

“ETHICS”, “MORALITY” AND THE AUGUSTINIAN *LIBERUM ARBITRIUM*

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The present paper aims at a reconsideration of the terminological distinction – postulated by eminent contemporary thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Bernard Williams – between “ethics” and “morality”. Although this distinction has not been settled as a standard, there is no doubt that it incited fruitful debates relating to the contemporary issues of moral philosophy as well as the history of ethics. Julia Annas, to take one considerable example, presented a full-fledged criticism of the distinction and touched upon crucial questions**. In the following pages, we shall take the general argument of Annas as our starting-point, and reevaluate it with reference to a particular moment in the history of ideas, in order to shed light on the proposed distinction. To this end, we shall focus on the philosophy of Augustine, more precisely on his *De Libero Arbitrio* (On Free Choice), with the aim of comprehending the novelty of his contribution to the history of ethics. We shall show how Augustine, through his original usage of the concept of voluntas (will), reorganized the sphere of ethics and redefined the relationship between happiness (beatitudo) and right action. We will thereby illustrate that the ethics / morality distinction is highly illuminating for getting the real sense of this process of redefinition and reorganization, as well as the broader transformation that it triggered in the way human action will be problematized by later generations.*

Keywords: ethics, morality, Augustine, will, eudaimonia, right action.

1. “Ethics” and “Morality”: Advantages and Limitations

Although various objections can be oriented towards it, the distinction between the once interchangeable terms ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ can be considered to have made at least two positive contributions to the field of philosophy. First, it motivated a reorganization in the moral philosopher’s

standard vocabulary and impelled her to question the authority of the existing “canonical” theories, i.e. Utilitarianism and – to a greater extent – Kantianism. In this sense, the distinction can partly be associated with a particular position – usually called “virtue ethics” – that questions the hegemony of Kantian morality. Bernard Williams, to take a representative figure, suggested that “mo-

* It is worth noting, following Annas (1992), that no detailed theoretical formulation of this distinction has been made by one particular philosopher. It is, however, possible to find a set of presuppositions that seem to ground such a distinction. See Annas (1992), p. 133, note 1.

** “Ancient Ethics and Modern Morality”, *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol. 6, Ethics. (1992), pp. 119–136.

ality” – centered on the principles of duty, obligation and autonomy that were inherited from the Kantian theory – should be seen as a subspecies of the more general field of research called “ethics”¹. In doing this, his primary intention was to criticize the impoverishment caused by the hegemony of Kantian deontology, and to show that new horizons could be opened if we took the broader, Socratic question “How should one live?” as our starting-point. In such a case, Williams thinks, it would be possible to come up with new types of problematics relating to the formation of the acting agent or the acquisition of particular virtues, instead of limiting our enterprise to the discussion of moral rules to follow.

The other positive effect of the distinction between “ethics” and “morality” relates to the field that may loosely be called “the history of ideas.” This distinction provided the historian with a rewarding conceptual tool, with the usage of which certain original traits of different periods of the history of philosophy could be highlighted. It is no coincidence that those who took this distinction seriously also criticized a particular conception of history – usually named as “progressivism” – according to which Kantianism (or in some cases Utilitarianism) represents the most developed form that moral enquiry took in history². By using this distinction, it became possible to read ancient theories of action as sophisticated, original enterprises that could shed light on

various problematics ceaselessly occupying contemporary moral philosophers.

There is, however, the risk of going too far in delineating these two categories and turning them into fixed, abstract and incommensurable models belonging to two distant periods of history. Julia Annas, in her article that we already mentioned³, warns us against this risk and undertakes the task of showing the extent to which, despite their apparent differences, ancients’ and moderns’ ways of treating human action share a common ground. A closer focus shows, Annas thinks, that ancient ethics and modern morality do not constitute two competing positions, “since they are doing the **same thing in different ways**”⁴.

We think that Annas’ warning has the merit of protecting the theoretician from being entrapped by the comfort of using these two categories as “ideal types” and deriving extreme conclusions from them. However, we find it difficult to follow Annas in her specific arguments, since her position seems to go too far in the other direction by defending the futility of making such a distinction. Annas’ above-cited formula shows that for her, what matters is the “thing” that theories do, and that “the ways” in which they do it are of minor significance. However, we do not think that such a clear-cut distinction can be made between “the thing” and “the ways to do it”, mainly because the concepts and categorizations that one uses in a theoretical enterprise have a direct effect on the way the initial problems, as well as the presuppositions that ground them, are articulated and reflected upon. This is

¹ Williams (1985), ch.I, esp. pp. 4–6.

² For a detailed discussion of the progressivist position, see Williams (1993) ch. I, pp. 1–20. For a general account of progressivism and the reactions against it, see “Introduction” in Gill (1996), esp. pp. 1–11.

³ See note **.

⁴ Annas (1992), p. 133. My emphasis.

especially valid for the field of ethics, where it is quite difficult to separate the nature of a given problematic from the concepts and strategies that one uses in articulating it and dealing with it.

For this reason, our goal, in the present study, will be to argue against some aspects of Annas' position by showing that "the way" in which a particular theory does something is constitutive of "the thing" it does. To this end, we shall focus on one particular philosopher, namely Augustine, and concentrate on his most important early dialogue, i.e. *De Libero Arbitrio* (*On Free Choice*). Our purpose will be to show that the "ethics / morality" distinction can be useful, if not imposing, in understanding the originality of Augustine's position and the significance of the transformation that he triggered in the history of ethical thought. We will argue that Augustine, who is a loyal follower of the ancient eudemonist "ethics", is one of the central figures who changed "the way" the ethical sphere is organized, and that this reorganization may be best understood with appeal to the ethics / morality distinction.

In challenging Annas' position, our primary focus will be on her ideas concerning actions and agents. In the fourth part of her article, Annas revisits the idea according to which ancient ethics is more focused on the agent and the virtues to be built, while modern morality centers on rules and right action⁵. She criticizes this distinction by suggesting that all serious ancient and modern philosophers have considered both agents and actions, since the goodness

of persons and the rightness of actions are inseparable from each other: A good person is the one who does right actions, and right actions imply the internalization of some sort of goodness⁶. The difference between ancients and moderns is a matter of emphasis and it has no essential theoretical outcome.

By focusing on the interesting case of Augustine, we will try to illustrate that this change in emphasis has in fact major effects on the essential traits of a theory. We will begin our discussion by first reminding the reader of the fundamental eudemonist principles shaping Augustine's position. Our second task will be to show how, in a particular moment of his career, a specific – but extremely vital – question led Augustine to reorganize the sphere of ethical reflection by introducing a series of new concepts and problematizations, so that a new, "moralistic" attitude became present in *De Libero Arbitrio*.

2. Eudemonism in the *De Libero Arbitrio*

Even if, as we will try to show, Augustine's rupture from the tradition of ancient pagan philosophy is observable in certain key aspects of his ethics, it would be false to describe his overall enterprise as a reaction to his predecessors. On the contrary, there are good reasons to emphasize the continuity between the ancient tradition and Augustine, by seeing him as the most important figure of what is usually called the "Christian antiquity". As a devoted Platonist, Augustine never ceased to rely on eudemonist

⁵ Annas (1992), pp. 128–130.

⁶ Annas (1992), p. 129.

principles: The idea that the goal of ethical endeavor is to reach *beatitudo* (the Latin term for the Greek *eudaimonia*) dominated Augustine's entire work, and especially his earlier texts. Accordingly, in defining his ethical enterprise, he allocated a leading role to the acquisition of virtues.

A general look at *De libero arbitrio* is sufficient for the reader to observe the predominance of Platonist intellectualism and eudemonism in the dialogue. The beginning part, where the reasons why human beings sin are investigated, exposes the strong relationship between evil and human understanding in a highly Platonic fashion: We do not learn to do evil, since the one who really learns something understands it, and all understanding is good⁷. In a later passage, Augustine relates the idea of *beatitudo* to the Platonic ideal of order in the soul, and explains his version of eudemonism on the basis of intellectualist principles:

Whatever this thing is in virtue of which human beings are superior to animals, whether we should call it 'mind' or 'spirit' or both (for both terms are used in Scripture), if it rules and controls the other things that constitute a human being, then that human being is perfectly ordered. <...>Therefore, when reason, mind or spirit controls the irrational impulses of the soul, a human being is ruled by the very thing that ought to rule according to the law that we have found to be eternal. (1.8)

It is not difficult to discern here the echoes of the Platonic-Plotinian (as well as Aristotelian) eudemonism that is based on the suggestion that human soul is subject to both rational and irrational sources of motivation, and that the final good is reached by the domination of the former over the latter.

⁷ *De libero*, 1.1

For Augustine, *beatitudo* will be reached by following a basically Platonist agenda, i.e. by grasping the unchangeable principles and thereby enabling the rational element in the soul to rule the irrational one.

From this point onward, Augustine's preoccupation with the problem of theodicy leads him to ask the reason *why* the rational element fails to accomplish its goal. At this point, Augustine seems to deviate from his pagan masters' path and follows a different strategy. For Plato and Aristotle, it is possible to explain this failure by pointing at the lack of harmony between the different motivational sources underlying our actions. Both thinkers presume the existence of three different parts or elements that are of desiderative nature and that direct the agent towards particular, pre-given objects⁸. In both cases, the failure of the rational element to reach *eudaimonia* is explained by its disability to rule over the two other desiderative principles and to be impeded in its orientation towards its natural goal, i.e. the good.

Augustine, however, cannot cope with the central question of theodicy by simple reference to the lack of harmony between rational and irrational elements. As he clearly states, the basic principles of the divine order would exclude the possibility that lower elements rule over higher ones,

⁸ It is indeed true that there are serious differences between Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of the soul. For one thing, Aristotle does not refer to the three desiderative sources as parts of the soul, but rather as elements or faculties (*phuseis*) belonging to the same desiderative instance (*orektikon*) of the soul (*NE* 1102b, *De Anima*, II, 3 (414b)). Plato, on the other hand, is quite clear in this partitioning (especially in Books IV and IX of the *Republic*) and goes as far as to find their counterparts in the human body (*Timeaus*, 69e),

as it would be the case in Aristotle's acratice man: The eternal law has endowed the mind with the ability to control inordinate desires and to rightly rule over cupidity (1.10). If, therefore, the higher element is controlled by the lower ones, this should be due to its intentional turning away from the eternal law that permits and imposes its rule. At this point, Augustine needs to follow a new strategy and to have appeal to a mechanism that would be treated in abstraction from reason and the lower elements that may rule over it. In other words, he will assume that the mind has a power, through the usage of which it can become "a companion of cupidity." This power is *voluntas* (will), i.e. the faculty through which the mind makes free choices.

We would like to maintain that Augustine's usage of *voluntas* – in a context largely permeated by the intellectualist and eudemonist vocabulary of ancient philosophy – constitutes one of the key aspects of the transformation that he produces in ethics. Although we agree with Charles Kahn that he never presents a systematic theory of *voluntas* and of free choice⁹, the way he introduces and develops the concept in *De Libero Arbitrio* indicates how he implants a new seed into the ancient soil of Greek and Latin eudemonism. As we will try to show, the usage of *voluntas* as a key ethical concept leads Augustine to reorganize the ethical sphere and to introduce some new

aspects that foreshadow the development of a "moralistic" attitude.

2. *Boulêsis* and *Voluntas*

In order to clarify how *voluntas* leads to the formation of a new ethical sphere, we think that it would be enlightening to point at its difference from the Aristotelian notion of *boulêsis* (rational wish). There is an obviously legitimate, etymological ground for beginning with such a comparison: The Latin term *voluntas* has been coined from the verb *volo* (to want) in order to translate the Greek term *boulêsis*¹⁰.

Aristotle uses the term *boulêsis* in order to refer to one of the three elements that belong to the desiderative part (*orektikon*) of the soul. It is a desire, based on rational principles, that is directed towards its naturally given object, which is the good – or the apparent good. As the account in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (book III, 1111b5–1113a34) shows, *boulêsis* is the source of our orientation towards the final good, which is *eudaimonia*. In this sense, it refers mainly to a motivational source, and not to a capacity to make choices as in the case of *voluntas*. For Aristotle, therefore, evil-doing cannot be the product of *boulêsis*, but of its being impeded by the lower desires in reaching its goal. Hence, insofar as it is necessarily oriented towards the good, *boulêsis* can only be the positive ground of ethics. The element of choice (*proairesis*), as well as the principle of "voluntariness" posed by the pair of *hêkon* and *akon*, relates only

⁹ Kahn (1988), p. 238. Kahn thinks that such a systematic treatment will not be possible until the idea of *voluntas* will be integrated into the Aristotelian theory of human action by Aquinas. On this subject, see also Djuth (1999), p. 881.

¹⁰ Terence Irwin clearly states that "Augustine's conception of will is derived from Aristotle's conception of *boulêsis*, taken over by the Stoics." Irwin (2007), p. 400. See also Kahn (1988), p. 241.

to the means that leads one to the end given by *boulêsis*. As Kahn puts it, therefore, nothing relates the idea of voluntariness (or the related idea of choice) with *boulêsis*¹¹.

The Augustinian *voluntas*, however, is not only a desiderative power, but also a power to choose. And the scope of its choice, as we shall see in the pages to follow, is not limited to the means that one would adopt in reaching a pre-given, natural end. Although God has given human beings *voluntas* to enable them to reach the good, its movement towards the final good is not natural as in the case of *boulêsis*¹².

To emphasize this difference, however, should not lead us to identify the position of Augustine in the *De libero arbitrio* as absolute voluntarism. In 1.14 of the same dialogue, where Augustine states quite explicitly that human beings naturally will to be happy, the meaning of *voluntas* is closer to that of the Greek *boulêsis*, i.e. a wish that has its own object¹³. Just like the Aristotelian *boulêsis*, *voluntas* becomes a desire that follows its natural orientation towards its pre-given object. This idea seems to contradict with the distinction that Augustine will later make (3.1) between natural and voluntary movements: If we all will to be happy (and we cannot “choose” not to be happy), how can we differentiate between the movement of *voluntas* and the natural movement of a stone? In what sense, then, can *voluntas* be a power of choice?

¹¹ Kahn (1988), p. 241.

¹² Note that in his later writings, Augustine will seemingly change his position on this subject by emphasizing the natural quality of *voluntas*. In *De Civitate Dei* (14.13), he will argue that an evil will is contrary to nature.

¹³ Djuth (1999), p. 881.

We do not think that this question has a consistent answer in Augustine. Although he makes a distinction between natural and voluntary movements, his conception of *voluntas* consistently incorporates reference to a natural tendency, at least as far as happiness is concerned. However, this situation does not seem to lead to an inconsistency with the potential to ruin the foundations of Augustine’s ethics, since the tendency of *voluntas* towards happiness has little ethical implication. As we will try to illustrate, the ethical role of *voluntas* does not derive from its tendency towards happiness, but from the way it is used in order to reach that goal.

In order to clarify this point, we will start with a question that Augustine raises soon after he makes the suggestion that *voluntas* and its free choices constitute the only reason behind the existence of evil:

How can anyone suffer an unhappy life by the will, when absolutely no one wills to be unhappy? <...>How can we claim that it is by the will that human beings achieve a happy life, when so many are unhappy despite the fact that everyone wills to be happy? (1.14)

Augustine here points at a possible contradiction of his conception of *voluntas*: if there is unhappiness in the world, this is because of our voluntary choices. But it is also clear that we all will to be happy, i.e. that *voluntas* makes us wish happiness. How can *voluntas*, necessarily oriented towards happiness, may also be the source of our unhappiness¹⁴? In order to solve this conflict, Augustine makes a distinction – unknown to the Greeks – between “willing” and “willing rightly”:

¹⁴ Note that such a contradiction would not arise in Plato or Aristotle, since, to repeat, the power that orients us towards good is not at the same time held responsible for our evil-doing.

Those who are happy, who must also be good, are not happy simply because they will to be happy – even the wicked will that – but because *they will it in the right way*, whereas the wicked do not. (1.14)

In order for one to reach happiness, which is the final good towards which *voluntas* leads her, one should live rightly. We might think that this idea is in line with Plato's and Aristotle's accounts of *eudaimonia*, according to which the natural orientation of *boulêsis* towards the good does not guarantee a good and happy life. Upon closer scrutiny, however, it is possible to realize that Augustine's moral psychology – especially his usage of *voluntas* – leads to a significant difference in his general conception of good and right action. In Aristotle's and Plato's cases, the reason why *boulêsis* cannot reach its pre-given goal is the interference of other, non-rational kinds of desires external to it. For Augustine, however, the reason why the will is unable to reach what it wishes is not simply a lower sort of desire that obstructs its path, but itself, or more exactly its disability to use itself "rightly". What Plato and Aristotle conceived as the outcome of a clash between different kinds of desire, is for Augustine the result of a malfunction of one and the same motivational source, i.e. *voluntas*: We will to be happy, but we do not will it rightly. *Boulêsis* itself does not, by its own movement, move away from its natural course towards *eudaimonia*. By contrast, *voluntas* has the possibility to diverge from its path towards the eternal things and thereby miss the mark.

On this basis, we would like to argue that the essential tendency of *voluntas* towards happiness has no serious ethical relevance

in Augustine's thought. What counts primarily for Augustine's ethics is not the natural object of *voluntas*, but rather the "rightness" of the act of willing. In other words, what is important is to aim at the proper sort of happiness – one which overlaps with goodness – in the proper way (and this is what Augustine means when he says that those who are truly happy "must also be good"). Goodness, on the other hand, is not what *voluntas* conquers by following its "natural" movement, but rather what is reached by the **right usage** of our will and its capacity to make choices.

This is the reason why the natural tendency of *voluntas* towards happiness differs from the natural tendency of *boulêsis* towards the good: *Boulêsis* is not a tool subject to right or wrong usage but, to repeat, a desire that is naturally oriented towards what is inherently good for us. However, *voluntas* and its ability to make good and bad choices is an instrument to be used. In *De libero arbitrio*, Augustine compares *voluntas* to physical organs, which are good insofar as they are created by God for our use, but which can be used wrongly: The eyes are good insofar as "they were put into the place of greatest dignity" to be used to provide security, while many people use them in the service of inordinate desires (2.18). Although *voluntas* is superior to bodily organs (for it belongs to the soul), it is still an intermediate good (*medium bonum*): Although it is an instrument that is designed for good purposes, it can be used in the service of evil as well¹⁵.

¹⁵ Virtues, on the other hand, are considered to be great goods, since they cannot be used wrongly (2. 19).

3. “Moral Space” and the Passage to “Morality” in the *De libero arbitrio*

What is important from our standpoint is the kind of ethical sphere to which this notion of *voluntas* as instrument leads us. The idea of “willing rightly” is closely related with the notions of order (*ordo*) and justice (*justitia*), which are the constitutive elements of the Augustinian moral sphere¹⁶. Both terms are extensively used in some key passages of the *De libero arbitrio* that we will focus on later, but their first detailed treatment takes place in an earlier dialogue titled *De Ordine*. Here, Augustine tries to reconcile the perfection of God’s order with the existence of evil in the world and, to this end, he resorts to the idea of justice: Since God is just, and since justice cannot be imagined without any reference to a distinction (*distinctio*) between what is preferable and what is not, the good has to have a contrary. Evil, therefore, has a key role in the operation of divine justice: It is the fundamental element, on the basis of which God makes distinctions that sustain his justice¹⁷. In other words, the divine order necessitates the opening of a space between good and evil, a “moral space” in which God’s justice will operate.

The opening of this space is what gives the “instrument” called *voluntas* its moral

function. As Augustine says, the reason why *voluntas* is a good thing is not that it is naturally oriented towards the good, but that it enables man *to act rightly* by choosing the good. We think that this idea of “acting rightly” represents another rupture that Augustine makes with his ancient predecessors: The idea of free choice, together with the notions of order and justice that ground it, leads to a further qualification that would be of little significance for Greek philosophers: a good action is *also* a right action. It is true that Augustine follows Plato and Aristotle in conceiving goodness as the inherent quality of an action. However, he brings in a further category, i.e. rightness, which becomes operative in the divine moral space and which is strictly related with the possibility of choice. Accordingly, an action is good only insofar as it is right, i.e. insofar as it is the outcome of the right usage of *voluntas*, and thereby deserves a positive evaluation in the divine order.

Another key passage of the *De Libero Arbitrio* is worthy of detailed analysis, since it contributes to our comprehension of the novelty of the Augustinian moral space. Book I of the *De libero arbitrio* finishes with the firm conviction that free will, or more correctly the capacity of *voluntas* to make free choices, is the reason behind the existence of evil in the world. But a question that Evodius addresses to Augustine in the closing lines points at a new problem that will occupy them for a large part of Book II. Evodius says:

But I have a further question. Since, as we have found, free choice gives us the ability to sin, should it have been given to us by the one who created us? It would seem that we would

¹⁶ For a lengthy and elaborate analysis of these two notions, see Bouton-Touboulic (2004).

¹⁷ See *De Ordine*, 18 and 19. Bouton-Touboulic warns us about the incongruity of thinking that the existence of evil should precede the creation of the universe. This is not the case, since Augustine does not think that the existence of order depends on that of evil. He instead thinks that the temporal “usage” of the order may necessitate the existence of evil. See Bouton-Touboulic (2004), p. 260.

not have sinned if we had lacked free choice, so there is still the danger that God might turn out to be the cause of our evil deeds.

This question indicates the fact that attributing all evil-doing to free choices of *voluntas* would not be sufficient to spare God from his responsibility in the existence of evil. By endowing human beings with such a capacity of choice, thereby giving them the opportunity to commit evil acts, God is indirectly responsible for evil.

For this reason, the second book opens with Evodius' following demand:

Now explain to me, if you can, why God gave human beings free choice of the will, since if we had not received it, we would not have been able to sin¹⁸.

The strategy that Augustine follows in answering his interlocutor is worthy of detailed analysis, since it shows the way Augustine puts forward what we would like to call a "juridical" conception of morality. During the first few paragraphs, Augustine orients his interlocutor to the solution of the problem. In 2.1, he gives the following account:

If all of this is true, the question you posed has clearly been answered. If human beings are good things, and they cannot do right unless they so will, then they ought to have a free will, without which they cannot do right. True, they can also use free will to sin, but we should not therefore believe that God gave them free will so that they would be able to sin. *The fact that human beings could not live rightly without it was sufficient reason for God to give it.* The very fact that anyone who uses free will to sin is divinely punished shows that free will was given to enable human beings to live rightly, for such a punishment would be unjust if free will

had been given both for living rightly and for sinning.

Two ideas stated (or presumed) in this passage are worth noting:

- 1) The goodness of human beings differs from, say, that of animals, insofar as it is related with the idea of "acting rightly"¹⁹. One may say that, in this context, the goodness proper to human beings is not based solely in their being endowed with reason, but also with the capability of making choices and acting rightly²⁰.
- 2) This capability, here and in other parts of the *De libero arbitrio*, is directly related to the divine regime of rewards and punishments, grounded and legitimized by God's justice. Hence, a human being can be good by doing right actions, i.e. by being constantly evaluated in the moral space, by being subject to divine justice, hence by being a part of the regime of rewards and punishment.

We think that Augustine, in legitimizing the existence of free will in human beings, introduces a conception of moral space that is alien to Greek eudemonism. Divine order (which contains evil as a grounding principle), together with divine justice and the related regime of rewards and punishments, becomes the grounding element of this new moral space. Accordingly, goodness of a man is explained by the rightness of

¹⁹ Evodius explicitly states this in the part preceding the lines that we quoted above: "Furthermore, I claimed, and you agreed, that everything good is from God. From this we can understand that human beings too are from God. For human beings as such are good things, since they can live rightly if they so will."

²⁰ A more explicit expression of this idea is found in Book III of the same dialogue: "<...> a creature that sins by free will is more excellent than one that does not sin only because it has no free will." (3.5.15)

¹⁸ *De Libero Arbitrio*, 2.1.1.

his voluntary actions, i.e. his ability to be rewarded by God's justice.

On this basis, we would like to argue that the most significant change that Augustine brings into pagan eudemonism concerns the way through which *beatitudo* is reached. On the one hand, Augustine follows the traditional orientation of eudemonism since he takes *beatitudo*, described as being with God, as the final good. On the other hand, while in Greek eudemonism, the attainment of happiness overlaps with the obtaining of necessary virtues, in Augustine's eudemonism happiness is reached as the reward of doing the right actions. In the passage where Augustine makes the above-suggested distinction between "willing to be happy" and "willing it rightly", this idea is explicitly stated:

[T]he eternal law <...> has established with unshakable firmness that the will is rewarded with happiness or punished with unhappiness depending on its merit. And so when we say that it is by the will that human beings are unhappy, we do not mean that they will to be unhappy, but that their will is in such a state that unhappiness must follow whether they will it or not. (1.14)

In a way unknown to Greek eudaimonists, happiness is integrated into the regime of rewards and punishments. While in Greek ethics, *eudaimonia* overlaps with the acquisition of proper virtues, Augustine's *beatitudo* is rather described as the derivative outcome of virtuous life: it is the reward of right action. Although God's justice (i.e. his righteous evaluation of right and wrong actions) guarantees the overlapping between virtuous life and happy life, there is a conceptual differentiation between the two terms: the former does not

imply the latter. So that virtuous life leads to happiness, God's involvement is required. The existence of such a conceptual wedge and God's mediatory position permit us to safely conclude that *beatitudo* has a secondary, derivative position in Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio*, compared with the idea of "acting rightly".

Conclusion

While explaining the role of Christianity in the formation of modern "morality" (for which the notions of obligation and choice are dominant), Alasdair MacIntyre makes the following remark:

What Christianity requires is a conception not merely of defects of character, or vices, but of breaches of divine law, of sins. An individual's character may at any given time be a compound of virtues and vices, and these dispositions will preempt the will to move in one direction or another. But it is always open to the will to assent to or dissent from these promptings. <...> Everything turns on the character of the interior act of will. Character, therefore, the arena of the virtues and vices, simply becomes one more circumstance, external to the will. The true arena of morality is that of the will and of the will alone²¹.

For the reasons that we presented above, it would be improper to think that MacIntyre's suggestion totally illuminates Augustine's philosophy, or his position in the *De libero arbitrio*. We nevertheless think that MacIntyre's emphasis on the centrality of the will in Christianity helps us to identify the historical role that Augustine played with his theory of *voluntas* in *De libero arbitrio*. We think that the idea of "acting rightly" and the related notion

²¹ MacIntyre (1997), p. 168.

of free choice make Augustine the central figure in the development of a new attitude that will later be the source of modern “morality”, where the ideas of following rules and fulfilling duties will be central.

At this point, we may listen to Annas’ criticism and ask whether the category of *voluntas* leads to a fundamental change, to the degree of foreshadowing the formation of a new, “moralistic” attitude. If we accept Annas’ distinction between “the thing” a philosopher wants to do and “the way” he does it, we may question our account. After all, Augustine deviates from his ancient predecessors only in that he changes the definition of *eudaimonia* and integrates it to a different conceptual universe. However, we think – and we hope to have shown convincingly – that Augustine’s novelty goes well beyond that of simply replacing

old concepts and strategies with new ones, so that he finds a new “way” to deal with the old problems. In fact, the chain of transformations that begins with the use of *voluntas* as a central concept leads to a new sort of ethical sphere, where not only the “ways” to deal with the problems, but also the problems themselves begin to change. Once the sphere of ethics begins to be organized around the notions of “free choice” and “right action” – while the ideas of “good action” and “happiness” become secondary, though strictly related to the former notions, – a new attitude vis-à-vis goodness and rightness arises. In our view, this leads to an essential transformation in the ethical experience of the subject, a transformation that may be best understood as a passage from one paradigm (ethics) towards another (morality).

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S a n t r a u k a

Straipsnyje analizuojama A. MacIntyre'o ir B. Williams'o pasiūlyta terminologinė „etikos“ ir „moralės“ skirtis. Ši skirtis kol kas netapo etikos diskurso standartu, tačiau ji neabejotinai paskatino vaisingus filosofų debatus svarstant šiuolaikinius moralės filosofijos klausimus, interpretuojant etikos istoriją. Julia Annas, viena ryškesnių šių debatų dalyvių, pateikė išsamią skirties kritiką. Straipsnyje kritiškai analizuojama Annas argumentacija, ji vertinama aptariant vieną idėjų istorijos momentą – Augustino *Liberum Arbitrium* – ir siekiama naujai pažvelgti į minėtą skirtį ir jos reikšmę etinio diskurso istorijoje. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad Augustino *Liberum Arbitrium* reikšmė

etikos istorijoje sietina su perėjimu nuo graikiškosios *etikos* prie perspektyvos, siejamos su *moralės* terminu. Parodoma, kaip Augustinas, originaliai vartodamas valios (*voluntas*) sąvoką, perorganizavo etikos lauką, naujoviškai apibrėžė laimės (*beatitudo*) ir teisingo veiksmo sąryšį. Taip demonstruojama, kad etikos ir moralės skirtis iš esmės grindžia dvi etikos diskurso paradigmas ir yra labai vaisinga, padedanti suprasti etikos lauko transformaciją į tuos pavidalus, kuriais klausimus apie žmogaus veiksmus kelia vėlesnės kartos.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: etika, moralė, Augustinas, valia, *eudaimonia*, teisingas veiksmas.

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