

ACT, HUMAN (Latin *actus humanus*)—a human action, an act of decision, whose source is in rational knowledge and free will. The human act is not limited to the cognitive action of the intellect, nor is it manifested chiefly in theoretical knowledge, but it takes in practical cognition (acts of decision) and “poetic” cognition, namely creative and artistic cognition. Human action originates in man as a rational and free being. The human act differs from an “act of man”, in which something happens independently of man’s will.

THE GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN ACT. Every age and every generation in its turn considers human action. Human action is inseparable from the fact of man’s existence as a man. Not everything that man does is a manifestation of his humanity. Not everything he does is a human act, but only that which originates from him as rational and willed. Many processes occur in man as a defined individual. There are biological processes (these are conditions for vegetative life), sensory processes, and spiritual processes. The processes of which we are informed by physics, chemistry, and biology, take place in us independently of our will and knowledge. We may observe these processes and even influence them by providing stimuli, but ultimately these processes are independent of us; they are the work of nature alone. Such things as the transformation of matter, respiration, biological rhythms, and the reaction of the nervous system to stimuli, occur in man but they do not complete man as man by way of his specific powers, namely knowledge and volition.

Man is the source only of the specific activity that flows from the will directed by the reason. It is commonly said that specifically human action is always conscious and freely willed. Therefore what is not conscious and freely willed, that which is not wanted in a human manner, is not an action of man as man; it is not a human action, although it occurs in man.

The object and aim of cognition (of theoretical cognition) is being, and we call the agreement of cognition and being truth. The same being and the same reality that elicits the process of action is a being as a good. How does it happen, that being as good elicits human action (which creates culture), and that this action is marked by morality (one of the essential parts of culture), as a real being is at the same time a good?

To speak as briefly as possible—it is because a being (as a concrete thing known in whatever way) elicits in man a “movement” to himself; it elicits a germinal appetite called the appetite of self. This moment of the “appetibility of being” is generally called the good. Being as truth is the relation of a being to an intellect that creates, produces or receptively knows that being; being as good is the relation of a being to a will as the first moving power and the source of rational activity. This is expressed in the abstract formula “good is to be done” (*bonum est faciendum*), or in short form, in its chief and personal form it is at the same time the rules of conduct, the rules that are called the basis formulation of the so-called laws of nature (more precisely, this is the basic law of personal action), in the form of a command—do good (*fac bonum*). When a man knows a concrete good, even if his knowledge is merely cursory, he is drawn by the good, displaced from his passivity, and set toward the good. Man can attain and achieve the good. Man himself is not the full good (for he is a contingent being whose existence may be lost) and he extends his life and existence by various goods by which he is made more complete. Of course, when man attains or aims at attaining the concrete goods that under various aspects make him more complete, these same goods by themselves do not fill him with a good that is proportional, ultimate, which exhausts human capacity or potentiality. Human capacity or potentiality is infinite and

requires an infinite good that is proportional to human transcendence, a good which ultimately actualizes the person's potentialities and is constantly manifested in human life. The most important manifestation of this potentiality or dynamism is the prime practical imperative: "do good."

**THE STRUCTURAL FACTORS OF ACTION.** In every action of a contingent being, and especially in man's human action, we can see factors or causes that form the "reason of being" for the action: (1) the object or aim, which is the motive for the existence of the action; (2) the determination and establishment of a content and direction for the activity by an exemplar cause; (3) the actual action that comes out of a determined and teleologically motivated efficient cause who is the source of the action.

Ad 1. The action of contingent beings, including man, is not something necessary, as we know from experience and a philosophical analysis of contingent being, whose existence (which does not constitute a feature of the essence) is not joined by necessity with the essence. Therefore the appearance of activity in the case of man is explained in terms of a cause, since it came into existence after not existing, and it did not need to be. It is commonly said that action exists because a man wants to act. That is right! However, the "wanting" of action is only the embryo of action, since this desire did not previously exist. The desire is by nature a desire for something which is the object of desire and at the same time in a certain sense creates the desire; this thing as an object of desire has an attractive power in itself that produces a desire for itself. In the classical understanding, this is the good. Being is the good insofar as it is desired (or insofar as it has in it the power to arouse desire in some sense). The good, insofar as it actually arouses a desire for itself, is an end. Therefore the problematic of the end is primary and we must examine it in our explanation of human action. Every action possesses an object. There is no action without an object. The good and the end are the object of human acts as human (insofar as they originate from the will—they are rationally desired). The good and the end are the same. Every good is potentially an object and end of action; the end is an actualization of the causal action of the good. The causal action of the end is primary with respect to other kinds of causation, as Thomas Aquinas writes: "Everything that acts must act for an end. For in the case of causes that are ordered to one another, if the first cause were removed, then the others would be necessarily removed. The first among all causes is the final cause. This is because matter would not take on a form if an acting agent did not move it. For nothing leads itself from potency to act, and an acting agent moves only because it intends an end. If it has not been determined to cause a certain effect, then there is no reason why it would cause one effect rather than another. In order for it to cause a certain effect, it must be determined to something that has the character of an end. This kind of determination, just as in the case of rational natures it is effected by rational desire, which is called the will, in other natures is effected by a natural inclination called natural appetite [...] It is proper to a rational nature that it should aim at an end, when it elicits action from itself and leads itself to an end; whereas natures that do not possess reason are led by something other than themselves, as it were, and led to an end which is either apprehended, as in the case of animals, or not apprehended, as in the case of things that act without any knowledge." (*S. th.*, I–II, q. 1, a. 2.)

The causal action of the end is first in all the actions of the contingent being, for it is the reason for action coming into existence rather than not existing. The essential function of the end is to be the reason for realizing a desire for the good. As Aristotle noted, the end is realized analogically, that is, not univocally. It is realized in one way in man's conscious activity, since man is the efficient cause of his own acts, the beings that are acts of the will,

and he determines himself as exemplar and chooses for himself the end or good. The end is realized otherwise in the area of production, where man causes some effect outside himself and produces a work that is intended to endure independently of him, such as a work of art, a sculpture or a piece of technology (these works have their own necessary specific character of being depending on their material and the exemplar idea or criterium behind them, and this specific character must be taken into account, whereas this is not the case in acts of free will in the moral order, where there is freedom in the choice of an end, the freedom of autodetermination, and the freedom in actual action). The end is realized in yet another way in non-rational nature, where the end, the determination, and the actual fact of action occur by necessity. Wherever there is the moment of an ordered appetite to something, we find the essential moment of teleological action. We analyze teleological action primarily on the complicated example of self-aware action, human action, and then we extrapolate the results by analogy to the action of the rest of nature. This is not merely a projection of man's consciousness or his mode of thought, because the laws of our thought are the laws of being itself as we see them (we ourselves are beings); and furthermore we are entitled to analogical transference by our discovery of the elements of nature's action, and although these are in different contexts, they are the same as what we find in the analysis of our own human teleological action.

If, therefore, the action of efficient causation exists, there is a reason why it exists rather than not existing. It is not a question here of the cognitive determination thanks to which we know what we are going to do and how, but it is a question of the fact that action comes into existence and the constitution of action. The reason is the execution of the first movement of the will, namely the "first love" that desire has for the object that appears in our knowledge as good. Our desire (the will's act of volition) at the moment when the good is presented to it, is thrown out of its passive state and moved, as it were, by the perceived good. The perceived good thus acts on our desire and causes a transformation within it, and as a result there arises an "affinity" which is, as it were, a motive force and inclination to the perceived good. The act of the faculty of rational desire, namely the will, insofar as it is moved by the perceived good in the first phase and has been internally directed to the good and "gravitates" toward it, is the "first love", the casting of desire and will from passivity regarding the good. This act as having been elicited by the will is already a real action and is the first phase in efficient causation. The first act in action is already the "second act" of love, and it cannot be the deciding moment in the order of final causality since it presupposes as its reason something prior. It presupposes the first act which is an "internal inclination toward" the good to which man aspires by his rational action. The first act of love toward the good is essentially the motive which by the same token is the reason why the action of an efficient cause comes into existence.

Ad 2. The next factor in explaining the action of contingent beings in general is the exemplar cause. The exemplar cause causes the determination of action and gives it direction. As we know, a consequence of every form is some inclination to action. The determination of action is in nature a consequence of the structure or nature of the being that acts. We know what type of determinate action will come from an apple tree, a cherry tree, or an oak. Among animals, the determination of action in their cognitive order is often very flexible and already appears at the level of a very primitive sensory cognition. Cognitive stimuli evoke changes among beings, horses, dogs etc., in their kinds of activity. Nonetheless, new actions appear as consequences of the sensory cognitive form depending upon the nature of the animal. Such actions are commonly called instinctive, since they are determined by a

knowledge of the object and of the animal's structure.

The determination of action in man occurs in one way when it is ordered to the production of an external work, and in another way when it concerns human moral conduct. In the area of production and art there are rules connected with the character and content of the work produced and that of the material that is reworked. Actions in these areas cannot be arbitrary because they must take into account the object, character, and matter of the product. In the moral domain, however, the eliciting of action completely depends upon us, for we may elicit an activity or not elicit it from ourselves, and we may direct it in various ways. Nonetheless in the area of moral conduct as well, action is always determined. This is expressed in the Latin adage: "*ab indeterminato nil sequitur*"—from that which is indeterminate nothing follows—no action flows out of a source that is not determined to some action.

The determination to act comes from the reason, insofar as the reason by a properly and freely chosen practical judgment determines itself to act. In the action there is already a determination and direction from the action. Obviously, this determination and direction is nothing other than a reading of the content of the good which is contained in the practical judgment and chosen, and which casts the subject out of a state of indifference to act. In human action, cognition ordered to action (practical cognition) is the factor that determines and directs action. The contents of cognition come from the thing, and therefore the thing (the being) insofar as it is known and impresses its content upon our cognitive apparatus, is ultimately the factor that directs and regulates human action. We ourselves choose the thing's contents expressed in action, and we make the choice in the form of a practical judgment whereby we determine ourselves to act.

Ad 3. The third factor that integrates action is efficient causation, namely the execution of the action which is at the same time motivated and determined.

The coming into existence (the facticity) of action is realized in one way in the order of nature that does not know, in another way in the knowing nature of an animal, and in yet another way in man. If it is correct to assert that "the consequence of every form is a certain inclination" (*unamquamque formam sequitur aliqua inclinatio*), then in natural things this inclination is always realized in action. So, for example, a grain will always grow if the conditions are favorable, namely if the objective obstacles that would hinder its action are removed. A tree will always "act", that is, it will always realize its process of vegetation, when the conditions are right. In the Middle Ages it was said that a stone will always fly to earth when the obstacle is removed, namely the column upon which the stone was placed. The cognitive actions of animals are differentiated in view of the objects that are the stimuli, and their actions are flexible with regard to the subject, but their actions are also inevitable when the natural conditions in the subject and object come into existence. In man's human action, the fact that an action comes into existence depends upon his will, namely his wanting. A man, as we know from internal experience supported by an analysis of man's ontological structure and his mode of action, may act or not act depending upon whether he wants or does not want to act. Even when there are attractive motives and the ways to perform the action are exactly determined, a man may refuse to elicit an action from himself when he does not want this for any reason or he simply does not want to perform the action.

The elicitation of action may be twofold: (a) directly from the will and spontaneous; or (b) commanded by the will in an act of volition and passed on to the other faculties for execution (e.g., to the hands, that they should do something, or to the feet, that they should walk, or the reason that it should think). The command of the will that elicits action may be a “despotic” or a “political” command, depending upon whether the will has absolute power over the faculties of the body, or is only able to arouse them and restrain them, as in the case of human sentiments that only in a certain measure can be commanded or forbidden. We may “play politics” with our feelings, which means that we must influence them by objects presented by way of cognition, for feelings are largely independent and are directly connected with the objects of their operations.

The mechanism described here whereby actions depend upon the factors of the end, the efficient cause, and the exemplar is only one description of these factors, each of which is a “reason of being” in its own order for our action. This does not mean that these factors exert their influence in a sequence in time, but only that an actual performed human action is under various aspects causally dependent upon the final, exemplar and efficient causes. Ultimately it is man himself who acts and he elicits his action from himself, but the elicited action cannot be understood without the end or motive, without the exemplar, and without the actual desire for human action. Since three factors appear as reasons for the existence of action, these factors must be set forth and put in order among themselves. When we put them in order, the good or end appears as the first factor, in view of the fact that the object as a good, being at the same time the end, is the reason for the existence of action as its motive; the exemplar determines and directs the action. Without the determination of the source to act, it would be impossible to elicit actual action from oneself.

THE ACT OF DECISION—THE HUMAN ACT. These factors influence man through cognition. When a man has a motive and a direction for his action, he finally wants to act and he elicits from himself human action in a union of will and reason. He elicits action in an act that integrates all his aspects, and this is the act of decision. In the act of decision a man constitutes himself as a real source of action that concretely aims at a freely chosen good. This good is first the arousal of action aimed at an object. As long as a purely object good (some concrete good and being) does not enter into a real relation with the person, it will not evoke in man any action that is a consequence of the teleological causation of the good. Hence the matter of constituting oneself as a real source of action is of great importance, since it is at the basis of our understanding of all human activity and thereby at the basis of our understanding of culture. Man must determine himself to action (or make a decision to act) in every area of his personal life. Only the purely biological actions that occur in man are not subject to a human decision; all types of human action are caused by acts of decision to act, although sometimes these decisions are made so spontaneously that we almost do not notice them, but these are still decisions and require us to take counsel with others and others for a long time before we really determine ourselves to act. Although theoretical knowledge is prior by its nature to practical knowledge as it appears in acts of decision, yet we must first decide to seek knowledge and to think before we begin actually to seek knowledge or think. Our decision to act or not to act is inseparable from our being, for even non-action when it is intended and the result of a decision is a kind of “action” that requires a decision that may even be very difficult. Hence all the decisions that underlie human action are inseparable from man’s being and human action insofar as it is human. The acts of decision that elicit and direct human action, whether immanent acts (acts of the reason and will alone) or acts that pass to the exterior by our muscular system, have an essential influence on man’s attitude. They decide his morality and ultimately they shape his

personal profile.

Acts of decision are certainly made “within the human heart”: these are the most immanent acts, although they appear outside in the form of perceptible action. All our internal experiences are focussed in acts of decision. Our internal experiences often and rightly lead to the sphere of knowledge and desire or volition, and this finds expression in the saying: “a conscious and free” human act. The cognitive and appetitive sphere includes all the activities that occur in man and those over which we do not have dominion or only have incomplete dominion, and those over which we have complete dominion. It is obvious that someone whose mind is clouded by chemicals such as alcohol or narcotics will make decisions in a certain way, a sick man will make decisions in another way, and a man who is in a normal condition will make decisions in yet another way. These differences in the process of decision have no bearing on the structure as such of the decision, but they do influence the making of decisions (the functioning of the decision-process). We cannot enumerate all the factors that can influence the process of forming a decision that is based on the normal operation of biological mechanisms in man. These mechanisms are also capable of being shaped by an individual’s natural history, cultural history, habits, and acquired skills. The cognitive and appetitive factors that enter into the act of decision also include the sphere of sense cognition and the sphere of sensory appetite, namely the sphere of human feelings in the broadest sense. Our acts of the reason, and the will, namely the acts which as we said are conscious and free, grow out of the concrete depth of our feelings and sense cognition (especially in the imagination), and in their functioning they continually depend upon what lies in those depths.

Our judgments concerning action, called practical judgments, as well as our acts of free volition (acts of love in the broadest sense), together form the fabric of the act of human decision. The decision is like the visible tip of an iceberg. Most of the iceberg is unseen in the depths of the ocean, and only a small part emerges above the surface. It is the same with our acts of decision. We can observe and analyze only the culminating moments of the process of decision, the moments that essentially constitute the act. Nonetheless, the acts that constitute the decision emerge from the whole of our biological and psychological life, and that basically remains a mystery to us. The culminating moments of the decision-process appear above the surface of the biological and psychological “depths” and can be clearly seen and described, for the structure of the act of decision is continually conscious and accessible to man in concomitant reflection. In its culminating moments, the act of decision—and thereby the conscious, free, and truly human act—is a unique union and synthesis of will and reason, and so it involves the entire man. We can perceive this in our concomitant reflection, since we deliberate over certain decisions for a long time; we carry them out in constant thought; we let them take root in our psyche to such a degree that our memory of at least some of our acts of decision is constantly vivid and present before us. Yet all this does not mean that by our decisions we have exhausted or actualized all our psychic potentiality in a certain area, or that our act of decision was the only one possible, that it was the best, or that we were capable considering all the moments of the decision-process.

Man’s actions, like all other types of actions we can see in the world, are contingent and unnecessary in their existence. This is externally visible in that fact that the activity appears at a certain time and ceases at a certain time, that it is modified in one way or another and runs a certain course depending upon the conditions present. The contingent character of action is stronger in man in his free action which does not depend only upon the context but also and primarily upon his will. It depends upon whether we want to act or not. When we

want to act, then this desire also involves very essential objective conditions, for there is no action that is without an object. What is the object of our will? We know from internal experience that it is the good. If our will is an appetite born from intellectual cognition, and the good, as Aristotle rightly defines it at the beginning of his *Nicomachean Ethics*, is “that which all desire”, then it is the object of appetite and the will. For contingent beings, “to be” and “to move toward” are really the same. Everything that exists aims at the basic good of preserving and extending its own existence. The first natural inclination that emerges from the structure of a contingent being is the actualization of itself by action, and by the same token, this is an inclination to obtain the good proper to that being. This inclination to actualization by action in the contingent being is nothing other than the universally perceptible dynamism of being in all of nature, and man is also a part of nature. Man, however, in his ontological dynamism connected with the good possesses for himself only proper features.

Man differs from other beings because he knows the nature of the good and rationally directs himself toward the good he has selected. Thereby the good becomes the end of human appetite. If the end is the actually desired good, then the end of human action is not merely the good insofar as it is desired, but insofar as it is rationally desired. The nature of the good is understood in the same measure as the good becomes the rationally intended end. This concerns at the same time the end of action in the ultimate sense and the end in an intermediate sense, insofar as the good is indirectly desired in view of the final end. Only thought can grasp the right proportion between the end and the means (intermediate ends) that lead to the end. Man is not inclined to want the good (and end) only by the pull of his nature (natural inclination), but also by the judgment of the reason and the recognition of the good as the end of elicited action. Thomas Aquinas, the classical author of the theory of action, wrote: “[...] among the actions that man performs, only those are properly human which in a proper sense belong to man as man. Man differs from the other non-rational creatures because he is the master of his own acts. Hence also we call human acts only those acts of which man is the master. And man is the master of his acts by reason and will, and so we hold that free choice (free deliberation) is a faculty of the will and reason. And we call only those acts human in the proper sense that come from the will as it deliberates. If some other acts belong to man, they may be called acts of man, but not human acts, since they are not acts of man as man. It is evident that all the acts that proceed from a certain potency are caused by it in view of the character of its object. The object of the will is the end and good; hence all human acts must be for an end.” (*S. th.*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1).

Saint Thomas notes that the good is the proper object of human appetite when it becomes the specific object of appetite in a concrete sense, and that the good acts upon the will as the end, which is the good insofar as it actually acts upon the appetite.

**THE CONTENT-DETERMINANTS OF THE HUMAN ACT.** The good (or end) that moves our appetite is not without content. It is rich in content. This existing content attracts human appetite. The interpretation of “my good” as “my truth”, as a concrete content I can understand and whereby I may enrich myself, occurs by the reason and finds its ultimate formulation in the form of a practical judgment about the good I understand and which inclines me to act. The content of the good I have understood (my truth understood in my good) determines that as the formal cause of a thing determines its essence. Thomas Aquinas writes: “The object moves by determining the act in the manner of the formal principle, which in the natural order specifies action, just as, for example, heating is specified by heat. The first formal principle is being and universal truth, which is the object for the intellect.

Therefore by this way of moving, the intellect moves the will as it presents to the will its object.” (*S. th.*, I–11, q. 9, a. 1). The content that I read within the concrete good as “my truth” (and the truth is always marked by the personal character of the one who reads and sees the truth, since truth is the agreement of knowledge in the form of a judgment with a thing) determines the action that is evoked by the influence of the good as an end. Although these things occur in one real action, the causation of the end has a different character, and the causation of the object as the formal (exemplar) cause has yet another character: the first is the motive for the action and the second gives a specific meaning to the same action; it determines the action and forms it like a plan, or determines and forms an activity of production in accordance with a plan.

The reason performs the function of forming and determining action by its practical judgments concerning the good or end of the action. A concrete good appeals to the will (the appetite) by way of knowledge, and knowledge finds its final stage in the practical judgment: “do this and that, in such and such a way”. Before a man makes a practical judgment regarding a good whose value he reads and appropriates to himself at least in part, he reads and intentionally appropriates it as “my truth” about “my good”, there are many preparatory factors in the form of complicated sensory cognition—both the external senses and the internal senses, and the glow of the emotions or feelings occurs at the same time upon their background.

THE INFLUENCE OF EMOTION. We know from psychology that people appropriate the contents of sense cognition in different ways. This was expressed in the Middle Ages in the principle: *quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*—whatever is received, is received according to the mode of the receiver. There are visual, auditory, tactile and olfactory modes of cognition. The imagination also plays upon this background and is one of the constituent components of the process of the feelings. The components of the feelings are: (a) sense cognition; (b) the movement of the appetite; (c) an organic change. The feelings may strengthen or weaken the freedom of our acts of decision. The feelings have an enormous influence on our cognitive processes. Our cognitive processes are objective in regard to the content known, but they are liable to subjectivization in the manner in which we grasp things and ultimately in how we make practical judgments. The subjectivization of our cognition is influenced by our emotional attitude. Thomas fittingly writes: “It is evident that according to the influence of the passion of sensory appetite, a man changes in his dispositions (to action). Hence in the measure in which a man finds himself under the influence of an emotional passion, he sees something as proper to himself that he would not see as proper if he were not subject to those feelings; as something seems good to an angry man that does not seem good to a calm man. In this way, sensory appetite moves the will from the direction of the object.” (*S. th.*, I–II, q. 9, a. 2).

The process of forming the final and determining practical judgment is complex and influenced by the initial attitudes and dispositions that dispose a man to read in the concrete good an intellectual content that in terms of the object is truly an objective content, but at the same time is “my truth”, i.e., the truth that will constitute the content of the practical judgment that will determine my activity.

In this context, we can see the important role of human deliberation, which has two phases: the theoretical-practical phase, and the practical-practical phase. St. Thomas calls both of them together “*consilium*”. It precedes the actual choice of the practical judgment whereby we finally determine ourselves to action. Thomas writes: “This choice is a consequence of



reason’s judgment concerning what we should do. In things that we should do, there many uncertainties, since these acts concern particular and contingent matters which are uncertain because of their variability. In that which is doubtful and uncertain, the reason cannot make a judgment without prior investigation. Hence the reason needs to investigate what should be chosen before it makes a judgment. This investigation is called counsel (*consilium*). Therefore the Philosopher in Book III of the *Ethics* says that a choice is the appetite for what is presented to counsel.” (*S. th.*, I–II, m q. 14, a. 1). Counsel in this sense concerns our action, which may be realized in various ways. On the one hand, it depends upon the objective content of the good that we want to achieve in our action, and on the other hand is depends upon our mode of execution and upon all the individual acts we intent to perform. These acts are many and cannot be repeated the same way. Hence our acts will always be conceived as means aiming at an end, and thereby the question of counsel is associated not only with an understanding of the good that we realize, but also with the character of our acts as means by which we realize our ends.

The understanding of the good and the understanding of my acts that realize the good belong to the order of content, to the order established by the reason that knows the good and understands the ways to obtain the good that attracts us. Hence the order of content is that which determines and gives direction by our reading of the content of the good or end and of the human acts that mediate in obtaining the good. Thus ultimately man’s two powers intertwine and complement each other in real human action—the will that desires the good, and the reason that understands the good and determines the means (as it reads their contents) that lead to achieving “my” good. Hence the will’s choice of a practical judgment is an act of decision which weaves into one real human act knowledge and volition, where “volition-love” appears in a free decision that performs the function of an act in relation to knowledge as potency.

THE COOPERATION OF THE REASON AND THE WILL IN THE HUMAN ACT (THE ACT OF DECISION). J. Woroniecki made a concise and correct analysis in his *Katolicka etyka wychowawcza* [Catholic Educational Ethics]: “We will better understand the mutual influence of the reason and the will upon each other when we analyze the further course of moral activity as it aims at an end by the choise of various means (Woroniecki KEW I 103). We have the start of this analysis in Aristotle (*E. nic.*, III 4), and after him it was further developed by St. John Damascene (*De fide orthodoxa*, II, 22–28), and St. Thomas Aquinas developed it with precision in his *Summa*. Mankind’s eternal experience has formulated the conviction that there is no volition without knowledge: *Nil volitum nisi cognitum*, as the old philosophers would say, or *Ignoti nulli cupido*—there is no desire for the unknown.

A Table illustrating the shared action of the reason and the will in a human act		
	THE REASON	THE WILL
INTENTION	1. A thought about the object as good or evil 3. A thought about the object as an end.	2. Complacence or an absence of complacence in the object 4. An intention to acheive the object.
DECISION	5. Counsel: considering in practical judgments the means to the end 7. Deliberation: judging among the practical judgments in a concrete way	6. Permission or Consent for one or another 8. The choice of one judgment concerning the good

EXECUTION	9. Command: the ordering of the act: (a) <i>ordinatio</i> , (b) <i>intimatio</i>	10. Active execution or performance (c) <i>motio</i> 11. Passive execution 12. Satisfaction with achieving the end ( <i>fruitio</i> )
	13. Judgment	

All our practical activity begins from an act of knowledge, from the thought (1) of an object that we know as good or evil for us, and by virtue of this thought our will assumes a certain position toward the object. The first position is the starting point for all the subsequent activities of the will. This first position will be either complacency or displeasure (2), and then there is a certain spiritual tension, an attraction to the object or a withdrawal from it, depending on whether it suits us or not. Sometimes the whole process of volition ends at this stage where the will takes a position toward the object: the will is satisfied with an internal complacency in the good.

It may also happen otherwise: complacency may give birth in us to a desire for a connection that is no longer merely spiritual, but a real connection with the object. The reason may be excited by the strong complacency in the will and begin to consider the possibility of obtaining the object: the first thought about the object becomes a thought about the object as an end (3) and under the influence of this thought, the complacency of the will is transformed into an intention (4). The object was hitherto only a good to us, but now it becomes an end to which we intend to direct our activity with the help of the appropriate means. The intention of the will is a stronger tension than complacency alone and becomes the starting point for a whole series of acts whose final result may be that it obtains the objects and the will's tension will be calmed by satisfaction in the possession of the end. If this end can be obtained in one act, then the whole process is very simple and is limited to the steps 3, 4, 9, 10, 11, and 12 in our diagram. For example, we feel thirsty (3), we want to drink water (4), and so we decide to do it (9), and by our will we put our hand into motion (10), which we use to pour water into a glass and lift it to our lips (11). The action ends with the slaking of our thirst (12).

The process is very complex when the end is far and sometimes requires many means if it is to be realized. In such cases two phases are very evident in our conduct: the first phase is intention, and the second phase is execution. The intention begins at the moment we make the intention, and the first action is considering various means (5). This consists in comparing particular means with the end in order to conclude whether they are suitable for obtaining the end. If they are, then the will gives its consent (6), that is, it consents to consider these means before the decision; if not, then it rejects them. In turn there is the concrete deliberation (7) understood in the sense in which we commonly say that something is done with deliberation or deliberately. Deliberation consists in comparing particular means not merely with the end, but also with each other, in order to prepare for the choice of the most proper means [...] In deliberation, the influence of the will is already much greater than in thinking about means in comparison with the end, and to a greater degree it is subject to the dispositions of the will and the feelings. Properly speaking, they should not be there at all, so that the reason may calmly consider all possibilities without pressure from them. However, deliberation without the influence of the will is unthinkable, for deliberation

prepares for the choice (8) that is the will's act. Here is the kernel of this explanation of the freedom of the will which we call autodeterminism. [...] The final judgment of the reason, which we call deliberation, is shaped under the influence of the will and the will causes it to be the final judgment. This process, of course, may be shortened when the reason is convinced that there is only one means leading to the end [...], that is, that after the intention is formed, deliberation immediately follows, and after deliberation a choice. With the choice the first phase of moral conduct is finished, called intention [...] When the choice is made, the reason gives a command (9), whereby it orders that everything that was intended should be led into an act.”

This above passage from Woroniecki shows (perhaps for the first time in the Polish language) the mechanism of making a decision, namely of the choice of a particular practical judgment whereby we finally determine ourselves to one rather than another concrete action.

The culminating point of this process is the fact of the decision, the human act, which is a fusion of the reason's act of knowledge and the will's choice. Of course, the will and its free choice ultimately decide things here. I alone by my will want and choose only one among many determinants that I understand (which are presented to me as my practical judgments), and thereby I put an end to the process of deliberation. I have deliberated on the choice of means leading to my end, and with an act of the will I conclude the process of deliberation on the way to realize what I have intended. By the choice (the act of the will) of one final practical judgment, I determine myself to one rather than another action. In the act of choosing a judgment, I make myself dependent upon its objective content, which has been drawn from the real order of persons and things. At the same time, I alone choose this arrangement by a choice of a practical judgment. I myself decide that precisely this judgment and none other suits me, and so I alone want to determine my action according to the content of the practical judgment. Yet I know that this judgment may not be the best possible one or the only one, but I want to act in the way indicated by the content of the practical judgment. In this I reveal my personal position and manifest my autonomy. No one can impose this judgment upon me. I alone choose it, since that is what I want, although I could do otherwise. The concomitant reflection that always accompanies my internal acts continuously informs me of this. In the act of choosing (by the will) a practical judgment, my personal human freedom is fulfilled.

Freedom of choice concerns the practical judgments whereby “I” want to determine myself in a certain way to activity. Strictly speaking, I do not choose external things themselves, but I choose myself in my practical judgments about things, and by this choice I put into motion the mechanism of real external action. This mechanism is already a play upon certain powers or faculties of a necessary nature; I must take into account the laws of nature in my actions. I must “play” upon these laws according to their structures. There is no freedom here, only necessity. Freedom exists within man, in his act of choosing a particular practical judgment whereby he determines himself to a certain action and not some other.

THE DECISION—THE MORAL BEING. The moment someone determines himself in action by the choice of a concrete practical judgment is the moment of decision, namely the moment when someone cuts through the process of deliberation, the moment of acceptance when he wills to act as the finally chosen practical judgment indicates. I make myself into a real and concrete source of action. This is action is now a human act in its essential sense. Thereby a qualitatively new being arises in man. This is a moral being. Prior to this, there were only cognitive processes and a “velleity”; “I would like” to do this or be that, but these

processes are not bound together into one and still do not constitute me as a source of real action. At the moment I want to act in a certain way, when I really determine myself to real activity, I constitute myself as a real and new source of concrete action. A new being arises within me, called forth by my acts of reason and will, a new being that is the reason for action. I have changed myself as I ordered myself to a particular new action.

The moment when deliberation is bound together with choice into a unity, the moment of decision, is in the strictest sense of the word the constitution of a new moral being, for in the act of so making a decision, the efficient cause is constituted together with its necessary and inseparable relation to the rule of human conduct. This rule of human conduct—the most proximate moral norm—is none other than the content of the final practical judgment whereby I have determined myself to act. I have freely chosen the content of the practical judgment, and it is an apprehension of the objective state of affairs (of myself and the world of persons and things), and this state of affairs ultimately depends upon the source of reality as such, upon the Absolute. All this appears spontaneously to man, but it may also be justified in theoretical terms. We cannot abstract the existence of the rule of human conduct (the content of the final practical judgment that determines my action) from being as apprehended by analogy, and so it cannot be considered apart from the First Being as the reason for the existence of all that exists. Since I have freely chosen this rule, then the act of decision contains the entire content of morality. Therefore acts of decision as internally fused with morality, “decide” (and in a sense constitute) man’s moral face. The acts of decision that ultimately demarcate the character of human action put us not in categories of “to have”, but in the category of “to be”. We are as we have decided “to be” by our decisions. The external performance of these acts is only a consequence and a putting into motion of the laws of nature. Our entire attitude, determination and ultimate ordering to performance has already taken place in the human heart by acts of decision.

This allows us to understand the words of the Gospel where Jesus said: “You have heard that it was said: do not commit adultery. I say to you, whoever looks upon a women in order to lust after her has already committed adultery in his heart.” The phrase “look upon in order to” indicates the already performed external act of decision, although external circumstances may have made it impossible to perform the act indicated by the words “in order to”. The internal human decision is the source of conduct.

We must still discuss the external performance of the decision that has been made. The phase of performance begins with a command to act. If a decision is made, then it must be carried out rationally as far as it is possible, namely in an order that brings into agreement both the subject of the action and its object, as well as the way the already decided-upon action will be performed. The command—*imperium*—is performed, for the sake of an analysis of human action, in three phases: (a) *ordinatio*—the ordering of the action; (b) *intimatio*—a proclamation together with a coercion of the proper faculties or powers to act; (c) *motio*—putting the process into real motion, where the process has already been decreed in the act of decision. As in all cases, so here as well the reason still directs the performance of the action by its commands, but the will as the fundamental motor of action carried them out. This act of the will is called “active execution” (10) as opposed to “passive execution”, that is, the moving “under the will’s impulse” of the muscles and everything involved in the physical realization of the act. When the process of execution is successful and we arrive at our end—the end of our undertaking, we find satisfaction (12) in the successfully performed work. All these phases of execution as the highest psychic acts are accompanied by reflection, specifically that which is called “concomitant reflection”, which allows us later to

reconstruct the whole process of human action. Concomitant reflection is also the foundation of our inner memory and of the special act of reflection in act that as a judgment about oneself as acting finally draws together the drama of human action.

Here arises a very important question. Does the external execution, normal human action in the world of physical beings, count for nothing? We live in the real world, and only real acts influence the system of real relations in the world. Idle thoughts and fantasies do not matter to me if they do not conclude in some real human activity. Therefore only real human activity is important in the real world of persons and things.

What does real activity mean in the case of man? What are the real sources of this activity? Man is not merely a biological machine. He is something more. Man has his inner realm, his soul, which appears in the human psyche not only as a witness, but as the true motor of human action. Therefore when we examine real action, we cannot fail to consider the real reason for all that later appears in the world as the system of complex skeletal- muscular action and the system of external tools that has been called forth by man. The decision, the human act, is the “place” where man is constituted as the efficient cause of his specifically human acts. The human act is the focal point as one being in the category of quality for all the essentially human elements of real action: cognition which concludes in a concrete practical judgment, and desire culminating in an act of free choice of the practical judgment, whereby we finally determine ourselves to act and constitute ourselves as the real sources of physical action. The entire moral act is the act of decision, and all other acts are moral acts only in the measure to which they are really connected with the act of decision.

The act of decision to act is inseparable from man’s mode of being; furthermore, as it shapes man’s face as a person, it is an act that is inseparable from man, just as human action is inseparable from man. Therefore every man is condemned to the decision as the reason of being for all typically human activities. Action is not the only consequence of the decision, but there may also be a decision not to act. A decision to do nothing may sometimes cost us more than spontaneous action.

When we know the general model of human action, we may understand the central moment of decision, which always stands at the foundations of every real action. Although sometimes a man may overlook these particular moments or phases in his action—this is the result of practiced skill in acting or the result of a powerful spontaneity in action—yet he can never forget the act of decision, for without the decision he would not have become a real source of human action. Hence the act of decision is contained in every human action as the reason of being for rational and conscious human action.

The whole of human life is a chain of actions. Just as particular concrete actions have the phases and moments that we have presented above in the diagram of action, so all the sections of our life and even our human life as a whole may be conceived as a great process where we intend and perform our life in a braid of activities that are guided by the search for the good and for happiness. In relation to the good as the end of our inclinations, where the good may be either clear in our minds and feelings, or only vaguely or implicitly present in our subjective acts, we make our decisions (with respect to the good), and our decisions are commonly decisions to act for the good understood as our ultimate good. This good is not always present to our minds as the Absolute, although in real terms by virtue of the chain of dependence in being, this good is God.

There is nothing more personal than the concrete moral experience. Its value depends upon the point of view of our conscience when it directed the execution of the act. This does not mean that there are no objective judgments of morality, that there are no objective conditions for moral conduct, or that it is impossible to teach others how to act in a morally positive manner. Man is a contingent being and is a “blank slate” upon which the world of persons and things write in order subsequently to elicit love and action. Man’s internal life is primarily the interiorization of the contents he finds in the world of nature and culture. He can creatively transform and use these contents for the personal ends he realizes by his human action.

Thus there are, as it were, two branches of the human person. These take in the world as man encounters it: the branch of the intellect (concerned with cognition as a whole) which interiorizes these contents in knowledge, and the branch of the will (desire as whole) which passes into both immanent and transitive action. The process of knowledge may be characterized as a “centripetal” motion, from things to the person who is enriched by the ensemble of contents of beings that he receives in his own intentional way, and he comes into a relation with these things by affirmation or negation. The process of action, which is rooted in human knowledge, may be characterized as a “centrifugal” motion that leads the subject out of his inner realm toward things, and ultimately he makes some connection with these things. Thereby man realizes his human mode of “being in the world” and immersion in the world. The decision is the essential moment that constitutes both real human activity and morality in man. Man’s conduct and his human acts are the same—they are moral acts. We should carefully examine the problematic of “moral being”, since it is joined by necessity with human action. In our analysis of culture, we cannot ignore the problem of morality, since morality is one of the essential threads of culture.

Regarding the structure of the moral being, we consider the act of decision and the human act, i.e., man’s conscious and free act, to be equal. There is only one place where actions and psychic processes braid together to form one being and become a real source of real action (or non-action). If a man acts through his various organs and faculties, we may think of this sort of action as coming from the man as a whole, whose immediate center (braided into one as act and potency) is the action of the reason—which crowns all cognitive processes—and the will—which for its part crowns man’s appetitive processes. This occurs in the act of decision, in which we freely choose for ourselves a practical judgment whereby we determine ourselves to a particular action. The choice of the will actualizes and makes real the content of the practical judgment in action. The cognitive contents of all judgments (including practical judgments) are of themselves as indicating a *posse* (possibility) incapable of generating an act without an act of the will to give *esse* (existence) to a determinate content of judgment. Hence a human act is an act of a real decision to act or not to act, and all others are either a preparation for the decision or the execution of the decision. It is a mistake to suggest that this act is the same as the command—*imperium*. The *imperium* or command is a process composed of *ordinatio* (the ordering of the decision that has been made), *intimatio* (passing on the decision for execution), and *motio* (the setting in motion of the will), which is already the execution of the decision that has been made. These matters are known from an analysis of the human act. Thus only in the act of decision does the whole man express himself as he constitutes himself as a real source of action. The execution of the decision does not change its character as a moral being, although all the other aspects may change: ontic, psychic, social, economic etc..

The act of decision is essentially a moral being, and so it is a being that is entirely ordered to

the norm of man's right action (in the sense of worthy action). What is the norm of man's worthy action? It is the real nature or structure of being, and primarily that of man, but also that of other natural things, insofar as this structure can be seen by the reason. We read the structure of things (the human person and things of nature) both in prescientific cognition and in human cognition as it is refined by science, philosophy and religion. This reading of the nature and structure of things is performed in a theoretical judgment about things. My theoretical reading of the nature of things may find added depth in philosophy, religion and theology. I can see that the natures of contingent things are ultimately derived from God. Therefore the rationally read nature of being joins with me in action: I must take into account the "truth" of being and select for myself a practical judgment that will determine me to action, a judgment in accord (by my theoretical judgment) with the "truth" of being, and so with the structure of being insofar as this is a participation in God, as religion teaches me and as philosophy justifies. In my act of decision or human act there is a necessary and real (transcendental) reference to being, to the structure of being that demarcates my mode of action with respect to the being. I freely choose for myself a practical judgment whereby my choice determines me to real action.

The entire act of decision as a human act is in a real and necessary (transcendental) relation to the norm or content of conduct, and this norm is, to speak briefly, the structure of being which structure is read as "my truth" about the good that is the object of my action. The transcendental relation of the act of decision (and the content of the practical judgment, and the realization of this content by my act of choosing this judgment) to the norm of conduct, namely to the being and its structure—this structure is expressed in a theoretical judgment about the nature of the thing—is inseparable from every decision. Therefore there are no morally indifferent decisions. All the contents of practical judgments are necessarily related to the contents of the theoretical judgments that express my understanding of the world or reality, and the world has a necessary reference to God.

Therefore it is a mistake to distinguish between the act of decision as a decision and the act as moral. Every act of decision is a moral act, for a being is moral because I choose for myself one among many practical judgments and I make real its content by my action; this content—contained in the act of decision—is by its nature either in agreement or disagreement with the structure of the thing that I read in my theoretical judgment. I am not constituted as morally good by any obligation, but by a real relation of agreement between the practical judgment in the decision and my theoretical judgment. Lack of agreement in my judgment of decision constitutes me as morally evil. That is all. Before the decision there is no real being that is an act. Thoughts about an act are only theories, mirages or temptations for which we are not responsible, for there is still no human action. Morality is the human decision to act. By necessity, by virtue of the structure of the decision (by its nature), it is wholly in a transcendental relation to the nature of being as this nature is read in a theoretical judgment. There are no amoral decisions, for there are no decisions to act with regard to non-being.

The description of the mechanism of decision makes visible the structure of the moral being and allows man to know himself and his decisions. The mechanism of decision shows in a more flexible way how man is related to the real good in action, for there is no human action in the absence of an object.

S. Thomae Aquinatis, *Summa Theologiae*, I—II, in: *Opera omnia Sancti Thomae Aquinatis*, Taurini-R 1948–1967; Woroniecki KEW I–III (passim); K. Wojtyła, *Osoba i Czyn* (The Acting Person), Kr1969, Lb 1994<sup>3</sup>; T. Styczeń, *Wolność w prawdzie* [Freedom in truth], R 1988; Krapiec *Dzieła* [Works] XV; E. Kaczyński, *Verità sul bene nella morale*, R 1998.

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