

Augustine, from *On Free Choice of the Will*

St. Augustine (354–430 B.C.), a philosopher from northern Africa, was the most prominent philosopher for Christianity in its first millennium. He developed an influential synthesis between Platonism and Christianity. In this excerpt from On Free Choice of the Will, Augustine argues that although God foresees everything that happens, and God’s foresight is never mistaken, we nevertheless have the sort of free will required for moral responsibility. He also argues that God’s goodness is reconcilable with the creation of free beings whom he knows in advance will sin, because the existence of beings with free will who sin is better than their nonexistence.

Book Two

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

AUGUSTINE: Do you know for certain God gave us this thing that you think should not have been given?

EVODIUS: If I understood Book One correctly, we have free choice of the will and we cannot sin without it.

AUGUSTINE: I too remember that that had become quite clear to us. But what I asked just now was whether you knew that it was *God* who gave us this thing, which we clearly have and by which we sin.

EVODIUS: Who else would it be? For we have our existence from God, and it is from him that we deserve punishment for doing wrong and reward for doing good.

AUGUSTINE: Here again I want to know whether you know this for certain, or whether you willingly believe it on the urging of some authority, without actually knowing it.

EVODIUS: I admit that at first I believed this on authority. But what could be truer than that everything good comes from God, that everything

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just is good, and that it is just for sinners to be punished and the good rewarded? From this I conclude that it is God who afflicts sinners with unhappiness and confers happiness on the good.

AUGUSTINE: I make no objection. But I do have one further question: How do you know that we have our existence from God? You did not explain that; you showed only that it is from him that we deserve punishment or reward.

EVODIUS: That is an obvious consequence of the fact that God, as the source of all justice, punishes sins. It may be that goodness confers benefits on those not committed to its charge, but justice does not punish those not in its jurisdiction. So it is obvious that we belong to God, because he is not only most generous in conferring benefits but also most just in punishing.

Furthermore, I claimed, and you agreed, that everything good is from God. From this we can understand that human beings too are from God. For human beings as such are good things, since they can live rightly if they so will.

AUGUSTINE: If all of this is true, the question you posed has clearly been answered. If human beings are good things, and they cannot do right unless they so will, then they ought to have a free will, without which they cannot do right. True, they can also use free will to sin, but we should not therefore believe that God gave them free will so that they would be able to sin. The fact that human beings could not live rightly without it was sufficient reason for God to give it. The very fact that anyone who uses free will to sin is divinely punished shows that free will was given to enable human beings to live rightly, for such punishment would be unjust if free will had been given both for living rightly and for sinning. After all, how could someone justly be punished for using the will for the very purpose for which it was given? When God punishes a sinner, don't you think he is saying, "Why didn't you use your free will for the purpose for which I gave it to you?"—that is, for living rightly?

And as for the goodness that we so admired in God's justice—his punishing sins and rewarding good deeds—how could it even exist if human beings lacked the free choice of the will? No action would be either a sin or a good deed if it were not performed by the will, and so both punishment and reward would be unjust if human beings had no free will. But it was right for there to be justice in both reward and punishment, since this is one of the goods that come from God. Therefore, it was right for God to give free will to human beings.

EVODIUS: I concede that point now. But don't you think that if free will was given to us for living rightly, we ought not to have been able to pervert

it and use it for sinning? It should have been like justice, which was also given to human beings to enable them to live well. No one can use justice to live wickedly. In the same way, it ought to be the case that no one could use the will to sin, if indeed the will was given for acting rightly.

AUGUSTINE: God will, I hope, enable me to reply to you—or rather, he will enable you to reply to yourself, as Truth, the greatest teacher of all, teaches you within. But first I want you to tell me this. I asked whether you knew for certain that God gave us free will, and you said that you did. So now that we have agreed that he gave us free will, should we presume to say that it should not have been given? If there is some doubt whether it was God who gave it, it is appropriate for us to ask whether it was a good gift; and if we find that it was, then we have also found that it was given by God, from whom the soul has all good gifts. But if we find that it was not a good gift, we will understand that it was not given by God, whom it is impious to blame. But if it is quite certain that God gave us free will, then we must admit that it ought to have been given, and in exactly the way that it was given; for God gave it, and his deeds are utterly beyond reproach.

EVODIUS: Although I hold these things with unshaken faith, let's investigate them as if they were all uncertain, since I do not yet *know* them. It is uncertain whether free will was given for doing right, since we can also use it to sin; consequently, it is also uncertain whether it ought to have been given. For if it is uncertain whether it was given for doing right, then it is also uncertain whether it ought to have been given. This means in turn that it is doubtful whether it was given by God. For if it is doubtful whether it ought to have been given, then it is also doubtful whether it was given by God, since it is impious to believe that God gave something that should not have been given. . . .

EVODIUS: I confess that I am quite convinced that this is the way to prove that God exists—as well as it can be proven in this life among people like us. And I am also convinced that all good things come from God, since everything that exists—whether that which has understanding, life, and existence, or that which has only life and existence, or that which has existence alone—is from God. Now let's take a look at the third question and see whether it can be resolved: should free will be included among those good things? Once that has been shown, I will concede without hesitation that God gave it to us, and that he was right to do so.

AUGUSTINE: You have done a good job of remembering what we set out to do, and you have most astutely realized that the second question has now been answered. But you ought to have seen that the third question too has already been answered. You had said that it seemed that God should

not have given us free choice of the will, because whoever sins does so by free choice. I said in reply that no one can act rightly except by that same free choice of the will, and I affirmed that God gave us free choice in order to enable us to act rightly. You replied that free will should have been given to us in the same way that justice is given; no one can use justice wrongly. That reply of yours drove us into a roundabout path of discussion; along the way we showed that there is nothing good, however great or small, that is not from God. But that fact could not be shown clearly enough until we had first challenged the irreligious stupidity of the fool who "said in his heart, 'There is no God'."¹ by attempting to find some evident truth to the contrary, going as far as our reason can take us in such an important matter, with God helping us along this precarious path. But these two facts—I mean that God exists and that every good thing is from him—which of course we believed quite confidently even before this discussion, have now been so thoroughly considered that this third fact seems altogether obvious: free will should indeed be counted as a good thing.

For earlier in our discussion it had become clear, and we had agreed, that the nature of the body is at a lower level than the nature of the soul, and so the soul is a greater good than the body. But even when we find good things in the body that we can use wrongly, we do not say that they ought not to have been given to the body, for we admit that they are in fact good. So why should it be surprising that there are also good things in the soul that we can use wrongly, but which, since they are in fact good, can only have been given by him from whom all good things come?

Consider what a great good a body is missing if it has no hands. And yet people use their hands wrongly in committing violent or shameful acts. If you see someone who has no feet, you admit that his physical well-being is impaired by the absence of so great a good, and yet you would not deny that someone who uses his feet to harm someone else or to disgrace himself is using them wrongly. By our eyes we see light and we distinguish the forms of material objects. They are the most beautiful thing in our bodies, so they were put into the place of greatest dignity; and we use them to preserve our safety and to secure many other good things in life. Nonetheless, many people use their eyes to do many evil things and press them into the service of inordinate desire; and yet you realize what a great good is missing in a face that has no eyes. But when they are present, who gave them, if not God, the generous giver of all good things? So just as you approve of these good things in the body and praise the one who gave

1. Psalm 14:1; 53:1

them, disregarding those who use them wrongly, you should admit that free will, without which no one can live rightly, is a good and divine gift. You should condemn those who misuse this good rather than saying that he who gave it should not have given it.

EVODIUS: But first I would like for you to prove that free will is a good thing, and then I will concede that God gave it to us, since I admit that all good things come from God.

AUGUSTINE: But didn't I just go to a great deal of trouble to prove that in our earlier discussion, when you admitted that every species and form of every material object subsists from the highest form of all things, that is, from truth, and when you conceded that they are good? The truth itself tells us in the gospel that the very hairs of our head are numbered.² Have you forgotten what we said about the supremacy of number, and its power reaching from end to end? What perversity, then, to number the hairs of our head among the good things, though of course among the least and most trivial goods, and to attribute them to God, the creator of all good things—for both the greatest and the least goods come from him from whom all good things come—and yet to have doubts about free will, when even those who lead the worst lives admit that no one can live rightly without it! Tell me now, which is better: something without which we *can* live rightly, or something without which we *cannot* live rightly?

EVODIUS: Please, stop; I am ashamed of my blindness. Who could doubt that something without which no one lives rightly is far superior?

AUGUSTINE: Would you deny that a one-eyed man can live rightly?

EVODIUS: That would be crazy.

AUGUSTINE: But you admit that an eye is something good in the body, even though losing it does not interfere with living rightly. So don't you think that free will is a good, since no one can live rightly without it? Look at justice, which no one uses wrongly. Justice, and indeed all the virtues of the soul, are counted among the highest goods that are in human beings, because they constitute an upright and worthy life. For no one uses prudence or fortitude or temperance wrongly; right reason, without which they would not even be virtues, prevails in all of them, just as it does in justice, which you mentioned. And no one can use right reason wrongly.

Therefore, these virtues are great goods. But you must remember that even the lowest goods can exist only from him from whom all good things come, that is, from God. For that was the conclusion of our previous discussion, which you so gladly assented to many times. Thus, the virtues,

2. Cf. Matthew 10:30

by which one lives rightly, are great goods; the beauty of various material objects, without which one can live rightly, are the lowest goods; and the powers of the soul, without which one cannot live rightly, are intermediate goods. No one uses the virtues wrongly, but the other goods, both the lowest and the intermediate, can be used either rightly or wrongly. The virtues cannot be used wrongly precisely because it is their function to make the right use of things that can also be used wrongly, and no one uses something wrongly by using it rightly. So the abundant generosity of the goodness of God has bestowed not only the great goods, but also the lowest and intermediate goods. His goodness deserves more praise for the great goods than for the intermediate goods, and more for the intermediate goods than for the lowest goods; but it deserves more praise for creating all of them than it would deserve for creating only some of them.

EVODIUS: I agree. But there is one thing that concerns me. We see that it is free will that uses other things either rightly or wrongly. So how can free will itself be included among the things that we use?

AUGUSTINE: In the same way that we know by reason everything that we know, and yet reason itself is included among the things that we know by reason. Or have you forgotten that when we were asking what we know by reason, you admitted that we know reason itself by means of reason? So don't be surprised that, even though we use other things by free will, we also use free will itself by means of free will, so that the will that uses other things also uses itself, just as the reason that knows other things also knows itself. Similarly, memory not only grasps everything else that we remember, but also somehow retains itself in us, since we do not forget that we have a memory. It remembers not only other things but also itself; or rather, through memory we remember not only other things, but also memory itself.

Therefore, when the will, which is an intermediate good, cleaves to the unchangeable good that is common, not private—namely, the truth, of which we have said much, but nothing adequate—then one has a happy life. And the happy life, that is, the disposition of a soul that cleaves to the unchangeable good, is the proper and principal good for a human being. It contains all the virtues, which no one can use wrongly. Now the virtues, although they are great and indeed the foremost things in human beings, are not sufficiently common, since they belong exclusively to the individual human being who possesses them. But truth and wisdom are common to all, and all who are wise and happy become so by cleaving to truth and wisdom. No one becomes happy by someone else's happiness; even if you

pattern yourself after someone else in order to become happy, your desire is to attain happiness from the same source as the other person, that is, from the unchangeable truth that is common to you both. No one becomes prudent by someone else's prudence, or resolute by someone else's fortitude, or temperate by someone else's temperance, or just by someone else's justice. Instead, you regulate your soul by those unchangeable rules and lights of the virtues that dwell incorruptibly in the common truth and wisdom, just as the one whose virtue you set out to imitate regulated his soul and fixed it upon those rules.

Therefore, when the will cleaves to the common and unchangeable good, it attains the great and foremost goods for human beings, even though the will itself is only an intermediate good. But when the will turns away from the unchangeable and common good toward its own private good, or toward external or inferior things, it sins. It turns toward its own private good when it wants to be under its own control; it turns toward external things when it is keen on things that belong to others or have nothing to do with itself; it turns toward inferior things when it takes delight in physical pleasure. In this way one becomes proud, meddlesome, and lustful; one is caught up into a life that, by comparison with the higher life, is death. But even that life is governed by divine providence, which places all things in their proper order and gives everyone what he deserves.

Hence, the goods that are pursued by sinners are in no way evil things, and neither is free will itself, which we found is to be counted among the intermediate goods. What is evil is the turning of the will away from the unchangeable good and toward changeable goods. And since this turning is not coerced, but voluntary, it is justly and deservedly punished with misery.

But perhaps you are going to ask what is the source of this movement by which the will turns away from the unchangeable good toward a changeable good. This movement is certainly evil, even though free will itself is to be counted among good things, since no one can live rightly without it. For if that movement, that turning away from the Lord God, is undoubtedly sin, surely we cannot say that God is the cause of sin. So that movement is not from God. But then where does it come from? If I told you that I don't know, you might be disappointed; but that would be the truth. For one cannot know that which is nothing.

You must simply hold with unshaken faith that every good thing that you perceive or understand or in any way know is from God. For any nature you come across is from God. So if you see anything at all that has

measure, number, and order, do not hesitate to attribute it to God as craftsman. If you take away all measure, number, and order, there is absolutely nothing left. Even if the rudiments of a form remain, in which you find neither measure nor number nor order—since wherever those things are there is a complete form—you must take that away too, for it seems to be like the material on which the craftsman works. For if the completion of form is a good, then the rudiments of a form are themselves not without goodness. So if you take away everything that is good, you will have absolutely nothing left. But every good thing comes from God, so there is no nature that does not come from God. On the other hand, every defect comes from nothing, and that movement of turning away, which we admit is sin, is a defective movement. So you see where that movement comes from; you may be sure that it does not come from God.

But since that movement is voluntary, it has been placed under our control. If you fear it, do not will it; and if you do not will it, it will not exist. What greater security could there be than to have a life in which nothing can happen to you that you do not will? But since we cannot pick ourselves up voluntarily as we fell voluntarily, let us hold with confident faith the right hand of God—that is, our Lord Jesus Christ—which has been held out to us from on high. Let us await him with resolute hope and desire him with ardent charity. But if you think that we need to discuss the origin of sin more carefully, we must postpone that for another discussion.

EVODIUS: I will bow to your will and postpone this question, for I don't think that we have investigated it thoroughly enough yet.

Book Three

EVODIUS: It has been demonstrated to my satisfaction that free will is to be numbered among good things, and indeed not among the least of them, and therefore that it was given to us by God, who acted rightly in giving it. So now, if you think that this is a good time, I would like you to explain the source of the movement by which the will turns away from the common and unchangeable good toward its own good, or the good of others, or lower goods, all of which are changeable.

AUGUSTINE: Why do we need to know that?

EVODIUS: Because if the will was given to us in such a way that it had this movement naturally, then it turned to changeable goods by necessity, and there is no blame involved when nature and necessity determine an action.

AUGUSTINE: Does this movement please you or displease you?

EVODIUS: It displeases me.

AUGUSTINE: So you find fault with it.

EVODIUS: Of course.

AUGUSTINE: Then you find fault with a blameless movement of the soul.

EVODIUS: No, it's just that I don't know whether there is any blame involved when the soul deserts the unchangeable good and turns toward changeable goods.

AUGUSTINE: Then you find fault with what you don't know.

EVODIUS: Don't quibble over words. In saying, "I don't know whether there is any blame involved," I meant it to be understood that there undoubtedly *is* blame involved. The "I don't know" implied that it was ridiculous to have doubts about such an obvious fact.

AUGUSTINE: Then pay close attention to this most certain truth, which has caused you to forget so quickly what you just said. If that movement existed by nature or necessity, it could in no way be blameworthy. But you are so firmly convinced that this movement is indeed blameworthy that you think it would be ridiculous to entertain doubts about something so certain. Why then did you affirm, or at least tentatively assert, something that now seems to you clearly false? For this is what you said: "If the will was given to us in such a way that it had this movement naturally, then it turned to changeable goods by necessity, and there is no blame involved when nature and necessity determine an action." Since you are sure that this movement was blameworthy, you should have been quite sure that the will was not given to us in such a way.

EVODIUS: I said that this movement was blameworthy and that therefore it displeases me. And I am surely right to find fault with it. But I deny that a soul ought to be blamed when this movement pulls it away from the unchangeable good toward changeable goods, if this movement is so much a part of its nature that it is moved by necessity.

AUGUSTINE: You admit that this movement certainly deserves blame; but *whose* movement is it?

EVODIUS: I see that the movement is in the soul, but I don't know whose it is.

AUGUSTINE: Surely you don't deny that the soul is moved by this movement.

EVODIUS: No.

AUGUSTINE: Do you deny that a movement by which a stone is moved

is a movement of the stone? I'm not talking about a movement that is caused by us or some other force, as when it is thrown into the air, but the movement that occurs when it falls to the earth by its own weight.

EVODIUS: I don't deny that this movement, by which the stone seeks the lowest place, is a movement of the stone. But it is a natural movement. If that's the sort of movement the soul has, then the soul's movement is also natural. And if it is moved naturally, it cannot justly be blamed; even if it is moved toward something evil, it is compelled by its own nature. But since we don't doubt that this movement is blameworthy, we must absolutely deny that it is natural, and so it is not similar to the natural movement of a stone.

AUGUSTINE: Did we accomplish anything in our first two discussions?

EVODIUS: Of course we did.

AUGUSTINE: I'm sure you recall that in Book One we agreed that nothing can make the mind a slave to inordinate desire except its own will. For the will cannot be forced into such iniquity by anything superior or equal to it, since that would be unjust; or by anything inferior to it, since that is impossible. Only one possibility remains: the movement by which the will turns from enjoying the Creator to enjoying his creatures belongs to the will itself. So if that movement deserves blame (and you said it was ridiculous to entertain doubts on that score), then it is not natural, but voluntary.

This movement of the will is similar to the downward movement of a stone in that it belongs to the will just as that downward movement belongs to the stone. But the two movements are dissimilar in this respect: the stone has no power to check its downward movement, but the soul is not moved to abandon higher things and love inferior things unless it wills to do so. And so the movement of the stone is natural, but the movement of the soul is voluntary. If someone were to say that a stone is sinning because its weight carries it downward, I would not merely say that he was more senseless than the stone itself; I would consider him completely insane. But we accuse a soul of sin when we are convinced that it has abandoned higher things and chosen to enjoy inferior things. Now we admit that this movement belongs to the will alone, and that it is voluntary and therefore blameworthy; and the only useful teaching on this topic is that which condemns and checks this movement and thus serves to rescue our wills from their fall into temporal goods and turn them toward the enjoyment of the eternal good. Therefore, what need is there to ask about the source of the movement by which the will turns away from the unchangeable good toward changeable good?

EVODIUS: I see that what you are saying is true, and in a way I understand it. There is nothing I feel so firmly and so intimately as that I have a will by which I am moved to enjoy something. If the will by which I choose or refuse things is not mine, then I don't know what I can call mine. So if I use my will to do something evil, whom can I hold responsible but myself? For a good God made me, and I can do nothing good except through my will; therefore, it is quite clear that the will was given to me by a good God so that I might do good. If the movement of the will by which it turns this way or that were not voluntary and under its own control, a person would not deserve praise for turning to higher things or blame for turning to lower things, as if swinging on the hinge of the will. Furthermore, there would be no point in admonishing people to forget about lower things and strive for what is eternal, so that they might refuse to live badly but instead will to live rightly. And anyone who does not think that we ought to admonish people in this way deserves to be banished from the human race.

Since these things are true, I very much wonder how God can have foreknowledge of everything in the future, and yet we do not sin by necessity. It would be an irreligious and completely insane attack on God's foreknowledge to say that something could happen otherwise than as God foreknew. So suppose that God foreknew that the first human being was going to sin. Anyone who admits, as I do, that God foreknows everything in the future will have to grant me that. Now I won't say that God would not have made him—for God made him good, and no sin of his can harm God, who not only made him good but showed His own goodness by creating him, as He also shows His justice by punishing him and His mercy by redeeming him—but I will say this: since God foreknew that he was going to sin, his sin necessarily had to happen. How, then, is the will free when such inescapable necessity is found in it?

AUGUSTINE: You have knocked powerfully on the door of God's mercy; may it be present and open the door to those who knock. Nevertheless, I think the only reason that most people are tormented by this question is that they do not ask it piously; they are more eager to excuse than to confess their sins. Some people gladly believe that there is no divine providence in charge of human affairs. They put their bodies and their souls at the mercy of chance and give themselves up to be beaten and mangled by inordinate desires. They disbelieve divine judgments and evade human judgments, thinking that fortune will defend them from those who accuse them. They depict this "fortune" as blind, implying either that they are better than fortune, by which they think they are ruled, or that they themselves suffer from the same blindness. It is per-

fectly reasonable to admit that such people do everything by chance, since in whatever they do, they fall.³ But we said enough in Book Two to combat this opinion, which is full of the most foolish and insane error.

Others, however, are not impertinent enough to deny that the providence of God rules over human life; but they prefer the wicked error of believing that it is weak, or unjust, or evil, rather than confessing their sins with humble supplication. If only they would let themselves be convinced that, when they think of what is best and most just and most powerful, the goodness and justice and power of God are far greater and far higher than anything they can conceive; if only they would consider themselves and understand that they would owe thanks to God even if he had willed to make them lower than they are. Then the very bone and marrow of their conscience would cry out, "I said, 'O Lord, have mercy upon me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against you'."⁴ Thus they would be led in the secure paths of divine mercy along the road to wisdom, not becoming conceited when they made new discoveries or disheartened when they failed to do so. Their new knowledge would simply prepare them to see more, and their ignorance would make them more patient in seeking the truth. Of course I'm sure that you already believe this. But you will see how easily I can answer your difficult question once I have answered a few preliminary questions.

Surely this is the problem that is disturbing and puzzling you. How is it that these two propositions are not contradictory and inconsistent: (1) God has foreknowledge of everything in the future; and (2) We sin by the will, not by necessity? For, you say, if God foreknows that someone is going to sin, then it is necessary that he sin. But if it is necessary, the will has no choice about whether to sin; there is an inescapable and fixed necessity. And so you fear that this argument forces us into one of two positions: either we draw the heretical conclusion that God does not foreknow everything in the future; or, if we cannot accept this conclusion, we must admit that sin happens by necessity and not by will. Isn't that what is bothering you?

EVODIUS: That's it exactly.

AUGUSTINE: So you think that anything that God foreknows happens by necessity and not by will.

EVODIUS: Precisely.

3. The Latin word for 'chance' (*casus*) is derived from the verb 'to fall' (*cadere*).

4. Psalm 41:4

AUGUSTINE: Now pay close attention. Look inside yourself for a little while, and tell me, if you can, what sort of will you are going to have tomorrow: a will to do right or a will to sin?

EVODIUS: I don't know.

AUGUSTINE: Do you think that God doesn't know either?

EVODIUS: Not at all—God certainly does know.

AUGUSTINE: Well then, if God knows what you are going to will tomorrow, and foresees the future wills of every human being, both those who exist now and those who will exist in the future, he surely foresees how he is going to treat the just and the irreligious.

EVODIUS: Clearly, if I say that God foreknows all of my actions, I can much more confidently say that he foreknows his own actions and foresees with absolute certainty what he is going to do.

AUGUSTINE: Then aren't you worried that someone might object that God himself will act out of necessity rather than by his will in everything that he is going to do? After all, you said that whatever God foreknows happens by necessity, not by will.

EVODIUS: When I said that, I was thinking only of what happens in his creation and not of what happens within himself. For those things do not come into being; they are eternal.

AUGUSTINE: So God does nothing in his creation.

EVODIUS: He has already established, once for all, the ways in which the universe that he created is to be governed; he does not administer anything by a new act of will.

AUGUSTINE: Doesn't he make anyone happy?

EVODIUS: Of course he does.

AUGUSTINE: And he does this when that person is made happy.

EVODIUS: Right.

AUGUSTINE: Then suppose, for example, that you are going to be happy a year from now. That means that a year from now God is going to make you happy.

EVODIUS: That's right too.

AUGUSTINE: And God knows today what he is going to do a year from now.

EVODIUS: He has always foreknown this, so I admit that he foreknows it now, if indeed it is really going to happen.

AUGUSTINE: Then surely you are not God's creature, or else your happiness does not take place in you.

EVODIUS: But I am God's creature, and my happiness does take place in me.

AUGUSTINE: Then the happiness that God gives you takes place by necessity and not by will.

EVODIUS: His will *is* my necessity.

AUGUSTINE: And so you will be happy against your will.

EVODIUS: If I had the power to be happy, I would be happy right now. Even now I will to be happy, but I'm not, since it is God who makes me happy. I cannot do it for myself.

AUGUSTINE: How clearly the truth speaks through you! You could not help thinking that the only thing that is within our power is that which we do when we will it. Therefore, nothing is so much within our power as the will itself, for it is near at hand the very moment that we will. So we can rightly say, "We grow old by necessity, not by will"; or "We become feeble by necessity, not by will"; or "We die by necessity, not by will," and other such things. But who would be crazy enough to say "We do not will by the will"? Therefore, although God foreknows what we are going to will in the future, it does not follow that we do not will by the will.

When you said that you cannot make yourself happy, you said it as if I had denied it. Not at all; I am merely saying that when you do become happy, it will be in accordance with your will, not against your will. Simply because God foreknows your future happiness—and nothing can happen except as God foreknows it, since otherwise it would not be foreknowledge—it does not follow that you will be happy against your will. That would be completely absurd and far from the truth. So God's foreknowledge, which is certain even today of your future happiness, does not take away your will for happiness once you have begun to be happy; and in the same way, your blameworthy will (if indeed you are going to have such a will) does not cease to be a will simply because God foreknows that you are going to have it.

Just notice how imperceptive someone would have to be to argue thus: "If God has foreknown my future will, it is necessary that I will what he has foreknown, since nothing can happen otherwise than as he has foreknown it. But if it is necessary, then one must concede that I will it by necessity and not by will." What extraordinary foolishness! If God foreknew a future will that turned out not to be a will at all, things would indeed happen otherwise than as God foreknew them. And I will overlook this objector's equally monstrous statement that "it is necessary that I will," for by assuming necessity he tries to abolish will. For if his willing is necessary, how does he will, since there is no will?

Suppose he expressed it in another way and said that, since his willing is necessary, his will is not in his own power. This would run up against the

same problem that you had when I asked whether you were going to be happy against your will. You replied that you would already be happy if you had the power; you said that you have the will but not the power. I answered that the truth had spoken through you. For we can deny that something is in our power only if it is not present even when we will it; but if we will, and yet the will remains absent, then we are not really willing at all. Now if it is impossible for us not to will when we are willing, then the will is present to those who will; and if something is present when we will it, then it is in our power. So our will would not be a will if it were not in our power. And since it is in our power, we are free with respect to it. But we are not free with respect to anything that we do not have in our power, and anything that we have cannot be nothing.

Thus, we believe both that God has foreknowledge of everything in the future and that nonetheless we will whatever we will. Since God foreknows our will, the very will that he foreknows will be what comes about. Therefore, it will be a will, since it is a will that he foreknows. And it could not be a will unless it were in our power. Therefore, he also foreknows this power. It follows, then, that his foreknowledge does not take away my power; in fact, it is all the more certain that I will have that power, since he whose foreknowledge never errs foreknows that I will have it.

EVODIUS: I agree now that it is necessary that whatever God has foreknown will happen, and that he foreknows our sins in such a way that our wills remain free and are within our power. . . .