

The Concept of Human Acts Revisited

St. Thomas and the Unconscious in Freedom

Introduction: ST. THOMAS and Astrology

In ST. THOMAS's time — though not only his — many people believed in the special “art” or “science” of astrology.¹ This is similar to the belief in the predictions of oracles to be found in the myths of many cultures. A basic assumption of such beliefs is that there are hidden astrological laws and forces which reign over us and from which we cannot escape. According to this basic assumption, even in what appears to be the exercise of freedom the person remains under the control of the stars or of “destiny” — though without knowing how this is so. The human agent is unable to perceive how this control is being exercised, and, in acting, remains unaware of the directive powers being exerted by the stars on that acting.

As the Italian commentator S. CENTI has noted, ST. THOMAS felt obliged to treat of this difficulty in almost all his works, wherever he found the occasion,² and T. LITT, in his dissertation on the heavenly bodies in the cosmology of ST. THOMAS, has identified 40 places in the latter's works in which he discussed the causal effect of stars on human action.³ There is also one letter in which ST. THOMAS dealt exclusively with the question whether it is permitted to consult the stars.⁴

¹ Cf. THORNDIKE 1923, 604-605.

² Cf. CENTI 1985, 236 n. 2: “Il quesito che a noi può sembrare piuttosto curioso, era di grande attualità ai tempi dell'Autore.... Il fatalismo astrale, che aveva imperversato nell'antichità pagana, si ripresentava nel secolo XIII in veste scientifica attraverso le opere degli arabi.”

³ Cf. LITT 1963, 27f. 201-214. Due to his cosmological interest, however, LITT does not pay much further attention to the topic of freedom: among the occurrences cf. *De ver* 22, 9 ad 2; 24,1 ad 19; *Summa contra Gentiles* III, 85; *In De an* III, 4; *Summa Theologiae* I, 115, 4c; *De malo* 6 ad 21; *In Eth Nic* I, 20; III, 13; *Summa Theologiae* II-II, 95, 5c and ad 2; *Metaph.* VI, 1. 3 n. 1213; cf. LITT 1963, 240-241 (and note 14 below).

⁴ *De iudiciis astrorum*, in: *Leonina XLIII* (1976) 201.

At about the same time as this letter,⁵ in a fundamental part of his *Summa Theologiae*, AQUINAS wrote about the influence of the stars on our acting. In his treatise on human acts in the *Prima Secundae*, he talks about the proper acts of the human person as acts which are voluntary and hence determined by the will. These are called human acts, *actus humani*,⁶ and in the process of clarifying the activities of the will, ST. THOMAS asks what causes could move the faculty of will to act, and hence move the person to bring forth a human act. Obviously, this is a central question regarding the concept of human freedom, which implies both *the freedom to exercise* — that is, to determine whether to act or not to act — and *the freedom to specify one's actions* — that is, to determine whether to do this or that. It is in this context that ST. THOMAS deals with the question of whether the will is moved to willing by the heavenly bodies (*I-II*, 9, 5). In more precise terms, the question regards the influence of the stars on our destinies, and the making of true predictions by astrologers: do these predictions not establish the determining impact of heavenly bodies on our actions, and therefore, on our freedom and on our lives?⁷

In his basically philosophical discussion of whether the human will can be moved by external causes to an exercise of willing, ST. THOMAS leaves the reader in no doubt as to his own position: because the will — like the intellect — is a spiritual and bodiless power, and because it is evident that a bodily thing cannot act as an efficient cause on a bodiless thing, it is therefore impossible that any body — not even a heavenly body — should have a *direct* impact on the intellect or the will.⁸ As a result, the stars cannot determine human freedom, notwithstanding astrological claims to the contrary. It is only the *instinctus naturae* and the *instinctus gratiae* — which certainly are not bodily — that

⁵ Cf. TORRELL 1993, 519, on the date of "*De iudiciis astrorum*": "L'opuscule date vraisemblablement du second séjour parisien (1269-1272)." The unfinished commentary on ARISTOTLE's *De Caelo et Mundo*, in which ST. THOMAS exposes basic cosmological reflections, was written *later*, most probably in 1272-1273; cf. TORRELL 1993, 503; WEISHEIPL 1974, 284. In our context, we are concerned with ST. THOMAS's understanding of the human act, not with an exposition of his cosmology (cf. LITT 1963).

⁶ Cf. *I-II*, 1, 1c.

⁷ Cf. *I-II*, 9, 5 arg. 3: ... *per observationem caelestium corporum astrologi quaedam vera praenuntiant de humanis actibus futuris, qui sunt a voluntate. Quod non esset si corpora caelestia voluntatem hominis movere non possent. Movetur ergo voluntas humana a caelesti corpore.*

⁸ Cf. *I-II*, 9, 5c: *potentia omnino immaterialis et incorporea. Manifestum est autem quod nullum corpus agere potest in rem incorpoream, sed potius e converso. ... Unde impossibile est quod corpus caeleste imprimat directe in intellectum aut voluntatem* [emphasis added].

can effect or cause human willing *directly*, according to the proper nature of the will.⁹

An objection asks, however, whether this position is tenable in the light of the evidence that some people are often able to predict the deliberately chosen actions of others. Or better still, one may ask if this position is able to account for, or explain, the true predictions of human actions which are sometimes made on the basis of astrological constellations (cf. 9, 5 arg. 3).

As is characteristic of the *Summa Theologiae* in general, here ST. THOMAS'S response is both brief and concise, and a model of coherent argument. It is my intention to unfold the complexity of this response and, in so doing, to reconsider ST. THOMAS'S concept of the human act and, hence, of human freedom. It should be noted that this concept is presented in the very beginning of the *Secunda Pars* in order to lay the foundation for the rest of the ethical part of the *Summa Theologiae*. It is my intention to show that this concept is more differentiated than usually understood, and that it allows for important influences on human freedom which do not eliminate human freedom although the person may not be aware of them. In addition, the nature of these influences, as ST. THOMAS conceives them, is highly interesting in relation to the findings of modern psychology.

I have already pointed out that AQUINAS does not accept the hypothesis that the will can be moved by the stars to *exercise* willing. However, earlier on, in preparing his response in the body of the article, he does concede that the will can be moved by heavenly bodies in the same way in which an external thing or event can move the will. That is, the human will can be moved by the stars in two ways:

1) external bodies are influenced by the movements of celestial bodies and then in turn move the will, after having been presented to the senses, and/or

2) our sense organs themselves are influenced by the movements of the stars and contribute to the motion of the will.¹⁰

For AQUINAS, then, the possible influence of the stars on our willing and acting may be mediated (1) by the occurrence of events that are presented to our senses, and/ or (2) by the induction of some disposition in

⁹ Cf. I-II, 6, 1 ad 3; 9, 6; 10, 4.

¹⁰ Cf. I-II, 9, 5c: *Eo modo quo voluntas movetur ab exteriori obiecto, manifestum est 1) quod voluntas potest moveri a corporibus caelestibus: inquantum scilicet corpora exteriora, quae sensui proposita movent voluntatem, 2) et etiam ipsa organa potentiarum sensitivarum subiacent motibus caelestium corporum.*

our sense organs which — in contrast to will and intellect — are corporeal. According to ST. THOMAS, therefore, it is our sensitive powers which can be moved accidentally by the movements of the stars.¹¹ Effectively, ST. THOMAS is tracing back any potential influence of the stars on human freedom to their induction of sensitive activities in the human person, either (1) through the sense perception of some presented stimulus and/or (2) through an induced change in the sense organ itself.

With this preparation, then, AQUINAS responds to the argument based on the occurrence of true astrological predictions:

We have already noted that emotional feeling is an act of a bodily organ. Consequently there is nothing to prevent us holding that impressions from heavenly bodies render some people more prompt to anger than others, or to concupiscence, or to some such emotion. Indeed they are such by temperamental constitution. Most men follow their passions; only the wise resist. And therefore in the majority of cases astrological predictions may well be verified. All the same, as Ptolemy remarks, *The wise man dominates the stars*; he checks their effects by withstanding his passions, for he is free and not under the sway of the heavenly bodies. Or we may admit with Augustine that *when the truth is foretold by astrologers, this is due to some most hidden inspiration to which the human mind is unconsciously subject and since it is done to deceive it is the work of the seducing spirits* (I-II, 9, 5 ad 3 - transl. GILBY 1971, 79).¹²

In this reply once more, ST. THOMAS traces the influence of the stars to their eventual prompting or stimulating of emotions, passions, sensitive appetite in the human person. Is he, then, reducing the problem of true astrological predictions in our context to a question of insufficient control of one's emotions?

¹¹ Cf. I-II, 9, 5c: *Omnes enim vires sensitivae, cum sint actus organorum corporali-um, per accidens moveri possunt a caelestibus corporibus.*

¹² ... sicut dictum est, appetitus sensitivus est actus organi corporalis. Unde nihil prohibet ex impressione corporum caelestium aliquos esse habiles ad irascendum vel concupiscendum, vel aliquam huiusmodi passionem, sicut et ex complexione naturali. Plures autem hominum sequuntur passiones, quibus soli sapientes resistunt. Et ideo ut in pluribus verificantur ea quae praenuntiantur de actibus hominum secundum considerationem caelestium corporum. Sed tamen, ut Ptolomaeus dicit in Centiloquio, sapiens dominatur astris: scilicet quia, resistens passionibus, impedit per voluntatem liberam, et nequaquam motui caelesti subiectam, huiusmodi corporum caelestium effectus. Vel, ut Augustinus dicit in II Super Gen. ad litt., fatendum est, quando ab astrologis vera dicuntur, instinctu quodam occultissimo dici, quem nescientes humanae mentes patiuntur. Quod cum ad decipiendum homines fit, spirituum seductorum operatio est.

In fact, this is the case. In order to control one's emotional desires or promptings, the human agent needs to be aware of them. It is part of the underlying assumption of astrological predictions, however, to presuppose that people believe in the influence of stars though they do not actually feel anything of this influence; they believe that this influence is working on them (and on their acting) from without, while they cannot perceive at all how this is done.

It seems most improbable that AQUINAS was not familiar with this basic assumption — and in consequence, for anybody who is somewhat acquainted with his method of reinforcing the difficulties or arguments of his opponents, it seems even more improbable that he should have ignored it in his response. We may, therefore, be sure that AQUINAS saw his response as providing an adequate answer to the difficulty presented by the fact that people are not at all aware of how the influence or “mysterious control” of the stars acts on them. He answered that the stars arouse emotional desires in the agents. How can this answer be understood as coping adequately with the above mentioned difficulty?

First of all, the difficulty is not resolved satisfactorily by affirming that ST. THOMAS is excluding any influence of the stars on human action, though it is true that he remains firm in his defence of human freedom.¹³ We have already seen that AQUINAS *does* concede to the stars some influence on human action. Though essentially correct, the interpretation expressed by LITT (1963, 240), in which he explains that the influence of the heavenly bodies is indirect and never determining, is not sufficient to cope with the basic assumption of the belief in astrological predictions.¹⁴ The contrary opinion would be that their influence is direct and (always) necessitating, but, in his response, ST. THOMAS introduces a third or intermediate position, when he explains that celestial influence is indirect, while at the same time admitting that astrological predictions may well be verified in the majority of cases (*ut in pluribus*).¹⁵ How is this inter-

¹³ Cf. WEISHEIPL 1974, 400: “... activities that depend upon free will, which in no way depends on the stars.” TORRELL 1993, 314: “Par contre, Il est très ferme, on s'en doute, pour défendre la liberté humaine.” 519: “Sans nier les effets corporels des astres sur notre monde, la réponse de Thomas exclut fermement les actes humaines du domaine de leur influence.” (All quotations refer to the *De iudiciis astrorum*, in which ST. THOMAS however does not differ from the understanding presented in *I-II*, 9, 5 as well as in *I-II* 95, 5 ad 2.)

¹⁴ “Il affirme avec tout autant de certitude que l'influence des corps célestes sur les actes humains est indirecte et jamais nécessitante. Il ajoute très souvent que l'opinion contraire est hérétique, puisqu'elle exclut la liberté humaine.”

¹⁵ Cf. *I-II*, 9, 5c and ad 3. Cf. *De ver* 22, 9 ad 2: *corpora caelestia non possunt de necessitate immutare voluntatem nec unius hominis nec multitudinis*. The stress is on “*de ne-*

mediate position to be understood, and how is it to be reconciled with the understanding of human freedom and with the related concept of human action? An important consideration in this regard is offered by CENTI (1985, 237, n. 2) who comments that AQUINAS has done nothing more than concede simple probability to these astrological predictions, based on statistical laws.¹⁶ Philosophical rigour, however, will ask in a more precise manner about the motivational bases of these statistical laws in human acting, and will also repeat that the basic assumption or experience underlying astrological beliefs still remains unexplained. Again, we are left with the question how to reconcile the admitted influence of the stars on human will with AQUINAS's understanding of human freedom and action, in other words: how are we to understand AQUINAS's intermediate position?

Having listened to ST. THOMAS's response, we can say at least that, for him, whatever influence of the stars on human action there might be, it is always mediated by, or rather traced back to, the effects of human emotions. And according to the basic assumption underlying astrological beliefs, *these emotions* or promptings go unrecognized; they are not perceived or consciously felt by the persons themselves; in other words, they are *unconsciously, but effectively influencing human action*. We may conclude that ST. THOMAS, in his response, *allows* for such unconscious emotional influence, which escapes the control of reason and will. This does not exclude at all that some persons — e.g., but not only, the *sapientes* — may also be conscious of emotions aroused in them by the impact of the stars. The decisive point, however, is the fact that in the majority of cases, for ST. THOMAS, these emotional tendencies are working unconsciously in the acting person.

But, would this not contradict the very concept of free human action or its basic constituent, self-determination? Is ST. THOMAS, then, being self-contradictory? Can our deliberate or free actions be subject to influences, or even conditioning, of which we are entirely unaware? Let me put it plainly: My thesis is that ST. THOMAS's concept of the human act and, hence, of freedom, does not exclude, but systematically allows for such relevant unconscious emotional influences. As we shall see, this thesis is different from the classical understanding of human acts and freedom.

cessitate"; therefore this does not exclude the possibility of true predictions "*ut in pluribus*" (cf. also I-II, 95, 5 ad 2).

¹⁶ "A leggere attentamente, vediamo che egli accorda a codeste predizioni una semplice probabilità fondata su leggi statistiche, per dirla con frasario moderno."

The classical interpretation of what St. THOMAS meant by 'actus humanus'

In the very first article of the *Secunda Pars*, ST. THOMAS provides a number of brief formulas relating to his concept of the human act. He equates human actions properly so-called with those actions which stem from 'deliberate will'¹⁷; this corresponds to another affirmation in the same article: only those actions of which the human person is master may properly be called human actions.¹⁸ These short-formulas are obviously echoed in the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on human freedom and responsibility, which reads: "Freedom is the power, rooted in reason and will, to act or not to act, to do this or that, and so to perform deliberate actions on one's own responsibility. By free will, one shapes one's own life." (1731) "Freedom makes man *responsible* for his acts to the extent that they are voluntary." (1734)

With these brief formulas and basic affirmations on human action in mind, the question: 'Can our deliberate actions be subject to important emotional influences of which we are entirely unaware?' becomes more urgent still, especially when we listen to the interpretations of contemporary authors who reflect the classical understanding of ST. THOMAS's teaching on the *actus humanus*. According to N. MAILLOUX (1954, 265), from "the start, the moralist makes a clear distinction between the acts over which man has complete control, since they proceed from a deliberate decision and conform to the dictates of reason — *human acts* — and the acts which escape such control and the causes and motives of which do not submit to any rational influence — *the acts of man*." And C. MOONEN (1993, 19) explains: "The human act *as such* reaches only as far as its being '*in intentione*' reaches. Here, willing, choosing, striving for, proposing and intending, are completely synonymous, and these actions mark the content and limits of the human act."¹⁹ M. RHONHEIMER (1994c, 37) summarizes the classical or conventional understanding of human action according to AQUINAS: "Our acting is characterized as *hu-*

¹⁷ *I-II, 1, 1c: Illae ergo actiones proprie humanae dicuntur, quae ex voluntate deliberata procedunt.*

¹⁸ *I-II, 1, 1c: illae solae actiones vocantur proprie humanae, quarum homo est dominus.*

¹⁹ The German original reads: "Der menschliche Akt geht als solcher nur soweit als sein 'in intentione' geht. Hier sind wollen, wählen, anstreben, beabsichtigen, intendieren völlig synonym, und diese Handlungen markieren den Inhalt und die Grenzen des menschlichen Aktes"; in other words, MOONEN emphasizes (1993, 18): "nur soweit das Kennen und Wollen reicht, ist das konkrete Tun eines Menschen wesentlich menschliches Tun." MOONEN's attention then focuses on effects and circumstances that are not intended, in order to exclude them from the moral appraisal or specification of human actions.

man because it is *voluntary*, that is, it is borne of aspiring which is guided by reason; and, because we remain masters of such acting, we know what we are doing, and how our actions also affect others. Because we perceive our responsibility for the consequences, we can do one thing and leave another.”²⁰ As a result, in another place (1994a, 17), RHONHEIMER affirms that in considering human actions, “we must start from the *normal condition* in which actions are chosen and performed, that is, from the condition that the agent chooses and thus willingly performs *exactly* the action which he *believes* he is choosing and performing.”²¹

In this classical interpretation of ST. THOMAS’s concept of the *actus humanus*, all of these authors are stressing correctly that the agent has to operate consciously, using will and reason.²² This is as much beyond question as is the same authors’ awareness of the relevance of the character and dispositions of the agent, since AQUINAS conceives of ethics mainly as virtue ethics (cf. PINCKAERS 1990; RHONHEIMER 1994; SCHOCKENHOFF 1987). This conception already indicates that AQUINAS systematically takes into consideration more factors in the agent than the agent’s knowledge or consciousness of the act he is performing. It is possible that, in the “majority of cases” of human actions in which true astrological predictions may occur, such factors may in fact be particular unconscious strivings which *co-determine* the action. The agent, however, normally would at least be surprised and would not recognise them as his own action-tendencies or pursue them at all, if he became aware or were made aware of them. For example, someone may know that she is deciding to become a nurse because she wants to care for others and likes nursing; she may not be aware, however, that at the same time she is *also* defending against strong unconscious guilt-feelings towards her

²⁰ “Il nostro agire si caratterizza come *umano* perché è *volontario*, cioè nasce dall’aspirare guidato dalla ragione, e perché ne possediamo la padronanza: sappiamo che cosa facciamo, quali sono le conseguenze del nostro fare anche per gli altri, e in virtù della percezione della responsabilità delle conseguenze, possiamo fare l’una cosa e tralasciare l’altra.”

²¹ Cf. G. STANKE 1984, 167: “All das, was der Mensch unbewußt, d.h. gedankenlos, unüberlegt oder im Zustand geistiger Unzurechnungsfähigkeit tut, und auch all das, wozu er gegen seinen Willen durch äußere oder innere Umstände gezwungen wird oder was er aufgrund biologischer, seiner Freiheit entzogener Gesetzmäßigkeiten ausführt, gilt folglich nicht als menschliche Handlung.”

²² N. MAILLOUX (1954, 265-266, emphases added) recalls the explicit awareness on the part of traditional moral theology of many insufficiencies and deficiencies in human willing, and he points to ST. THOMAS: “Aquinas goes so far as to say that the great mass of human individuals remain immature to the point of never finding in themselves sufficient courage and insight to overcome this *determination* of sensuality and continue to let most of their behaviour be *dominated* by it.” How would MAILLOUX qualify the actions of the “great mass” of “immature” human individuals — as *actus humani* or *actus hominis*?

parents. Or a man may know that he is going to marry his future partner because he loves her; but at the same time he is not aware that in her he has *also* looked for and found someone who is dominating, just like his mother was.

Actually, a re-reading of the treatise on the *actus humanus* (I-II, 6-17) will reveal a concept of human action in which, from the start, ST. THOMAS takes into consideration more factors in the agent than the agent's knowledge of the act he is performing — and we shall do well to follow his example and apply this approach in a systematic way also in ethical action theory. For ST. THOMAS it does not contradict his concept of the human act that there may be important emotions which *co-determine* the act, which are unconscious and therefore out of the control of reason and will.

*St. THOMAS's concept of the 'actus humanus' revisited*²³

The treatise on the *actus humanus* has undergone a history of interpretation in which efforts have repeatedly been made to identify a sequence of steps in which intellect and will interact to produce a human act. From C.-R. BILLUART (1685-1757) on, it has become a common opinion that, within the human act, AQUINAS differentiates twelve steps of will and intellect that can be consciously perceived; S. PINCKAERS (1955) raised basic objections against this kind of interpretation and reduced the scheme to four steps, whilst D. WESTBERG (1994, ch. 8-12) recently proposed a new scheme with six or, in some more difficult cases, eight steps. While these analyses of the interplay of intellect and will, which are inferred from ST. THOMAS's treatment of the relevant terms, are both reasonable and useful (cf. FINNIS 1991; WESTBERG 1994), JOSEPH DE FINANCE has remarked on AQUINAS's construction of the treatise: "The order followed — a logical one which is exterior to the living genesis of the action — makes his exposition to be somewhat confusing" (1967, 44). And, regarding the analysis of the *actus humanus* in a sequence of twelve steps, DE FINANCE goes on to ask: "could it not also be maintained that this analysis mistakes the point of the Thomistic one?" (1967, 46).

According to W. KLUXEN's (1964, 206) opinion, after defining the terms, ST. THOMAS sets about investigating the conditions under which an action can still be considered 'voluntary'. This perspective encour-

²³ For a more detailed discussion cf. BAUMANN 1996, 157-234.

ages us not to isolate our attention on the operations of intellect and will, but to pay more attention to the role of the emotions or “sensitive appetite” in the process of human acting as repeatedly mentioned and discussed by AQUINAS in this treatise.²⁴

The gradual definition of the term “voluntary”

Reading the first two articles in *Quaestio* 6 of the *Prima Secundae*, which provide the definition of the term ‘voluntarium’, the reader may wonder why AQUINAS is proceeding so slowly and gradually: He starts from movements in general which start from an inner principle; such a movement from within is given *perfectly* or *in the full sense* when there is *some kind* of knowledge of the goal of the movement.²⁵ Such knowledge is *maximally* realized in the human person, and therefore, his acts are maximally found to be voluntary,²⁶ but it is also found (to a lesser extent) in the sensitive apprehension and appetitive behaviour of animals (cf. I-II, 6, 1 ad 2). Thus, *in a first step*, ST. THOMAS is stressing the twofold characteristic or structure of *any* appetitive movement of animals, including the human person:

I. first, there is an *inner dynamic principle* which brings about movement from within;

II. secondly, this inner principle also *provides a direction* towards *some apprehended goal*.²⁷

Such movement, brought about and directed from within, is voluntary, whether it is stimulated by external influences or not (cf. I-II, 6, 1 ad 1-3). Interestingly, it is these same two types of external stimu-

²⁴ The importance of these considerations is also stressed by RHONHEIMER in his detailed study of practical reason in AQUINAS (1994b, 223): “Der von Thomas entwickelte Begriff des Voluntarium ist von Anbeginn in eine differenzierte und differenzierende Theorie der verschiedenen Strebevermögen integriert.” But, in the next sentence, instead of pursuing this insight by analyzing this ‘differentiated and differentiating theory’, the author concentrates on will and intention: “Deshalb ist der Begriff des Voluntarium zunächst und vor allem der Begriff einer der ‘voluntas’ entspringenden Handlung, genauer: einer intentionalen Handlung, die aufgrund einer ‘electio’ (Prohairesis) gesetzt wird.” This switch of attention seems to be due to his interest in demonstrating the potential infallibility of individual practical reason.

²⁵ Cf. I-II, 6, 1 c: *illa perfecte moventur a principio intrinseco, in quibus est aliquod intrinsecum principium non solum ut moveantur, sed ut moveantur in finem. Ad hoc autem ... requiritur cognitio finis aliqualis.*

²⁶ Cf. I-II, 6, 1c: *cum homo maxime cognoscat finem sui operis et moveat seipsum, in eius actibus maxime voluntarium invenitur.*

²⁷ Cf. PINCKAERS 1962, 293: “un double principe [intérieur]: l’un moteur, l’autre directeur”.

lation capable of preceding voluntary movement which AQUINAS will later concede to be the (only) possible ways in which the stars may influence human actions: (1) by the presentation of some stimulus to the senses, which apprehend it and elicit (sensitive) desire or appetite and (2) by inducing a natural change in the body of the animal, e.g. by coldness or heat, a change which likewise leads to the arousal of sensitive appetite.²⁸

This first step of definition is presented in the first article of the treatise.

Only *in a second step*, in the second article, does ST. THOMAS confine 'voluntarium' to the meaning of 'perfecte voluntarium' which is given when the agent not only moves himself towards a goal but also knows that the goal is a goal, that is, knows that he is acting for the sake of a goal. Such knowledge implies the capacity to reflect and decide whether to move towards a goal or not, and by which means to move there, a capacity which is only given in beings who possess reason (*ratio*).²⁹ In contrast to the first step of the treatise, from this point on ST. THOMAS calls 'voluntary' what comes from the will as rational appetite, or that to which the will is directed.³⁰

Why this gradual approach in the definition of 'voluntarium', of the distinctive quality of human acts?

Let me propose that in using this method ST. THOMAS has a twofold intention:

First, he recalls and underscores the *common dynamic and directive structure* of the appetitive powers, that is, of *sensitive and rational appetite*, of emotions (or *passiones*) and will. I propose that AQUINAS does so in order to keep in mind that both of these powers are present and united in the human agent and that both of these powers contribute to the human act.

²⁸ Cf. I-II, 6, 1 ad 2: *Uno modo, inquantum per motum exteriorem praesentatur sensui animalis aliquod sensibile, quod apprehensum movet appetitum ... Alio modo, inquantum per exteriorem motum incipit aliquid immutari naturali immutatione corpus animalis, puta per frigorem vel calorem; corpore autem immutato per motum exterioris corporis, immutatur etiam per accidens appetitus sensitivus qui est virtus organi corporei. God can use both of these ways to move the human will 'from without', while also being able to move it 'from within'; cf. I-II, 6, 1 ad 3.*

²⁹ Cf. I-II, 6, 2c: *voluntarium secundum rationem perfectam: prout scilicet, apprehenso fine, aliquis potest, deliberans de fine et de his quae sunt ad finem, moveri in finem vel non moveri.*

³⁰ Cf. I-II, 6, 3c: *a voluntate; 6, 7c: voluntas in id fertur; and 6, 7 ad 3: in his quae usum rationis non habent, neque voluntarium est neque involuntarium.*

Secondly, he maintains that one cannot speak of a human or voluntary action if there is no active participation of will and reason. He does not demand at all, however, that *only* will and reason should interact in the *inner process* of bringing forth a human act. In fact, for ST. THOMAS it is inevitable that sensitive appetite play an important role in this process.

The interplay of emotions with reason and will in the human act

In the *Prima Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*, AQUINAS had already presented an analysis of the 'inner human senses' which, by their operations, precede, contribute to and interact with, the activities of reason and will. When in the gradual definition of the term 'voluntary' he recalls that sensitive apprehension and appetite interact in the inner process of producing a human act, he can presuppose our knowledge of this analysis given in the *Prima Pars*:³¹

Sensitive appetite is similarly structured in both animals and human beings. In human beings, however, sensitive appetite has undergone a specifically human and individual development due to the operations of the (specifically human) *vis cogitativa* which combines³² sensitive perceptions of external stimuli, perceptual organization (by the *sensus communis*), spontaneous memories (*memoria*) and fantasies (*vis imaginativa*) into one apprehended thing. This apprehended object, then, by the same *vis cogitativa*, is appraised as emotionally pleasurable or painful for the person; as a result, there follows a corresponding emotional desire for, or else rejection of, this apprehended object.³³

These operations of the inner senses (sensitive perception, perceptual organization, combination with sensitive memories and fantasies, and sensitive appraisal of the resulting apprehended object) take place in a spontaneous 'intrapyschic' process *before* the human person can inter-

³¹ Cf. I, 78, 4; 81, 1. 3; cf. STOCK 1958.

³² Cf. I, 78, 4; *per collationem quandam*.

³³ There are striking similarities to this account of human emotional processes in the analysis presented by the American object-relations theorist O. KERNBERG (1992, 5-6): "I define affects as psychophysiological behavior patterns that include a specific cognitive appraisal, a specific facial expression, a subjective experience of a pleasurable and rewarding or painful and aversive nature, and a muscular and neurovegetative discharge pattern. ... There is fairly general agreement today that affects from their very origin have a cognitive aspect, that they contain at least an appraisal of the 'goodness' or 'badness' of the immediate perceptive constellation, and that this appraisal ... determines a felt motivation for action either toward or away from a certain stimulus or situation."

vene actively and consciously by will and reason; therefore, they are also influential during the intervention of will and reason.

This spontaneous process of the operations of the ‘inner senses’ produces both (1) an apprehended object and (2) an emotionally dynamic directedness of the person in relation to this apprehended object;³⁴ both of these are connected with each other within the person, the spontaneous emotional reaction of the person being connected to the apprehended object.

In other words, the object apprehended by sense perception is already emotionally toned; it is linked, within the person, to an activated inclination of sensitive appetite towards or away from it. It is this apprehended object which then — always intrapsychically — is presented to reason which will appraise it ‘rationally’ and propose it to the choice of will as a “bonum apprehensum” (or object). This spontaneous emotional directedness persists in the person and disposes reason and will to appraise and to choose in a given direction.

Now, it is clear that for ST. THOMAS this dynamic emotional orientation cannot move the will necessarily to an act of willing; however, it has a disposing effect on practical reason, with the consequence that something may appear desirable or undesirable which otherwise would have been judged differently. In other words, the preceding sensitive process of apprehension and appraisal makes practical reason more ready to appraise the apprehended object as good and suitable (*conveniens*) or bad and unsuitable (*inconveniens*) for the person, in line with the preceding appraisal by the *vis cogitativa*. In the same way, by disposing it, sensitive or emotional appetite can move the human will *ex parte obiecti*, that is by means of the rationally appraised — and, previously, emotionally appraised — object.³⁵ It is with reference to such emotional (pre-)dispositions in the human agent that ST. THOMAS quotes and shares ARISTOTLE’S opinion that “*qualis unusquisque est, talis finis videtur ei*” (I-II, 9, 2c).³⁶

³⁴ Again note the closeness of KERNBERG’S theorizing (1992, 11): “The affects we observe in the psychoanalytic situation not only always have cognitive content but — and this is, I think, a crucial finding — always have an object relations aspect as well; that is, they express a relation between an aspect of the patient’s self and an aspect of one or another of his object representations.”

³⁵ Cf. I-II, 9, 2c: *Manifestum est autem quod secundum passionem appetitus sensitivi, immutatur homo ad aliquam dispositionem. Unde secundum quod homo est in passione aliqua, videtur sibi aliquid conveniens, quod non videtur extra passionem existenti ... Et per hunc modum, ex parte obiecti, appetitus sensitivus movet voluntatem.*

³⁶ In a recent article, R. DARGE presents his analysis of the human act: “Nach ihrer Funktion im Gefüge der Handlung lassen sich die einander wechselseitig zugeordneten Teilvervollzüge der Handlung in zwei Gruppen einteilen, denen zwei Hauptphasen entspre-

An understanding in depth of “what manner of person a man is” (transl. GILBY 1971, 69) today would be more explicitly sought in terms of the person’s biography and with special attention to his affective memory which has been individually formed from the beginning of his life (cf. ARNOLD 1984, 26-28). In AQUINAS’s analysis, the contributions of affective memory could be inserted in the associations provided by sensitive memory and (more indirectly) by sensitive fantasy, with their impact on the emotional (pre-)dispositions of the agent.

In this life, according to AQUINAS, human will remains free to realize, in the sense of *libertas exercitii*, whatever object is presented to it by reason (cf. *I-II*, 9, 1c). It is also true, however, that the disposing influence of emotions on the *specification* of the object, that is, on what appears as good and suitable to the person, is especially strong when it is a question of concrete situations and things³⁷ — and human actions and choices always take place in the context of concrete situations, persons and things. Moreover, there are three possible ways in which this influence may be related to the acting person’s consciousness. First, it is possible that the person may become aware of such a disposing influence on the part of his emotions; in other cases, he may notice only the result of such influence, such as in moments of some (other) kind of *akrasia* (cf. BARAD 1988) “when the reason is swayed by conflicting considerations about commanding or not, with the result that it fluctuates between alternatives and makes no decisive ruling” (*I-II*, 17, 5 ad 1, transl. GILBY 1970, 195). Finally, and most importantly for our context, this disposing influence of the emotions may, in other cases, go completely unrecognized by the person, with the result that he chooses to pursue an object or

chen, in denen die Dynamik des Handlungsaufbaus verläuft: (a) eine Gruppe von Akten, in denen der Handelnde sich vorgängig zur Ausführung der Tat in Rücksicht auf das Ziel, dem sein Tun dient, sowie in Beziehung auf das im Interesse der Erreichung des Ziels von ihm zu Tuende orientiert und bestimmt, und (b) eine Gruppe von Akten, in denen die Tat, zu der sich der Handelnde bestimmt hat, zur Ausführung kommt und nach außen hin in Erscheinung tritt.” (1997, 56-57) Then he states: “Im Unterschied zu dieser letzteren Gruppe, die auch Akte der sinnlichen Strebevermögen einschließt ..., umfaßt die *erste Gruppe nur Akte der an sich rationalen Wirkvermögen.*” (57 [emphasis added]) Obviously, he shares the classical understanding of the *actus humanus* and denies the contribution of sensitive apprehension and appetite to the voluntary act in his “first group” of inner processes. Thus, a crucial element is denied which, in my opinion, could shed light (1) on the importance and “intrapsychic” function of moral habits, as well as (2) on the deeper meaning of “what manner of person a man is” (*qualis unusquisque est*).

³⁷ Cf. *I-II*, 9, 2ad 2: *actus et electiones hominum sunt circa singularia. Unde ex hoc ipso quod appetitus sensitivus est virtus particularis, habet magnam virtutem ad hoc quod per ipsum sic disponatur homo, ut ei aliquid videatur sic vel aliter, circa singularia.*

goal as a “good” for him (*sub ratione boni*)³⁸, when in fact it is only *apparently* good, though he is convinced of aspiring to a *true* good.

This interpretation of ST. THOMAS’S action theory, which presents the complex process of the “inner action”, provides a convincing framework within which to understand the various elements to be found in his discussion of the human act, as well as the indications given in his response to the astrological question. He has this notion of apparent goodness in mind when he explains why the will is not forced against its natural aspiration to the good when it sets out to sin: “That on which the will is set by sinning, though it be an evil and contrary to rational nature in reality and truth, is nevertheless apprehended as something good and responding to some emotion or some decayed disposition in a man” (*I-II*, 6, 4 ad 3, transl. GILBY 1970, 19).³⁹ In some cases, the person may know that he is seeking something in contrast to the real good; in other cases, it seems he does not know this. For in the context of different kinds of ignorance, ST. THOMAS proposes the case of “ignorance in wrongly choosing” which is given when a person does not actually attend to what he could and should consider. ST. THOMAS explains that this results from passion or from some habit,⁴⁰ thus repeating here in short form what he had said in the foregoing response.⁴¹ Later, in discussing the fundamental question of whether human willing is directed only towards the good, he explains that both sensitive and rational appetite tend towards what is apprehended as good. “One consequence is that the object to which the will tends is not necessarily good for it in point of fact; it is enough that it is apprehended as a good. Which is why Aristotle says that the end is a good or a seeming good” (*I-II*, 8, 1c, transl. GILBY 1970, 53).⁴² In most cases, it seems, a person would not choose an apparent good in contrast to what he has also recognized as true good, that is, if he knew that it is only an apparent good.

³⁸ It could be disputed whether R. MCINERNY (1992, 30) is correct when he argues that “This *ratio boni* or reason for choosing any and everything we choose is what Thomas means by ultimate end.”

³⁹ ... *id in quod voluntas tendit peccando, etsi sit malum et contra rationalem naturam secundum rei veritatem, apprehenditur tamen ut bonum et conveniens naturae, in quantum est conveniens homini secundum aliquam passionem sensus, vel secundum aliquem habitum corruptum* [emphasis added].

⁴⁰ Cf. *I-II*, 6, 8c: ... *ignorantia malae electionis, vel ex passione vel ex habitu proveniens.*

⁴¹ Cf. *I-II*, 6, 4 ad 3. Note that for ST. THOMAS, ignorance is one of the basic roots of sin; cf. *I-II*, 71.

⁴² *Ad hoc igitur quod voluntas in aliquid tendat, non requiritur quod sit bonum in rei veritate, sed quod apprehendatur in ratione boni. Et propter hoc Philosophus dicit, in II Physic., quod finis est bonum, vel apparens bonum.*

All of these elements are synthesized in AQUINAS's answer to the astrological beliefs, and he illustrates them with the carefully chosen quotation from AUGUSTINE who talks of *hidden* incentives which *unknowing* human minds suffer from, alluding to the unconsciously working inclinations of sensitive appetite and the corresponding ignorance of the person.⁴³ The person is convinced that he is acting with full insight and freedom, while in fact unconscious tendencies are *co-determining* the object of the (deliberate) action which is chosen and carried out. Nevertheless, the person accomplishes a human act in the full sense (*perfecte voluntarium*) according to ST. THOMAS's understanding of the *actus humanus* — and also according to the person's self-understanding.

The act is a human act in the full sense, because there is an active participation of will and reason, without which no action can be considered a human act (sufficient condition). But this does not mean, for ST. THOMAS, that the necessary inner dynamic principle, which gives a direction toward an apprehended goal, is uniquely determined by will and reason. On the contrary, for AQUINAS, it may be *co-determined* by preceding and accompanying inclinations of sensitive appetite of which the agent may be more or less aware. The normal condition, therefore, need not necessarily be that the agent chooses and performs *exactly* the action which he (consciously) *believes* he is choosing and performing. It would perhaps be enough to affirm that under normal conditions (i.e. of reality testing) there is a *sufficient correspondence* between the choosing or acting of the agent and what the agent believes he is choosing or doing, so that they are and remain *sufficiently* his own choosing or acting, for which he is responsible. This would also account for that "majority of cases" (*ut in pluribus*) in which — according to ST. THOMAS — the agent may be completely unaware of the distorting impact of his emotional strivings on his perceiving, choosing and acting. For such cases are nevertheless to be considered as human acting in the full sense of ST. THOMAS's concept of the *actus humanus*.

Some Consequences

1. This way of understanding ST. THOMAS's concept of the *actus humanus* seems rather new. According to this concept, a person is *sufficiently* free and responsible in his actions, provided there is the active or

⁴³ Cf. I-II, 9, 5 ad 3: ... *instinctu quodam occultissimo dici, quem nescientes humanae mentes patiuntur.*

conscious participation of intellect and will, in other words, as long as specific situationally relevant or generalized psychopathological disturbance is excluded (cf. *I-II*, 10, 3c). At the same time, such a human act may include relevant unconscious tendencies in the person, which co-determine what the person is striving for or shrinking from, persevering in or neglecting at the expense of other good or even better possibilities. The mysterious, hidden 'control or power of the stars' on human action has been traced back to hidden, unconscious emotional strivings within the person (which may have been stimulated from without). In this understanding of the *actus humanus*, St. THOMAS has translated longstanding spiritual wisdom into action theory, and has opened up a framework within which an interdisciplinary integration of valid insights from depth-psychology may become possible.⁴⁴ Such insights, confirmed by empirical research (RULLA *et. al.* 1976; 1989), can do much to overcome the either-or thinking which, in theory, has allowed for relevant unconscious influences on human behaviour only in cases of psychopathology and which otherwise presumed the conscious, rational control of all emotional influence.⁴⁵ It seems that OCKHAM's razor, which has established the principle of parsimony in scientific explanation and theory, has been applied to excess in action theory, where, instead of reducing everything to the conscious operations of interacting will and intellect, a principle of multiple functions or meanings, both conscious and unconscious, seems more suited to the object in question.⁴⁶ The relevant influ-

⁴⁴ This framework of action theory, especially of the inner world of the human agent, has been repeatedly indicated by K. DEMMER (e.g. 1989, 218).

⁴⁵ This criticism includes both S. FREUD and psychoanalysis in general as well as manuals of moral theology and philosophy. It is certainly widely accepted in moral philosophy and theology that the virtues dispose one to choose well and to act well. However, becoming virtuous and growing in virtue do not seem to be simply a matter of conscious striving and good will. There can be within the person debilitating resistances of an unconscious nature, which prove stubbornly refractory to change. These resistances (and their influence on the person's life) can be better understood and resolved if they are uncovered as unconscious emotions, or unconscious dispositions to act, on the part of the person. Only then is it possible for the person to deal with them consciously and with greater freedom, so as to take them into account in his choices and actions.

⁴⁶ Cf. WOJTYLA 1969, 91/93: "An analysis of the human being, of the acting person, if it were to be grounded on consciousness alone, would from the first be doomed to inadequacy. ... (f) ... in point of fact, it seems that it would be impossible to understand and explain the human being, his dynamism as well as his conscious acting and actions, if we were to base our considerations on consciousness alone. In this respect, as it seems, potentiality of the subconscious comes first; it is primary and more indispensable than consciousness for the interpretation of human dynamism as well as for the interpretation of conscious acting. Consciousness stresses the subjective aspect of conscious acting and to some extent also of what happens in man, but it does not constitute the inner structure of

ence of *the unconscious in freedom* does not deny or absorb freedom, though the latter may be reduced or limited from within the agent.

L. RULLA, in the formulation of the bases for an interdisciplinary anthropology of the Christian vocation, has stated concisely (1986, 300): "There are many forms of human behavior which cannot be explained, nor the person helped to change them, if one's approach is based *only* on the level of rationality, or ideals, or spiritual limitations, or defects that are psychopathological." In terms of the dialectical dispositions which are present in every human person, in addition to what has been classically considered the conscious dialectic of virtue vs sin and an unconscious dialectic of normality vs pathology, he has proposed an additional dialectic of consciously pursued values vs unconscious emotional tendencies.⁴⁷ ST. THOMAS's differentiated concept of the *actus humanus* allows for a further systematic translation and higher integration into moral philosophy and theology of these interdisciplinary insights concerning the human agent, with the result that *the unconscious in freedom* is no longer neglected (cf. BAUMANN 1996, 291-354). At the same time, such an integration may help prevent fundamental ethics from uncritical and incompetent acceptance of psychological hypotheses which tend rather to deny the human person's capacity for free and moral action.⁴⁸

2. Obviously, however, right from the beginning of the ethical part of his *Summa Theologiae*, ST. THOMAS is implying a relevant limitation of the *competence* of practical reason in the majority of persons as far as concrete situations that call for action are concerned. He assumes that most people — not "an exceptional case" (RHONHEIMER 1994a, 17) — follow unrecognized emotional tendencies which only wise persons resist (cf. *I-II*, 9, 5 ad 3);⁴⁹ what is an undoubted good to the wise, may not

the human dynamism itself. ... Speaking of the subconscious we refer to, as it were, an inner space, to which some objects are expelled or withheld and prevented from reaching the threshold of consciousness."

⁴⁷ Cf. RULLA 1986, 84-89 and, in more detail, 170-203; cf. RULLA 1997. RULLA calls this latter dialectic the "second dimension" which consists of the unconscious but influential tension due to inconsistent motivational tendencies, conscious and unconscious, within the same person. Substantial research has demonstrated the crucial role of this second dimension for living the Christian vocation, both in terms of inconsistencies and credibility as well as perseverance; cf. RULLA et al. 1976, 1989, IMODA 1997.

⁴⁸ Cf. the concern of JOHN PAUL II in this regard, as formulated in *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (1984) Nn. 17-18.

⁴⁹ This assumption of AQUINAS is actually confirmed by empirical research which proved the presence of dynamically central unconscious inconsistencies in 60-80% of the representative samples; cf. RULLA et al. 1976; 1989 (with further literature).

be considered good at all by the majority.⁵⁰ Correspondingly, it seems, ST. THOMAS recommends not overestimating one's capacity to reach the truth in one's individual practical judgements in concrete situations of action: For him, in particular situations one's knowing the truth "*non habet aliquid magnum*", not in the sense that it is unimportant or useless, but that it cannot be expected to reach the clarity expected at the level of universal notions and necessary principles (cf. *I-II*, 14, 3c). An individual agent claiming the infallibility of individual practical reason, therefore, seems to exaggerate grossly. For the degrees of certainty in particular situations correspond to two different kinds or levels of truth. One is the certainty implied in a sufficiently healthy reality testing (in psychological terms) which implies a realistic perception and evaluation of self and others in terms of ordinary social norms.⁵¹ The other is the certainty according to the character of truth in matters of morals as ST. THOMAS explains in his comment on ARISTOTLE'S *Nicomachean Ethics*: Perfect certainty is not expected in moral matters,⁵² but rather, what is required is a basic docility towards the experiential moral *wisdom* of the community (cf. *I-II*, 14, 1. 3. 6), especially of the community of faith (cf. *I-II*, 106-108).

3. ST. THOMAS considers the "despotic" repression of emotions as dangerous in regard to moral competence and effective freedom. For such despotic repression, in contrast to "royal" governing by will and reason, recognizes neither the inherent laws of human emotions and psycho-social needs nor their potentially constructive contribution towards living the Christian vocation of loving God with all one's strengths and weaknesses and one's neighbour as oneself — just as it is free citizens who contribute best to a political community.⁵³ The recognition of the potentially constructive contribution of human emotions to moral living implies the task of an accepting, firm and flexible pedagogy or re-educat-

⁵⁰ Cf. *I-II*, 14, 1 ad 3: *nihil prohibet aliqua esse certissima bona secundum sententiam sapientum et spiritualium virorum, quae tamen non sunt certa bona secundum sententiam plurium, vel carnalium hominum.*

⁵¹ Cf. *I-II*, 14, 6 ad 3: *in singularibus contingentibus potest aliquid accipi certum, etsi non simpliciter, tamen ut nunc, prout assumitur in operatione. Socratem enim sedere non est necessarium: sed eum sedere, dum sedet, est necessarium. Et hoc per certitudinem accipi potest.*

⁵² Cf. *In Eth Nic I, III*, n. 32: *Materia autem moralis talis est, quod non est ei conveniens perfecta certitudo.* And n. 36: *... ad hominem disciplinatum, idest bene instructum, pertinet, ut tantum certitudinis quaerat in unaquaque materia quantum natura rei patitur. ... debet ... nec minori esse contentus.*

⁵³ Cf. *I-II*, 9, 2 ad 3; 17, 7c.

tion of the emotions⁵⁴ which does not deny the necessary tensions implied in any moral decision. The acceptance of these necessary tensions prevents their repression to the unconscious, and is in contrast to a widespread tendency which aims at an illusionary ethical and temporary psychological tranquillity.

4. As to the moral appraisal of human actions, in the tradition faithful to AQUINAS, the object of human action has always been considered, even before the intention and circumstances, as the primary source for such an appraisal. When ST. THOMAS declares that the goodness of a moral act is indicated first of all by the suitability of the object,⁵⁵ he relies on what he had earlier understood by the term "object" in the treatise on the human act.⁵⁶ This object is not simply identical with the external reality as encountered, perceived and/or operated upon by the human agent. This would presuppose a naive realism regarding the operations of intellect and will. In terms of critical realism, the "object" is constituted in a more complex way: in addition to a sufficiently realistic perception (in psychological terms of reality-testing), there are intrapsychic associations of memory and fantasies as well as emotional appraisals which are combined with this perception; these (sensitive) memories, fantasies and appraisals confer an emotionally dynamic orientation to what is presented to reason and will as "apprehended thing", which then is additionally appraised by reason. As such, it is the object or *bonum apprehensum* to be chosen (or not) by will. In this sense, the *bonum apprehensum* as the object or end of the human action also contains the individual unconscious meanings and functions (which are both dynamic and directive) associated by the agent. This understanding of the *obiectum* corresponds to what is demanded by the Encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* in the tradition of AQUINAS: In order "to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the *perspective of the acting person*" (n. 78). The viewpoint of the 'first person'

⁵⁴ Cf. WOJTYLA 1969, 95: "Let us add that the transfer to the domain of consciousness of moments captured in subconsciousness, and especially those hindered from coming to a genuine objectivization, stand out as one of the chief tasks of morality and education." Cf. IMODA 1993, ch. 9.

⁵⁵ Cf. I-II, 18, 2c: *prima bonitas actus moralis attenditur ex obiecto convenienti*. Cf. *Veritatis Splendor* n. 78: "the morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the 'object' rationally chosen by the deliberate will."

⁵⁶ The understanding of what AQUINAS meant by this *obiectum* has been controversial (cf. e.g. RHONHEIMER 1994a; HÖRMANN 1984; KEENAN 1992). C. MOONEN (1993, 45 n. 24) has stated that ST. THOMAS "nirgendwo eine systematische Erklärung gibt, um anzudeuten, was er unter 'Objekt' der Handlung versteht."

(RHONHEIMER 1994a) is necessary. It remains inadequate, however; for it does not do justice to the complex reality of the *obiectum* as *bonum apprehensum* as I have analyzed it,⁵⁷ nor to the reality of the (inter-)acting human person(s) if limited to conscious operations, mainly of intellect and will. For in the anthropology and action theory of AQUINAS, the human person “who is the actor, who performs actions, is also the dynamic subject of everything that happens in him, whether the occurrences are at the emotive or the vegetative level and whether they are or are not accessible to consciousness” (WOJTYLA 1969, 90).⁵⁸ *The unconscious in freedom* is an anthropological given that still calls for adequate recognition and integration in ethical action theory.

5. Let me offer a short reflection from the new or re-discovered perspective, by applying this reconsideration of ST. THOMAS’s original concept of the *actus humanus* to one still disputed question, that is, his teaching about the erroneous conscience (cf. *I-II*, 19, 5-6). As is well-known and accepted, according to AQUINAS, a person who acts against his or her own rational insight or conscience is acting badly (cf. *I-II*, 19, 5); and a person who acts according to his or her erroneous conscience, is excused (cf. *I-II*, 19, 6). However, ST. THOMAS does not conclude, as frequently expected nowadays⁵⁹, that: “Anyone is acting morally well who acts according to his or her conscience”. E. SCHOCKENHOFF (1992, 89) underlines that AQUINAS even warns against such a conclusion as a fallacy, in order to defend the respect for truth against the pretensions of freedom. W. WOLBERT (1996, 339-341) tries to resolve this dilemma, in which he, like A. ANZENBACHER (1992, 105) perceives an incoherence of AQUINAS’s thinking, by distinguishing the acting person’s intentions and the evil consequences of the action which, for WOLBERT, are ontic or pre-

⁵⁷ Cf. also *Quodl.* 3, q. 12, a. 2: *Et ideo actus humanus iudicatur virtuosus vel vitiosus secundum bonum apprehensum, in quod per se voluntas fertur, et non secundum materiale obiectum actus.*

⁵⁸ In this sense, the “*New Language for Psychoanalysis*”, formulated by R. SCHAFFER (1976) as action language in order to overcome the shortcomings of psychoanalytic metapsychology, seems particularly interesting for the further interdisciplinary integration into ethics of valid psychoanalytic insights.

⁵⁹ Cf. ANZENBACHER 1992, 105, reporting and then commenting this teaching of AQUINAS: “Damit aber ergibt sich folgende (prekäre) Möglichkeit: Jemand, dessen Gewissen irrt, kann zwar nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen, aber dennoch (ohne es zu wissen) böse handeln. (19, 6) Eine solche Konsequenz ist im Sinne unserer bisherigen Erörterungen völlig unhaltbar. Auch THOMAS versucht, diesen Bruch zu überbrücken; er verlagert das Problem ..., löst aber das Problem nicht. ... In der Ethik jedoch ist eine solche Sicht unmöglich; sie bewirkt bei THOMAS eine eigentümliche Verrechtlichung des Problems, die sich mit der eigenständigen Bedeutung der Moralität nicht vereinbaren läßt.”

moral evils. WOLBERT argues that morally, the good intentions make for the moral goodness of the agent, notwithstanding the non-culpable error of conscience; nevertheless, one ought not to underestimate the damage caused in consequence of such errors but strive to limit them as much as possible. Evidently, this is an attempt to overcome the dichotomy which, in the case of human actions according to the classical understanding of *actus humanus*, only allows for *either* virtue *or* sin. ST. THOMAS, however, had opened a broader and more complex perspective by his original concept of the human act which includes an intermediate, more comprehensive and more dynamic viewpoint.

Recalling the majority of persons who, according to ST. THOMAS, rationally choose and act (unknowingly) in the dynamic direction of their inconsistent unconscious tendencies, we may assume that these persons cannot but follow their unconsciously hampered⁶⁰ rational insight. This is part of their personal dignity. At the same time, it is important to think of freedom and of rational insight not in terms of static blocks but of dynamic developmental processes which can make progress as well as regressing; that is, there may be growth in freedom and insight as well as reversals and loss. In this sense, the interdependence of actual freedom and truth is regarded as a dynamic process of discovery and realization, of novelty and faithfulness.

ST. THOMAS has based his action theory and ethics first, on the consideration of the final end of human action and living (cf. *I-II*, 1-5), and secondly, on a sophisticated concept of the specifically human act. It seems that, as traditionally understood, this concept has been simplified and reduced, so that affect is isolated and almost exclusive consideration is given to the dynamic direction of action provided by will and intellect.⁶¹ AQUINAS himself, however, provides a broader, more comprehensive vision of human freedom and of practical reason. The re-consideration of his concept of the *actus humanus* which is proposed in the present article, may stimulate further questions and reflection, involving the understanding of the later topics and treatises in his theological ethics. It seems that what ST. THOMAS has formulated with regard to natural science can also

⁶⁰ While there may be many unconscious tendencies which are consistent with a person's rational tendencies, without the hampering effect of inconsistent unconscious dynamics, the depth psychologist might find himself out of work or strictly limited to the field of psychopathology.

⁶¹ Cf. TORRELL 1993, 231: "Même si c'est à regret, l'historicien doit bien constater que l'oeuvre maîtresse de Thomas n'atteint pas elle-même directement un très large public. Ses options en matière de théologie morale se répandirent bien davantage par des vulgarisateurs."

be applied to action theory: *error circa creaturas redundat in falsam de Deo scientiam, et hominum mentes a Deo abducit in quem fides dirigere nititur* (*Summa contra Gentiles* II, 3), and not, e.g., in the power of stars.

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RÉSUMÉ

A partir de son apparemment étrange observation d'une influence cachée des étoiles sur l'action humaine, une attentive reconsidération du concept de l'*actus humanus* de Saint Thomas dans la *Prima Secundae* révèle une vue plus ample des processus internes à l'agent humain qui contribuent à la spécification individuelle de l'action humaine, et, donc, de la liberté humaine. Il semble que, parmi les adeptes de la théorie thomiste de l'action, l'influence importante que l'appétit sensible peut exercer en cette direction, tout en restant entièrement caché aux actes conscients de l'intellect et de la volonté de la personne, n'a pas été reconnue jusqu'aujourd'hui. Dans sa théorie de l'action Saint Thomas fournit un cadre solide pour une réflexion ultérieure sur l'influence de l'inconscient dynamique sur la liberté et pour une intégration critique interdisciplinaire des intuitions valides de la psychologie des profondeurs. En plus, il semble que la redécouverte de son concept plus large de l'*actus humanus* rende possible de repenser à profit certains éléments classiques de son éthique.