

# Poinsot's Compatibilism: An Inspiration for Moral Psychology

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The compatibilist about free will claims that volitions (acts of will) can be both necessitated by a determination and free. According to compatibilism (in general) it is coherently conceivable that a person willing A cannot will non-A (under the same set of conditions) and, simultaneously, such volition of A is still an expression of her freedom. Given this very broad definition of compatibilism we may note that Portuguese Dominican João Poinsot (1589–1644), by religious name Johannes a S. Thoma, prominent thomist thinker of the early-modern period,<sup>1</sup> was a compatibilist.

My intention, however, is not to investigate in detail his complex account of free will, but rather just to point out some interesting aspects of his theory, namely those which can – as I will try to show – be useful and fertile for our present-day ethical thinking. I am not mainly interested in history of philosophy, but in philosophy. The final thoughts of this article will not be those of Poinsot but they will form my attempt to contribute to (meta) ethical discussions.

First of all I have to specify the kind of compatibilism which will be taken into consideration. It is neither the “physicalist” compatibilism rejected e.g. by Peter von Inwagen as contradicting the assumption of human responsibility;<sup>2</sup> nor will I examine the Poinsot's attempt to harmonize the Divine “premotion” with our freedom.<sup>3</sup> I will rather speak of a “rational

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1 For biographical profile of the thinker see Lavaud, B., *Appendice II – Jean de Saint Thomas (1589–1644). L'homme et l'oeuvre*. In: Saint-Thomas, J. de, *Introduction à la théologie de s. Thomas. Explication de l'ordre et de l'enchaînement des traités et questions de la Somme théologique*. Tr. di B. Lavaud. Paris, André Blot 1928, p. 411–446.

2 Inwagen, P. van, *An Essay on Free Will*. Oxford, Clarendon Press 1983.

3 Such Poinsot's theological issues are surveyed for example in the dissertation thesis of Mahonki, T. J., *The Radical Interiority of Liberty according to the Principles of John of Saint Thomas O.P.* Roma, Officium Libri Catholici 1962.

compatibilism”<sup>4</sup>, a position untouched by van Inwagen’s argument. Here the necessity in question is neither that of laws of nature nor that of immutable God’s decrees. The admitted psychological necessity of volition is caused by respective unambiguous rational view of the willing person.<sup>5</sup>

In our epoch the rational compatibilism has been indicated by Daniel Dennett (despite his physicalism<sup>6</sup>) and by Susan Wolf. Dennett remarks: “[W]hen I say I cannot do otherwise I mean I cannot because I see so clearly what the situation is and because my rational control faculty is *not* impaired. It is too obvious what to do; reason dictates it...”<sup>7</sup> Similarly Susan Wolf: “[O]ne explanation for why an agent might not be able to do otherwise is that it is so obviously rational to do what she plans to do and the agent is too rational to ignore that fact.”<sup>8</sup> We will see that a certain kind of rational compatibilism is already present in the thomist tradition.

Before the historical exploration, some brief observations on the notion of compatibilism and libertarianism are needed. Above all, compatibilism as *such* does not suppose any “global” determinism.<sup>9</sup> To be compatibilist only implies holding as conceivable that at least *some* of our volitions are necessitated by a kind of determination and yet free.

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4 I borrow the expression from Pink, T., *Free Will. A Very Short Introduction*. New York, Oxford University Press 2004, p. 45–49. Pink uses the term to label the position of Susan Wolf (that I will mention below).

5 Such psychological necessity is a case of alethic ontological necessity which can be (I think) reduced – in the last analysis – to the logical necessity. In the given case of necessity the will is still potency to choose otherwise (than it is actually choosing) *under a different set of conditions*. But it is not potency to choose otherwise *under the very same set of conditions*. If we agree (as I do) that the thesis “no agent can really perform an act without *having* potency to perform that act” is a conceptual truth, i.e. a case of logical truth, then we admit that the necessity in question is reducible to the logical necessity. I analysed the character of dispositional necessity in my paper “Dispositional Necessity and Ontological Possibility”. In: *Metaphysics: Aristotelian, Scholastic, Analytic*. Eds. L. Novák – D. D. Novotný – P. Sousedík – D. Svoboda. Heusenstamm, Ontos Verlag 2012, p. 195–208.

6 We may certainly ask whether Dennett’s physicalism permits him to hold consistently a very *rational* compatibilism. Some philosophers argue that what is *entirely* determined by physical causes cannot be *really* determined by rational reasons. Feser, E., *Philosophy of Mind. A Short Introduction*. Oxford, Oneworld 2005, p. 118–121.

7 Dennett, D. C., *Elbow Room. The Varieties of Free Will Worth Wanting*. Oxford, Oxford University Press 1984, p. 133.

8 Wolf, S., *Freedom within Reason*. New York–Oxford, Oxford University Press 1993, p. 70.

9 Thus for example John Searle recognizes the indeterminism on micro-level and yet he believes that the physical determinism on the macro-level is compatible with our freedom performed on that level. He looks for answers to questions like: “How can there exist genuinely free actions in a world where all events, at least at the macro level, apparently have causally sufficient antecedent conditions? Every event at that level appears to be determined by causes that preceded it. Why should acts performed during the apparent human consciousness of freedom be an exception? It is true that there is an indeterminacy in nature at the quantum level, but that indeterminacy is pure randomness and randomness is not by itself sufficient to give us free will.” Searle, J., *Freedom and Neurobiology*. New York, Columbia University Press 2007, p. 10–11.

Compatibilism, including rational compatibilism, opposes the libertarianism (which connects the opinion that we do have free will with incompatibilism). Although the typical contemporary libertarian is concerned especially with a form of nomological<sup>10</sup> determination (and contends that this kind of determination is incompatible with our freedom), the libertarian incompatibilism however essentially alleges that *any* determination<sup>11</sup> precluding our will to choose (*ceteris paribus*) otherwise is incompatible with freedom of the volitional act.<sup>12</sup> In the present paper I will arrive at the conclusion that the rational sort of compatibilism (along the lines suggested by Poinso't) is more plausible than libertarianism when it comes to explaining our moral psychology.

### Aquinas between libertarianism and compatibilism

Now let us turn our attention to free-will theories which form the background of Poinso't's thinking, mainly to that of Thomas Aquinas. Thomas believed that the will is by its nature an intellective faculty: it is directed by intellect. It could be objected that then the will is not (and cannot be) free: in every situation it must necessarily aim just at that alternative which is seen by intellect as preferable.<sup>13</sup> But there is an answer in Aquinas' account: considering a certain option the deliberating intellect sees many different aspects of this option: some of them could appear good and attractive, others evil or not attractive. In this sense each of two alternative options, A as well

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10 "Nomological" determinism or the determinism based on the concept of law of nature is not necessarily a thesis specifically about laws of *physics*. It is not necessarily physicalism. "Laws of nature may be laws of physics, of chemistry, of biology, of psychology, of sociology, or of any natural phenomena. Determinism, then, has no necessary connection to reductionism, whether reduction of all phenomena to physical phenomena or reduction within physics to the micro-level. Such reductionist theses are compatible with determinism but are not entailed by it." Clarke, R., *Libertarian Accounts of Free Will*. Oxford–New York, Oxford University Press 2003, p. 4–5.

11 Not only "nomological" determinism but also e.g. the claim that "God's foreknowledge determines our future acts" contradicts the "libertarian free will". Treinka's Zagzebski, L., Recent work on Divine Foreknowledge and Free Will. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*. Ed. R. Kane. Oxford–New York, Oxford University Press 2002, p. 48–49.

12 "[L]ibertarian free will, unlike a compatibilist version of free will, demands the ability, in the very circumstances that the individual finds herself, to choose among various alternative courses of action. (...) Picturesquely, libertarianism demands that there are alternative paths available to us, right then and there, and not merely that under certain causally possible conditions, though not the ones present, we would have such available options." Bernstein, M., Fatalism. In: *The Oxford Handbook of Free Will*, op. cit., p. 74.

13 Cf. Williams, T., The Libertarian Foundation of Scotus' Moral Philosophy. *The Thomist*, 62, 1998, p. 205.

as non-A, contains and displays different aspects (*rationes*).<sup>14</sup> Therefore the intellectual cognition does not determine necessarily the will towards one alternative.<sup>15</sup>

No surprise that Eleonore Stump concludes that “Aquinas holds a view which is libertarian in some sense”.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless the situation will appear less clear if we recall that libertarianism, as it is usually understood, includes incompatibilism: the freedom of volition always and necessarily implies certain kind of contingency, i.e. the possibility (under the same set of conditions) to will otherwise. (Hereafter I will use the term “contingency” in this special sense – in accordance with the usage of early-modern scholasticism.) And it seems that at least in some cases of good<sup>17</sup> volitions Thomas Aquinas admits both necessity and freedom together.

The compatibilist element appears at least twice in Aquinas’ writings (in both cases with reference to Aurelius Augustinus): in the beginning of 82<sup>nd</sup> question of the first part of his *Summa Theologiae* (answer to the first objection) and in the 22<sup>nd</sup> question of *De veritate* (article 5, ad s. c. 3). Although the medieval thinker believes that free volition cannot be necessitated by violence,<sup>18</sup> he adds that eventual “natural necessity” of a volition “does not

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14 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (hereinafter referred to as *STh*), I<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 13, a. 6, co.: “Respondeo dicendum quod homo non ex necessitate eligit. (...) Potest enim homo velle et non velle, agere et non agere, potest etiam velle hoc aut illud, et agere hoc aut illud. Cuius ratio ex ipsa virtute rationis accipitur. Quidquid enim ratio potest apprehendere ut bonum, in hoc voluntas tendere potest. Potest autem ratio apprehendere ut bonum non solum hoc quod est velle aut agere; sed hoc etiam quod est non velle et non agere. Et rursum in omnibus particularibus bonis potest considerare rationem boni alicuius, et defectum alicuius boni, quod habet rationem mali, et secundum hoc, potest unumquodque huiusmodi bonorum apprehendere ut eligibile, vel fugibile.” Cf. I<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 10, a. 2, co.; q. 17, a. 1, ad 2. It seems that in Poinset’s view the will (as intellectual appetite) differs from emotionality (sensitive appetite) just thanks to the fact that the will is related to such a “comparative” cognition. King, P., Late scholastic theories of the Passions. Controversies in the Thomist tradition. In: Lagerlund, H. – Yrjönsuuri, M. (eds.), *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*. Dordrecht–Boston–London, Kluwer 2002, p. 251.

15 Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 2, cap. 48, n. 5: “Iudicium igitur intellectus de agibilibus non est determinatum ad unum tantum. Habent igitur omnia intellectualia liberum arbitrium.” Cf. lib. 2, cap. 48, n. 6.

16 Stump, E., Aquinas’s Account of Freedom: Intellect and the Will. *Monist*, 1997, Vol. 80, Issue 4, p. 595–596.

17 The evil volition functions, as if by definition, always without necessity, i.e. in the “incompatibilist” way. This is the reason why Thomas rejects determinism or fatalism precisely in his text on evil: *De malo*, q. 6.

18 Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 6, a. 4, co.

remove the freedom of will”<sup>19</sup> because “freedom (...) contradicts the necessity of coercion but not the necessity of natural inclination” of the will.<sup>20</sup>

This Aquinas’ (quite sporadic and isolated) compatibilist suggestions remained largely neglected in the work of early-modern scholastic thinkers. The “second” scholasticism, partly in reaction to Reformation, dwelled much in the topics of free will and chiefly Jesuits contended hard with any kind of compatibilism; they defended the libertarian thesis. Thus for example Denis Pétau (1583–1625) argues very widely (and with many references to various Aquinas’ texts) that not only violence or constraint, but *any* necessity, including any inner psychological necessity, excludes freedom.<sup>21</sup>

Also (but earlier) Gabriel Vázquez (1549–1604) identifies the “mode of liberty” with the “mode of contingency which is opposed to necessity”.<sup>22</sup> The volitional act, says Vázquez, cannot be free merely thanks to the fact that it arises from inner principle and is brought on by one’s own cognition: such a functioning can be found also in the life of animals lacking the free will.<sup>23</sup> For freedom the “contingency” is essentially required.

Though in earlier works of John Poinsot, namely in his *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus*,<sup>24</sup> we find still rather a similar (incompatibilist) account of free will,<sup>25</sup> ten years (or little more) later the picture of freedom undergoes an important shift. In his *Cursus Theologicus*<sup>26</sup> Poinsot quotes and stresses, explicitly against Vázquez, Aquinas’ above mentioned compatibilist

19 Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I<sup>a</sup>, q. 82, a. 1, ad 1: “Necessitas autem naturalis non aufert libertatem voluntatis (...).”

20 Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 5, ad s. c. 3: “[L]ibertatis (...) opponitur necessitati coercionis, non autem naturalis inclinationis.”

21 Petavius, D., *De opere sex dierum*. In: *Theologiae Cursus Completus*, tom. 7. Ed. J.-P. Migne. Paris, Montrouge 1841, lib. 3, p. 1083–1202.

22 “[M]odus libertatis idem est quod modus contingentiae qui opponitur necessario.” Vázquez, G., *Commentariorum ac disputationum in primam partem S. Thomae tomus secundus*. Ingolstadt, Ioannes Hertsroy 1609, disp. 161, cap. 3, n. 9, p. 340.

23 *Ibid.*

24 The work was published for the first time between 1631–1635 in Alcalá de Henares and Madrid, though the title “Cursus Philosophicus” has not been fixed until the subsequent Roman edition (1637–1638). See Deely, J., *On the Value of Poinsot’s Work to Philosophy Today*. Introductory Remarks to the critical edition reprint of Poinsot’s “Cursus Philosophicus”. Ed. B. Reiser. “Il re-impresio emendata” 1948 (original edition Spain, 1631–1635). Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlag 2008, Vol. 1, p. v–xiv.

25 Poinsot, J., *Cursus Philosophicus Thomisticus* (hereinafter referred to as CP). Lyon, Arnaud & Borde 1678, vol. 3, q. 12, a. 2–4, p. 893–900.

26 *Cursus Theologicus* was published (divided in eight volumes) between 1637 and 1667. (João Poinsot wrote only volumes I–IV and a first part of volume V. A second part of volume V and volumes VI–VIII were written by Diego Ramirez OP.) The text of Poinsot’s to which I will refer in this paper (see the next footnote) appeared for the first time in 1645. See Forlivesi, M., *Le edizioni del “Cursus theologicus” di Johannes a s. Thomas. Divus Thomas (Bon.)*, 97, 1994, 3, p. 9–56.

remarks. The necessity of spontaneous “natural” inclination of the will does not contradict the freedom of such volition.<sup>27</sup> Poinset’s doctrine as outlined below forms a development of this (very scanty) Aquinian compatibilist impulsion and, furthermore, of Aquinas’ account of *voluntary acts* of appetitive potencies.

In Aquinas’ perspective, any desire, choice or volition, including the necessary one, is voluntary just in virtue of the fact that it is not caused from exterior factors but arises from “inner cognitive principle”.<sup>28</sup> There are two necessary and sufficient conditions for an appetitive act to be voluntary: (1) its *inner* origin and (2) the animal’s<sup>29</sup> own respective (motivating) *cognition* of the end, i.e. of the desired thing and its attractive features.<sup>30</sup> According to Poinset’s subsequent interpretation (which will be explained below) it is also true that whenever the pertinent cognition is *intellectual* cognition, the voluntary act, even if necessarily occurring, is equally a manifestation of free will.

## Perfect voluntary

Let us first look at Poinset’s concept of the voluntary act. In the footsteps of Aquinas and the thomist tradition he defines “the voluntary” by the fact that it comes from inner principle and involves the cognition of end (*voluntarium* is generally that *quod est a principio intrinseco cum cognitione finis*).<sup>31</sup> Poinset distinguishes “the voluntary” and “the free” (*liberum*). He identifies the voluntary with the spontaneous (*spontaneum*) and notes that it occurs also in the life of “infants, madmen or beasts” (e.g. the movement of beasts – unlike that of stone – usually arises “spontaneously” from inside and aims

27 Poinset, J., *Cursus Theologici in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*. Lyon, Borde & Arnaud & Barbier 1663, disp. 3, q. 6, a. 2, p. 182.

28 Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>a</sup>e, q. 6, a. 4, co.: “[A]ctus voluntatis nihil est aliud quam inclinatio quaedam procedens ab interiori principio cognoscente...”

29 Voluntary acts, unlike free ones, exist also in the life of beasts: a cat eats voluntarily, without involving free will.

30 Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>a</sup>e, q. 6, a. 2, co.: “[A]d rationem voluntarii requiritur quod principium actus sit intra, cum aliqua cognitione finis.”

31 Poinset, J., *Cursus Theologici in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*, op. cit., disp. 3, q. 6, a. 1, p. 178. We may wonder how the principle of the movement can arise “from inside” if the “mover” is an exterior object, the “end”. But it could be remembered that – also in Poinset’s view – the object (the cognized nature) becomes the “intrinsic terminus of intellection”. Heider, D., *Universals in Second Scholasticism*. Amsterdam–Philadelphia, John Benjamin’s Publishing Co. 2014, p. 145.

some goal cognized by the beast) although these beings cannot use (or have not) reason and so they cannot use (or have not) free will.<sup>32</sup>

So far it is clear that the “voluntary” does not coincide with the area of freedom: there are some “voluntary” acts which are not acts of free will. But Poinsot next introduces the concept of the “perfect voluntary” for designating a subset of the set of voluntary acts. The perfect voluntary is the voluntary motivated by *intellectual* cognition<sup>33</sup> of a good (or an evil). Does such a kind of voluntary coincide with the area of *free* volition? It may be objected that perhaps there are some cases of volition that are rationally motivated and yet necessarily functioning. Then there would seem to be some “perfect voluntary” acts which are not acts of free will. Are there – according to the thomistic tradition – cases of intellectually motivated and yet necessarily occurring acts of will?

Aquinas distinguishes two types of necessity: necessity concerning the determination of an act and necessity concerning the exercise or performance of an act.<sup>34</sup> In this sense later scholasticism introduced the terminological differentiation between “necessity in specification” (*necessitas quoad specificationem*) and “necessity in exercise” (*necessitas quoad exercitium*).<sup>35</sup> The first kind of necessity obtains when a person necessarily wants A rather than non-A (even if she may be able to avoid both volitions e.g. by ceasing the consideration of the question). The second comes up when the person simply cannot suspend her actual volition of A.

According Aquinas (and his followers) we necessarily want beatitude (happiness) according to the first type of necessity.<sup>36</sup> Poinsot agrees and says that we want the beatitude under necessity *quoad specificationem* (we cannot want the opposite). Moreover, participants of the eternal life, since they enjoy the clear beatific vision of God's essence,<sup>37</sup> love necessarily this infinite Good and want the union with God not only according to the necessity *quoad specificationem* but also *quoad exercitium* (they cannot suspend

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32 Poinsot, J., *Cursus theologicus in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*, op. cit., disp. 3, q. 6, a. 1, p. 178.

33 *Ibid.*, a. 2, p. 180–181.

34 Thomas Aquinas, *De malo*, q. 6., co.

35 Thus already Suarez, F., *Relectio theologica de libertate voluntatis Divinae in actionibus suis*, disp. 2, sect. 1. In: *Francisci Suarez varia opuscula theologica*. Mainz, Balthasar Lippius 1600, p. 496.

36 Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 5, co.; *De malo*, q. 6., co.

37 On the topic in detail: Paquin, J., *L'acte de vision béatifique selon Jean de Saint-Thomas*. Roma, Pontificia università Gregoriana 1950.

the actual inclination of their will).<sup>38</sup> So there are some cases of the “perfect voluntary” which functions with necessity.

### Eminent freedom

Now it may seem that there is at least some case of the perfect voluntary which is *not free* (because it is necessary). Indeed, in his earlier work Poinsoot seems to distinguish the necessary inclination to beatitude *against* free volition<sup>39</sup> (as do his closest intellectual fellows, Discalced Carmelites of Alcalá de Henarez, so-called *Complutenses*<sup>40</sup>). But later Poinsoot makes an important distinction between two types of freedom. “Formally free” (*liberum formaliter*) is that which arises with “indifference and contingency” and “without any necessity” and so “might not arise”.<sup>41</sup> Conversely “eminently free” (*liberum eminenter*) arises “with necessity” (*cum necessitate*) and without contingency (but also without coercion). The “eminently free” is nothing but *necessary spontaneous* inclination of the will as *intellective* appetite. As Poinsoot explains:

“There can be a perfect voluntary which is necessary and yet eminently free, albeit not formally free. Hence the perfect voluntary is always free, either eminently or formally, although it is not always formally free – as it can be necessary.”<sup>42</sup>

The “perfect voluntary” is always free because – if it is necessary – it comes “from all heart and all will”.<sup>43</sup> Freedom and necessity are compatible. The “beatific love” in eternal life is Poinsoot’s concrete example.<sup>44</sup> Now the question is, whether there are other cases of such compatibilist volitions.

We must first investigate what the essence or the “root” of freedom is, on Poinsoot’s view. He sees it in the “universality” of the will. The will does

38 Poinsoot, J., *Cursus Theologici in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*, op. cit., disp. q. 10, 5 a. 5, p. 255–260. In the psychology of Poinsoot the determination of the will, including in the case of beatific vision, comes from the object. See Forlivesi, M., *Conoscenza e Affettività. L’Incontro con l’essere secondo Giovanni di San Tommaso*. Bologna, Edizioni Studio Domenicano 1993, p. 268–269.

39 CP, vol. 3, q. 12, a. 4, p. 899.

40 Collegium Complutense Discalceatorum fratrum Ordinis B. Mariae de Monte Carmeli: *Disputationes in tres libros Aristotelis De anima*. Lyon, Sumptibus Ioannis Amati Candy 1627, disp. 22, q. 2, p. 590–595.

41 Poinsoot, J., *Cursus Theologici in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*, op. cit., disp. 3, q. 6, a. 2, p. 182: “[L]iberum formaliter est illud, quod procedit cum formali indifferentia, et contingencia, et sine ulla necessitate, ita ut possit non procedere, sicut communiter operamur liberare.”

42 Ibid.: “[P]otest dari voluntarium perfectum, quod sit necessarium; illud tamen voluntarium erit eminenter liberum, licet non formaliter: unde voluntarium perfectum, vel eminenter, vel formaliter semper est liberum, licet non semper sit formaliter liberum, sed potest esse necessarium.”

43 Ibid., p. 183.

44 Ibid., p. 182–184.

not find its (definitive) rest in any limited good; the will is oriented towards unlimited good, *universal* good.<sup>45</sup> Such a good is beatitude in general and (for participants in eternal life) God in particular (as the will of saints finds full beatitude in God). Both (1) the “formal” and (2) the “eminent” freedom of will consist in this “universality”:

(1) During earthly life the will, thanks to its “universality”, is not determined to any “particular” good. Therefore the will is “formally” free or “indifferent” in relation to particular limited goods.<sup>46</sup> (2) And beatitude (or in the afterlife, God) is the universal good which corresponds fully to the “universality” of will. Therefore the voluntary character of our necessarily adhesion to beatitude (or God) excludes any coercion (the kind of necessity incompatible with freedom). It implies only the spontaneous intellectual necessity compatible and conjoined with “eminent” freedom.<sup>47</sup>

“The eminently free is that which operates without such formal indifference but rather with necessity. Such necessity nevertheless does not arise from constraint or coercion of the potency [i.e. of the will] but from the adequacy of all the universality of that potency.”<sup>48</sup>

In the case of “eminently free” volition, there is not the contingency or “indifference” but the “root of indifference”, namely the “universality of will”, is still present:

“Although [the will] cannot operate indifferently with regard to such [universally good] object it still operates from the root of indifference which is the universality of will with full awareness. And this is named the liberty *eminenter*.”<sup>49</sup>

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45 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I<sup>a</sup>-II<sup>ae</sup>, q. 2, a. 8, co.

46 Poinsot's views about the “universality” of the will seem to grant that there are sometimes genuine rational alternative options – but why should it also allow for rational subjects to actually “do otherwise”, i.e. choose other options than they are actually choosing? This would be a real interpretative issue; nevertheless my concern in this paper is not to explain or justify the “libertarian” varieties of human volitions but – on the contrary – their “compatibilist” forms.

47 Poinsot, J., *Cursus Theologici in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*, op. cit., disp. 3, q. 6, a. 2, p. 182–184. J. O'Higgins notes: “[T]he intellectual appetitive being is oriented towards universal good. (...) Faced with the universal, perfect good (...) he cannot but choose it and this is what John of St. Thomas calls the realization of freedom *eminenter* (...).” O'Higgins, J., Introduction. In: Anthony Collins' *A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty*. Ed. J. O'Higgins. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff 1976, p. 16.

48 Poinsot, J., *Cursus Theologici in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*, op. cit., disp. 3, q. 6, a. 2, p. 182: “Liberum autem eminenter est illud, quod sine tali indifferentia formali, sed cum necessitate, non tamen orta ex coactione, vel coartatione potentiae, sed ex adaequatione totius universalitatis potentiae in agendo procedit.”

49 *Ibid.*: “[Voluntas] erga talem objectum non potest operari indifferenter, licet operetur ex ipsa radice indifferentiae, quae est universalitas voluntatis cum plena advertentia, et haec dicitur libertas *eminenter*.”

Such compatibilism was original in the context of second scholasticism<sup>50</sup> and it remained quite forgotten even within subsequent Thomism in 17<sup>th</sup> and beginning of 18<sup>th</sup> century. For instance thomist Paulus a Conceptione in his disputation “On the Free Voluntary”, though using the concept of formal freedom, does not mention the idea of eminent freedom; he defends a wholly incompatibilist account and even attributes it also to Poinsoot (with reference to his *Cursus Philosophicus*).<sup>51</sup> The concept of eminent freedom is absent also from systematic manuals of the “third scholasticism” (within second half of 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century).

### Extension of eminent freedom

Poinsoot’s above outlined explication of eminent freedom may lead us to believe that the compatibilist volition, namely the “perfect voluntary” which is always “eminently” free, concerns nothing else but the universal good which is only beatitude in general and, in the afterlife, God. However the issue is more complicated. Already Thomas Aquinas supposed that the will “necessarily wants as by natural inclination” not only “the ultimate end, i.e. beatitude” but also the things “that are included in the ultimate end, like existence, cognition of truth and some others in this way”.<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the will necessarily oriented to an end wants necessarily also the respective means if that means constitutes the only way to the end.<sup>53</sup>

Poinsoot says that the will desiring beatitude necessarily tends also towards “conditions” of beatitude such as “existence or life, and well-being,

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50 Interestingly, we find a counterpart of Poinsoot’s eminent freedom within Scotist tradition: the concept of “essential freedom”. “Scotistae putant voluntarium necessarium posse esse liberum libertate, quam vocant essentialem: nam quamvis concedant Spiritum sanctum produci per voluntatem divinam Patris ac Filii necessario, putant tamen eum produci libere, et quia non possunt dicere, quod producatur libere libertate indifferentiae, quia sic non necessario produceretur, sed simpliciter potest non produci, vocant libertatem, qua dicunt eum produci, essentialem (...)” Poncius, I., *Integer Theologiae Cursus ad mentem Scoti*. Paris, Antonius Bertier 1652, tract. 6, disp. 20, q. 1, p. 229. Nevertheless according to Poncius (John Punch) for human moral acts the incompatibilist “libertas indifferentiae” is required (ibid.). Poinsoot remains less clear at this point, as we shall see.

51 Paulus a Conceptione: *Tractatus Theologici Tomus Secundus*. Augsburg, Joannes Strötter 1726, tract. 9, disp. 2, p. 258–260.

52 Thomas Aquinas, *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 5, co.: “Et ideo, id quod voluntas de necessitate vult quasi naturali inclinatione in ipsum determinata, est finis ultimus, ut beatitudo, et ea quae in ipso includuntur, ut esse, cognitio veritatis, et aliqua huiusmodi...”

53 Thomas Aquinas, *STh*, I<sup>a</sup>, q. 82, a. 1, co.: “Necessitas autem finis non repugnat voluntati, quando ad finem non potest perveniri nisi uno modo, sicut ex voluntate transeundi mare, fit necessitas in voluntate ut velit navem.”

i.e. existence without defect" (*ipsum esse, seu vivere, et bene esse, idest, sine defectu esse*).<sup>54</sup> And he continues:

"Just as the will is obliged to pursue the good insofar as it is good (..), so it is *necessitated* by the formal nature of beatitude, which is the perfect good (..), to elicit in regard to this good only acts of pursuing and love. And *similarly it stands also in regard to those things that are ordered towards such an end in a way that without them the end could not be obtained*."<sup>55</sup>

For this Poinsot takes as examples the virtues and other means of spiritual life, because the true and complex beatitude (which includes *bene esse* and integrity) is related mainly with moral and spiritual life. (Aquinas spoke e.g. of a "spiritual joy", *gaudium spirituale*, consisting in the "rightness of conscience".<sup>56</sup>) But Poinsot says explicitly that the attribution of volitional necessity is *not* true of *every* means (*de omnibus mediis*) in question, e.g. of every virtue.<sup>57</sup> Is it true of *some* (act of) virtue? Unfortunately the question cannot be definitely answered from Poinsot's texts. I will try now to continue further transition into the moral area without his direct company.

### Eminent freedom and moral life

In the period of third scholasticism we find – within the thomistic anthropology – an interesting threefold distinction: necessity is divided into *necessitas naturalis*, *necessitas hypothetica*, and *necessitas coactionis* (i.e. "of constraint"). The "natural" or "essential" necessity operates in our innate inclination to the beatitude or happiness; this necessity is compatible with "the voluntary". The "hypothetical" necessity (or necessity *ex suppositione* or else *ex fine*) is the necessity of a means indispensable (in a given situation) for obtaining the end. This necessity (unlike the constraint) is also compatible with the voluntary character of a volitional act.<sup>58</sup>

This classification refers to the notion of "the voluntary", not directly that of freedom. But if we accept this view and connect it with Poinsot's claim

54 Poinsot, J., *Cursus Theologici in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*, op. cit., disp. 5, q. 8, a. 4, p. 256.

55 Ibid., p. 256–257: "[S]icut alligatur voluntas ad hoc ut bonum quatenus bonum prosequatur (...), ita necessitatur a formali ratione beatitudinis, quae est perfectum bonum, ut si velit elicere actum, non nisi prosecutionis et amoris elliciat erga illud, et similiter erga ea, quae ita ordinantur ad talem finem, ut sine his non possit obtineri." Italics added by D. P.

56 Thomas Aquinas, *Super Ioannem*, cap. 6, lect. 4; *Summa Theologiae*, II<sup>a</sup>-IIae, q. 9, a. 4, ad 1.

57 Poinsot, J., *Cursus Theologici in Primam Secundae D. Thomae Tomus Primus*, op. cit., disp. 5, q. 8, a. 4, p. 257.

58 Marcellus a Puero Jesu OCD: *Cursus philosophiae scholasticae ad mentem S. Thomae Aquinatis*, Vol. II – *Philosophia naturalis*, Bilbao, Elexpuru Hermanos, p. 422: "Voluntarium ergo coexistere potest cum necessario ex suppositione; nam qui vult efficaciter finem, velle debet necessario medium illud sine quo finis obtineri nequid."

that the rationally motivated (“perfect”) voluntary is *always* equally an act of (at least) “eminent” (if not “formal”) freedom, we have a *necessary and yet free* volition of some *means* to beatitude.

It may be argued that there are some necessary means chosen not freely, as if a person – in pursuit of her happiness – accepts an inevitable painful medical treatment: there is a taste of constraint. But there are also different cases of means, say some displays of virtue (means to the true happiness), which are not perceived as “necessary evil” but – on the contrary – as parts or aspects of our complex beatitude. For example I am generally quite happy not to be a killer.

Suppose that I am asked whether I want – purely for fun – to kill a friend of mine. Since I happen neither to be mad nor a monster, I cannot conclude my deliberation by the real decision to kill my friend. Perhaps I recognize fun as a value and I agree that killing may raise adrenalin and produce apart from predominating horrible aspects also some interesting ones. Nevertheless all these reasons will be utterly *unable* to reverse my decision not to kill, and so do not remove the necessity (*quoad specificationem*) of my volition.

It may be objected that this psychological necessity, even if recognized, can be seen just as a product or impact of emotionality. But we may leave the contribution of the *appetitus sensitivus* apart (by abstraction) and still guess clearly enough that, also in my intellectual sphere itself, given its (perhaps innate) moral principles and acquired moral horizons, the necessity works as well (in the considered case).

The (incompatibilist) libertarianism corresponds worse to our moral experience than the rational compatibilism does, according to my further compatibilist argument. Let us take for example two persons similar to the poor student Raskolnikov described in Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. Both differ from Raskolnikov by their choice not to kill the avaricious old woman. The first deliberator, however, makes his decision out of his dilemmatic mental state of incertitude and perplexity. His final good decision, due to its contingency, is quite similar to a random result. Conversely the second man understands the sense of moral principles so clearly that he makes his good decision with necessity.

Since it seems that the morality of the second person surpasses that of the first, my point is that the libertarian thinker divorces, or even puts in conflict, morality and the freedom: The more the person (the second man) is virtuous, the less he is free (for the supposed necessity of his volition is taken, in libertarian theory, as incompatible with freedom). And – respectively – the less the person (the first man) is moral, the more he is free. Indeed, he would be free *in contrast* with the second (putatively unfree) man if it were true that the freedom, as the libertarian believes, entails contin-

gency. This is a queer rule of proportion. The rational compatibilism avoids such queerness.

Sometimes we make morally good decisions. And sometimes we are sure – in concrete cases – that, despite the fact that the physical conditions permit us to will and do otherwise, we are still, as *rational* moral agents (not *only* as owners of decent emotionality), effectively incapable of willing and doing otherwise. And, besides, sometimes we are simultaneously aware that such volition is a display of our inner freedom. The rational compatibilism (unlike the libertarianism) permits us to respect this complex moral experience.

Robert Kane (in his response to Dennett's argument quoted in the beginning of my present essay) admits the veracity of above mentioned awareness of inner freedom (accompanied by incapacity to decide otherwise) exclusively for cases where the psychological necessity of a choice is a consequence of agent's past "self-forming actions", i.e. undetermined ("libertarian") will-setting actions in her life-history. Kane describes the "self-forming actions" as "the actions in our lives by which we form our character and motives (i.e., our wills) and make ourselves into the kinds of persons we are."<sup>59</sup> I do not see why the experience of inner freedom should not be equally respectable, where the necessity in question is e.g. a result of our innate intuition of moral laws,<sup>60</sup> rather than of our "libertarian" past self-forming.

Yes, our moral life presupposes that we have genuine control over our choices and actions. But for example on J.M. Fischer's approach to "guidance control" there are just "two chief elements": the volition that issues in action (1) "must be the 'agent's own,' and (2) it must be appropriately 'reasons-responsive.'" (Contingency is not required.)<sup>61</sup> In other words (if we agree to use the scholastic terminology), the volition constitutes the case of freedom-entailing "perfect voluntary" if it (1) comes from inner principle and (2) involves the *intellective* cognition of our end. I think this account of freedom can be useful for building an ethics based neither on constraint nor on arbitrariness. The moral law can be fully interiorized;<sup>62</sup> the necessity

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59 Kane, R., *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*. New York–Oxford, Oxford University Press 2005, p. 129–131.

60 See the quasi-intuitionist interpretation of Aquinas' natural-law theory developed by John Finnis: *Natural Law and Natural Rights*. New York–Oxford University Press 2011, p. 59–99.

61 Fischer, J. M., Compatibilism. In: Fischer, J. M. – Kane, R. – Pereboom, D. – Vargas, M., *Four Views on Free Will*. Malden–Oxford–Carlton, Blackwell Publishing 2007, p. 78.

62 I distinguish mere "internalization", i.e. inner adopting of moral rules (cf. Cencini, A. – Manenti, A., *Psicologia e Formazione. Strutture e dinamismi*. Bologna, Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna EDB 2000, p. 293–304), and "interiorization" or the finding the moral law in the deep essence of our own rationality (cf. Taylor's concept of "our true nature or deep self", Taylor, C., Foucault on freedom and truth. In: Taylor, C., *Philosophy and the Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers II*. Cambridge–New York–Melbourne, Cambridge University Press 1990, p. 183).

of moral law finds its psychological counterpart in our inner rational necessity compatible with freedom.

I suggest the relevant rationally-compatibilist concept of (not contingency-based) freedom can be developed with help of Poinso's account of "eminent" freedom connected with the notion of "universality". The "universality" of the will i.e. the necessary orientation of the will towards the "universal" (full) good (true beatitude) makes the will free and undetermined – according to Poinso – in respect to partial goods. But the same "universality" causes in some cases the above outlined "hypothetical" necessity under which we choose some conditions and means in our pursuit of the full human good, or perhaps some parts or aspects of the true beatitude (inseparable from morality). In this "necessary" mode of volition the pertinent necessity is very different from – or even contrary to – any coercion or constraint. Thus the volition is "eminently" free. It is worth noting that the Poinso's theory permits us to reduce both "libertarian" as well as "compatibilist" cases of freedom to one and the same base: the "universality" of the will in Poinso's terminology.

#### SUMMARY

According to Portuguese Dominican João Poinso (by religious name Johannes a S. Thomā), prominent thomist thinker of the early-modern period, the rationally motivated voluntary volition (the "perfect voluntary") is always an act of freedom, even when it arises (under certain set of conditions) necessarily. In such a case Poinso speaks of "eminent freedom" (differing from "formal freedom" defined by a kind of "contingency"). The concept of eminent freedom, which presumes the compatibility of freedom with necessity, can be useful in moral psychology as it permits to the ethicist to respect our moral experience of necessary volitions.

**Keywords:** John Poinso, free will, necessity, compatibilism, moral psychology