

Freedom and the Unconscious in Thomas Aquinas*

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A) *Preliminary remarks on the interdisciplinary dialogue between Theology and Psychology*

If Thomas Aquinas had to be given a religious name, as it is customary among Carmelites, he could have been called Thomas a Creatore. With this proposal in his delighting essay on Aquinas, G.K. Chesterton has underscored a ruling perspective of Thomistic thought. This ruling perspective of the unity of theology of creation and salvation underlies the following affirmation which I understand as an urgent plea for interdisciplinary learning and dialogue to be sought by theologians:

“Error circa creaturas redundat in falsam de Deo scientiam, et hominum mentes a Deo abducit in quem fides dirigere nititur” (Summa contra Gentiles 11, 3).

An error about the creatures causes an even more mistaken theology, and distracts human minds from God in whom they ought to direct their faith.

We can find a similarly open-minded call for the study of the humanities in the 2nd Vatican Council. In *Gaudium et Spes* N. 62, the Council expresses the confidence, that the due use of the findings of secular sciences in pastoral care, especially of psychology and sociology, will result in “a purer and more mature living of the faith”. Likewise, John Paul II has repeatedly demanded that theologians and ecclesiastical judges make use of the findings of the human sciences, not missing however to call them to be critical and not to forget that theology has its own object, principles and

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methods of research as is true of other sciences, too (cf. GS 36; e.g. VS 111; FR 43. 68–69; discourses to the Roman Rota in 1984, 1987, 1988).

Interdisciplinary learning and dialogue enjoy a long tradition in Catholic theology, especially in Moral and Pastoral Theology. It has also seen ups and downs, progress and failures. It is not uncomplicated. Just let me mention a few basic difficulties a theologian may encounter. I limit myself to the most poignant issue: that is, the findings that concern the image of what and who the human person is (theological anthropology). First, the theologian generally is not an expert in the matters of the other disciplines, e.g. psychology. How can he or she judge the reliability or validity of the psychological contribution? Is it simply a hypothesis to be proved or is it knowledge which enjoys the scientific status of convalidated theory? Is the contribution and the research which has led to this contribution a mixture of empirical facts and anthropologically relevant interpretations which derive from implicit or explicit ideological presuppositions on the part of the scientists? What are these presuppositions? Are they acceptable - or do they determine, already from the starting point, the results?

Parvus error in principio magnus est in fine (De ente et essentia, Prooemium).

From these epistemological questions, it is evident that there is need of a philosophical mediation between the contributions of psychology and theological thought in order to integrate these contributions adequately. There is no naive and direct use of the humanities in theology. The different scientific objects, principles, methods and results need an apt philosophical system which serves as platform both for the dialogue and for the integration of findings (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, passim). In this situation, there are two seemingly opposed dangers.

First, that theologians look for dialogue with partners in psychology, or the humanities, whom they know will confirm them. Such opportunism may be enticing and assuring, but it is not real dialogue. It also prevents from real interdisciplinary learning.

Second, theologians surrender their own constructive and critical theological contribution and accept psychological affirmations uncritically. A truly theological anthropology is swept away. Again, this is not dialogue. Both of these behaviours are defensive and immature.

Dialogue presupposes two strong partners who want to learn from each other and who are able to critically scrutinize their own thinking just as the other counterpart. As

Karl Rahner (1980, 44) has put it, the real misery of interdisciplinary dialogue, however, remains that both partners are not sufficiently experts in the field of the other in order to understand each other and to achieve results which are acceptable for both sides.

In seeking a dialogue, one also needs to look for a right partner. Now, in psychology, including depth psychology, there is plenty of academic and clinical directions, schools and traditions which do not even dialogue among themselves. Which of them could be the right partner? This difficulty adds even more to the misery of not being an expert in the psychological field.

It is obvious, therefore, that interdisciplinary learning and dialogue between theology and psychology is facilitated if and when a theologian has received a thorough and recognized formation not only in philosophy and theology, but also in psychology. Being well enough at home in both theology and psychology requires this scholar to search for an integration of both bodies of knowledge. It also enables and urges one to articulate questions which emerge from one's professional and academic activities. Such truly and existentially relevant questions will then determine the concrete method for an interdisciplinary study to resolve the question at stake. It is the question which should determine the adequate scientific method, not some scientific method which determines what questions may be asked.

B) *Concretization: The leading and stimulating question of my research*

Straddling as a priest and psychotherapist between psychology as science and clinical practice on the one side, and moral theology on the other side, there was raised an urgent question inside me. My psychological studies, and even more so my own didactic therapy and clinical work, cognitively and emotionally convinced me of the reality of the strong, if not ubiquitous influence of unconscious dynamics or emotions.

For instance, one could take the case of a nurse and think - like herself - that she is daily committing herself to her work because, as a Christian, she wants to care for others and likes to help the poor and the suffering. However, no one could ever be aware that at the same time she is unconsciously defending herself against strong unconscious guilt-feelings towards her mother - a defence which contributes much to her drive in her work, to her accumulating frustration, to the decrease of her enthusiasm and even to her psycho-somatic exhaustion after a number of years.

Another example: A priest firmly convinced of his vocation and of the value and need of prayer for a Christian and especially for his priestly life. After several years of

dutiful apostolate in which he functioned quite well and efficiently managed his parish, he comes for consultation after suffering from several depressive symptoms. For years he had noted that although he wished to pray, he always fled from it. He fulfilled his official duties, but felt an increasing alienation and bitterness. It is only now that he conceded he needed help – after realizing that he cannot manage to change by himself and to live a spiritual and balanced life and fulfill his apostolate even though he has regularly confessed and celebrated mass.

The research and theory developed by L.M. Rulla and his collaborators has provided a convincing framework to the understanding of such unconscious dynamic processes and developments in living the Christian vocation. Such dynamics are not to be considered merely in a moral perspective of free and good will. Nor are they to be understood within the perspective of psychopathology, but within that of the strong dynamic unconscious. Such contradictory dynamics are inconsistent with, or in significant tension with the consciously intended personal as well as objective ethical and Christian ideals.

On the basis of L.M. Rulla's work (1986, 1989, 1997), which considers longstanding developments in Christian living, one might ask: How can these empirically verified and convalidated findings be adequately integrated into an ethical action theory, that is into the theory of both moral theology and philosophical ethics of how the human person exercises his or her freedom in his or her concrete and single deliberate actions? Note that it is in our concrete living and acting whether we do or do not translate and live our ideals and convictions of what is good. Note that the conviction that unconscious and irrational influence is always present in our living, is a central feature and basic column not only of Freudian psychoanalysis but of all the different schools of depth-psychology (cf. Wyss 1977; Wallwork 1991; Baumann 1996,1–73).

The driving question for my research became: How could philosophical and theological ethics integrate this basic insight from depth-psychology with their action theory without denying the freedom and the responsibility of the human person, that is, without taking these unconscious dynamics as psychopathological. In fact, Moral Theology has to consider the totality of the components of human acting (cf. Honnefelder 1995,905). In interdisciplinary dialogue it seeks to understand and work through a maximum of reality:

“All the aspects which are relevant for moral acting need to be considered” (Demmer 1989, 156).

As you could see from the examples, these unconscious realities seem most relevant for moral acting and living. The difficulty of integrating them into ethical action theory becomes more evident, when we consider

C) *Aquinas's concept of the human act and its classical interpretation*

In the very first article of the *Secunda Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas provides a number of brief formulas relating to his concept of the human act (cf. I-II, 1, 1c). He equates properly so-called human actions with those actions which stem from deliberate will. Human acts are the same as voluntary acts. This corresponds to another affirmation in the same article which says:

Only those actions of which the human person is master may properly be called human actions.

These formulas have determined action theory of moral philosophies and theology through the centuries and have entered 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)

Summarizing the classical interpretation of this concept of the human act, N. Mailloux (1954,265) explains that 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 with 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.”

With these brief affirmations of Aquinas on human action in mind, our question becomes more urgent still: Can, along this concept of the human act, our deliberate actions be subject to important, distorting psychic influences of which we are entirely unaware?

It might seem that M. Rhonheimer (1994, 17) was answering just this question when in an article on the interpretation of *Veritatis Splendor* he affirmed 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.”

Rhonheimer is doing nothing more than faithfully echoing the classical interpretation of St. Thomas's concept of the *actus humanus*. The psychiatrist who told me in a discussion that the concept of the dynamic unconscious could not possibly be inserted into the classical concept of the human act, seemed to be right. Rhonheimer, like all the other authors, stresses correctly that the agent has to operate consciously, determining the act by will and reason. He and the other authors are also aware of the relevance of the character and dispositions of the agent, since Aquinas conceives of ethics mainly as virtue ethics. However, it seems that this awareness has definitely and immediately faded out in their interpretation of the concept of the human act. Let me explain.

Making this longer discussion a shorter one, in the interpretations of the treatise on the human act in the *Summa Theologiae* (I-II, 6-17), authors have usually focused on the interplay of reason and will in bringing forth a human act, that is, a voluntary act, be this an inner act of the will or an act commanded by the will (cf. McInerney 1997, 61-76). They call this interplay of reason and will the “structure” or even the “psychology (cf. Gilby 1970) of the human act”. They do not pay sufficient attention to the role of the emotions or of sensitive appetite in the process of human acting, even though this is repeatedly mentioned and discussed by Aquinas himself.

Still motivated by my question and in search of a solution, I started to read his treatise on the human act with a different focus of attention.

D) *The gradual definition of the concept of the human act (I-II, 6, 1-2)*

Aquinas takes two articles of *Quaestio* of the *Prima Secundae* to define the term “voluntary”. He starts from movements in general which derive from an inner principle. Such movement from within is given perfectly and in the full sense when there is some kind of knowledge of the goal of the movement. Such knowledge is maximally realized in the human person, and therefore, his or her acts are maximally found to be

voluntary. But it is also found, to a lesser extent, in the sensitive apprehension and appetitive behaviour of animals. Thus, in a first step,

Aquinas is stressing the twofold characteristic or structure of any appetitive movement of animals, including the human person:

First, there is an inner dynamic principle which brings about movement from within. Second, this inner principle also provides a direction towards some apprehended goal.

Such movement, brought about and directed from within, is defined as voluntary in the first article, whether this movement is stimulated by external influences or not. In the second article then, Aquinas confines "voluntary" to mean "perfectly voluntary". A "perfectly voluntary" act is given when the agent not only moves towards a goal but also knows that the goal is a goal, that is, he knows that he is acting for the sake of a goal. Such knowledge implies the capacity to reflect and to decide whether to move towards a goal or not, and by which means to get there (you may call this the 'reflexive principle'). Such a capacity is only given to beings who possess reason. In contrast with the first article and the first definition of voluntary, Aquinas calls voluntary only what comes from the will as rational appetite, or that to which the will is directed.

E) *Why this gradual definition?*

It is striking that Aquinas did not immediately provide the precise definition. Why is it that there is a gradual definition of the term voluntary, starting from a rather vague one which Aquinas finds no longer adequate in the second article and in which he gives a precise account of the necessary elements that make an act voluntary? Let me propose that in using this gradual method he has a twofold intention with regard to the distinctive quality of human acts.

First, he recalls, and thus emphasizes, the common dynamic and directive structure of the appetitive powers, that is of both the sensitive and the rational appetite. In other words, of the emotions and the will. My interpretation is that Aquinas does so in order to make the scholar 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.

Secondly, St. Thomas maintains that one cannot speak of a human or voluntary action if there is no active participation of will and reason. He does not however, demand 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.

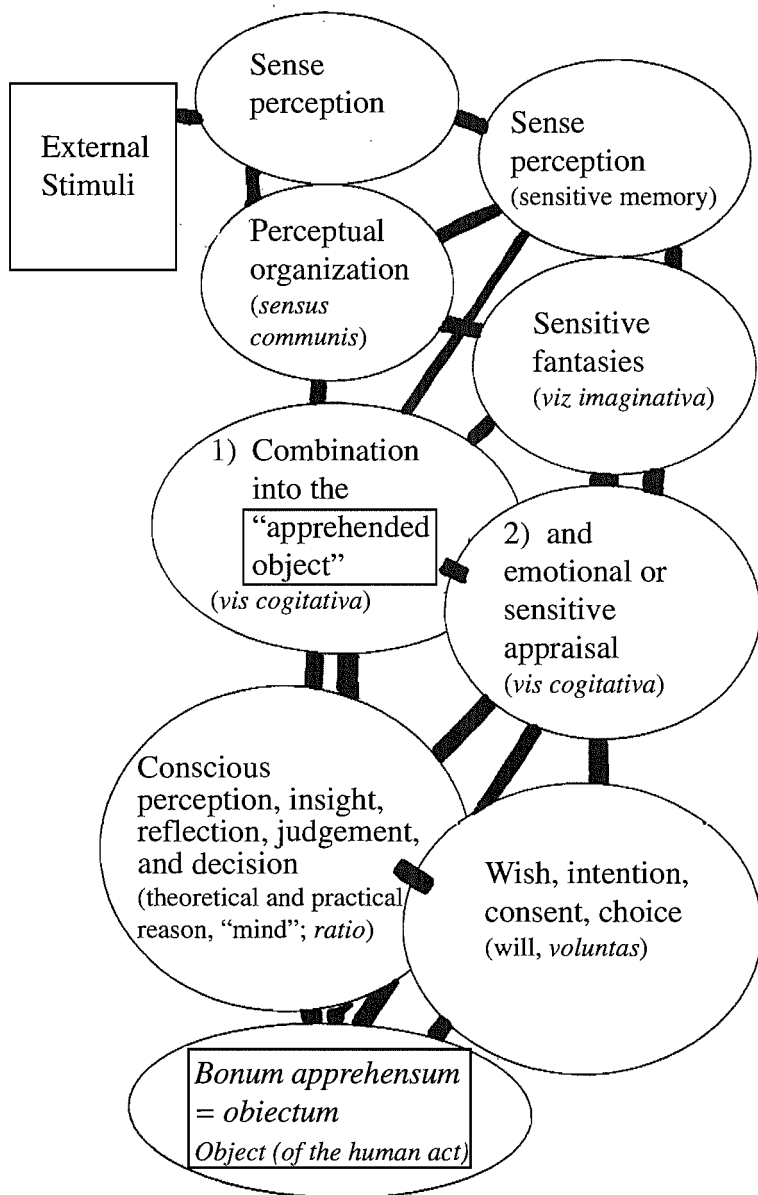
When in his gradual definition of the human act he calls attention to the sensitive apprehension and appetite which contribute to the human act, Aquinas allows the scholar to remember what he has already studied in the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa Theologiae* as far as the “inner human senses” are concerned (cf. I, 78, 4; 81, 1–3). Let me recall them while I refer to

F) *The interplay of emotions with reason and will in the human act*
(cf. I-II, 6–17)

Sensitive cognition and sensitive appetite are structured similarly in both animals and human beings. In human beings, however, sensitive cognition and sensitive appetite have undergone a specifically human and individual development due to the operation of the (specifically human) *vis cogitativa* which takes the place of the animal *vis aestimativa* with its fixed instinctual dispositions of appraisal. The *vis cogitativa* however, is much more flexible and is influenced by reason. Hence, it is also called *ratio particularis*, but it remains an inner corporeal sense; it is not part of the incorporeal mind like reason and will in Thomistic psychology.

The *vis cogitativa* combines into one apprehended thing several activities of the inner senses: the sense perceptions of external stimuli, the perceptual organization effected by the *sensus communis*, the spontaneous memories which the affective memory immediately associates to these percepts and the fantasies spontaneously produced by or elicited from the *vis imaginativa*. Furthermore, the *vis cogitativa* automatically appraises this apprehended object as more or less pleasurable or painful for the person and evokes some corresponding emotional desire for, or rejection of, this apprehended object.

In other words: there is quite a host of operations of the inner senses, of sensitive cognition and appetite, which form part of a spontaneous “intrapyschic” process, before the human person can intervene actively and consciously by the use of will and reason. The *vis cogitativa* presents to the will and reason an apprehended object which beforehand has already been cognitively organized and emotionally charged by the sensitive part of the soul, that is, by the sensitive perception, by the perceptual organization, by the sensitive memories and by the fantasies as well as by the sensitive appraisal and emotional response of desire or rejection. No need to say, these intrapyschic operations remain also influential and active during the interventions



of the will and reason. Reducing the complexity of these intrapsychic processes of sensitive cognition and appetite into a scheme, we can say that they produce (1) an apprehended object and (2) an emotionally dynamic directedness of the person in relation to this apprehended object. Both apprehended object which is an intra-psychic reality – and the spontaneous emotional reaction of the person are connected with each other in the psychic reality of the person.

When this apprehended object is presented to the will and to reason by the *vis cogitativa*, it is already emotionally toned. It is linked, within the person, to an activated inclination of sensitive appetite towards or away from it. This spontaneous dynamic directedness of sensitive appetite persists in the person when reason is about to appraise the apprehended object “rationally” as good to be chosen or less (*sub ratione boni*) and hence to present it to the choice of will as a “*bonum apprehensum*” (or object). Evidently, the rational appraisal as directive principle (11) and the choice of will as dynamic principle (11) have undergone a predisposition into a direction which has been pre-determined by the spontaneous dynamic directedness (1) provided by the sensitive part of the soul - precedingly and concomitantly.

G) *Unconscious emotional influence on the human act?*

Could there be unconscious emotional influences on the human act according to this Thomistic conception of the spontaneous intrapsychic operations of sensitive cognitions and appetite? The given analysis of the inner processes constituting the apprehended object presented to reason and will can be interpreted as providing an open system which Aquinas, had he lived today, would allow and use to integrate unconscious emotional influences. But would this not alter his concept of freedom and responsibility, the necessary condition of which is human acting?

Continuing with the reading of the treatise on the human act, it becomes clear that for St. Thomas, the dynamic emotional orientation of the person as part of the apprehended object, cannot by itself force the will to an act of willing in relation to this apprehended object. However, it has a disposing effect on practical reason. Consequently, something may appear as desirable or undesirable but which otherwise the person would have judged differently by practical reason. 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 way of disposing it, the 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 (cf. I–II, 9, 2c). It is with reference to such emotional (pre-) dispositions in the human agent that Aquinas quotes and shares Aristotle’s opinion that

“qualis unusquisque est, talis finis videtur ei” (ibid.). What manner of person a man or woman is, such is the end that he or she finds desirable.

E.g. due to her unconscious guilt feelings towards her mother the nurse spontaneously and unconsciously seeks situations in which she can prove her worthiness and lovability e.g. by helping others. And the priest, for some unconscious reason, has been emotionally pre-disposed to reject moments of silence and personal prayer. An understanding in depth of “what manner of person a man is” should therefore take account of the kind of intrapsychic sensitive operations which constitute the apprehended object. In a special way, it should consider the contributions from the sensitive memory and fantasy which store up the profound affects and desires of one’s emotional biography.

Again, the will cannot be forcibly moved by any object or emotional predisposition (cf. I–II, 9, 1c). However, for Aquinas, the disposing influence of emotions on the specification of the object to be chosen is especially strong in concrete situations and in face of concrete persons and things. Human actions and choices, nonetheless, always take place in the context of concrete situations, of persons and things (cf. I–II, 9, 2 ad 2). Now, there are three possible ways in which this influence of emotions may be related to the person’s awareness of it, according to the discussion of Aquinas.

First, it is possible that the person becomes aware of such a disposing influence of the emotions. After considering them one may either take a distance or else take another stand in order to appraise the situation more amply, more realistically, and more objectively. Secondly, one may come to notice only the result of such influence, such as in moments of weakness of the will (“*akrasia*”),

“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 or she chooses to pursue an object or goal as a “good” for him or her (*sub ratione boni*) when in fact it is only apparently good, though he or she is convinced

of aspiring to realize a true good.

It is this notion of apparent goodness which Aquinas has in mind when he explains why the will is not forced against its natural aspiration to the good when the person 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 man” (as Gilby 1970, 19 is translating I-II, 6, 4 ad 3).

He gives the same reason to account for the ignorance when a wrong choice is made because a person does not actually attend to what he or she could and should consider (cf. I-II, 6, 8). And in discussing the fundamental question of whether human willing is directed only towards the good, he explains that both the sensitive and the rational appetite tend towards what is apprehended as good. He concludes:

“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).

In most cases, it seems a person would not choose an apparent good in contrast to what he or she has recognized as a true good, that is, if he or she knew that it is only an apparent good.

If these elements do not yet suffice to evidence that for Aquinas there may be completely hidden and disadvantageous emotional influences on the human act, let us listen to what he responds to the question of astrological beliefs. These beliefs contain the assumption that there are hidden astrological laws which reign over us. Hidden influences which govern our course of life and actions and from which we cannot escape. As a consequence, even what may appear as an exercise of freedom to us, remains under the control of the stars – even though we do not know how. To this difficulty of true astrological predictions, Aquinas responds:

“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 men 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 1970, 79).

I have discussed this response more at length elsewhere (Baumann 1996,229-234; 1999, 147-152. 162). In a nutshell: Thomas traces back the influence of stars to their eventual prompting or stimulating of emotions, passions and sensitive appetite in the human person. However, in the majority of cases, the persons do not become aware of such influence and of the elicited emotions – and therefore, they have no control of these emotions and of their impact on their behavior. To the contrary, the persons who are convinced that they are acting with full insight and freedom, in fact are not, as unconscious emotional 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 Aquinas’s understanding of the *actus humanus* – and also according to the person’s self-understanding.

It is a human act in the full sense, because there is an active (and decisive) participation of will and reason, without which no action can be considered a human act. This participation is a 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, it may be co-determined by preceding and accompanying inclinations which stem from the sensitive appetite and of which the agent may be more or less aware. Aquinas would even suggest and concede that in the majority of cases, the person is not at all aware of such relevant emotional tendencies and of their respective – disadvantageous – influence on his or her perceiving, choosing and acting.

Again, these cases are to be considered as human acting in the full sense of St. Thomas’s concept of the *actus humanus*. The normal condition from which we must start, therefore, need not be “that the agent chooses and thus willingly performs exactly the action which he believes he is choosing and performing” as traditionally demanded

(cf. Rhonheimer 1994, 17). It would be probably enough to affirm that under normal conditions there is a sufficient correspondence between the choosing or acting of the agent, and what the agent believes he is choosing and doing, to the effect that they are and remain his own choosing and acting and for which he is responsible - notwithstanding the distorting unconscious tendencies which pertain to him as well.

H) *Conclusion: a re-discovery with consequences*

1. The interpretation of St. Thomas's concept of the human act, which I have presented here, seems to be a re-discovery of a central feature of what Aquinas himself had intended by his gradual definition and extensive discussion of the human act. He has translated long-standing spiritual wisdom on freedom in the human condition into action theory and has created an open philosophical system which proves capable of integrating valid insights from depth-psychology. My research has given proof to K. Demmer's conviction that the study of our best traditions can frequently show that they contain starting points for the solution of contemporary questions (cf. 1989, 111). However, it was necessary to study Aquinas in the original and not just summaries (cf. Torrell 1993, 231¹). It seems that Ockham's razor which has established the principle of parsimony in scientific explanation and theory, has been applied in excess in the reading of Aquinas in the past seven centuries, especially in the action theory. Instead of isolating affect and concentrating on the conscious operations of will and reason, a principle of multiple operations and tendencies, both conscious and unconscious, including both the rational and the sensitive appetite, would have been most suited to the understanding of the concept of the human act - respecting both Aquinas's thought and the real conditions of the exercise of freedom.

Let me give you a maybe astonishing confirmation for this opinion, formulated not by a psychoanalyst but by the Polish phenomenologist and moral philosopher Karol Wojtyla in 1969 (91/ 93, emphasis added):

“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.... In this respect, as it seems, potentiality of the subconscious comes first; it is primary and more indispensable than

¹“Même si c'est à regret, l'historicien doit bien constater que l'oeuvre maîtresse de Thomas n'atteignit pas elle-même directement un très large public. Ses options en matière de théologie morale se répandirent bien davantage par des vulgarisateurs.”

consciousness for the interpretation of human dynamism as well as for the interpretation of conscious acting.”

If my interpretation of Aquinas has not gone astray and is correct, then we do not only have an adequate philosophical instrument with which to conceive the unconscious in freedom, but we also have a lot of research in front of us which can be stimulated by this re-discovery. This can start in the first place by understanding the work of Aquinas himself. E.g. from the viewpoint of the strong relevance of the unconscious emotional impacts on human acting, it seems most significant that in the course of the *Summa Theologiae*, after the treatise on the human act, there follow only four – dense – questions on the specification of human acts as good or bad (I–II, 18–21). While on the passions of the soul, that is on human emotions, there are 28 questions (I–II, 22–48) and another seven questions on the basic considerations of habits or dispositions as principles of human acts (I–II, 49–55).

It will hence be important not only to favour Aquinas’s virtue ethics, but also to take into consideration and study systematically more factors in the agent rather than the agent’s mere knowledge or consciousness of the act he is performing. Aquinas had already done this when he set out to define and discuss the human act. Research should take this into consideration – be this research in the other treatises of the *Theological Sum*, or in the philosophical or theological ethics in general. Certainly, this is another call for interdisciplinary learning and dialogue between theology and psychology. An error about the creatures, especially about the human agent, will lead to an even more mistaken theology, as Aquinas had put it (*ScG II*, 3). It seems that this applies to action theory and to moral theology, as well.

2. These findings should have a repercussion place, not only and not even primarily, in the field of the academic setting but in our daily moral and religious living. In his comment on Aristotle’s “*De anima*”, Aquinas says that we need to become familiar with the forces of our soul when we want to start and live a moral life and grow in virtue (cf. In *De anima* 1, 7; cf. Schockenhoff 1998, 110). In our treatise on the human act, he considers the “despotic” repression of emotions as dangerous in regard to moral competence and effective freedom. In contrast, he prefers and advises that will and reason govern the emotional needs and longings “royally”. Just as the free and not the oppressed citizens will serve their good king best, or contribute best to a political community with just laws, Aquinas thinks that human emotions and psycho-social needs have their inherent laws and as such may constructively contribute to the realization of the image of God towards which every person is created in her or his totality (cf. I–II, 9, 2 ad 3; 17, 7c). The recognition of the potentially constructive

role of human emotions in our moral living implies the task of an accepting, firm and flexible attitudes, pedagogy and re-education of the emotions (cf. Imoda 1993) which do not deny the necessary tensions implied in any moral decision (cf. Kiely 1980; Schafer 1976, 52). The acceptance of these necessary tensions prevents their repression to the unconscious, and is in contrast with a wide-spread ideology which aims at an illusionary ethical and temporary psychological tranquillity.

This firm accepting attitude, however, is only a first step. The reality of strong unconscious influences, which have accumulated on our human acting since the earliest childhood, implies that they are withdrawn from our free control and “government”. Growing in virtue does not seem to be simply a matter of conscious striving and of good will. As in the example of the afore mentioned priest: There could be strong resistances in his life which proved stubbornly refractory to change by his conscious efforts. One needs to uncover the unconscious emotions and dynamics at their roots and to understand their meaning. Only then will it become possible for him, with God’s help, to deal with his long-repressed emotional realities consciously and with greater freedom, so as to implement gradual changes and to experience new joy in his priestly life. Note again the striking remark of Karol Wojtyła in his “The Acting Person” (1969, 166):

“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.”

No wonder that John Paul II has emphasized affective maturity as a principal request and goal of priestly and religious formation (cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis* 43f; *Vita Consecrata* 65f) and called for a corresponding formation of the formators.

3. Let me conclude. The reality of the unconscious in freedom is to be considered as an anthropological given, that is, as part of the human condition. It should not only be integrated into a theory of ethical action but it ought to become part of our self-understanding. This will make us acknowledge the limits of our “objectivity” in perceiving, in understanding, in judging and in deciding in particular situations. Accordingly, Aquinas teaches that perfect certainty is not expected in moral matters (cf. In Eth Nic, I, III, n. 32 and 36). Rather, what is required is a basic docility towards the experiential moral wisdom of the wise (cf. I–II, 14, 1.3.6), especially in and as part of the community of faith which is guided and assisted by the Holy Spirit (cf. I–II, 106–108). Acknowledging the unconscious should make us more realistic, more humble, and more responsible. With God’s help, it could actually challenge and help

us to “a purer and more mature living of the faith” (GS 62).

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Actus humanus – human act:

"Acts over which man has complete control, since they proceed from a deliberate decision and conform to the dictates of reason"

Actus hominis – act of man:

"Acts which escape such control and the causes and motives of which do not submit to any rational influence"

(cf. N. Mailloux [1954] Psychic determinism, freedom, and personality development, in: M.B. Arnold/J.A. Gasson [Ed.s], *The Human Person* (Ronald Press; New York 1954) 265.