

The Thomistic Roots of Modern Papal Teachings on Freedom as Found in the Writings of Leo XIII

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BOTH JOHN PAUL II AND BENEDICT XVI wrote extensively about the importance of having a proper understanding of freedom. For example, in *Veritatis Splendor*, John Paul II teaches about the relation between freedom and truth (the wisdom of God).¹ Benedict likewise notes that fidelity to the truth is the only means to true freedom and integral human development.² Both John Paul and Benedict, using the terms of *Gaudium et Spes* §17, will contrast authentic (also called genuine or responsible) freedom with false freedom.³ This notion of authentic freedom is also very similar to the meaning of “freedom for excellence” that is championed by Servais Pinckaers in his very influential book, *Sources*

¹ *Veritatis Splendor* §31–53. Although John Paul only occasionally directly refers to Leo XIII in this section of the Encyclical, the description of genuine freedom given by John Paul is similar to the description given by Leo XIII in *Libertas*. In *Centesimus Annus* (written two years before *Veritatis Splendor*), John Paul gives explicit praise to Leo for explaining the true meaning of freedom: “Here, particular mention must be made of the Encyclical *Libertas Praestantissimum*, which called attention to the essential bond between human freedom and truth, so that freedom which refused to be bound to the truth would fall into arbitrariness and end up submitting itself to the vilest of passions, to the point of self-destruction” (§4; cf. §17).

² *Caritas et Veritate* §9; cf. §17 and §70.

³ John Paul in *Veritatis Splendor* will also speak of a rightful or proper autonomy in contrast to a false autonomy (§38–41).

of *Christian Ethics*. In this book Pinckaers argues that for the last 600 years (following Ockham) the predominant view of freedom in western society has been what he calls a “freedom of indifference” (or in the language of the abovementioned popes: a false freedom). For an example he points to the manuals used to teach theology to seminarians for the last few hundred years. He notes that they placed freedom almost solely in the will—where one is just as free when rejecting the truth found in the intellect as when following it.⁴ As a consequence, freedom was seen as always being in opposition to law—including the law of God. However, long before Pinckaers or *Gaudium et Spes*, Leo XIII, in 1888, wrote an encyclical refuting this incomplete view of freedom. This encyclical, *Libertas*, repudiated those who declared that freedom is a sheer autonomy of the will.⁵ Leo argued that true freedom requires that reason guides the will to its proper end. Leo goes on to note that true freedom is found in God and the saints who cannot choose evil. Choosing evil is a defect in human liberty. Consequently, Leo argues that true freedom requires that the intellect and appetites are guided and motivated by law (*Libertas* §7).

Leo was an ardent supporter of Thomas Aquinas. During his papacy, Leo endorsed the use of Thomistic thought in Catholic theology and philosophy in his encyclical *Aeternae Patris*.⁶ In this encyclical, Leo requests a return to Thomas’s teachings on “the true meaning of freedom, which at this time is running into license” (§29). But to what extent was Leo’s view

⁴ Pinckaers, *Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 254–79. For an example not in Pinckaers, see Joseph Schade, *Catholic Morality: A Manual* (Patterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1943). This book was written well after Leo XIII’s call to use Thomistic principles in moral theology, so the understanding of freedom is much closer to authentic freedom than in some earlier manuals. Yet even in this manual the author speaks of freedom as a “freedom of indifference” found almost exclusively in the will (19–20). In fact, much can be known about the view of freedom animating the book by reading the dedication in the preface: “To Mary, the lawgiver’s mother.”

⁵ Leo was primarily writing against the “modern liberties” enabled by Enlightenment ways of thinking (§2). But the encyclical also refuted all views that placed freedom in opposition to law. In other words, the encyclical also refuted views within the Church that stated that following God’s law is a restriction to freedom even though humans are required to follow God’s law.

⁶ Furthermore, Leo declared Thomas to be the patron of Catholic Schools, established the Academy of St. Thomas, and commissioned the critical edition of Thomas’s writings known as the Leonine Edition.

of freedom influenced by Thomas? After all, Thomas's view of freedom is complex. Sometimes it appears to be very much like what Leo describes, and other times it appears to be different. For example, in support of Leo's view, texts can be found that say things like "The more love one has, the freer one is."⁷ Texts can also be found that appear to contradict Leo's view, however, such as when Thomas notes that natural liberty is a freedom from coercion—see *Summa theologiae* I, q. 83, a. 2, ad 3—and that "free judgment is indifferent to good and evil choice."⁸ This essay will first briefly explain Leo's view of freedom. Then, it will look and see if Leo's view of freedom is in continuity with the view of Thomas.

Leo's View of Freedom⁹

Although Leo's notion of freedom permeates many of his encyclicals,¹⁰ he systematically describes freedom in *Libertas*. (I am using the terms freedom and liberty as synonyms.) In this encyclical, he begins by making a distinction between natural freedom and moral freedom (§3). In a clear allusion to *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 83, a. 1, Leo states that natural freedom is the ability of the will to choose a particular means to an end as guided by the intellect.¹¹ Leo explains that because humans necessar-

⁷ III *Sent.* d. 29, q. 1, a. 8, qc. 3, s.c. 1: "Sed contra, quanto aliquis plus habet de caritate, plus habet de libertate: quia ubi spiritus domini, ibi libertas; 2 Cor 3:17. Sed perfectam caritatem habens, potissime habet libertatem." See also *De veritate* q. 22, a. 6; ST I-II, q. 109, a. 2.

⁸ ST I, q. 83, a. 2: "Liberum autem arbitrium indifferenter se habet ad bene eligendum vel male."

⁹ I am grateful for the help of Dr. Ed Macieroski and Kalen Skubal in the writing of this section.

¹⁰ See for example, *In Plurimis*, *Rerum Novarum*, *Immortale Dei*, and *Sapientiae Christianae*.

¹¹ §5: "Liberty, then, as We have said, belongs only to those who have the gift of reason or intelligence. Considered as to its nature, it is the faculty of choosing the means fitted for the end proposed, for he is master of his actions who can choose one thing out of many. Now, since everything chosen as a means is viewed as good or useful, and since good, as such, is the proper object of our desire, it follows that freedom of choice is a property of the will, or, rather, is identical with the will in so far as it has in its action the faculty of choice. But the will cannot proceed to act until it is enlightened by the knowledge possessed by the intellect. In other words, the good wished by the will is necessarily good in so far as it is known by the intellect; and this the more, because in all voluntary acts choice is subsequent to a judgment upon the truth of the good presented, declaring to which good preference should be given.

ily choose the good, and the good is the proper object of the will, freedom of choice is a property of the will—but only insofar as it is guided by the intellect, which declares the truth of the good presented. In other words, natural freedom is found in the proper operation of both the intellect and will.

Although Leo clearly makes a distinction between natural and moral freedom in paragraph three, he does not have a clear transition to a separate section on moral freedom. Instead, he begins to teach about the perfection of natural freedom, which is moral freedom. In other words, moral freedom is not a completely different type of freedom (like the distinctions between authentic and false freedom made by the later popes) but an extension of natural freedom.¹² He notes that the natural powers of the intellect and will are ordered to their proper acts of knowing the truth and loving the universal good. When these powers function properly, humans are free because freedom results from the intellect knowing the true end and how to attain it and from the will choosing an action based on its love for this end. Consequently, the greater the perfection of the intellect and will (one could also add passions in here), the greater the freedom of the individual (§7, 8, 12, 22).

To support this point Leo teaches that humans may appear to be free when there are defects in the intellect or will; however, in reality, to the extent these defects affect their actions, humans lack freedom. He states:

For, as the possibility of error, and actual error, are defects of the mind and attest to its imperfection, so the pursuit of what has a

No sensible man can doubt that judgment is an act of reason, not of the will. The end, or object, both of the rational will and of its liberty is that good only which is in conformity with reason.”

¹² The relation between natural and moral freedom is briefly alluded to later in the document (§8). Leo states that God aids humans in performing good actions: “The first and most excellent of these is the power of His divine *grace*, whereby the mind can be enlightened and the will wholesomely invigorated and moved to the constant pursuit of moral good, so that the use of our inborn liberty becomes at once less difficult and less dangerous. Not that the divine assistance hinders in any way the free movement of our will; just the contrary, for grace works inwardly in man and in harmony with his natural inclinations, since it flows from the very Creator of his mind and will, by whom all things are moved in conformity with their nature.” Inborn liberty is here a synonym to natural freedom. God’s grace causes moral freedom by perfecting natural freedom, not hindering it.

false appearance of good, though a proof of our freedom, just as a disease is a proof of our vitality, implies a defect in human liberty. The will also, simply because of its dependence on the reason, no sooner desires anything contrary thereto than it abuses its freedom of choice and corrupts its very essence.¹³

Leo goes on to note that doing evil is not freedom at all, but in the words of the Apostle Paul, “a slavery to sin.” Thus, although the ability to do evil allows us to easily identify our ability to freely choose, it is actually a defect in liberty.¹⁴ Leo then quotes Aquinas to make his point,

Everything is that which belongs to a thing naturally. When, therefore, it acts through a power outside itself, it does not act of itself, but through another, that is, as a slave. But man is by nature rational. When, therefore, he acts according to reason, he acts of himself and according to his free will; and this is liberty. Whereas, when he sins, he acts in opposition to reason, is moved by another, and is the victim of foreign misapprehensions. Therefore, “Whosoever commits sin is the slave of sin.”¹⁵

¹³ §6: “Verum sicut errare posse reque ipsa errare vitium est, quod mentem non omni parte perfectam arguit, eodem modo arripere fallax furtumque bonum, est indicium liberi arbitrii, sicut aegritudo vitae, est tamen vitium quoddam libertatis.” The translation is from the documents on the Vatican website. See also *Immortale Dei* §37.

¹⁴ Because freedom emerges from knowledge of the truth and love of the good, freedom is like the transcendentals of being, goodness, and truth in that its opposite is not a truly existing thing but rather a privation of it. For example, evil is not a truly existing thing, but rather a privation of goodness. Knowing evil helps us to better understand and appreciate goodness, but it is ultimately a lack of goodness.

¹⁵ §6. The quote is from Aquinas’s commentary on the Gospel of John, ch. 8, lec. 4, §1204. Translation is by the Vatican. The Latin of the text is: “Unumquodque est illud quod convenit ei secundum suam naturam: quando ergo movetur ab aliquo extraneo, non operatur secundum se, sed ab impressione alterius; quod est servile. Homo autem secundum suam naturam est rationalis. Quando ergo movetur secundum rationem, proprio motu movetur, et secundum se operatur, quod est libertatis; quando vero peccat, operatur praeter rationem, et tunc movetur quasi ab alio, retentis terminis alienis: et ideo qui facit peccatum, servus est peccati.” Because the translation is from the Vatican website, I did not want to alter it. I want to point out, however, a symmetry in the text that is obscured by the translation. In talking about the free action, Aquinas states that the free person acts according to reason, by his own power, and according to his own operation. But in the case of sin, the sinful person acts against reason, as if moved by another, and is restrained by external ends of the other.

Humans are free when they are masters of their actions. However, whenever humans act based on misunderstanding, lack of love, or disordered passions, they are moved by something outside of themselves. They are unable to pursue their proper actions. In other words, they lack freedom in a similar way as if they were coerced to act by a tyrant. Consequently, Leo shows that the moral freedom to do good is really just an extension of natural freedom. Natural freedom flows from the intellect and the will. When these powers are perfected so as to avoid ignorance, concupiscence, and the effect of disordered passions, humans are morally free. On the other hand, the freedom that results from the defects in the intellect, will, and emotions is a false freedom, a slavery to sin.

Leo contrasts the false freedom of being able to do evil with the true and perfect freedom of God and the saints by saying that the infinitely perfect God, “although supremely free, because of the supremacy of His intellect and of His essential goodness, nevertheless cannot choose evil; neither can the angels or saints who enjoy the beatific vision.”¹⁶ Because God and the saints have perfect freedom, then the ability to do evil cannot be an essential element of freedom.

The saints have this perfect freedom because they perfectly participate in the wisdom and love of God. Humans on earth can participate in the eternal law (the wisdom of God) whenever they follow laws that are derived from the eternal law (§8, 10). These laws guide the intellect, and they move the will and passions, thus causing greater freedom (§7, 12). Leo adamantly refutes the proponents of classical liberalism who argue that law always removes freedom by stating, “nothing more foolish can be uttered or conceived than the notion that because man is free by nature, he is therefore exempt from the law” (§7). Leo goes on to note that law is the reason that guides humans to their proper actions. If freedom and law contradict each other, then man would become free by being deprived of reason (which is absurd). Humans are bound to submit to law because they are free by nature.¹⁷

¹⁶ §6: “qui cum sit summe intelligens et per essentiam bonitas, est etiam summe liber, malum culpae velle nulla ratione potest.” Leo references Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio* I.6.14 for this point. Leo goes on to note that if the ability to do evil belonged to the essence or perfection of liberty, God and the angels and saints would have no freedom or less freedom than humans in this state of imperfection.

¹⁷ §7. See also *Immortale Dei* §36–38.

Leo concludes by teaching that because virtue and grace perfect the natural inclinations of the soul giving humans the ability to perform their proper actions, the greater the virtue and grace in a human, the greater the freedom.¹⁸ Grace does not remove freedom but enhances it because it moves humans in accord with their nature to their proper action and end. He further states, “Religion conduces to pure morals, and pure morals to freedom” (§22).

Thomas’s View of Freedom¹⁹

In teaching the proper view of freedom, Leo only explicitly references Thomas a few times (e.g., §6, 8); however, the entire treatise is filled with Thomistic concepts and phrases. For example, Leo is clearly relying on Thomas in his descriptions of natural freedom,²⁰ his description of humans as ordered by divine wisdom to their right and proper actions,²¹ his description of the nature and role of law and its participation in eternal law,²² and his description of the role of grace and religion.²³ However, to fully see the extent that Leo is influenced by Thomas, it is necessary to examine Thomas’s view of freedom. A systematic study of Thomas’s view of freedom is beyond the scope of this essay; instead I will explain a few aspects of Thomas’s view of freedom by comparing each of them to the points that I subscribe to Leo in the section above.

Leo makes a distinction between natural freedom and moral freedom and then treats moral freedom as the completion of natural freedom. Does Thomas also make this distinction between natural and moral freedom and further believe that natural freedom is fulfilled in moral freedom? Although Thomas does not literally make this distinc-

¹⁸ §8. Leo refers to an unidentified paraphrase of Thomas to support his point.

¹⁹ Unless I specifically note changes made for a more literal translation, the translation of the *Summa theologiae* is from the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger Bros., 1948), and the translation of the *SCG* is from Anton Pegis (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1955).

²⁰ See *Libertas* §3 and *ST* I, q. 83.

²¹ See *Libertas* §17 and *ST* I-II, q. 93.

²² See *Libertas* §9–12, §16–17 and *ST* I-II, qq. 90–96, qq. 106–108.

²³ *Libertas* §8 (on grace) and §19–22 (on religion) and *ST* I-II, qq. 109–114 (on grace) and II-II, q. 81 (on religion). When describing grace in *Libertas* §8, Leo does specifically refer to Thomas, but Leo does not cite a specific passage. In talking about religion in *Libertas* §20, Leo does specifically refer to *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 6.

tion when first treating free choice, Thomas does make a similar distinction between the power of free choice (*liberum arbitrium*)²⁴ and the perfection of this power through grace and virtue ordering the power to its proper action. In other words, all rational powers in humans must be perfected by virtues for them to attain their proper ends.²⁵ The power of free choice is a rational power, and thus must also be perfected by virtues.²⁶ A similar distinction can be made between the power of the will (the rational appetite) to love the good and the actions of the will once perfected by justice or charity. The virtues perfect the will giving it the ability to perform its proper acts of love.

Although Thomas does make a distinction between the unperfected power of free choice and free choice when the soul is perfected (the specific passages showing this distinction will be examined below), he does not specifically refer to this distinction as a distinction between natural and moral freedom. So where does Leo get these terms? In *ST* I, q. 83, a. 2 Thomas does speak of natural freedom and contrasts this freedom to the freedom from fault and unhappiness. First, Thomas explains that free choice is a power and not a habit.²⁷ Then in his reply

²⁴ This phrase is usually translated as “free choice.” But Thomas has a different term, *liberam electionem*, that is more literally translated as “free choice.” A more literal translation of *liberum arbitrium* that also shows the strong role of the intellect in freedom for Thomas would be “free judgment.” I use the terms “free judgment” and “free choice” interchangeably.

²⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 55, a. 1: “Now there are some powers which of themselves are determinate to their acts; for instance, the active natural powers. And therefore these natural powers are in themselves called virtues. But the rational powers, which are proper to man, are not determinate to one particular action, but are inclined indifferently to many: and they are determinate to acts by means of habits.” “Et ideo huiusmodi potentiae naturales secundum seipsas dicuntur virtutes. Potentiae autem rationales, quae sunt propriae hominis, non sunt determinatae ad unum, sed se habent indeterminate ad multa, determinantur autem ad actus per habitus.” See also *ST* I-II, q. 58, a. 4, ad 1.

²⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 55, a. 1, ad 2: Thomas notes that good use of free choice is said to be a virtue inasmuch as virtues are needed to make good use of it. But because free choice is a unique power of the soul in that it is composed of the operation of two other powers, the intellect and the will (*ST* I, q. 83), multiple virtues are required to perfect it.

²⁷ Thomas states that free judgment (choice) is indifferent to good and evil choice, wherefore it is impossible for free judgment to be a habit. For more on Thomas’s view of natural freedom see *ST* I, q. 83 in its entirety; I, q. 105, 3–5; *SCG* I, ch. 88; and *De malo*, q. 6. Thomas also talks extensively about freedom in *ST* I-II, q. 1, aa. 1–2 and I-II, qq. 6–17. (See especially q. 17, a. 1, resp. 2, which notes that the subject of

to the third objection, he notes, "Man is said to have lost free choice by falling into sin, not as to natural freedom, which is freedom from coercion, but as regards freedom from fault and unhappiness. Of this we shall treat later in the treatise on morals in the second part of this work."²⁸ Because Thomas states that this second type of freedom will be treated in the part of the *Summa* on morals, Leo refers to the second type of freedom as moral freedom. There is textual justification for Leo to use these terms because, in *De malo* q. 2, a. 3, ad 2, Thomas makes a distinction between the natural goodness of the will and the moral goodness of the will.²⁹

Both Leo and Thomas make a distinction between natural freedom and a second type of freedom (which following Leo will be called moral freedom). But does Thomas, like Leo, believe that moral freedom is the proper end of natural freedom? At first glance, it might appear that Thomas's view of freedom really is different from Leo's. Leo's whole encyclical is about how true freedom comes from virtue and law. Thomas specifically affirms that natural freedom exists in a human prior to virtue and that natural freedom is indifferent to good and evil choices (*ST*, q. 83, a. 2; Cf. *De malo*, q. 6). But if Thomas's question on free judgment is

freedom is the will, but the cause of freedom is reason). Because these latter passages are technically in the second part of the *Summa*, however, they are probably already speaking of moral freedom. Nonetheless, a great deal about natural freedom can be gleaned from them because all humans act in accord with their nature. Thus, by looking at the actions, we know something of the nature that causes them.

²⁸ "Homo peccando liberum arbitrium dicitur perdidisse, non quantum ad libertatem naturalem, quae est a coactione; sed quantum ad libertatem quae est a culpa et a miseria. De qua infra in tractatu moralium dicitur, in secunda parte huius operis." In *De malo*, q. 6, a. 1, resp. 23, Thomas makes a similar statement. But in q. 6, a. 1, resp. 22, he makes the same distinction as in *ST* I, q. 83, a. 2, resp. 3. Thomas states that those who do evil, which they rationally hate (cf. Rom 7:15), do not have free action, but they do have free will: "quod ille qui facit quod non vult non habet liberam actionem, sed potest habere liberam voluntatem." Note how in this passage Thomas uses the term "free will" and not "free choice" (*electionem*) or "free judgment" (*arbitrium*) as he usually does. This is an interesting passage because *De malo*, q. 6 places a lot of emphasis on the role of the will within free choice; however, Thomas shows how, without the proper guidance of the intellect, the will may be free but the person is not free. More about this passage will be explained below.

²⁹ Thomas notes, "The will by its nature is good, and so also the will's natural act is good. And I say 'the will's natural act' to mean that human beings by their nature will to exist, live, and enjoy happiness. But if we should speak of moral good, then the will, absolutely considered, is potentially, not actually good or evil."

looked at within the context of the *Summa* as a whole, we see that Leo's interpretation of Thomas is basically correct. The question on freedom (I, q. 83) is in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae* in the section where the nature of humans is covered; whereas the second part of the *Summa* treats the perfection of human nature through its proper actions.³⁰ All things act in accord with their nature. Because things are perfected to the extent that they perform their proper action, a being's nature determines its mode of perfection.³¹ For example, because humans are made with an intellect and will, humans are ultimately perfected by knowing and loving God and others while a tree without spiritual capacities is perfected simply by living and growing. Hence, in reference to freedom, the *natural* ability of the intellect and will to freely choose is ultimately ordered to the true (*moral*) freedom that comes from sharing in the wisdom and love of God.

Within the first part of the second part of the *Summa Theologiae* Thomas introduces and elucidates one moral principle after another as he shows how humans must be perfected and guided in order to perform their proper actions. Paralleling this development of moral teaching is the development of the notion of moral freedom. Beginning with the treatise on happiness and extending into the treatise on human acts in general, Thomas emphasizes multiple times that free choice is ordered to the end of happiness.³² When covering habits, Thomas notes that because humans by nature need virtues and gifts to perform their proper actions, habits aid humans in acting freely.³³ When covering sin,

³⁰ See *ST* I, a.75, prologue, where Thomas states that he will first treat the nature of man (qq. 75–90). See then the prologue to the second part, where Thomas states that in this part he will treat humans inasmuch as they are free principles of their actions. See further the prologue to I-II, q. 6, where Thomas states that because happiness is obtained by human actions he will then study human actions. It is in this section of looking at human actions that he spends a great deal of time on the will and its relation to the intellect (*ST* I-II, qq. 6–17).

³¹ *ST* I, q. 5, a. 5; q. 73, a. 1; *SCG* I, ch. 68.3; III, ch. 150; Cf. *Sentencia libri Physicae* II, 14, n. 268. For a detailed study of the relation between the first and second act of the creature as ordered to God, see John Rziha, *Perfecting Human Actions* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 43–78.

³² See *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 1 and a. 2; I-II, q. 10, q. 12, q. 13; q. 55, a. 1, ad 2. See also Pinckaers, *Sources*, 386–88.

³³ See *ST* I-II, q. 55, a.1, ad 2, where Thomas states that good use of free choice is said to be a virtue, because virtues are directed to the good use of free choice. Cf. I-II, q. 68, a. 3, ad 2; q. 108, a. 1, ad 2; II-II, q. 183, a. 4, ad 1.

Thomas notes that disordered passions remove freedom.³⁴ In the treatise on law, Thomas notes that the new law of the Spirit is the law of liberty.³⁵ Finally, in the section on grace Thomas notes that humans in their weakened state need the grace of God to strengthen their freedom.³⁶ Only with the aid of the virtues, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of God are humans free to obtain their ultimate end. Thomas demonstrates the development of the power of freedom through virtue, grace, and law by stating that the new law of grace, which perfects the soul to share in God's knowledge and love, is the law of liberty:

According to the Philosopher (*Metaphysicae* I, 2), what is "free is cause of itself." Therefore he acts freely, who acts of his own accord. Now man does of his own accord that which he does from a habit that is suitable to his nature: since a habit inclines one as a second nature. If, however, a habit be in opposition to nature, man would not act according to his nature, but according to some corruption affecting that nature. Since then the grace of the Holy Spirit is like an interior habit bestowed on us and inclining us to act aright, it makes us do freely those things that are becoming to grace, and shun what is opposed to it.³⁷

Thomas affirms that habits suitable to nature perfect freedom because they allow humans to more perfectly act by their own accord. Grace is

³⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 10, a. 3; q. 73, a. 6. Thomas emphasizes that sin is an act of free judgment. Whenever disordered passions precede the sinful act, they remove freedom and diminish the sin. However, consequent disordered passion increases the gravity of the sin (*ST* I-II, q. 77, a. 6). Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 26, a. 1, which notes that the sensitive appetite is free to the extent it participates in reason; i.e., it is perfected to desire the rational good. See also *ST* I, q. 62, a. 8, ad 3 and q. 83, a. 2, ad 3.

³⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 108, a. 1. In the *Summa* when covering the natural and old law, however, Thomas does not talk about how law increases freedom.

³⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 1; q. 111, a. 2.

³⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 108, a. 1, ad 2: "Secundum philosophum, in I *Metaphys.*, liber est qui sui causa est. Ille ergo libere aliquid agit qui ex seipso agit. Quod autem homo agit ex habitu suae naturae convenienti, ex seipso agit, quia habitus inclinat in modum naturae. Si vero habitus esset naturae repugnans, homo non ageret secundum quod est ipse, sed secundum aliquam corruptionem sibi supervenientem. Quia igitur gratia spiritus sancti est sicut interior habitus nobis infusus inclinans nos ad recte operandum, facit nos libere operari ea quae convenienti gratiae, et vitare ea quae gratiae repugnant." Cf. *ST* III, q. 7, a. 2; *SCG* III, ch. 148; IV, ch. 22, ch. 113.3.

like a habit, so it also perfects freedom. Finally, the grace of the Holy Spirit is called the new law, because it functions like a law: guiding and moving humans to freely perform their proper action.³⁸ Hence, like Leo, Thomas believes that moral freedom is simply natural freedom brought to its proper operation. Furthermore, freedom is perfected by law, virtue, and grace.

Because humans are free when they act by their own accord, defects in the intellect, will, and passions diminish freedom. In the above section on Leo's view of freedom, I already quoted the passage from Thomas's commentary on John, which notes that without reason guiding the intellect, humans are not free. They are like slaves who are moved by another to their actions—because they are not performing actions proper to their nature.³⁹ Elsewhere Thomas notes that when humans do evil, which they rationally hate (cf. Rom 7:15), they do have free will (*voluntatem*), but they do not perform a free action.⁴⁰ In other words a distinction can be made between the freedom of the will and the freedom of the human person. In terms of the natural power of free choice, the will is free whenever it chooses something determined by the intellect to be good—even if it is an apparent good.⁴¹ However, the person himself is not *truly* free unless the intellect knows the truth and the will loves the good. Because these powers require virtue and grace to be perfected, so also freedom is perfected as humans increase in grace and virtue. Thus, like Leo, Thomas believes that defects in the powers of the soul remove freedom of choice.

³⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 106, a. 2; q. 108; *SCG* IV, ch. 22.6.

³⁹ The passage stated, "Everything is that which belongs to a thing naturally. When, therefore, it acts through a power outside itself, it does not act of itself, but through another, that is, as a slave. But man is by nature rational. When, therefore, he acts according to reason, he acts of himself and according to his free will; and this is liberty. Whereas, when he sins, he acts in opposition to reason, is moved by another, and is the victim of foreign misapprehensions. Therefore, 'Whosoever commits sin is the slave of sin.'" *Super Ioan.* 8, lec. 4, §1204. See note 15 above.

⁴⁰ *De malo*, q. 6, a. 1, ad 22. "quod ille qui facit quod non vult non habet liberam actionem, sed potest habere liberam voluntatem." Note how in this passage Thomas uses the term "free will" and not "free choice" (*electionem*) or "free judgment" (*arbitrium*) as he usually does. Cf. *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 5, ad 3.

⁴¹ In fact, in the section on sin, Thomas spends a great deal of time speaking about how sins are freely chosen and how in a certain sense the degree of sinfulness is in accord with the degree of freedom (*ST* I-II, qq. 71–88).

Because Thomas sees that moral freedom is perfected by law, virtue, and grace, the most perfect freedom exists when humans or angels share in the wisdom and love of God in the beatific vision. When speaking of angels in the presence of God, Thomas states,

It belongs to the perfection of its liberty for the free choice to be able to choose between opposite things, keeping the order of the end in view; but it comes of the defect of liberty for it to choose anything by turning away from the order of the end; and this is to sin. Hence there is greater liberty of will in the angels, who cannot sin, than there is in ourselves, who can sin.⁴²

Consequently, just as Leo states God and those that perfectly participate in his knowledge and love are the most free, so also Thomas confirms the freedom of the angels in the presence of God. This perfect freedom also extends to humans in the beatific state; (see *Summa contra gentiles* IV, ch. 95). Like Leo, Thomas also asserts that the ability to do evil is not essential to freedom, but comes from a defect in freedom.

Finally, one of the points that Leo emphasizes the most is that just laws do not remove freedom, but perfect freedom because they guide the intellect. Thomas also makes this point in a passage in the *Summa contra gentiles*. In this passage, Thomas notes that for the soul unperfected by virtue and grace, the law conflicts with freedom. Once the soul is perfected, however, the Holy Spirit moves the soul to act freely:

The will, of course, is ordered to that which is truly good. But if, by reason of passion or of bad habit or disposition, a man be turned away from that which is truly good, he acts slavishly, in that he is diverted by some extraneous thing, if consideration be given the will's natural order itself. But, if one considers the

⁴² *ST* I, q. 62, a. 8, ad 3. "Unde quod liberum arbitrium diversa eligere possit servato ordine finis, hoc pertinet ad perfectionem libertatis eius, sed quod eligat aliquid divertendo ab ordine finis, quod est peccare, hoc pertinet ad defectum libertatis. Unde maior libertas arbitrii est in Angelis, qui peccare non possunt, quam in nobis, qui peccare possumus." See also *SCG* I, ch. 88, in reference to freedom in God and *SCG* IV, ch. 95, in reference to humans in the beatific vision. Cf. *Commentary on Romans*, ch. 8, lec. 4.

act of the will as inclined to an apparent good, one acts freely when he follows passion or a corrupt habit. He acts slavishly, of course, if while his will remains such he—for fear of a law to the contrary—refrains from that which he wills. Therefore, since the Holy Spirit inclines the will by love toward the true good, to which the will is naturally ordered, He removes both that servitude in which the slave of passion infected by sin acts against the order of the will, and that servitude in which, against the movement of his will, a man acts according to the law; its slave, so to say, not its friend. This is why the Apostle says: “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor 3:17); and: “If you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal 5:18).⁴³

This passage shows many of the parts of Thomas’s view of freedom. First, it notes that disordered passions and vices remove freedom. It then reminds the reader that because free will is a power, it is still free to pursue an apparent good. When the will is pursuing this false good, just laws appear to constrain that freedom. Yet true freedom can be found in following the inclination of the Holy Spirit (called the new law of grace in *ST* I-II, qq. 106–8). Finally, quoting 2 Corinthians 3:17, Thomas notes that participating in the guidance and love of the Holy Spirit results in freedom.

One of Leo’s most influential contributions on the topic of freedom is the distinction he makes between true and false freedom. As seen above, this distinction is adopted by the Vatican II fathers in *Gaudium et Spes*, by John Paul II, and by Benedict XVI. Does Thomas also make this distinction? Thomas does speak of true freedom in contrast to a slavery

⁴³ *SCG* IV, ch. 22.6: “Cum autem voluntas ordinetur in id quod est vere bonum, sive propter passionem sive propter malum habitum aut dispositionem homo ab eo quod est vere bonum avertatur, serviliter agit, inquantum a quodam extraneo inclinatur, si consideretur ipse ordo naturalis voluntatis. Sed si consideretur actus voluntatis ut inclinatae in apparens bonum, libere agit cum sequitur passionem aut habitum corruptum; serviliter autem agit si, tali voluntate manente, propter timorem legis in contrarium positae, abstinere ab eo quod vult. Cum igitur spiritus sanctus per amorem voluntatem inclinet in verum bonum, in quod naturaliter ordinatur, tollit et servitutem qua, servus passionis et peccati effectus, contra ordinem voluntatis agit; et servitutem qua, contra motum suae voluntatis, secundum legem agit, quasi legis servus, non amicus. Propter quod apostolus dicit, II Cor. 3–17.”

to sin. True freedom results when humans are perfected by justice to seek their proper action. He states:

Since man, by his natural reason, is inclined to justice, while sin is contrary to natural reason, it follows that freedom from sin is *true* freedom which is united to the servitude of justice, since they both incline man to that which is becoming to him. In like manner true servitude is the servitude of sin, which is connected with freedom from justice, because man is thereby hindered from attaining that which is proper to him. That a man become the servant of justice or sin results from his efforts.⁴⁴

When humans are servants to justice, they are truly free. Although Thomas believes that humans by *natural* freedom can freely commit sin and see just laws as a restriction of their freedom, *true* freedom results when humans are inclined (through grace and virtue) to their proper end of knowing and loving God.

Yet, even as I show the continuity between Thomas's view of freedom and Leo's view of freedom, there are certainly differences of emphasis between Thomas and Leo. Thomas spends significantly more time speaking of the natural power of free choice and far less time speaking of moral freedom whereas Leo basically only speaks of moral freedom. In fact, in many of the places where one would expect Thomas to speak of humans lacking freedom due to slavery to sin—for example, in the section on sin in the *Summa Theologiae* I-II, qq. 71–88—Thomas basically only focuses on the natural power of free choice and the fact that sin consists of freely choosing evil.

Despite the fact that Leo XIII emphasizes different aspects of freedom (owing to the pastoral needs of the time), there is clearly continuity

⁴⁴ ST II-II, q. 183, a. 4: “quia homo secundum naturalem rationem ad iustitiam inclinatur, peccatum autem est contra naturalem rationem, consequens est quod libertas a peccato sit *vera* libertas, quae coniungitur servituti iustitiae, quia per utrumque tendit homo in id quod est conveniens sibi. Et similiter vera servitus est servitus peccati, cui coniungitur libertas a iustitia, quia scilicet per hoc homo impeditur ab eo quod est proprium sibi. Hoc autem quod homo efficiatur servus iustitiae vel peccati, contingit per humanum studium.” Emphasis added. In the reply to the first objection, Thomas also notes how charity results in freedom from sin and in q. 184, a. 4, ad 2 Thomas speaks about how grace moves humans from servitude to freedom.

between Thomas's understanding of freedom and that of Leo. However, this continuity can be obscured if only the passages from Thomas that treat free choice as a power are examined. Thomas does state that free judgment as a power is "indifferent" to good or evil actions inasmuch as it can choose either. Like all rational powers, however, it must be perfected to perform its proper action. Hence greater practical knowledge and the virtues perfecting the intellect, will, and emotions perfect the natural power of free judgment so that it can perform its proper action of freely choosing actions ordered toward God.⁴⁵ Grace especially perfects this power. Thomas notes that true freedom exists when humans freely choose actions ordered to God by charity through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, whereas false freedom exists when humans commit sins. Leo affirms Thomas's view and further specifies that freedom is perfected by laws that guide human reason and move the will to good actions. Leo emphasizes the role of law and truth in guiding humans because he is writing against those that hold that freedom is a sheer autonomy of the will. **N&V**

⁴⁵ Because the power of free choice emerges from the powers of both the intellect and will, there is not a specific virtue that perfects it. In other words, there is not a virtue called perfected freedom. Rather, because both the intellect and will must be perfected (as well as the passions because of their influence on the intellect and will), virtues perfecting all three powers are essential for true freedom to exist.