

## St. Thomas and the Causes of Free Choice

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The stimulus to compose this paper came from my reading of David Gallagher's paper, entitled "Free Choice and Free Judgment in Thomas Aquinas"<sup>1</sup>. Gallagher presents Thomas on free choice at considerable length, following the doctrine through the *De veritate* and the *Contra gentiles* to the *De malo* and the *Prima secundae*. Choice is seen as something which follows upon knowledge, but in order for choice to be truly free, the will itself must control that knowledge, i.e. must somehow determine what aspect of things the intellect as source of specification of the choice considers. How can this be? Will we not get into an infinite regress of acts of intellect and acts of will [275]? Gallagher's first principle is that the will must be primary in the situation. His ultimate solution is to stress the simultaneity of the acts of intellect and will. We read:

It is true that the intellectual activity of deliberation precedes the will's movement in choice, but the determining consideration of the will's object is that which arises in the choice itself and which arises through the agency of the will. The will is said to "follow" reason not in a temporal sense, but only insofar as its act receives its formal determination from reason. Thus the "prior" act of the will by which reason is moved from one consideration to another is in fact the act of choice itself. *There is no series of acts and so no regress.* [276, my italics].

He also stresses the unity of the human being, so that one does not have such a strong picture of one power's acts causing another power's acts<sup>2</sup>. In the end, he seems to think he has avoided presenting Thomas's choice as something irrational [277].

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<sup>1</sup> D.M. GALLAGHER, *Free Choice and Free Judgment in Thomas Aquinas*, «Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie», 76 (1994), pp. 247-277. I refer to places in this paper simply by page number in my own text.

<sup>2</sup> St. Thomas himself certainly exploits the unity of the human being for an understanding of the relations between intellect and will; cf. the very important *Summa theologiae* 1-2.17.5.ad 2, on how the will, an appetite, *understands* a command from the intellect.

I am far less sanguine than Professor Gallagher about his success in this regard. For one thing, Thomas himself seems to take great interest in the causal relations among the acts of the powers. Consider, for example, the way he answers an objector who notes that St. John Damascene calls deliberation an “appetite” (Thomas’s own position being that deliberation is substantially a cognitive act):

... when the acts of two powers are ordered one to another, there is in each something that pertains to the other power; and so either act can be given a name from either power. But it is evident that the act of reason directing as regards things which are for the goal [*in his quae sunt ad finem*], and the act of the will tending towards those things in accordance with the rule of reason, are ordered to each other. Hence, in [that] act of the will, which is choice, there appears something of reason, viz the order; and in the deliberation, which is the act of reason, there appears something of will, as matter, because deliberation is about those things which a man wills to do; and also as source of movement [*sicut motivum*], because by the fact that the man *wills the end*, he is moved to deliberate about those things which are for the end. And so the Philosopher says in *Ethics* VI [1139b4] that “choice is appetitive intellect”, that he may show that both concur for choice; and so also Damascene [*De fide orthodoxa* II.22 (PG 94.945)] says that “deliberation is inquisitive appetite”, that he may show that deliberation in a way pertains both to will, concerning which and starting from which there is inquiry [*circa quam et ex qua fit inquisitio*], and to the inquiring reason<sup>3</sup>.

What I admire and stress in this text of Thomas is his care in distinguishing *two different roles of will*, one as prior and one as posterior to reason, and the entirely *causal* nature of the analysis. There is a series and very explicitly so.

To back away from this diversity within the human agent seems to me a highly questionable move if the goal is to interpret Thomas. But, most of all, I believe that a close reading of Thomas reveals a different line of thinking than one gets from a reading of Gallagher. My aim in what follows is to suggest that line of thinking.

## **1. Will as self-mover through deliberation**

Since the writings of Thomas on free choice are so extensive, and since there is even talk (and on Gallagher’s part [249]) of a development of doctrine in this matter, I will “begin at the end”, so to speak. I will take as my guide the *De malo*, q. 6 presentation. Here, we have a disputed question on the express issue of human freedom of choice, and one which all see as pertaining to the later writings. Thomas is answering a need during the Averroist crisis of about 1270<sup>4</sup>. One would expect that,

<sup>3</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae* [henceforth “ST”] 1-2.14.1.ad 1. My italics.

<sup>4</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de malo* [henceforth “DM”], in *Opera omnia*, t. 23, Rome/Paris, 1982: Commissio Leonina/Vrin, p. \*4. These notes on the date of q. 6 and the rest are by L.-J. Bataillon, O.P. [cf. p. \*68].

if there has been development, Thomas will have “gotten it together” by this time and will carefully display the key issues surrounding human choice.

Still, I will not depend exclusively on *DM 6*, but will also use the *ST 1-2.8-17*, on the will’s elicited and commanded acts. In fact, this study by Thomas of the types and gradation of acts of the will is the primary thing to consider, and I am using *DM 6* only as a kind of key framework for the free choice issue.

The question bears on human choice, “*electio humana*”: whether the human being has *free* choice of his acts or chooses *of necessity*. Choice is viewed as an event, a movement, in the human being, and the question bears on the mode of production of that event or movement. In the body of the question, the positive teaching focuses on the principle or source of one’s acts. The principle within the human being is compared to and distinguished from the principle in (a) things which altogether lack cognition, “natural things”, and (b) also brute animals. What is the same in all is that *inclination follows upon form*: i.e. there is a form which is the principle of action, upon which form follows an inclination: from these the action follows. What is different is the *universality* of the form in the human intellect, as contrasted with the form individuated by matter in the lower things. Because of this universality of the form, *the inclination of the will* is indeterminate as regards many; Thomas uses the example of the architect who conceives the form of the house, universally, under which are included diverse shapes of house, so that his will can be inclined to making a square house or a round one or some other shape.

This, then, is the first consideration of all: the indetermination of the will’s inclination, based on the universality of the intelligible form.

Secondly, we discuss the movement which can be visited upon the powers of the soul (our interest ultimately being in a movement in the power of the soul called “will”, a movement called “choice”). There are two aspects under which a power is movable, specification (doing this or that) and exercise (acting well or not so well, acting or not acting at all). Specification, in nature, comes from the object, something which pertains to the *formal* order. Intellect, having as its object “that which is” or “the true” (the supreme item in the order of *form*), has the supreme object, and so has the primacy in that “movement” of powers called “specification”. Exercise, in nature, comes from the agent which sets a thing in motion; and since *every agent acts for an end*, the power of the soul which has as object the end as such is supreme in the order of exercise. This power is the will, which moves even the intellect to act or not act. Indeed, the will, as supreme in the order of exercise, is able to move *itself* in that order.

Thirdly, and, as it seems to me, most important for our purposes, Thomas investigates whether the will, in putting itself into that movement which is a choice, gives itself a necessitated movement or a free movement.

This part of the discussion bears upon the exercise of acts. The first thing Thomas points out is the will’s ability to move *itself*, just as it moves the other powers. This is considered through a sort of possible objection: does not “moving oneself” mean that one and the same thing will be both in act and in potency, an impossibility? No, says Thomas: just as the intellect knowing principles moves itself to conclude, so the

will, actually already willing something in act, moves itself to will something else in act. We get the description of the willing of health, the deliberation about things that can confer health, and ultimately the willing of the swallowing of the medication. The first act of the will Thomas also describes as “willing to deliberate” [... *ex uoluntate uolentis consiliari*]. [DM 6, Leonine line 377]

It is this picture of the will bringing about, itself, the movement of willing, by means of deliberation, which is used to answer the question: movement, i.e. exercise, of the will, free or necessary? The key is *the nature of deliberation*. Deliberation is not a *demonstrative* inquiry, but one allowing of coming to opposite conclusions. Since this is the *proper* means by which the will moves itself, the movement which it imparts to itself is not necessarily this or necessarily that (not even “to choose” or “not to choose”)<sup>5</sup>.

Here I might digress slightly to note two things. One is the *causal* structure of producing an act of choice. Just as in ST 1-2.9.3, which asks whether the will moves itself, so here we have the insistence on the two roles of the will itself: agent and patient. By means of one act already present (willing the end), it produces another act, a “moved movement” which is precisely the choice. And this is in harmony with the general doctrine of ST 1.60.2, on the act of love in angels and human beings, that all *elective* loving is *caused* by our natural love<sup>6</sup>.

Secondly, this focus on the nature of deliberation and its proper object, the contingent, concerning which reason can come to opposite conclusions, is found both in ST 1-2.13.6 (“whether man chooses freely or of necessity”) and in ST 1.83.1, on whether man has free choice. Indeed, in the 1-2 text, the power of reason to view particular contingents in a variety of ways is made the explanation of the freedom in both the order of specification and the order of exercise.

## 2. The need for an exterior mover

To come back to DM 6, no sooner is the solution proposed, however, than we are reminded that the will is not always in the act of “willing to deliberate”. Thus, it must be moved to that act, and if by itself, the act of doing so will require a *previous* deliberation. Thus, Thomas himself sees his solution as, in itself insufficient, i.e. as in itself leading to an infinite regress. How does he solve this problem? He tells us that *the only solution* is to posit the first act of the will as coming from some *exterior* agent (this bestowed first act presumably incorporates willing the end and willing

<sup>5</sup> The argument is very definite. We read: *Cum igitur uoluntas se consilio moueat, consilium autem est inquisitio quedam non demonstratiua set ad opposita uiam habens, non ex necessitate uoluntas se ipsam mouet*. [lines 377-381].

<sup>6</sup> We read: «... the will naturally tends towards its own ultimate end; for every human being naturally wills beatitude. And from this natural willing are *caused* [*causantur*] all other willings; since whatever a man wills, he wills because of the end. Therefore, the love of the good which man naturally wills as an end is natural love; the love *derived* from this, which is of the good which is loved because of the end, is elective love [*dilectio electiva*]». [ST 1.60.2 (363b1-11)].

the deliberation to attain it)<sup>7</sup>. While some people have thought that this could be a celestial body, Aristotle rightly saw that it must be something superior to will and intellect, namely God.

The last touch on this solution is to point out that God moves things in accordance with what befits the nature of the moved thing. It is God who gives light things movement upwards in accordance with their form and heavy things downward movement in accordance with their form or nature. Thus, the movement he gives to the will in making it a source of the movement to move itself is the proper act of the will, i.e. a movement towards the universal good which remains indeterminate as regards particular goods [...*indeterminate se habentem ad multa...*] [lines 414-415].

This, then, is Thomas's general answer as regards the exercise of the act of the will. Because the will gives itself movements by means of deliberation, a non-demonstrative inquiry, the resulting movements are not necessitated but optional. And while this requires that there be at the beginning of the will's acts a movement of which it is not itself the source, nevertheless that movement from God is of a nature to assure that the resulting self-imposed movements will remain optional. (In *ST* 1-2.10.4, we have an article devoted especially to the non-necessitating character of this outside influence<sup>8</sup>. In *ST* 1.82.4.*ad* 3, it is notable that God as the outside mover of the human willing agent is called, not merely the principle of the human acts of understanding, but of the acts of *deliberating*: "...*principium consiliandi et intelligendi...*").

In Gallagher's presentation of St. Thomas, one escapes from infinite regress by a doctrine of simultaneity of the contributions of intellect (specification) and will (exercise). There is no mention of the need to go outside the human being for a coherent account of human freedom. I wish to pose the question: can human freedom be understood, according to Thomas, unless it is understood as moved from without? I think not.

### 3. Freedom of choice and the object of deliberation

We come now to what, in my counting, is a fourth step, the examination of the movement of the will as regards "determination" or "specification" of its acts: is there necessitation of the acts of the will from this angle, or are all acts free from this

<sup>7</sup> I say "only solution" because Thomas argues that the external mover is a *necessity*. We read: "...*Sed cum uoluntas non semper uoluerit consiliari, necesse est quod ab alio moueatur ad hoc quod uelit consiliari; et si quidem a se ipsa, necesse est iterum quod motum uoluntatis precedat consilium et consilium precedat actus uoluntatis; et cum hoc in infinitum procedere non possit, necesse est ponere quod quantum ad primum motum uoluntatis moueatur uoluntas cuiuscumque non semper actu uolentis ab aliquo exteriori, cuius instinctu uoluntas uelle incipiat.*" [lines 381-391].

<sup>8</sup> As can be seen from other contexts, God's ability to provide an effect with its proper mode, either of necessity or of contingency, follows from his being the cause of being as being, necessity and contingency being the properties or differences of being as being; cf. *In Metaph.* 6.3 (#1220); *In Perihermeneias* 1.14 [Leonine lines 437-461]; and cf. *ST* 1.22.4.

point of view? Not surprisingly, just as the focus in discussing exercise ultimately was on the *object* of deliberation, so also here the question is: what is the sort of object which moves the will? First, we have the general point that the object of the will is the apprehended good and fitting item. It is not enough for something to be good; it must be fitting. “Fitting” here seems to mean “for me”, i.e. for the subject who does the willing. However, Thomas goes further, reminding us that since actions are with regard to singular and contingent things, “particulars”, it is only the particular good and fitting item which will be an object of choice: i.e. what is good and fitting for me *here and now*. In this way, approaching the objects of choice, we ask whether there can be necessitation of the movement of the will. The answer is yes: if there is presented to the mind an object which in every respect, in all particulars, is good and fitting, the will *cannot will its opposite*. This is the case with the object called “beatitude”, i.e. the state rendered perfect by the assembling of all goods.

However, Thomas is quick to remind us that this necessity is in the order of specification, the domain of “this *or* that”. This means that the *opposite* object cannot move the will to produce a choice. Nevertheless, the will is not necessitated to *will* beatitude (i.e. “*exercise* the act”), since the human act of willing is a *particular* good which need not be chosen. Let us notice that once again, it is *the nature of the object of deliberation* which makes possible this doctrine: reason can come to opposite conclusions about contingent particulars.

Having considered the unique case of beatitude, Thomas goes on to all the other particular contingent good and fitting items, as regards specification. If the object under consideration is such a good as is not found to be *good as regards all particulars which can be considered*, it will not move the will, even as regards determination of the act: someone can will the opposite, even while thinking about it. The opposite can be “good and fitting” in consideration of some other particular: what is good for health is sometimes not good for pleasure. - Again, we see that it is the object of deliberation, as regards its very nature, which makes for freedom. (God does not deliberate, but he knows the objects of deliberation without having to deliberate<sup>9</sup>).

We have not yet finished the issue of specification. Indeed, we come to a most interesting consideration by Thomas. I would say that it bears most directly on the problem which is truly involved in free choice as seen by Gallagher. Deliberation offers us many good particulars. Why does the will (seeking the end) prefer this one to that one? Clearly, it is the *will* which make the decision, just as Gallagher contends. However, everything depends on how we see the will placed in making the decision. It is the will as *agent* in the self-movement, i.e. the will which will confer upon itself the *movement towards a means*, the will as *intending* the end, and seeking reasonable means (i.e. deliberating), which is considered<sup>10</sup>. It is not the will as

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ST* 1.19.3 [ed. Ottawa, 133a17-32]: God creates freely, because created being as such has the status of a *merely optional ad finem* item, relative to the expression of the divine perfection; i.e. it has the status of an object of deliberation.

<sup>10</sup> On the nature of the act of *intention*, cf. *ST* 1-2.12, especially 12.4.ad 3, on the difference between intention and choice.



*undergoing* the movement of choice. There is every reason to consider a *series* of acts of will, and a *causal* series at that.

In any case, Thomas, now considering the resulting movement in the will, the moved movement, the choice, says:

... And that the will is borne towards [*feratur in*] that which is offered to it more according to *this* particular condition than according to *another*, can happen in three ways.

In one way, inasmuch as one [particular condition] is preponderant; and then the will is moved in accordance with reason: for example, when the man gives the nod [*preeligit*] to that which is good for one's health [*id quod est utile sanitati*] over that which is pleasant [*utile uoluptati*].

In another way, inasmuch as one thinks of one particular circumstance and not of another; and this happens mostly through some surprise appearance [*occasionem*], shown [to him] interiorly or exteriorly, such that that thought occur to that [person].

In the third way, it happens because of the *disposition* of the man: because, as the Philosopher [Aristotle] says: "Given that a person is *such*, the end will appear to that person in *such wise*;" thus, the will of an *angered* person and the will of an *untroubled* person will be differently moved regarding something, for the same thing is not "fitting" [*conueniens*] for both; just as food is differently welcomed by a well person and a sick person.

Here, then, we have what we might call "the general problem of the disposition". Thomas now goes on to explore its variety as regards the question: what *necessitates* the movement of the will, as regards specification of the act?

If the disposition in question is natural, one not subject to the will, then the will prefers that by natural necessity: thus, all human beings naturally desire being, living, and understanding. If the disposition is such that it is not natural, but subject to the will, as for example when someone through *habit* or *passion* is so disposed that something seems to him good or bad in its particularity, its moving of the will will not be necessary: because he would be able to get rid of the disposition, so that the thing not appear so; for example, when someone quiets the anger within himself so as not to judge the way an angry person would. - Thomas notes that it is easier to get rid of a passion than a habit.

Thomas concludes that there are some objects by which the will is moved of necessity, but this is not true of all. And his last word is that still, on the side of *exercise of acts*, the will is not moved of necessity. - Thus, all of this last consideration, so close to the Gallagher interest, comes under the heading of the specification of acts.

It seems to me that the most important point in this doctrine of the will and its following of deliberation is the *first* way the will is seen as responding, i.e. in fol-

lowing that good item which has preponderance from the viewpoint of reason itself. This is will operating as will, i.e. as the appetite which accompanies intellect or reason as such, and as desiring the true ultimate end. The other key consideration is the case of the will considering things inasmuch as bad habituation is ruling the deliberation (the nature of an imprudent act). The simple point here is that there is no necessitation since one can eliminate the habit or passion before acting. Of course, this would require a prior *deliberation*, thus getting one into a regress until one is moved by an outside mover<sup>11</sup>.

I have now followed out the *DM* 6 main reply. What seems to me central is the role of deliberation as the proper instrument of the will as self-mover: the proper object of deliberation and the power of reason to discern it is the key to the doctrine of free choice.

#### 4. Toward an adequate account of deliberation

Here I might add two notes of commentary on Gallagher's paper. One has to do with his conception of a sort of "gap" between the conclusion of deliberation and the performance of the choice. The other is related to that, namely that I think we should give more attention to the doctrine of consent and to the picture of "superior reason" (the domain of "ultimate deliberation") as the "part" of us responsible for consent.

Seeking to know how the will controls the consideration of the object of choice, Gallagher eventually comes to deliberation, but only to present it as considering "all options" [269]. Thus he says:

... Nevertheless, consideration [270] of this sort does not specify choice, since the good aspects of only *one* option actually perform that role. Hence, it is only the consideration in the choice itself which does so, and this can occur only when the will moves itself to the choice; there is no specification until there is exercise. [269-270, his italics]

This is inadequate, in that he should here be going into the distinction between consent and choice (alluded to briefly in his n. 58, p. 269). But most of all, he should not cut off the judgment and command operative in the choice from the preceding deliberation. He should bring in *all* the phases discussed by Thomas in the acts pertaining to prudence: cf. e.g. *ST* 2-2.51.2: deliberation, judgment, and *command*. All of this is the work of deliberating reason<sup>12</sup>. All of it is *prior* to the act of choice, properly considered<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. especially *ST* 1-2.9.6.ad 3: not only does God give the universal inclination without which a man does not will anything, but God also "sometimes" specially moves some to a determinate act of willing a particular good, as when someone is moved by grace.

<sup>12</sup> See especially *ST* 1-2.17.5.ad 1: *reason* (under the influence of the will) only truly commands once it has gone beyond a fluctuation between commanding and not commanding.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *ST* 1-2.15.3 [797b18-22]: «... *appetitus eorum quae sunt ad finem, praesupponit determina-*



Still, Gallagher's point that the will must be exercising a control on the deliberation is correct, and relates to the doctrine of higher reason and consent. This is St. Thomas's picture of consent as falling under the supreme judge within us, the *ratio superior* which is both reason (or intellect) and will, as turned towards the ultimate end<sup>14</sup>.

To conclude: I think it is unsuitable that almost nothing is said of the true role of deliberation [*consilium*], which as a non-demonstrative source of *conclusions*, is the proper answer for Thomas, as regards why the will is free in its choices<sup>15</sup>. Nor is the properly Thomistic answer to how the will controls its deliberations given, i.e. that it does so by virtue of prior deliberation and so ultimately needs an outside mover.

The conclusion of Gallagher's article strangely speaks of "simultaneity" as a help, and warns us against seeing one power as acting on another. Yet that one power act on another seems of the very essence of the Thomistic discussion<sup>16</sup>. One would never know it from Gallagher's presentation, but the *ST* 1-2 expressly gives us a line-up of acts, some belonging to the intellect, some to the will, with causal interaction as the key to understanding the outcome<sup>17</sup>.

I wonder if more attention ought not to be given to our *rational* nature, i.e. as involving a *layering* of events, some universal, i.e. all-invading, with respect to other, more particular acts<sup>18</sup>. In a sense, Gallagher's question is: how do we conceive of the act of *ratio superior*? It seems that it should be a kind of *sylogistic* event, i.e. an event with an inner cause-effect structure, with the principles being seen *as* principles of the conclusions. The eye of wisdom includes both principles and conclusions and the relation between them.

## Appendix

I find a most explicit and useful text in *In Perhermeneias* 1.14 [Leonine lines 462-519, concerning Aristotle at 19a7-8; and cf. Leonine lines 100-123]. Thomas is defending Aristotle's focus on deliberation as a root of contingency (the other root, for contingency *in nature* as distinguished from human affairs, is matter in potency to both of a pair of opposites; cf. Leonine lines 191-195). The objection is posed that, if the will has the good as its object, then it will have to opt for what seems good to it, and so choice, as following upon deliberation, will come about of necessi-

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*tionem consilii. Et ideo applicatio appetitivi motus ad determinationem consilii, proprie est consensus».*

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *ST* 1-2.15.4. Prudence is of course dependent on the will willing the true ultimate end, and the will cannot be truly virtuous unless it has at its service prudent deliberation: *ST* 1-2.65.1 [1047b5-29].

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ST* 1-2.17.1 *ad* 2: the will is the subject in which liberty is found, but the cause of the will's liberty is reason, reason as able to have diverse conceptions of the good.

<sup>16</sup> *ST* 1-2.17.1; 17.4 *ad* 1.

<sup>17</sup> See especially *ST* 1-2.15.3, showing that consent has as object the *ad finem* as such; the explanation of the sequence of acts in our practical life is spelled out in this article.

<sup>18</sup> Reason is able to issue commands regarding its own acts because of the diversity of *objects* which fall under the act of reason; reason *participates in itself*, as we see when the knowing of the conclusion participates in the knowing of the principles: *ST* 1-2.17.6 *ad* 2.

*note e commenti*

ty. Thomas answers by focusing on the nature of the object of deliberation as such. We read:

... But particular goods, with which human actions have to do, are not such [as those without which one could not be happy], nor are they apprehended under that aspect that without them there could not be happiness, for example to eat this food or that, or to abstain from it, yet they have in them what it takes to move the appetite, in function of some good considered in them; and so the will is not induced to choose them of necessity. And for this reason the Philosopher expressly [*signanter*] assigned the root of contingency in those things which are done by us to *deliberation* [*ex parte consilii*], which has to do with *those things which are ordered to an end and nevertheless are not determinate*; in the domain of those things wherein the means are determinate there is no work for deliberation, as is said in *Eth.* 3 [1112a34-b9].