

*Albert on human action and Aquinas*¹

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“In moral matters, St. Thomas owes much to his teacher Albert,”² especially on the theme of the human act and its morality. While still young, St. Albert wrote *De natura boni* on the nature of moral good, and later *De bono*.³ Regarding his manner of conceiving the goodness of the human act, it is very probable that he was influenced by the Franciscan master Odon Rigaud, who had also commented on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard.⁴

As we have already mentioned, St. Albert was one of the first proponents of the truth contained in Aristotelian thought, and was among those principally responsible for the introduction of Aristotle at the University of Paris.⁵ Regarding the role of reason in the moral life, St. Albert opportunely distinguished between speculative reason and practical reason – a distinction already present in Aristotle – while at the same time maintaining the unity of the intellectual faculty.⁶ In the human being there is a single intellectual faculty, reason, which when exercised with respect to what things are – the essence of things – is called speculative, but when by extension it reflects on the ends to be realized through our action, is called practical. St. Thomas as we know

¹ This essay was originally the second chapter of my doctoral dissertation, *A especificação moral dos actos humanos segundo são Tomás de Aquino*, (Rome: Edizioni Università Santa Croce, 2008). I offer special thanks to Dr. Joseph T. Papa for his excellent translation, and to Dr. William F. Murphy, Jr., who arranged for the translation.

² O. LOTTIN, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, tome III, II partie, cit., p. 592: “A son maître Albert, saint Thomas doit beaucoup en matière morale.”

³ Cf. *ibidem*, tome IV, III partie, cit., p. 513.

⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 454: “Si l’on compare le *status questionis* de cet article d’Albert avec celui d’Odon Rigaud, on se convainc sans peine qu’Albert a sous les yeux le texte du maître franciscain; la solution est d’ailleurs la même et s’inspire parfois des mêmes termes” (if one compares the *status questionis* of Albert’s article with that of Odon Rigaud, one is easily convinced that Albert had the text of the Franciscan master in front of him; the solution is moreover the same, and at times he is inspired by the same terms); cf. *ibidem*, p. 455: “Dans l’ensemble, il [saint Albert] reprend les solutions d’Odon Rigaud [...]. Nous sommes en présence d’un effort vers une simplification des problèmes et des solutions” (On the whole, [St. Albert] takes up the solutions of Odon Rigaud [...]. We have before us an effort at simplification of both the problems and the solutions).

⁵ Cf. S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *La théologie morale à la période de la grande scolastique*, in “Nova et vetera” 52 (1977), p. 120: “Saint Albert le Grand fut le principal protagoniste de l’introduction d’Aristote à l’Université de Paris et le plus célèbre théologien de son temps” (St. Albert the Great was the principal protagonist of the introduction of Aristotle at the University of Paris, and the most celebrated theologian of his time).

⁶ Cf. O. LOTTIN, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, tome III, II partie, cit., p. 540: “Sans en faire aucunement deux facultés différentes, saint Albert distingue, dans la *Summa de homine*, entre la raison spéculative et la raison pratique” (Without in any way making them into two different faculties, St. Albert distinguishes, in the *Summa de homine*, between speculative reason and practical reason).

assumes this important distinction, and it can be said that “in St. Thomas and in St. Albert the Great the role of the practical reason was presented with more emphasis than among the Franciscan masters of the time.”⁷

There is no question for Albert that “the will is the universal mover of all of the powers to action,”⁸ but at the same time “the will by itself is blind, nor can it function except according to the pre-ordination and the conception of reason, and therefore its entire ordering derives from reason.”⁹ This amounts to an acknowledgement of the mutual interdependence between the will and practical reason. These two faculties working in reciprocal collaboration are a necessary presupposition for the human act to exist.

Another important fact is that St. Albert follows, prior to St. Thomas, the famous maxim of Pseudo-Dionysius that the goodness of human acts proceeds from a cause of integral goodness, whereas evil derives from some particular defect.¹⁰ It was thanks to Albert that the young Thomas first came in contact with the *De divinis nominibus*, since Thomas was Albert’s secretary when the latter wrote his *Commentary*.¹¹ We know that this experience left an important mark on Aquinas’s thought in a number of areas.

Also worth noting is the fact that “following Aristotle, Albert identifies the matter of the act with its object, but makes no use of this identification.”¹² It will be St. Thomas who will later exploit all the advantages of the hylomorphic theory applied analogously to the human act.

Beyond what has been said already, it can be said that “St. Thomas will also as-

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 539, note 2: “chez saint Thomas e saint Albert le Grand le rôle de la raison pratique a été présenté avec plus d’insistence que chez les maîtres franciscains du temps.”

⁸ ALBERT THE GREAT (saint), *Summa de homine*, q. 65, a. 2, in A. Borgnet - E. Borgnet (eds.), “B. Alberti Magni ratisbonensis episcopi, ordinis praedicatorum. Opera omnia”, Vivès, Paris 1898, t. 35, pp. 551-552: “voluntas est motor universalis omnium potentiarum ad actum.”

⁹ IDEM, *Super Ethica*, in “Sancti doctoris Ecclesiae Alberti Magni Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum episcopi opera omnia”, t. 14, Aschendorff, Monasterii Westfolorum 1968-1987, lib. 1, lect. 8, n. 40: “voluntas de se caeca est nec operatur nisi secundum praeordinationem et conceptionem rationis, et ita totus ordo est a ratione.”

¹⁰ Cf. O. LOTTIN, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, tome IV, III partie, cit., p. 545: “Albert met en avant l’axiome du Pseudo-Denys qui allait être cité tant de fois, *bonum ex una et tota causa est, malum ex quolibet particulari defectu*. Pour qu’un acte soit bon, il faut qu’il le soit en tous ses éléments, à la manière d’un tout intégral, *totum integrale*, qui se détruit dès qu’un de ses éléments fait défaut” (Albert highlights the axiom of Pseudo-Dionysius that was to be quoted sometimes, *bonum ex una et tota causa est, malum ex quolibet particulari defectu*. For an act to be good, it must be so in all of its elements, as an integral whole, *totum integrale*, which is destroyed if one of its elements is defective).

¹¹ Cf. J.-P. TORRELL, *Initiation à saint Thomas d’Aquin*, cit., pp. 31 and 186.

¹² O. LOTTIN, *Psychologie et morale aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles*, tome II, I partie, Abbaye du Mont César - J. Duculot éditeur, Louvain - Gembloux 1948, p. 465: “après Aristote, Albert identifie le matière de l’acte avec son objet, mais nul usage n’est fait de cette identification.”

sume from his master various specific theses: the concept of the human act conceived of as a conjunction of the will, the efficient cause, and reason, the formal cause; the concept of synderesis conceived of as residing in the practical reason and not in the will, as was held unanimously before Albert; the concept of conscience, conceived of as the conclusion of a syllogism where synderesis constitutes the major premise; the thesis of the imputability as venial sin of non-deliberate movements of the sensible appetite. At times, however, Thomas distances himself from Albert: I refer to Albert's conception of *liberum arbitrium* as a faculty distinct from reason and will, whereas for St. Thomas this is nothing other than the will; I am also referring to the moral indifference of certain acts *in concreto* that Albert admits, whereas Thomas, from his *Commentary on the Sentences*, denies the possibility of such an indifference"¹³ in real life.

It is also important to bear in mind that "St. Albert the Great dedicated much time to the study of the works of the great Latin authors,"¹⁴ and his most brilliant student would benefit from the results of his investigations.

1. *DE NATURA BONI*

St. Albert the Great was an enthusiast of Aristotelian thought, "the first to cite Aristotle so abundantly when treating of moral questions."¹⁵ It is also interesting that "Albert was the first to insert a treatment on the natural virtues in a theological work."¹⁶ Albert sometimes refers to these natural moral virtues as civil virtues and gives an ample treatment of the cardinal virtues in his theological writings. It is important to recognize that "Albert's treatment of the natural virtues included in *De natura boni* and *De bono* will remain an isolated effort until St. Thomas, who will

¹³ *Ibidem*, tome III, II partie, cit., p. 593: "De son maître, saint Thomas reprend d'ailleurs plusieurs thèses spéciales: le concept de l'acte humain conçu comme la conjugaison de la volonté, cause efficiente, e de la raison, cause formelle; le concept de syndérèse conçue comme résidant dans la raison pratique, et non dans la volonté, comme on l'avait unanimement prétendu avant Albert; le concept de conscience, conçue comme conclusion d'un syllogisme dont la syndérèse constitue la majeure; la thèse de l'imputabilité comme faute vénielle des mouvements indélélibérés de l'appétit sensitif. Mais à l'occasion Thomas se sépare d'Albert: je cite d'Albert sur le libre arbitre conçu comme faculté distincte de la raison et de la volonté, tandis que pour saint Thomas, il n'est autre que la volonté; citons encore l'indifférence morale de certains actes *in concreto* admise par Albert, tandis que saint Thomas, dès son Commentaire, nie la possibilité d'une telle indifférence."

¹⁴ L.J. ELDERS, *Santo Thomas de Aquino y los Padres de la Iglesia*, cit., p. 62: "San Alberto Magno dedicó mucho tiempo al estudio de las obras de los grandes doctores latinos."

¹⁵ A. CANAVERO, *Introduzione*, in Albert the Great (saint), "Il bene", Rusconi, Milan 1987, p. 11: "Fu il primo a citare così largamente Aristotele trattando di questioni morali."

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 20: "fu Alberto il primo ad inserire un trattato sulle virtù naturali in un'opera teologica."

again take up the theme, completing it, in his treatment of the virtues in the *Prima Secundae*.¹⁷

“The *Tractatus de natura boni* is [...] the earliest of Albert the Great’s works to reach us. Though it is not listed in the old catalogues of Albert’s works, there is no doubt of its authenticity. Regarding the date of composition, scholars agree that it was during 1236-1237, when Albert was a reader of theology in the Dominican convent of Regensburg¹⁸; it should consequently not be considered a writing that reflects the maturity of his moral thought. “In the *Tractatus de natura boni* and the *De bono*, Albert the Great speaks of the good especially from the moral perspective, that is, not from the ontological perspective of the *bonum* as transcendental, but seen in relation to human actions and to the virtues.”¹⁹ One must be attentive, however, since Albert frequently “jumps” with a certain facility from the moral to the ontological perspective.

Speaking of the generic goodness and evil of human acts, Albert says that “if [a] generically good [action] takes on evil circumstances, it certainly becomes evil, as with feeding a hungry person or a beggar so as to then boast about it, or similarly to kill someone who should be killed, but out of hatred or revenge, not observing the order of law. Conversely, a generic evil can become good, as when one gives to someone who shouldn’t be given to so as to be a prophet or to do penance, or kills someone who shouldn’t be killed because the judgment of a trial and the evidence against him requires it, even if in one’s conscience he knows the accused is innocent, and yet he is forced to put him to death who, according to the order of law, has been proven guilty based on the texts of the trial and the witnesses.”²⁰ Albert thus asserts that an action

¹⁷ *Ibidem*: “il trattato albertino sulle virtù naturali inserito nel *De natura boni* e nel *De bono* rimase un tentativo isolato fino a san Tommaso, che riprese il tema e lo completò nel suo trattato sulle virtù nella *Prima Secundae*.”

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 21: “Il *Tractatus de natura boni* è, come abbiamo detto, la più antica delle opere di Alberto Magno giunte a noi. Anche se non è ricordata negli antichi cataloghi delle opere di Alberto, non ci sono dubbi sulla autenticità. Per quel che riguarda la data di composizione, gli studiosi sono concordi nel fissarla nel biennio dal 1236 al 1237, quando Alberto era lettore di teologia nel convento domenicano di Ratisbona.”

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 11: “Nel *Tractatus de natura boni* e nel *De bono* Alberto Magno parla del bene soprattutto dal punto di vista morale, ossia non dal punto di vista ontologico, del *bonum* come trascendentale, ma visto in relazione alle azioni umane e alle virtù.”

²⁰ ALBERT THE GREAT (saint), *De natura boni*, in “Sancti doctoris Ecclesiae Alberti Magni Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum opera omnia”, t. 25, pars I, Aschendorff, Monasterii Westfolorum 1974, n. 17: “Si enim bonum in genere malas recipiat circumstantias, fiet utique male, ut reficere esurientem causa vanitatis et ut nutriatur histrio; similiter occidere occidendum propter livorem et vindictam non servato ordine iuris. E contrario autem malum in genere bene fit, ut dare, cui non dandum est, in nomine prophetae, et ut natura servetur ad paenitentiam, et occidere non-occidendum, quia sic poscunt allegata et probatio, quae est contra eum; iudex enim secundum allegata procedere cogitur, et ideo etiam conscientia sua sola sciente innocentiam occidere compellitur eum quem allegata et testimonia testium

that is good considered in itself, such as to give food to a hungry person, could become evil by the presence of evil circumstances, specifically for being ordered to evil ends such as “to boast” or “out of revenge,” ends which Albert considers to be within the circumstances of the act. Conversely, Albert also claims that what is ordinarily evil, considered in itself, can become good, which can happen when particular circumstances are present which seem to change the global sense that the action acquires in a particular context, a context which is changed by the presence of the circumstance, as when someone gives alms to fulfill a penance, even when he gives to someone who does not need help.

In another passage the holy bishop applies the concept of matter to the human act analogously. He says “just as in nature there is something prior that is the subject of natural forms – i.e., the matter – and it sometimes has a beautiful form and sometimes ugly, so it also happens that in moral realities, that is, in the actions of our will, there is an action that is subject to the circumstances, and that action is called good in general and evil in general when it assumes good or evil circumstances. Thus the generic good is only an action that falls on due matter (*materia debitam*), such as to give food to one who is hungry, to kill one who should be killed, or to free one who should be freed. In fact, the matter of the action is that which our action is about. Similarly, the generic evil is an act that falls on undue matter (*indebitam materiam*), such as giving food to one who is full, or killing someone who should not be killed.”²¹ With these words Albert seems to associate the matter with the object of the act. In fact he claims that “a person’s action is always measured by that about which he acts (*ea circa quae operatur*),”²² that is, it is always measured by its matter. For him, therefore, “this [generic] good consists in a right proportion of our action to the matter, that is, in relation to the thing about which we act (*circa quam operamur*); therefore, good is manifest in us when we do what we should do, and abandon what should be abandoned.”²³ In fact “in the *genus moris*, good is destroyed in two ways: when [for exam-

secundum iuris ordinem nocentem comprobaverunt.”

²¹ *Ibidem*: “Sicut in natura est res prima, quae est subiectum formarum naturalium, scilicet materia, et quandoque habet formam pulchram et quandoque turpem, sic etiam in moribus, in operibus scilicet voluntatis nostrae, est opus unum, quod est subiectum circumstantiis, et hoc dicitur bonum in genere et malum in genere et quandoque vestitur circumstantiis bonis, et quandoque malis etc. Sic bonum in genere est actus solus super materiam debitam, ut pascere esurientem et interficere interficiendum et liberare liberandum. Materia enim operis est id circa quod est opus nostrum. Similiter malum in genere est actus super indebitam materiam, ut reficere saturatum vel occidere non-occidendum.”

²² *Ibidem*, n. 19: “homo semper opera sua ad ea circa quae operatur, mensuret.”

²³ *Ibidem*, n. 18: “hoc bonum [in genere] consistat secundum proportionem debitam nostri operis ad materiam, idest ad rem, circa quam operamur, tunc in nobis se bonum ostendit, quando quod faciendum est, facimus, et dimittimus, quod dimittendum.”

ple] someone eats during a time of fast, since we omit what we must do and fail to give the soul what it needs; and it is destroyed by the poison of transgression, when we do what we should not do.”²⁴ Which is to say that moral good is destroyed both by evil actions and by omissions.

2. *DE BONO*

In *De bono*, a more extensive work, we find a fuller reflection on the morality of human acts. At the beginning of this treatise, St. Albert makes important distinctions concerning the various kinds of moral good. He says that

“the good in general is spoken of in two ways: first, as a habit, that is, because of the first power or the first subject in moral things and because of the general form. And second, with respect to its form, where it is spoken of in three ways. It can be taken in a general sense according to the number of individuals in which that form is, that is, when nothing underlies that good that is not good, and similarly for evil in general, when nothing is taken, as such, that is not evil. And in this way charity is a generic good, and adultery a generic evil. The good in general is also spoken of according to the capacity of the general form in itself; here it is licit to consider something in it that isn’t good. Likewise, one speaks of the evil in general by the opposite, just as mercy is called good in general, even though to have compassion for a poor person who is under judgment would not be good. Likewise, to suffer over another’s prosperity is evil in general, although to suffer over another’s prosperity when that prosperity is an occasion of sin for him would not be evil. The third way in which we speak of the good in general is that the generic form of one individual can be better than the form of another, and thus we say that it is better to be a horse than a donkey, since an excellent horse is better than an excellent donkey, and in the same way we say that charity is generically better than temper-

²⁴ *Ibidem*: “bonum in genere moris dupliciter destruitur, quia etiam consumitur inedia, quando omittent, quod facere debemus, necessaria animae non ministramus, et occiditur veneno transgressionis, quando facimus, quod facere non debemus.”

ance.

Similarly, the good in itself is referred to in three ways, namely, according to that which in itself is opposed to that which is compared with something else. In fact we say that a thing is good both in itself and compared with something that is not good, and vice-versa, and according to what is said of it in itself with respect to its own nature, and that is opposed to that which is in something else not of the same nature, and according to that “in itself” it is opposed to what is other than itself, and therefore in itself it is good because the character of goodness in it is weak. An example of the first is riches, which are in fact a good in themselves, but in comparison to merit they are not good. An example of the second can be found in the second book of the *Sentences* of our master, where he says that the entire act is in itself good, but when joined to and informed by sin, it is evil. An example of the third is some good that derives from the circumstances, because its circumstances lack the nature of good.

The good *per se* must be distinguished in the same way. In fact here *per se* is not understood as in the demonstrations, where *per se* is spoken of in four ways, none of which interest us. Here, rather, *per se* is meant in two ways, according to the end and according to the form. In fact for Augustine, those actions that are joined to a good end are good *per se*. Similarly, those things that cannot be done badly are also called good *per se*, and these are good by their form (*ex forma*), which cannot be deformed. An example of the first is to give alms for [love of] God. An example of the second is to love God with the love of charity.

An action can be called good *secundum se* in two ways, that is, by its opposition to what is according to something else, and according to the nature of what is according to its own form. In the first way, the being of the good *secundum se* converges with the good in itself. In the second, it converges with the good *per se*. “In itself” and “*per se*,” then, have a relationship of inferior/superior: anything that is good *per se* is also good in itself, but the two are not convertible.

In fact, this is called good because of itself in two ways, that is, ac-

according to the nature of the end, and according to the opposition to what is caused by something else. And according to the first reason the good because of itself is convertible with the good *per se* in the first sense. According to the second reason, it is convertible with the honest good.”²⁵

Albert distinguishes here between the good *in genere*, *in se*, *per se*, and *secundum se*. In continuity with the doctrine set forth in *De natura boni*, the Dominican claims that “the good in general is that which can be done either well or badly,”²⁶ its goodness or evil depending on the due circumstances by which it is, or is not, accompanied. Also, “the good in itself can be done well or badly, and as such is called a

²⁵ IDEM, *De bono*, in “Sancti doctoris Ecclesiae Alberti Magni Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum episcopi opera omnia”, t. 28, Aschendorff, Monasterii Westfalorum 1951, trac. 1, q. 2, a. 6, n. 56: “bonum in genere in duabus modis dicitur, ut habitum est, scilicet pro potentia prima sive subiecto primo in moribus et pro generali forma. Et secundo modo dicitur tripliciter comparationem illius formae. Potest enim generalitas attendi secundum multitudinem individuorum, in quibus est forma illa, quando scilicet nihil est accipere sub bono illo, quod non sit bonum, et similiter malum in genere, quando nihil est accipere sub ipso, quod non sit malum. Et sic caritas est bonum in genere et adulterium malum in genere. Dicitur etiam bonum in genere secundum potestatem formae generalis in se, licet aliquid sit sub ipsa accipere, quod non sit bonum. Et similiter dicitur malum in genere per oppositum, sicut misericordia dicitur bonum in genere, cum tamen miseri pauperis in iudicio non sit bonum. Et similiter dolere de aliorum prosperitatibus est malum in genere, cum tamen dolere de aliorum prosperitate, quorum prosperitas est eis occasio peccati, non sit malum. Tertio modo dicitur bonum in genere, cuius forma generalis magis potest in individuum unum quam forma alterius, sicut dicimus equum meliorem esse asino, eo quod optimus equus optimo asino melior est. Et sic dicimus meliorem in genere caritatem quam temperantiam.

Similiter bonum in se dicitur tribus modis, scilicet secundum quod in se opponitur ei quod est comparatum ad aliud. Dicimus enim aliquid in se bonum et comparatum ad aliud non bonum, et e converso, et secundum quod in se dicit considerationem propriae naturae et opponitur ei quod est coniunctum alii quod non est de natura sua, et secundum quod in se opponitur ei quod est extra se, et tunc in se est bonum, quod rationem boni claudit in se. Exemplum primi est essem divitem; hoc enim est bonum in se, sed comparatum ad meritum non est bonum, eo quod inclinatur ad malum; et e converso pati tribulationem in se non est bonum, comparatum autem ad meritum est bonum. Exemplum secundi est in II Sententiarum positum a Magistro, ubi dicit, quod omnis actus in se est bonus, coniunctus tamen informati peccati est malus. Exemplum tertii est bonum quolibet ex circumstantia, quod in suis circumstantiis claudit rationem boni.

Eodem modo distinguendum est in eo quod est bonum *per se*. Non enim accipitur hic *per se* sicut in demonstrativis, ubi *per se* dicitur quattuor modis, de quibus nihil ad propositum. Sed *per se* dicitur hic secundum duos modos, scilicet ex fine et ex forma. Dicuntur enim bona *per se* secundum Augustinum, quae coniuncta sunt bono fini. Similiter dicuntur *per se* bona, quae non possunt male fieri, et illa sunt bona ex forma, eo quod non possunt deformari. Exemplum primi est dare eleemosynam propter Deum; exemplum secundi est deligere Deum ex caritate.

Secundum se bona sunt duabus modis, scilicet secundum oppositionem ad id quod est secundum aliud, et secundum rationem eius quod est secundum propriam formam. Et secundum primam rationem esse convertitur bonum secundum se cum bono in se. Secundum aliam autem convertitur cum bono *per se*. In se autem et *per se* sic se habent sicut inferius et superius; quidquid enim est bonum *per se*, est etiam bonum in se, sed non convertitur.

Hoc vero dicitur bonum propter se, duobus modis dicitur, scilicet secundum rationem finis et secundum oppositionem ad id quod est propter aliud. Et secundum rationem primam convertitur bonum propter se cum bono *per se* de prima significatione. Secundum secundam autem convertitur cum honesto.”

²⁶ *Ibidem*, a. 4, n. 53: “bonum in genere est, quod potest bene et male fieri.”

generic good.”²⁷ The situation seems to be different for the good *per se*, which it seems cannot be done badly, given that it also includes the rectitude of the *finis operantis* and not only the good *in genere* of the action; Albert in fact claims that “every *per se* good is good in itself.”²⁸ But *per se* can also refer to the form of a virtue, which is necessarily good *per se*, and he thus says that “the good *per se* in the second sense cannot be done badly.”²⁹

For Albert, the idea that “the good *per se* and the evil *per accidens* are not mutually opposed must be said to be false, if the good *per se* is said regarding the form and the evil *per accidens* is said regarding what is contrary to that form.”³⁰ For example, the goodness *per se* of chastity is opposed to the evil of adultery, which *per se* procures sexual pleasure but *per accidens* involves an opposition to the form of chastity. Regarding the goodness *secundum se* of an act, this seems to be not much different than goodness *per se*. Indeed, the former also requires an integral good, that is, the goodness of all the circumstances and of the *finis operantis*; along these lines Albert says that “rectitude of the circumstances and of the end is virtue *secundum se*.”³¹

Speaking of how the expression *materia debita* should be understood in the context of the human act, he says that “the *materia debita* of the sexual act is not the woman. Likewise, the *materia debita* of the act of killing is not the person. Actually, [*materia debita*] is said of killing someone who should be killed, and of uniting sexually with one’s own wife; here ‘who should be killed’ and ‘one’s own’ are important circumstances, through which these acts are related to special virtues, i.e., to justice and conjugal chastity.”³² Here St. Albert uses the category of *materia debita* to refer to those circumstances that are necessary for the goodness of a particular kind of act. It is in this sense that he says that one’s own wife is the *materia debita* of the sexual act. It would make no sense to say that “one’s own wife” is the *materia debita* of the act of the will. Rather, the object or the matter of the act of the will is, in this case, not merely one’s own wife, but sexual union with one’s own wife. And it is only in this way that the act is related to the virtue of conjugal chastity.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, a. 6, n. 57: “bonum in se potest bene et male fieri, et cum dicitur bonum in genere.”

²⁸ *Ibidem*: “omne bonum per se est bonum in se.”

²⁹ *Ibidem*: “bonum per se in secunda significatione non potest male fieri.”

³⁰ *Ibidem*: “bonum per se et malum per accidens non opponuntur, dicendum, quod hoc falsum est, si bonum per se accipiat per formam et malum per accidens dicat accidens contrarium illi formae.”

³¹ *Ibidem*, q. 5, a. 1, n. 111: “rectitudo circumstantiae et finis est virtutis secundum se.”

³² *Ibidem*, q. 2, a. 4, n. 53: “Concubitus enim debita materia non est mulier. Similiter occisionis materia debita non est homo. Si vero dicatur occidere occidendum et concumbere cum sua, per li ‘occidendum’ et per li ‘sua’ importabuntur circumstantiae, per quas trahuntur actus isti ad speciales virtutes, scilicet ad iustitiam et ad continentiam coniugalem.”

Regarding “those who ask about those things, the mere name of which indicates to be evil, one must say that these things are inseparable from an evil end. Now the end is twofold, i.e., either of the action (*finis operis*) or of the agent (*finis operantis*), and here we are referring to the *finis operis*. Adultery is in fact joined to an evil end, even if the agent has a good intention, and it cannot be done well.”³³ This distinction between the *finis operis* and the *finis operantis* is important, and since “the form in moral realities derives from the end,”³⁴ Albert is saying that adultery is intrinsically joined to an evil *finis operis*, independently of its *finis operantis*, and it is this form that corrupts the will. Along these lines he also says that “some [actions] are evil in themselves, without exception, such as to steal, to commit adultery and the like; others are evil for another reason or *per accidens*, as was eating the forbidden apple, and can be exempted from the precept by the one who issued it.”³⁵ Actions that have an evil *finis operis* are therefore evil in themselves.

On the question of whether the difference between the virtues of generosity and magnificence is only a material difference or if it is a specific difference, the Dominican responds by saying that “virtues and vices differ by their matter, which is the end of the intention. Therefore what is accidental in things may perfectly well be the end of the intention, because intentionally it is what is principally willed; and given that it is from the end that the *ratio* is derived, [this] would be the specifying difference of the will and of the intention joined to these ends. Therefore, the generous person has the intention to give because someone needs his gifts; the magnificent person, on the other hand, has the intention of giving large gifts precisely as large, and thus generosity and magnificence are of different species.”³⁶ From this follow some very important ideas. According to Albert, the will is morally specified by the ends to which it tends and not according to the material element implied in those ends, since if the latter were true then generosity and magnificence would be of the same moral species. In fact they are specified according to the *ratio* of the ends to which they deliberately

³³ *Ibidem*, a. 6, n. 57: “ad id quod quaeritur de his quae mox nominata sunt mala, dicendum, quod illa sunt ea quae inseparabilia sunt a malo fine. Est autem duplex finis, scilicet operis et operantis, et intelligitur hic de fine operis. Adulterium enim adeo coniunctum est malo fini, quod etiam si bonum intendit operans, non potest bene fieri.”

³⁴ *Ibidem*: “forma autem in moribus est a fine.”

³⁵ *Ibidem*, trac. 3, q. 2, a. 7, n. 259: “quaedam sunt in se mala, et haec non capiunt dispensationem, sicut furari et adulterari et huiusmodi, quaedam autem sunt mala per aliud vel per accidens, sicut fuit comestio pomi vetiti, et talia recipiunt dispensationem praecipue ad eisdem qui ediderunt.”

³⁶ *Ibidem*, trac. 1, q. 5, a. 2, n. 118: “virtutes et vitia diferunt per materiam, quae est finis intentionis. Unde quod est accidens rei, bene potest esse finis intentionis, quia principaliter est intentum. Et cum a fine sumatur ratio, erit differentia specificativa voluntatem et intentionum penes huiusmodi fines. Unde liberalis intendit dare, prout oportet in donis quibuscumque, magnificus autem in magnis, in quantum magna sunt, et sic liberalitas est magnificentia differunt specie.”

tend. The *ratio finis* of generosity is specifically distinct from the *ratio finis* of magnificence, since by generosity we are disposed to donate our goods *as needed by others*, whereas with magnificence we are disposed to donate our goods to others *precisely as a large gift*. Different moral ends give rise to specifically different virtues.

Another interesting point is the comparison of the theologian's moral perspective with that of the philosopher. Albert says that "for the theologian, nothing is indifferent in actions that the will does deliberately, but it can happen that for the ethicist something indifferent may be done, and this because, for the ethicist, no virtues come into play, which are the principal causes in all voluntary acts, but each one moves with respect to its matter."³⁷ The holy Dominican doctor seems to claim here that there may be concrete actions that relate to none of the natural moral virtues, and are thus of no interest from the ethical perspective, but these indifferent actions are nonetheless relevant for the theologian, perhaps because he considers not only the natural moral virtues, but above all the infused theological virtues by which all human action is ordered to our supernatural end. In this case an act that is indifferent from the ethical perspective would not be so from the theological perspective, because it is carried out, or not, in the grace of God, i.e., it is necessarily ordered or disordered with respect to the final supernatural end.

3. *SUPER DIONYSIUM DE DIVINIBUS NOMINIBUS*

As we have already said, the commentary on the *De divinis nominibus* written by St. Albert at Cologne would leave an important mark on his disciple Thomas, so much so that Aquinas himself would later write a commentary on Pseudo-Dionysius's work.

Perhaps the central idea that Albert received from the Areopagite was the doctrine of evil as the privation of a due good. Thus, following Pseudo-Dionysius, the Dominican comments that

“evil causes nothing as evil, but as the good with which it is mixed.

If we consider the act of lust, which is the cause of evil habits, as an act, it is good; it in fact proceeds from the love in the soul, which in

³⁷ *Ibidem*, q. 2, a. 7, n. 59: “nihil esse indifferens in operibus voluntatis cum deliberatione factis secundum theologum, licet secundum ethicum aliquid indifferens possit invenire. Et hoc est ideo, quia secundum ethicum nulla virtus ponitur, quae sit generale movens ad omnes actus voluntarios, sed unaquaeque movet in sua materia.”

turn derives from an external object, the pleasure of touch in venereal things, and this is the first cause. When we say that it is good, we are not speaking of moral good, but of natural good. The good is said of that by which a given thing reaches its due perfection, according to its genus. Therefore, according to this definition, the pleasure of that good is in its nature, because it belongs to the perfection of the nature itself. Also, this natural love is good insofar as it attains the end to which it tends, and from this it produces the habit, which is good in its nature, according to which the acts can be produced. In all of these things the evil occurs by the separation from the end on which the *moral* good depends, which happens because of the enjoyment of these pleasures; because in fact the pleasure is taken as an end, but since it is not possible that there be two final ends, it happens that the pleasure itself becomes the cause of the separation from the end that determines the moral good, a separation which causes it to cease to be good and puts pleasure first; and something similar occurs with the love of other things. It is thus evident that all evil is based in a good that is imperfect due to the privation of the perfection from which its [moral] good derives; and not because it is a small good, or that the good is not good in an absolute sense, but it is not so under a particular aspect, just as with a dead person. And as that evil is in that good, the evil is caused and is a cause; indeed as being evil [considered in isolation] it is not willed, nor can it move to action; nor does anyone will the separation from the [moral] good, but this happens by the privation which realizes the [particular] good that is imperfect, and therefore lacks the moral goodness which is said of union with the final end, which is *per se* the end of the will.”³⁸

³⁸ IDEM, *Super Dionysium De divinis nominibus*, in “Sancti doctoris Ecclesiae Alberti Magni Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum episcopi opera omnia”, t. 37, Aschendorff, Monasterii Westfalorum 1972, cap. 4, n. 167: “malum, secundum quo est malum, nullius est generativum, sed secundum bonum, cui admiscetur. Si enim consideretur actus luxuriae, qui est generativus mali habitus, in quantum actus, bonum est; procedit enim ab amore, qui est in anima, qui iterum efficitur ab obiecto extra, quod est delectabile tactus in venereis, et hoc est primum movens. Cum autem haec dicimus esse bona, non intendimus de bono moris, sed de bono naturae. Bonum namque dicitur ex eo quod unumquodque attingit perfectionem debitam secundum suum genus. Secundum hoc igitur et delectabile illud bonum est in natura sua, quia attingit propriae naturae perfectionem. Amor etiam ille in natura bonum est, secundum quod est motum et perfectum suo obiecto, et sic etiam actus exterior bonus est, secundum quod attingit finem,

Here Albert stresses that moral evil is the privation of a due perfection caused by preferring a particular good *secundum quid*, which necessarily involves the privation of the due perfection and consequently disorder with respect to the final end. Using a different example, we could say that someone who steals a car is not attracted to that action by the disorder of stealing considered in itself, because “no one who acts tends to evil as an end,”³⁹ but is attracted to the action by the good that possessing the car would be for him. It is this desire which leads the thief to disregard a perfection required of him as a human being – to live in a just relationship with his neighbors –, since by his choice he shows that he prefers to possess the car and so become unjust, to being a just person without the car. Albert also implicitly claims that disorder of the will in relation to one of the moral virtues necessarily separates the person from the realization of the final end of the will. In our example, Albert would say that one who steals out of a desire to possess makes temporal goods his final end, and consequently necessarily separates himself from the true happiness that can only be realized in loving communion with God. It is in this sense that he says that “the evil end is a certain good under a particular aspect and according to the intention of the agent, but as it separates him from the true end, it becomes evil absolutely,”⁴⁰ because it causes the loss of the highest suitable good.

Albert also holds that “the good has the nature of an end,”⁴¹ and that “the end is that which is intentionally desired *per se*.”⁴² Moral evil is always the privation of a due end that is joined to a given particular good, and in this sense we can say that the apparent good is the cause of moral evil. Obviously, however, “the good is not *per se*

ad quem est. Et ex hac parte generat habitum, qui etiam bonus est in sua natura, secundum quod potest producere actuum. In his autem omnibus incidit malum per separationem a fine, a quo est bonum morale, quae incidit per fruitionem illius delectabilis; quia enim delectabile illud accipitur ut finis, cum impossibile sit esse duos fines ultimos, accidit sibi esse separativum a fine determinante bonum in moribus, qua separatione remota esset bonum et ordinabile in primum delectabile; et similiter est de amore et de omnibus aliis. Unde patet, quod omne malum fundatur in bono imperfecto per privationem perfectionis, a qua est illud bonum, non quia sit parvum bonum, et illud non est bonum simpliciter, sed secundum quid, sicut mortuus homo. In quantum tamen malum est in illo bono, malum est generatum et generans; in quantum enim est malum, non est intentum nec virtutem habet agendi; neque enim separationem a bono aliquis intendit, sed incidit ex aliquali adhesionem ad aliud bonum. Nec privatio agere potest, sed virtus activa fundatur in subiecto privationis, quod bonum est, licet imperfectum, et ideo non bonitate moris, quod dicitur secundum conjunctionem ad ultimum finem qui est per se finis voluntatis.”

³⁹ *Ibidem*, n. 217: “nullus in operando respicit ad malum sicut ad finem.”

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*: “finis mali est bonum quidem secundum quid et secundum intentionem agentis, sed in quantum separat a vero fine, efficitur malus simpliciter.”

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, n. 57: “bonum autem habet rationem finis.”

⁴² *Ibidem*, n. 157: “finis est, quod per se intenditur.”

the cause of evil, but of the good.”⁴³ It is the privation of a due good that causes evil in the will.

It is important to remember that, for the holy doctor, “the good and being are convertible as considered ontologically, but not as intentions.”⁴⁴ When he says, therefore, that “an act is determined according to its objects,”⁴⁵ it is important to bear in mind that an “object” from the moral perspective is not an “object” considered metaphysically. As we have already mentioned, objects of the will are ends to which the will tends. Along these lines he also says that “by union with the due end someone is good, and any way by which someone departs from that end would be evil.”⁴⁶ Then, “the object can be considered in two ways, either as moving an absolute power, or by comparison with the cause in virtue of which it has the capacity to move,”⁴⁷ that is, we can speak of the object in relation to the powers of the soul, in this case referring to the objects of the virtues that perfect the various operative faculties of the person, or we can speak of the object of a concrete act as it proceeds from a given virtue.

As we have already seen, for St. Albert, “in moral things the cognition of the end is central, since the difference that specifically determines each habit is taken from the end, and thus it occurs that the virtuous habit, as the Philosopher says, is always joined to a good end,”⁴⁸ that is, it has an object that is suitable to the person as a human being. In fact, “virtue perfects the soul and reason with respect to the end, to which the soul is naturally disposed and in potency, and therefore the propensity to virtue is natural in reason, for the formation of the virtues and for a certain beginning of them, in the same way that an egg is proportioned to the beginning of the animal form and is the ‘way’ to arrive at an animal. Therefore the closer reason is to virtue the more perfect it is, and the more it departs from the end to which it is ordered by virtue, the more it tends to its corruption. To the degree to which vice departs from that end, therefore, it is the cause of [reason’s] corruption and not its perfection, even if it unites with a certain end, but fights against reason itself.”⁴⁹ It can be said, there-

⁴³ *Ibidem*, n. 153: “bonum non est per se causa mali, sed boni.”

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, n. 172: “bonum et ens convertuntur secundum supposita, sed non secundum intentiones.”

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, n. 139: “actus determinetur secundum obiecta.”

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, n. 213: “per conjunctionem ad finem debitum unum est bonum; quocumque autem modo divertatur ab illo, erit malum.”

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, n. 132: “Obiectum autem potest duplice considerari: aut secundum quod movet potentiam simpliciter, aut secundum comparisonem ad causam, a qua virtutem movendi habet.”

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, n. 161: “in moribus potissima est cognitio per finem, eo quod differentia completiva uniuscuiusque habitus in specie sumitur a fine; sunt enim habitus virtutum, ut dicit Philosophus, semper coniuncti bono fini.”

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, n. 163: “virtus perficit animam et rationem ad finem, ad quem naturaliter est in potentia et disposita; et ideo in ratione est naturaliter proportio ad virtutem et seminarium virtutis et inchoatio qua-

fore, that for St. Albert there is in human reason a natural inclination to the virtuous ends, even if these are only a beginning, a disposition to be able to acquire the various virtuous habits. In this sense vice “fights” with reason in that it “undermines” these beginnings of virtue that reason possesses naturally, and once that battle is won by vice it leads to the corruption of reason, i.e., its disorientation “against nature” with respect to the natural moral virtues.

4. *SUPER ETHICAM*

We know that “at the point when he was preparing to write the moral part of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas considered things from the ground up: he began with a reading and written commentary on the work of Aristotle, and also reviewed the commentary of his old master Albert.”⁵⁰ It is not surprising then that there is a certain dependency between Aquinas’s moral doctrine and Albert’s *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*. Indeed, we find many statements in Albert’s commentary with which Aquinas’s moral writings are in substantial continuity.

Speaking of the nature of ethics, St. Albert says that “ethics does not treat of the actions of oxen or donkeys, but of people, and not as animals, but as people,”⁵¹ meaning that ethics considers human action precisely as human, that is, as proceeding from reason and will, and from this perspective human action is fundamentally different than that of oxen and donkeys. Indeed “practical reason is proper to and an excellence of [the human person] himself,”⁵² and therefore “the specificity of human action must be according to that which is properly his and excellent in itself [...], but practical reason is proper to the human person, and therefore his actions must follow it, and in this consists happiness.”⁵³ To act humanly for Albert is to act using reason, which has a

edam ipsius, sicut in semine est proportio et inchoatio formae animalis et est via ad animal. Et ideo ratio, quanto magis appropinquat virtuti, magis perfecta est, et quando magis elongatur a fine, ad quem ordinatur per virtutem, tendit ad corruptionem. Et ideo, quia vitium elongat a fine illo, est corrumpens ipsam et non perficiens, quamvis coniungat cuidam fini, sed pugnat contra ipsam.”

⁵⁰ J.-P. TORRELL, *Initiation à Saint Thomas d’Aquin*, cit., p. 335: “Au moment où il s’appête à rédiger la partie morale de la *Somme de théologie*, Thomas reprend les choses à fond: il procède à une lecture commentée par écrit de l’oeuvre d’Aristote, il revoit aussi le Commentaire de son ancien maître Albert.”

⁵¹ ALBERT THE GREAT (saint), *Super Ethica*, cit., prol., n. 40: “moralis scientia non est circa operationis bovis vel asini, sed hominis, non in quantum animal, sed in quantum homo.”

⁵² *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 8, n. 40: “ratio practica est proprium et optimum in ipso [homine].”

⁵³ *Ibidem*: “Proprium opus hominis debet esse secundum id quod est proprium sibi et optimum in ipso, ut probatum est primo; sed proprium et optimum in homine est ratio operativa; ergo secundum hoc inest sibi opus suum, quod est felicitas.”

natural rectitude in relation to the end⁵⁴ and also naturally grasps the various human goods. Along these lines he says that “the seeds of the virtues are in the nature of reason,”⁵⁵ and therefore “all of the good of the person derives from reason,”⁵⁶ which knows the ends, to a greater or lesser degree, that realize human nature as such. It is also in virtue of reason that the person is capable of ordering his concrete choices in view of the virtuous life, disposing him to happiness. In this sense Albert says that “the work of the person consists in the order of reason,”⁵⁷ “reason, whose task it is to order a particular thing to the end.”⁵⁸

Therefore “from the nature of the end, a person is oriented in the choice of those things that are in view of the end,”⁵⁹ and consequently “a choice cannot exist, as regards its power of choice, without the intellect, that is, without the practical reason, nor without the moral habits that incline the appetite.”⁶⁰ Albert recognizes that for a virtuous choice to be effected the right ordering of practical reason is not enough; the will must also be well-disposed through the virtues that incline to suitable goods. In fact “voluntariness is common both to choice, which is said regarding those things that are for the end, and to the will, which is said with respect to the end.”⁶¹ Virtuous ends are desired voluntarily through the moral virtues, along with the choices that lead to them.

Another central idea is that of “our will is free, and not determined to one thing only.”⁶² Everything that has the nature of a good can be willed, even when it simultaneously includes the privation of a due good, i.e. an evil. Here is the root of the *liberum arbitrium* that St. Albert, contrary to St. Thomas, considers a different faculty than reason and will. Acts that proceed from reason and will can be good or evil from the moral perspective. Along these lines Albert says that “choice is said with respect to a good action or to what is contrary to it, that is, to a vicious action.”⁶³

⁵⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, lect. 16, n. 92: “ratio semper recta est et ad optima quantum ad finem, ad quem dirigitur” (reason is always straight and excellent towards the end to which is headed).

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, lect. 12, n. 74: “semina virtutum sunt in natura rationis.”

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, lib. 6, lect. 18, n. 590: “totum bonum hominis manat a ratione.”

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 8, n. 40: “opus hominis consistit in ordine rationis.”

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, lib. 3, lect. 11, n. 220: “rationem, cuius est ordinare unumquodque ad finem.”

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, lib. 6, lect. 7, n. 509: “ex ratione finis dirigitur aliquis in his quae ad finem sunt.”

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, lect. 3, n. 485: “electio non potest esse quantum ad vim electionis sine intellectu, idest mente practica, neque sine morali habitu, qui inclinatur in appetitu.”

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, lib. 3, lect. 1, n. 153: “voluntarium est communius quam electio, quae est eorum quae sunt ad finem, et quam voluntas, quae est finis.”

⁶² *Ibidem*, lect. 6, n. 190: “voluntas in nobis libera est et non determinata ad unum.”

⁶³ *Ibidem*, lib. 6, lect. 3, n. 485: “electio est de actione bona vel contrario in actione, scilicet de actione vitiosa.”

Another important distinction that Albert takes from Aristotle is that between *poiesis* and *praxis*. Albert says that “in moral action [*praxis*] the end is always the action, in things that are transformed [*poiesis*] the end is sometimes the thing realized, and sometimes the transforming action.”⁶⁴ Thus according to Albert it should be emphasized that “there is a difference between acting [*praxis*] and making [*poiesis*]. Indeed to act, according to the Philosopher, is here considered as an action: it is the operation, which can be an end. But to make is always ordered to something else, in fact to make is said regarding the operation of the arts, [...] but to act refers to the operation of virtue, which is not in view of some external thing but in view of one’s own good [...] because in these operations [the virtues] themselves are the ends of the habits.”⁶⁵ Therefore “action [*praxis*] is said, not of the act from which the transformation of matter proceeds, but of the operation itself, to which, through the act, it is mixed with the movement, as are virtuous actions.”⁶⁶ Ethics is thus interested in human *praxis*, in an effort to determine what ends/actions lead to happiness, to a virtuous life, to good *praxis*. The study of good *poiesis*, i.e. the best way to transform reality, falls to the arts and not to ethics. The latter, in fact, is not primarily concerned with the “output” of the human act, but with determining what ends and actions make the person as such good.

a) *The centrality of virtue*

The concept of virtue is central for Albert, as it is in Aristotle.⁶⁷ For the Dominican “virtue falls under the definition of happiness; therefore the former is prior to the latter. And it does not fall as a formal difference, but material.”⁶⁸ The virtues are thus like dispositions to happiness, necessary conditions that it may exist. According to Al-

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 9, n. 45: “in agibilibus semper finis est operatio, in factibilibus operatum quandoque et quandoque operatio.”

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, lib. 6, lect. 3, n. 479: “diferentia est inter agere est facere. Agere enim, secundum Philosophum hic accipit actum, est operatio, quae potest esse finis. Sed facere semper ordinatur ad alterum; pertinet enim facere ad operationem artium, quarum et operationes et operata, quae apotelesmata sunt, ordinantur ad quendam usum vitae sicut ad finem. Sed agere refertur ad operationem virtutis, quae non est propter aliquid ad extra, sed propter bonum proprium, ut dicitur in tertio de fortitudine, quia in illa operationes ipsae sunt fines habitum.”

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, lib. 2, lect. 2, n. 109: “Agibilia autem dicuntur secundum actionem, quae non procedit ad transmutandam materiam, sed est propria operatio rei, cui per actum admiscetur motus, sicut sunt opera virtutum.”

⁶⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, lib. 7, lect. 9, n. 656: “omnia opera moralia veniatur in virtutes” (all moral actions are resumed in virtues).

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 1, n. 7: “virtus cadit in diffinitione felicitatis; ergo prius de ea. Et dicendum, quod non cadit sicut formalis differentia, sed sicut materialis.”

bert “all virtue is according to right reason,”⁶⁹ and thus it is important to emphasize that the moral virtues “are among those goods that are rationally attractive.”⁷⁰ This does not mean that the virtues are a pure construction of human reason. This is not Albert’s position, given his assertion that “even if the virtues do not derive from nature, by the fact that they are perfections of nature they have a certain relation with nature,”⁷¹ since “in nature there are natural aptitudes in view of moral perfection”⁷²; that is, the foundation on which the virtues are formed is given by nature. This being so, it can also be said that “no virtue is contrary to the other virtues, since all virtue is according to right reason, in which there is no contradiction,”⁷³ but rather order, in view of happiness. It is not surprising, then, that St. Albert says that “happiness is human action according to the best of the virtues,”⁷⁴ thus emphasizing that happiness consists in the virtuous life.

Following the Stagirite, the great Dominican doctor attributes a central role to prudence. For him prudence “is essentially an intellectual virtue, but moral with respect to its matter.”⁷⁵ It perfects right deliberation, guiding all human action in view of the virtues. In a few words it can be said that “prudence, [...] directs all the other virtues.”⁷⁶ In this sense Albert says that “one who has prudence, has all the virtues,”⁷⁷ since “prudence is the conductor of the virtues; just as reason rules the other powers, so prudence rules the other virtues”.⁷⁸ it is the guide that lights the way.

At the same time St. Albert acknowledges the dependence of prudence on the other virtues. “Prudence is the director in the works of the moral virtues, and therefore it is necessary that it have principles according to the moral virtues,”⁷⁹ since it would be impossible for it to lead us to something that it does not know. In this sense Albert acknowledges that “prudence could not exist without moral virtue,”⁸⁰ since the virtues

⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, lib. 4, lect. 2, n. 259: “omnis virtus est secundum rectam rationem.”

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 16, n. 92: “[virtutes morales] sunt in rationali persuasibili.”

⁷¹ *Ibidem*, lib. 4, lect. 7, n. 290: “licet virtutes non sint a natura, in quantum tamen sunt perfectiones naturae, habent aliquam relationem ad naturam.”

⁷² *Ibidem*, lib. 8, lect. 12, n. 760: “ad perfectiones morales sunt in natura naturales aptitudines.”

⁷³ *Ibidem*, lib. 4, lect. 8, n. 294: “Nulla virtus contrariatur alii virtuti, cum omnis virtus sit secundum rationem rectam, in qua non est contrarietas.”

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 8, n. 41: “felicitas sit opus hominis secundum optimam virtutum.”

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, lib. 6, lect. 7, n. 511: “[prudentia] est intellectualis virtus essentialiter, sed quantum ad materiam moralis.”

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 15, n. 88: “prudentia, cuius actus est felicitas, dirigit omnes alias virtutes.”

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, lect. 8, n. 43: “qui habeat prudentiam, habeat omnem virtutem.”

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, lib. 6, lect. 7, n. 510: “prudentia est auriga virtutum; sicut enim ratio regit alias potentias, sic prudentia alias virtutes.”

⁷⁹ *Ibidem*, lib. 10, lect. 13, n. 910: “Prudentia autem est directiva in operibus moralium virtutum, et ideo oportet, quod habeat principia secundum morales virtutes.”

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, lib. 6, lect. 17, n. 587: “prudentia non potest esse sine virtute morali.”

form the ends to which prudence directs us. If on the one hand the virtues cannot exist without prudence, on the other hand Albert recognizes that prudence cannot exist without the virtues, since it is in view of these that it guides action.

It is clear that “happiness depends on the exercise of prudence, [...] and it is necessary that all of the virtues be included in happiness.”⁸¹ Also “prudence is said only with respect to human goods, and the operations of the moral virtues, which pertain to human life, are called human goods.”⁸² The moral virtues “are reducible to the order of reason, participating in it by another and not of themselves,”⁸³ that is, the moral virtues participate in the order of reason because of prudence. By prudence “the order of reason is inserted into all of the inferior powers, and similarly it determines the measure and gives the form to all the other virtues.”⁸⁴ Indeed for Albert, “prudence is extremely perfect according to goodness, because it gives to all the form of the good, since through it the mean is given in all things.”⁸⁵

Linked to the centrality of prudence in St. Albert’s thought is the centrality of choice. For him “choice is an act of a single power, called *liberum arbitrium*, which is a power distinct from reason and will, though participating in something of both.”⁸⁶ As we have pointed out, St. Thomas distances himself from his master on this point, asserting that choice is essentially an elicited act of the will, and not postulating the existence of *liberum arbitrium* as a power distinct from reason and will. According to Albert “to choose is an act of the *liberum arbitrium*, which is a ‘middle’ power between reason and will and which possesses something of both, but is formal with respect to what proceeds from the will.”⁸⁷ Choice, however, being principally a movement of the will, is “charged” with rationality, and for this reason Albert also stresses that “actions do not generate the virtues unless they are done in a rational way, and this rationality is present in actions through choice. Choice is the first of the virtuous

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 8, n. 43: “felicitas est secundum operationem prudentiae, qua aliquis regit se et alios, oportet, quod in felicitate congregentur omnes virtutes.”

⁸² *Ibidem*, lib. 6, lect. 7, n. 513: “prudentia est tantum circa humana bona, et dicuntur humana bona operationes virtutum moralium, quae sunt circa humana vitam.”

⁸³ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 8, n. 40: “[virtutes] reductae sunt ad ordinem rationis, participantem ipsam ab alio et non per se.”

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, lect. 15, n. 86: “rationis ordo ponitur in omnibus potentiis inferioribus, et similiter prudentia determinat medium et dat formam omnibus aliis virtutibus.”

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, lect. 8, n. 42: “prudentia est perfectissima secundum bonitatem, quia dat omnibus formam boni, quia per ipsam datur medium in omnibus.”

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, lib. 3, lect. 4, n. 173: “electio est actus unius potentiae, quae dicitur liberum arbitrium, quae est alia potentia a ratione et a voluntate, participans tamen aliquid utriusque.”

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, lect. 5, n. 180: “eligere est actus liberi arbitrii, quod est potentia media inter rationem et voluntatem habens aliquid ab utraque, sed formale in ipso est illud quod est voluntatis.”

realities, and the action is almost like a proximate and instrumental agent. Moral judgment for the most part derives from choice.”⁸⁸ There is therefore a rational judgment present in choice. Along these lines Albert also distinguishes two perspectives from which choice can be considered. He says that “choice, with respect to what is said of a particular art, is proper to prudence, but as being in use it is incorporated into the act of prudence and in the nature of all the virtues, and this is in the highest degree proper to all the virtues, because from this they have the form of virtue.”⁸⁹ Choice is therefore an act of prudence insofar as it is something ordered in view of the end, and it is simultaneously an act of a particular virtue insofar as it is generated by it.

Virtuous choices repeated over time are absolutely necessary for the formation of virtuous habits. Beyond question “the first rectitude of human goods is in human nature, but perfection comes by repeated action.”⁹⁰ St. Albert also emphasizes that to choose virtuously does not mean to reject pleasures, saying that “the virtuous person does not flee pleasures absolutely, but only if they are exaggerated, whether by defect or excess”⁹¹ in relation to the virtuous mean which, as we have seen, is determined by prudence, i.e. by right reason. This being so, it must be said that “the joys of the virtuous are not only spiritual, but also corporal,”⁹² because there are many sensible pleasures that are in accord with virtue.

b) The specification of human acts

St. Albert also makes many important statements regarding the moral specification of human acts. For him “the final end does not give the species in moral things, but the closely connected (*coniunctus*) end that is taken for each act.”⁹³ Each act is specified by its proximate end. Thus it is “the will united to the end that gives the

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, lect. 4, n. 174: “operationes non generant virtutes, nisi in quantum habent modum rationis, hic autem modus ponitur in eis per electionem. Et electio est primum dans modum virtutis, et operatio est quasi agens propinquum et sicut instrumentum. Et iudicium in moribus est magis ab electione.”

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*: “electio, secundum quod dicit quandam artem, est proprium prudentiae, sed secundum quod est in usu, prout incorporatur operatio prudentiae et rationis omnibus virtutibus, sic est maxime proprium omnium virtutum, quia ab hoc habent formam virtutis.”

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, n. 186: “prima rectitudo humani boni est in natura humana, sed perfectio est per assuetudinem operum.”

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, lib. 7, lect. 12, n. 671: “virtuosus non fugit delectationes simpliciter, sed secundum quod sunt in extremo, vel per defectum vel per abundantiam.”

⁹² *Ibidem*, lib. 10, lect. 9, n. 886: “delectationes virtuosus non sunt tantum spirituales, sed etiam corporales.”

⁹³ *Ibidem*, lib. 3, lect. 10, n. 211: “finis ultimus non dat speciem in moralibus, sed coniunctus, qui accipitur per unumquodque actum.”

species in moral things.”⁹⁴ The great Dominican doctor recalls that “at times someone, by means of an evil that is the *finis operis*, intends to attain a good, but he never attains it. In this case, all that he tends to by the intention of the action, he does, but the same is not true for he who tends by his intention of agent to an evil, and not for a good, because from that intention of evil, he intends to despise [the good] and thus guilt increases.”⁹⁵ The idea is worth emphasizing that a vicious *finis operis* specifies the will, even when it has in view a virtuous *finis operantis*. What one intentionally desires in an act determines the kind of action one does.

There are, however, some cases in which the *finis operis* cannot easily be determined. For example, according to Albert, “homicide is a certain act, [...] expressive of its matter while it is obvious by its nature. The nature of killing never involves a *materia debita* the intention of which is to preserve life. But it can become *materia debita* because of the moral circumstances, such that to kill a wrongdoer becomes precisely a *bonum ex genere* and as such accomplishes an act of vindictive justice which is a particular species. Thus homicide, which is called *materia indebita* because it is to kill a person as a person, is always evil, but to kill a thief, who is a thief inasmuch as he is opposed to the good of human beings, is good.”⁹⁶ Here Albert seems to be saying that the *finis operis* of homicide is vicious because it is unjust, whereas the *finis operis* of *furicidium* (killing a thief) is virtuous because it is an act consistent with vindictive justice. The case is different with adultery, where Albert considers that such an act always necessarily has a vicious *finis operis*. He says that “adultery is always associated with an evil end, because it is an act which regards a *materia indebita*, and its usefulness is for something beyond itself, not of its nature as with homicide, and therefore it cannot become good, nor can it ever be done in a good way.”⁹⁷

Distinguishing between the various types of good, he says that

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, lib. 4, lect. 4, n. 273: “voluntas coniuncta fini dat speciem in moribus.”

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, lib. 5, lect. 9, n. 412: “aliquando aliquis per malum, quod est finis operis, intendit pervenire ad bonum, sed numquam perveniet. In omnibus igitur, quantum intenditur intentione operis, tantum fit, sed non, quantum intenditur intentione operantis in malis, et non in bonis, quia ex intentione mali intenditur contemptus, et sic crescit culpa.”

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, lib. 2, lect. 7, n. 141: “homicidium actus quidem est, ut in littera dicitur, consignificans materiam, ut est exhibita a natura; natura autem occisioni numquam materiam debitam praeparat, cuius intentio est conservare in vita. Sed efficitur debita per circumstantias morales, ut quando occidendus est perniciosus, et sic actus occisionis transiens in ipsum bonum ex genere, et secundum quod efficitur actus iustitiae vindicativae, quae est una specie eius. Unde homicidium, quod dicit indebitam materiam, quia est occisio hominis secundum quod homo, semper mala est, sed furicidium, quod est furis in quantum contrariatur saluti hominum, bonum est.”

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*: “adulterium semper coniunctum est a malo fini, quia est actus circa indebitam materiam, et illa utilitas est extra ipsum, non natura sua sicut in homicidio, et ideo non potest ipsum facere bonum nec umquam potest bene fieri.”

“the good in general (*bonum in genere*) is said of certain things, not because in themselves they have something good in the act, but because they can be done badly, and thus the same thing is called evil in general (*malum in genere*), as it can be done badly, or good, as it can be done well. Others rightly say that something is called *bonum in genere* because a particular thing has goodness and this is the common form, and thus it is called *bonum in genere*, because in all its aspects it is good, as with fortitude and the other virtues. These are called *malum ex genere* for the opposite reason, that is, according to the first power in moral things, which is the act regarding due matter where there is nothing besides the due matter (*debita materia*); this is first because it is under the moral genus of the good, as also the due matter is under the due circumstances and the due end, such as to help the poor; and the contrary is evil, when it falls on undue matter (*indebitam materiam*). In itself (*per se*) is said regarding the form, and therefore the good *per se* has, beyond this, due circumstances, to which are added the due matter as a form, and in the opposite case evil comes about by undue circumstances. Of itself (*secundum se*) is said of a given thing that is suitable as such, and therefore *secundum se* is good in everything that is contained in its essence, it is the added good that above we called goodness derived from the end, which is the moral species. This completes the goodness of moral actions. Therefore *secundum se bonum* is better than *per se bonum*, and this is better than what is *in genere bonum*, and likewise for evil *secundum se*, which is evil by its essence.”⁹⁸

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*: “bonum enim in genere dicitur a quibusdam, non quod de se habet aliquid boni actu, sed quia potest male fieri, et tunc hoc idem dicitur malum in genere, in quantum male potest fieri, vel bonum, in quantum potest bene fieri. Alii melius dicunt, quod bonum in genere dicitur, quod aliquid habet bonitatis, et hoc est vel forma communis, et sic dicitur bonum in genere, quod secundum totam coordinationem suam est bonum sicut fortitudo et aliae virtutes, et malum ex genere per oppositum; vel secundum primam potentiam in moribus, et hoc est actus circa debitam materiam, quae nihil plus etiam de debito materiae; et ideo hoc est primum, quod substat in genere moralis boni, sicut etiam debitum materiae substat debito ex circumstantiis vel ex fine sicut subvenire pauperi; et e contrario est de malo, quando est super indebitam materiam. ‘Per se’ autem dicit formam, et ideo bonum per se habet super hoc debitum circumstantiae, quae est adveniens debita materiae sicut forma; et per oppositum est in malis per indebitas circumstantias. ‘Secundum se’ autem dicitur aliquid esse quod convenit sibi in quantum huiusmodi, et ideo secundum se bonum est, quod quantum ad omnia quae in essentia eius continentur, est bonum addens supra praedicta bonitatem ex fine, quae est species in moribus; et in hoc est com-

Applying these distinctions to the above examples, we would say that homicide is a *malum in genere* because it is normally associated with a vicious *finis operis*, but in the case of *furicidium* the *finis operis* becomes virtuous. Adultery, strictly speaking, is not a *malum in genere*, but a *malum ex genere* or a *malum secundum se*, because its *finis operis* is always contrary to virtue. According to Albert “what is evil *ex genere*, [...] is essentially evil, and such an act can never be done well,”⁹⁹ as with adultery. In fact “evil *ex genere* is not only a potency, but it is a certain beginning of evil in the *materia indebita* and up to this point in the common form.”¹⁰⁰ This *materia indebita* necessarily produces a disorder in the act of the will with respect to a particular virtuous end, and consequently in relation to the final end, to happiness. In the case of *furicidium* the thief is killed not as a person – which would be a homicide that as such is always vicious – but as a thief. The presence of this circumstance, to which the act of causing death is ordered, is decisive in the determination of the moral species of the act. Albert clearly emphasizes that “a circumstance, as a circumstance, never changes the species of the moral act with respect to its primary essence. But as it becomes an end of the will, it ceases to be a circumstance and produces another species, because the species derives from the end, especially in the moral order. Just as to be a ‘relative’ or to be ‘married’ is an accident of a woman who is the object of a lustful act, it can also be the end of the will when someone desires a married [woman] as married, and thus he commits a sin of another species. And if we say that the end is a circumstance, specifically ‘for what motive,’ it must be said that an end that is joined to the operation is never a circumstance, but gives the species to the act. But the end of the intention, which is in something else, does not give the species; this is a circumstance, as when I shoot an arrow to teach someone.”¹⁰¹ Also worthy of special note is the idea

pleta ratio boni operis moralis. Unde melius est ‘secundum se bonum’ quam ‘per se bonum’, et hoc etiam melius quam ‘in genere bonum’, et sic etiam malum secundum se est, quod ex essentialibus suis habet maltiam.”

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*: “illud quod est malum ex genere, secundum quod dicitur malum ex circumstantia, est essentialiter malum, et tale numquam potest bene fieri.”

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*: “malum ex genere non est potentia solum, sed est aliqua inchoatio mali in materia indebita et adhuc plus in forma communi.”

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, lib. 3, lect. 2, n. 168: “circumstantia, inquantum circumstantia est, numquam variat speciem actus moralis quantum ad primum esse. Sed inquantum efficitur finis voluntatis, sic iam non est circumstantia et sic facit aliam speciem, quia a fine est species actus maxime in moribus. Sicut esse consanguineam vel esse maritatum est accidens mulieri, quae est obiectum luxuriae in actu, sed tamen potest esse finis voluntatis, inquantum vult aliquis coniugatam inquantum huiusmodi, et sic efficitur peccatum alterius speciei. Et si dicas, quod finis est una circumstantia, scilicet ‘cuius gratia’, dicendum, quod finis, qui est coniunctus operationi, numquam est circumstantia, sed dat speciem actui. Sed finis intentionis, qui est in altero, non dat speciem, et haec est circumstantia, sicut quando proicio sagitam, ut

that the *finis operantis* does not give the species to the act, but is a circumstance of it. For Albert, what gives the species to the act is the *finis coniunctus operatione*, that is, the *finis operis*. Elsewhere, however, speaking of the “end sought by the agent,”¹⁰² that is, the *finis operantis*, St. Albert says that “the end, even if it be external, as an end is also the intrinsic cause since it is the form, because the form and the end coincide as one.”¹⁰³ Therefore, if on the one hand the great Dominican recognizes that the *finis operantis* is a circumstance that does not give the species to the act, on the other hand he stresses that that end is the reason for which the act exists, and as such it has the nature of a form. He therefore says, in continuity with the Philosopher, that “some acts can be ordered to two virtues, one as the ‘producer’ and the other as the ‘commander’ of the act,”¹⁰⁴ as in the case of someone who gives alms to do penance for his sins.

According to St. Albert, “someone can do an injustice only materially, and not in such a way that it would be under the form of injustice. As when a distributor out of ignorance parcels out unevenly, or makes an unequal exchange, in that case an injustice is not done in the action. If, on the other hand, one speaks of acting unjustly based on the form of the action, then there is realized or there is an injustice based on the action. [...] Actions do not form habits except insofar as they possess something of the form of the virtue, at least regarding the way they are done, which is determined in them by the circumstances and by the end, in which all the virtues are rooted.”¹⁰⁵ Not only ignorance or inattention can cause a material injustice but, as we saw above in the case of *furicidium*, also the fact of the will being ordered to a *finis operis* in itself virtuous (i.e., stopping theft), to which is joined a “material” injustice, in this case the causing of the thief’s death.

Regarding the way in which evil is produced in the action or in the habit, Albert claims that “the opposition between good and evil can be twofold, either according to

doceam alium.”

¹⁰² *Ibidem*, lect. 10, n. 208: “finis, qui est intentus ab operante.”

¹⁰³ *Ibidem*: “finis quamvis sit extra, in quantum est finis, tamen est causa intrinseca, in quantum est forma, quia forma et finis concidunt in unum.”

¹⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, lib. 5, lect. 14, n. 440: “aliquem actum possunt ordinari duae virtutes, una sicut eliciens actum et altera sicut imperans actum.”

¹⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, lect. 9, n. 412: “aliquis potest operari iniustum quantum ad materiam tantum, non secundum quod stat sub forma iniustitiae. Sicut si distributor faciat ex ignorantia inaequalem divisionem aut commutat non aequa commutatione, tunc ex tali operatione non efficitur iniustus. Si autem dicatur operari iniustum ex forma operis, tunc efficitur vel est iniustus ex tali operatione; dictum enim est in secundo, quod operationes non inducunt habitum, nisi secundum quod habent aliquid de forma virtutis ad minus quantum ad modum, quem ponit in eis per circumstantias et finem, in quo sunt radicaliter omnes virtutes.”

what is in the habit or in the action, insofar as it receives the form from the object and leaves something in the agent, i.e., the disposition or habit, and thus they are mutually opposed; or as what is lacking and should be present, as occurs in an evil action, which should instead be clothed with due circumstances and a due end.”¹⁰⁶ In other words an act can be evil because of its intrinsic disorder, as in the case of a lie with a vicious *finis operis*, since “the intention of deceiving is included in the notion of lying,”¹⁰⁷ or it can be evil because it lacks some due good, and this can occur even when the act has an apparently virtuous *finis operis*, as, for example, when someone misses Sunday Mass to go to a football game, which is an act contrary to the virtue of religion, even if considered in itself going to a football game would not be an intrinsically vicious act, as is lying. Therefore it must be said that “a sin of omission is voluntary, but it is not said to be voluntary based on the act of the will, which is set on a particular thing, but because it is under the power of the will, in that it leads to what is opposed, or not,”¹⁰⁸ to virtue.

Another important idea that Aquinas will later make his own is that “evil in itself pleases no one, because in itself it is not spoken of with respect to the will, nor is it a cause, as Dionysius says.”¹⁰⁹ Actually “evil, according to its abstract meaning, pleases no one, but as it is in a concrete thing subsisting in a particular good, it can please someone, not as evil, but as a particular good,”¹¹⁰ and thus it can be said that “evil does not act except in virtue of the good.”¹¹¹ The will can only tend to something under a particular aspect of good, and even actions which are morally evil have a quality of goodness under a certain aspect; in this sense it should be emphasized that “all sin derives from an error in the conclusion”¹¹² of a practical syllogism, because something that is merely an apparent good is considered to be a suitable good.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, lib. 1, lect. 12, n. 66: “oppositio boni et mali potest esse dupliciter: vel secundum quod est in habitu vel actione, secundum quod habet formam ex obiecto et relinquit aliquid in operante, scilicet dispositionem vel habitum, et sic opponuntur contrarie; aut quantum ad id quod deficit de eo quod debet esse, sicut mala actio est, quae debet esse vestita circumstantiis et fine debito.”

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, lib. 4, lect. 14, n. 337: “intentio fallendi includitur in ratione mendacii.”

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, lib. 3, lect. 6, n. 192: “omissio peccatum est voluntarium, sed non dicitur voluntarium ab actu voluntatis, qui feratur super aliquod, sed quia est in potestate voluntatis, ut feratur super oppositum vel non.”

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, lib. 4, lect. 14, n. 337: “malum secundum se nulli placet, quia ipsius non est voluntas nec causa, ut dicit Dionysius.”

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*: “malum, secundum quod significatur in abstractione, nulli placet, sed secundum quod est concretum subsistens in particulari bono, potest alicui placere, non unde malum, sed unde particulare bonum.”

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, lib. 7, lect. 2, n. 608: “malum non agit nisi virtute boni.”

¹¹² *Ibidem*, n. 609: “omne peccatum est ex errore in conclusione.”

5. *QUAESTIONES*

As was the common practice, St. Albert also treated of various brief questions debated in his day. In these also we find various statements with some relevance for the theme of the moral specification of the human act.

For Albert, “the end gives the species and the final difference in moral realities, just as the form does in natural things,”¹¹³ that is, just as the form determines the natural species of a given being, so also the end determines the moral species of a given voluntary act. It should not be surprising, then, that he says that “the diversity of modes that derives from the diversity of ends causes specific distinctions in moral realities; it is like the substantial form in natural things. Accidental modes do not diversify the species.”¹¹⁴ To speak about the moral specification of an action is thus to consider the ends to which the will voluntarily tends, and therefore “even if virginity and like things are accidents of the woman, nevertheless they are essential differences for the will as present in this or that act; in fact some seek pleasure in a virgin, others in a prostitute, and because of the diversity of objects, which are determined by the end, the species of lust is diversified.”¹¹⁵ If the end to which the will is directed changes, then the moral species of the act is altered. Albert says that “just as a natural daughter receives matter from the mother and is distinguished from her according to the form, so the vices produce a particular thing from the same matter, which can be called its daughter, and it is an essential difference according to the end, which in morality has the place of the form.”¹¹⁶

St. Albert makes another interesting distinction when he says that “the determination of a movement is twofold, either according to the aspect of good not considered in particular, but separated from the matter joined to it, and it is in this way that it moves the practical intellect; or discerning the type of movement considering the as-

¹¹³ IDEM, *Quaestiones*, in “Sancti doctoris Ecclesiae Alberti Magni Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum episcopi opera omnia”, t. 25, pars II, Aschendorff, Monasterii Westfolorum 1993, q. de avaritia II, a. 8, ad 3 [post solutio 3]: “finis dat speciem in moralibus et ultimam differentiam, quemadmodum forma in naturalibus.”

¹¹⁴ *Ibidem*, ad 4 [post solutio 4]: “diversitas modi, quae est ex diversitate finis, facit differre secundum speciem in moralibus, et est tamquam forma constitutiva in naturalibus. Modus autem accidentalis non diversificat speciem.”

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*, q. de luxuria, a. 8, ad 4: “licet virginitas et huiusmodi sint accidentia mulieris, tamen sunt differentiae essentialis voluntati prout est in hoc actu vel illo; quidam enim quaerunt delectationem in virgine, quidam in meretrice. Et ita propter diversitatem obiecti, quod ponitur finis, diversificatur species luxuriae.”

¹¹⁶ *Ibidem*, q. de avaritia II, a. 8, ad 5 [post solutio 4]: “sicut filia naturalis recipit materiam a matre et differt secundum formam, ita vitium producit aliud, quod dicitur sibi filia circa eandem materiam, et est differentia essentialis secundum finem, qui tenet in moralibus locum formae.”

pect of the particular good together with the realities added to it, even if matter lacks it is in fantasy, about which many err because they consider particular things. But regarding the motor powers, from which movements proceed, these can be of two kinds, either commanded, as with the capacities of the muscles and nerves, or commanding, as with the appetitive capacities, though these latter are of two kinds, either moved by the aspect of the good in abstraction from universal matter – this is the will – or moved by the aspect of good together with the matter, and these are the irascible and concupiscible appetites, by which a person is moved to the terrible or to the delightful; these are not powers of the rational soul but of the sensibility. In fact, the more spiritual someone is the less he is divided; thus the rational will is not divided like the sensible appetite, because it is in the spiritual subject and its object is spiritual, which moves neither to wrath nor to concupiscence. These powers, therefore, are said to be universal movers, because they move according to universal natures.”¹¹⁷ St. Albert thus distinguishes between the rational appetite – the will – and the concupiscible and irascible appetites that the person has in common with the other animals, and which have as their proper object the sensible and particular good or evil. Regarding whether sin can exist or not in the sensuality, Albert says: “we accept with Augustine that venial sin can exist in the sensuality, but not mortal. If one were to say that there is sin in the movement of the excited sensuality, it would be a venial and very light sin. And this is so because the movement, which is the first disposition in the moral act, does not reach the perfected nature of good or evil; it is not determined by the circumstances and by the end, by which the nature of good or evil is perfected in moral acts, acts by which we are masters of our acts.”¹¹⁸ That is, the acts of the sensibility are not

¹¹⁷ *Ibidem*, q. de synderesi, a. 1, solutio: “determinare motum est dupliciter: aut secundum rationem boni non consideratam in particulari, sed penitus separatam ab appendiciis materiae, et sic est movens intellectus practicus; aut discernit motum considerando rationem boni in particulari coniuncto appendiciis, licet absente materia, et sic est phantasia, quae multiores errat, quia particularia considerat. Sed potentiae motivae, quarum est motus, sunt duabus modis: aut enim sunt imperatae sicut virtutes affixae musculis et nervis; aut sunt imperantes sicut appetitivae, licet istae sint duabus modis: aut enim sunt moventur rationi boni abstrahentes a materia universali, et sic est voluntas; vel a ratione boni coniuncta materiae, et sic est irascibilis et concupiscibilis, secundum quod movetur a terribili vel delectabili; et hae non sunt vires rationalis animae, sed sensibilis. Quando enim aliquid magis spiritualis est, minus dividitur; unde voluntas rationis non dividitur hoc modo sicut appetitus sensibilis, quia est in subiecto spirituali, et obiectum eius spirituale est, quod non movet ad irascendum vel concupiscendum. Iste ergo potentiae dicuntur universaliter moventes, quia sunt acceptae secundum universales rationes movendi.”

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, q. de sensualitate et de eius motibus, a. 2, solutio: “Concedimus secundum Augustinum, quod in sensualitate potest esse veniale peccatum, sed non mortale. Si enim, inquit, in sensuali motu tantum illecebra peccati teneatur, veniale ac levissimum peccatum est. Et hoc sic apparet, quia motus est prima dispositio in actu morali, non attingens perfectam rationem vel boni vel mali, eo quod non determinetur circumstantiis et fine, quibus perficitur ratio boni vel mali in actibus moralibus, qui sunt quod sumus domini nostrorum actuum.”

perfectly voluntary, and therefore they are not completely under our control.

Aristotelian teleology is very present in St. Albert's moral thought. Speaking of the possibility that an act of avarice be commanded by an act of pride, the theologian-saint says that "in moral realities, the end is principally that in which the entire reason for the thing is realized, and pride commands an act of avarice, even if it does not produce it directly. The same happens with the virtues, in which charity commands the acts of all the other virtues, even if it is each virtue that produces its own act."¹¹⁹ Albert recognizes that even if a particular act is of the species of avarice, this does not mean that it could not also be under another, more generic moral species, such as pride. Moreover, this multiplicity of moral species in an action always occurs when a vice or a virtue commands another moral habit to the performance of the act, as is clear in the case of one who studies out of charity. According to Albert, it is only in the remote end that the *ratio* of a given concrete act is fulfilled.

Regarding whether the end sought in action sometimes also has the nature of an efficient cause, given that it moves the action, he says that "the end draws to itself, because by means of that action it can be realized, and thus it falls within the intention of reason. And note that I am not saying that the end is the absolute reason [to explain the action], but I speak only of its reason as it becomes efficient, because in this way it falls within the reason of the action that is performed. [...] The end is not the ultimate reason why one does a particular thing, but the reason for doing what one does; the intention of works of justice is happiness as a final cause, but they may well also be done [simply] so as to do works of justice."¹²⁰ Albert here seems to emphasize that there is an intrinsic *ratio* in actions which is like the efficient cause of the action and is realized in a concrete action, even if that end is subsequently ordered to other, further ends. Specifically, he claims that the end that moves to a concrete action, the efficient cause of the action, is the terminus of the action (*ad quod fit*), even though he acknowledges that the final cause in an absolute sense would be happiness (*propter quod fit*). Thus the end to which Albert seems to refer is the *finis operantis*, which is

¹¹⁹ *Ibidem*, q. de vitiis capitalibus, a. 1, solutio: "finis praecipue in moralibus est, in quo completur tota ratio rei; et superbia imperat actum avaritiae, licet non eliciat eum, sicut est in virtutibus, quod caritas imperat actum omnium aliarum virtutum, licet quaelibet virtus eliciat actum proprium."

¹²⁰ *Ibidem*, q. de quiditate et esse: "finis facit ipsum conferre, quoniam per tale opus potest ipsum consequi, et sic cadit in intentione rationis. Et attende diligenter, quod non dico, quod finis sit ratio simpliciter, sed sic dico ipsum rationem prout convertitur in efficientem, quia sic cadit in ratione operis, quod agitur. [...] Finis autem est non propter quod fit res, sed ad quod fit, verbi gratia iustitiae opera fiunt propter beatitudinem tamquam propter causam finalem, sed tamen bene possunt fieri ad bene exercitataeque se habere ad opera iustitiae."

unquestionably the term of a concrete action; from the point of view of the action's execution, it can be said that the desire of the will in relation to that intermediate end is the efficient cause that moves the agent to initiate the action. By his last phrase, moreover, the great Dominican seems to suggest that the concrete action could have an intrinsic rectitude in relation to the virtue of justice, i.e., its *finis operantis* is an act that realizes the virtue of justice.

Regarding the habit of the first practical principles, Albert says that this is “synderesis, which has joined to it the natural law, about which it cannot err, just as occurs with the intellect regarding the first speculative principles,”¹²¹ and thus in this sense it can be said that practical reason is always correct. From this derive many important consequences for human action, among them that “avarice is against the nature of the person as a person, that is, it opposes reason informed by the habit of the natural law.”¹²²

6. THE MATTER OF THE HUMAN ACT

Worthy of special attention is the concept of matter which, as we have already noted, Albert applies to the object of the human act, though he makes little use of that application. This will be different with Aquinas, and for this reason it is important to understand adequately the sense in which St. Albert expressed himself on this topic. He analogously applies the metaphysical concept of matter to both the object of the human act and to the object of the moral virtues. For example, when treating of the specific difference between the pleasure of taste and sexual pleasure, Albert points out that this involves not only a material difference, but also a formal difference. He says that “matter *per se* specifies nothing. But here we are not dealing only with a material difference between what can be touched or tasted, but there is a difference of ends, which in moral things are the specific forms of the appetites. It is clear that one has as its end pleasure in food according to the appetite, and the other sexual pleasure according to the appetite. Thus two difficult natures cause two virtues, because the difficult requires virtue.”¹²³ Here it should be emphasized that the concept of matter is op-

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, q. de synderesi, a. 1, solutio: “synderesis, quae habet apud se universalia iuris, circa quae non est error, sicut est intellectus principiorum in speculativis.”

¹²² *Ibidem*, q. de avaritia II, a. 1, ad 7: “avaritia est contra naturam hominis, in quantum est homo, scilicet contra rationem habitu iuris naturalis informatam.”

¹²³ IDEM, *De bono*, cit., trac. 3, q. 2, a. 2, n. 227: “materia per se nihil specificat. Sed hic non est differentia a materia tantum, quae est tangibile vel gustabile, sed est differentia finium, qui fines appetitus in moribus sunt formae specificae. Palam autem, quod alius est finis delectationis in cibo secundum appe-

posed to the concept of end, and in this context Albert rightly says that matter *per se* does not morally specify habits. Along the same lines he says that “matter considered only as matter does not of itself produce a different species, but it does as possessing a proportion to a form, because in this way there is in it a certain beginning of the form: it alters the species because the form is given according to due matter. Therefore, a different proportion not only changes the number, but in fact a different proportion changes the species.”¹²⁴ Thus for the Dominican doctor matter considered as simple matter does not specify morally, but matter considered as possessing a certain beginning of a form, i.e., matter as *proportioned* to a particular form, contributes to the moral specification of the human act. That “the form is always proportioned to the matter”¹²⁵ is a metaphysical truth that St. Albert applies analogously to habits and to moral actions and their objects. One must be attentive, however, because the concept of matter can be applied analogously to various aspects of the act, and it is thus necessary to specify exactly which element is being referred to, “as when it is said ‘an act that falls on due matter (*debita materia*)’; due refers to nothing more than the right proportion of the act with the matter according to its nature, just as ‘to give something to eat’ is proportioned to ‘the hungry’, ‘to teach’ to ‘the ignorant’, ‘to console’ to ‘the sad’, and likewise with other actions. In generic evil undue [matter] implies the lack of this proportion.”¹²⁶ As is clear in these examples, Albert abstracts a formal aspect of the *ratio* of the object of the act, for example “to console,” and links the concept of *materia debita* to the matter proportioned to that act taken generically, in this case “the sad”. Note, however, that from this perspective, which is not the only one in which the concept of *materia debita* can be used, one can also say that the *materia debita* of the act “to steal” is “another’s property.” Only when we put ourselves in the perspective of the object of the act of the will do *materia debita* and *materia indebita* acquire an absolute dimension, because of their proportion with the final end of the will. When compared with the object of the will, therefore, we must say that “to con-

titum et alius delectationis in coitu secundum appetitum. Unde duae rationes difficilis causant duas virtutes, quia difficile indiget virtute.”

¹²⁴ IDEM, *Super Ethica*, cit., lib. 1, lect. 6, n. 29: “materia ut materia tantum considerata non facit sui diversitate diversam speciem, sed materia, in quantum est habens proportionem ad formam, quia sic est in ipsa quaedam incohatio formae, diversificat speciem, quia forma datur secundum merita materiae. Et ideo diversae eiusdem proportionis diversificant tantum numerum, sed sic diversa proportio facit diversam speciem.”

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, lib. 4, lect. 5, n. 280: “forma semper sit proportionata materiae.”

¹²⁶ IDEM, *De bono*, cit., trac. 1, q. 2, a. 4, n. 52: “Cum enim dicitur actus super debitam materiam, debitum nihil amplius importat quam rectam proportionem actus ad materiam secundum sui naturam, sicut reficere proportionatur esurienti et docere ignoranti et consolari tristanti et sic de aliis. In malo autem in genere indebitum importat privationem huius proportionis.”

sole the sad” is a *materia debita*, whereas “to steal someone else’s property” is a *materia indebita*.

Elsewhere St. Albert makes a useful distinction, saying that “matter is spoken of in three ways, i.e., the *materia ex qua*, the *materia in qua* and the *materia circa quam* [...]. The *materia ex qua* and the *materia in qua* are not principles by which we know things, that are material, but the *materia circa quam* is frequently the principle by which we know things, principally in the soul, for which the matter is not so much matter as an end.”¹²⁷ These words seem to associate the concepts of *materia ex qua* and *materia in qua* with metaphysical principles related to the object of the human act, and to associate the concept of *materia circa quam* with the properly moral principles of the human act, i.e., with the causes of the human act, which are the ends that are in the soul through their apprehension by practical reason, and to which the will deliberately tends. The Dominican doctor expresses himself along these lines when he says, speaking of the matter of the virtues, that “honor is not a specific aspect of virtue, almost a certain species in itself in which no matter forms its matter, just as the matter of an animal is not the animal, but the matter from which (*materia ex qua*) it is something material, e.g. the parts; the matter about which (*materia circa quam*) is completely external, and it is in this last way that the matter is called the matter of the virtue, such as riches, honor and the like.”¹²⁸ Here the *materia ex qua* is compared to the parts of which a body is constituted, with the *materia circa quam* being more like an “informed” reality. Applied analogously to the human act we could say that the *materia ex qua* would be constituted by those elements or parts from which the moral action is formed, whereas the *materia circa quam* would coincide with the object, and only thus is it susceptible of being *debita* or *indebita* from the moral point of view. St. Albert seems to confirm this interpretation when he says, with great clarity, that “even if the matter out of which (*materia ex qua*) never affects the form or the end of the act, nonetheless the matter about which (*materia circa quam*) determines the end of the will, and thus in a certain way is the formal principle in moral things.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷ *Ibidem*: “materia tripliciter dicitur, scilicet ex qua et in qua et circa quam, sicut determinatum est in quaestione De materia. Ex qua autem et in qua non sunt principium cognoscendi rem, cuius sunt materia. Sed materia circa quam frequenter est principium cognoscendi rem, praecipue in animae, in quibus materia non tantum est materia, sed etiam finis.”

¹²⁸ IDEM, *Super Ethica*, cit., lib. 4, lect. 8, n. 298: “honor non est aliquid virtutis quasi quaedam species ipsius et nulla materia est id cuius est materia, sicut materia animalis non est id quod est animal, sed ‘materia ex qua’ est aliquid materiali ut pars; ‘materia circa quam’ est omnino extra, et huiusmodi materia est materia virtutis ut divitiae et honor et huiusmodi.”

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*, lib. 5, lect. 2, n. 367: “quamvis ‘materia ex qua’ numquam incidat cum forma vel finem in idem, tamen ‘materia circa quam’ efficitur finis voluntatis et sic quodammodo est principium formale

In his *Questiones* Albert stays faithful to the meaning he has given to these concepts. He says that “the matter out of which (*materia ex qua*) something is made does not change the species, but the matter about which (*materia circa quam*) something is made, which is the object and has nature of end, does distinguish according to the species, especially in moral realities, in which the aspect of good or evil are considered, which derives from the end.”¹³⁰ Thus the *materia ex qua* does not specify the act in the moral order, whereas the *materia circa quam*, which is explicitly equated with the object of the act and with its end, gives the act its moral species.

Treating of the various types of avarice, the holy doctor defends their specific distinction, though he recognizes, obviously, that all are ordered to the same end of avarice. He says that “the matter does not move, nor does it give the species in moral realities, except as joined to an end. Therefore even if all these vices have the same matter, they differ according to their specific ends, even if they later come to be ordered to the capital end, just as to the good of an army. Therefore they also differ according to the motive, because the end moves.”¹³¹ St. Albert thus claims that even if all the “offspring” vices of avarice have the same generic matter of riches, they are specifically distinguished among themselves based on the proximate ends to which they tend.

St. Thomas will in some sense “inherit” St. Albert’s development of the concepts of *materia ex qua* and *materia circa quam*, applying them analogously in both the metaphysical and moral fields, and specifically to the object of the human act and to the object of the virtues and the vices. Our paper *Aquinas on the Object of the Human Act: A Reading in Light of the Texts and Commentators*¹³² will be dedicated precisely to an investigation of the use that Aquinas makes of these concepts, so as to be in a position to more faithfully interpret Aquinas’s thought in the passages where he applies them to the object of the human act.

in moribus.”

¹³⁰ IDEM, *Questiones*, cit., q. de luxuria, a. 8, ad 3: “materia ex qua fit aliquid, non diversificat speciem, sed materia circa quam aliquid fit, quae est obiectum habens rationem finis, facit differre secundum speciem, et maxime in moralibus, in quibus consideratur ratio boni et mali, quae est ex fine.”

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, q. de avaritia II, a. 8, ad 3 [post solutio 4]: “materia non movet nec dat speciem in moribus nisi secundum quod coniungitur fini. Unde licet omnia ista vitia conveniant in materia, differunt tamen secundum speciales fines, licet ulterius referantur ad finem capitis sicut ad bonum in exercitu. Unde etiam differunt secundum motivum, quia finis movet.”

¹³² D. SOUSA-LARA, *Aquinas on the Object of the Human Act: A Reading in Light of the Texts and Commentators*, in «Josephinum Journal of Theology» 15 (2008), pp. 243-276.