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Choosing to be Human: Albert the Great on Self Awareness and Celestial Influence

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Abstract. Albert the Great (c.1200-1280) was so interested in astrology and the influence of the heavens upon terrestrial affairs that he discussed this important component of natural philosophy in almost everything he wrote, from his early *De bono* to his late and unfinished *Summa theologiae*. A poorly understood component of the reason why he was so fascinated with this subject is his understanding of human versus animalistic action. According to Albert it is only when people act in accord with a willed choice informed by an understanding of why the action is undertaken that an activity may properly be considered human and therefore good, making it very important to understand external affecting factors. In Albert's philosophy, the most powerful external influence affecting a person is that derived from the heavens—therefore understanding these forces is important if one wishes to act as a fully actualized human. Analysis of this component of Albert's philosophical system is essential if we are to understand the vast importance that he gave astrology, which in turn is the key to many elements of his broader philosophy.

What is it that constitutes the ontological essence of humanity? What differentiates human from animal action? Far from being easy questions, debate and discussion on these issues has engaged some of the finest minds of both the past and the present, with no answer having yet gained universal acceptance.¹ Given this long-running controversy it should come as no surprise that medieval intellectuals could disagree about what constituted human action, and an instructive example of this disagreement can be found through an examination of the positions of

¹ An example of the current controversy can be found in the various points of view—often conflicting—expressed by the panelists discussing "what it means to be human" at the 2008 World Science Festival. See <http://www.worldsciencefestival.com/2008/to-be-human> [accessed 12 Aug. 2009].

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Albert the Great (c.1200-1280) and his protégé, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Such an approach is useful because it highlights an interesting point of disagreement between these two men, while providing an example of Albert's creative use of sources in his commentaries. Although no less a scholar than James Weisheipl has characterized these writings as simple 'paraphrases',² the truth of the matter is that Albert wove Neoplatonic ideas into his analyses of Aristotle resulting in an original blending of ideas that is neither Aristotelian nor Neoplatonic, but should instead be read as Albertine.³ In my study I will focus on Albert's argument that only actions undertaken in full knowledge of *why* one is acting can be considered human acts. The corollary to this position is an emphasis upon the importance of understanding outside forces inclining one to act in accord with impulses rather than through an active, thoughtful engagement of the will. For Albert, celestial influence is the most important of these forces, making an understanding of astrological⁴ forces an important tool in attempts to live as a fully actualized human, thereby maximizing happiness.

In order to understand Albert's position and the ways in which it diverged from Aristotelian notions, let us begin with a brief overview of what Aristotle had to say about three closely related topics: the essential nature of a human, the motivations of humans to action, and human agency in relation to outside influences. Such an overview will allow us to see most clearly where Albert agrees with—and diverges from—his most important intellectual antecedent. In the following presentation of Aristotle's ideas I focus on brevity over a comprehensive analysis, for to

2 J. A. Weisheipl, 'The Life and Works of St. Albert the Great', in *Albertus Magnus and the Sciences* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980), p. 27.

3 Therese Bonin highlights a similar point in Albert's integration of Neoplatonic emanation into his system of thought. See Therese Bonin, *Creation as Emanation* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2001), [hereafter Bonin, *Creation as Emanation*]; Stanley B. Cunningham also notes Albert's creative blending of sources and originality in his *Reclaiming Moral Agency: The Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), [hereafter Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency*], part I.

4 Albert used the terms *astronomia* and *astrologia* almost interchangeably. Typically in modern scholarship the term astrology carries a connotation of a study of heavenly influences interacting with terrestrial objects, which is how I shall use the term throughout this paper.

do otherwise would be to distract from the true focus of my study—the thought of Albert the Great.

For Aristotle, the essence of humanity is inherent in the possession of an intellectual soul.⁵ This soul, providing both the capacity for reasoned thought and the ability to choose between alternatives, is the form providing the ontological basis of what it is to be a human. This is not to say that a person's sensible form—flesh, blood, and bone—is irrelevant, for it is not, but such material being possesses only a low-level actuality, a presence in the world allowing a person to be perceived by other creatures.⁶ It is not in any way the essence of a human qua human, nor is that physical form the basis of human action or agency.

Instead, the essence of humanity is drawn from the capacity to acquire and assimilate knowledge, and perhaps more importantly from the ability to integrate that knowledge through a process of critical reasoning. For Aristotle, the mere capacity to gather knowledge is a first-level potentiality, a baseline ability that all people possess, but to attain a higher level of personhood an individual must make active use of that knowledge through contemplation.⁷ In order to attain the highest pinnacle of what it is to be a human, the object of contemplation must be the human soul, which is the highest form of being found in the world.⁸ Jonathan Leer argues that there has been much unnecessary confusion surrounding this issue, caused by the tendency of translators to treat the Greek terms *epithumia* (appetite as a function of the sensible soul) and *orexis* (a higher-order desire) as synonyms. Following Leer's argument, Aristotle believed that though humans possess both appetites, the latter is only a human characteristic, as it requires the presence of the intellectual

5 Jonathan Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), [hereafter Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*], pp. 98-99.

6 Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*, p. 103.

7 Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*, pp. 104-5; 116-7; Aristotle's *De anima*, Robert Drew Hicks, ed. (Amsterdam: A. Hakkert, 1965), [hereafter Aristotle, *De anima*], II.5; III.8.

8 Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*, p. 133; Aristotle, *Ethica Nichomachea*, Immanuel Bekker, ed. (Berlin: G. Reimeri, 1881), [hereafter Aristotle, *Ethica Nichomachea*], x.7,1177b26-1178a8.

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soul.⁹ Still, both are located within the desiring part of the soul and an individual may be driven to act by either form of motivation, with movement based on either of two faculties, the practical mind or the appetite.¹⁰ The practical mind allows for the formulation of a deliberated choice (*prohaeris*) in order to accomplish a desired goal and is therefore a higher-order activity.¹¹ Nevertheless, even when functioning completely outside the bounds of contemplation, as one does who operates instinctively or who carries out a task that is so familiar and well understood that it has become automatic, that person is still a human actor engaging in what is a human activity.¹² In the first case, the individual had the option to engage the will in order to override the desire if he or she had so chosen, and in the latter case if asked to explain why and how an action was undertaken a deliberative explanation could be delivered after the fact.¹³

As we shall see, Albert differed radically from Aristotle on this singularly important point, and in this case the difference between the two largely explains why celestial forces were so much more important to Albert than either his Greek predecessor or his protégé, Thomas Aquinas, whose own thought was in this instance far more Aristotelian than that of his master. Furthermore, analysis of Albert's view of the relationship between free will and the ontological basis of humanity will further clarify Albert's debt to Neoplatonic thought and the ways in which he blended this philosophical system with Aristotelian philosophy, in all likelihood with no awareness that such a blending was taking place.

We should first undertake to understand Albert's position on the relationship between free will and the essential nature of that which is human—what could be termed *humanitas*—and for that we must turn to

9 Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*, p. 142; Aristotle, *De anima*, III.9,432b5-6;

10 Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*, p. 142; Aristotle, *De anima*, III.9-10; 10,433a9-30.

11 Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*, p. 143; Aristotle, *Ethica Nichomachea*, III.2-4; [for *prohaeris*, see III.2, III2a1; III3, III3a2-7]

12 Leer, *Aristotle and the Desire to Understand*, p. 133; Aristotle, *Ethica Nichomachea*, x.7,1177b26-1178a8.

13 John M. Cooper, *Reason and Human Good in Aristotle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), pp. 9-65.

his early commentary *Super ethica*, written between 1250 and 1252.¹⁴ The crux of his discussion as it relates to our current subject is the distinction made between *voluntas* and *desiderium*. The former is that peculiarly human trait, free will, which is a faculty of the intellectual soul. But the latter is a hollow and meaningless longing, serving to tempt the appetites, thereby distorting our understanding of the good.¹⁵ This longing causes us to mistake those things that can lead to *voluptas*, or sensual pleasure—which, as an end, is fit only for beasts—for those things that bring *felicitas*, or true happiness.¹⁶ An object desired due to a sensible longing is the product of the sensible soul, and is therefore not chosen through an act of the will. Therefore, such objects can never represent an end worthy of a human¹⁷ standing untouched as they are by reason for, according to Albert, ‘the work of man, inasmuch as he is a man, is a work of reason’ and works performed through the application of reason are, by definition good—and human—acts.¹⁸ True, certain actions, such as feeding the poor, can be thought of as inherently good,¹⁹ but for a person to fully participate in the goodness of the action he or she must choose to undertake the act through application of the will.²⁰ Ultimately, only acts involving the application of reason are fully good and such a mode of behavior should be the goal of everyone, but a person should not be assumed to act in a willed intellectual manner. For though ‘reason is

14 Albertus Magnus, *Super ethica: Commentum et Quaestiones*, Wilhelm Kubel, ed. (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1968), [hereafter Albertus, *Super ethica*], pars I, p. vi.

15 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, pp. 7, 10. ‘vacuum est desiderium’, which ‘Omne quod appetit, appetit per modum artis vel naturae; sed torquere [desiderium] appetit bonum’.

16 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, pp. 17, 21 ‘Voluptas nulla lege ordinatur’, and ‘non videtur pertinere ad bonam vitam’, because ‘voluptas est bonum bestiarum’.

17 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, p. 10.

18 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, p. 40. ‘Opus hominis, in quantum homo est, est rationis . . . oportet, quod opus hominis in quantum homo sit idem quod opus boni’.

19 Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency*, pp. 116-7.

20 Cunningham takes note of Albert’s insistence in the *De bono* on the importance of choosing to act in accord with reason, but he fails to follow Albert’s argument through to its logical conclusion. See Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency*, pp. 135-38.

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never deflected from uprightness' under optimal circumstances, such a deflection can indeed come about when the individual is moved 'by another inclination, such as from concupiscence or wrath, which corrupts prudent assessment'.²¹

Albert saw the impulses driving us to behave in an animalistic fashion as deriving from a broad range of sources, but no influence was greater than that derived quite literally from the highest source possible, that is 'the rays of diverse stars'²² impacting the body and influencing the soul *per accidens* toward actions as the body tugs upon the soul. Such a viewpoint was entirely in keeping with medieval cosmological principles, based on an understanding of Aristotelian physics that all medieval scholars shared. In this model, the doctrine of efficient causation posited that motion was responsible for all change, through a linked series of affects and consequences beginning with the prime mover actuating change in the heavenly bodies.²³ As Albert explains in his commentary *De caelo*, God acts first on the highest level within the hierarchy of the created universe, the orb of the celestial bodies, influencing everything beneath it²⁴ through a downward emanation of power passing through the

21 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, p. 40. 'Ratio numquam deflectitur a rectitudine, nisi alio quodam inclinante, scilicet concupiscentia et ira, quae corrumpit aestimationem prudentiae'.

22 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, p. 81. 'quod inducunt de radiis diversarum stellarum'.

23 John D. North, 'Celestial Influence—the Major Premise of Astrology', in *'Astrologi Hallucinati: Stars and the End of the World in Luther's Time'*, Paola Zambelli, ed. (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 45-100.

24 Albertus Magnus, *De caelo et Mundo*, Paul Hossfeld, ed. (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1971), [hereafter Albertus, *De caelo*], pars I, p. 4. 'Magnificamus deum creatorem, qui eminet proprietatibus omnium creaturarum . . . eo quod eius actus manifestatur in naturalibus'. Pars I, p. 23. 'Deus non continetur caelo, sed potius est in ipso sicut motor indivisibilis . . . Rationabiliter autem iudicaverunt omnes gentes deum esse in caelo. Deo enim dederunt potestatem causandi et creandi ista inferior, et ideo, cum ab uno non possit esse nisi unum et ab uno . . . quod non inceptit, non possit esse diversitas aliqua secundum naturam, dederunt ei caelum, quod in substantia ingenerabile est et secundum motum diversificatum, ut movendo illud causet nova inferior diversa eo modo . . . ut per motum locale corporis huius [Deus] causet mutationem omnem in inferioribus et diminutionem et additionem et corruptionem et remotionem et alterationem'.

various levels of the hierarchy of creation.²⁵ Albert is very clear about how this causal chain functions. Ordering causes flow from the first principle to the first heaven.²⁶ As God's power flows downward from his being and through the lower levels of reality, its impact is altered, making the motive process the primary affective force, as opposed to the substance of the influencing 'ray' itself.²⁷ Below the sphere of the first heaven the levels of ordering causes are the second sphere (where the zodiacal signs and the fixed stars are to be found), the seven spheres containing the planets Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the sun, Venus, Mercury, and the moon, and then finally the sphere of 'active and passive things', which represents the sublunar realm.²⁸ In this model, influence emanating from the heavens explains a wide variety of observable Earthly phenomenon, ranging from the actions of individual elements, including the process of generation and corruption, to the passage of time itself.

Thus, inferior motions and compositions are always determined through the influences of a superior point (or points) in creation through an outpouring of influence from God.²⁹ The ordering of each sphere is then brought about through the light of the sphere above, reaching

25 For a detailed explication of the emanatory process in Albert's works, compared to emanation as Plotinus and his intellectual descendents presented it, see Bonin, *Creation as Emanation*, pp. 45-48.

26 Albertus, *De caelo*, pars. I, p. 56. 'fluunt a primo principio ad caelum primum'.

27 Alain de Libera, *Albert le Grand et la Philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1990), [hereafter De Libera, *Albert le Grand*], pp. 116-18. This is what the author refers to as Albert's 'metaphysic of flows', to emphasize the important role of the 'flowing' of divine influence from point to point in creation, rather than the simple power of the light involved.

28 Albertus, *De caelo*, pars. I, p. 56. The most concise description of Albert's ten-sphere system of the universe is found in his *Problemata determinata*, Jacob Weiseipl, ed. (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfolorum, 1975), p. 48. 'His [the nine upper spheres] coniungunt ad sphaeram activorum et passivorum, et est orbis quattuor essentialium simplicium, quae dicuntur esse elementa'. The sublunar sphere is not often included in the cosmologies of medieval thinkers, making Albert's system stand out somewhat from the nine-sphere model found among other writers, a point that escaped Pico della Mirandola in his *Disputationes Adversus Astrologiam Divinatricem*, Eugenio Garin, ed. (Florence: Vallecchi Editore, 1946), Vol. II, p. 246. See also Price, pp. 168-77.

29 Albertus, *De caelo*, pars. I, p. 57

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eventually down to the earth. There celestial light is diffused as an actuating force upon terrestrial beings,³⁰ ‘illuminating’ the souls of humans.³¹ This light force impels souls to receive their individuating characteristics and bodies to conceive, or ‘generate’ in scholastic terms, and then dissolve into corruption, thereby acting as the instrument of divine will in ordering and altering the universe.³² God could directly interact with the universe, intervening in a miraculous fashion, but in Albert’s view, he prefers to work his will through the celestial intermediaries created precisely for this purpose.³³ In this way Albert utilizes a Neoplatonic emanatory aspect of light, modified as an actively willed instrument, in a Christianized Aristotelian system.³⁴

30 Albertus Magnus, *Liber de Natura et Origine Animae*, Bernhard Geyer, ed. (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1955), [hereafter Albertus, *Liber de Natura*], p. 6.

31 Albertus, *De caelo*, pars I, p. 57, ‘super animas hominum illustrat’.

32 Albertus, *De caelo*, pars I, pp. 57, 114. Through ‘cuius virtutes [illuminati] concipiuntur in seminibus generatorum et corruptorum’.

33 If we are willing to accept the *Speculum astronomiae* as a genuinely Albertine work, this is where we find the clearest statement of the view that God works his will upon the earth through the stars, as if they were his instruments. See Albertus Magnus, *Speculum astronomiae*, as included in Paola Zambelli’s *The Speculum Astronomiae and its Enigma: Astrology, Theology, and Science in Albertus Magnus and his Contemporaries* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), [hereafter Albertus, *Speculum astronomiae*], p. 220, ch. 3: ‘Ipse qui est Deus vivus, Deus caeli non vivi, velit operari in rebus creatis . . . per stellas surdas mutas sicut per instrumenta’. I discuss the authorship of this work in my forthcoming study, Scott E. Hendrix, *Albert the Great’s Speculum Astronomiae and Four Centuries of Readers* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, forthcoming), ch. 1.

34 This model, with its Neoplatonic elements, is representative of Albert’s system of thought as a whole. He derived the idea that God’s influence flows as a stream of light through each of ten heavens downward to the terrestrial realm from *De causis et processu universitatis a prima causis*. Albert’s system of thought appears broadly Aristotelian, yet instances such as this one reminds us that his philosophical system contains a larger Neoplatonic element than might be immediately evident to a casual reader. For an exploration of some important examples of Neoplatonism in Albert’s thought see Bonin’s *Creation as Emanation*, pp. 1-3, passim.

Albert provides one of his most thorough discussions of the complex influences that the heavens can ultimately impart to the terrestrial realm in his work *De fato*.³⁵ Here he discusses some of the possible influences of the heavenly bodies on conception, infant mortality, and the characteristics a developing infant can acquire through celestial interaction with terrestrial elements.³⁶ Each of the planets has a different dominant nature; for example, Saturn has a ‘cold and dry’ nature.³⁷ These natures function as contingent variables acting upon the development of bodily organs and humors.³⁸ In this way, the flow of influence that begins with God arcs downward to eventually affect the development of all terrestrial creatures, including human beings, in a manner that largely determines both an individual’s health and personality.³⁹ Albert’s belief in the indirect, but powerful, influences of celestial bodies upon a

35 Albert, ‘De fato’, Paul Simon, ed. in *Opera Omnia*, Vol. 17.2 (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1975), [hereafter Albertus, *De fato*], pp. 66-75.

36 Albertus, *De fato*, p. 66.

37 Ibid.

38 Edward Grant, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 204, 227, 467-69. Grant discusses the different properties and natures of the planets. These varying characteristics did present an apparent conflict. The planets were held to be composed of a perfect substance (quintessence) and thus could not have accidental properties. Therefore, it seems as if they should have had perfectly uniform influences, rather than differing from one planet to the next. Medieval scholars held the differentiation in influence to be explainable partly through the orbital positions of these planets. Some scholars argued that all earthly effects, such as hot or cold, came from celestial influences, but that these effects only existed as manifested in the patient. By the fourteenth century the characteristics that were seen to incline a terrestrial patient toward a certain result, such as being hot-tempered or sickly, existed virtually (*virtualiter*) in the celestial region but not formally (*formaliter*). See Edward Grant, ‘Cosmology’, in *Science in the Middle Ages*, David C. Lindberg, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 287.

39 Albertus, *De fato*, pp. 68-71. Albert also accepted the idea that one knowledgeable about the influences imparted by the heavens could also predict the likely future of an individual, as Zambelli outlines on pp. 65-67. For example, consider Albert’s commentary *De generatione et corruptione* (as quoted by Zambelli): ‘et hoc modo innotescit, quoniam qui sciret vires signorum et stellarum in ipsis positarum in circulo periodali dum nascitur res aliqua, ipse quantum est de influentia caelesti praenosticari posset de tota vita rei generatae’.

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person's inner being explains why he maintained that one wishing to understand the functions of the soul should begin by studying the interactions and influences of celestial bodies. All things are from God—the Christian equivalent of the Prime Mover, —but by 'influencing [man] through the motion of heaven [he] regulates and causes the intellectual operations of the soul' and impresses change secondarily "on the rational soul".⁴⁰

As these celestial forces impact the human body they result in a strong influence toward a certain behavior or action. Certainly, such motivations are influences only and may be resisted, but only through an intentional act of will.⁴¹ However, resisting celestial influences requires great effort, due to the nature of heavenly bodies as necessary causes, being absolutely regular in their motions and composed of perfect quintessence. Thus, any such influence 'is more firm within us than that which is from a cause that is not necessary'.⁴² It is through the motivations imparted to our sensitive appetites by these heavenly forces that we are driven toward

40 Albertus, *De fato*, p.66. '[Intelligentia] influens per motum caeli regulat et causat operationes intellectuales animae'. 'sic est in omnibus moventibus et motis quae distant invicem. similiter est intelligentia et anima: quoniam intelligentia distat, et imprimit in animam rationalem secundum locum distans ab eo'. In this quote Albert is relating Aristotle's view of the influence of the way the Prime Mover influences sublunar events, at least as Albert understood the Philosopher's position. From a Christian perspective the 'intelligence' in question, the Prime Mover, is God. There is no doubt that Albert accepts the view that God's influence orders the cosmos through celestial bodies, as indicated in the *solutio* on p. 68: 'dicitur fatum forma ordinis esset et vitae inferiorum, causata in ipsis ex periodo caelestis circulis ambit natiuitates eorum . . . Forma autem ista causata ex caelesti circulo et inhaerens generabilibus et corruptibilibus'. For a clear and relatively concise introduction to the principles and elements of medieval and Renaissance astrology, see Eade's, *The Forgotten Sky*.

41 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, p. 84. Albert makes a vivid argument by analogy between those things that influence the soul through the body, and the persuasive force a father can exert over his son or a friend over a friend. 'Id est persuasivum ad opus, sicut pater persuadet filio et amicus amico'.

42 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, 66. 'Illud quod est per causam necessariam, firmius est in nobis quam quod per causam non-necessariam'. For a more detailed discussion, see Albert's commentary, *De physica*, Paul Hossfeld, ed. (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1987), pars I, pp. 116-18.

harmful action,⁴³ thereby acting in a sinful and bestial manner of behavior.

But what of Albert's position on the absolute uprightness of reason? He was knowledgeable enough about human nature to understand that even though people are free agents, possessed of the highest form of soul present in the terrestrial realm, an intellectual soul, and thus never knowingly acting in accord with negative impulses,⁴⁴ human action does not always involve the intellect. Instead, people regularly allow themselves to be moved along by the influences acting upon them.⁴⁵ Humans, as composite beings made up of souls enmeshed within imperfect matter, are all too easily moved by the corporeal influences imparted by celestial influences, since 'there is a two-fold principle of actions in man, that being nature and free will'.⁴⁶ Our will is indeed free, but our natural self, that part of us which is made up of our generated, corporeal being, is ruled by the stars.⁴⁷ Therefore, unless our will 'struggles, it is drawn and hardened by our natural self, and when the natural self is moved by the motions of the stars, the will then begins to

43 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, p. 84. 'quod est pars sensitivi appetitus, quo propulsatur nocivum'.

44 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, pp. 145-46. 'Dicendum, quod omnis malus est quodammodo ignorans et habet ignorantiam electionis'. Albert certainly had it on good authority that free will can only be directed toward a good end, unless twisted by an outside influence. In his commentary on Matthew, Albert adduces Aristotle and John Damascene in agreeing with Augustine, whom he quotes as saying 'Voluntas namque non est nisi in bonis; in malis flagitiosisque factis non voluntas, sed cupiditas proprie dicitur'. Albert the Great, *Super Matthaicum*, Bernhard Schmidt, ed. (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1987), [hereafter, Albertus, *Super Matthaicum*], p. 256.

45 Paola Zambelli has also noted the importance of Albert's *Super ethica* to understanding his view of the relationship between free will and celestial influence. See Zambelli, p. 176.

46 Albertus Magnus, *De mineralibus* (Venice: Joannem et Gregorium de Gregoriis, 1495), [hereafter Albertus, *De mineralibus*], I.II 'Est enim in homine duplex principium operum, natura scilicet et voluntas'.

47 Albertus, *De mineralibus*, I.II. 'Natura quidem regitur sideribus, voluntas quidam libera est'.

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incline toward the motions of the stars and the constellations'.⁴⁸ In this way knowledge that allows us to understand those celestial influences driving our behavior enables us to live more in accord with God's will and the standards of behavior dictated by our essential nature as beings possessing an intellectual soul and the free will that goes along with it.

Therefore, Albert sees the study of the heavens and their influence upon us as a proto-psychological tool allowing for insight into the distinctions between human actions—those resulting from free choice—and animalistic behavior occurring due to bodily impulses derived from celestial impulses. In other words, understanding the power of celestial influence allows the cognoscenti to more easily counteract its powerful effects, making it easier to act as a human rather than an animal. There were those who felt that too much emphasis upon the role of celestial influence in human actions was dangerous, representing a denial of free will, but late in life Albert vividly expressed what he felt about such people. In what is the most harshly worded rebuke I have encountered in Albert's writings, he refers to those holding such a view as 'deeply illiterate' whose 'ignorance is altogether clear'.⁴⁹

Perhaps it is understandable why some may have been made uncomfortable by the relationship between celestial influence and human action that scholars such as Albert posited, for he finds the study of heavenly influences to be useful for more than merely avoiding bad actions. Indeed, he finds it an important aid to anyone desiring to exercise

48 Albertus, *De mineralibus*, I.II. 'sed nisi renitatur, trahitur a natura et induratur, et cum natura moveatur motibus siderum, incipit voluntas tunc ad motus siderum et figuras inclinare'.

49 Albert the Great, *De quindecim problematibus*, Bernhard Geyer, ed. (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfalorum,, 1975), 31-44, 35. 'Quod autem tertio dicunt, quod voluntas hominis ex necessitate vult et eligit, numquam potuit dicere nisi homo penitus illitteratus, quia omnis ratio et omnis ethicorum schola tam Stoicorum quam Peripateticorum clamat nos dominos esse actuum nostrorum'. Albert is directly addressing the third of the 15 problems, 'quod voluntas hominis ex necessitate vult et eligit'. However, his discussion flows naturally into what he has to say about problem four, 'Quod omnia quae in inferioribus aguntur, subsunt necessitate corporum caelestium', where following a brief outline of the various levels of causality that I have outlined above, he states 'Et ut omnino pateat eorum ignorantia . . . quod quamvis allatio solis et planetarum in circulo declivi sit causa generationis inferiorum et recessus eorundem in eodem circuli sit causa corruptionis et sint aequales periodi generationis et corruptionis'.

free will at all, which for Albert is the essence of human action. It may be surprising to think that Albert believed astronomical study made it easier to live as a human, rather than a beast, but if he is to be considered a consistent thinker—and I think it would be a mistake not to view him that way—then it appears that we are driven to this conclusion. As I have already noted, Albert states that ‘the work of man, in so much as he is a man, is the work of reason’⁵⁰ beginning with an investigation of first principles—that is the reasons why one acts in a given manner, which leads directly to the metaphysical study of the soul in the estimation of Albert and his fellow scholastics.⁵¹

In Albert’s estimation, it is easiest to understand the soul if one first understands the impact of corporeal impulses upon it. Understanding the way in which humans are supposed to act, which is facilitated by a study of the soul in conjunction with the secondary influences that threaten to warp and pervert our actions, offers the best possible chance to act in a voluntary rather than an instinctual manner. Within the parameters of this model of human behavior, voluntary action is by definition a perfected act of will, in which this faculty is activated through participation in reason. But no action may be truly voluntary unless it involves an understanding of the various possible choices involved.⁵² The examination and consideration allowing this level of understanding does not only guard against bad actions. Indeed, such self-knowledge is also the essential basis for good actions. Any action that we might take, if it is the result of an unconsidered impulse devoid of understanding of the rationale behind the apparently good action, is in fact not good despite any appearances to the contrary. The reason for this is simple: any truly

50 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars. I, p. 40. ‘Opus hominis, in quantum homo est, est rationis’.

51 Albertus Magnus, *De Causis et processu universitatis a prima causa*, Winifrid Fauser, ed. (Aschendorf: Monasterii Westfolorum, 1993), p. 57; Albertus, *Liber de Natura*, p. 12 ; Albertus, *De caelo*, 114; et al. The idea that the study of first principles, which leads directly to a study of the soul, is a higher order of reasoning than other intellectual pursuits was common to Scholastics. See Ferdinand Steenberghen, *Aristotle in the West*, p. 14.

52 Here I am paraphrasing for the sake of clarity. Albert states in *Super ethica*, pars I, p. 136, ‘voluntarium denominatur a voluntate; sed illud quod denominatur, exigitur ad cognitionem rei’, and on p. 152, ‘Dicendum, quod hic diffinitur voluntarium, secundum quod est a voluntate perfecta, prout participat regimen rationis’.

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good act is dependent upon a freely willed intent to do good, requiring an understanding not only of our intended action, but also why we intend it and why it is a good act.⁵³ Clearly Albert is a long way from Aristotle, who saw every action taken by a human as involving the will either through direct engagement or implicitly through a failure to halt action.

Nevertheless, Albert's definition of human action as a willed act is not wholly surprising. Classical writers from Plato to Cicero had posited the primacy of self-willed behavior over instinctual responses.⁵⁴ However, Albert's position that truly human action demanded an engagement of the will following a critical analysis of the goodness or badness of a particular action was far from universal. In fact, his protégé, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), disagreed with him on this important issue. It was not that Thomas denied that celestial influences could incline one toward certain types of behavior, but rather that Thomas did not accept Albert's fundamental definition of human action.⁵⁵ In order to explain this statement, let us first examine Thomas' definition of human action. Writing in his *Summa theologiae* he states

53 Albertus, *Super ethica*, pars I, p. 146. 'si ignoraret rationem sui facti, etiam si faciat bonum, non bene facit, unde non est bonus'. Also see Albert's discussion of voluntary action, wherein he makes it clear that without 'being directed by reason' no action can properly be considered voluntary. Albertus, *Super ethica*, p. 244. 'Voluntarium perfecte causatur ex voluntate et ratione dirigente, secundum quod consideratur ab ethico. Si unum privetur, non est voluntarium'.

54 For Cicero, see his *De officiis*, with an English translation by Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA: Loeb Classical Library, 1990), p. 102. 'Duplex est enim vis animorum atque natura, una pars in appetitu posita est . . . quae hominem huc et illuc rapit, altera in ratione, quae docet et explanat, quid faciendum fugiendumque sit'. For a consideration of Plato in relation to modern theories of the mind, see Ruth Macklin, 'Man's "Animal Brains" and Animal Nature: Some Implications of a Psychophysiological Theory', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 39, no. 2 (1978): 155-81, [hereafter Macklin, *Man's 'Animal Brains'*].

55 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, (New York: Blackfriars, 1964-1976), [hereafter Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*], Ia.82.4; Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* (Würzburg: Andreas Göbel, 1896), [hereafter Aquinas 1896, *Compendium theologiae*], pp. 281-281, c. CLXXI; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, I.63, II.16, II.22; Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae* (Rome: Desclée & C. Herder, 1934), CXXVII. This is by no means an exhaustive list of Thomas' references to celestial influence. See Thomas Litt's excellent list of 130 passages in Thomas' works that refer to astrology.

of those actions which are performed by a human, those alone are properly called human that are of a human characteristic inasmuch as he is a person. For a man differs from the other irrational creatures in this, that he is the lord of his own actions. Therefore, only those actions of which a man has control are properly called human.⁵⁶

Therefore, it is clear that for Thomas free choice of the will was a necessary characteristic of what it was to be human. On the face of it, this position seems consistent with Albert's. But closer examination reveals a critical difference.

This difference is found in Thomas' position on the engagement of the will during the conduct of actions carried out by humans. Thomas recognized that people frequently act in accord with outside influences, be they physical temptations or more extreme examples, such as violence or the threat of violence.⁵⁷ However, these are singular events and do not alter the overall relationship between *humanitas* and will. However, even under normal circumstances, Thomas maintained that people regularly acted without an active movement of the will. Such actions could occur either when an action does not require continuous involvement of the will or when the will is only indirectly involved with an action.⁵⁸

When considering events that do not require continuous involvement of the will, the process begins when intelligible species of a perceived good enters into the intellect.⁵⁹ Based upon this perception, the individual

56 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia2ae.1.1. 'Dicendum quod actionum quae ab homine aguntur, illae solae proprie dicuntur humanae quae sunt propriae hominis in quantum est homo. Differt autem homo ab aliis irrationalibus creaturis in hoc, quod est suorum actuum dominus. Unde illae solae actiones vocantur proprie humanae quarum homo est dominus'. See also Anthony Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind* (New York: Routledge, 1993), [hereafter Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*], pp. 41-58.

57 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia. 82. 1; Ia2ae.6.4.

58 T. H. Irwin, 'Who Discovered the Will?' *Philosophical Perspectives*, VI, Issue: Ethics (1992): p. 466.

59 Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles*, I.72, I.76; Aquinas, *Compendium theologiae*, XXX-XXXI. For a discussion of Thomas' view of perceived versus actual goods, see Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologia 1a 75-89* (Cambridge: Cambridge

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may then act in a manner intended to acquire the good in question.⁶⁰ For example, imagine that a person learns of an herb present only on a mountaintop with the ability to cure the illness of a loved one. Making a decision to obtain this herb, the person then undertakes a long and difficult climb to get to the top of the mountain. The successful completion of this climb may require a myriad of actions along the way, many of which result from snap decisions made in reaction to circumstances as they arise. Such decisions do not require a new exercise of the will to constitute a willed, and therefore human, action.⁶¹ Instead they flow naturally from the initial decision to climb the mountain, so all actions leading to the recovery of the herb are willed acts.⁶²

As with Albert, Thomas was observant enough of human nature to recognize that not all human actions resulted from conscious decisions. Instead, many actions result only from an indirect involvement of the will, a position that can clarify discussions about Thomas as a compatibilist in his stance on free choice versus determinism.⁶³ Some actions that humans undertake are the result of unconscious habit, such as when a man strokes his beard while thinking without being consciously aware of the action,⁶⁴ or those resulting from the inclination of passions derived from the sensory appetites, such as concupiscence or rage.⁶⁵ Nevertheless, should one so choose, it would always be possible to override such an impulse. Thus, in Thomas' words 'the will is able *not* to will to lust or *not* to consent to lust' or other sensitive passions.⁶⁶

University Press, 2002), [hereafter Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*], pp. 247-49.

60 Aquinas 1896, *Compendium theologiae*, CVII.

61 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia2ae.6.1; Ia2ae.16.3.

62 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia.82.1; Ia.83.3.

63 For a discussion of the issues of libertarianism, determinism, and compatibilism, see Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, pp. 77-78.

64 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia2ae.2.3; Ia2ae.6.3.

65 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia2ae.6.3-8; Ia2ae.10.3; Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature*, pp. 248-49; Kenny, *Aquinas on Mind*, pp. 59-61.

66 Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Ia2ae.10.3. 'tamen potest voluntas non velle concupiscere aut concupiscentiae non consentire'. For a discussion at length of actions and their morality, see Joseph Pilsner, *The Specifications of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), ch. 2.

Therefore any action undertaken by a human involves either an explicit or implicit involvement of the will—a position completely consistent with that of Aristotle.⁶⁷

Ultimately, while both Albert and Thomas agreed upon the importance of free will to the human condition, they disagreed on the exact relationship between the will and *humanitas*. While the student maintained that any human action necessarily involved the will, the master maintained that the involvement of the will was what made an action human in the first place. Thus, for Albert, many actions carried out by humans were not only animalistic, but were in fact the actions of an animal, if no active engagement of the will leading up to the action occurred. This stance has important implications. In one sense, Albert's consideration of the role of external influences in decision making seems to presage modern analytical discussions of human actions, giving his understanding of the importance of analyzing celestial influence the appearance of a sort of proto-psychology. By forcing an individual to think about the bases of his or her actions and the possible external stimuli to action, astrology may indeed have allowed a person to act in a more self aware fashion.⁶⁸

Albert believed that individuals had a great deal of power to better themselves through self analysis and self fashioning. This ability for self improvement resulted from the soul's likeness to God, the first cause, which gave it a measure of nobility awaiting an act of will to bring about

67 Thomas uses implicit approval of the will to explain why even virtuous people, such as Job, suffer punishment. Virtuous though an individual might be, all people guilty of original sin—meaning everyone—are *capable* of sinning. Therefore, the will of all people implicitly allows for sin, thereby making all people guilty of sin through implied consent. See Eleonore Stump, 'Biblical commentary and philosophy', *The Cambridge Companion to Aquinas*, Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 263-64.

68 Albert is, in effect, entering into the psychological debate about self determination and naturalism versus non-naturalism centuries before the development of psychology as a science. For a sampling of viewpoints expressed in this debate over the years, see Manuel M. Davenport, 'Self Determination and the Conflict between Naturalism and Non-Naturalism', *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 56, no. 15 (1959): 633-44; Macklin, *Man's 'Animal Brains'*, pp.155-81; Patricia G. Devine and Steven J. Sherman, 'Intuitive Versus Rational Judgment and the Role of Stereotyping in Human the Human Condition: Kirk Versus Spock?' *Psychological Inquiry*, Vol. 3, no. 2 (1992): 153-59.

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perfection.⁶⁹ This sounds strikingly similar to Renaissance ideas as propounded by one of the era's most eloquent writers, Pico della Mirandola, who famously said: 'O great liberality of God the Father! O great and wonderful happiness of man! It is given to him to be that which he chooses to be and that which he wills'.⁷⁰ It is not clear that Pico would have agreed with Albert about the usefulness of astrology to this process of self-fashioning,⁷¹ but the two writers are not far apart in their faith in the potential for improvement that lies at the core of humanity.

In light of the favorable position that astrology held within the field of medieval natural philosophy, it should be no shock that Albert the Great, the modern-day saint of scientists who is frequently cited in historical studies as an example of solidly scientific thought in the Middle Ages, was profoundly interested in astrology. Likewise, it should come as no surprise that Albert, the long-time lector of theology at various Dominican houses and master of theology at the University of Paris, had a deep and abiding interest in understanding the way in which humans could live a good life in accord with God's dictates. However, modern researchers tend to view Albert the philosopher of science as somehow separate from Albert the theologian. My study shows that any attempt to force Albert into such artificial categories, as if his mind were somehow compartmentalized, diminishes our understanding of how he viewed the

69 Bonin, *Creation as Emanation*, p. 49. Bonin is drawing upon Albert's use of the *Liber de causis*, a thoroughly Neoplatonic work that he mistook for Aristotle's missing work on metaphysics. See De Libera, *Albert le Grand*, pp. 55-59; Albert the Great, *Summa Theologiae sive De Mirabili Scientia Dei*. Libri I, Pars I, Quaestiones 1-50A. Dionysius Siedler, P. A., Wilhelm Kubel, and Heinrich George Vogels, eds. (Monasterii Westfalorum: Aschendorff, 1978), p. 60. This was a universal mistake prior to Thomas of Moerbeke's completion of a new translation directly from the Greek in 1268. See Ferdinand Van Steenberghen, *The Philosophical Movement in the Thirteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1955), p. 40.

70 Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, Charles Glenn Wallis, Paul J. W. Miller, and Douglas Carmichael, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Co., 1965), p. 5.

71 However, H. Darrell Rutkin's work suggests that astrology was far more important to Pico than most would like to think. See Rutkin, 'Astrology, Natural Philosophy and the History of Science, c. 1250-1700: Studies Toward an Interpretation of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*' (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 2002), pp. 278-328.

world. For Albert, the study of scientific subjects—including astrology—for all of their intrinsic interest, gained ultimate significance for what such study had to tell us about God and our relationship to the divine.