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## HOW CAN A SPIRITUAL CREATURE CHOOSE EVIL? ANSELM OF CANTERBURY AND THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE SIN OF ANGELS

The sin of angels is a very special case since it is a source of all moral evil for Christian theology as it was the first act of turning creation away from God. It could perhaps be presented as a “sin of sins” and the understanding of its nature seems of the utmost importance to explain any other acts of this kind. The theological approach to the choice of evil should start with the analysis of the fall of angels, and it is not only treated as a part of a treaty on angels but also — since it helps to understand any human choice which rejects God — it should be studied as a subject of moral theology. Although angelology seems to belong to the field of theology alone, it also has significant philosophical aspects. Since the angel is a spiritual creature, which is more perfect than man, who is composed of soul and body, his powers also operate on a more perfect level. Therefore, even for philosophers the case of the sin of angels can be helpful as a kind of a thought experiment testing the moral choice in “pure” conditions which could expose the very nature of free will.<sup>1</sup>

The intellectual and volitional activity of angels can be understood as pure since it has no connection with matter. It can be observed especially in the writings of Aquinas, who disagrees with the Neoplatonic view of angels which claimed that they were composed of form and spiritual matter. The sources of

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<sup>1</sup>Tobias Hoffmann also notices that Aquinas’ position on the sin of angels is especially helpful in discussing the problem of free choice and determinism (T. HOFFMANN, “Aquinas and Intellectual Determinism: The Test Case of Angelic Sin,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 89/2 (2007), p. 126–127).

this opinion could be traced as far back as Aristotle, who first postulated that in geometry there must exist something called intellectual matter (*hyle note*).<sup>2</sup> But it was Plotinus who introduced the concept of spiritual matter as an element which is necessary to make any distinction between spiritual beings.<sup>3</sup> This opinion was still alive and well in the Middle Ages thanks to Solomon ibn Gabirol who in his treaty *Fons vitae* presents his own modification of Plotinus' arguments.<sup>4</sup> Although those arguments were accepted by almost all authors of the 13th century, Aquinas very carefully rejects them by using his new metaphysics of the act of being.<sup>5</sup>

This polemic is very important because it enables Aquinas to present angels as purely spiritual beings that do not contain any matter in their metaphysical structure. Such an approach has far-reaching consequences for the understanding of the powers of angels. According to Aquinas, angels cannot conceive individuals sensually, so there is no abstraction in their intellectual cognition. As regards their appetitive activity, angels are free from any passion, unlike humans who are also dependent on the transformations which occur in body organs. As a result, in case of the angel we are dealing with a purely spiritual being that acts in an almost perfect way.

In the earlier investigation by St. Anselm we do not have such a careful distinction of the metaphysical structure of angels, but, nevertheless, this discussion is also very complicated and concentrates on a similar question of how a perfect being can make an imperfect choice. The goal of this article is to examine the role of intellect and will in the sin of angels according to two major works on this topic: *On the Fall of the Devil* by St. Anselm of Canterbury, and a treaty on angels from Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae*. In his dialogue St. Anselm continues the tradition of St. Augustine and, as we will see, seems to claim that the fall was caused by angelic will. Following the argumentation of Aquinas on this topic, we shall try to answer the question whether Aquinas agrees with Anselm that it was only the will which caused the fall.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, Z (VII) 10, 1036a 9–12; H (VIII) 6, 1045a 33–37; I (X) 8, 1058a 23–24.

<sup>3</sup> One of the treaties of the *Enneads* is called *On the Two Kinds of Matter* (*Enneades*, II, 4).

<sup>4</sup> For the presentation of Avicbron's arguments see: J.M. DILLON, "Solomon Ibn Gabirol's Doctrine of Intelligible Matter," *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. L.E. Goodman, (Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern, 7), New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, p. 43–59.

<sup>5</sup> For full presentation of Aquinas' arguments see: T. STĘPIEŃ, "Aquinas Against Spiritual Matter," *Epekeina*, vol. 6/2 (2015), p. 1–13.

## ANSELM AND THE TWO TYPES OF WILL

The main question is formulated at the beginning of the dialogue *On the Fall of the Devil* by invoking the following verse from the First Letter to the Corinthians (4,7): “What do you have that you have not received?”<sup>6</sup> The student smartly suggests that since every gift and power comes from God, the angels that have fallen did not have the ability to persevere (*perseverantia*) because they had not received it from God. Therefore, they did not have a free choice and God is the one to be blamed for their fall, since He had not given them everything that was necessary to persevere in the good.<sup>7</sup> The teacher in the dialogue argues that God gave the ability and will to persevere to all the angels and since Satan also received the ability to persevere, he could have done so.

The problem lies in the will of the devil, who somehow misused what he had received, and the main question concerns the difference between good angels and those who fell since each of them had received the same gifts from God. The first answer given by Anselm points to the change in the will of the devil. First he received the will to persevere and later he abandoned it; as the teacher says, he did not “will till the end.” According to Tomas Ekenberg Anselm invents a new Latin word to describe this condition, by saying that although the devil *velit*, he did not *pervoluit*.<sup>8</sup> Anselm concludes:

So I say that the devil did not will what he should have willed when he should have willed it, not because he lacked the will (and lacked it because God did not give it to him), but because, willing what he ought not to have willed, he drove out the good will when the bad will supervened. Therefore God did not give him the good will to persevere, and he did not receive it, not because God did not give it, but on the contrary, God did not give it because he gave up willing what he should have willed, by abandoning and not retaining it.<sup>9</sup>

This answer, however, does not resolve the problem, because it seems problematic to introduce a temporal succession in the perfect will of angels. Anselm

<sup>6</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *De casu Diaboli*, I, ed. Schmitt, p. 233, l. 3: “quid habes, quod non accepisti?”

<sup>7</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, II, ed. Schmitt, p. 235, l. 20 – p. 236, l. 8.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. T. EKENBERG, *Falling Freely. Anselm of Canterbury on the Will*, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2005, p. 51.

<sup>9</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, III, ed. Schmitt, p. 240, l. 7–11: “Dico ergo quia non ideo non voluit cum debuit et quod debuit, quia voluntas defecit deo dare deficiente, sed quia ipse volendo quod non debuit, bonam voluntatem expulit mala superveniente. Quapropter non ideo non habuit bonam voluntatem perseverantem aut non accepit quia deus non dedit, sed ideo deus non dedit, quia ille volendo quod non debuit eam deseruit, et deserendo non tenuit” (transl. B. Davies, G.R. Evans, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, same translation in following quotations).

suggests that the devil had the will for some time and then lost it, and this was the reason why God did not give him perseverance. Saying that the devil had the will to persevere and abandoned it basically means that he did not have it since a certain date and therefore he did not persevere. However, this is only a preliminary answer and the main part of the dialogue entertains the problem of how the devil could have willed what he willed. Anselm points out that the devil could basically will only two things: justice (*iustitia*) and happiness (*beatitudo*). Since willing justice can never end in committing a sin,<sup>10</sup> the only possible answer is that he willed happiness. More precisely, he could have willed something he did not possess, which Anselm calls “something advantageous” (*aliquid commodum*), which could make him happier. This thing remains unknown to us and Anselm himself claims that he does not know what it was, but it certainly was something that all angels lacked.<sup>11</sup>

Having said that, Anselm can tell his version of the story of the fall. After God had created all the angels, they were equal in nature and obtained the same gifts from God. Good angels chose justice and therefore God gave them the one thing which was necessary for their full happiness. Evil angels chose happiness instead of justice because they wanted to achieve what they lacked through their own power. As a result, they were denied not only the one thing which they wanted but also the good which they had already possessed.<sup>12</sup> To commit a sin, it is not enough to have only the will of happiness (*voluntas beatitudinis*), but it is also necessary to have a second type of will — the will of justice (*voluntas iustitiae*).<sup>13</sup> Therefore, God must have created angels as having those two types of will and two sources of motivation. The good angels persevered because they had the love of justice, and, therefore, by choosing the will of justice they also preserved the will of happiness. Choosing justice does not eliminate happiness, while choosing happiness eliminates justice. Following the will of happiness makes an angel abandon the will of justice, and abandoning justice makes them evil.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, IV, ed. Schmitt, p. 241, l. 17: “Iustitiam vero volendo peccare non potuit.”

<sup>11</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, VI, ed. Schmitt, p. 244, l. 3–5: “Quid illud fuerit non video; sed quidquid fuerit, sufficit scire quia fuit aliquid ad quod crescere potuerunt, quod non acceperunt quando creati sunt, ut ad illud suo merito proficerent.”

<sup>12</sup> Cf. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, VI, ed. Schmitt, p. 240, l. 17–28.

<sup>13</sup> The concept of so-called “two-wills theory” was not invented by St. Anselm but is rather a formalization of St. Augustine’s concept of conflicting intentions of doing what is good for oneself and doing what is right. St. Anselm adopts this view of the angelic sin and of two sources of motivation which are needed to choose freely and commit a sin. Cf. P. KING, “Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin,” in: *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. T. Hoffmann, (Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition, 35), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 273.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, XII–XIV, ed. Schmitt, p. 251, l. 22 – p. 259, l. 4.

Nevertheless, pointing to those two types of will seems insufficient to fully understand the sin of angels. Anselm seems to realize that the choice is dependent on the knowledge that one has, so he considers two cases in which the knowledge that the angel possessed or lacked would have made the fall impossible. First of all, an angel must have the knowledge that the happiness which he has is not the utmost possible happiness, therefore he is able to will greater happiness only if he knows that such happiness is possible.<sup>15</sup> Secondly, Anselm considers some specific questions concerning the devil's knowledge of his future fall. When his will was still just, he could not have foreseen that he would fall in the future, since it is impossible to come up with an argument which would provide necessary or even probable knowledge about a future fall.<sup>16</sup> The next question concerns the problem whether the evil angel knew that he should not want what he wanted, i.e. that he should not desire happiness while abandoning justice. Here, the answer is affirmative and he must have known what he should and what he should not will.<sup>17</sup> The last question concerns the devil's knowledge about future punishment. In this case he must have known that the fall entails punishment, and that he should be punished if he falls. However, to commit a sin it is necessary to be ignorant on whether the one who commits a sin will actually be punished. In other words, the devil must have known that he should be punished but he did not have the knowledge that punishment was unavoidable.<sup>18</sup>

As Tomas Ekenberg points out, we can sum up the considerations on the devil's knowledge by saying that his cognition about the fall and punishment must be somehow incomplete and he must have been ignorant or at least uncertain about its consequences.<sup>19</sup> However, even these reflections on the knowledge of the devil before the fall do not answer the main question: how is it possible for a good and just creature to fall. They rather outline the conditions which made the fall possible. That is why the student poses the final question, which he calls "fatuous," but which in fact is crucial: "Whence comes for the first time

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<sup>15</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, XIII, ed. Schmitt, p. 257, l. 8: "Vult ergo esse beatus quanto altius hoc esse posse cognoscit."

<sup>16</sup> Cf. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, XXI, ed. Schmitt, p. 266, l. 24 – p. 267, l. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, XXII, ed. Schmitt, p. 269, l. 14–20.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, XXIII, ed. Schmitt, p. 269, l. 28 – p. 270, l. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. T. EKENBERG, *Falling Freely*, p. 65. Peter King notices that with regard to the foreknowledge St. Anselm significantly develops the thought of St. Augustine and presents the Devil as fully capable moral agent (cf. P. KING, *Augustine and Anselm on Angelic Sin*, p. 274); he also explains extensively Anselm's position on the character of Devil's foreknowledge regarding the consequences of his sin (cf. *ibidem*, p. 274–281).

that evil which is called injustice or sin in the angel who was created just.”<sup>20</sup> The final answer of the teacher is worth quoting in full. The devil wills evil:

only because he wills. For this will has no other cause by which it is forced or attracted, but it was its own efficient cause, so to speak, as well as its own effect.<sup>21</sup>

So, the devil himself is the cause of his fall and there was no external cause which forced him to do so. He willed it only because he could have willed it, and injustice which is non-existent could not have been the cause. Although he must have been ignorant and uncertain about the consequences of his deed, the only reason of a wrong decision is his own will. The problem is that such statement draws a very problematic picture of a will which is perfect, but makes a wrong choice while not being inclined or forced by anything external. The easiest escape from this dilemma would be to point at a certain lack in the intellectual apprehension of justice and happiness. St. Anselm does not offer such explanation and we still do not know why perfect will chooses wrongly. The dilemma seems to be still unresolved and the final touch of Anselm’s dialogue points at the will itself as the power which is the sole cause of an evil or good decision.

#### AQUINAS ON ANGELS’ LACK OF CONSIDERATION

St. Thomas knew the dialogue *On the Fall of the Devil*, but it is significant that he quotes Anselm only once in the 63<sup>rd</sup> question of the First Part of *Summa theologiae* devoted to the sin of angels and the article does not concern the fall itself, but rather the desire of the devil to be like God.<sup>22</sup> One of the reasons could be the fact that in the *Summa* we observe a different strategy in considering the fall of angels. First of all, St. Thomas stresses the role of intellect which is almost non-existent in Anselm’s dialogue. Even when Aquinas demonstrates that angels must have the power of the will, he basically states that they must have the appetitive power since they have the cognitive one. The cognition of a certain kind of good in nature comes with an inclination towards that good; therefore, angels also must have the intellectual appetitive power: “since the angels by their intellect know the universal aspect of goodness, it is manifest

<sup>20</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, XXVII, ed. Schmitt, p. 275, l. 5–7: “unde primum venit malum quod dicitur iniustitia sive peccatum, in angelum qui factus est iustus.”

<sup>21</sup> ANSELM OF CANTERBURY, *DCD*, XXVII, ed. Schmitt, p. 275, l. 31–33: “Non nisi quia voluit. Nam haec voluntas nullam aliam habuit causam qua impelleretur aliquatenus aut attraheretur, sed ipsa sibi efficiens causa fuit, si dici potest, et effectum.”

<sup>22</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 63, a. 3, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 126.

that there is a will in them.”<sup>23</sup> Will can only desire what the intellect presents to it as good, and therefore there must be a knowledge of the good which can be willed. Going further we will see that the outcome of such systematic approach enables Aquinas to look closer at this lacking thing, which was mentioned by Anselm and which angels wanted in order to gain full happiness.

After careful consideration of the nature of angels and their powers (intellect and will), St. Thomas discusses their happiness after the creation and the grace that was given to them. Aquinas points out that it is not enough simply to achieve the good for a concept of beatitude, but it is also necessary to be confirmed in it.<sup>24</sup> The fall of angels tells us that although they possessed a certain kind of happiness, they were not confirmed or established (*stabilitas sive confirmatio*) in the good. Aquinas specifies that the term beatitude means “ultimate perfection of a rational creature” (*ultima perfectio rationalis seu intellectualis naturae*).<sup>25</sup> So, we can see that there is a difference between two kinds of happiness: natural happiness and beatitude. After the creation, angels were happy but they were not in beatitude since they lacked that ultimate perfection; in other words, they possessed natural beatitude (ultimate happiness of nature), but they lacked beatitude as such.<sup>26</sup> To be more precise, St. Thomas carefully distinguishes natural happiness from the one which comes from grace. Since every creature naturally desires happiness this kind of happiness can be achieved by natural powers. In this case the way of achieving happiness depends on the degree of perfection of nature. Angels do not acquire natural happiness like humans do, that is by subsequent acts of intellect and will which lead to virtue. Therefore, they must have had this natural happiness from the moment of their creation — they were created this way.<sup>27</sup>

However, there is also another kind of happiness, one which is beyond the nature of any created being. It comes from grace and is a gift from God, and is the ultimate beatitude (*ultima beatitudo*) in the strict sense of the word. After the creation angels did not have this kind of beatitude. What is interesting, Aquinas understands both kinds of happiness as an ability to contemplate God

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<sup>23</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 59, a. 1, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 92: “Unde, cum angeli per intellectum cognoscant ipsam universalem rationem boni, manifestum est quod in eis sit voluntas.” (transl. Fathers of English Dominican Province, London: B. Oates & Washbourne, 1922, same translation in following quotations).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 62, a. 1, s.c., ed. Leonina, p. 110: “[...] de ratione beatitudinis est stabilitas sive confirmatio in bono.”

<sup>25</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 62, a. 1, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Aquinas also uses the term *beatitudo naturalis* to describe the ultimate natural happiness of angels. But when he uses the term *beatitudo* without any adjectives, he is referring to this beatitude which derives from grace.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 62, a. 1, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 110.

who is the ultimate good. Explaining natural happiness, he quotes Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* demonstrating that happiness is a certain kind of contemplation. In case of a man such contemplation confirms his likeness to gods, who have it in a perfect way.<sup>28</sup> The perfection of the contemplating activity relies on the perfection of the contemplated good. Therefore, Aquinas says, referring to Aristotle, the ultimate natural happiness consists in the contemplation of God since He is the most perfect object of intellect (*optimum intelligibile*). The second kind of happiness also consists in the contemplation of God but lifted to a higher level. St. Thomas simply says that this kind is more perfect because it is based on "seeing God as He is" and such way of seeing God lies beyond any natural powers of a created intellect.

To see the difference between those two kinds of contemplation more precisely, we must return to what Aquinas said earlier about the angelic cognition. There are three kinds of cognition: knowing something in its essence, in its similitude, and in its reflection.<sup>29</sup> Aquinas explains this by referring to the example of sight. The light is present in the eye in its essence, but if the eye sees a stone, it sees it by its similitude; the third kind relies on seeing the stone not directly but reflected in a mirror. Applying those kinds of perception to the knowledge of God, Aquinas argues that angels know God naturally only in the second mode. The first kind — seeing God through His essence — lies beyond any natural power of a created being. The third kind is proper to human cognition since we know God's reflection in the beauty and order of the material world. This leaves only the second possibility, namely that God is known to angels by a similitude present in the knower. But this occurs in a special way. Although the angels have all natural knowledge from the moment of their creation thanks to the species which are impressed in their intellects, they do not know God exactly in this way because God does not belong to any species and there can be no conception of God's nature. Therefore, Aquinas concludes that the angelic cognition of God is closer to the human one, and the difference lies only in the grade of perfection of the mirror which reflects the image of God. We have to acquire this image from sensual created things that form an external mirror. Angels see it internally since they are themselves the images of God as spiritual creations.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Ethica Nicomachea*, X, 8, 1178b–1179a.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 56. a. 3, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 67: "Uno modo, per praesentiam suae essentiae in cognoscente, sicut si lux videatur in oculo: et sic dictum est quod angelus intelligit seipsum. Alio modo, per praesentiam suae similitudinis in potentia cognositive: sicut lapis videtur ab oculo per hoc quod similitudo eius resultat in oculo. Tertio modo, per hoc quod similitudo rei cognitae non accipitur immediate ab ipsa re cognita, sed a re alia, in qua resultat: sicut cum videmus hominem in speculo."

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibidem*: "Quia enim imago Dei est in ipsa natura angeli impressa per suam essentiam, angelus Deum cognoscit, in quantum est similitudo Dei. Non tamen ipsam essentiam Dei videt:

Now we can return to the kinds of contemplation considered above. The natural contemplation of God in case of angels is a contemplation of the reflection of God's nature, which the angel himself is. This contemplation, however, does not allow to see the essence of God. The knowledge of the essence of God or rather the contemplation of His essence is possible only thanks to grace and it is exactly what Aquinas described above as "seeing God as He is." So, finally, we can answer (at least partially) what was the thing lacked by the angels after their creation, without which it was impossible for them to attain the ultimate beatitude. It was the direct contemplation of God's essence.

At this point we can turn to the final question of the will of angels and the state of this will before they made the choice. Here Aquinas' approach is once again intellectual, as it states that the will is unable to make any move without the intellect which recognizes its object. Although the angelic intellect naturally has the cognition of God in the image, this can only make the will to want the good perceived in this image, which can lead to the natural contemplation of God and to the natural happiness. St. Thomas notices that the will naturally only wants what lies in nature. Yet nature also limits the range of willing, and no being can naturally will something which lies beyond nature. "Therefore, if there is anything which is above nature, the will cannot be inclined towards it, unless helped by some other supernatural principle."<sup>31</sup> Consequently, it is necessary for the will to desire the contemplation of God in His essence, to be helped by grace.

[...] to see God in His essence, wherein the ultimate beatitude of the rational creature consists, is beyond the nature of every created intellect. Consequently no rational creature can have the movement of the will directed towards such beatitude, except it be moved thereto by a supernatural agent.<sup>32</sup>

Since the intellect of an angel cannot conceive the essence of God because it lies beyond his power, the intellect cannot even propose the ultimate beatitude of the contemplation of God to the will. Reading those explanations, we might think that Aquinas sees the problem of the sin of angels rather as the lack of cognition, not as the wrong choice of the will, since the will seems to be utterly dependent on the activity of the intellect. But we must observe that in such case

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quia nulla similitudo creata est sufficiens ad repraesentandam divinam essentiam. Unde magis ista cognitio tenet se cum speculari: quia et ipsa natura angelica est quoddam speculum divinam similitudinem repraesentans."

<sup>31</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 62, a. 2, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 111: "Et ideo, si aliquid sit supra naturam, voluntas in id ferri non potest, nisi ab aliquo alio supernaturali principio adiuta."

<sup>32</sup> *Ibidem*: "cum de Dei cognitione ageretur, quod videre Deum per essentiam, in quo ultima beatitudo rationalis creaturae consistit, est supra naturam cuiuslibet intellectus creati."

the grace given by God to all angels before their choice was not the grace of seeing the essence of God. Such grace would simply mean that God automatically gave them the ultimate happiness and sin would be no longer possible.<sup>33</sup> What Aquinas seems to say here is that angels obtained the inclination of the will towards God without any “extra” knowledge of His essence.

Thomas explains further that any movement of the will (*motus voluntatis*) to God can be called conversion (*conversio*) and we can distinguish its three types: the perfect love of God (which needs consummate grace), that which merits beatitude (which needs habitual grace) and finally the movement by which we dispose ourselves to having grace.<sup>34</sup> It is obvious that angels did not have consummate grace yet, since this would mean that they had the ultimate beatitude. But in this case we also have to exclude the third and most basic kind, which is described by St. Thomas as “the operation of God, who draws the soul towards Himself.”<sup>35</sup> As he argues in the next article (q. 62, a. 3), angels were created in grace and they also had habitual grace, which allowed them to merit beatitude.<sup>36</sup> Finally, explaining that angels merited their beatitude, he states that it is not enough to have free will to merit it, but the will must be informed by grace.<sup>37</sup> In those texts he constantly speaks about the inclination of the will, so it seems that the grace which is needed to turn to God is the help given to the will, not to the intellect.

Finally, we can look at Aquinas’ reflections on the nature of the sin of angels. St. Thomas first shows what sin is and what kind of sin can be committed by angels. For the purpose of his explanation he gives a brief definition, saying that: “sinning is nothing else than a deviation from that rectitude which an act ought to have.”<sup>38</sup> Only in one case the ultimate rule of act lies in the virtue of the agent itself (*cuius regula est ipsa virtus agentis*). This is of course the case of God who Himself is the ultimate rule for His own actions or, as Aquinas puts it, “Divine

<sup>33</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 62, a. 8, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 117–118.

<sup>34</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 62, a. 2, ad 3, ed. Leonina, p. 112: “[...] quilibet motus voluntatis in Deum, potest dici conversio in ipsum. Et ideo triplex est conversio in Deum. Una quidem per dilectionem perfectam, quae est creaturae iam Deo fruientis. Et ad hanc conversionem requiritur gratia consummata. Alia conversio est, quae est meritum beatitudinis. Et ad hanc requiritur habitualis gratia, quae est merendi principium. Tertia conversio est, per quam aliquis praeparat se ad gratiam habendam.”

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem: “[...] operatio Dei ad se animam convertentis.”

<sup>36</sup> Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 62, a. 3, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 112.

<sup>37</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 62, a. 4, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 113: “[...] quia liberum arbitrium non est sufficiens causa meriti; unde actus non potest esse meritorius secundum quod est ex libero arbitrio, nisi in quantum est gratia informatus.”

<sup>38</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 63, a. 1, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 121: “[...] peccare nihil est aliud quam declinare a rectitudine actus quam debet habere.”

will is the sole rule of God's act, because it is not referred to any higher end."<sup>39</sup> In case of any creature the rule of the act of will lays beyond the power of the agent, so the rectitude of the act relies on regulating it according to the ultimate end which is God or, more precisely, the will of God. St. Thomas gives here the example of a soldier who can be a good soldier only when his will is subordinate to the will of the commanding officer. Therefore, in case of angels they can be good only when their will is subordinate to the will of God, and they are evil when it is not. In the answer to the 4th objection (q. 63, a. 1) we have a more precise explanation that angels cannot sin by willing something which is evil in itself. Choosing evil in this way always involves error or ignorance which cannot occur in the angelic cognition. The sin can be committed by angels only when they are freely choosing something which is "good in itself but not according to a proper measure or rule."<sup>40</sup> Here, the defect of free will (*liberum arbitrium*) does not occur on the part of the chosen good, but rather is a defect of the choice itself which is not properly regulated. Aquinas adds:

Such a sin does not presuppose ignorance, but merely absence of consideration of the things which ought to be considered. In this way the angel sinned, by seeking his own good, from his own free-will, insubordinately to the rule of the Divine will.<sup>41</sup>

Although we can see here that the choice relies on the will itself, the most important element once again seems to be intellectual rather than voluntary. What is lacking is proper consideration (*consideratio*) and it is not faulty or improper consideration, but rather an act of intellect that is completely missing. But how is it possible that such perfect intellect did not consider things which ought to be considered? To see Aquinas' answer we must refer to his earlier works. In the *Commentary on the Sentences*, when resolving the problem of how the sin of angels is possible, he says that it is not easy to see such possibility since the sin can be present in the will only when there has been some kind of deception in reason, and therefore all evil is a kind of ignorance.<sup>42</sup> Aquinas probably remarks

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<sup>39</sup>Ibidem: "Divina autem voluntas sola est regula sui actus: quia non ad superiorem finem ordinatur."

<sup>40</sup>THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 63, a. 1, ad 4, ed. Leonina, p. 122: "non cum ordine debitae mensurae aut regulae."

<sup>41</sup>Ibidem: "Et huiusmodi peccatum non praeexigit ignorantiam, sed absentiam solum considerationis eorum quae considerari debent. Et hoc modo angelus peccavit, convertendo se per liberum arbitrium ad proprium bonum, absque ordine ad regulam divinae voluntatis."

<sup>42</sup>THOMAS AQUINAS, *In II Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, sol., ed. Vives, p. 76: "Quomodo autem peccaverunt, difficile est videre; quia non potest esse peccatum in voluntate, nisi sit aliquo modo deceptio in ratione; unde omnis malus est quodammodo ignorans, ut in III *Ethic.*, cap. I, dicit Philosophus: quod qualiter sit videndum est ad propositae quaestionis intellectum." Aquinas

on the difficulty of acknowledging the sin of angels because of the perfection of angelic cognition. However, to explain his position he must show how their knowledge is limited. He continues that even in intellectual knowledge there is something particular and something general.

For Aquinas, the imperfection of such cognition depends on its particularity. Considering the thing in a particular way means taking into account only some of its aspects or conditions (*conditiones*) and ignoring others. On the other hand, the intellect knows something in a perfect way when it apprehends it generally, that is considering all of its aspects. For angels it is impossible to know at once (*simul*) all aspects (*conditiones*) of apprehended things, unless they see all things in the Word (Christ), but such cognition is granted to angels only after they have made their choice and, of course, when they have made the right one. Before the choice was made, angels had known all aspects of the apprehended object, but only habitually (*in habitu*), while only some of them had been known by them actually (*in actu*).<sup>43</sup>

Therefore, the act of the will of angels was defective because it was based on the consideration of a certain aspect or condition of the thing.<sup>44</sup> This answer seems to resolve the problem only partially, because one can still ask why angels did not consider those other aspects which they knew only habitually. This was certainly not due to the lack of time, and the angelic intellect could easily pass from considering one condition of the thing to considering another — so what

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refers here to the fragment of *Nicomachean Ethics* where Aristotle considers the conditions of voluntary and involuntary action, cf. ARISTOTLE, *Ethica Nicomachea*, III, 1, 1110b–1111b. Tobias Hoffmann notices that the rule *omnis malus ignorans* does not apply to the angelic sin, because in this case we can only say that sin was caused by some kind of “cognitive defect” (T. HOFFMANN, *Aquinas and Intellectual Determinism*, p. 136).

<sup>43</sup>THOMAS AQUINAS, *In II Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, sol., ed. Vives, p. 76–77: “Ipse enim distinguit in VII *Ethic.*, cap. III, operandorum duplicem cognitionem, scilicet universalem et particularem: et quia operationes sunt circa singularia, ideo aliquem recte in universali opinantem, circa singularia peccare contingit. Singularia enim contingit cognoscere dupliciter: scilicet in habitu et in actu. Contingit ergo aliquem peccantem rectam existimationem etiam de singulari operabili in habitu habere, non tamen in actu; quia in nobis habitus passione ligatur, ne in actum exeat circa considerationem particularis operandi, sicut ebrietate, ita et ira et concupiscentia; adeo ut si verba pronuntiet, sensum mente non teneat, in quantum iudicium rationis vehementia passionis absorbetur: unde dicitur in VI *Ethic.*, cap. V vel IV, quod delectatio corrumpit existimationem prudentiae. Sed quamvis hoc modo in angelis iudicium intellectus ligari non possit, eo quod tales passiones in eis non sunt, potest tamen ligari in quantum considerando unum retrahitur a consideratione alterius; eo quod ejus intellectus simul plurium non est, nisi sicut in verbo omnia contemplantur.”

<sup>44</sup>THOMAS AQUINAS, *In II Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, sol., ed. Vives, p. 77: “Contingit autem aliquid esse eligendum secundum unam conditionem rei consideratam, quod tamen eligendum non est, omnibus conditionibus concurrentibus consideratis; et ita potuit in angelis error electionis esse, et peccatum.”

stopped this process? Aquinas seems to acknowledge this problem and clarify what he means by the lack of consideration in the answer to the 4th objection of this question. He gives the example of a doctor who knows that certain medicine can help the patient, but this does not automatically mean that the doctor at this moment knows that the medicine is suitable for all patients, because he did not know it earlier, or did not consider it (*quam vel non cognoscit, vel non considerat*).<sup>45</sup> Although this example clarifies the problem of the lack of consideration, we still do not know why such consideration was absent. For further explanation we must look at Aquinas' discussion on the will as the cause of evil presented in *De malo*. The lack of consideration is not the sin in itself, sinful is only acting in the state of such lacking. When the will is borne to something that is good in some respect, but is linked to something which is unqualifiedly evil, it should pre-consider (*praeconsiderare*) a deficiency before it makes any choice.<sup>46</sup> Here, Aquinas uses a similar example of a carpenter who uses the rule to cut the wood. He usually uses it, but when he doesn't he fails to cut the wood straight.<sup>47</sup> In this context, however, after explaining the application of the rule to moral decisions, Aquinas adds that:

[...] the carpenter errs because he proceeds to cut the piece of wood without using the measuring bar, not because he does not always use the bar. And likewise, the moral fault of the will consists in the fact that the will proceeds to choose without using the rule of reason or God's law, not simply in the fact that the will does not actually attend to the rule.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *In II Sent.*, d. 5, q. 1, a. 1, ad 4, ed. Vives, p. 77: "[...] sicut medicus iudicans aliquid esse expediens uni aegroti secundum unam infirmitatem ejus consideratam, quod tamen non est sibi simpliciter expediens propter aliam aegritudinem, quam vel non cognoscit, vel non considerat."

<sup>46</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *De malo* q. 1, a. 3, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 16: "[...] in quantum uoluntas fertur in aliquid quod est bonum secundum aliquid, set habet coniunctum quod est simpliciter malum; set ut bonum deficiens in quantum oportet in uoluntate preconsiderare aliquem defectum ante ipsam electionem deficientem, per quam eligit secundum quid bonum quod est simpliciter malum."

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem: "Si ergo sit aliquis artifex qui debeat aliquod lignum recte incidere secundum aliquam regulam, si non directe incidat, quod est male incidere, hec mala incisio causabitur ex hoc defectu quod artifex erat sine regula et mensura."

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem: "[...] sicut artifex non peccat in eo quod non semper tenet mensuram, set ex hoc quod non tenens mensuram procedit ad incidendum. Et similiter culpa uoluntatis non est in hoc quod non actu attendit ad regulam rationis uel legis diuine." (transl. R. Regan, B. Davis, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) See also the comments on the topic by Tobias Hoffmann, who notices that this explanation by Aquinas was never mentioned by his successors who rejected his views on the angelic sin (cf. T. HOFFMANN, "Theories of Angelic Sin from Aquinas to Ockham," *A Companion to Angels in Medieval Philosophy*, ed. T. Hoffmann, (Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 35), Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2012, p. 277).

Returning to the question of the cause of the lack of consideration that led to the angelic sin, we can speculate that the will of angels was so inclined to obtain happiness that it did not allow the intellect even to consider that such willing was defective since it was not in accordance with a proper rule. Or rather there was no consideration in the intellect of angels because the intellect was simply overwhelmed by the will, and the will proceeded to action without the necessary consideration. So, can we finally say that Aquinas agrees with Anselm that it was only the will which caused the fall? To see the relations between the two thinkers properly, it is not only worth examining the cause of the fall, but also the kind of sin which was committed. In *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas names the sin which was committed by angels:

But there can be no sin when anyone is incited to the good of the spiritual order; unless in such affection the rule of the superior be not kept. Such is precisely the sin of pride — not to be subject to a superior when subjection is due. Consequently the first sin of the angel can be none other than pride.<sup>49</sup>

According to St. Anselm, as we remember, angels chose between the will of justice and the will of happiness. St. Thomas, however, does not see pride as the sin against justice but rather against temperance. More precisely, pride is the sin against a virtue of humility, which is a part of temperance.<sup>50</sup> However, we must have in mind that there is a difference between an angel and a man. In case of the latter, temperance is needed because passions of concupiscent power must be submitted to the order of reason, but since angels do not have passions there is a question whether temperance can even occur. This leads to an even more general question of whether we can distinguish any virtue in angels. Aquinas is tacit about it, but since the angels were created perfect, we can assume that their will was — like their intellect — naturally perfect from the very moment of creation. So, can we even say that they abandoned justice? Since this virtue can be described as applying the order of reason to external acts, it involves a certain order which in case of angels was abandoned when they tried to achieve ultimate happiness on their own without taking into account the will of God. So perhaps Anselm is right that it should be understood rather as the sin against justice, since it involves abandonment of the proper order.

Finally, it is worth noticing that Aquinas and Anselm agree that the fault lies in the very act of will, which abandoned something that was necessary. According to St. Anselm it was the abandonment of justice, while for St. Thomas it

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<sup>49</sup>THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, I, q. 63, a. 2, corp., ed. Leonina, p. 123: “In spiritualibus autem bonis non potest esse peccatum dum aliquis ad ea afficitur, nisi per hoc quod in tali affectu superioris regula non servatur. Et hoc est peccatum superbiae, non subdi superiori in eo quo debet.”

<sup>50</sup>Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *ST*, II-II, q. 161, a. 4, ed. Leonina, p. 299–300.

was the absence of consideration. Therefore it seems that for Aquinas the cause of sin was not a “pure” act of will but rather certain cooperation of intellect and will. Or rather the defect of the act of will occurs not in the will alone, but must be preceded by the defective cognition of the intellect. Consequently, the will follows the intellect which judges the objects as good or bad.<sup>51</sup> But this case is so interesting because Aquinas does not explain how to understand the defective activity of the angelic intellect or the lack of knowledge. He seems to refrain from ascribing such features to the perfect angelic cognition and only partially explains this problem by evoking the human examples of a doctor and a carpenter. Instead he says that certain act of intellect is missing, since it is the lack of consideration of things which ought to be considered. The problem still lies in the will, since it neither allowed nor ordered the intellect to consider what ought to be considered. This seems to be very close to Anselm’s answer that the will alone is responsible for the fall. But the difference is also visible, and pointing at the will as the main cause of sin does not necessarily mean that we should term Aquinas’ position voluntarist as Jacques Maritain did.<sup>52</sup> The main difference lies in the fact that there are two types of will for Anselm, or two inclinations which are primarily in the will. Judging this theory from St. Thomas’ position, we could say that there is a certain aspect of judgement in the will itself, since it determines whether to choose justice or happiness over justice. For Aquinas, the will itself cannot recognize the good, i.e. cannot see which one is better to choose and, since the will only chooses between the options shown by the intellect, there are no two types of the will. Therefore, in my opinion, we cannot say that Aquinas is a voluntarist, but it is also incorrect to call him an intellectual. In his explanation of the sin of angels he places himself rather in the middle between the two opposite positions. The sin was caused by both the intellect which failed to consider, and the will which did not will such a consideration.

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<sup>51</sup>Tobias Hoffmann claims that this is the main difference between Aquinas and his predecessors (T. HOFFMANN, *Theories of Angelic Sin from Aquinas to Ockham*, p. 286: “The dominant view among earlier theologians was that the will is free to act either in accord with or against the judgment of reason. For Aquinas, by contrast, the will desires or chooses as reason judges”).

<sup>52</sup>Cf. J. MARITAIN, “Le péché de l’Ange,” *Revue Thomiste*, vol. 56 (1956), p. 197–239.

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## HOW CAN A SPIRITUAL CREATURE CHOOSE EVIL? ANSELM OF CANTERBURY AND THOMAS AQUINAS ON THE SIN OF ANGELS

### S U M M A R Y

Although the sin of angels seems to be only a theological issue, it is a very interesting case of the choice which was made by intellectually perfect creatures, and therefore it can be helpful in understanding the very nature of choice. This article analyses the two most significant views on the matter as presented by St. Anselm of Canterbury in his dialogue *On the Fall of the Devil*, and by St. Thomas Aquinas in the first part of *Summa Theologiae*. The problem is the role of the intellect and the will in the process of decision making and which of these powers seems to be more important in case of the sin of angels. The main problem of St. Anselm's analysis lies in the question of how angels could have chosen freely, since only freedom of their choice can dismiss the claim that God is the one to be blamed for their fall. St. Anselm claims that God gave angels two types of will: the will of justice and the will of beatitude, and since angels lacked something to achieve the ultimate beatitude, they preferred happiness over justice. The focus is then on the act of will, which seems to make the choice without the need of any other cause.

Although St. Thomas knew of Anselm's dialogue, it seems that he did not refer to it while discussing the sin of angels. Although he ultimately agrees that the cause of the fall of angels was a defective act of will, he sees the problem not in the will alone, but rather in the intellectual aspect of the decision. Aquinas makes a distinction between the two kinds of beatitude and shows that although angels after the creation had natural beatitude, they lacked ultimate beatitude, that is seeing God as He is. Angels wanted to obtain this ultimate beatitude by their own power regardless of the rectitude which their action ought to have — and this was insubordination to the rule of the Divine will. According to St. Thomas, the defect of the act laid in not considering the thing

which ought to be considered, and therefore it was a lack of consideration. This lack of consideration was possible because angelic cognition was not perfect, and therefore they considered their choice only in one aspect while abandoning other possible views on the matter. However, this defect of consideration was also the effect of the action or restraining of the action of will which did not allow or did not order them to make it. Finally, Aquinas's answer seems to show a balance between the cognitive and voluntary aspects of the angelic sin.

KEYWORDS: Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, angels, sin, free choice

SŁOWA KLUCZE: Anzelm z Canterbury, Tomasz z Akwinu, aniołowie, grzech, wolność wyboru