Free Will vs. Free Choice in Aquinas' *De Malo*

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Abstract: The goal of this paper is to show that Thomas Aquinas, in his *Disputed Questions on Evil*, presents a theory of free will that is compatibilist but still involves a version of the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP) and even requires alternative possibilities for a certain kind of responsibility. In Aquinas' view, choosing between possibilities is not the primary power of the will. Rather, choice arises through the complex interaction of various parts of human psychology, in particular through the indeterminacy of the intellect and through the interaction between reason and passion. Both of these ways provide cases where Aquinas not only allows for alternative possibilities but thinks that they are necessary for moral responsibility, all the while remaining, strictly speaking, a compatibilist.

The goal of this paper is to show that Aquinas, in his *Disputed Questions on Evil* (*QDM* = *Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*), is a compatibilist who upholds a version of the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP). Aquinas does not think that you have to be able to choose between possibilities in order to be responsible for your action in a general sense. However, he does think that you need to be able to choose between possibilities in order to have a certain kind of responsibility, *moral* responsibility.[2]

Because Aquinas' position seems to defy current categories in the debate over free will, it will be helpful to locate Aquinas within that debate. I first discuss libertarianism and compatibilism and the range of possible subviews. I will show that compatibilism, in the strictest sense, does not require determinism: A compatibilist can affirm that people genuinely choose between alternative possibilities but deny that this is a necessary condition for free action. Next, I will discuss how Aquinas' account of the will entails that we can be generally responsible for our actions in the absence of alternative possibilities. Then I will show that, for Aquinas, alternative possibilities are required for moral responsibility and how this kind of choice is possible according to Aquinas. The choice between possibilities is not the primary power

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[2] I will be focusing specifically on free will in relation to ordinary human moral action. I am not going to discuss how free will is compatible with Aquinas' view of divine sovereignty and omnicausality, another difficult and important question for scholars of Aquinas.

of the will. Rather, choice arises through the complex interaction of various parts of human psychology in at least two ways: as a result of the indeterminacy of the intellect and as a result of the interaction between reason and passion.[3] Finally, I will briefly consider the relevance of Aquinas' view to contemporary discussions relating to the will.[4]

Compatibilism Does Not Entail Determinism

What makes an act free? What is it about my actions that make them mine, rather than someone else's or mere workings out of the laws of nature?

The first distinction to make is between *moral responsibility* and *general responsibility*.[5] The question of free will is often glossed over as a question about moral responsibility, but it need not be. Someone who runs a four-minute mile is sufficiently responsible for his action to incur non-moral praise in a way that a running robot would not (though its creators might). A skilled painter deserves admiration even if she is a scoundrel.[6] So in what follows, I will refer to the defining feature of acts of free will as mere *responsibility* without specifying the kind of responsibility:

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[3] See Hoffman, "Free Will Without Choice," for an excellent overview of key medieval figures on this topic. My paper can be seen as a companion to Hoffman, a tree-level examination beneath Hoffman's forest-level summary. Hoffman agrees with me that Aquinas has a two-level theory of free will, where one level does not require libertarian free choice, and another does. He does not cash this out in terms of contemporary debates on libertarianism and compatibilism, nor does he identify Aquinas as a compatibilist or distinguish between general and moral responsibility. He also does not go in-depth into the psychology of choice according to Aquinas. He assembles a wide variety of Thomistic texts from outside the *De Malo* and shows that Aquinas' view is continuous with a broader medieval tradition stemming from Augustine.

[4] See W. Mattews Grant, *Free Will and God's Universal Causality: The Dual Sources Account* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), for a recent and well-known contemporary Thomistic account of free will.

[5] King, in his forthcoming book, *Simply Responsible*, similarly argues for a concept of "simple responsibility" that is not necessarily moral. But whereas he seems to assimilate moral responsibility to a more general notion of responsibility, I distinguish them (and so too, I think, does Aquinas).

[6] According to Aquinas, all human action is meritorious or demeritorious, that is, involves moral responsibility (*Summa Theologica* 1a2ae 21.4). But even given this, it is still true that some human actions also involve other kinds of non-moral responsibility, allowing us to distinguish moral and non-moral responsibility: The scoundrel painter deserves credit for his art even if he also deserves condemnation for his crimes.

FREE WILL: For an agent *P* and an act *a*, if *P* is generally responsible for *a*, *a* is a freely willed act of *P*.

Note that this definition involves general responsibility only. There may be cases in which someone is generally responsible for an action but not morally responsible.

Let's call the ability to have responsibility for one's actions free will. The controversy relevant to our purposes concerns what makes an actor responsible for an act. One view is that what I will call free choice between alternatives is essential to responsibility.[7] An agent has a free choice between alternatives if, under the same conditions, they could have refrained from doing *a*:

Free Choice: For an agent *P* and an act *a*, *a* is a freely chosen act of *P* only if *P* had an unconditioned ability not to do *a*.

Note the distinction between "free will" and "free choice." According to libertarians, free choice is required for general responsibility and, therefore, for free will:

Libertarianism: For an agent *P* and an act *a*, *P* is generally responsible for *a* only if *P* freely chooses *a*.

According to determinists, free choice is never possible:

Determinism: From one state of affairs, only one state of affairs follows.

If determinism is true, the state of affairs that obtained when *P* was about to choose *a* could only have resulted in the state of affairs that includes *P*'s choosing *a*. Not choosing *a* would only have been possi-

[7] I have borrowed the terminology of "free will" and "free choice" from Hoffman and Furlong's article, "Free Choice," M. V. Dougherty, ed., *Aquinas's Disputed Questions on Evil: A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 57. "Free choice" corresponds to Aquinas' *libera electio and liberum arbitrium*. Aquinas does not use "free will" (*libera voluntas*) in a technical sense. However, he does distinguish between acts of the will (*voluntas*) and acts of free choice. When I use "free will," I am referring to the faculty to perform the former, which Aquinas simply calls the "will" (*voluntas*). Scott MacDonald, "Aquinas's Libertarian Account of Free Choice." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 52, no. 204 (2) (1998), 309, uses the same terminology, arguing that *libera electio* and *liberum arbitrium* are close enough to be treated under the same label, using "free will" to translate *voluntas*.

ble if the state of affairs leading to *a* had been different. We'll call this determinist flavor of choice conditional choice, in contrast to the libertarian's "free choice." According to compatibilists, the conditional choice is sufficient for general responsibility:

Compatibilism: For an agent *P* and an act *a*, *P* is generally responsible for *a* if *P* conditionally chose *a*.

Since conditional choice and free choice are incompatible, this definition amounts to the claim that free will and determinism are compatible.

Typically, someone who affirms libertarianism would deny determinism, and someone who affirms compatibilism would affirm determinism. But affirming determinism is compatible with affirming either libertarianism or compatibilism. For instance, a hard determinist who denies free will outright would affirm both libertarianism and determinism: free will requires free choice, but free choice is impossible, so there is no free will.[8] It is equally possible to affirm compatibilism while denying determinism. This amounts to saying that determinism is false, but if it were true, we still would have (do have) free will. For instance, one might affirm that agents generally have free choice, but even under circumstances where their choice becomes determined (conditioned) by their circumstances, they are still responsible for their actions. Someone who held this position would say that, in most cases, we freely choose between alternatives, but even if we did not, we could still be responsible for our actions.

I do not know anyone in contemporary philosophy who holds this position, but it is a logically possible position to hold. Aquinas, I will now argue, did hold this position for general responsibility. There are two questions to answer on this topic:

1. Did Aquinas teach in the *De Malo* that free will requires free choice? That is, in order to be generally responsible for actions, must we have had an unconditioned ability to refrain from those actions?

2. Did Aquinas teach in the *De Malo* that some agents do have free choice? That is, do some agents actually have the uncondi-

[8] Here I'm making hard determinism into a subspecies of libertarianism. This may be taxonomically disorienting, but since Aquinas was not a hard determinist, we can allow this simplified version of things.

tioned ability to refrain from the actions they perform?

I have shown that these questions are distinct. The first determines
62 whether Aquinas is a libertarian or a compatibilist. The second can be affirmed or denied no matter what the answer to the first is and clarifies the kind of libertarian or compatibilist Aquinas is.[9]

Aquinas is a Compatibilist

Although Aquinas denies that the will is subject to natural necessity in all cases, there are at least some cases in which it is, in which cases it does not have genuine free choice between alternatives. Aquinas, therefore, thinks that free will does not require free choice. Therefore, according to the definition I gave above, Aquinas is a compatibilist but not a determinist: He does not think the will is determined, but he thinks that even when it is, the agent in question is still sometimes responsible for his or her actions.

According to Aquinas, humans have a dual principle of action: the intellect, whose object is "being and truth," and the will, whose object is "the good" (*DM* 6.1).[10] The will is the executive power within the human being: It moves every power in the human soul into action, including the intellect. Thus, the will is the efficient or moving cause of the intellect's action.

The will, however, does not move the powers arbitrarily or with complete freedom of choice. The function of the will is to pursue whatever is perceived to be good. But it is the intellect whose task is to determine what is good, and it is "the good intellectually grasped" that "moves the will" (*DM* 6.1). The good apprehended by the intellect thus acts as a formal cause on the will, giving shape to its action: that the will moves at all is by its own power, but that it pursues this particular object is due to the intellect.

[9] I hope that this way of laying out the question also helps clarify why I am defining the terms the way I am. The way "libertarianism," "compatibilism," and "determinism" are used in contemporary discourse track views that are the combination of answers to two distinct questions: whether we have free choice, and whether free choice is required for moral responsibility. This use of terms can give the impression that one's views on these two questions must correlate in a certain way and that these three particular combinations of answers exhaust the possible positions on free will. Neither of these is true. This is why I am using "libertarianism" and "compatibilism" in a stricter sense than the one in which the terms are usually used.

[10] For Aquinas, of course, these are the same thing, apprehended in different ways (see *Summa Theologiae* 1a 5.1).

If something is good to such a degree that there is no way for the intellect to perceive it as bad, that object sets the will in motion "necessarily" (*DM* 6.1). The obvious example, according to Aquinas, is happiness. There is no way to think of happiness, as such, as a bad thing; therefore, the will is necessarily moved to pursue happiness. Yet the will's pursuing happiness is still an act of free will: It is not coerced, and the efficient cause of the will's motion is the will itself. Elsewhere in the *De Malo,* Aquinas infers that we "cannot will misery" (*DM* 16.5), and therefore it is impossible to will evil directly but only "apprehended under the aspect of good" (*DM* 16.5). And since the vision of God is the ultimate happiness, someone who sees God in his essence "cannot not adhere to God" (*DM* 3.3). In this life, it's impossible not to will happiness, but different people may come to different conclusions about the best means to get happiness. Once someone has seen God and thereby achieved the highest happiness, they will God necessarily. Yet Aquinas ascribes this adhering to God to the will and not to an external principle, so it is a natural, not a coerced, necessity.

Aquinas, then, is a compatibilist, and quite strongly so. It's not that it simply happens to be the case, due to our circumstances or general laws of physics, that our wills are determined. Rather, being determined is something essential to the will in particular: the will, in essence, is a power for seeking one determinate thing, the good. The will is, at its core, fixed on a single goal. Its nature is to follow the leading of the intellect, and its characteristic action is to pursue the good, not to make choices.

Free Choice Emerges from the Circumstances of the Will

Although Aquinas is a compatibilist, he nevertheless maintains that humans are able to make unconditioned choices between alternatives. In this section of the paper, I will discuss how he can hold both views at once.

Some compatibilists have claimed that it is sufficient for responsibility, and therefore for free will, that one not be externally coerced. David Hume, for example, defines free will in terms of "hypothetical liberty," or as I have called it, conditional choice: "By liberty, then, we can only mean a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of our will," which are in turn just as determined as material events.[11] As long as we are not forced to do something by an external

[11] David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the*

power, we have willed freely, according to Hume.

Aquinas agrees with Hume as far as free will is concerned, but he thinks the lack of coercion is not sufficient for what he calls "free choice" (*libera electio*). Despite saying that the will is, with regard to its seeking the good, moved necessarily, Aquinas also says that the will has "free choice," meaning that "the will has to do with contraries, and is not moved necessarily to either one of them," that "a person is master of their actions, and it is up to them whether to act or not act. Otherwise, they would not have free choice over their actions" (*DM* 6.1). It is clear that "free choice," for Aquinas, means free choice as defined in the first section of this paper: the ability to act or not act in an unconditioned way. And Aquinas makes this claim in exactly the same passage he shows his compatibilist credentials, *De Malo* 6.1. How are we to square this circle?

One possible position is that it is a simple fact about the will that it can freely choose between alternatives. Descartes can be read in this way when he says that "willing is merely a matter of being able to do or not do the same thing."[12] The will either simply is an ability to make free choices, or that ability follows immediately from the nature of the will unless it is blocked somehow. A compatibilist could maintain this view by saying that, although the will can choose between alternatives, this is *accidental* to responsibility: Even if the will could not choose, it would still be responsible for its actions.

Aquinas, however, takes a different route: Free choice is not essential to the will *simpliciter*, but it does emerge necessarily from the interaction of the will with its particular objects and with other psychological powers, namely the intellect and the passions. More precisely, free choice becomes possible when the intellect fails to determine the will toward a particular good. This happens in two ways: through the interaction between the will and the intellect, when the objects are not apprehended by the intellect as absolutely good, and through the interaction between the will and the passions when the will is hindered by the passions from following the directives of the intellect.

Choice & the intellect

Principles of Morals, eds. L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 95.

[12] René Descartes, *Discourse on Method; and Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. by Donald A. Cress. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998), 84.

In *DM* 6.1, Aquinas explains how the human will has free choice by comparing it with inanimate objects and irrational animals, which do not. Following his line of thought will make his position clear.

According to this passage, any natural thing has a principle of action in two parts. One part specifies the action, and another inclines it to act based on the first part. For inanimate objects, the first part is their form, and the second part is an inclination dictated by the form. Since their forms are completely contained in matter, their inclination is "determined to one." The form of a stone, for example, dictates motion toward the center of the earth. The inclination that follows from the form is determined by that one movement and nothing else. The stone does not have any other option than moving downward, so its movement is necessary. If I were to pick up the stone and throw it into the air, I would be doing violence to the stone because I am forcing it to act against its nature.[13] In either case, the movement is necessary—but only in the second case is it coercive.

Nonrational animals present a highly complicated version of a fundamentally similar phenomenon.[14] The forms of animals are also completely contained in matter, and therefore, like inanimates, they have an "inclination to one." The difference is that animals are receptive to their environment, receiving other forms through their senses. The animal's particular inclination, then, is altered based on the animal's perception. The reason that an animal does not act the same in all cases is not that there is anything indeterminate (not "determined to one") in the animal. Rather, it is that the animal is responsive to its environment: Its internal state (in its imagination and memory) changes based on its environment, and its internal state inclines it to a certain response. Since the brute animal's inclination is determined by its environment, does that mean animals are coerced into action? No: The efficient cause of their action is the "active principle" within them. Yet, as in the case of inanimate objects, their action is necessitated or "inclined to one" because their principle of action is material and, therefore, particular. In other words, nonrational animals are particularly sophisticated instances of ordinary material beings. They are "determined to one" and therefore necessitated because they have only one response to any particular situation (this distinguishes them from inanimate objects, which cannot respond to their environment at all).

[13] See, e.g., *Summa Theologiae* 1a 2ae 6.4 resp., where he calls a stone's upward movement "violent" because it is contrary to the downward-moving nature of the stone.

[14] Aquinas does not mention plants in this section.

Like irrational animals, rational animals (humans) also have a two-part principle of action, one part of which specifies the action and the other part of which makes the action happen. But for rational animals, the first part is the intellect, and the second part is the will. It is this difference that ultimately allows Aquinas to accommodate free choice, although it will take us a few steps to get there.

The intellect and will, unlike the senses and appetite of irrational animals, are immaterial powers. Since the intellect is not contained in matter, the forms that the intellect cognizes are universal rather than particular, conceptual rather than material. But because action always deals with particular cases, the universality of the will means that it is "indeterminately related to many." Aquinas gives the example of an architect building a house. The architect decides that it would be good to build a house; this does not automatically entail that he build a round house or a square house.

How does one decide which particular action to take? Aquinas says in *DM* 6 that this happens by "counsel." The will, once presented with options, is not immediately able to simply pick one; instead, it using the information provided by the intellect, one deliberates about what to do. The resulting feedback between the intellect and the will (the will directing the intellect to deliberate; the intellect presenting its deliberation to the will; the will, perhaps, directing the intellect to provide more information; and so forth) eventually results in action.

But this has not quite gotten us to unconditioned free choice. For as Thomas Williams points out, the intellect, for Aquinas, "operates deterministically ... We have no control over how things look to us."[15] And so, in cases where there is only one possible means to the good, the intellect gives only one possible course of action to the will. What this would mean, though, is that the human will is no less "inclined to one" than the sensitive appetite of nonrational animals. The acts of nonrational animals are "inclined to one," not because they only perform one action (as in the case of inanimate beings), but because they have only one possible response to any given circumstance: they have conditioned choice, but not unconditioned, free choice. In the case of nonrational animals, the relevant circumstances include the sensitive forms received into the animal's imagination. In the case of humans, the relevant circumstances include these plus the universal forms received into the intellect and any more complex thoughts formed out of these. If these universal forms

[15] Thomas Williams, "The Libertarian Foundations of Scotus's Moral Philosophy," *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 62, no. 2 ,(1998).

lead to only one possible determination of action by the intellect, even if the human will is capable of infinitely more complex decisions than the animal appetite, in the final analysis, it is no less "determined to one" and therefore no less necessitated than the animal appetite.

Choice & the Passions

But this is not the whole story. In *DM* 6.1, Aquinas says that counsel is "not demonstrative"—in other words, it cannot lead the intellect to a single, irrefutable conclusion. And in *DM* 3.3, he says that just as the intellect does not have to assent to conclusions that are not irrefutably proven, the will does not have to be moved toward any action that does not have a "necessary connection to happiness." It is by the deliberation of the intellect that the will perceives this or that particular course of action as good. So if the intellect cannot prove that a particular choice must be good or that a particular choice would be better than other alternatives, it cannot propose to the will that it must pursue that good.[16] In that case, the will has an unconditioned free choice to act or not act.[17] If this were not so, Aquinas would have no grounds to distinguish the freedom of rational animals from the non-freedom of irrational animals as he does.[18]

[16] Franklin et al. say that in *De Malo* 6 Aquinas lists three circumstances in which the will can reject a decision to which it is attracted and argue that all of them are compatible with a non-PAP free will. But they leave out a fourth condition: The will can reject a decision to which it is attracted when there is another possible decision that is as good as or better, or when the decision to which it is attracted is not necessarily good.

[17] Colleen McClusky, "Intellective Appetite and the Freedom of Human Action." *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 66, no. 3 (2002), 443ff explains this by citing a Buridan's Ass type case from ST 1a 2ae 10.2 resp.: A hungry man is set equidistantly between two equally good bits of food. How can he choose between them? McClusky interprets Aquinas' answer thus: The intellect can consider the bits of food from any specific criteria (their relative tastiness, size, nutritional value, texture, color, one's own left- or right-handedness, etc.) and eventually find some criterion that privileges one over the other. But even if we ignore thought experiments where there is no such criterion by which they differ, there is a higher-level problem: How does the intellect decide which criterion to employ? Since the intellect is deterministic, it must, in fact, be the will that makes this decision. But then we must ask by what criterion the will makes this higher-level decision; and then we are off on an infinite regress, unless we concede that, at some point, the will just chooses. So, I think McClusky's interpretation of the case is correct, but it does not fully answer the question of how the will comes to choose between equal alternatives.

[18] MacDonald, "Aquinas's Libertarian Account of Free Choice," 326ff comes to a

Aquinas even takes this further and claims that no particular created good has a necessary connection with happiness, and so the will is not moved to any particular created good necessarily. Other than generally willing the good or happiness (and, we must suppose, when actually experiencing the Beatific Vision), the will always has unconditioned power of choice over its actions.[19] But the will's ability to freely choose between options does not arise because it is intrinsically a choice-making power, but because of the finitude of created goods and because of its interaction with the intellect. I conclude, then, that Aquinas' *libera electio* answers to free choice as defined above and that Aquinas, while remaining technically a compatibilist, thinks that we do choose between genuine alternatives most of the time.[20]

But even that is not the whole picture. The will is influenced in its

similar conclusion by other means. He argues that, for Aquinas, the decisions of the will are based on second-order "meta-judgments." In other words, we can subject the inclination of our will or the deliverances of our intellect to judgement and decide whether to follow it. MacDonald, along with McClusky, may show a significant way in which Aquinas' view differs from contemporary libertarianism: We do choose freely, but this may occur more at the level of selecting criteria for choice rather than directly choosing action (whether that is what Aquinas means is beyond the scope of this paper).

[19] Kevin M. Staley, "Aquinas: Compatibilist or Libertarian?" *The Saint Anselm Journal* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2005), 77, responding to McClusky, adds another wrinkle to the Buridan's Ass type case from ST 1a 2a 10.2: Even if we could explain why the will chooses one criterion over another, Aquinas is quite clear that no finite good can move the will deterministically, and so even the will's choice of criterion of choice (its "meta-judgements," in MacDonald's terms—see fn. 16), does not fully explain why the man chooses one bit of food over the other.

[20] Loughran, among many others, have argued that Aquinas is a compatibilist in a more traditional sense: Aquinas, on this view, thinks that free will does not require free choice, and, in fact, we do not have a capacity for free choice. Loughran is right to point out that, for Aquinas, the free will of rational animals is distinguished form the appetite of irrational animals because the will is not passively moved by any finite, particular object, and that the will's decisions result from an interlocking chain of intellectual apprehensions and voluntary decisions. He is even right that "this deliberative chain must ultimately terminate in [rather, begin with] acts of apprehension which are not commanded by the will" (p. 17). But he is wrong to conclude that, since the chain must start outside the will, "there is no element of potency left in the will which is not being determinately moved to act" (17). For even if the chain of deliberation begins with an intellectual apprehension, that intellectual apprehension under most circumstances does not necessitate the will in one direction or another. Otherwise, there would be no ultimate difference between the human ability and non-human inability to choose to act or not act. But Aquinas is quite clear that there is.

choices not just by the intellect but by another aspect of human psychology: the passions. What emerges is a view of free choice that does not involve the will choosing unilaterally but interacting richly with the intellect and the passions. Examining the relation between the will and the passions will show that, although Aquinas thinks not all acts of the will involve free choice, all acts of the will that are morally meritorious or demeritorious do. In our terminology, free choice is not required for general responsibility, but it is required for moral responsibility.

Under ideal circumstances, the will does whatever the intellect presents to it as good. But because human beings are partially material, we have, along with our will, a sensitive appetite like that of nonrational animals. This natural appetite can weaken or shut down the intellect and motivate the will to act in a way that it would not if it were following the intellect. In such a case, the will is confused by the passions and does not consciously consider that what it is willing is evil because the "vehement" passion resulting from the sensory appetite "repulses" knowledge and takes its place in the will's calculations (*DM* 3.9, response and ad 7).

When this happens, do we have free choice? Sometimes yes, and sometimes no, and this, according to Aquinas, is what decides whether we are morally culpable for our actions: "It does not seem to be meritorious or demeritorious for someone of necessity to do what he cannot avoid" (*DM* 6.1). So, even though Aquinas thinks that we can be generally responsible for our actions even when we could not have chosen otherwise, he thinks that there is another, stricter kind of responsibility, which we have been calling *moral* responsibility, that requires free choice.

To see more clearly what Aquinas means, consider *DM* 3.10, where he considers the case of sins due to weakness. The objector argues that when we sin out of weakness, we do not sin voluntarily (obj. 1). Rather, our will is blocked by our passions (obj. 3). In *DM* 3.10 obj. 3, the objector argues that when "the judgment of reason is impeded by passion," the will cannot avoid sinning and therefore has not sinned. If the will cannot do other than sin, then the sin is not imputed to the agent as a moral fault. In his reply, Aquinas does not contest this principle but simply replies that even if the "fettering of reason" necessitates a sin of weakness, the will normally has the power to remove the fettering of reason by the passions and, therefore, could have avoided the sin ("the will has the power to apply or not apply its attention;" "it is in the power of the will to exclude the fettering of reason;" it "has the

power to remove the fettering of reason;" and so on).

Aquinas acknowledges that sometimes the passions are so strong that the will truly loses control. But then he makes a further distinction. First, Aquinas says that in the case of an "insane" person, "the fettering of reason by passion" has "advanced to such a point" that the will cannot avoid the passions of the appetite (*DM* 3.10). In this case, the person's actions are not imputed to them as a sin. Note that the insanity has "advanced"—the person becomes insane as they lose control over their passions. That means that the insane person previously had a normal person's ability to avoid sin, but, against their will, their mental state deteriorated until they lost this ability.

Second, Aquinas says that if the start of the emotion was voluntary and could have been blocked by the will at an earlier point, then we can consider the person to have sinned, even if they could not control themselves in the moment of sinning.[21] He gives the example of someone who commits homicide while drunk (*DM* 3.10). The idea seems to be that, as long as the person voluntarily got drunk, they are responsible for any crimes they commit while drunk. And we know that their getting drunk was voluntary, according to Aquinas, because "at the beginning of the process, the will could have stopped passion from going so far" (*DM* 3.10).

So, Aquinas is distinguishing between three kinds of people committing sin, whom I will label as follows:

1. The *Akratic*: In their right mind, they were beset with passion, were perfectly able to resist the passion, but chose not to, and committed a sin due to that passion. They are guilty of moral fault.

2. The *Insane*: The state of their mind deteriorated until they were unable to resist passion and committed a sin. Their will was unable to stop this deterioration. They are innocent of moral fault.

3. The *Drunk*: The state of their mind deteriorated until they were unable to resist passion and committed a sin. At the beginning of this process, their will was able to stop it, but they chose not to. They are guilty of moral fault.

[21] For a similar contemporary view, responding to Frankfurt scenarios, one can look at Wyma's *Principle of Possibly Passing the Buck*, explained in Keith D. Wyma, "Moral Responsibility and Leeway for Action," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (1997); John Martin Fischer, *My Way: Essays on Moral Responsibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 109ff.

It is clear what distinguishes the Akratic from the Insane/Drunk: The Akratic is able to do otherwise at the moment of the sin, while the Insane and the Drunk are not. But this is not the deciding factor in moral responsibility according to Aquinas, for it is also clear what distinguishes the Insane from the Drunk: The Drunk had the ability to check their passions at the beginning of the progression, while the Insane did not. In other words, the Drunk could have done otherwise, while the Insane could not. If this were not Aquinas' criterion for moral responsibility, he would have no grounds to attribute moral fault to the Drunk and not to the Insane: He would have to either condemn both or excuse both.

Aquinas, then, accepts a limited principle of alternate possibilities, one that fits within a theoretically compatibilist framework but understands most or all cases of moral choice in a libertarian way. On the one hand, he does not accept a principle of alternate possibilities in a simple sense: To be generally responsible for our actions, we do not have to have been able to do otherwise in the moment. He introduces two qualifications:

1. Alternate possibilities are required not for general responsibility but specifically for moral responsibility. (He brings in the idea in the case of determining moral fault, and he does not seem to think it applies to, e.g., the Beatific Vision.[22])

2. We do not need to have alternate possibilities at the moment of action but merely at some point in the process leading to the action.

Aquinas, I conclude, is a compatibilist about the will in general but upholds a version of the principle of alternate possibilities for moral responsibility.

Conclusion

A remaining concern: Although Aquinas seems to say that the will

[22] Of course, moral decisions prior to reaching the Beatific Vision presumably can influence whether or not someone actually reaches beatitude (I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out). One might think of the Beatified as the positive analogue to the Drunk, and in that case, perhaps there is a way to say that the Beatified is morally responsible for achieving beatitude, even if they cannot choose otherwise once they reach that point. To my knowledge, Aquinas does not ever approach the question in this way.

chooses between alternatives under most circumstances, he never explains exactly how it comes to its choice. But Aquinas' lack of a unified account of free choice does not mean that he is a determinist. In "What is Freedom?" Jamie Anne Spiering argues that Aquinas intentionally refrains from giving a single definition of *libertas* or freedom because he thinks freedom cannot be understood apart from the nature in which it is instantiated. This paper agrees: We can observe two kinds of freedom in Aquinas, neither of which he explicitly distinguishes, and these two kinds of freedom are characterized by a complicated interaction between different aspects of human nature as well as influence from God and angels. If we demand a complete explanation of why the will chose this rather than that option, the question has been begged in favor of determinism. To be fair, how the will chooses when it is not necessitated is not clear in Aquinas. But maybe demanding such clarity is wrongheaded from the start. This ability may be an unanalyzable property of the will, just as it is an unanalyzable property of the intellect that it can choose between undemonstrated conclusions. The lack of such an answer in Aquinas' writings is no evidence that he was a determinist.

Another possible concern with nondeterminist compatibilism is that, even if it makes free choice between alternatives possible, it also makes it merely accidental to the will, a side effect of the indeterminacy of the intellect or of the passions rather than something essential to the will itself. And if we're responsible for our actions whether we have this kind of free choice or not, then its primary intuitive appeal (i.e., that without it, we do not have moral responsibility) is undercut. Another problem, which does not seem to be on Aquinas' mind but is certainly dear to contemporary philosophy of religion, is that nondeterminist compatibilism undermines a free will theodicy. If we can have free will and be determined not to sin (say, if we were all given the Beatific Vision at birth), there is no reason for God to give us the ability to sin. Yet another, which Aquinas would have been aware of, is that if free will in the proper sense does not require choice between alternatives, then there is no non-dogmatic reason to maintain, as Aquinas did, that God freely chose to create the world and could have done otherwise.

But the distinction between general and moral responsibility we've drawn out of Aquinas helps us solve all these problems. If moral responsibility is due to free choice in addition to free will, then even if mere free will confers a different kind of responsibility and thus a different kind of value, the need for free choice retains its intuitive ap-

peal. And the free will theodicy relies on a similar intuition: The value of God's creatures freely choosing Him when they could have done otherwise might be so great that it outweighs the evil risked by such rejection. But such rejection is possible due to free choice, not free will. So, even for a compatibilist, a free choice theodicy is still possible. A compatibilist could even maintain that the blessed in heaven cannot sin, that their not sinning is up to them, and yet that they have no choice, in the proper sense, in the matter.[23] Finally, our ability to choose between alternatives may answer to some perfection in God, and to deny Him the ability to freely choose might involve denying a perfection of God.

[23] Aquinas' view, then, can get around one of the difficulties of libertarianism for Christian theology highlighted in Jeremy W. Skrzypek, "Are Christians Theologically Committed to a Rejection of the Principle of Alternative Possibilities?" *The Heythrop Journal* 64, no. 1 (2023).