will or good itself is nothing. Therefore a bad will is not itself the evil which makes men evil, just as a good will is not itself the good which makes men good.

What I have said of will can also be said of the inclination of will. The conversion from theft to giving is no greater than that which converts the same will from generosity to avarice. And so too for the other things that I said of the will.

S. What you say is what I too think.

T. Therefore neither a bad will nor a depraved conversion of will is the very evil whereby an angel or man becomes evil, which we say to be nothing, nor a good will or a good conversion of will the good whereby they become good.

9. That injustice is evil itself and is nothing

S. So what is the evil that makes them bad and the good that makes them good?

T. We should hold that justice is the good whereby they are good or just, both angels and men, and that whereby the will itself is called good and just; and injustice is the evil that is only a privation of the good, and makes angels and men bad and makes their will bad. So we should say that injustice is nothing but the privation of justice. As long as the will originally given to a rational nature is simultaneously oriented to its rectitude by the same act with which God gives it, thus not only inclined to rectitude, but created right, that is, oriented to what it ought do, as long as, I say, the will remains in that rectitude that we call truth or justice, it was just. But when it distanced itself from what it ought and turned against it, it did not remain in the original rectitude in which it was created. And when it abandoned it, it lost something great, and acquired in exchange only the privation of justice we call injustice and that has no positive being.

10. How evil seems to be something

S. When you say that evil is the privation of the good, I agree, but none the less I see that good is a privation of evil. And just as I perceive in the privation of evil something else comes to be that we call good, so I note that in the privation of the good something comes
to be that we call evil. Wherefore although evil can be shown by some arguments to be nothing, since evil is only vice or corruption, which are only in some essence, and the more they are there, the more toward nothingness they turn it, and if the same essence came wholly to nothing, vice and corruption would be found to be nothing; although, I say, in these and other ways evil can be proved to be nothing, my mind cannot agree except on the basis of faith alone, unless we can eliminate the difficulties that prove to me on the contrary the reality of evil.

For when the word ‘evil’ is heard, our hearts irrationally tremble at what they understand in the meaning of this word, if it means only nothing. Again, if this word ‘evil’ is a noun, it is significant. But if it is significant, it signifies. But it can only signify something. How then can evil be nothing if its name signifies something? Finally since there seems to be such tranquillity and repose while justice remains, in many instances justice seems nothing more than the quieting of evil, as with charity and patience, whereas when justice goes, such diverse and onerous and multiple feelings occupy the mind which like a cruel master forces this poor homunculus to be concerned with so many laborious and base actions and to take on the grave burden of these actions: if it is thus, it will seem strange that nothing gives rise to all these.

II. That evil and nothing cannot be shown from their names to be something but only a quasi-something

T. I do not think it is absurd for you to say that nothing is something, since no one can deny that ‘nothing’ is a noun. If it cannot be shown that nothing is real just because there is the word ‘nothing’, how would one think to prove that evil is real just because there is the word ‘evil’?

S. An example that solves a problem by raising another is worthless, but I do not know what this nothing itself would be. If you want to show me what I understand evil to be, show me first what I understand nothing to be, then you can deal with the other arguments rather than those having to do with the word ‘evil’ that lead me to think it is something.

2 That is, inhere in something as its property or accident.
T. Since for nothing to be does not differ from something is not, how can we say what it is for something not to be?

S. If there is not anything signified by this word, it does not signify something. But if it does not signify something, it is not a noun. Therefore, although no one says that nothing is something, but we are always driven to say that nothing is nothing, still no one can deny that the word ‘nothing’ is significant. But if this noun does not signify nothing but something, what it signifies seems to be something and not nothing. But if what it means is something and not nothing, how can it be signified by the word ‘nothing’? Indeed, if ‘nothing’ is used correctly, nothing truly is, and therefore it is not something. Wherefore if what is signified by this word is something and not nothing, it follows that it is falsely and incongruously named by ‘nothing’. But if, following common opinion, what is called ‘nothing’ is truly nothing and is not in fact real, the necessary consequence is that the word ‘nothing’ does not signify something and then it does not signify nothing. How is it then that the word ‘nothing’ is not devoid of meaning and signifies some thing, and does not signify some thing, that is, something real, but signifies nothing?

T. Perhaps there is no contradiction between signifying nothing and something.

S. But if there is no contradiction, either the word ‘nothing’ signifies nothing and something as taken differently, or we must find the reality that is something and nothing.

T. And if both conclusions can be affirmed, that is, if there are different ways of understanding the meaning of the word and that the same reality is both something and nothing?

S. Let us look at both.

T. It is clear that the word ‘nothing’ in no way differs in meaning from the expression ‘not something’. Moreover it is evident that ‘not something’ indicates that every thing, whatever expresses any reality, should be excluded from the mind nor anything whatsoever of its meaning be retained. But since the negation of a thing must necessarily include in its meaning the thing negated—no one could understand what is meant by non-man unless he understands what man is—this term not-something, by negating what is, signifies something. Since then taking away everything that is something signifies
nothing, it makes up the essence that must be retained in the mind of the listener: therefore ‘not-something’ signifies no thing or reality.

The expression ‘non-being’ then, according to these diverse considerations, in a way signifies reality and being and yet in no way signifies reality and being, for it signifies them by way of denial and not positively. Thus the word ‘nothing’ which does away with everything that is something and by so doing does not signify nothing but something, does not do so positively. So it is not necessary that nothing be something just because its name in a certain way signifies something; rather, it is necessary that nothing be nothing, because its name signifies something in this way. Similarly, there is nothing against the word ‘evil’ being meaningful if it thus signifies something by excluding it and positively signifies nothing.

S. I cannot deny that, following your argument, the word ‘nothing’ in some way signifies something, but it must be understood that the something which in this way is signified is not called ‘nothing’, nor when we hear the word do we take it for the reality that is signified in this way. So I ask why this name is spoken, and what do we understand when we hear it: what I want to ask is, what is it? This is what the word properly signifies and since a word is because it signifies it, not because in the way stated above it signifies by denying something. Indeed it is accounted a name of its signification, which is called ‘nothing’. I ask how that can be something if it is properly called ‘nothing’, or how it is nothing if its name signifies something, or how something and nothing can be the same. That is what I am asking about ‘evil’ and of what it means and what ‘evil’ is the name of.

T. And you rightly pose this problem because although by the foregoing argument both ‘nothing’ and ‘evil’ signify something, evil and nothing are not what they signify. But there is another argument according to which they signify something and that something is signified, but not a true but a quasi-something.

There are many cases where the grammatical form does not correspond with the reality signified. For example, ‘to fear’ is an active verb, grammatically speaking, but in reality to fear is passive. So too ‘blindness’ grammatically indicates some thing, but in reality it is nothing positive. Just as we say that someone has sight and that sight is in him, so we say that he has blindness and that blindness is in
him, although blindness is not something real but the lack of it, and to have blindness does not mean to say one has something but rather is deprived of it. In fact blindness is nothing other than non-sight or the absence of sight where it ought to be found. But non-sight or the absence of sight is certainly no more real where it ought to be found than where it ought not to be found. Many other things are expressed as reality from the point of view of the form of discourse, because we speak of them as if they existed, when no positive reality is involved.

It is in this way that 'evil' and 'nothing' signify things, that is, what is signified is not something in reality but only in grammatical form. 'Nothing' signifies simply non-being or the lack of all that is real. And evil is only non-good or the absence of good where good ought to be found. But that which is only an absence of reality is certainly not real. Hence evil in truth is nothing and nothing is not real, and yet in a way evil and nothing are something because we speak of them as if they were real, as when we say, 'He did nothing' and 'He did evil', that is, that what he did was nothing or evil—in the same way that we say 'I did something and I did a good thing'. So we deny that what someone says is in any way something: 'What you say is nothing.' For 'what' or 'this' which are properly said only of realities, here are not said of realities but of quasi-realities.

S. You have satisfied me with respect to 'evil' from whose meaning I sought to prove that it signifies something.

12. That the angel cannot have its first act of willing from itself, and that many things can be said to be from an alien capacity but not from an alien incapacity

S. But there remains for you to show me how I should respond to the other arguments that tend to persuade me that evil is a positive reality.

T. To get to the heart of the matter we must begin by backing up a bit. And you need to understand what I will say, not just in pieces, but remembering the whole as joined in a single intuition.

S. I will do all I can, but if at times I am slower than you might wish, do not fail to wait for me.

T. Let us then say that in this moment God creates an angel and wills to make him happy, not all at once, but in stages. So let us say
that he has been created and is capable of volition but does not yet will anything determinate.

S. Stipulate what you like but keep my question in mind.

T. Do you think that the angel can of himself will anything?
S. I am not quite sure of what you mean by ‘of himself’. Something that has nothing that it has not received, which we said above is true of every creature, cannot do anything ‘of itself’.

T. By ‘of himself’ I mean with what he now has. For example, what has feet, and the other conditions for walking, can walk of itself. But what has feet, but unsound ones, cannot walk of itself. In this sense, then, I ask you if that angel, who is capable of willing, but does not yet will anything, can will something of himself.

S. I think he can, if he wills.

T. You are not answering my question.

S. Why?

T. I asked about one who does not yet will anything and about the capacity before it is used, and you answered with an example of one who wills and thus of an actuated capacity. Whatever is, by the very fact that it is, can be. But not everything that exists had the capacity to exist before it existed. So when I ask if he who does not will anything can will, I am asking you about the capacity that precedes willing, and what can move it to will. But you, when you answered that ‘if he wills, he can’, are speaking of the possibility which is actuated in the very act of willing. It is indeed necessary that he can will if he is willing.

S. I know that there are two kinds of power: one that is not yet actuated and one that is already actuated, but I also know that whatever can be, while it is, if at one time it was not, could be before it existed. If it had not the capacity to be, it would never have been. So I think I have answered well, since he who can will because he is willing, necessarily could have willed before he did so.

T. Do you not think that what is nothing has absolutely nothing and therefore has no capacity, and without a capacity it cannot in any way do anything?

S. I cannot deny that.

T. I think that before the world came to be it was nothing.

S. What you say is true.

T. Therefore it has no capacity of any sort before it is.

S. That follows.
T. So it did not have the capacity to be before it was.
S. But I say, if it was incapable of being, it was impossible for it to be at any time.
T. It was both possible and impossible before it was. That in which there was no capacity to exist before it was, was impossible; but for God, in whose capacity it was that it should come to be, it was possible. It is because God could make the world before it came to be that the world is, not because the world itself had the capacity before it was.
S. I am unable to counter your argument, but linguistic usage tells against it.
T. That is not surprising. Many things in common parlance are said improperly, but when we are trying to get to the bottom of the truth we must as far as possible and as the argument requires set aside the distracting improprieties. It is due to this impropriety of language that we often say, 'A thing can', not because it can, but because something else can. So too we say, 'A thing cannot', when in effect it is something else that cannot. If I should say, 'A book can be written by me', the book certainly can do nothing and it is I who can write the book. And when we say, 'That one cannot be conquered by the other', we intend to say that the latter cannot conquer the former.
This is the origin of our saying that God cannot do anything that is contradictory or perverse because God is so powerful in justice and beatitude, indeed, since beatitude and justice do not differ in him, but are one good, he is so omnipotent in simple goodness that no reality is capable of harming the highest good. That is why God cannot corrupt or lie. Very well, that which does not exist does not of itself have a capacity to exist, but if something else is capable of making it be, in that sense it can exist—by the capacity of the other.
Although capacity and incapacity can be of various kinds, for now it is sufficient to say that there are many things that can, not by their own power, but by that of another, and many things that cannot, not by their own incapacity but by that of another. Now, when I posed the problem about the hypothetical angel just created, and created capable of willing, but which does not yet will anything, and asked you if he can will anything of himself, I spoke of his own capacity, and it is with respect to it that I ask you to respond.
S. If he is capable of willing, if there is nothing lacking in him save actually willing, I do not see why he could not will of himself.
Anyone who is capable of seeing and is put in a bright place but with
his eyes closed, sees nothing, but he can see of himself. Why then is
one who does not will unable to will of himself in the way that one
who does not see is able to see by himself?

T. Because one who does not see has sight and the will with which
he can open his eyes, whereas we are speaking of one who has not
yet any effective willing. Tell me then if a thing that moves itself
from not willing to willing, wills of itself to move.

S. If I say that it moves without willing, it will follow that he
moves because of another, not of himself, except perhaps in the
manner of one who instantly closes his eyes to parry a blow or is
forced to will what he did not before in order to avoid some harm. I
do not know then if he first willed himself to move by this act of
will.

T. No one is forced to will something out of fear or from the sense
of some harm or the desire for some useful thing not had if he does
not have a natural will to avoid that harm or pursue the useful things:
that is what moves him to the further willing.

S. I cannot deny it.

T. Hence whatever is moved to will, first wills itself so to move.

S. It is so.

T. Therefore what wills nothing, can in no way move itself to will.

S. I cannot contradict that.

T. It follows that an angel already capable of willing, yet who wills
nothing, cannot have its first willing from itself.

S. I must agree that a thing that wills nothing cannot of itself will
anything.

T. But he cannot be happy if he does not will happiness. And I
say happiness, not happiness with justice, but the happiness that all
desire, even the bad. All in fact will to be well. Therefore prescind-
ing from the fact that every nature is good [ontologically], two kinds
of good and evil are usually distinguished: the moral good, which is
called justice to which the evil that is injustice is opposed, and the
good that it seems to me can be called the useful, to which the
harmful is opposed. Not everyone wants justice nor do all flee injus-
tice. On the other hand not only every rational nature, but every
subject capable of sensation, tends to the useful and avoids the
harmful. For no one wills but what he takes to be useful to him. In
this sense all want things to be well with them and do not want things
to go badly for them. It is of happiness in this sense that I now speak, because no one can be happy who does not will happiness. And no one can in fact be happy either by having what he does not want or by not having what he wants.

S. There is no denying that.
T. One who does not will justice ought not to be happy.
S. I will not deny that either.

13. *If it had only the will for happiness, it could neither will anything else nor not will it, and the will, whatever it willed, would be neither just nor unjust*

T. Let us say then that God gives him, as his first volition, only the will for happiness, and see whether because he has this volition, he is now capable of willing something other than what he has been given to will.

S. Go on. I am eager to hear.
T. It is obvious that he does not yet will anything other than happiness, because it has not been given to him to will anything else.
S. True.
T. So what I am asking is whether he is capable of moving himself to will something else.
S. I do not see how he can move himself to will something other than his happiness, since he does not will anything else. For if he wills to move himself to will something else, he already wants that something else.
T. Therefore just as when he has not received any volition he is not able of himself to will, so having received only the will for happiness, he is not able of himself to will anything else.
S. That is so.
T. And can he not determine himself to will that which he believes will lead to his happiness?
S. I do not know how to answer. If in fact he cannot, I do not see how one who cannot will what he believes leads to happiness can be said to will happiness. If he can, I do not see why he cannot will something else.
T. But what does he who seems to will something, not for its own sake, but for something else really will? That which he is said to will or that by means of which he wills it?
S. Certainly that which he wills by means of the other.
T. So one who wills something for the sake of his happiness, really wills nothing other than his happiness. Hence he can will that which leads to happiness while willing only his happiness.
S. That is clear enough.
T. Then I ask you if, having only the will for happiness, he is able not to will it.
S. He cannot simultaneously will and not will.
T. True, but that is not what I asked. I asked if he could abandon this will, to move himself to will not to will happiness.
S. If in fact he does this unwillingly, he does not do it. If willingly, he wills something other than happiness. But he does not. So it is clear, I think, that he can in no way of himself not will that which alone he is given to will.
T. You understand well, but tell me whether he who wills only happiness and cannot not will it, can will happiness more the more he understands it?
S. If he cannot will happiness more the more and better he understands it, either he does not will happiness at all or he wills something else for the sake of which he does not will the better. But we agreed that he loves happiness and nothing else.
T. Therefore he wills to be happy to the degree that he knows it.
S. Without a doubt.
T. Then he wills to be like God.
S. Nothing is clearer.
T. So what do you think, can the will to be like God be unjust?
S. I cannot call it just, because he would want what does not befit him, nor unjust, because he would will it necessarily.
T. But we said that one who wills only happiness, wills only the useful.
S. Yes.
T. If then he who wills only the useful cannot have something more and more truly useful, he would will a lesser advantage, but one accessible by him?
S. Indeed, he cannot not will the less, if the greater is impossible for him.
T. And would the will of one who wills the less useful and the unclean things in which irrational animals delight be unjust and blameworthy?
S. But how can his will be unjust and reprehensible if he wills that which he is not given the capacity not to will?

T. Yet it is obvious that the will itself that wills either the more or less useful is the work and gift of God, as are life and being endowed with senses, which do not involve morality and in which there is neither good nor evil.

S. There is no doubt there.

T. So to the degree that the will is a being, it is good, and so far as concerns morality it is neither good nor evil.

S. Nothing is clearer.

T. But the angel cannot be happy if he does not have a morally good will. If in fact he wills what he cannot and ought not to be, he cannot be perfectly and worthily happy.

S. That is obvious.

14. And it would be the same if the angel were given only the will for rectitude; it is because it was given both that it can be just and happy

T. Let us now consider the will for justice and see if the same angel to whom is given to will only what befits his nature, could will something else or could of himself not will what he has been given to will.

S. It must be exactly the same here as it was with the will for happiness.

T. Then this angel would have a will that is neither moral nor immoral. For just as above there could not be an unjust will if he willed something unfitting, since he could not not will it, so if he should will what is fitting, his will would not be just, since it was so given to him that he could not will otherwise.

S. That is so.

T. So neither by willing happiness alone nor by willing only that which befits its nature could that angel be called moral or immoral, because his will would be necessitated; on the other hand, if he neither can nor ought to be happy if he does not will and if his will is not morally good, God must harmonize the two wills in him such that he wills to be happy but wills it justly. Thus, when the moral good is present, his will to be happy is modified so as to eliminate going beyond, without destroying his capacity to go beyond. That is,
although by willing to be happy he can surpass the measure, because his will is good he does not want to surpass it, and in this way, having a just will for happiness, he can be and ought to be happy. Such an angel, by not willing that which he ought not, although able to, would merit the capacity never to will that which he ought not and, always following justice, of never being deprived of any moderate desire; if he should abandon justice by an immoderate will, he would be deprived of all that he desires.

S. Nothing could be thought to be more fitting.

T. Remember that, when we first considered the will to be happy alone, without the limit we have added, that keeps it under the will of God, we said that there would be neither justice nor injustice in it, whatever it willed.

S. I remember.

15. That justice is something real

T. Do you think that that which when added to the will so moderates it that it can only will what it ought is something real?

S. No one who understands at all would think it nothing.

T. And I think that you have understood that this reality is nothing other than justice.

S. It could not be thought to be anything else.

T. So justice is certainly something.

S. And something very good.

16. That injustice is only the absence of befitting justice

T. Should that will will and not will according to justice before receiving justice?

S. There is no ‘can’ to entail the ‘ought’ because it has not received it.

T. But after it has, do you doubt that it should, at least when it is not subject to violence?

S. I think that will is always obligated, whether it retains what it accepted or willingly abandons it.

T. You judge rightly. But what would this will have if, without being forced either by need or violence, it should abandon the justice that has been attributed to it with such wisdom and with such
usefulness for it? And abandon it by spontaneously using its power, or by willing more than it ought to? Would anything remain of this will beside what we first considered, before the addition of justice?

S. Since only justice was added, if justice is taken away, certainly nothing would remain but what was there before, but with this difference, that the justice received would make it indebted and the same justice abandoned would leave in it beautiful traces of itself. By the very fact that it remains indebted to justice it shows that it had been adorned by justice. It is only right that once it receives justice, it ought always to be just unless it lose it because of violence. A nature that received justice, if only at one time, is shown to be more noble and to bear the sign of always having a quasi absolute good than a nature that never had or ought to have had it.

T. You reason well. But add to this that the more a nature has this good, and ought to have it, it is praiseworthy, just as a person who ought to have it and does not is accounted more blameworthy.

S. I am in complete agreement.

T. Make clearer to me the good that reveals the nature praiseworthy and the person blameworthy.

S. To have and to ought to have justice shows the natural dignity of a nature, and not having it constitutes personal dishonour. For it was made worthy by him [God] who gave it but it does not have it because it abandons it. The obligation came from him who gave justice, the not-having it from him who abandoned it. He is obliged because he received it, he does not have it because he abandoned it.

T. Accordingly, what is blameworthy in that will is not that it did not remain in justice, but that it does not have justice.

S. The only thing I blame in it is the absence of justice, or not having justice. For as I already said, the worthiness adorns it, not having it demeans it, and the more the having adorns it the more not having demeans. Thus not having justice because of its own fault demeans the will only because being fit to have it, thanks to the goodness of the giver, constitutes its dignity.

T. So you do not think the will that lacks the justice it is not meant to have is unjust or that there is injustice in it?

S. Who would not agree?

T. If it should be unjust or if injustice be in it, I think you would have nothing to complain of it.

S. Nothing at all.
T. So the only thing you find reprehensible is its injustice and its being unjust.

S. There is nothing else with which I could find fault.

T. So if the only thing you find blameworthy is the absence of justice and its not having justice, as you said a short while ago, and again it is indeed the injustice in it and its being unjust that you find reprehensible, it is obvious that its injustice and being unjust are nothing other than the lack of justice and not having justice.

S. It could not be otherwise.

T. Therefore just as the absence of justice and not having justice have no essence, so injustice and being unjust have no being, and so are nothing rather than something.

S. No other conclusion is possible.

T. And you will also remember the conclusion to which we came that, once justice is lost, the justice received being abandoned, nothing remains but what was there prior to receiving justice.

S. That is what we concluded.

T. But the will is not unjust nor is there any injustice in it prior to receiving it.

S. No.

T. So, when it has lost justice, either there is no injustice in it and it is not unjust, or injustice and being unjust are nothing.

S. No conclusion seems more necessary.

T. But you conceded that this will has injustice in it and is unjust after it abandoned justice.

S. I must grant that.

T. So injustice and being unjust are nothing.

S. You make me think I understand what I thought I had not understood.

T. I think you have also grasped why the same absence of justice is not called injustice before justice has been given but only when justice has been abandoned, and not-having-justice is equivalent to being unjust, and both are blameworthy—although injustice is nothing other than the absence of justice and being unjust is nothing other than not having justice. The reason is that the absence of justice is not blamed where justice is not meant to be. Just as not having a beard is no disgrace in a man who does not yet have one, but when he should have one it is disgraceful that he does not; so not having justice does not deform a nature that ought not to have it, but
debases one meant to have it. And just as having a beard denotes a virile nature, so not having one takes away from virile character.

S. I now see that injustice is only the absence of justice where justice ought to be.

17. Why the angel that abandons it cannot regain justice

T. When earlier we spoke of an angel that was given only the will for happiness, we saw that he would not be able to will anything else.

S. Yes.

T. Now, justice having been abandoned and only the prior will for happiness remaining, can the deserter go back to the will for justice by himself, something that was not given to him beforehand to do?

S. Much less. Before it was due to a condition of nature that he could not have it, but now it is by reason of his fault as well.

T. So there is no way in which he could acquire justice when he does not have it, either before receiving it or after having abandoned it.

S. He cannot have anything of himself.

18. How the bad angel makes himself bad and the good angel makes himself good, and that the bad angel owes thanks to God for the goods he received but abandoned, just as the good angel does who retained what he had received

T. But is there not some way, at least when he has it, that he can give himself justice?

S. How could he?

T. We use ‘make’ or ‘do’ in many ways. For we say that we make something when we make a thing to be and when we could make a thing not be and do not. In this second sense the angel could give himself justice, because he could take it away or not take it away. Similarly, one who remains in the truth in which he has been created and does not, as he could, cause himself not to have it, in a sense gives it to himself yet receives the whole from God. From him they receive both the having and the capacity to keep or abandon it. God gives the latter in order that they may give themselves justice in some sense. If they could in no way take justice away from themselves, there would be no sense in which they could give it. He who gives