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Thomas Aquinas on the Divine First Motion of the Human Will

I. INTRODUCTION

The freedom of the will is not only one of the most important but also the most discussed subjects in the philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. From recent studies, we can understand more precisely the meaning and development of Aquinas's theory of the will's freedom from the perspective of its historical context.¹ In spite of this abundant recent historical research, there is no systematic study of Aquinas's notion of 'the first motion of the human will by God,' which appears in *De malo* q. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9.² This topic needs to be pursued, not only because it is an indispensable element in Aquinas's late theory on the will's freedom, but also because it can, per se, be regarded as a significant insight into how God intervenes in human will.

Why does Aquinas raise the question of 'the first motion of the human will by God'? And what does this concept really mean? Before discussing these questions, let us examine the context in which they arise. In *De malo* q. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9, Aquinas explains the will's freedom in relation to the will's self-motion. His explanation can be summarized as

¹ The following are worthy of being mentioned as the most valuable recent studies of Aquinas's theory of the will's freedom: GALLAGHER, David: *Free Choice and Free Judgment in Thomas Aquinas*, in: *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 76 (1994), 247–77; STUMP, Elenore: *Aquinas's Account of Freedom: Intellect and Will*, in: *The Monist* 80 (1997), 576–97; MCCLUSKEY, Colleen: *Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas on the Freedom of Human Action*, in: SENNER, Walter/ANZULEWICZ, Henryk (Hgg.): *Albertus Magnus. Zum Gedenken nach 800 Jahren. Neue Zugänge, Aspekte und Perspektiven*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2001, 243–254 2001; SCHÜSSLER, Rudolf: *Doxastischer Voluntarismus bei Thomas von Aquin*, in: *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 79 (2012), 75–107. In order to understand Aquinas's position in the various trends in the moral psychology of the late thirteenth century, see HOFFMANN, Tobias: *Intellectualism and Voluntarism*, in: PASNAU, Robert (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Medieval Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010, 414–427.

² We can refer to the following 'classical' materials, which treat this notion roughly or only incidentally: LOTTIN, Odon: *Liberté humaine et motion divine de S. Thomas d'Aquin à la condamnation de 1277*, in: *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 7 (1935), 52–69; PESCH, Otto Hermann: *Philosophie und Theologie der Freiheit bei Thomas von Aquin in quaest. Disp. 6 De malo*, in: *Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 13 (1962), 1–25; LONERGAN, Bernard: *Grace and Freedom*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd 1971; RIESENHUBER, Klaus: *Die Transzendenz der Freiheit zum Guten*. München: Berchmanskolleg 1971. B. Shanley's study in 1998 is an exception. In his study on the relation of divine causation to human freedom, Shanley offers an interpretation of this notion in a chapter devoted to this notion, as we will see later.

follows: Because the will desires a certain end, it desires to deliberate upon which means is appropriate for the end and it chooses a certain object which is judged to be appropriate. In this act of choice, while what specifies the act formally is the object apprehended by intellect, the power to exercise this act comes from the will itself which desires the end. In terms of the exercise of act (*quantum ad exercitium actus*), the will moves not only intellect but also the will itself. In other words, by willing the end, we desire to deliberate upon its means and we desire to choose its means for that end. In this sense, Aquinas asserts that the will is moved by itself from willing the end to the choice of the means. The essence of the human will's freedom consists in this self-motion of the will, which involves an act of judgment, but cannot be reduced to such act.

This explanation raises a further significant question: How does the self-motion of the will begin? Aquinas, as an Aristotelian, thought that such a self-motion of the will would not come to pass if the will had not been already actualized in a certain way. What is potential can be moved to actuality only by virtue of what is actual.³ Therefore, according to Aquinas, the will is moved by itself only in so far as it actually wills a certain end. That is to say, the will, which initially has only the potential to choose the means (e.g. medicine) is moved to the act of choosing the means by its actually willing the end (e.g. health). But, the reduction of the particular will's self-motion to the actuality of willing the higher end cannot proceed to infinity. Thus, at least in the first moment of its self-motion, the will must have been moved passively by an external agent which is ontologically different from the will. The beginning of the will's self-motion cannot be in itself conceived as self-motion. According to Aquinas, the supposition of an external agent is inevitable, as long as we do not always actually deliberate and do not always actually desire to deliberate. By quoting the eighth book of the *Eudemian Ethics*, Aquinas insists that this first agent or mover, which moves the will to act in the first instance, is none other than God.⁴

As we have examined so far, Aquinas asserts that there should be, of necessity, God's intervention at the beginning of a human being's mental

³ This is the basic principle of Aristotle's metaphysics, which identifies Aquinas – and also his followers such as Godfrey of Fontaines – as 'an Aristotelian.' See WIPPEL, John: *The Metaphysical Thought of Godfrey of Fontaines*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press 1981, 179f.; PUTALLAZ, François-Xavier: *Insolente liberté*. Fribourg: Edition universitaires 1995, 198f. Application of this principle to the will's motion can be regarded as the most fundamental difference between the followers of Aquinas and the voluntarists of the late 13th century.

⁴ See QDM, q. 6; ST I-II, q. 9, a. 4; a. 6 and *Eudemian Ethics* VIII, 2, 1248a15ff. As for the meaning of this quotation, see DEMAN, Thomas: *Le 'Liber de Bona Fortuna' dans la théologie de S. Thomas d'Aquin*, in: *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 17 (1928), 38–58; FABRO, Cornelio: *Le « Liber de bona fortuna » de l' « Ethique à Eudème » d'Aristote et la dialectique de la divine Providence chez Saint Thomas*, in: *Revue Thomiste* 88 (1988), 556–72.

act which consists of a series of deliberations and choices. Aquinas's position, which attempts to clarify how a series of deliberations and choices begins, can be called 'the will's divine first motion'.⁵ Without much difficulty we can understand the theoretical gist of Aquinas's view here, namely, that one cannot but presuppose a first external mover in order to explain the self-motion of the will. And yet the detailed meaning of Aquinas's position still remains obscure. For, while Aquinas proves the necessity of presuming the will's divine first motion, he does not explicate manifestly the concrete way in which it happens. Thus, the task of understanding the specific meaning of this notion is entirely left to its interpreter.

In this paper, I will attempt to interpret the notion of the will's divine first motion posited by Aquinas in *De malo* q. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 9. I will attempt to support my interpretation not only by textual analysis but also by both reflection on psychological experience and application in a theological context. My main arguments are as follows: First, Aquinas's notion of the will's divine first motion in *De malo* q. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 9 illustrates the divine efficient cause, not merely in the sense that God sets up the inclination toward the universal good in the human will, but rather in the sense that God instigates the particular and concrete act of the will. Second, it is more likely that this divine first motion happens repeatedly, not only once. Third, this does not mean, however, that the human will requires God's intervention at each moment of being awakened from an unconscious state such as sleep or the absence of mind. Fourth, the notion of the will's divine first motion can be understood as the phenomenon of grace and conversion in its theological and moral context.

II. CAN THE WILL'S DIVINE FIRST MOTION BE UNDERSTOOD AS IMPARTING THE WILL'S INCLINATION TOWARD THE UNIVERSAL GOOD?

One interpretation of the will's divine first motion in *De malo* q. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 9 is to understand it as God's constituting the natural inclination of the human will. Such an interpretation is found in K. Riesenhuber. According to Riesenhuber, the external impulse (*instinctus*) through which Aquinas saves the will's self-motion from the infinite regress is God, who invests the will with its general inclination toward the end. God is a universal mover in the sense that God creates the will together with its natural inclination toward the end, and hence the will's first motion means the universal motion by God, namely the motion of

⁵ The notion of the will's divine first motion is, as we have seen, set in the context of Aquinas's argument for the will's self-motion, and based on his inductive consideration of a series of willing and deliberation as a psychological phenomenon. In that sense, it can be regarded as unique among the treatments of 'the will's motion by God' in Aquinas's works.

producing a natural inclination toward the universal good. In this sense, Riesenhuber interprets the will's divine first motion as an ontological origin (ontologischer Anfang) rather than as a temporal origin (zeitlicher Anfang). In his words, the will's first motion by God is so-called 'staying motion (bleibende Bewegung)', not the motion of stirring the particular acts of the will anew each time.⁶

Indeed there is a textual basis that renders such an interpretation attractive, which can be found, among other places, in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9, a. 6 where the external principle of the will's first motion is proved to be God. The argument for this proposition proceeds as follows: (1) the natural motion of things arises from the internal principle, i.e., nature of the thing in itself. In this natural motion of things, however, we can observe not only the internal principle but also the external principle of the motion, which is the producer of nature. If the motion of a thing is brought about by external causes other than the producer of nature, the motion will not be a natural motion but a coercive one. (2) Therefore, the external principle of the will's motion, which distinguishes itself from the will as the internal principle of its motion and which is to be regarded as the moving principle along with the will, is nothing other than the producer of the will's nature, since the will's motion, i.e., voluntary motion, belongs to the category of natural motion. (3) Consequently, the will is moved by God as an external principle.⁷

It is clear, in this text, that Aquinas makes the point that God is the producer of the will's nature. Moreover, in a reply to the third objection, by remarking that God as a universal mover moves the will to its universal end, Aquinas seems to think that God's being the efficient cause of the will's motion is found in God's producing the will's natural inclination

⁶ RIESENHUBER: *Die Transzendenz der Freiheit zum Guten*, 310.

⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, c. "motus voluntatis est ab intrinseco, sicut et motus naturalis. Quamvis autem rem naturalem possit aliquid movere quod non est causa naturae rei motae, tamen motum naturalem causare non potest nisi quod est aliquo modo causa naturae. Movetur enim lapis sursum ab homine, qui naturam lapidis non causat, sed hic motus non est lapidi naturalis, naturalis autem motus eius non causatur nisi ab eo quod causat naturam. Unde dicitur in VIII Physic. quod generans movet secundum locum gravia et levia. Sic ergo hominem, voluntatem habentem, contingit moveri ab aliquo qui non est causa eius, sed quod motus voluntarius eius sit ab aliquo principio extrinseco quod non est causa voluntatis, est impossibile. Voluntatis autem causa nihil aliud esse potest quam Deus. Et hoc patet dupliciter. Primo quidem, ex hoc quod voluntas est potentia animae rationalis, quae a solo Deo causatur per creationem, ut in primo dictum est. Secundo vero ex hoc patet, quod voluntas habet ordinem ad universale bonum. Unde nihil aliud potest esse voluntatis causa, nisi ipse Deus, qui est universale bonum. Omne autem aliud bonum per participationem dicitur, et est quoddam particulare bonum, particularis autem causa non dat inclinationem universalem. Unde nec materia prima, quae est in potentia ad omnes formas, potest causari ab aliquo particulari agente."

toward the universal good.⁸ The same explanation can also be found in *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 105 which is usually cited as a parallel text of *Summa Theologiae* q. 9, a. 6. In *Summa Theologiae* q. 105, Aquinas tries consistently to explain God's intervention in the motion of creatures by observing that God produces or constitutes the nature of created things. Therefore, Aquinas here explains God's being the efficient cause of the will's motion in the sense of God's causing the will's inclination toward the universal good, in other words, in the sense of God's constituting the natural inclination in the will.⁹

This explanation, according to which God's causal relationship to the human will's motion consists in God's creating the will with its natural inclination, is very important. However, this is not the only way to understand the meaning of the human will's motion being caused by God. In *Summa contra gentiles* Ch. 89, Aquinas explicitly criticizes people who argue that God causes our willing in the sense that God causes in us the power of willing, but not in such a way that God makes us will this or that.¹⁰ This text clearly shows that Aquinas puts the emphasis on God's causal involvement in the particular act of the will, which cannot be reduced to God's being the cause of the power of willing generally.¹¹ Here he is interested in the concrete operation of divine Providence which reaches out to the individuals, while in *Summa Theologiae* q. 105, which deals with God's governance over creatures in general, he is emphasizing

⁸ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 6, ad 3. "Deus movet voluntatem hominis, sicut universalis motor, ad universal obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum. Et sine hac universali motione homo non potest aliquid velle."

⁹ *ST* I, q.105, a.4, c. "[...] ita voluntas movetur ab obiecto, quod est bonum, et ab eo qui creat virtutem volendi. Potest autem voluntas moveri sicut ab obiecto, a quocumque bono; non tamen sufficienter et efficaciter nisi a Deo. Non enim sufficienter aliquid potest movere aliquod mobile, nisi virtus activa moventis excedat, vel saltem adaequet virtutem passivam mobilis. Virtus autem passiva voluntatis se extendit ad bonum in universali, est enim eius obiectum bonum universale, sicut et intellectus obiectum est ens universale. Quodlibet autem bonum creatum est quoddam particulare bonum, solus autem Deus est bonum universale. Unde ipse solus implet voluntatem, et sufficienter eam movet ut obiectum. Similiter autem et virtus volendi a solo Deo causatur. Velle enim nihil aliud est quam inclinatio quaedam in obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum universale. Inclinare autem in bonum universale est primi moventis cui proportionatur ultimus finis, sicut in rebus humanis dirigere ad bonum commune est eius qui praeest multitudini. Unde utroque modo proprium est Dei movere voluntatem, sed maxime secundo modo, interius eam inclinando."

¹⁰ *SCG* III, c. 89, "Quidam vero, non intelligentes qualiter motum voluntatis Deus in nobis causare possit absque praeiudicio libertatis voluntatis, coacti sunt has auctoritates male exponere: ut scilicet dicerent quod Deus causat in nobis velle et perficere, in quantum causat nobis virtutem volendi, non autem sic quod faciat nos velle hoc vel illud; sicut Origenes exponit in III periarchon, liberum arbitrium defendens contra auctoritates praedictas."

¹¹ *IBID.*: "Hoc ipsum quod Salomon dicit, 'Quocumque voluerit, vertet illud', ostendit non solum divinam causalitatem ad potentiam voluntatis extendi, sed etiam ad actum ipsius."; "Deus igitur est causa nobis non solum voluntatis, sed etiam volendi." The texts on grace, as we will later see, also show the same interests.

the role of the immanent principle within the nature of created things. As a result, we can say that there are, in Aquinas, two ways of explaining God's influence upon the human will, according to the different concerns in each context. The first way is to explain that God creates the human will with its natural inclination as its internal principle, or creates the natural inclination in the human will toward the universal good. The other way is to explain that God immediately causes the actuality of the will's motion in particular instances. Aquinas, of course, accepts not only the second but also the first way of explaining God's causal relationship to the will's 'motion'; that is to say, as a way of explaining God's 'moving' the human will. But it is not difficult to grasp that the first explanation is concerned with the extended sense, rather than the strict sense, of the term 'motion' or 'to move.' At any rate we should not forget that Aquinas accepts both explanations of the will's motion by God, and that he thinks the second cannot be reduced to the first.

How then is the will said to be moved by God in *De malo* q. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9? What does Aquinas mean by the divine impulse which is presupposed as the beginning of the will's self-motion? In my view, it would be a mistake to interpret the text, based only on the arguments in *Summa Theologiae* q. 9 a. 6, to mean that the will's first motion can only be understood as God's creating the human will together with its natural inclination toward the universal good, or as putting the natural inclination into the will. The reason for this is that, strictly speaking, what Aquinas in a. 6 intends to present is an argument about why there can be no external mover of the human will other than God, rather than an argument about how God moves the human will. The argumentative point of a. 6 lies not in claiming that the beginning of the will's self-motion is God's act of producing the will together with its natural inclination, but in claiming that only the one who produces the will's nature deserves to be considered the external mover of the will.¹² The meaning of being the first mover of the will in principle is explained not in a. 6 but in a. 4. What matters in a. 4, as well as in *De malo* q. 6, as explained above, is how the will's self-motion can accord with Aristotle's axiom that what is potential can be moved to its actuality only by virtue of what is actual. As long as the will's self-motion refers to the phenomenon that the will is moved to the act of willing the means by the act of willing the end as *actus secundus*, what Aquinas searches for as the beginning of the will's self-motion is nothing other than the *actus secundus*, which is the actuality of the motion. Indeed, the first motion of the will by God should be regarded as a certain instigation of the will's second actuality. Whenever Aquinas

¹² In this point, I think that *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 111, a. 2 (Whether the angels can change the will of man?) is more appropriate as a parallel text to *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9, a. 6 than is *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 105, a. 4.

quotes the *Eudemian Ethics*, he does so in the context of searching for what is the ground for the act of the human spirit qua *actus secundus*.¹³ Someone who interprets Aquinas as claiming that God merely imparts the natural inclination to the human will and that the will initiates its self-motion on the particular occasion of recognizing an object by virtue of this natural inclination, fails to understand Aquinas as an Aristotelian, and mistakes him to be a thinker like Henry of Ghent.¹⁴

III. CAN THE WILL'S DIVINE FIRST MOTION HAPPEN REPEATEDLY?

Now, let us take a step forward. What exactly is meant by 'the divine instigation of the will's act'? More fundamentally, to what sort of explanation does Aquinas's notion of the will's divine first motion belong? As regards this question, an important answer can be found in B. Shanley's study (1998). Although he rightly points out that the causation implied by this notion is different from the divine causation of God's imparting the will's natural inclination to *bonum universale*, he insists that Aquinas does not try to account for a particular psychological datum with this notion.¹⁵ In Shanley's view, this notion is to be regarded purely as a metaphysical explanation and, as such, there is no way to interpret it psychologically. It is certainly true, as Shanley emphasizes, that Aquinas intended primarily a metaphysical justification of the will's self-motion. However, the problem of Shanley's view consists in that he separates the beginning of the will's self-motion from the will's motion as a concrete psychological act. Aquinas's notion of the will's divine first motion is not to be treated as the causality afforded by the unmoved mover, which is supposed to coexist with the whole series of the will's motion and to support it perpetually, as Aristotle has in mind in *Physics* VIII and Aquinas has in mind in *Summa theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 3 or in *Summa contra gentiles* I, q. 13. What matters in this notion is rather the divine influence as instigation temporally prior to the human mind's occurrent acts, which is conceived by Aristotle when he searches for the beginning of the deliberating (*initium consiliandi*) in *Eudemian Ethics* VIII. Therefore, what we can say about *intentio Aquinatis*, is only that he tries to justify the will's motion in the framework of the metaphysical concept of potency and act, to be precise, in the general framework of the Aristotelian axiom of "quidquid movetur ab alio movetur", and

¹³ cf. *ST* I, q. 82, a. 4, ad 3; *ST* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, c.; *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 1; *SCG* III, c. 89; *SLE* lib. 10, lect. 14, n. 9.

¹⁴ In order to compare Aquinas with Henry as regards the problem of will's motion, see TESKE, Roland: *Henry of Ghent's Rejection of the Principle: Omne quod movetur ab alio movetur*, in: VANHAMMEL, W. (ed.): *Henry of Ghent. Proceedings of the International Colloquium on the Occasion of the 700th Anniversary*. Louvain: Louvain University Press 1996, 279–308.

¹⁵ SHANLEY, Brian: *Divine Causation and Human Freedom in Aquinas*, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1998), 99–122, 112f.

we cannot conclude that he would separate the will's first motion from the will's motion, i.e. from the area of psychological experiences. The notion of the will's divine first motion is, therefore, not metaphysical in the sense that it excludes in principle the possibility of interpreting it in connection with psychological reflections.

How can we then carry out the investigation into the detailed and psychological meaning of that notion? I would suggest a question as a stepping stone: namely, the question about whether the will's divine first motion occurs repeatedly.¹⁶ If we interpreted the will's divine first motion only as God's imparting the will's natural inclination toward the universal good, raising the question of whether it occurs repeatedly or not would be pointless from the start. For the proposition that God imparts a natural power or disposition repeatedly to His creatures would be as absurd as the proposition that God creates those creatures repeatedly. But if we accept the above interpretation of the will's first motion by God as an impulse to the will's second actuality, then we rightly confront the question about whether such an impulse happens only once or multiple times. Before exploring this question further, we should note that we cannot find any explicit answers to this question in any of Aquinas's texts. Nevertheless, I would propose that, based on the context in which the question arises, the better interpretation is that the will's divine first motion happens repeatedly. Such an interpretation is supported by the following texts.

*"However, since the will does not always will to deliberate, it is necessary that it be moved by something to will to deliberate; and if by itself, it is again necessary that deliberation precede the movement of the will and the act of the will precede deliberation; and since an infinite regression is not possible, it is necessary to maintain that, so far as concerns the first motion of the will, the will of anyone not always actually willing must be moved by something exterior, by whose impulse the will begins to will."*¹⁷

"As far as the will is moved by the object, it is evident that it can be moved by something exterior. But in so far as it is moved in the exercise of its act, we must again hold it to be moved by some exterior principle. For everything that is at one time an agent actually, and at another time an agent in potentiality, needs to be moved by a mover. Now it is evident that the will begins to

¹⁶ As far as I know, the only scholar who concerned himself with this question is O.H. Pesch. See PESCH: *Philosophie und Theologie der Freiheit bei Thomas von Aquin in quaest. Disp. 6 De malo*, 20f.

¹⁷ QDM, q. 6. "Sed cum voluntas non semper voluerit consiliari, necesse est quod ab aliquo moveatur ad hoc quod velit consiliari; et si quidem a seipsa, necesse est iterum quod motum voluntatis praecedat consilium, et consilium praecedat actus voluntatis; et cum hoc in infinitum procedere non possit, necesse est ponere, quod quantum ad primum motum voluntatis moveatur voluntas cuiuscumque non semper actu volentis ab aliquo exteriori, cuius instinctu voluntas velle incipiat." (English text from OESTERLE, Jean: *On Evil*. Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press 1995, 241, emphasis added by author.)

will something, whereas previously it did not will it. Therefore it must, of necessity, be moved by something to will it."¹⁸

In either case, the main presupposition for the argument is the fact that the will does not always will its object.¹⁹ The mover which moves the will to act and which will turn out to be none other than God, is proposed to be the principle for the existence of the occurrent acts of the will. In other words, the external mover that Aquinas postulates here is not the principle for the actualization of a constant motion which lasts along with the will's nature, but it is the principle for the will's motion as a temporary and occurrent act. The will's divine first motion, therefore, must be understood as a particular impulse that transmits actuality to a particular act of willing as the temporal beginning of the will's self-motion, which then proceeds to willing an end, deliberating on the means and choosing the means. We take it for granted that this divine first motion of the will can occur repeatedly in so far as the human will exists.

Now, someone may raise the following objection: If the first motion of the will by God is repetitious, then it means that God must intervene whenever the will's act emerges out of a dormant state. However, it is not probable that God intervenes whenever any particular willing is awakened from its unconscious state, such as from sleep or absentmindedness and begins to deliberate and choose. But my interpretation does not entail this. In order to avoid any further misunderstanding, let me clarify how the repetition of the first motion of the will by God can be justified in the light of psychological experience.

Let us clarify with an example. A man who wants to be a scholar can make the choice to read a book when he happens to recognize a scholarly 'useful' book displayed in a bookshop while walking absent-mindedly down a quiet street, even though he is not then consciously desiring to become a scholar. Although his willing of the end, i.e. his willing to become a scholar, was not immediately present as an *actus secundus* in his consciousness, there is no reason to deny that the particular act of choice caused by his recognition of the book was 'a choice for the sake of that end.' As this example illustrates, in order for a certain choice to occur, it is

¹⁸ *ST I-II*, q. 9, a. 4, c. "voluntas movetur ab obiecto, manifestum est quod moveri potest ab aliquo exteriori. Sed eo modo quo movetur quantum ad exercitium actus, adhuc necesse est ponere voluntatem ab aliquo principio exteriori moveri. Omne enim quod quandoque est agens in actu et quandoque in potentia, indiget moveri ab aliquo movente. Manifestum est autem quod voluntas incipit velle aliquid, cum hoc prius non vellet. Necesse est ergo quod ab aliquo moveatur ad volendum." (English text from *FATHERS OF THE ENGLISH DOMINICAN PROVINCE: The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*. Allen, TX: Christian Classics 1981, 1416, emphasis added by author).

¹⁹ The same point is made in *Summa Theologiae I-II*, q. 10, a. 1 ad 2. "Et similiter non oportet quod voluntas, quae de potentia in actum reducitur dum aliquid vult, semper actu velit, sed solum quando est in aliqua dispositione determinata. Voluntas autem Dei, quae est actus purus, semper est in actu volendi."

not necessary to have consciously willed the end as a form of second actuality immediately prior to making such choice. The will can surely exercise the act of choice spontaneously on the occasion of recognizing the means to an end without supposing it to have been moved by the second actuality of the prior willing of the end.

Nevertheless, there is another thing that should not be overlooked: although the prior willing of the end is not immediately present in the consciousness as a form of second actuality, it has to exist within the power of the will of the one who makes a choice, at least as a sort of actuality of intention, insofar as the willing of the means is still a 'choice,' or rational act. In other words, although the will to become a scholar remains not as *actus secundus* but only as *potentia* in the consciousness of he who absent-mindedly walks in the street, this *potentia* is different from the *potentia* of willing to become a scholar in the cases of those who have never wanted to become a scholar, or those who do not want to become a scholar any more. To use the scholastic terminology, the former can be described as *potentia secunda* which can evolve at any time into *actus secundus*, and be regarded, therefore, as a power (= *actus primus*) which acts spontaneously. In contrast, the latter indicates *potentia prima* in the sense of mere disposition which enables someone to have a certain power.

Why, then, does the will have the active power to perform spontaneously the particular act of choice (e.g. the willing of reading) in the former sense of *potentia*? We have no choice but to say that the willing of a specific end to which that particular act of choice is directed is already 'stored up' within the will in a state of habit which corresponds to *potentia secunda*, namely *actus primus*. But, in order to be stored up in this way, the willing of the end must have been exercised at least more than once as *actus secundus*. The more often it is carried out, the stronger the habit or power of willing the end will become and the more easily it will be summoned to *actus secundus* by even the slightest cognitive influence of the object.²⁰ However, if an end was never before willed in reality, then who played the role of the efficient cause to activate the willing of the end for the first time? Aquinas's notion of the will's divine first motion is the answer to this question.

In a certain single act of the will aroused spontaneously by the cognition of some object, namely in the act of choice, we can, when asked to explain our choice, appeal to a higher end, which is distinguished from the

²⁰ Therefore my interpretation is not based on the misunderstanding that Aquinas did not acknowledge the will's spontaneous power, which, without any impulse from an external mover, can be actualized by the cognition of an object. What I argue is that, in order to explain the actual function of such a spontaneous power in the framework of Aquinas's theory of the will's self-motion, the power must be understood as an inclination that is being experienced, being exercised, and so, being stored up as a specific actuality, not merely as a natural inclination imparted to the will when it was created.

chosen object itself. It is the characteristic of choice as a rational act distinct from a sensitive appetite that it can be explained sufficiently only by appeal to a certain higher end, not by its immediate object. But however well we understand the value of a certain end, the end cannot be the ground for an act of choice if we have never once willed the end. When we have discovered a certain 'ultimate' end which can explain a whole series of deliberations and choices, the first act of willing of that ultimate end can be only understood to be actualized by an impulse of something which produces the will's nature, not by an active power of the will itself. And then, if the first instance of the willing of the end which is caused by that impulse is not sufficient to form a constant active power to cause the particular series of volitional acts directed toward that end, or if we sometimes begin to will a wholly new sort of end, which has never been willed before nor thought to be able to be willed before, we should naturally conclude that the first impulse is given repeatedly. This explanation will become clearer when we broaden our horizon to include moral and theological contexts.

IV. THE WILL'S DIVINE FIRST MOTION IN THE THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

Aquinas's concept of the will's divine first motion is connected with the concept of grace in the theological context. The textual evidence is found in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.109 where Aquinas discusses the necessity of grace. In a.2, where he argues that grace is the prerequisite for human beings to will the good, Aquinas considers the objection that man can will the good without grace because man is the master of the acts of his own will. Aquinas's reply to this objection is as follows:

"Man is master of his acts and of his willing or not willing, because of his deliberate reason, which can be bent to one side or another. And although he is master of his deliberating or not deliberating, yet this can only be by a previous deliberation; and since it cannot go on to infinity, we must come at length to this, that man's free-will is moved by an extrinsic principle, which is above the human mind, to wit by God, as the Philosopher proves in the chapter 'On Good Fortune' (*Ethic. Eudem. VII*). Hence the mind of man still unweakened is not so much master of its act that it does not need to be moved by God; and much more the free will of man weakened by sin, whereby it is hindered from good by the corruption of the nature."²¹

²¹ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 1. "homo est dominus suorum actuum, et volendi et non volendi, propter deliberationem rationis, quae potest flecti ad unam partem vel ad aliam. Sed quod deliberet vel non deliberet, si huius etiam sit dominus, oportet quod hoc sit per deliberationem praecedentem. Et cum hoc non procedat in infinitum, oportet quod finaliter deveniatur ad hoc quod liberum arbitrium hominis moveatur ab aliquo exteriori principio quod est supra mentem humanam, scilicet a Deo; ut etiam philosophus probat in cap. de bona fortuna. Unde mens hominis etiam sani non ita habet dominium sui actus quin indigeat moveri a

This argument is exactly in line with the arguments in *De malo* q. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9, which both introduce the necessity of the will's divine first motion. In both of these texts, Aquinas cites the famous phrase from the *Eudemian Ethics*. This noticeable agreement can be regarded as textual evidence for the interpretation which connects the notion of the will's divine first motion with the theological notion of grace.²²

A substantial argument for such a connection is, however, to be developed in analyzing Aquinas's notions themselves closely. In order to elucidate the notion of the will's divine first motion in the light of his theory of grace, we should first examine the two distinct meanings of grace. Not only in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 109 but also in the texts wholly devoted to the topic of grace, Aquinas distinguishes between *gratia habitualis*, a gift which God infuses into us and which always exists within us like a form or disposition, and *gratia actualis*, or God's operation which causes us to move toward a good willing and a good behavior. According to this distinction, the will's divine first motion, for now, may well be said to belong to *gratia actualis*.

From Aquinas's explanation of the general meaning of *gratia actualis*, i.e. grace as a type of motion, we hardly find justification for concluding that this grace is given repeatedly. Rather, the fact that Aquinas repeatedly uses the Aristotelian term "first mover" in arguing for the necessity of this grace so as to designate God's role, seems to imply that this grace is an event that happens only once. However, we should not hastily conclude from the fact that Aquinas uses this term that his intention was to reduce the notion of *gratia actualis* to a perpetual motion in the Aristotelian sense, which enables and supports the whole series of motion in creatures. The more precise and full meaning of Aquinas's concept of *gratia actualis* comes out when Aquinas explains it in terms of the fallen human nature due to original sin. According to Aquinas, human beings need to be healed by not only *gratia habitualis* but also grace as a type of motion (*gratia actualis*), due to the actual condition of human nature fallen into sin and ignorance. Since human beings are in this condition, even those who have already received grace should pray incessantly so that God may continue to guide them and guard them.²³ Grace as a type of motion is a kind of

Deo. Et multo magis liberum arbitrium hominis infirmi post peccatum, quod impeditur a bono per corruptionem naturae." (English text from FATHERS OF THE ENGLISH DOMINICAN PROVINCE: *The Summa Theologica of St Thomas Aquinas*, 2529–2530)

²² As for the further analysis of the agreements between the texts of grace and the texts of the will's motion, see LONERGAN: *Grace and Freedom*, especially 97–103 and 121–125.

²³ *ST* I-II, q. 109, a. 9. c. "Indiget tamen auxilio gratiae secundum alium modum, ut scilicet a Deo moveatur ad recte agendum. Et hoc propter duo. Primo quidem, ratione generali, propter hoc quod, sicut supra dictum est, nulla res creata potest in quemcumque actum procedere nisi virtute motionis divinae. Secundo, ratione speciali, propter conditionem status humanae naturae. Quae quidem licet per gratiam sanetur quantum ad mentem, remanet tamen in ea corruptio et infectio quantum ad carnem, per quam servit legi peccati, ut dicitur ad

healing, and this grace should – as we pray for it to be given repeatedly – be given repeatedly.

In Section III, I distinguished between the will's natural inclination, which is presumed to be given at the moment when the will was created, and the will's active power, within which the actuality of a particular act of willing the end is 'stored up' and which can exist only after being instigated by an external mover. In principle, we cannot dismiss the possibility that even with a first single instigation the latter power continues to exist as an ability to act spontaneously. But, when seen from a moral and theological standpoint, this becomes a completely different issue. Granting that, once the will has been first instigated to exercise the act of willing the end, the will's power to act may not be dissipated to such a degree that it cannot thereafter spontaneously make any deliberation or any choice. However, if a man in the condition of sin and ignorance repeats immoral acts owing to erroneous deliberation and choice and such acts form a habit, then it is very probable to suppose that a good and orderly deliberation and choice cannot result from the original willing of the end any longer. In this case, we are obliged to conclude that the external instigation is necessary again, so that one may will the end and exercise a series of deliberation and choice that are ordered to the willing of the end. Just in this sense, Aquinas remarks that God moves and changes the human will. For Aquinas, the event that those who used to will the evil are now beginning to will the good is impossible to explain by appealing to the will's spontaneous power alone, no matter how much Aquinas emphasizes the will's spontaneity.²⁴

The further refinement of the meaning of grace in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 111 a. 2 provides a framework for determining with greater precision the meaning of the will's divine first motion. Here, Aquinas divides the meaning of *gratia actualis* into *gratia operans* and *gratia cooperans*. The former is grace operating within the will's inner act and the latter is grace

Rom. VII. Remanet etiam quaedam ignorantiae obscuritas in intellectu, secundum quam, ut etiam dicitur Rom. VIII, quid oremus sicut oportet, nescimus. Propter varios enim rerum eventus, et quia etiam nosipsos non perfecte cognoscimus, non possumus ad plenum scire quid nobis expediat; secundum illud Sap. IX, cogitationes mortalium timidae, et incertae providentiae nostrae. Et ideo necesse est nobis ut a Deo dirigamur et protegatur, qui omnia novit et omnia potest. Et propter hoc etiam renatis in filios Dei per gratiam, convenit dicere, et ne nos inducas in tentationem, et, fiat voluntas tua sicut in caelo et in terra, et cetera quae in oratione dominica continentur ad hoc pertinentia." In ad 2, this grace as a motion, which guides and guards us, is said to be the Holy Spirit's operation (*operatio Spiritus Sancti*). Furthermore, it is worth noting that in *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 68, a. 1, Aquinas explains the meaning of the Holy Spirit's operation by citing the *Eudemian Ethics*.

²⁴ For now, let it suffice to quote the remarks in *De veritate*. QDV, q. 22, a. 8, c. "Immutat autem voluntatem dupliciter. Uno modo movendo tantum; quando scilicet voluntatem movet ad aliquid volendum, sine hoc quod aliquam formam imprimat voluntati; sicut sine appositione alicuius habitus, quandoque facit ut homo velit hoc quod prius non volebat."

operating within the will's external act. When God operates within the will's inner act, the human will is moved passively by God's operation. In contrast, in the will's external act, the will is not only moved passively by God, but it also moves itself at the same time, so that God's operation becomes a type of cooperation.²⁵ We can infer that the notion of the will's divine first motion corresponds to the notion of *gratia operans*, because the will's divine first motion implies God's operation in relationship to a human will which remains purely movable and is not yet able to move itself. According to Aquinas, *gratia operans* functions first of all when the will, which is used to willing evil, now begins to will the good.²⁶ This event is also called 'conversion.' In my view, the will's divine first motion as discussed by Aquinas in *De malo* q. 6 and *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9 can be understood as a psychological notion that explains this theological event. Therefore, any plausible interpretation of the concept of the will's divine first motion will not appeal to the meaning of 'first' in the sense of 'happening only once.'

V. CONCLUSION

The act of the will is a rational and spontaneous act. The rationality of the will's act consists in the reflective consciousness about the reason why it wills something. In other words, if I am conscious of the relationship between my present desire for something and the end that constitutes the reason for that desire, my presently acting on that desire is deemed to be rational. The spontaneity of the will's act is, as it were, the 'residue of the act' that cannot be reduced to rational and objective consciousness. Aquinas

²⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 111, a. 2, c. "[...] sicut supra dictum est, gratia dupliciter potest intelligi, uno modo, divinum auxilium quo nos movet ad bene volendum et agendum; alio modo, habituale donum nobis divinitus inditum. Utrouque autem modo gratia dicta convenienter dividitur per operantem et cooperantem. Operatio enim alicuius effectus non attribuitur mobili, sed moventi. In illo ergo effectus in quo mens nostra est mota et non movens, solus autem Deus movens, operatio Deo attribuitur, et secundum hoc dicitur gratia operans. In illo autem effectus in quo mens nostra et movet et movetur, operatio non solum attribuitur Deo, sed etiam animae, et secundum hoc dicitur gratia cooperans. Est autem in nobis duplex actus. Primus quidem, interior voluntatis. Et quantum ad istum actum, voluntas se habet ut mota, Deus autem ut movens, et praesertim cum voluntas incipit bonum velle quae prius malum volebat. Et ideo secundum quod Deus movet humanam mentem ad hunc actum, dicitur gratia operans. Alius autem actus est exterior; qui cum a voluntate imperetur, ut supra habitum est, consequens est ut ad hunc actum operatio attribuatur voluntati. Et quia etiam ad hunc actum Deus nos adiuvat, et interiorius confirmando voluntatem ut ad actum perveniat, et exteriorius facultatem operandi praebendo; respectu huius actus dicitur gratia cooperans. Unde post praemissa verba subdit Augustinus, ut autem velimus operatur, cum autem volumus, ut perficiamus nobis cooperatur. Sic igitur si gratia accipiatur pro gratuita Dei motione qua movet nos ad bonum meritorium, convenienter dividitur gratia per operantem et cooperantem."

²⁶ *ST*. I-II, q. 111, a. 2, c. "[...] praesertim cum voluntas incipit bonum velle quae prius malum volebat."

nas observes this residue in the exercise or performance of will's act (*exercitium vel usus actus*).²⁷ He argues that, whether exercising the act or not, the will's act is not determined by the intellect.²⁸ This indeterminacy implies that the dimension of self-determination is somehow included in the will's motion after all. In this sense, the will's act is to be said to be not only rational but also spontaneous.

Aquinas thinks that an existence of such a rational and spontaneous act is not completely explained by the mutual and cooperative relationship between the intellect and the will. According to Aquinas, the ultimate ground for the possibility of a rational and spontaneous act should be sought outside the circular relationship between the acts of the soul's faculties and must be found instead in God, who is the principle for the existence of those faculties. For Aquinas, God must be not only the principle that produces the subject of the act, but also the principle that instigates the subject to begin to act, as far as the subject of a rational and spontaneous act, i.e. the subject of freedom, is concerned.

In the sense that the reason of existence transcends factual existence, the will's divine first motion is a kind of transcendental account of the psychological phenomenon of the will's self-motion. Likewise, it is also a kind of metaphysical principle, as it is postulated by the application of the Aristotelian metaphysical axiom. But as I argued above, the concrete and detailed meaning of the notion of the will's divine first motion unfolds itself when we examine the notion not just in a metaphysical context, but also in an empirical and, furthermore, theological context. In such an expanded context of interpretation, we conclude that the notion of the will's divine first motion can be properly understood as the repeatable divine instigation of the particular act of willing the end.

Finally, it will be useful to examine briefly another possible objection to my interpretation. As we have seen in Shanley, some may insist that the will's divine first motion should be treated as a purely metaphysical notion which is invented in order to justify the psychological investigation in the will's self-motion, and not as a notion which denotes an actual and concrete event. Apart from their textual misunderstanding which we discussed above, they might insist this because they are questioning the possibility experiencing the will's divine first motion. Could it be indeed an event to be experienced? I admit that it may be almost impossible for us to experience the will's divine first motion 'as a divine motion.' But we should ask what makes it seemingly impossible. The reason is that we have no clear

²⁷ *ST* I-II, q. 9, a. 1, c.

²⁸ As is well-known, it was in his later works after 1270 that this argument appeared explicitly. Concerning the development of the Aquinas's theory on the freedom of will, see WESTBERG, Daniel: *Did Aquinas change his Mind about the Will?*, in: *The Thomist* 58 (1994), 41–60; KIM, Yul: *A Change in Thomas Aquinas's Theory of the Will: Solutions to a Long-Standing Problem*, in: *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 82 (2008), 221–236.

criterion in our consciousness for distinguishing between willing that arises out of our own pure spontaneity and willing that is instigated by divine operation. The moment when my will is moved by grace is not the moment when I say to myself that 'I am desiring something by virtue of a certain external power.'

Apart from an exceptional case such as rapture, we can, at best, re-interpret the experience 'rationally' in the religious context and think only afterward that the motion of my will occurred by virtue of God's grace. The reason why grace is grace is not because we perceive it as grace, but because it causes a renewal in our life beyond our present empirical consciousness. Hence, we might not be aware of the operation of grace at the moment when grace operates. If we admit that the realm of experience can be broader than the realm of empirical consciousness, then we should not say that the grace is something that cannot be experienced simply because its operation transcends our empirical consciousness. Just as our consciousness of freedom may not necessarily guarantee our real freedom, so may we be only insufficiently conscious of the freedom we have. It is the same case with grace.

Abstract

This paper aims to interpret the notion of the will's divine first motion mentioned by Thomas Aquinas in De malo q. 6 and Summa theologiae I-II, q. 9. It argues that the concrete and detailed meaning of this notion can only be understood when it is interpreted not only from a metaphysical point of view, but also from both an empirical and a theological point of view. In this expanded context of interpretation, it will be shown that the notion of the will's divine first motion implies God's causal relationship to the human will's motion, not in the sense that God creates the human will with its natural inclination toward the universal good, but rather in the sense that God instigates the human will to exercise particular acts of willing the end on repeated occasions. More precisely, the will's divine first motion can be interpreted as something corresponding to gratia operans ut actualis according to Aquinas's division of grace in Summa Theologiae I-II, q. 109.