

42

Henry of Ghent on the Primacy
of the Will

Quodlibet I, Question 14

Is the will a higher power than the intellect, or the intellect a higher power than the will?

There follows a treatment of questions that pertain both to the separated soul and to the soul joined to the body. One of these concerned the comparison of its two principal powers to each other, namely, whether the will is a higher power than the intellect or the intellect is a higher power than the will. The other five were concerned with the comparison of their actions.

With regard to the first question, it was argued that the intellect would be a higher power, because the Philosopher says this in the tenth book of the *Ethics*.¹ According to him, practical reason is the first mover in things to be done by the will.² Moreover, Augustine says in chapter twenty two of *Against Faustus*: Without a doubt in actions of the soul, contemplation, which belongs to the intellect, is preeminent.³ Moreover, in his reason man is formed anew according to the image of God.⁴ Finally, that which directs is higher than that which it directs and the judgment of the intellect directs the will.

Against this view is the fact that the will is the first mover of itself and other things in the whole kingdom of the soul, and such a power is higher.⁵

<The Solution>

To this we must say that, since the powers of the soul of themselves are hidden from us and unknown to us, just as the substance of the soul is, we have to seek, in a way appropriate

1 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 7, 1177b30–1178a2.

2 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 13, 1102b28.

3 Cf. Augustine, *Against Faustus (Contra Faustum)* XXII, 27: CSEL XXV, 621. Where the citation is not exact, as in the present case, I have omitted quotation marks.

4 Cf. 2 Co 3:18 and Col 3:10.

5 Early in the thirteenth century, William of Auvergne had drawn an extended comparison of the will to the king or emperor over the other powers of the soul; cf. his *De anima* c. II, pt. 15, in *Opera omnia* (Orléans-Paris, 1674), vol. II, pp. 85f.

to us, all knowledge concerning them from what is subsequent to them. Hence, we have to judge the preeminence of one power over another from those things that are subsequent to the powers and that provide us a way of coming to know the powers. These are three: habit, act, and object. We must say that the power whose habit, act, and object are superior to the habit, act and object of another is without qualification superior to that other power.

Now it is the case that the habit, act, and object of the will are utterly superior to the act, habit, and object of the intellect. Hence, we must say that the will is absolutely superior to the intellect and is a higher power than it.

The position we have taken is clear because the characteristic habit of the will which carries it toward the good by an act of true love is the habit of charity. By it, according to Augustine, we love God in himself and the neighbor in God and because of God.⁶ But the highest habit of the intellect is wisdom by which we contemplate God and things eternal, according to Augustine in book fourteen of *The Trinity*.⁷ The Apostle states well the degree by which the habit of charity is superior to every habit of wisdom and knowledge, when he says in chapter thirteen of the First Letter to the Corinthians, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and do not have charity," and so on.⁸

The degree by which the act of the will, which is to will or to love, surpasses the act of the intellect, which is to know or to have knowledge, is obvious from two comparisons: first, from the comparison of one act to the other, second, from the comparison of each of them in terms of how the subject of the act is perfected by its object.

What we are aiming at is clear from the first comparison. For, as Augustine says in book twelve of *On Genesis*, and the Philosopher says in book three of *The Soul*, "The agent and the mover are always more noble than that upon which they act."⁹ But the will is the universal and first mover in the whole kingdom of the soul and superior to and first mover of all other things to their end, as will be seen below. For, as Anselm says in *Likenesses*, "It moves reason and all the powers of the soul."¹⁰ And as Augustine says in book three of *Free Choice*, "The mind itself is first subject to the intention of the mind; then the body which it governs, and thus it moves any member to activity."¹¹ Hence, the will commands reason to consider, to reason, and to deliberate when it wills and about what topics it wills, and it likewise makes it to stop. The intellect does not command or move the will in any such way, as will become clear further on, when we say more about their comparison.

From the second comparison, what we are aiming at is likewise clear. For by the action of the will the will itself is perfected by the very reality that is loved as it exists in itself, because by its action the will is inclined toward the reality itself. But by the action of intellect the intellect is perfected by the thing known as it exists in the intellect. By its action the intellect draws into itself the reality known, while by its action the will transfers itself to the object willed for its own sake so that it may enjoy it. For this reason, as Dionysius says in chapter four of *The Divine Names*, by its action the intellect likens itself to the reality known, but the will transforms itself into the object willed.¹² It is much more perfect and lofty to be

6 Cf. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine (De doctrina christiana)* I, xxii, 21: CC XXXII, 17–18.

7 Cf. Augustine, *On the Trinity (De trinitate)* XIV, i, 3ff.: CC L/A, 422ff.

8 1 Co 13: 1ff.

9 Cf. Augustine, *The Literal Interpretation of Genesis (De Genesi ad litteram)* XII, 16: CSEL XXVIII, 402, and Aristotle, *On the Soul (De anima)* III, 5, 430a18–19.

10 Pseudo-Anselm, *Likenesses (De similitudinibus)* 2: PL CLIX, 605C.

11 Augustine, *Free Choice (De libero arbitrio)* III, xxv, 75: CC XXIX, 320.

12 Cf. Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names (De divinis nominibus)* IV, #4: PG III, 711C–D.

transformed into the good as it is in itself according to its own nature than to be made like the true as it is in the knower in the manner of the knower and thus in an inferior manner. Accordingly, Augustine says in the eleventh book of *The Trinity*, “When we know God, his likeness comes to be in us, but a likeness of an inferior degree, because it is in an inferior nature.”¹³ Hence, the activity of the will is far more perfect and lofty than the activity of the intellect to the degree that love and esteem for God is better than knowledge of God. Even if with respect to those things that are less than the soul the opposite is the case, namely, that the action of the intellect is higher than the will, because the knowledge of bodily things in the soul is higher and more noble than the love of them, this only makes the intellect to be more noble than the will in a certain respect. But the first relation and comparison makes the will to be higher without qualification. For the first goodness and the first truth are the essential and primary objects of the intellect and the will; other things are objects of the intellect and the will in comparison to them secondarily and in a certain respect. In the same way, in other things something true or good is true or good in some respect in comparison to the first truth and first goodness, since by nature it does not have the character of true or good except through an impression of the first truth and goodness, as will have to be explained elsewhere. Thus the will seeks something good by reason of some participation that thing has in the first goodness and the intellect knows something true only by reason of some participation that thing has in the first truth. Accordingly, it is more natural for the will to be perfected by the first goodness than by anything else and for the intellect to be perfected by the first truth than by anything else. For this reason the will and the intellect cannot perfectly come to rest in the enjoyment of any good or in the knowledge of any truth until the first goodness and the first truth are attained. In accord with this, Augustine says in the beginning of *The Confessions*, “You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”¹⁴ Hence, since everything should be judged to be unqualifiedly more of a certain kind in comparison to that which is more without qualification and more in terms of its nature, as the Philosopher says in the first book of *Posterior Analytics*,¹⁵ the act of the will should be judged unqualifiedly better than the intellect and absolutely so, since it is unqualifiedly better than it in comparison to its first object. This agrees with the thought of the Philosopher in the *Topics*: “If the best in this genus is better than the best in that genus, then the former is better than the latter without qualification.”¹⁶

Next, that the object of the will is superior to the object of the intellect is obvious, because the object of the will, which is the good without qualification, has the character of an end without qualification and of the ultimate end. The object of the intellect, which is the true, has the character of a good of something, for example, of the intellect. Thus it has the character of an end subordinate to another end and ordered to the other end as to the ultimate end. For, when there are many particular ends, they are all included under some one end, and all the powers which have divers ends are subordinated to some one power whose end is the ultimate one, as is stated in the beginning of the *Ethics*.¹⁷ In accord with this, then, the intellect is completely subordinated to the will. And in this way, as in all active potencies ordered to an end, that potency which regards the universal end always moves

13 Augustine, *The Trinity (De trinitate)* IX, xi, 16: CC L, 307.

14 Augustine, *The Confessions (Confessiones)* I, i, 1: CC XXVII, 1.

15 Cf. Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics* I, 2, 72a29–30.

16 Aristotle, *Topics* III, 2, 52c.

17 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 1, 1094a6–10, 18–19.

and impels to activity the other potencies which regard particular ends and regulates them, as the master art regulates the other arts in a city, as is stated in the beginning of the *Ethics*,¹⁸ so the will moves the reason and directs it to activity, as well as all the powers of the soul and members of the body.

It must, then, be said that the will is absolutely the higher power in the whole kingdom of the soul and thus higher than the intellect.

<With Regard to the Arguments>

It is easy to reply to the objections raised against this position.

To the first objection, with regard to what the Philosopher says in book six of the *Ethics*, one should say that his comparison is literally understood with regard to those potencies in which there are the other intellectual habits, and thus nothing from that statement applies to the will.

To the second objection, that practical reason is what moves first, one should say that something is said to move in two senses. In one way, metaphorically, by proposing and revealing an end toward which one should move. Practical reason moves in this way, and in this way it moves the person who wills; it does not, properly speaking, move the will, which is moved by the person who wills. Nor does reason, properly speaking, move in this sense; rather, it is the object that of itself moves reason to know and, thereby, in revealing itself as good, it metaphorically moves the person who wills to desire it. For the good as known moves the person who wills, but reason itself as knowing does not move the will. In another way, something is said to move another in the manner of an agent and one impelling the other to act. In this way the will moves the reason, and this is more truly to move.

To the third objection that contemplation holds the first rank in the actions of the soul, one should admit that it is true, but this has nothing to do with the will, since he was speaking about the relation of the active and the contemplative life. Of these the one is ruled by speculative reason which is the higher; the other is ruled by practical reason which is lower. But both are ruled by the will which is above both of them.

To the fourth objection, that the image is formed anew in reason, one should say that it is true, but not the whole truth. For part of the image, and the perfecting part, pertains to the will. For this reason the mental word in which the perfect character of the image shines forth, is, according to Augustine, "knowledge along with love."¹⁹

To the fifth objection, that what directs is superior to what it directs, one should say that there is one who directs with authority, as a lord directs a servant; he is the higher. In that way the will directs the intellect. Or, one directs another by way of service, as a servant directs a master in carrying a light before him at night so that the master does not stumble. Such a director is inferior, and in this way the intellect directs the will. Hence, the will can withdraw the intellect from directing and knowing when it wills, as a master can withdraw a servant.

18 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, 1, 1094a4–5, 9–10.

19 *****