Revisiting "*propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*" in Augustine's *De Libero Arbitrio*

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Abstract: In the first book of De Libero Arbitrio, Augustine concludes that the origin of evil is "its own will and free decision" (propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium) (1. 11. 21). Despite its importance for the development of Augustine's theory of will, researchers have largely ignored this statement and failed to provide a detailed analysis of it. This paper will, by contrast, take this claim seriously, aiming to reveal its full philosophical significance by focusing on the function of the concept of will.

In the first section, I begin by exploring the meaning of propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium by analyzing it word by word and situating it in its proper context. I show that this expression is composed of words with legal nuances and that, taken as a whole, it expresses the view that nothing other than the mind itself subjugates the mind to desire. In the second section, I focus on Augustine's formulation of philosophical inquiry in his earliest treatises before De Libero Arbitrio, showing that it consists of three steps: the purification of desire, the exercise of reason, and the contemplation of the Truth. In the final section, I demonstrate that propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium forced Augustine to reorganize the model of the soul and of philosophical inquiry that he had forged since his earliest days. A new program of philosophical inquiry, which was formulated later in De Doctrina Christiana, places the purification at the final stage, suggesting that the concept of will was the driving force in transforming how Augustine engages in philosophy.

Introduction

In the first book of *De Libero Arbitrio* (388, hereafter *lib. arb.*[1]), Augustine reaches the conclusion that the origin of evil is "its own will and free decision" (*propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*) (1. 11. 21). This phrase represents the decisive moment when, for the first time, Augustine—one of the most influential figures in the

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[1] Quotations from Augustine's works in English are based on the translations listed in the bibliography, with some modifications to reflect the structure and nuance of the original Latin text.

historical development of the concept of will[2]—took up the problem of the will in his writings as being of central importance to his philosophy. I would contend, however, that not enough attention has been paid to this phrase or to the first book of *De Libero Arbitrio*. Peter Brown, in his classic biography, depicted Augustine in 386–391 as a young optimistic philosopher who was not yet mature, or even "more Pelagian than Pelagius" (Brown, 1967/2014, p. 141).[3] In the detailed analyses of the first book of *De Libero Arbitrio* by Paul Séjourné and Robert O'Connell, the significance of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* was hardly noticed,[4] for their aim was to place this work in a larger context (for Séjourné, the spiritual progress or conversion of Augustine; for O'Connell, the influence of Neoplatonism and Stoicism). Even in Simon Harrison's recent monograph, *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* is passed over and quickly replaced by the shorter term *uoluntas* (Harrison, 2006, p. 68f). For many readers, this phrase has been taken as a slogan to quote rather than a claim to be studied. What, then, did this phrase mean to Augustine when he was writing *lib. arb.*? That is, what is the significance of the concept of will as the origin of evil in the first book of this work?

This paper tackles this question by focusing on the function of the concept of will, in the sense of its influence on Augustine's broader philosophical inquiry. More popular themes, such as the precise definition of the will, the problem of theodicy, and its compatibility with determinism, all fall outside the scope of this paper. Instead, its aim is to examine the notion of the will at a microscopic, practical level. Already before the *lib. arb.*, Augustine had undertaken an extensive investigation of the origin of evil and moral psychology. Thus, the introduction of the concept of will ought to

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[2] It is no longer possible to regard Augustine as the privileged "inventor" of the concept of will, given the long debate over Augustine's position in the history of the concept of will that was sparked by Albrecht Dihle's *Theory of Will in Classical Antiquity* (1982). Dihle argues that the concept of will cannot be found in Greek and Latin philosophy before Augustine (Dihle, 1982, pp. 123–144). Michael Frede, on the other hand, criticizes Dihle by highlighting the Stoic essence of Augustine's concept of will (Frede, 2012, p. 173f). In my view, they are both too simplistic to grasp the complex nature and background of Augustine's concept of will. As Richard Sorabji suggested, we should view Augustine as one of many philosophers who contributed to the historical process of "clustering" the diverse mental functions into a single concept of "*uoluntas*" (Sorabji, 2000, p. 337).

[3] For a critique of Brown's influence on the studies of *De Libero Arbitrio*, see Madec, 1994, p. 135, and Harrison, 2006, pp. 28–62.

[4] Séjoruné comments that "il [=Augustin] ne trouve que cette explication [=*propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*], ambiguë, s'il en fut, qui était celle de saint Ambroise, il y a trois ou quatre ans, à Milan" (Séjourné, 1951, p. 343, n. 1), as if to say it was a mere borrowing from Ambrose. O'Connell (1970) has no mention of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*.

have brought about some changes in Augustine's philosophy. Otherwise, the claim that the will is the origin of evil would be almost meaningless, amounting to a mere change of label lacking substantial philosophical novelty. My goal here is to assess the scope of this "change", arguing that the concept of will altered Augustine's approach to philosophy.

This paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, I concentrate on explicating the meaning of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*. A close analysis of the terms "*proprius*" and "*liber*" will confirm that we should understand *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* as a claim that the submission of the mind to desire results from nothing other than the mind itself. The second section temporarily leaves aside *lib. arb.*, shifting the focus to earlier writings, especially *Soliloquia*. Here, I show that the structure of the philosophical inquiry in the Cassiciacum period consists of three steps: the purification of desire, the exercise of reason, and the contemplation of Truth. The final section will consider the function of the concept of will based on the discussion in the first and second sections. I argue that the introduction of the concept of will brought about a crucial change with regard to the possibility of the purification of the soul, and thus fundamentally transformed the young Augustine's approach to philosophical inquiry.

1. The meaning of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*

Before attempting to interpret the concept of will, it should be stressed that *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* is a tricky phrase that requires careful attention. It is tempting to think that Augustine is referring here to the notion of "free will", since he himself juxtaposes the words "will" (*uoluntas*) and "free" (*liber*). The term "free will" is so familiar to modern readers that it is easy to assume that we can gain some understanding of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* by replacing it with the former expression. But this would be a mistake for two reasons: First, there is a danger of anachronism, since the concept of free will as we know it is also a historical product— hence we cannot take it for granted that Augustine had the same concept of free will as we do. Second, and more importantly, the meaning of freedom in the language of young Augustine is far removed from what we understand by the notion of "freedom of the will". If we examine the terms *liber* or *liberare* at the time of *lib. arb.*, we find that, in a philosophical or theological context, their use is limited to the ultimate stage

in philosophy, in which the soul is "liberated" from the condition of this world.[5] There is a clear difference between this "freedom as liberation" and our notion of "freedom of the will", since "freedom of the will" is something we have by default, while "freedom as liberation" is a goal to be achieved in the future (or after death, if it is attainable at all).[6] Therefore, the interpretation of the expression *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* represents a major challenge for us, one that should be resolved by examining Augustine's language and context.

(1) *Voluntas* and *arbitrium*

I propose to read *et* appositionally, such that *propria uoluntas* and *liberum arbitrium* indicate a single state of affairs. Let us start with *uoluntas* and *arbitrium*. Some studies try to make a conceptual distinction between them. For instance, Kirwan and Rist claim that *arbitrium* and *uoluntas* differ in meaning, arguing that *liber* exclusively modifies *arbitrium* to create the technical term *liberum arbitrium* and hence that the expression *libera uoluntas* is merely a "lapse from this correct conclusion" (Kirwan, 1989, p. 86f) or "an alternative for *liberum arbitrium uoluntatis*" (Rist, 1994, p. 186, n. 91). There are, however, 34 appearances of *libera uoluntas* in the second and the third books of *lib. arb.*—a number that is hard to explain on Rist and Kirwan's interpretation. Moreover, as Rist and Kirwan would agree, in all these instances *libera uoluntas* means substantially the same thing as *liberum arbitrium*. Therefore, there is no reason to draw a substantial distinction between *uoluntas* and *arbitrium* in *lib. arb.* While there may still be a difference in nuance, this would have little impact on the argument of *lib. arb.*

Nevertheless, my proposal here should not be confused with that of Johannes Brachtendorf, who reaches a seemingly similar conclusion. Brachtendorf applies the distinction between first-order and second-order will to *uoluntates* and *uoluntas*, concluding that *uoluntas* in the singular is equivalent to *liberum arbitrium*. He argues that "Augustine clearly holds a two plane theory of willing as presupposed by compatibilism" (Brachtendorf, 2007, p. 222), alluding to Harry Frankfurt[7] as a representative of the compatibilists. According to Brachtendorf, Augustine makes explicit use of *uoluntates* (in the plural) and *uoluntas* (in the singular) in writings as *Confessiones*, with the former corresponding to "concrete intentions" and the latter to "the will that confirms these intentions" and the *liberum arbitrium* that "decides over

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[5] For example, *sol.* 1. 1. 2; 1. 10. 27; *quant.* 34. 78; *De Musica*. 6. 5. 14; *lib. arb.* 2. 13. 37.
[6] Cf. Holte, 1990, p. 78; den Bok, 1994, p. 243.
[7] Especially Frankfurt, 1971.

uoluntates" (*ibid.*, p. 222f). However, we cannot conclude on this basis that Augustine was a two-plane theorist. In *lib. arb.*, Augustine is undoubtedly aware of the second-order will, saying "Is not taking delight in one's own good will, and valuing it as highly as we described, itself the good will?" (*lib. arb.* 1. 13. 28). Nonetheless, Augustine's intention was not to distinguish between these two orders of will, but rather to *conflate* them, for it is precisely this conflation that enables Augustine to declare: "Anyone who wills to live rightly and honorably, if he wills himself to will this rather than transient goods, acquires so great a thing with such ease (*tantam rem tanta facilitate*) that willing itself is nothing other than having what he willed" (*lib. arb.* 1. 13. 29). This ease (*facilitas*) in attaining virtue is rendered possible by the fact that both first-order and second-order will are referred to using a single term "*uoluntas*". While this reasoning might be philosophically dubious, it reveals Augustine's strategy of unifying all mental phenomena under a single conception of the will, which we will explore in section 3 of this paper. Therefore, at least in *De Libero Arbitrio*,[8] we should not limit the term *uoluntas* (in the singular) and *liberum arbitrium* to the second-order will as conceptualized by modern two-plane theory.

(2) *Proprius* and *liber*

In a similar vein, the two adjectives, *proprius* and *liber,* are meant to have the same philosophical significance. In *lib. arb.*, *proprius* is used consistently to mark a contrast with *communis*.[9] The following passage gives a typical account of *proprius*:

> A proper thing (*proprium*) should be understood, just like a private thing (*priuatum*), as that which each one of us is to ourselves and that which he alone senses in himself because it pertains particularly to his own nature; a common thing (*commune*), on the other hand, also just like a public thing (*publicum*), as what is sensed by all who sense it without destroying or transforming it. (*lib. arb.* 2. 7. 19)

Setting aside the direct context of this passage (namely the *sensus communis* shared by many agents), the characteristics of *proprium* are given by descriptions such as "just like a private thing", "he alone in himself", and "pertains to his own nature".

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[8] To be fair, my conclusion does not exclude the possibility that the studies I have mentioned might apply to the later works of Augustine. For a well-ordered account of *uoluntas* and *liberum arbitrium,* particularly in late writings such as *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, see den Bok, 1994, pp. 241–246.

[9] Cf. O'Connell, 1968, p. 53.

This use is consistent in Augustine's early language. In *De Quantitate Animae* (388, hereafter *quant.*), Augustine proposes, "Let us not arrogate (*uindicemus*) anything to ourselves as our own (*nobis proprium*), deceived by a desire of empty glory" (*quant.* 34. 78). Given that the verb *uindicare* signifies a claim to one's own property,[10] what is termed *proprium* here has almost the same legal nuances as *priuatum*. In other words, *proprius* is understood in line with legal vocabulary to signify the possession of what belongs to one.

At the same time, despite my assertion that true freedom was an ultimate goal in the language of the young Augustine, we certainly find some different uses of the adjective *liber* in a non-philosophical context.[11] Let us examine two passages from *lib. arb.*:

> The law does not force them to kill but merely leaves it in their power. Hence, they are free not to kill anyone for things they can lose against their will and thus should not love. (*lib. arb.* 1. 5. 12)

> Freedom […] is genuine only if it belongs to happy people who adhere to the eternal law, but for now I am discussing the "freedom" by which people who have no human masters think of themselves as free and which those who want to be set free from their human masters desire. (*lib. arb.* 1. 15. 32)

In the first example, taken from 1. 5. 12, "being free" is conceived in relation to two operations of law, namely "forcing" (*cogere*) and "leaving in power" (*relinquere in potestate*). Freedom here is contrasted with the former and equated with the latter. The second example, taken from 1. 15. 32, clearly shows that Augustine is not talking about genuine freedom (freedom as liberation), but instead about freedom as a legal

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[10] " (leg.) to assert one's title to, claim as one's property (what is in the possession of another)" (OLD, p. 2278).

[11] My discussion of the adjective *liber* is addressed to some researchers who have almost ignored it in Augustine's expression of *liber arbitrium*. Sarah Byers argued that, in Augustine's interchange of *uoluntatis arbitrium* with *liberum uoluntatis arbitrium*, "*liberum* seems to be applied for emphasis, the idea being that since assent is by definition a choice between options (to approve or not approve an impression) " (Byers, 2006, p. 184). Ōnishi Yoshitomo, rightly observing that *liberum arbitrium* does not refer to genuine freedom, suggested that *liberum arbitrium* should just be translated as "will (*ishi* 意志)" without adding the adjective "free (*jiyuu* 自由)" (Ōnishi, 2014, p. 115, n. 3). They both went too far to make the word *liber* substantially meaningless. We should, at the very least, not ignore the fact that Augustine did employ the word *liber*.

status, namely, not being a slave (i.e., "having no human masters"). In Roman law, to be a free person meant to possess a legal personality, which made it possible to exert one's due power and responsibility (*potestas*),[12] a feature that connects 1. 15. 32 with 1. 5. 12. Thus, we can conclude that it is still possible to talk about non-genuine freedom, which is not the ultimate goal of philosophy, in a meaningful way when we talk about freedom in a legal context and register. This concept of freedom in *liberum arbitrium* consists of having one's own legal power as a legal personality, without being subject to compulsion by any external power.

(3) The context and the meaning of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*

These meanings of *proprius* and *liber* fit well with the immediate context of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* in *lib. arb.* 1. 11. 21. From 1. 9. 19, Augustine and Evodius discuss how the right order of the soul, in which the mind (*mens*), reason (*ratio*), or spirit (*spiritus*) presides over other "irrational motion of mind" (*irrationales animi motus*) (1. 8. 18), can be disrupted and become occupied by vice. According to Augustine, the mind is naturally stronger than desire (*cupiditas*), and virtue is naturally stronger than vice, as determined by the eternal law. Thus, it should be impossible for the desire to force the mind to fall under its control. Likewise, an equally virtuous mind cannot do so, for this evidently goes against the virtue it possesses. Thus, as a logical consequence, Augustine concludes that what causes the mind to become subjugated to desire is nothing other than the mind itself. The expression *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* was meant to capture this conclusion.

The legal implications of *proprius* and *liber* also reflect this context. It is noteworthy that the whole process of reasoning here presupposes the existence of the eternal law that governs everything. This eternal law provides the legal context for the language of the dialogue that leads to *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*. Before introducing the idea of eternal law, Augustine and Evodius discussed whether there is any particular transgression (such as murder, adultery, or sacrilege) that is permissible under secular (or temporal: in contrast to the eternal) law. Note that what is at stake is not whether the act is good or evil, but whether it is justifiable or not (in the latter case, it is a sin). This naturally requires the notion of law as the criterion of justice. Hence,

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[12] Even though *potestas* is often translated as "power" in English, it should be noted that it implies the idea of rightness (*ius*) (Berger, 1953, p. 640). Hence, an excessive use of power beyond one's due limits is not considered to be *in potestate*. Cicero's translation of the Stoic notion of ἐφ᾽ ἡμῖν (up to us) by *in nostra potestate* (Kahn, 1988, p. 249) also conveys such implications, for *in nostra potestate* implies an exhortation to recognize and remain within our proper limits, namely, within what is in our *due power*.

the concept of law as a context was already anticipated very early on in the dialogue (at least at 1. 3. 6, where Augustine asks: "Is it because the law forbids it?"). The subsequent discussions on concrete cases might, at first glance, merely look like a succession of "ordinary everyday examples" and "simple concepts" (Harrison, 2006, p. 31). While this is the case, it is not the only issue that the long conversation in 1. 3. 6–1. 6. 14 is about. Instead of making philosophical progress, this part of the dialogue carefully prepares the way for the introduction of a legal *context*, which is suitable for employing *proprius* and *liber* in the legal sense, as seen in (2).

Therefore, *propria uoluntas* refers to a *uoluntas* as the mind's own possession, while *liberum arbitrium* means that it is nothing other than the mind that has the power (*potestas*) to do so.

This analysis helps simplify our interpretation of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium.* By this, Augustine means only that "nothing but the mind itself subjugates the mind to desires". The terms *uoluntas* and *arbitrium* thus do not refer to a particular mental realm in the sense of a substance in the human soul but to an act of mind (*mens*) to will (*uelle*) to be under the control of desires. Nor is Augustine attempting to complicate the meaning of freedom by introducing a brand-new notion of free will; instead, he is merely speaking in legal language.[13] This minimalistic interpretation of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*, I argue, suffices for our reading of *lib. arb.* 1. 11. 21, providing the basis for a further investigation of the function of the concept of the will in *lib. arb.* Before doing so, however, we need to form an idea of what Augustine's philosophy was like prior to *lib. arb.*, as a necessary step to evaluating its effect.

2. Philosophical Inquiry at Cassiciacum

In his earliest days at Cassiciacum, Augustine was concerned as much with how to conduct his philosophical inquiry as with particular philosophical or theological problems. His struggle offers us ample testimony on this matter and even resulted in the creation of an unprecedented genre. *Soliloquia* (hereafter *sol.*), the title Augustine himself coined to refer to a new form of writing (*sol.* 2. 7. 14), thus provides us with

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[13] Brian Stock (2010) is the only study, as far as I have seen, that observed the "legal narrative and literary narrative" intertwined in the text of *lib. arb.* (Stock, 2010, p. 149), but Stock does not develop this idea to analyze the effect that the legal narrative had in *lib. arb.* For the influence of Roman law in the formation of the idea of *uoluntas* in Latin language, see Dihle, 1982, pp. 135–143.

useful material from which to extract information about Augustine's earliest philosophical project. In *Soliloquia*, Augustine breaks the process of philosophical inquiry down into three steps:

> Therefore, the soul needs three things: eyes of which it can now make good use, looking at something (*ut aspiciat*), and seeing (*ut uideat*). (*sol.* 1. 6. 12)

These three things are meant to occur in a certain order, as the following exchange indicates: (Reason) "When, therefore, it has healthy eyes, what is left?" — (Augustine) "That it looks at something" (*sol.* 1. 6. 13). Augustine resorts to visual metaphors, describing the philosophical inquiry as the turning upwards of the eyes of the soul because, for most human souls, the light of Truth[14] is too strong to bear. Let us unpack this metaphor and clarify what each step stands for.

In the first step, "eyes of which it can make good use", refers to healthy eyes (*oculi sani*) that are "removed from and purged of the various desires (*cupiditates*) for mortal things" (*sol.* 1. 6. 12). Prior to this first step, the soul is trapped by desires and in an impure state, which the soul itself sustains by its habits, because it is too deeply immersed into this unhealthy condition to extricate itself. Augustine metaphorically calls this nature of desire "a birdlime" (*uiscum*) or "a cage" (*cavea*) (*sol.* 1. 14. 24). This is why Augustine condemns desires: not because they are morally evil, but because the objects of desires are sought "for their own sake" (*propter seipsa*) (*sol.* 1. 11. 19) and hold us in a state of captivity. Desires are, in essence, binding forces imposed on our souls.

The second step, "looking at something", is tricky, mainly because it sounds almost the same as the "seeing" in the final step. But since the condition of the eye of the soul attained in the first step is described as "[that] which it can make good use of", we can infer that "looking at something" entails using the healthy eyes of the soul. Augustine thinks that the health of the soul's eye is, on its own, an insufficient condition for the contemplation of Truth.

> It's dangerous to want to show them [i.e., healthy eyes] what they don't yet have the strength to see. Therefore, they should be exercised first, and their love should be beneficially delayed and nourished. (*sol.* 1. 13. 23)

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[14] "Truth" starting with a capital T is meant to stand for *ueritas* (the transcendent principle that makes something true) as distinguished from *uerum* (specific true things or states of affairs), because the English word "truth" can refer to both.

Even healthy eyes require training to be able to see the dangerously brilliant light of the Truth. *Aspicere* thus refers to this process of training, in order to strengthen the eyes of the soul by passing from things that are illuminated by something else to brighter sources of light. Interestingly, Augustine paraphrases *aspicere*'s nominal form, *aspectus*, by "reason" (*ratio*) (*sol.* 1. 6. 13). This odd juxtaposition suggests that what is trained through the process of *aspicere* is reason. Reason is trained by exercising it in the ascent from material things to intelligible objects. The "order of study" in *De Ordine* (hereafter *ord.*) 2. 7. 24–2. 19. 51, which is described as reason's self-exhibition through the study of liberal arts, corresponds precisely to this second step of *aspicere*. The Latin term *aspicere*, composed of *ad* and *specere*, seems to imply a subtle nuance of this process of exercising reason. It consists of successive attempts to look at particular objects with a range of ontological statuses: It is thus a process of "looking at *x*", while leaving the object *x* undefined.[15]

On the other hand, the final step, "seeing", has a single unique object: Truth. While this object can be referred to in different ways (e.g., as Wisdom or God), "seeing" in all cases denotes the ultimate phase in which the soul gains a "perfect and right look at something (*aspectus rectus atque perfectus*)" (*sol.* 1. 6. 13), namely the light of Truth. Augustine does not dedicate many lines to the description of this final stage, and as long as philosophy is a "*love* of wisdom", this final step should remain outside or at least at the margins of this philosophical inquiry.

In brief, the three steps of philosophical inquiry at Cassiciacum, as Augustine expressed them in *Soliloquia*, are: (1) the purification of desire, (2) the exercise of reason, and (3) the contemplation of Truth.

This scheme of philosophical inquiry also applies to another source for the young Augustine's philosophical program, namely the seven-step ascent in *De Quantitate Animae*. In *quant.* 35. 79, Augustine provides three different formulations of the seven steps. The following table shows the correspondence between the different formulations in the order of appearance:

1	vitalization (*animatio*)	from the body (*de corpore*)	beautifully from another thing (*pulchre de alio*)

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[15] This is why I translate *aspicere* by "looking *at something*," adding "at something" to the most recent translation, "looking" (Foley, 2020b, p. 31), following Watson's "looking at something" (Watson, 1990, p. 41).

2	sense (*sensus*)	through the body (*per corpus*)	beautifully through another thing (*pulchre per aliud*)
3	art (*ars*)	about the body (*circa corpus*)	beautifully about another thing (*pulchre circa aliud*)
4	virtue (*uirtus*)	toward the soul itself (*ad seipsam*)	beautifully to the beautiful thing (*pulchre ad pulchrum*)
5	tranquility (*tranquilitas*)	in the soul itself (*in seipsa*)	beautifully in the beautiful thing (*pulchre in pulchro*)
6	initiation (*ingressio*)	toward God (*ad Deum*)	beautifully toward the beauty (*pulchre ad pulchritudinem*)
7	contemplation (*contemplatio*)	with God (*apud Deum*)	beautifully with the beauty (*pulchre apud pulchritudinem*)

While the first formulation might give the impression that the seven steps are independent of each other, the following two formulations indicate that they can be subdivided into three groups, i.e., "*corpus/seipsa (anima)/Deus*" or "*aliud/pulchrum/pulchritudo*". The seven steps should thus be understood in terms of a 3-2-2 formation. I will not go into the details of each step here, for it would be enough to describe them in terms of this 3-2-2 structure. The first three steps concern something that is alien to the soul's nature. Under the influence of Neoplatonism, the early Augustine assumed that the soul is essentially immaterial and beautiful (Harrison, 1992, p. 13f), as its nature should be situated among the intelligible realities (*ea quae uere sunt*) (*quant.* 33. 76). Hence, both the body (*corpus*) and another thing (*aliud*) that is not beautiful are external and inferior to the soul itself. By contrast, the fourth and the fifth steps describe how the return to the soul is deepened, while the sixth and the seventh steps illustrate the final stage in which the soul sees God or beauty itself (*pulchritudo*).

The first three steps correspond to the "purification of desire" in *Soliloquia*, as desire is something alien to the soul's rational nature, just like the *corpus* and *aliud* in *quant.* The fourth and fifth steps also correspond to the "exercise of reason", because the education in the liberal arts, which exemplifies the process of "looking at something" (*aspicere*), is, after all, the soul's self-discovery. As the inquiry

concerning the liberal arts proceeds in *De Ordine*, the soul comes to be convinced "either that the soul itself is reason or that reason belongs to it and either that there is nothing better and more powerful in reason than numbers or that reason is nothing other than number" (*ord.* 2. 18. 48). Since every discipline in the liberal arts is more or less created by reason, reason is the subject and the object of the studies in these disciplines. The soul thus arrives at an awareness of what it is (i.e., reason) through the fourth and fifth steps in *quant.* There is no need to specify that the third step in *sol.* is equivalent to the final two steps in *quant.*, since they both point to the contemplation of God (or Truth) as the final achievement of the philosophical ascent.

The three-step model in *Soliloquia* thus gives the simplest illustration of the essence of philosophical inquiry as Augustine understood it at Cassiciacum. This view remained consistent for two years, from 386 to 388, right before Augustine began working on the first book of *De Libero Arbitrio*.

3. Concept of Will and the Re-organization of Philosophical Inquiry

Let us now turn back to the question posed at the beginning of this article: What is the significance of the concept of will as the origin of evil in the first book of *De Libero Arbitrio*? Does its emergence mean that Augustine discovered a new field of mental phenomena, in place of other potential sources of evil, such as lust (*libido*) and desire (*cupiditas*)? Such a view would be wholly mistaken since it conceives of Augustine's philosophical project as resting on something like multiple-choice questions. *Voluntas* is not one candidate for the origin of evil that stands on a par with the others. Instead, will, for Augustine, differs in one notable way from other movements of the soul (*motus animi*): it pertains to the mind (*mens*). The analysis of *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* (*lib. arb.* 1. 11. 21) in section 1 has already made clear that Augustine means by this that what subjugates the mind to the control of desire is nothing other than the mind itself. Thus, the mind has a will. Desire and lust, by contrast, are something external to the mind. Desire is certainly conceived of as a powerful binding force in the early writings of Augustine, as we saw in section 2, but it is not a movement that belongs to the mind itself. Rather, the very fact of its being a "binding force" demonstrates the externality of desire with regard to the mind. As long as desire is designated as the origin of evil and sin, the mind remains pure and detached from all evil and sin.

Such an understanding of the soul and the mind can be vividly observed in Augustine's passion for demonstrating the immortality of the soul in his earliest writings. A series of demonstrations occupies the whole second book of *Soliloquia* and *De Immortalitate Animae*, but apparently these were unsuccessful, as Augustine himself admits in *Retractationes* (1. 5. 1). The essence of the demonstration of the immortality of the soul is that the human soul is a substratum (*subiectum*) or a seat (*sedes*) of Truth, and this seat "can't be dragged away from it by any bodily death" (*sol.* 2. 19. 33). What is called "seat" here corresponds to the mind (*mens*) in *De Libero Arbitrio*. As long as Truth is imperishable, the mind, as a seat of Truth, cannot perish either and should be immune to desire and lust: the mind is the last hope for us humans that something could lead us up toward divine wisdom. The demonstration of the immortality of the soul was thus a demonstration of the possibility for humans to acquire ultimate wisdom. It was a necessary consequence for Augustine that his interlocutor in *Soliloquia* should be "Reason" (*Ratio*), given the status of the reason (which is often juxtaposed with mind—cf. *lib. arb.* 1. 8. 18) as a guide in philosophical inquiry.[16]

Given this understanding of the human soul, it was impossible for Augustine to imagine that the mind spontaneously submits itself to desire. In *De Immortalitate Animae*, he claims that the mind (*animus*)[17] "never wills" (*imm. an.* 13. 20) itself to become body (*corpus*) and does not suffer such a thing "either by its own will or by another forcing it (*nec propria uoluntate nec alio cogente*)" (*imm. an.* 14. 23). Here, Augustine rejects the possibility that mind could be spontaneously inclined toward evil and sin, which is the same conclusion he reaches in *lib. arb.* 1. 11. 21. A minimalistic reading of *lib. arb.* 1. 11. 21 suggests that Augustine merely admits the possibility that the mind *can* will to be a comrade of desires, but not the essential nature of the mind to will to be so. However, it is the possibility that Augustine refused to accept in *imm. an.* 14. 23, marking a big step forward on Augustine's part. It is now clear that this step was made possible by abandoning the conception of the mind as something free of desire and evil. At the same time, Augustine's adoption of the concept of will explains why he gave up on demonstrating the soul's immortality: the concept of will deprived the mind (or reason) of its privileged position as a pure divine

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[16] On the somewhat divine status of Reason as an interlocutor in *Soliloquia*, see O'Connell, 1968, p. 122f; Yamada, 1985, pp. 17–21; Cary, 2000, pp. 82–87.

[17] *Mens* and *animus* often overlap in Augustine's usage as he employs *animus* in a specific way when he is concerned with the soul's rational aspect, while *anima* expresses the vivifying force. Cf. O'Daly, 1987, p. 7f; Cary, 2000, p. 178, n. 2.

realm within the human soul, making it impossible, or even meaningless, to demonstrate the immortality of the soul.[18]

More importantly, this shift in his understanding of mind and soul went beyond changing merely one element in his system of thought. Let us recall the second section of this paper: The second step in the program of the philosophical inquiry in *Soliloquia* was the exercise of reason that has already been purified from desire in the first step. We observe here an implicit assumption that reason is, in its own nature, devoid of desire, and desires and lusts are dirt or stains attached externally to reason. This assumption is, however, invalidated by the concept of will in *De Libero Arbitrio*. If the mind can subjugate itself to the control of desire through its own will, purification of the mind is not an easy task of cleansing the external dirt from reason as in the schema presented in *Soliloquia*. It is not about removing the evil will from the mind. As we saw in section 1, Augustine carefully avoids substantiating the "evil will". What Augustine calls the "evil will" (*mala uoluntas*) is merely the wrong use of the will by the soul. Evil will is not a substantiated realm in the mind but an act of willing of the mind. Thus the evil will cannot be removed from the mind unless the mind itself is completely transformed. In this way, the discovery of the concept of will forced Augustine to reframe or reorganize his earliest program of philosophical inquiry.

The reorganization of philosophical inquiry was not like total destruction and reconstruction from scratch. Augustine's task was to place the remains of his past philosophical efforts and achievements in a new context and elaborate a new philosophical construct. After concluding that *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* is the origin of evil, Augustine undertakes to ground the entire system of moral psychology solely in the concept of will. Augustine starts by asking Evodius whether they have some sort of will (*sitne aliqua nobis uoluntas?*) (*lib. arb.* 1. 12. 25), a point which serves as the starting point or basis for the following discussions (Harrison, 2006, p. 100f). After confirming that they do possess a will, Augustine goes on to define every aspect of his philosophical inquiry in light of this concept of will: virtue, the happy life, eternal law—they all depend on the good will (*bona uoluntas*) "by

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[18] Phillip Cary also observes the same "change of mind" that led him to abandon the divinity and immortality of the soul but at the same time claims that this took place in *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* (388–390), a polemical work written slightly after *De Libero Arbitrio*. Cary's point is that, after leaving Milan, "Augustine realizes that Catholic doctrine does not allow him to conceive of the soul as divine and immutable" (Cary, 2000, p. 112). Even though it is true that the denial of the divinity of the soul fits well with Catholic doctrine, Cary does not seem to explain how it was possible for Augustine to bring himself into conformity with Catholic doctrine. If it lacked an inner motivation, Augustine's "change of mind" would have been mere acquiescence to an externally imposed dogmatic demand.

which we seek to live rightly and honorably and to attain the highest wisdom" (*lib. arb.* 1. 12. 25). Desire and misery, by contrast, can be explained as the lack of a good will. They represent wrong uses of the will, meaning that the will itself is exempt from accusation. Hence, the concept of will, which encompasses every aspect of philosophical inquiry, appears as a promising principle from which to embark on the task of reorganization.

However, my own view is that this task was not fully completed in *De Libero Arbitrio*, because a more difficult problem, that of justifying God's creation of human beings with the will, presented itself to Augustine, a problem that took Augustine seven years to finish *De Libero Arbitrio*. Nor do I mean to argue that Augustine underwent a dramatic change of mind just as Peter Brown depicted in the chapter titled "The Lost Future" of his classic biography (Brown, 1967/2014, pp. 139–150).[19] The introduction of the concept of will was just the beginning or a trigger of the reorganization of his philosophical inquiry. There is, however, evidence that Augustine eventually went in a direction in which this potentiality could be realized. Let us compare the two versions of the "seven steps of inquiry" in *De Quantitate Animae* and *De Doctrina Christiana* (396–426, hereafter *doctr.*), which were published, respectively, before and after *De Libero Arbitrio* (388).

	quant. 33. 70–35. 79	*doctr.* 2. 7. 9–11
1	*animatio*, *de corpore*, *pulchre de alio*	fear (*timor*)
2	*sensus*, *per corpus*, *pulchre per aliud*	piety (*pietas*)
3	*ars*, *circa corpus*, *pulchre circa aliud*	knowledge (*scientia*)
4	*uirtus*, *ad seipsam*, *pulchre ad pulchrum*	bravery (*fortitudo*)
5	*tranquilitas*, *in seipsa*, *pulchre in pulchro*	counsel of compassion (*consilium misericordiae*)
6	*ingressio*, *ad Deum*, *pulchre ad pulchritudinem*	understanding (*intellectus*)
7	*contemplatio*, *apud Deum*, *pulchre apud pulchritudinem*	wisdom (*sapientia*)

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[19] To be fair, Brown later regrets that he overly emphasized Augustine's change of mind at the end of the new edition of this book (Brown, 1967/2014, p. 490).

The respective programs for the ascent of the soul outlined in these two texts have the same number of steps, yet their content differs a great deal. The first difference is that, in *doctr.*, there is no equivalent to the first three steps in *quant.*, namely vitalization, sense, and art, which correspond to the souls of plants, animals, and humans and are described without any moral implications.[20] In *quant.*, it is only after the fourth step (virtue) that the moral or religious aspect comes to the fore, while in *doctr.*, the moral aspect is apparent from the very first step (fear of God). Thus, steps 1–3 in *doctr.* seem to correspond to the fourth step (virtue) in *quant.* (Kato, 1991, p. 242). The second difference is that the purification of desire is achieved in the fourth step in *quant.*,[21] while it is not attained in *doctr.* until the sixth step (understanding). If we combine these two observations, we see that the fourth step in *quant.* overlaps with the first six steps in *doctr.* This odd correspondence can be explained by the emergence of the concept of will in Augustine, which took place between the writing of these two texts. As we have seen, the expression *propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium* (*lib. arb.* 1. 11. 21) involves a denial of the assumption that the mind can be free of desire. Therefore, the purification of the soul is now the task that must be confronted by the end of the philosophical inquiry. At the same time, the first three steps in *quant.* become meaningless as the object of purification is no longer the desires that are external to the mind and thus that can be removed in only three steps.

Thus, following *lib. arb.*, philosophical inquiry of Augustine went through a significant transformation. The problem of will is not merely one of the questions addressed by philosophical inquiry, but the driving force that changed how Augustine engages in philosophy.

Conclusion

The question I raised at the beginning of this paper was, "What is the function of the concept of will in *De Libero Arbitrio*?" This question was addressed in several steps. I began by analyzing the key phrase from *lib. arb.*, "its own will and free decision" (*propria uoluntas et liberum arbitrium*), concluding that this should be understood in

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[20] The third step (art) is a "wealth common to both the goods and the evils" (*quant.* 33. 72), which implies that art is indifferent to morality.
[21] The fourth step is described as "achieving (*efficere*) purity" and the fifth as "keeping (*tenere*) purity" (*quant.* 33. 74).

terms of the spontaneous submission of the mind to the desire. Having elucidated the structure of philosophical inquiry in Augustine's Cassiciacum writings in the second section, I then showed in the third section that this conclusion had two consequences for Augustine's philosophy: The first was a radical change in the theory of the soul in relation to desire and mind. The second was the reorganization of the program of philosophical inquiry, which presupposed the possibility of the purification of the soul at an early stage, followed by a new schema that puts the purification at the final stage of the inquiry. These effects and functions of the concept of the will, I believe, will make it more acceptable to those who do not share the same theological motivation as Augustine and his followers.

The significance of the concept of will can be placed in a broader context. Augustine's trust in the mind or reason prior to *De Libero Arbitrio*, which was bound up with the immortality of the soul, was rooted in an understanding of humans as something mortal—a view that had been dominant since classical antiquity. The concept of will that Augustine presented in *lib. arb.*, on the other hand, opens up another possibility of human finitude. Even the best parts of humans—i.e., mind and reason—are bound to commit sin and evil. We are finite beings, however long we live, however talented we might be, and whatever efforts we make. We are finite beings as long as we remain human—not because we will eventually die, but because the will that pervades our souls is finite. Such a view of humanity cannot be found in the early works of Augustine, who initially thought that wisdom would be attained either in this life or after death (cf. *sol.* 1. 12. 20). Nor can it be found in the Stoic philosophers who supposed that it is impossible for humans to be wise (*sapiens*) in practice, but possible in theory. But if this is the case, how and for what purpose do we live and philosophize, bearing this heavy finitude of our being? Augustine's later philosophy, which was developed in light of the doctrine of original sin and the divine Trinity, can be read as a response to or struggle with this question. The nuanced remark by Evodius by the end of the first book of *De Libero Arbitrio*— "I yield to your will, and quite readily join mine to yours in judgment and in prayer" (*Cedo uoluntati tuae et ei meam iudicio et uoto libentissime adiungo*)" (*lib. arb.* 1. 16. 35)—seems to suggest how central the will (*uoluntas*) has become to their philosophical inquiry.

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