



# Henry of Ghent on the Will

# Overview

Henry of Ghent

Reminder: Aquinas

Human action

The faculty of will

Freedom of the will

Henry: Intellect and Will

# Henry of Ghent (1217?–1293)

- the most prominent theologian in Paris in the generation after Aquinas
- involved in most university debates at the time; also in 1277, Tempier
- many works, mostly on theology; also sermons.
- many *Quodlibeta*, from 1276 onwards



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# Aquinas on Human Action in General

- *actus humanus* vs. *actus hominis* ('human action' vs. 'action of a human')
- Human actions are *puposive*: they are done for the sake of attaining some goal, which is cognized as good.
- The will is not a natural "steering wheel"; it is an inclination for what we see as good.
- We can only have one ultimate end (happiness), and this end is common for all humans. But we can have various intermediate ends, and we can also perceive the ultimate end differently.
- Once we know the end, we can deliberate about how we want to get there.

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# Aquinas on Human Action in General

So here is what the structure of a human action looks like:

- the intellectual apprehension of some object as good for the agent in the specific circumstances;
- an act of will (*voluntas*) desiring this end as a good in itself;
- a further act of will (*intentio*) that desires the good that can be attained in the particular circumstances;
- an intellective investigation (*consilium*), considering the various means by which the end can be attained;
- the judgment of the will (*iudicium*), endorsing what it sees as the best means to attain the end.

Of course not all (or perhaps not any) of these steps need to be conscious or even temporally distinct.

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# Will as Rational Desire

Everything, in its own way, tends towards the good.

- natural things, like stones: tend towards their natural place (heavy downwards, light upwards) – **natural desire**
- lower animals: flee danger, pursue food, etc. – **animal desire**
- things with understanding (humans, angels): **rational desire = will.**



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# The Will as a Desire

- The will is similar to other principles (like the heaviness of a stone) in that it is an **active principle**, from which the thing's movements originate. All these principles are given by the forms the things have.
- BUT, in stones and cats the tendency is fixed to one course, because the form from which it originates is a *material form* – e.g., it is an individual form that is only capable of one kind of motion. The forms that taken in by the mind and in turn move the will are not individual but universal forms.



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# Freedom of the Will

How can the will be free as a rational desire?

“All things with understanding have freedom of will deriving from the judgment of the understanding, and that is freedom of decision, which is defined as free judgement of reason” (SCG II.48).

- Things that lack freedom lack it either because they don't have judgment (*iudicium*) at all (like stones, etc.); or their judgment is fixed by nature (e.g., a sheep can't but flee the wolf).
- So, where the judgment is *not* fixed by nature, there is freedom.
- The understanding *is* fixed on the general good as such (you can't desire but what you perceive as good), but it is *not* fixed on any particular good.
- Notice that freedom is primarily due to the way the intellect works!

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# Will and Compulsion

Can the will be compelled?

“So then sometimes the will can be compelled by an object, but not always; but to exercise its act it can never be compelled” (*De malo*, q. 6).

- 1 Exercise: “the will clearly moves itself just as it moves our other powers” (*De malo*, q. 6).
  - The will moves itself by deliberation, which is not compulsory
  - But if it wasn't at first willing at all, the first stimulus must come from the outside (recall Anselm's argument about why the first volition must have been created!).
- 2 The object, i.e., something apprehended as good:
  - something apprehended as good, entirely, in all circumstances, would compel the will – this is why we *are* compelled to will happiness.
  - But particular goods in particular circumstances don't compel

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# Concepts of Freedom

- **Augustine**: Free will is a power for opposites (can be abused too) (FCW 2.18, 3.1)
- **Boethius**: Rational creatures must have choice, but need not be able to exercise it, provided they can do what they truly want.
- **Anselm (OFC)**: “Freedom of choice is the power to preserve rectitude of will for the sake of rectitude itself.” (OFC 3, p. 36).
- **Al-Ghazali**: free will is what can discriminate and choose between altogether similar things.
- **Aquinas**: free will is rational deliberation about the best means to a desired end.

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Two main claims:

- 1 The will is a higher power than the intellect
- 2 The will moves itself – the intellect is only a *sine qua non* condition of willing.

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We can't inspect our mental powers directly (contra Descartes), so we will have to rely on what is subsequent to them:

- 1 Habits
- 2 Acts
- 3 Objects

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# Will as a Higher Power

- 1 **Habits:** the ultimate habit of the will is charity, while the ultimate habit of the intellect is wisdom; charity > wisdom; therefore, etc.
- 2 **Acts:** love > knowledge:
  - the will commands reason, while the converse does not hold (contra Aquinas)
  - love is directed to its object itself, while reason is directed to the similitude of its object
- 3 **Objects:** the object of the will is the good without qualification, which is the highest end.

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What does the intellect do then?

- it is a *Sine qua non* condition:
  - Oxygen :: Fire = Good understood :: Good willed
  - we can't will something unless we cognize it, but cognition does not necessitate willing.
- **The will is the cause of its own movement** (controversial claim! Cf. Aristotle – nothing moves itself).

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# Voluntarists vs. Aristotelians?

## Does the intellect determine or influence volitions?

- If yes, does that mean that the will is not free?
- If not, then is the will random?
- Is there anything else that compels/determines the will?
- What role does the object of volition play in the volition itself? Are there “irresistible” objects?

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- **Al-Ghazali**: free will is what can discriminate and choose between altogether similar things.
- **Aquinas**: free will is rational deliberation about the best means to a desired end.
- **Henry**: the will is free because it moves itself.

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