It severed the bonds between individuals in the same way in which it had isolated human acts from each other. Society was no longer anything more than an artificial creation and a constraint. Henceforth the individual and society would be opposed and would engage in a struggle for power, in a dialectic of domination. The two poles were individual freedom to the point of anarchy and state control to the point of despotism.

It is clear that the influence of freedom of indifference was very far-reaching. It affected all areas of human action and all the problematics to be encountered in moral theory. It even reshaped the questions; they became disjunctive, where in the case of freedom for excellence they would be synthesized, as we shall see. Wherever it appeared, freedom of indifference seemed to be a force for division and separation, for an opposition engendering an interminable dialectical struggle.

#### FREEDOM OF INDIFFERENCE AFTER OCKHAM

A lengthy study would be needed to describe the influence and development of freedom of indifference in the modern era, in philosophy as well as theology. I shall merely mention a few instances of it.

Descartes was very familiar with this concept of freedom. In spite of his prudence in speaking of it, it could well have been his preference. In his *Principia philosophiae* he wrote: "We are aware of freedom of indifference within us to such a point that nothing is more obvious or more perfect."<sup>16</sup>

The idea reappears with others in philosophical dictionaries. In Lalande: "[in contrast with determinism] . . . the power to act with no other cause than the power itself, that is, without any reason bearing on the content of the action. . . . The indeterminacy of the will relative to its object under this particular form is generally called *freedom of indifference*."

The dictionary of Foulquié and Saint-Jean proposes under "free will": "Distinguished today from freedom (the power of self-determination

16. "Libertatis autem et indifferentiae, quae in nobis est, nos ita conscios esse, ut nihil sit quod evidentius et perfectius comprehendamus."

through motivation) and close to freedom of indifference (the ability to take decisions independently of motives), in so far as it is viewed as the power to choose between contraries." A quotation from Henri Bergson is added: "Free will, in the ordinary sense of the term, implies that contraries may be equally open to being chosen."

In scholastic theology, the reaction against nominalism was especially strong in the Thomistic school, among commentators on St. Thomas. The outstanding feature of moral theory that was opposed to it was the teaching on natural law, written in every human heart and attainable by reason. Through this, knowledge of the Creator's will was made clear and available to all. Moral obligations could be firmly based on natural law, free from the uncertainties inherent in the notion of divine caprice. It was thought that the nominalist tide, together with the profound relativism it engendered, could be checked in this way.

Yet we can question whether this foundation rested on solid enough ground. Even among Thomists, freedom of indifference was accepted, though it had caused the relativism against which they were fighting. As we have seen, freedom of indifference was at the root of nominalism and the logic behind it. The surest sign of the adoption of freedom of indifference—beyond definitions and discussions—was concentration on the morality of obligation, which was admitted even by ethicists who, following St. Thomas, continued to use the order of the virtues rather than that of the commandments.

Here again, a patient historical study is needed in order to show the evolution of ideas about freedom in the scholastic tradition. We shall call upon only one witness, Billuart, who has played the role of classical author for the manuals of the last two centuries and is a good interpreter of the tradition he represents.<sup>17</sup>

Billuart enumerated five definitions or five types of freedom. The first three he took from the Fathers of the Church: freedom from suffering, from sin, and from law. These applied principally to God, who had no superior and was himself the law and rule. (Already we hear the echo of nominalism.) Then came the two basic definitions that were at the heart of the lengthy discussion carried on against Jansenism:

—The first kind of freedom was freedom from violence and coercion (*a violentia seu coactione*). It was called the freedom of spontaneity. It was freedom from external force, and also from interior inclinations that could be compelling. This was the freedom with which the blessed loved

17. *Cursus theologiae. Tractatus de actibus humanis. Dissertatio II* (Paris, 1895), vol. 4.

God in heaven, and loved happiness in this life, and with which God loved himself and produced the Holy Spirit. This freedom could be extended to animals and even inanimate objects; we speak of the spontaneity of a bubbling spring or a rock's free fall.

—The second kind of freedom was freedom from all necessity, including every natural instinct and all determination to any “one thing,” which would cancel the power to choose between contraries. It was freedom to will and not to will, to will this or that. It was called the freedom of indifference because it was applied to contraries (*est ad opposita*).<sup>18</sup> This was the definition of freedom chosen by Billuart. For him, to ask if man enjoyed free will was equivalent to asking if he possessed freedom of indifference. It was therefore on freedom of indifference that Billuart depended in his attack on the roots of Jansenism (which was, for its part, based on a freedom of spontaneity).

Apparently it did not occur to Billuart to wonder how St. Thomas could place the natural inclination to the good and to happiness at the very source of human freedom, as the inclination that wins us our final end and engenders all our choices. For St. Thomas, there was no opposition between nature—here read *spiritual*—and human freedom, but rather a profound harmony, like the harmony between the spring and the brook it feeds. But with St. Thomas, we envision a totally different concept of freedom. We are in another world.

18. “Quinta libertas est a necessitate; et est immunitas non solum a coactione seu violentia, sed etiam a naturali instinctu et determinatione ad unum sine potentia ad oppositum: qua libertate gaudet qui potest velle vel non velle, hoc vel illud velle. Dicitur libertas indifferentiae, quia est ad opposita.”

## Freedom for Excellence

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We are so accustomed to thinking of freedom as the power to choose between contraries that we can hardly imagine any other concept of it. We need, therefore, to embark on a real rediscovery of freedom if we wish to shake off the notion of freedom of indifference.

In this research we shall begin with the concrete experience of certain external activities in which our freedom is at work and can be observed. These examples will help us to discern how our freedom operates in more the interior actions of the moral order. As we combine various characteristic features of this freedom in a harmonious whole, a freedom will emerge that is utterly different from freedom of indifference. Finally, we shall verify the affinity of this new freedom with the teaching of St. Thomas.

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### I. EXAMPLES

We shall begin with two examples from the realm of art as understood by the ancients: the study of music and of a foreign language. Such activities engage a person sufficiently to provide a number of analogies with moral action, and will serve as an introduction to our study of human freedom.

We all know how music is taught to a child—piano, for instance. In the first place, the child must have certain predispositions. Without some attraction to music and an ear for it, lessons are a waste of time.

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But if the child is gifted, it is well worth the effort to find a music teacher who will explain the rules of the art and develop the talent by dint of regular exercises. In the beginning the child, despite a desire to learn, will often feel that the lessons and exercises as a constraint imposed on freedom and the attractions of the moment. There are times when practice has to be insisted upon. But with effort and perseverance, the gifted child will soon make notable progress and will come to play with accuracy and good rhythm, and with a certain ease—even the more difficult pieces. Taste and talent are developing. Soon the child is no longer satisfied with the assigned exercises but will delight in improvising. In this way, playing becomes more personal. The child who is truly gifted and able to keep up these musical studies may become an artist, capable of executing with mastery whatever may be suggested, playing with precision and originality, delighting all who hear. Further, this artist will compose new works, whose quality will manifest the full flowering of talent and musical personality.

In this very simple example, we can clearly see a new kind of freedom. Of course anyone is free to bang out notes haphazardly on the piano, as the fancy strikes him. But this is a rudimentary, savage sort of freedom. It cloaks an incapacity to play even the simplest pieces accurately and well. On the other hand, the person who really possesses the art of playing the piano has acquired a new freedom. He can play whatever he chooses, and also compose new pieces. His musical freedom could be described as the gradually acquired ability to execute works of his choice with perfection. It is based on natural dispositions and a talent developed and stabilized by means of regular, progressive exercises, or properly speaking, a *habitus*.

Let us look now at the study of a foreign language. Undoubtedly the best method is to begin by taking courses in grammar and vocabulary, and then to add a visit to a country or an area where only the new language is spoken. Here again, a minimum of predisposition is needed in the beginning, and then perseverance in our efforts to follow the rules that are the very constraints of a language. Little by little, we will succeed in expressing ourselves correctly and in understanding better what we hear and read. Soon we will feel at ease; we will enjoy speaking the language. In the end we will be able to understand and say whatever we wish, with facility and precision.

Once again, we have seen a new kind of freedom, very different from the choice between contraries; we are free to choose whatever words we wish to form our sentences. It is a freedom subject to the constraint of grammatical rules, of course, but it is far more real and is supported by

the rules as it develops. It is not to be confused with the freedom to make mistakes, which is implied by the choice of contraries, but lies rather in the ability to avoid them, without conscious effort. This we call freedom for excellence, for it enables us to understand and speak with perfection.

### The Example of Courage

Now we are ready to take an example in the moral order such as the forming of a virtue like courage.

Whatever our temperament, we all have a certain understanding of courage, and we esteem it. In a child, however, courage is more imaginary than real. The child spontaneously identifies with persons who appeal to his imagination—great men, fictional heroes; they must never be cowards, even in the direst situations. He himself however is easily frightened by a trifle, shrinks before a shadow, and is afraid to go to bed in the dark.

The development of courage is progressive. It is acquired far more through small victories of self-conquest, repeated day after day, than through dreams of great actions. It grows with the dogged effort to study, to finish a task, render a service, or overcome laziness or some other fault. There will also be battles to fight, trials to encounter, small and great sufferings to endure, reaching their pitch in the illness and death of loved ones.

There is no course in courage, like courses in music or the other arts. Its best school is the family, where we learn from our parents' example, wise discipline, and the encouragement we receive to make personal efforts and persevere in them. Courage, like any virtue, calls for educators rather than professors.

Courage, which the Romans considered as the highest of virtues, is a characteristic of the morally mature person. It is indispensable for complete moral freedom. Gradually formed in us through life's discipline, first given, then personally appropriated, courage enables us to undertake worthwhile projects of high value to ourselves and others, regardless of all interior and exterior resistance, obstacles, and opposition. We act when and how we wish, to the point of exploiting the very setbacks that might have weakened our resolve and checked our plans. The person of little courage can indeed boast that he is free to do what he wants, and can affirm himself along with the crowd in rebelling against rules and laws. In reality, despite all his talk, his freedom is very weak and

he is near to being a slave, for he does not know how to form a firm, lasting determination strong enough to rescue him from the pressure of circumstances or feelings so as to master them as he ought.

Courage presupposes a mature personality, formed by difficulties and trials and capable of initiating and achieving the worthwhile actions that are life's fruits. Once again we are looking at a courageous freedom with qualities far different from those of freedom of indifference.

We could choose many more examples from the other virtues: temperance (the patiently acquired mastery over the body), justice (the consistent desire to give all persons their due), generosity (which gives of itself to the limit), or prudent discernment (the fruit of much experience). All these examples would combine to demonstrate the internal harmony of the virtues. True courage is worth little without wise discernment as to what should be done, and without self-control, justice, and generosity.

The examples we have considered suffice to show us the main characteristics of freedom for excellence and to describe it in general. We shall now examine the origin of this freedom more closely, before tracing its development.

## II. THE ROOT OF FREEDOM

We have seen that freedom of indifference opposed natural inclinations in order to dominate them. Here, on the contrary, we find a freedom that presupposes natural inclinations and takes root in them so as to draw forth the strength needed for their development.

Initially, moral freedom is given to us through a specific spontaneity issuing from our spiritual nature as human persons, and is comparable to the dispositions required for engaging in the arts or other professions. There is this difference however: every person possesses basic moral inclinations and a primal moral sense that no corruption due to sin can completely destroy, whereas artistic gifts are bestowed on us individually in varying degrees. Some, for example, see in music nothing but "expensive noise."

The natural root of freedom develops in us principally through a sense of the true and the good, of uprightness and love, and through a desire for knowledge and happiness. Or again, by what the ancients called *semina virtutum*, the seeds of virtue, which give rise to these natural dispositions—the sense of justice, of courage, truth, friendship, and gen-

erosity—which cause us to give spontaneous praise to acts so conformed and to condemn their absence, at least in a general way. Such dispositions project a certain ideal of life, which gives direction to our desires and forms and influences our moral judgments.

Far from lessening our freedom, such dispositions are its foundation. We are free, not in spite of them, but because of them. The more we develop them, the more we grow in freedom. In this we discover the true, specifically moral meaning of the famous principle of ancient philosophy, *sequi naturam*, “follow nature,” so frankly adopted and christianized by the Fathers of the Church. This “nature” does not restrain human freedom; it is essentially liberating. It produces a spontaneity in the spiritual order that is very different, in its relationship to freedom, from the spontaneity of the senses or external nature. This is why St. Thomas could speak of an *instinctus rationis* or rational instinct, in reference to our natural moral sense linked to reason, and could with marked predilection use the expression *instinctus Spiritus Sancti* to describe the action of the Holy Spirit through his gifts at the heart of the Christian life (IaIIae, q 68). There is obviously nothing blind about such an instinct, nor is it opposed to freedom. It exists at the very source of the light and spontaneity that make for freedom.<sup>1</sup>

1. To illustrate this concept of freedom and show that it is indeed that of the Fathers as well as St. Thomas, here are two quotations from St. Maximus the Confessor, which express very clearly human freedom's rootedness in the spiritual nature of man. The perfection of our free will consists in its conformity to our nature, created by God, and finds its fulfillment in our participation in the divine nature through grace and the Spirit. The quotations are taken from a commentary on the Our Father and in particular on the petition for the forgiveness of our trespasses.

“[God] has clearly shown that when our free will is united to the principle (logos) of nature, our free choices will not be in disagreement with God, since there is absolutely nothing unreasonable in the principle of nature—which is also natural and divine law—when the movement of free choice conforms with the principle of nature. And if there is nothing unreasonable in the principle of nature, our free will, moved according to the principle of nature, is very likely to produce actions wholly in accord with God. This will be due to an efficacious disposition, produced by the grace of the One who is good by nature, to produce virtuous acts” (A. Riou, *Le Monde et l'Eglise selon Maxime le Confesseur* [Paris, 1973], 235, PG vol. 90, col. 901 D).

“In consistently downplaying nature in favor of the passions, [man] has ignored the principle of nature out of his ardor for the latter. In the movement of this principle, we need to know the law of nature and that of the passions (whose tyranny prevails through a choice made by free will and not by nature). Nature's law must also be preserved by actions in conformity with nature, and throw off the rule of the passions which is so far from freedom. Through reason we must safeguard nature, which is pure and innocent in itself, without hatred and dissension; we must unite free will with nature and do only what is indicated by the principle of nature, rejecting all hatred and dissension towards the One in whose image we are made. . . .

“[Christ] gives us as our weapons the law of the commandments. According to this law

Thus founded on a natural sense of goodness and truth, freedom is no longer characterized by indifference, but rather by the spontaneous attraction and interest experienced in regard to all that is true and good, or at least to whatever seems so to us. The morality issuing from this freedom is a morality of attraction, not obligation.

As with the arts and professions, however, experience quickly reveals a considerable distance between our fine plans and our capacities, our intentions and their realization. At the beginning of the moral life we are like children, full of desires and plans, but weak-willed and quick to seek refuge in the imaginary. In this painful struggle between the ideal and the real, we discover how far our freedom is enslaved by our weaknesses and faults, how inappreciable still in the face of life and its demands.

Experience thus shows us our need for an education at the moral level comparable to an apprenticeship in the world of art. We need to learn what it is to be human, through education in freedom. While freedom of indifference is presented whole and entire at the outset of the moral life, at least in principle (for it has no degrees; it exists or does not exist at each instant), freedom for excellence requires the slow, patient work of moral education in order to develop. We shall now outline the principal stages of its growth.

### III. DISCIPLINE

There are three basic stages of education in freedom, comparable to the three stages of human life. Childhood corresponds to what we shall call the stage of discipline, adolescence to the stage of progress, and adulthood to the stage of maturity or the perfection of freedom.

Learning an art begins with the study and practice of its rules, under the guidance of a teacher. Similarly, learning freedom requires exercise in the principal rules of moral life, with the help of appropriate teachers,

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we must overcome our passions; thus nature is bound to the law through charity. It arouses in us an insatiable desire for itself, for it is the bread of life, of wisdom, knowledge, justice. Through the accomplishment of the Father's will it makes us like to the angels in their adoration, we who imitate and show forth heavenly joy in our way of life. And it leads us on high to supreme realities, to the Father of lights. It causes us to communicate in the divine nature through the participation in the grace of the Spirit, by which we are called children of God. We are wholly clothed, without spot or stain, in the One who himself gives us this grace and who is by nature the Son of God . . ." (*ibid.*, 237, PG vol. 90, col. 905).

beginning with one's parents. Moral education begins with the acceptance of what may be called the discipline of life, based on rules, which are the moral laws.

We should at once clarify the nature of this discipline, for the word has a harsh connotation in our day, due to the intervention of freedom of indifference. In its original sense, discipline refers to the relationship of a disciple to the teacher who is to impart the principles and rules of some art or science, and particularly that art of living that is morality or wisdom. Discipline involves the communication of knowledge and the formation of mind and will, within the context of a growing harmony between disciple and teacher according to the criterion of excellence. Discipline does not seek a union of wills controlled by a binding authority. The wide difference between the two concepts can be seen in the fact that true discipline appeals to natural dispositions, to a spontaneous sense of truth and goodness, and to the conscience of the child or disciple. It ministers to growth through the rules that correspond to all these in depth. In the case of freedom of indifference, on the contrary, discipline with its laws always appears as the work of an alien will, restrictive if not hostile. The theory of freedom of indifference robs discipline and education of the profound, intimate rootedness they require. Education becomes a battle; it can no longer be service or collaboration.

Nevertheless, as a child deplores the lengthy exercises needed in order to acquire skill at the piano, so moral discipline is often resented in this first stage of education. It is viewed as a painful limitation to one's freedom to act as one pleases, because it presents prohibitions, the negative side of law—the side first experienced. After an initial period of easy docility, a kind of dialectical debate ensues between child and teacher, disciple and master, personal freedom and the law.

This is a crucial moment in the work of education. The goal of education is to lead the child to understand (and the educator must first understand this himself) that discipline, law, and rules are not meant to destroy his freedom, still less to crush or enslave him. Their purpose is rather to develop his ability to perform actions of real excellence by removing dangerous excesses, which can proliferate in the human person like weeds stifling good grain, and by guarding him against unhealthy errors that could turn him aside and jeopardize his interior freedom. Ultimately, the achievement of harmony between freedom and law must be the work of the individual himself. He needs to reestablish certain defense zones within his own conscience, where the opposition between freedom and certain laws and precepts is resolved. No one can do this essential work for him, this intimate clarification, which achieves har-

mony between freedom and law in view of progress toward really worthwhile action.<sup>2</sup>

Still, the educator's view of his task is of tremendous importance. It will itself be determined by a dialectical debate between a too-liberal concept (currently called nondirective), which stresses individual freedom exclusively, and an authoritarian concept, which would mold freedom like soft clay. Father Laberthonnière has described this debate very clearly in connection with Catholic education. What he wrote sixty years ago is still relevant, and has to do with the formation of the freedom for excellence we are discussing, "the freedom that does not give into self, but conquers self. . . . One becomes free only by becoming better."

The Catholic educator would betray his title and mission if he were to lose sight of contemporary conditions and follow a "laissez faire" policy under any pretext whatsoever, exerting no influence in the lives of the students entrusted to him. But he would be equally false to his title and mission if, losing sight of the sublime ideal of Christian salvation, he were to form spineless robots who could think and act only upon orders from others. There are better things for him to do than simply pay respect to freedom of conscience; better things than to dominate individuals, forcefully or cleverly imposing ideas and beliefs upon them. His task is infinitely more delicate, more noble. He must work to form free consciences, so that the ideas and beliefs he inspires may develop within them like living fruits, becoming a part of their own being.<sup>3</sup>

This illustrates the moral law's pedagogical role. It first appears as something external, proposed to us by teachers and presented as the expression of a higher, divine will. We experience its external quality especially through its demands and constraints. Yet if we have ears to

2. Nietzsche himself testified to this general experience: the need for rules and restraint in order to develop creative freedom in the arts and in moral life. "The essential thing in all moral theory, a thing of inestimable value, is on-going, continual restraint. To understand Stoicism, or Port Royal, or Puritanism, we need to remember that it has always been through restraint that any language reached the height of its power and freedom, metrical restraint tyrannising over rhyme and rhythm. What pains have been taken by poets and orators of all nations, and also some prose writers of our day, to meet the inexorable demands of the human ear! This is all done 'out of pure folly' according to utilitarian rustics who think they are clever; 'out of servility to arbitrary laws', say anarchists who flatter themselves that they are 'free' and even 'free thinkers'. But strange as it may seem, everything that exists or ever did exist in this world, of freedom, finesse, audacity, dance or statesmanship, everything in the realm of art and morality, of thought, government, eloquence or persuasion, in the arts or in moral life, could never have flourished without the tyranny of these 'arbitrary laws'. And I say this in all seriousness: as far as I can see it is restraint that is 'nature', is 'natural'—not 'freedom to do your own thing'" (*Beyond Good and Evil* [Chicago, 1955], 93).

3. L. Laberthonnière, *Théorie de l'éducation*, 9th ed. (Paris, 1935), 64–65.

hear, this law resonates within us, revealing a hidden, vigorous harmony with our intimate sense of truth and goodness at the root of our freedom. Thus the law leads us to the discovery of a deeper freedom beyond the external, superficial kind we enjoy. It opens us to an interior voice, which enlightens and attracts us as no other can. The education that began externally has thus finished by exerting an interior influence that alone can unite moral law and freedom, so as to give the latter a running start.

### The Decalogue

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Moral law is expressed mainly in the Decalogue, which applies particularly to this first stage of moral life. It formulates basic commands and prohibitions; without respect for these, no worthwhile moral life or true freedom is possible. It is appropriate, however, to stress the two commandments of love of God and neighbor from the very beginning; this has not always been done. They are the living seed of the moral law and give inspiration and positive meaning to the other commandments. The child needs to experience God's love and the love of his teachers, even though they may be strict and demanding, if his formation is to be successful and fruitful.

Moral theories of obligation during recent centuries take their value from the teaching of the Decalogue, which they have chosen as their essential foundation. They are therefore particularly appropriate for this first stage of apprenticeship to basic moral rules. However, we can regret their having terminated moral formation with this stage, considering later stages as irrelevant to the generality of students, as if the search for further perfection would be of interest to very few. I believe the reason for this position is to be found in freedom of indifference, which blocks the rapport between law and freedom in an opposition that works to the detriment of freedom's development. We are no longer dealing with a freedom that grows like a living organism, but with an assertive freedom, capable of a yes or no at each instant.

### “Beginners” in the Order of Charity

This first stage in moral education corresponds, in St. Thomas, to the first degree in the formation of charity (IIaIIae, q 24 a 9). This is the stage of *incipientes*, beginners, whose main concern is to avoid sins and

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to fight inclinations opposed to charity. The negative precepts of the Decalogue are especially appropriate during this early stage of the moral life, when the seed of love of God and neighbor implanted in our hearts needs protection for future growth. Clearly, when charity is beginning to be formed, the prohibitions of the moral law can sometimes appear a hindrance to freedom and the spontaneity of love. Yet they are necessary if our sentiments are to acquire uprightness and truthfulness, so is to harmonize with a deep, spiritual spontaneity.

This first stage may also be related to the categories used by the mystics to describe progress in the spiritual life under the impulse of the Spirit. The stage of discipline corresponds to the purgative way, in which the soul undergoes the purifications needed in order that God may act in it and reveal himself to it.

#### IV. THE SECOND STAGE OF MORAL EDUCATION: PERSONAL PROGRESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIRTUE

The second stage in the formation of freedom and the moral personality is comparable to young adulthood, at the end of the crisis of adolescence. It is characterized by taking one's own moral life in hand, by a predominance of initiative and personal effort, by the development of an appreciation and taste for moral quality, and the deepening of an active interiority. It is the stage of progress when virtues are formed, together with a consistent personal intention to act in accord with excellence. Little by little, sensible pleasure is put aside, together with the desire for reward and the fear of punishment. These things formerly served as supporting motives in the first stage; now they yield to love of virtue for its own sake, and to love of others for themselves, which is friendship.

Thus a person learns to carry out a task with care, to practice justice, act honestly, seek the truth, and love sincerely, even though such actions may require sacrifice or may be unnoticed by others. It is an apprenticeship in work well done, in daily courage, patience, and perseverance and, in the end, the discovery of a joy very different from pleasure, because it is the result of our actions and character rather than of external events.

To understand what happens in this second stage of moral formation, we need to rediscover, through experience and ideas, the essence of true

virtue, for freedom of indifference has completely emptied this notion of content and force.

Virtue is not a habitual way of acting, formed by the repetition of material acts and engendering in us a psychological mechanism. It is a personal capacity for action, the fruit of a series of fine actions, a power for progress and perfection. In the tradition of Aristotle, it is termed a *habitus*. Unfortunately the term *habitus* is not found in modern languages, though it designates a specifically human disposition for action.

At the same time, virtue is contained within a timespan and within the action performed, in a certain sense. Within the timespan, virtue develops the person and his actions; it transforms the passing moment. While freedom of indifference holds us fixed within the instant, moral progress requires our perseverance in the active intention that orients our life toward a goal, a higher reality that gives it its full value. No progress can be made without the ongoing, patient, and courageous effort that directs all our successive actions in one direction, the goal we long for and love supremely through all inevitable obstacles and fluctuations.

Freedom for excellence, like our personality itself, needs permanence if it is to grow, flower, and lead us to the adult stage where it will produce the noblest actions. At the heart of continuity and in its perfection, through the power of virtue, a man achieves works bearing the stamp of his unique quality as a moral person.

With virtue we rediscover true fidelity. Fidelity is not limited to defending and maintaining ideas, observances, institutions, and ancient and revered ways of judging and living, which form tradition. This is only virtue's husk, which could stifle it if hardened. The chief object of real fidelity is that seed of the spiritual life, true and good, which has taken root and appears in a doctrine and institutions, but whose soul is vivified by virtues. We may call it a conserving fidelity, if you will. But as applied to a life principle it is in reality vivifying and dynamic, like the continuity and progress we spoke of above. Fidelity is necessary for virtue's growth, and shares its power of renewal. In sum, it is freedom's fidelity to itself, to its qualitative source, the natural sense of truth and goodness.

Fidelity is primarily spiritual, but it cannot exist without material fidelities. Since we are body and soul we need both, as a support and as concrete material for the exercise of various virtues and progress in them. Moral fidelity will therefore incorporate the more material fidelities and integrate them. At the same time, it will give them that sup-

pleness of movement and adaptation to reality which our soul imparts to our bodily organs.

### “Progressives” in the Order of Charity and the Sermon on the Mount

The second stage of moral education, characterized by progress in virtue, is called by St. Thomas the degree of “progressives.” Their chief concern is to grow and advance in the exercise of various virtues and especially in the practice of charity.

The Sermon on the Mount is a text admirably suited to this stage. Several aspects of the Lord’s Sermon harmonize with our analysis. The Sermon criticizes the legalism of the Pharisees, linked as it is to the negative precepts of the Decalogue. It insists on our moving to a higher kind of justice, on our progress in the qualities of the heart, or virtues, which culminate in active charity. The change is a qualitative one. We move from a limited moral theory to one of progress, based on a generosity that always exceeds the demand with the spontaneity of true love.

In the interpretation of the Fathers of the Church, the Sermon’s precepts go beyond external actions to penetrate to the level of the “heart,” in the evangelical sense of the word; there where our sentiments and actions are rooted, and where we discover, too, in secret, the qualities that make for justice in God’s eyes and that are wrought in us by him.

For St. Thomas, the Sermon is also the text of the New Law, which he calls a law of freedom, among other reasons because it has the unique capacity for opening up to us a vast field of freedom. This is indicated by the counsels, and is offered to our initiative through the inspiration of charity.

Thus the Sermon on the Mount is particularly appropriate for this second stage of moral freedom’s progress, as was the Decalogue for the first. Between the one law and the other, there is at once an essential continuity and a profound difference, as between the imperfect and the perfect, or the seed that sends forth its first shoots, tender and needing protection, and the plant that grows tall and strong.

The second stage may be said to correspond with the illuminative way of the mystics. This refers to the soul’s ongoing journey in the contemplative life and the practice of virtues through the Holy Spirit’s enlightenment and attraction. Faith is seen as the light bearer, illuminating God, oneself, Christ, the world, Scripture, the Church. It infuses wis-

dom and strength into the soul; these direct the mind's attention and the heart's impulse ever more powerfully to God, the source of Truth and Beauty. At the same time, our attraction to our neighbors is deepened by an effective, pure love.

#### V. THE THIRD STAGE OF MORAL EDUCATION: MATURITY OF AGE AND FREEDOM

The third stage of moral education brings freedom to maturity. It is the age of adulthood at the moral and spiritual levels.

We can characterize this stage by two features: mastery of excellent actions and creative fruitfulness. Due to the gradual development of his faculties, the human person is now capable of viewing his life in its entirety. He performs his actions personally according to a plan, a higher goal which will profit himself and others. This leads him, through patient acceptance of all trials and obstacles, to the fulfillment of a life project which gives meaning, value and fruitfulness to existence. The perfection of moral freedom is shown by the response to a vocation, by devotion to a great cause, however humble it may appear to be, or the accomplishment of important tasks in the service of one's community, family, city, or Church.

This is the freedom St. Thomas speaks of at the beginning of the *prima secundae*, where he sees in man's mastery over his actions an imaging of God. This self-mastery presupposes moral education and the gradual formation of virtues within us. They are like a sheaf of interior energies bound together by our persevering efforts to follow our vocation and grace. Self-mastery draws together our faculties, ideas, desires, and feelings, directing them all to the higher end we are pursuing. In this way, our personality is integrated and acquires autonomy in regard to external events. We use these to further our plans, drawing profit even from the opposition and trials they occasion. A profound interiority is developing within us. It does not isolate us, but becomes the needed pivot for our ongoing, fruitful exchange with the outer world. Thus our actions can slowly take shape and ripen into life's true fruits, the authentic outgrowth of our freedom.

We need to stress here the paradoxical character of this moral mastery which leads to the development of moral freedom. It unites two dimensions which are ordinarily opposed: the profoundly personal character of excellent action and its vast openness to others.

A symbol of this is a fruiting tree. The Gospel tells us that we know a tree by its fruit. The fruit is so much a part of the tree that it reveals both species and quality. At the same time, the tree offers each of its ripe fruits freely, flushed with color, delicious to the taste. They have been formed by the long exchanges between roots and nourishing earth, leaves, air and sun, through the drift of the seasons. In the same way, our free actions are all the more personal as they result from a greater moral self-mastery, guaranteeing our autonomy and interiority. Like all actions of high quality in the arts and professions, our moral actions are stamped with our personality. Often they have matured in long solitude and trial. If they are carried out in faith, they will issue from the invisible center of our being where we stand alone before the Father's gaze, hidden from all others. Yet those who have eyes to see will perceive their source and will praise the Father. Nothing is so irreducibly personal, arcane, and solitary in its roots and source as moral action.

Yet out of this hidden center of freedom comes openness to others, without which there can be no excellent action, no fruitfulness. Rooted in our hearts are those virtues that benefit others, such as justice (which is the firm resolve to give others their due), generosity, friendship, and many others. This is especially true of charity, which passes from intimacy with God to intimacy with others, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, and becomes for believers the seed, bond, and perfection of all truly moral qualities. Our freedom reaches maturity precisely with our capacity to balance the twofold dimension of personality and openness to others, interiority and outreach, living "for self" and "for others." We should note here that only the concept of freedom for excellence, based on the natural sense of the true and the good, enables us to be aware of this association, so vital for moral theory. The theory of freedom of indifference not only fails to explain it but actually destroys it, breaking it down into contraries.

We rediscover this union of personality and openness to others at the level of works accomplished. The work of excellence, the moral achievement perfect in its ordering, is so personal that it reflects its author in the depths of his being: he is recognized as good, just, generous, upright, charitable. He is known through his actions, somewhat as a great artist is recognized in his works, which need no signature. Works win a wide audience and touch those who know them most profoundly, for a work possesses the savor and perfection of a ripe fruit offered to the individual. In the same way, an excellent moral action is presented to another as a fruit intended for that person, a fertile seed to be received, a model to inspire, and an attractive example to imitate. Here it is appropriate

to recall the Aristotelian definition of virtue: it renders good not only the act and the one who performs it but still more those who profit by it and who may, in their turn, become fruitful because of it.

### “The Perfect” in the Order of Charity

St. Thomas calls the third stage of progress in charity the age of the *perfecti*, “the perfect,” those whose chief concern is to be united to God and to find all their joy in him. He applies to them the expression of St. Paul to the Philippians: their longing is “to be gone and be with Christ” (Phil 1:23).

A word of clarification is needed here. The terms *perfect* and *perfection* should be understood in a human sense, which is always relative in our present condition. In this sense we say a man has reached the perfection of his age, his growth, or his personality, meaning the maturity characteristic of an adult. St. Paul takes up this idea when he invites Christians to “become the perfect Man, fully mature with the fulness of Christ himself” (Eph 4:13). It is a perfection very different from that which is sometimes evoked by the word “virtue” when we say, for instance, that nothing could be more boring and more irritating than the perfect person who possesses every virtue. This perfection is not merely the reproduction of a model or the application of a theory, soulless and artificial. It is, on the contrary, a dynamic perfection, flowering from the heart; it is characteristic of the person who has reached the fulness of his active powers.

St. Thomas characterizes spiritual maturity by the perfection of love of God and Christ, which is the principal dimension of charity, as also of the contemplative life oriented to the vision of God (IIaIIae, q 180 a 4). It might be well to complete this description of the adult Christian with the following passage from Philippians quoted above, where St. Paul concludes: “and yet for your sake to stay alive in this body is a more urgent need. This much I know for certain . . .” (1:24). The perfection of charity sees the “urgency” of being ready to renounce even the fulfillment of the desire to be with Christ, for the sake of the neighbor’s good. The tension between the desire for Christ and the good of one’s neighbor, which St. Paul describes as a dilemma, shows the power of life and the fruitful strength that exist in perfect charity.

## The New Law

We can relate this teaching about the adult stage of the Christian to the Thomistic definition of the New Law, whose chief element is the grace of the Holy Spirit working within us through faith and charity, and also to the teaching about the action of the Holy Spirit through his gifts. Taking his cue from St. Augustine, who had linked the Gospel Beatitudes with the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed in Isaiah's chapter 11, St. Thomas distinguishes a twofold realization of the Beatitudes, through the virtues and the gifts (Iallae, q 69 a 3). The proper work of the gifts, penetrating the virtues in the form of inspirations, is to enable us to perform perfect actions transcending simple reason and our own initiative, in conformity with the generous upsurge of faith and charity.

Such is the lofty perfection taught us in the Sermon on the Mount, which we are to seek under the direct impulse of the Holy Spirit, our chief teacher. It alone can lead us to the full ripening of charity.

This work of the Holy Spirit corresponds exactly to the flowering of our freedom, as St. Thomas explains in a very beautiful passage in the *Summa contra Gentiles* (4.22), where he describes how the Holy Spirit moves man toward God in the mode of friendship. It happens in the context of a relationship that, humanly speaking, is based wholly on freedom and presupposes a personality matured by virtue. It is well worth our while to reread this extremely interesting passage based on the concept of freedom for excellence, informed by the natural inclination to the truly good.

For all that, one must bear in mind that the sons of God are driven not as slaves, but as free men. For since, according to Aristotle, that person is free who acts on his own, we do freely that which we do of our very selves. This is what we do by our own will; what we do against our will is not done freely but by force, whether the violence brought to bear upon us is absolute, as when "the entire principle of the action is extrinsic, with the subject contributing nothing"—for example, a person is pushed into motion—or whether the violence is combined with a certain voluntariness—for example, one wishes to do or endure what is less contrary to his will in order to avoid what is more contrary to it. But the Holy Spirit moves us to act in such a way that he causes us to act voluntarily, in that he makes us lovers of God. Therefore the sons of God are moved by the Holy Spirit freely, out of love, not slavishly out of fear. Hence the Apostle says, "What you received was not the spirit of slavery to bring you back into fear; you received the spirit of adoption" (Rom 8:15).

The will, of course, is ordered to that which is truly good. But if by reason of passion or some evil habit or disposition a man is turned away from that which

is truly good, he acts slavishly, in that he is diverted by some extraneous thing, if we consider the natural orientation of the will. But if we consider the act of the will as inclined to an apparent good, a person is acting freely in following passion or a corrupt habit. He acts slavishly, of course, if while his will remains so fixed, he—out of fear of a law to the contrary—refrains from doing what he wills. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit inclines the will to the good through love—the good to which the will is naturally ordered—he removes both the servitude whereby a man, infected by sin, follows his passion and acts contrary to the natural ordering of his will, and the slavery whereby he acts in accordance with the law but against his will, being the law's slave, not its friend. This is why the Apostle says, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Cor 3:17); and, "When you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law" (Gal 5:18).

In his commentary on chapter 44 of Isaiah concerning the outpouring of the Spirit, St. Thomas had already used St. Paul's words, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom," to describe "the perfect," whose initial gift is freedom.

In the language of the mystics, the unitive way corresponds to the age of maturity or of "the perfect." This explains the search for union with Christ of which St. Thomas speaks, expressed in the theme of spiritual marriage. The action of the Holy Spirit predominates here.

It is well to remember in this connection, however, that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount on the gifts of the Holy Spirit was intended, according to St. Thomas and the Fathers, for all Christians. It was a call to commitment to one single way, along which one might advance as far as possible according to one's vocation, with the help of grace. The three stages we have been discussing describe the progress and flowering of freedom for excellence by means of all the virtues, centered, for the Christian, in charity, which binds them together, enlivens them, and brings them to their perfection. The action of the Holy Spirit is at work from the beginning of the Christian life, in the call to faith and through the gift of charity. It is at work in every heart, like sap, which, hidden at first, is later revealed in all its power in the season of fruits, the time of maturity. For every Christian, as for the Church, Pentecost is the harvest feast. In our lives it has been prepared for by the season of sowing—often childhood—when the small grain of the Word was welcomed with faith in the simplicity of our hearts, as if on a day of a very personal annunciation.

The interpretation that would see in the Sermon and the gifts of the Holy Spirit an esoteric doctrine inaccessible to ordinary people is a logical result of the concept of freedom of indifference, which, by means of obligation, checked the principal use of moral freedom at its initial

stage, where law and freedom came into conflict. Since all freedom came to a standstill there, it could hardly grow. Moral theory itself remained at this level. It was no longer necessary to offer to all a perfection that transcended legal obligation.

According to St. Thomas, on the other hand, the Sermon on the Mount was addressed to every Christian, with the grace of the Holy Spirit. Each person could aspire, in heart and prayer, to the realization of the central precept of the Sermon: "You must therefore set no bounds to your love, just as your heavenly Father sets none to his" (Mt 5:48). This commandment, "impossible" in the eyes of men, the learned and the clever, becomes accessible to the little ones, the humble whom no one would think of as an elite, precisely because they are more aware of their weakness and better disposed to allow themselves to be led by the Spirit in faith and hope.

## VI. SOME REMARKS ON PROGRESS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF MORAL FREEDOM

### *1. Continuity in Developing Freedom*

The three stages in the formation of freedom for excellence that we have distinguished are not always separated in reality. As in biological growth, the first stage continues in the second and the second in the third, because of the positive quality of each and the weaknesses that sometimes perdure. Our childhood is with us to the day of our death, revealing some of our deepest traits. At life's decline, many feel the need to reawaken memories of their youth, as if to plunge once more into the source of their origin.

If we can characterize the first stage of moral education by the acceptance of discipline and the struggle against sin, this is not to say that as "proficients" or "perfect," where the freedom of initiative is greater, we no longer have to fight against our faults and we can throw off all discipline. The need for a rule of life persists to the end, but with maturity it is assumed personally, and thenceforward based on our own interior urging.

Similarly, if it is true that humility, according to the teaching of the Fathers, constitutes the first stage of the Christian's spiritual journey, it does not follow that those who have reached the stage of wisdom need have no more concern for this virtue. They need to be all the more on their guard against pride, which threatens them more than others. It is

said that with the increase of the wisdom that comes from God, humility, rooted in truth, grows all the deeper. We find this illustrated in great masters such as St. Augustine and St. Thomas. In the full maturity of their genius they set themselves, in all devotion and humility, to minister to others, one serving his people through preaching and direction, the other helping beginners in theology, to whom he dedicated his *Summa*. Thus maturity promotes a healthy circulation in moral and intellectual affairs; it is at the end of the journey that one is most inclined to turn to beginners with encouragement and guidance, and to communicate to them all one has learned. This is a far cry from the famous dialectic of master and slave. It is fruitful and leads to care for the weakest, not to constrain them but to lead them toward freedom and maturity.

### 2. *Progress by Contrasting Stages*

The progress we have been describing, even though continuous, is not linear. Its stages are often in contrast. Natural spontaneity is countered by the need for discipline imposed by educators. Next, in the stage where virtue is growing strong, the line of progress moves from externals to the interior. In this way, movements continue to contrast with one another, for we can never acquire the balance of virtue without the experience of going from one extreme to the other. Gradually we approach the characteristic "mean" where our efforts adjust to the precise line of moral growth. The line of progress is continuous, therefore, but angular, or better still, spiral. The person who is aiming at courage must fight both fear and audacity, fear and anger. He will often yield too far to one or the other before finally reaching that stage of perfection of virtue that adjusts to different situations and persons.

### 3. *The Problem of Education*

The progress in freedom for excellence which we are describing unfolds according to a certain dialectic, which has its extremities and contrasts but whose basic direction is constructive. This leads to a characteristic way of envisaging and posing problems of education. The method will be conjunctive, not disjunctive as in freedom of indifference. It will not be a question of choosing between a liberal or an authoritarian education, but of harmonizing freedom and authority in education and of discerning the stages and seasons when it is best to emphasize authority or to favor initiative. It will be the same with other

choices: not between voluntarism and intellectualism, but a choice for the collaboration of reason and will. The connection between freedom and nature must be sought, between freedom and grace, the individual and society, the person and the community. All the great problems concerning freedom will be affected by this difference in viewpoint and method.

#### *4. Involvement of All the Faculties*

The length and complexity of moral education stem from the fact that freedom for excellence calls for the collaboration of all the human faculties and requires the patient work of coordinating them, which is achieved through exercise and experience. This work also requires acceptance of the help of educators and a dynamic openness to contributions and exchanges encountered in society, in a spirit of justice and friendship. Here again the task is a lengthy one. Yet it is well worth the effort, for it provides freedom with the material and nourishment necessary for growth, and strengthens and guarantees the quality of its works. We can apply to freedom St. Paul's words about everything working together for the good of those who love God (Rom 8:28). Once we are free, we can profit by everything that happens, within and without, whether it comes from God or man, including contradictions and persecutions.

#### *5. Progress without End*

We should not be misled by terminology. The final stage of moral progress in no way designates an end, where all mobility and action cease. The age of adulthood is indeed the end of growth, but it is marked by the height of our powers. At the moral level, mature freedom develops within us an energy that, of itself, need fear no decline. Thus the perfection of virtue is simultaneously an end and a beginning. It marks the end of education but enables us to undertake works of highest excellence, bringing them to a successful outcome. In the same way, spiritual perfection does not put an end to our efforts. It is an interior energy, ever urging us forward to the best manner of acting, without ever wearying.

This is what St. Augustine describes so magnificently in his meditation on the Sabbath rest. The Sabbath has no evening, for it brings us into the creative rest of God, who is our "end without end."

After this sixth age, God will rest as on the seventh day, in the sense that he will make us, who are to be this seventh day, rest in him. . . . I say that this

seventh age will be our Sabbath, and that it will end in no evening, but only in the Lord's day, an eternal and eighth day, so to speak. Sunday, made glorious by Christ's resurrection, prefigures the eternal rest of spirit and body. There, we shall rest and we shall see, we shall see and we shall love, we shall love and we shall give praise. This is what shall be in the end without end. And what other end could there be for us, but to enter the Kingdom that has no end? (*City of God*, 22.30.5)

Words cannot contain the realities of the life of the spirit. We speak in paradoxes, trying to describe God as resting and active, trying to depict our rest in him as an end without end, a repose in which we exercise our highest powers to the full, our knowledge in vision, our will in love.

Together with the temptation to pride, the "perfect" may be lured into thinking, some day, that they have "arrived," have reached the summit where at last they can settle down. But true spiritual progress leads us, so to speak, from beginning to beginning, ever deepening our awareness of our origin, our sources of energy, and our end. The further we advance in things moral, the more strongly we are impelled by the wisdom and love that inspire freedom, to undertakings of the highest quality. Thus our freedom participates in the creative freedom of God.

#### VII. COMPARATIVE TABLE OF THE TWO FREEDOMS AND THEIR RELATION TO MORAL THEORY

Our analyses of freedom of indifference and freedom for excellence will be summarized in the accompanying comparative table. Commenting on this table, I shall add only two remarks, on the first and last points of comparison.

##### *The Freedom to Sin*

Because it is defined as a choice between contraries, freedom of indifference implies the power to choose between good and evil as a first form of choice. The choice between good and evil appears to be the essence of this freedom. This is why theologians like Billuart had to work out subtle distinctions in order to explain the difference between the moral freedom we enjoy in this world and that of the blessed in heaven and of God, who cannot sin. This said, we wonder if man is finally led to renounce an essential part of his freedom on approaching God.

*Freedom of Indifference*

**Definition:** The power to choose between contraries. (The choice between good and evil is essential to freedom.) Freedom resides in the will alone.

1. *Excludes natural inclinations* from the free act; they are subject to choice. In regard to these inclinations, freedom is indifferent.

2. *It is entire from the first moment.* No stages of formation and progress are required. There is no middle ground between being free and not being free.

3. *It is entire in each free choice,* in theory: each act is independent, isolated from other acts, and is performed at the instant of decision.

4. *It has no need of virtue,* which becomes a freely used habitude, or of finality, which becomes one circumstance of actions.

5. *Law appears as an external restraint and a limitation* of freedom; it creates an irreducible tension with it.

6. *Freedom is locked within self-assertion,* causing the will to be separated from the other faculties and the individual to be separated from other freedoms.

7. *It creates a moral theory focused on obligation and law; its relationship to Scripture is limited* to texts imposing strict obligations.

*Freedom for Excellence*

**Definition:** The power to act freely with excellence and perfection. (The choice of evil is a lack of freedom.) Freedom resides in reason and will together.

1. *It is rooted in the natural inclinations to the good and true,* to what has quality and perfection. It springs from an attraction to what appears true and good, and from an interest in it.

2. *It is bestowed in embryo* at the beginning of moral life; *it must be developed* through education and exercised, with discipline, through successive stages. Growth is essential to freedom.

3. *It integrates actions* in view of an end, which unites them interiorly and insures continuity.

4. *Virtue is a dynamic quality essential to freedom,* a habitus necessary for its development. *Finality is a principal element* of free action.

5. *Law is a necessary external aid* to the development of freedom, *together with the attraction to the true and good,* which is a note of inner freedom. Law is especially necessary in the first stage of education. It is progressively interiorized through the virtues of justice and charity.

6. *Freedom is open* to allowing all human powers to make their contribution to its action, and to collaboration with others for the common good and the growth of society.

7. *Its foundation is the attraction to the true and the good,* and the desire for happiness, *focusing on the virtues* and oriented to quality and perfection, lending itself to a relationship with *all of Scripture.*

In freedom for excellence on the other hand, the ability to commit faults in our moral life as well as in the arts is a lack of freedom, lessened if not eliminated by progress. The ability to sin is accidental to freedom, even though it is a part of the human condition in this world. The greatest freedom is God's. He, being impeccable, is fully creative; his power has no interior limitations. The nearer man approaches to God through the moral progress that weakens his inclination to sin, the more he grows in full freedom, sharing in the divine freedom itself. The blessed have therefore lost none of their freedom; rather, they have become supremely free as God is free, through the grace of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. They are free as to truth and goodness and enjoy perfect knowledge and a very pure love, which they express in praise of the works of divine grace in the world and in humanity. We could hardly, for all that, say that their knowledge and love lessens their freedom.

### *Freedom and the Moral Life*

The foregoing table brings us easily and clearly to the conclusion of our research by comparing, in the seventh and last point, freedom of indifference and duty-driven morality, on the one hand, with freedom for excellence and a moral theory based on virtue and happiness on the other.

In freedom of indifference, we note the fundamental features of morality of obligation as it took shape after the nominalist dispute and the humanism of the Renaissance. Freedom of indifference was commonly accepted by ethicists at that time, even by Thomists, and became for them the source of moral theory. The moral foundation rested on the two opposed bases of freedom and law, and it focused on the idea of obligation, which became the sole link, the sole conceivable point of agreement between the two. The subject matter of moral teaching comprised individual human actions, isolated by free decision and by cases of conscience that were studied as realities in themselves, together with the circumstances that particularized them. The consideration of finality faded into the background, and all that was left was the study of finality as sought by a person in some particular action; it was viewed as a secondary, purely circumstantial element. The study of virtue disappeared from fundamental moral theology, yielding to the commandments as the principle of the organization of subject matter. That all these characteristics derived directly and logically from the concept of freedom of indifference shows how close was its bond with the moral theories of obligation that followed nominalism.

We have added the relationship to Scripture, which has been reduced rather effectively during the last four centuries in Catholic textbooks of ethics. This situation can be explained on several counts, such as the anti-Protestant reaction, but certainly not least was the concentration of moral theory on obligation. This caused ethicists to lose interest in scriptural passages that contained no moral imperatives and did not correspond to the problems and the legalizing categories that meant so much to them. If it is true that freedom of indifference was at the origin of duty-driven morality, we are led to believe that it was responsible for this distancing from Scripture and was not perfectly in accord with it. Given freedom of indifference, it is difficult to see how one could explain God's teaching about the chosen people and about believers, presented as a progressive liberation from the sin which had held them in bondage, and as a gradual formation in living by faith, in love of God and neighbor, and in the hope, too, that holds out to us the Kingdom and the Beatitudes as our end. The concept of freedom for excellence seems to me far better adapted to a theology of freedom in conformity with Scripture.

Freedom for excellence harmonizes well with the moral theories of happiness and virtue whose models we have seen in ancient philosophy, in the Fathers, and in the works of St. Thomas. This concept offers moral theory the spiritual spontaneity it needs in order to develop: the natural inclination toward the true, the good, happiness. These tendencies develop through the progressive practice of the virtues, with the help of education, law, and grace. In this tradition, all human faculties and all the elements making up moral action are linked: intelligence, will, sensibility, freedom, with law and grace, virtue and discipline. They tend to join forces in the production of excellent actions, as personality and life are progressively unified through lasting agreement between intentions and actions. It is the same at the societal level: the natural inclination to live in society will be developed by justice and friendship, with a flowering of freedom and the gradual building of dynamic harmony between the members of the city in view of their common good and common tasks.

It seems that such a concept offers a far better foundation for receiving revelation and grace, particularly through freedom's natural openness to the true and the good. Here we can discern the image of God, written indelibly in the human heart.

Furthermore, the example of the Fathers shows what close and constant contact can be established between all of Scripture and an ethics based on the attraction of happiness, truth, and the virtues. The agree-

ment between revelation and moral philosophy was undoubtedly not established without in-depth debates, as we have seen with St. Paul, for example. But the outcome has been a remarkable harmony, attested by the great works of Christian theological wisdom, which flow directly from the wisdom of God and the knowledge of the mystery of Christ of which the Apostle speaks.

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