

## Grace and Free Will

## Grace and Free Will: St Paul

- ▶ Introduces the idea of inscrutable election:

“ [God] says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’ So it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy (Rm 9:15–16) ”

## Grace and Free Will: Augustine

- ▶ Develops his position over time under Paul's influence and in response to (Semi-)Pelagian ideas, moving to ever less autonomy of will
- ▶ Takes Paul's discussion to its logical conclusion, emphasizing that "grace comes first" and arguing that it cannot be rejected
- ▶ Humankind has freedom of choice, but the fall limited that choice to sinful options
- ▶ God does not hate or actively punish anyone, but he passively denies grace to some
- ▶ This is not unjust, as we all *are* Adam (cf. Stoic monism) and thus deserve punishment
- ▶ The denial of grace to some serves as a lesson to the elect
- ▶ Why these are chosen and others are not is beyond our understanding

# Grace and Free Will: Pelagianism and Compromise

## Pelagianism

- ▶ Held that grace can and must be attained by one's own strength

## Semi-Pelagianism

- ▶ Held that the autonomous will to good could trigger the response of grace

## Gregory the Great

- ▶ Held that grace comes first, but humans have a choice to accept or reject it
- ▶ Bede generally follows Gregory

## St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Righteousness Through Faith

“ By your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgement will be revealed. **For he will repay according to each one's deeds:** to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life; while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. (2:5-8) ”

“ What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? **'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.'** Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. But to one who without works trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness. (4:1-5) ”

## St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Grace, Sin, and Slavery

“ Therefore, since **we are justified by faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. (5:1–2) ”

“ What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, and that you, having been set free from sin, have become **slaves of righteousness**. (6:15–18) ”

## St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: The Bonds of Sin

“

I do not understand my own actions. For **I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate**. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. **I can will what is right, but I cannot do it**. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin. (7:15–25)

”

## St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Election

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Something similar happened to Rebecca when she had conceived children by one husband, our ancestor Isaac. Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call) she was told, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' As it is written, 'I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau.' What then are we to say? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.' So **it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who shows mercy.** For the scripture says to Pharaoh, 'I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.' So then he has mercy on whomever he chooses, and he hardens the heart of whomever he chooses. (9:10–18)

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## St Paul's Epistle to the Romans: Election

“ You will say to me then, ‘Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?’ But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is moulded say to the one who moulds it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’ **Has the potter no right over the clay**, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? (9:19–21) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: The Power to Will

“ In this passage the apostle seems to me to represent himself as a man set under the law, and to speak in that character. (Q1 §1) ”

“ ‘To will is present with me, but to do that which is good I find not.’ To those who do not rightly understand these words he seems by them to take away free will. Yet how does he do that when he says ‘To will is present with me’? If that is so, **actual willing is certainly within our power; that it is not in our power to do that which is good is part of the deserts of original sin.** (Q1 §11) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: The Limits of Free Will

“ In this mortal life one thing remains for free will, not that a man may fulfil righteousness when he wishes, but that he may turn with suppliant piety to him who can give the power to fulfil it. (Q1 §14) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: Grace Precedes Good Works

“

The Jews did not understand that evangelical grace, just because of its very nature, is not given as a due reward for good works. Otherwise grace is not grace. In many passages the apostle frequently bears witness to this, putting the grace of faith before works; not indeed that he wants to put an end to good works, but to show that works do not precede grace but follow from it. No man is to think that he has received grace because he has done good works. Rather he could not have done good works unless he had received grace through faith. A man begins to receive grace from the moment when he begins to believe in God, being moved to faith by some internal or external admonition. (Q2 §2)

”

## Augustine to Simplician: Grace Precedes Good Works

“ This is the truth the apostle wanted to urge; just as in another passage he says, ‘By the grace of God we are saved, and that not of ourselves. It is the gift of God. It is not of works, lest any man should boast’ (Eph. 2:8,9). And so he gave a proof from the case of those who had not yet been born. No one could say that Jacob had conciliated God by meritorious works before he was born, so that God should say of him, ‘The elder shall serve the younger.’ (Q2 §3) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: Rejecting and Echoing Stoic Notions

“ Both were begotten and conceived at one and the same time. And for another reason he stresses this fact, so as to give no opportunity to astrologers or to those who are called calculators of nativities, who conjecture the characters and destinies of those who are born from their natal hours. (Q2 §3) ”

“ A wheel does not run nicely in order that it may be round, but because it is round. So no one does good works in order that he may receive grace, but because he has received grace. (Q2 §3) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: The Central Question

“ How can election be just, indeed how can there be any kind of election, where there is no difference? (Q2 §4) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: An Interlude on Willing

“ There are two different things that God gives us, the power to will and the thing that we actually will. The power to will he has willed should be both his and ours, his because he calls us, ours because we follow when called. But what we actually will he alone gives, i.e., the power to do right and to live happily for ever. (Q2 §10) ”

“ If God has mercy, we also will, for the power to will is given with the mercy itself. It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure. [...] So the sentence, ‘It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy’ cannot be taken to mean simply that we cannot attain what we wish without the aid of God, but rather that **without his calling we cannot even will.** (Q2 §12) ”



## Augustine to Simplician: Interpreting the Pharaoh Passage

“ ‘The Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, For this very purpose did I raise thee up, that I might show in thee my power, and that my name might be published abroad in all the earth.’ [... T]he hardening which God causes is an unwillingness to be merciful. We must not think that anything is imposed by God whereby a man is made worse, but only that he provides nothing whereby a man is made better. (Q2 §15) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: God Owes Us Nothing!

“ No one can be charged with unrighteousness who exacts what is owing to him. Nor certainly can he be charged with unrighteousness who is prepared to give up what is owing to him. This decision does not lie with those who are debtors but with the creditor. [...] Sinful humanity must pay a debt of punishment to the supreme divine justice. **Whether that debt is exacted or remitted there is no unrighteousness.** (Q2 §16) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: We Cannot Understand the Election

“ [People] are both men and sinners, **men as fashioned by God, sinners by their own wills.** [...] God hates impiety. In some he punishes it with damnation, in others he removes it by justification, doing what he judges right in his inscrutable judgments. Those of the number of the godless whom he does not justify he makes ‘vessels unto dishonour’; [... h]e hates nothing which he has made. In making them vessels of perdition he makes them for the correction of others. He hates their impiety which he did not make. (Q2 §18) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: Who Needs Free Will?

“ Free will is most important. It exists, indeed, but of what value is it in those who are sold under sin? [...] We could neither will nor run unless he stirred us and put the motive-power in us.  
(Q2 §21) ”

## Augustine to Simplician: The Final Cop-Out

“ Only let us believe if we cannot grasp it, that he who made and fashioned the whole creation, spiritual and corporeal, disposes of all things by number, weight and measure. But **his judgments are inscrutable and his ways past finding out.** Let us say Halleluia and praise him together in song; and let us not say, What is this? or, Why is that? All things have been created each in its own time. (Q2 §22) ”

## Rist: Freedom of the Will

- ▶ According to Augustine, the will *is* the self, one's nature (421–2).
- ▶ Everyone has free *choice* within the bounds of this will (422; cf. Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus).
- ▶ Adam's nature originally involved free will, but the fall corrupted it (433–4).
- ▶ Every human being “is” Adam, so we share his nature (431; cf. Stoic substance monism).
- ▶ Augustine believes traces of our original nature remain; he could have used this to argue for freedom of the will in the willing of good, but he does not (432, 440, *passim*).
- ▶ In our fallen state, we are free only to sin; we need God's help to choose good (424).
- ▶ It takes continuous grace to stay on the path of righteousness (426).

## Rist: We Are All Puppets!

- ▶ “[M]an is a slave either of God or of evil, either of *caritas* or of *cupiditas*” (437).
- ▶ “When God wills that a man be saved, the matter is settled. The man is saved; his evil will is turned to good” (437).
- ▶ “When God refuses to show mercy to those whom he declines to save, he is acting justly, according to Augustine, because all men deserve condemnation as partakers in sin” (439).
- ▶ To Augustine, freedom is freedom *from* (424–5).
- ▶ “All men are thus ‘free’: the elect are free from serious sins, the damned are free from virtue” (440).
- ▶ “[T]he lot of the elect, even in this life, is superior to that of Adam before the Fall [...] in that the elect are maintained on the path of *libertas*, the good life, by God” (441).
- ▶ “God himself is not free from virtues” (442).

## Bibliography I

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