

'Intentio' and 'Electio' in Aquinas¹

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In this paper, we do not intend to make an exhaustive treatment of these concepts that are used by Aquinas with great frequency throughout his writings. Our purpose is only to highlight and to clarify some important relationships between this binomial and the other concepts considered important for the moral specification of the human act.

1. THE IMPORTANT TEXTS

The *electio* and the *intentio* are both elicited acts of the will, each having its own object, and are thus of themselves in the *genus moris*.² The *intentio* has as its proper object the end in view of which one acts, whereas the *electio* has as its proper object *ea quae sunt ad finem*.³ It is important to note, however, that “in fact the simple movement of the will to the end is not properly called *intentio*, but ‘simple willing.’ *Intentio*, for its part, refers to the inclination of the will to that end in which terminate those things that are for the end. One who desires health is said to have a ‘simple will,’ but he is only said to have the *intentio* of it when he wills something in view of health.”⁴ This means that for St. Thomas, strictly speaking there is no *intentio* without an *electio*, since only from the point at which someone wills something in view of something else can it be said that he *tends* to-

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² Cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3, d. 23, q. 1, a. 4, qc. 2, c.: “Sunt enim aliqui actus a parte appetitiva eliciti, sicut velle, eligere, concupiscere, et hujusmodi; et tales actus essentialiter morales sunt” (There are certain acts produce from the appetitive part, such as willing, choosing, desiring, and so on; and these acts are essentially moral); *Sententia Ethic.*, lib. 3, lect. 5, n. 3: “Genus autem electionis est voluntarium” (The gender of choice is voluntary); *Super Sent.*, lib. 1, d. 41, q. 1, a. 2, c.: “electio proprie est hominum” (choice strictly speaking is human); *ibidem*, d. 15, q. 4, a. 1, ad 3: “animalia habent aliquem modum prudentiae, non tamen dicuntur prudentiam habere, quia non habent actum rationis, qui proprie est actus prudentiae, scilicet ipsa electio” (animals have a certain kind of prudential acting, but are not said to have prudence, because they don’t have the act of reason in which properly prudence is found, i.e. is choice itself).

³ Cf. *ibidem*, lib. 2, d. 38, q. 1, a. 3, ad 5: “ratio potest ordinare actum voluntatis dupliciter: vel secundum quod voluntas est de fine, et sic actus voluntatis in ordine ad rationem est intentio: vel secundum quod est de his quae sunt ad finem; et sic actus voluntatis in ordine ad rationem est electio” (reason can order the act of will in two ways: either according to the end, and in this way the act of will related with reason is called intention, either according to those things that are for the end, and in this way the act of will related with reason is called choice); *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 13, ad 16: “intentio est actus voluntatis in ordine ad rationem ordinantem ea quae sunt ad finem, in finem ipsum; sed electio est actus voluntatis in ordine ad rationem comparantem ea quae sunt in finem ad invicem: et propter hoc intentio et electio differunt” (intention is the act of will guided by the reason that orders those things that are for the end towards the end itself, but the choice is the act of will guided by the reason that compares the things that are for the end between themselves, and because this intention and choice differ).

⁴ *Ibidem*, a. 14, c.: “Motus enim voluntatis in finem non dicitur absolute intentio, sed simpliciter velle; sed intentio dicitur inclinatio voluntatis in finem, secundum quod ad finem terminantur ea quae sunt in finem. Qui enim vult sanitatem, dicitur eam simpliciter velle; sed solum eam intendere dicitur, quando aliquid propter sanitatem vult.”

ward that other thing. The reverse is also true, i.e., that there can be no *electio* without a prior *intentio*.⁵ In a strict sense, then, it can be said that we have here two concepts that mutually require one another: where there is an *intentio* there is an *electio*, and where there is an *electio* there is an *intentio*. There is a causal priority of the *intentio* over the *electio*, though, given that “there can be no act proceeding from a deliberate subject without the intention of the end.”⁶ In fact, “in things that can be done, the end is like the [first] principles, because the necessity of the things that are realized depends on the end [...], and therefore in deliberation, an end is necessarily presupposed”;⁷ it can thus be said that “choice [...] is about things directed to the end, the end being presupposed.”⁸

The *intentio* has as its proper object the reason for which I do what I do, that is, the *finis operantis* or the remote end of the action,⁹ whereas “the proper object of choice is the means to the end,”¹⁰ and this object presents itself to the will as a particular realizable *finis proximus* or *finis operis*.¹¹ It is thus clear that “[t]he end is the reason for willing means, and so the will is dissimilarly related to each,”¹² and thus “choice (*electio*) and will [here in the sense of *intentio*], that is, the act of willing, are different acts; yet they belong to the same [appetitive] power,”¹³ the will.

For Aquinas, then, it seems that *finis* can be applied to various moral realities: to the final end, to the object of the *intentio*, to the object of the *electio*, etc. In this sense, he says that “anything willed that is the object of the will can be called an end, but what is more properly called the end is that to which the will ultimately tends, because this is that for which it was willed in the first place.”¹⁴ The final end is more properly called end than the intermediate ends, and these latter more

⁵ Cf. *Sententia Ethic.*, lib. 3, lect. 5, n. 15: “Sed electio est solum eorum quae sunt ad finem, non autem ipsius finis. Quia finis praesupponitur, ut iam praedeterminatus” (But choice is only about those things that are for the end, and not about the end. Because the end is presuppose, while it is predetermined).

⁶ *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 40, q. 1, a. 5, c.: “non potest esse aliquis actus procedens ab aliquo deliberante sine intentione finis.”

⁷ *Sententia Ethic.*, lib. 3, lect. 8, n. 2: “in operabilibus finis est sicut principium; quia ex fine dependet necessitas operabilium, ut dicitur in II physicorum; et ideo in consiliis oportet finem supponere.”

⁸ *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 11, a. 1, c.: “Electio autem, ut supra dictum est, est eorum quae sunt ad finem, praesupposito fine.”

⁹ Cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 38, q. 1, a. 1, arg. 4: “illud est finis actionis propter quod actio fit” (that is the end of the act in sight of which the action is made).

¹⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 3, c.: “proprium obiectum electionis est illud quod est ad finem.”

¹¹ Cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 40, q. 1, a. 2, c.: “voluntas dupliciter potest considerari: vel secundum quod est intendens, prout in ultimum finem fertur; vel secundum quod est eligens, prout fertur in objectum proximum, quod in finem ultimum ordinatur” (the will can be considered in two ways: either while is intending and in the last end is taken, either while is choosing and is directed to the proximate object that is ordered to the last end); *ibidem*, ad 3: “bonitatem rei non solum exigitur bonitas finis ultimi quem respicit voluntas intendens, sed etiam bonitas finis proximi, quem respicit voluntas eligens” (the goodness of things doesn’t requires only the goodness of the last end that concerns the intending will, but also the goodness of the proximate ends that concerns the choosing will). Obviously, the *electio* always falls on possible actions; cf. *ibidem*, d. 23, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3: “electio est eorum quae sunt in potestate ejus” (the choice concerns those things that are under is power); *Sententia Ethic.*, lib. 3, lect. 5, n. 16: “electio videtur esse circa ea quae sunt in potestate nostra” (choice is shown to be about those things that are in our power); *Super Sent.*, lib. 4, d. 33, q. 3, a. 2, c.: “electio impossibilium non est” (choice is not about impossible things).

¹² *De malo*, q. 6, ad 8: “finis est ratio volendi ea quae sunt ad finem. Unde non similiter se habet voluntas ad utrumque.”

¹³ *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 4, ad 2: “electio et voluntas, idest ipsum velle, sunt diversi actus, sed tamen pertinent ad unam potentiam.”

¹⁴ *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 38, exp.: “quodlibet volitum quod est obiectum voluntatis, finis potest dici; sed magis proprie di-

so than the proximate ends.¹⁵ The object of the *electio* is thus called the end of the will in a weaker sense, given that in the *intentio* “the will is said to regard the end, which is desired for itself. But to ‘choose’ is to desire something for the sake of obtaining something else: wherefore, properly speaking, it regards the means to the end.”¹⁶

Can a given intermediate end be a *finis* and *ea quae sunt ad finem* at the same time? Yes, but from different perspectives. It will have the character of a *finis* in relation to the more proximate ends, and the character of *ea quae sunt ad finem* in relation to the subsequent ends. And “in what is done in view of the end, all of the intermediate ends between the agent and the final end are ends in relation to prior ends, and active principles relative to subsequent ends,”¹⁷ that is, they are the *ratio volendi* of the more proximate ends.

There is another important difference, however, between an *intentio* of an end wanted for itself, to which the action is ordered, and the *ea quae sunt ad finem*. Whereas the latter can be a purely instrumental good, as in the case of indifferent moral objects, “it is not possible that the end to which a given action is deliberately ordered be indifferent.”¹⁸ This *necessarily* has to have some character of good, without which the agent would not be moved to the action.

While making these distinctions facilitating the analysis of the human act, St. Thomas simultaneously stresses its substantial unity, when he says that “the end and that which is for the end, considered as such, are not different objects, but a single object in which the end is like the formal aspect, a certain way of willing something, and on the other hand that which is in view of the end is like the matter, as light and color are also a single object”¹⁹ of the visual power. From this it follows

citur finis illud in quod ultimo voluntas tendit, quia hoc est ab ea primo volitum.”

¹⁵ If we consider that *finis* refers properly to the final end, then it can be said that all of the other ends subordinate to it are the object of *electio*; cf. *ibidem*, lib. 1, d. 41, q. 1, a. 1, c.: “electio, ut dicitur in 3 Ethic. non est finis ultimi, qui unicuique naturaliter est determinatus, sed tantum eorum quae sunt ad finem, ad quem per plura media deveniri potest” (choice as it is said in 3 Ethic. is not about the last end, which is naturally determined, but only about those things that are for the end, which in many ways can be achieved); *ibidem*, lib. 2, d. 25, q. 1, a. 3, ad 2: “omnium operationum humanarum potest esse electio, non quidem in quantum sunt finis, sed in quantum sunt ad finem” (about any human operation can concern choice, not while they are ends, but while they are for the end).

¹⁶ *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 4, c.: “voluntas dicitur esse de fine, qui propter se appetitur. Eligere autem est appetere aliquid propter alterum consequendum, unde proprie est eorum quae sunt ad finem.”

¹⁷ *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 2, n. 5: “In his quae agunt propter finem, omnia intermedia inter primum agens et ultimum finem sunt fines respectu priorum et principia activa respectu sequentium.”

¹⁸ *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 40, q. 1, a. 5, ad 5: “impossibile est quod finis ad quem ordinatur actio ex deliberatione, sit indifferens.”

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 4, ad 1: “finis et id quod est ad finem, in quantum hujusmodi consideratum, non sunt diversa objecta, sed unum objectum in quo finis sicut formale est, quasi ratio quaedam volendi; sed id quod est ad finem, est sicut materiale, sicut etiam lumen et color sunt unum objectum.” This passage at first glance would seem to confirm the proportionalist proposal of the *expanded notion of object*, but in fact this is not the case. For St. Thomas here the *finis* is the *finis operantis*, the object of the *intentio* of the agent, whereas *id quod est ad finem* is the object of the *electio* or *finis proximus*. This is therefore a single “aggregate” object formed by two objects of the will. According to St. Thomas, nothing prevents that *id quod est ad finem* would possess of its own a special relation of agreement or disagreement with reason, capable of specifically determining the moral species of the act. It is this morality that *ea quae sunt ad finem* can confer on the act that proportionalist thinkers miss in their interpretative proposal. Fortunately, here Aquinas provides abundant and unequivocal examples.

that the object of the *electio*, the *finis proximus*, has the character of *materia*, whereas the object of the *intentio*, the *finis operantis*, has the character of a form.²⁰ For example, “when someone wills to give alms for vainglory, here there is but a single act of the will, and this is entirely evil, though it is true that not everything that it contains is called evil.”²¹ There is a single act of the will, because the will does not tend to the end *and to ea quae sunt ad finem*; rather it tends, with the same act, to the end *through the ea quae sunt ad finem*.²² Aquinas thus unifies all human action.

This fundamental unity that forms the *intentio* and the *electio* does not prevent, however, a separate evaluation of the morality of each, as we have seen. The *intentio* must necessarily possess a *ratio boni* capable of attracting the will. The *electio*, for its part, can either be willed only in view of the *intentio*, and in this case its *ratio boni* is the same as that of the *intentio*, or in addition to this it can simultaneously possess an intrinsic goodness or malice that derives from its agreement or not with the order of reason. Along these lines, speaking of the object of the *electio*, St. Thomas says that “on those things [willed in view of the end] the will can be fixed in two ways: either it seeks them in view of the end, and then the same act of the will concerns both the end and the means; or because those things are desirable in themselves, and then the will toward each is different.”²³ For example, when someone gives alms to expiate his sins, the action of giving alms possesses an intrinsic goodness in itself; since it accords with the order of reason, it is an act of the virtue of mercy, independently of the subsequent ends to which it is ordered.

Another important question is whether, for St. Thomas, the external act and the internal act

²⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 5, c.: “idem actus voluntatis qui fertur in finem et in id quod est ad finem, tamen intentio nominat illum actum, secundum ordinem actus ad finem; sed voluntas nominat actum eundem, secundum ordinem ad objectum proximum, quod in finem ordinatur” (it is the same act of will that tends to the end and to that which is for the end. It is called ‘intention’ while it is ordered to the end. On the other hand, ‘will’ gives name to the same act while it tends to the proximate object that is ordered to the last end).

²¹ *Ibidem*, a. 4, ad 4: “cum aliquis vult dare eleemosynam propter inanem gloriam, hic est unus actus voluntatis; et hic actus totus malus est, licet nunquam ad omne id quod in eo est malitiam habeat.”

²² Cf. *ibidem*, lib. 4, d. 38, q. 2, a. 2, qc. 2, c.: “actus aliquis determinatur ad speciem moris dupliciter. Uno modo ex parte objecti, sicut fornicatio ex hoc quod est circa delectabilia tactus; et haec determinatio est materialis, et respicit habitum elicentem actum. Alio modo ex parte finis; et haec est formalis specificatio, et respicit habitum imperantem. Contingit autem quandoque quod ad eandem speciem determinatur actus ex utraque parte, sicut quando aliquis actus ab eodem habitu elicitur et imperatur, ut cum quis fornicatur propter delectationem. Quandoque autem ex utraque parte determinatur, sed ad diversas species, ut quando actus ab uno habitu elicitur, et ab alio imperatur, sicut cum quis fornicatur propter lucrum; determinatur enim ad speciem luxuriae ex objecto, sed ad speciem avaritiae ex fine; non tamen sunt ibi duo peccata, sed unum peccatum duplex, cum sit unus actus” (a certain act is determined to a moral species in a doubled way. One way is on behalf of the object, like fornication is determined from that which is pleasant to tactus, and this determination is the material one and concerns the habit that produces the act. The other way is on behalf of the end, and this is the formal specification and this concerns the habit that commands. It happens sometimes that the act is determined to the same species by both parts, like when some act is commanded and performed by the same habit, as when one fornicates for the pleasure. Other times the act is determined by both to different species, when it is performed by one habit and commanded by another, like when one fornicates for the money, is determined to the species of lust by the object, but to the species of greed by the end. These are not two sins, but one sin doubled because it is one act).

²³ *Ibidem*, lib. 2, d. 38, q. 1, a. 4, c.: “[Ita etiam dico de eo quod est ad finem: quia quaedam sunt quae quaeruntur propter finem, quae nihilominus habent in se unde desiderantur:] et in talia potest voluntas ferri dupliciter: vel secundum quod ea propter finem quaerit; et sic idem est actus voluntatis qui est in finem et in illud quod est ad finem: vel secundum quod ipsa sunt quaedam res per se desiderabiles; et sic est alia voluntas de utroque.”

are identified or not with the objects of the *electio* and the *intentio*, respectively. We can say that if we understand the external act not only as commanded by the will, but considered together with the voluntary purpose that animates it, then nothing prevents the conclusion that the external act corresponds to the concrete realization of an *electio*, whereas the interior (or internal) act expresses the end in view of which that choice is made.²⁴ The goodness of the external act will coincide, then, with the morality of the object of the *electio*.²⁵ At times, however, Aquinas refers to the *electio* as the interior act, in distinction from the external act understood in the sense of the commanded act.²⁶

These considerations, which seem valid to us, shed new light on some of Thomas's statements. According to him, "an external act belongs to the *genus moris* insofar as it is voluntary. And the two objects sometimes coincide, as, for example, if one willing to go somewhere goes there. And sometimes the two objects are different, and one may be good, and the other evil, as, for example, if one gives alms wanting to please people, the object of the external act is good, and the object of the internal act evil. And because the external act is constituted in the *genus moris* insofar as it is voluntary, we need to consider the moral species of the act formally according to the object of the internal act. And so the Philosopher says in the *Ethics* that one who commits adultery in order to steal is an avaricious person rather than an adulterer."²⁷ In this passage, it is clear that when St.

Thomas uses the expression "object of the external act," he is referring to the object of the *electio*,

²⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, d. 40, q. 1, a. 2, c.: "electio sit quasi consilii conclusio, ut in 3 Ethic. dicitur, oportet quod ad bonitatem voluntatis eligentis concurrat bonitas finis, et bonitas ejus quod ad finem ordinatur; et si hoc sit, proculdubio actus exterior bonus erit; si autem alterum desit, erit voluntas mala, et actus malus" (choice is almost like the conclusion of council, as it is said in 3 Ethic., it is necessary that to the goodness of the choosing will concur the goodness of the end and the goodness of that which is ordered to the end, and if this is the case then, without any doubt, the exterior act is good, but if one of this is missing then the will is evil and so the act); *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 15, ad 3: "dicitur electio principale respectu exteriorum actuum" (it is said that choice mainly concerns the exterior acts); *Summa theologiae*, II-II, q. 145, a. 1, ad 3: "Interior autem electio non innotescit homini nisi per exteriores actus. Et ideo exterior conversatio habet rationem honesti secundum quod est demonstrativa interioris rectitudinis" (the internal choice is not made known save by external actions. Wherefore external conduct has the character of honesty, in so far as it reflects internal rectitude); *Super Sent.*, lib. 3, d. 9, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 1, ad 2: "quamvis virtus habeat quod sit virtus ex actu interiori, scilicet ex electione; tamen quod sit determinata virtus, habet ex actu exteriori: quia nostra electio determinatur per actum exteriorem qui elicitur, secundum quem attingit virtus proprium objectum, vel materiam, ex quo specificatur actus vel habitus; ideo virtutes quaedam habent actus exteriores, non solum interiores, sicut patet de fortitudine et justitia" (although virtue has what is virtuous from the interior act, i.e. from choice, at the same time it is the exterior act that makes it to be a specific virtue, because our choice is determined by the exterior act that produces, which receives it from its object, or matter, from which is specified the act or habit. Therefore certain virtues have exterior acts and not only interior, like courage and justice).

²⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, lib. 2, d. 40, q. 1, a. 2, ad 2: "secundum voluntatem dicitur actus exterior bonus vel malus; sed non secundum voluntatem intendentem solum, sed secundum voluntatem eligentem" (according to the will the exterior act is said good or evil, but not only according to the intending will, but also according to the choosing will).

²⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, d. 15, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3: "actuum qui dependent ex libero arbitrio quidam in sola electione consistunt, sicut interiores actus" (acts that depend on a certain free will consist only in choice, like interior acts).

²⁷ *De malo*, q. 7, a. 3, c.: "actus exterior pertineat ad genus moris secundum quod est voluntarius, in actu morali possunt considerari duo obiecta; scilicet obiectum exterioris actus, et obiectum interioris. Quae quidem quandoque sunt unum; puta cum aliquis volens ire ad aliquem locum vadit illuc: quandoque vero sunt diversa, et contingit quod alterum est bonum et alterum malum; sicut cum aliquis dat eleemosynam volens placere hominibus, obiectum exterioris actus est bonum; obiectum autem interioris actus est malum; et quia actus exterior constituitur in genere moris in quantum est voluntarius, oportet quod formaliter consideretur species moralis actus secundum obiectum interioris actus; nam species actus consideratur secundum obiectum; unde philosophus dicit in V Ethic. quod ille qui ut moechetur furatur, magis est moechus quam fur."

and when he refers to the “object of the internal act,” he is referring to the object of the *intentio*. It is interesting that he begins by stressing that he is considering the external act in the *genus moris*, i.e. as voluntary. All of the examples he then offers confirm the identification of the object of the external act with the object of the *electio*: “to walk to a given place,” “to give alms” and “to commit adultery.” At the same time, two additional important statements are made. First, that the object of the *electio* can coincide with the object of the *intentio*. This occurs when the end that is sought for itself is intrinsic to the action itself that one does. Second, it is also important to emphasize that the object of the *electio* is less formal than the object of the *intentio*.

The *electio* is thus a central element in the human act, because in it the moral rectitude of the agent is concretized and manifest.²⁸ The “choice has in itself something voluntary and something rational”,²⁹ it is like the conclusion of the deliberative process,³⁰ in which practical knowledge is translated into action.³¹ For this reason “[t]wo things concur in choice: one on the part of the cognitive power, the other on the part of the appetitive power. On the part of the cognitive power, counsel is required, by which we judge one thing to be preferred to another: and on the part of the appetitive power, it is required that the appetite should accept the judgment of counsel.”³² This is the reason why every choice is intentional.³³ Moreover prudence, as the virtue that perfects right deliberation concerning *ae quae sunt ad finem*, is decisive for arriving at the right *electio*.³⁴

“The choice of a particular thing to be done is as the conclusion of a syllogism formed by the

²⁸ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 3, c.: “electio sit principaliter actus appetitivae virtutis” (choice is principally an act of the appetitive power); *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 24, q. 3, a. 2, ad 3: “electio est principale in virtute” (choice is fundamental in virtue); *ibidem*, lib. 4, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qc. 2, c.: “principale in virtute morali est electio; unde omnis habitus qui facit rectam electionem, potest dici proprie loquendo virtus” (fundamental in moral virtue is choice, therefore every habit that procudes a good choice can be called, strictly speaking, virtue).

²⁹ *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 15, c.: “electio habet in se aliquid voluntatis, et aliquid rationis.”

³⁰ Cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 4, d. 9, q. 1, a. 4, qc. 1, ad 3: “electio autem est quasi conclusio consilii” (choice is almost the conclusion of council).

³¹ Cf. *ibidem*, lib. 3, d. 33, q. 3, a. 1, qc. 3, ad 2: “electio est applicatio cognitionis ad opus” (choice is the application of the reasoning to the action).

³² *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 3, c.: “Ad electionem autem concurrunt aliquid ex parte cognitivae virtutis, et aliquid ex parte appetitivae, ex parte quidem cognitivae, requiritur consilium, per quod diiudicatur quid sit alteri praeferendum; ex parte autem appetitivae, requiritur quod appetendo acceptetur id quod per consilium diiudicatur”; cf. *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 15, ad 2: “practicae inquisitionis est duplex conclusio: una quae est in ratione, scilicet sententia, quae est iudicium de consiliatis; alia vero quae est in voluntate, et huiusmodi est electio: et dicitur conclusio per quamdam similitudinem, quia sicut in speculativis ultimo statur in conclusione, ita in operativis ultimo statur in operatione” (the practical quest has a double conclusion: one that is in reason, the decree, which is the verdict of the counseling, other that is in the will, the choice, and is called conclusion for a certain similarity, because in the speculative order the last is the conclusion, so in the operative the last is the action).

³³ Cf. *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 92, n. 7: “bona autem moralia praeter intentionem esse non possunt, cum in electione consistant” (the good in moral things can not be unintentional because it consists in choice).

³⁴ Cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3, d. 33, q. 2, a. 1, qc. 4, c.: “prudencia quae electionem rectam, facit” (prudence that makes good the choice); *ibidem*, a. 3, ad 1: “finis proximi pertinet ad virtutem moralem quantum ad hoc quod electio ad appetitum pertinet; sed electio eorum quae ad illum finem ordinantur, pertinet ad prudentiam quantum ad id quod cognitionis est: electio enim aliquid habet de cognitione, et aliquid de appetitu” (the proximate ends concern to moral virtue while choice tends to them, but the choice of those things that are ordered to that end concerns prudence in that it has of reasoning. Choice has something of reasoning and something of tendency).

practical intellect."³⁵ It is not, however, an act of the practical reason – though it depends on it³⁶ – but of the will. For Aquinas, “The choice is in fact the final confirmation by which something is accepted as a thing to be realized, which is certainly not in the reason, but in the will.”³⁷

2. INTERPRETATION

Various authors underscore the substantial unity formed by the *electio* and the *intentio*. Belmans says that “the end and the means, says St. Thomas, in fact constitute *unum et idem objectum* in relation to the incarnated will. It is clear this attribute is related with the act commanded in view of the end. In short, the end viewed through the means employed: these two aspects of concrete action represent but a single object of the will’s act.”³⁸ Pilsner seems to offer a very similar interpretation when he says “[w]hat the will intends (remote end), and the way in which it is attained (means) are *one object of the will*; they are analytically separable, but essentially the same.”³⁹

Rhonheimer also seems to offer the same reading when he says that “Thomas tells us that the object of the choice and the object of the intention in fact form a single object of the action (or a single object of the will).”⁴⁰ Abbà also sees things the same way. He says that “in the object of the choice we find two aspects: what is chosen, and the reason for choosing it. What is chosen is constituted by the chosen action in all its singularity, in function of the concrete circumstances. The reason for choosing it is constituted by that in view of which one chooses that action, that is, the objective or purpose that the subject puts into that action. The subject arrives at that action precisely insofar as he considers it capable of realizing the objective or purpose he has adopted. It is this purpose that specifies and distinguishes actions. The action of helping a needy person is not the same, from the perspective of the acting subject, if it is done out of piety, from a generous impulse, as a duty of friendship, or out of vainglory.”⁴¹ Obviously he does not want to call into question here the specifi-

³⁵ *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 86, a. 1, ad 2: “electio particularis operabilis est quasi conclusio syllogismi intellectus practici.”

³⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, II-II, q. 47, a. 1, ad 2: “electio praesupponit consilium” (choice presupposes counsel).

³⁷ *De veritate*, q. 22, a. 15, c.: “Electio enim est ultima acceptio qua aliquid accipitur ad prosequendum; quod quidem non est rationis, sed voluntatis.”

³⁸ T.G. BELMANS, *Le sens objectif de l’agir humain*, cit., p. 182: “la fin et les moyens, dit-il [Saint Thomas], constituent en réalité *unum et idem objectum* par rapport au vouloir incarné. Il est manifeste que cet attribut se rapporte à l’agir impéré irradié par la visée de la fin; bref, la fin visée à travers les moyens mis en œuvre, ces deux aspects de l’agir concret ne représentent qu’un seul ‘objet du vouloir.’”

³⁹ J. PILSNER, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas*, cit., p. 238.

⁴⁰ M. RHONHEIMER, *La prospettiva della morale*, cit., p. 94: “ci dice Tommaso che l’oggetto della scelta dell’azione e l’oggetto dell’intenzione formano in verità un unico oggetto dell’azione (o un unico oggetto della volontà).”

⁴¹ G. ABBÀ, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù*, cit., pp. 169: “Nell’oggetto della scelta riscontriamo due aspetti: vi è *ciò che è scelto* e vi è *la ragione per sceglierlo*. Ciò che è scelto è costituito dall’azione descritta nella sua singolarità, in funzione delle circostanze concrete. La ragione per scegliere è costituita da ciò in vista di cui si sceglie tale azione, cioè dallo scopo o intento che il soggetto mette in tale azione. All’azione circostanziata il soggetto perviene precisamente in quanto la scorge come idonea alla realizzazione dello scopo o intento da lui adottato. E questo intento che specifica e contraddistingue le azioni. L’azione di soccorrere un bisognoso non è la stessa, dal punto di vista del soggetto agente, se realizzata per senso di pietà, per impulso di generosità, per dovere di amacizia, o per vanagloria.”

cation by the object of the *electio*, but only to emphasize that the object of the *intentio* plays a fundamental role.⁴² Abbà further expounds some implications of this vision when he says that “choices in fact do not constitute a chaotic succession of acts unrelated among themselves, but in their individual variety they depend on more general, underlying intentions, more or less coordinated to form a plan of life or a style of life,”⁴³ that is, “actions do not appear in one’s conduct as isolated, but as the expression of ongoing basic intentions.”⁴⁴

Regarding the identification or not of the binomial object of the *electio*/object of the *intentio* with the binomial external act/internal act, the majority of the authors seems to not want to express an explicit opinion. John of St. Thomas, however, does think that this association reflects Aquinas’s thought. The Portuguese Dominican says that “the end is the determined object, and the specifier of the act of intention, which is called by Thomas internal act, and has for its object the end itself.”⁴⁵ The “intention is a different act than the choice, or the external act, and they therefore have different objects; they thus differ specifically, because diversity in acts derives from their objects.”⁴⁶

Carlo Caffarra shares the same opinion. He says that “no intention can be realized without a choice. And the latter always has for its object precisely what is called the external act. For exam-

⁴² Cf. *ibidem*, p. 179: “L’*intento*, ciò che il soggetto si propone di realizzare nell’azione e che è la sua ragione per agire, è una specificazione della sua concezione della vita buona. Le *circostanze* influiscono nel determinare che questa azione *hic et nunc* e non un’altra è conveniente al soggetto agente: cadono perciò sotto la sua responsabilità. Abbiamo anche osservato che a sua volta l’intento può essere articolato, essere cioè esso stesso considerato come una mediazione particolare d’un intento più generale. Per esprimere questa articolazione distingueremo tra *intento* prossimo e *fine* ulteriore. Entrambi sono propositi del soggetto agente, ma il primo conferisce all’azione la sua specie immediata e particolare, il secondo la sua specie principale: infatti è in ragione del fine remoto (per esempio, farsi un buon nome) che il soggetto adotta un intento particolare (per esempio, soccorrere un bisognoso). Se si giudica l’azione dal punto di vista dell’osservatore, l’azione è specificata dall’intento immediato ed il fine remoto appare come una circostanza, magari la circostanza principalissima; se si giudica l’azione dal punto di vista dell’autore allora il fine remoto conferisce all’azione una specie che sta alla specie conferita dall’intento come forma a materia: il fine remoto si serve dell’intento prossimo per realizzarsi. Quest’importanza del fine ulteriore lo rende particolarmente rilevante per la vita buona e richiede che anch’esso sia valutato secondo la regola morale” (The *intention*, what the subject proposes to realize in the action and his reason for acting, is a specification of his conception of the good life. The *circumstances* influence the determination that this action *hic et nunc*, and not another, is suitable to the acting subject: they thus fall under his responsibility. We have also observed that the intention can in turn be articulated, i.e., the intention itself can be considered as a particular mediation of a more general intention. To express this articulation, we distinguish between proximate *intention* and further *end*. Both are purposes of the acting subject, but the first confers on the action its immediate and particular species, the second its principle species: in fact it based on the remote end [for example, to create a good name for oneself] that the subject adopts a particular intention [for example, to help a needy person]. If the action is judged from the point of view of an observer, the action is specified by the immediate intention and the remote end appears as a circumstance, though perhaps the dominant circumstance; if the action is judged from the point of view of its author, then the remote end confers on the action a species which is to the species conferred by the intention as form is to matter: the remote end makes use of the proximate intention to realize itself. This importance of the further end makes it particularly significant for the good life, and necessitates that it also be evaluated according to the moral rule).

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 30: “le scelte infatti non costituiscono una successione caotica di atti non riferiti l’uno all’altro, ma nella loro varietà individuale dipendono da intenzioni più generali, soggiacenti, più o meno coordiante a formare un piano di vita o un stilo di vita.”

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 166: “le azioni appaiono nella condotta non come isolate, ma come espressione di intenzioni fondamentali permanenti.”

⁴⁵ J. DE ST. THOMAS, *Cursus theologicus*, t. 5, cit., p. 510: “finis est objectum determinatum et specificativum actus intentionis, qui a D. Thoma vocatur actus interior, et habet pro object ipsum finem.”

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 504: “intentio est distinctus actus ab electione, seu actu exteriori; ergo habet distinctum objectum; ergo et distinctum specificativum: diversitas enim actus ex object desumitur.”

ple: the person who gives alms out of vanity. The intention is concretized through a choice. The intention is the internal act, the external act is the almsgiving, which is carried out as the will chooses."⁴⁷ This is why "one cannot prescind from the subjectivity of the person that is present in the external act."⁴⁸

On the question of the relation of deliberation to the *electio*, Abbà notes that "to conclude deliberation, an intervention of the rational will is necessary, by which the subject assumes a particular practical judgment as his, making it final. It is this intervention that we call choice. In it, the subject adheres definitively to a concrete action just as it has been evaluated in the final practical judgment."⁴⁹ And, stressing the immanent effect produced in the moral subject, he says "in intentions and choices, the acting subject defines his own identity as a voluntary author, he determines what he intends to be, qualifying himself morally,"⁵⁰ and therefore, "intentions and choices, in that they are determinations that the subject gives to himself, define his character, his moral quality as author of the behavior. Moreover, intentions and choices, even once they have ceased, leave a mark in the operative faculties, a propensity to intentions and choices of the same kind. The virtues are precisely these propensities and dispositions."⁵¹ To translate good intentions into virtuous choices, however, obstacles must be overcome both at the cognitive level and at that of the affective tendencies,⁵² and thus, "only in particular, executed choices is the strength or fragility of the acting subject shown, his moral excellencies or deficiencies, his virtues or his vices."⁵³ For this reason Caffarra says that "the fundamental ethical problem for Aquinas is that of making good choices,"⁵⁴ also noting that "one reaches, or fails to reach, the desired good if his choice hits the mark, or misses it."⁵⁵

Abbà, speaking of the importance of the object of the *intentio*, says that "the good end – the

⁴⁷ C. CAFFARRA, *Concetti fondamentali dell'etica di S. Tommaso D'Aquino*, cit., p. 29: "nessuna intenzione può realizzarsi senza una scelta. Ed essa [la scelta] ha sempre per oggetto ciò che qui viene chiamato precisamente atto esterno. Esempio: la persona che fa elemosina per vanità. L'intenzione si concretizza attraverso una scelta. L'intenzione è l'atto interno, l'atto esterno è l'elemosina, che è compiuta in quanto la volontà sceglie."

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 36-37: "Non è [...] possibile prescindere dalla soggettività della persona, che è presente nell'atto esterno."

⁴⁹ G. ABBÀ, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù*, cit., p. 172: "Per concludere la deliberazione occorre l'intervento della volontà razionale, con la quale il soggetto assume un giudizio pratico particolare come suo proprio e lo fa esser ultimo: è questo intervento che denominiamo scelta. In essa il soggetto aderisce definitivamente a un'azione concreta così com'essa è valutata nell'ultimo giudizio pratico."

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 171: "nelle intenzioni e nelle scelte, il soggetto agente definisce la propria identità come autore volontario, determina chi egli intenda di essere, si qualifica moralmente."

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 177-178: "le intenzioni e le scelte, in quanto sono determinazioni che il soggetto dà a se stesso, definiscono il suo carattere, la sua qualità morale come autore di condotta; che, inoltre, intenzioni e scelte, anche quando sono cessate, lasciano nelle facoltà operative una traccia, una propensione a intenzioni e a scelte dello stesso tipo. Esattamente queste propensioni o disposizioni sono le virtù."

⁵² Rodríguez Luño opportunely mentions that disordered passions disturb the *iudicium electionis*; cf. A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *La scelta etica*, cit., p. 75: "Disordered passion directly affects the practical judgment, that Thomas Aquinas calls *iudicium electionis*."

⁵³ G. ABBÀ, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù*, cit., p. 173: "solo nelle scelte compiute e particolari si mostrano il vigore o la fragilità morale del soggetto agente, le sue eccellenze o e sue deficienze morali, le sue virtù o i suoi vizi."

⁵⁴ C. CAFFARRA, *Concetti fondamentali dell'etica di S. Tommaso D'Aquino*, cit., p. 14: "Il problema etico fondamentale per l'Aquinato è fare scelte giuste."

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 15: "Si raggiunge o meno il bene voluto se si azzecca la scelta o la si sbaglia."

necessary condition for the goodness of a choice – can be formally sought only by those who possess virtue, and therefore virtue is indispensable for the rectitude of the choice itself.”⁵⁶ Without virtue, the deliberation itself is not fully consistent with the global good of the human person, and thus is not fully reasonable, and neither is the choice that derives from it. “Without virtue the choice does not correspond fully to human nature.”⁵⁷ In this line of thinking, Abbà asserts that “the concepts of transcendental and categorial, used in fundamental option theories, are inadequate for expressing the discursive dynamic of choice,”⁵⁸ because they introduce an undue separation between the *intentio* of the final end and the *electio* of *ea quae sunt ad finem*.⁵⁹ Rodríguez Luño seems to agree when he says that “the unity of the person implies ethical coherence between the intention and the choice”,⁶⁰ “in fact, one who wants to obtain justice through means that he knows to be unjust, has an unjust will.”⁶¹

But in what exactly does the object of the *electio* consist? Rhonheimer seems to assert that these are intentional proposals of proximate ends,⁶² immediately realizable actions, when he says that “the ‘means’, [...] are concrete actions that are chosen so as to reach a given end. A means, therefore, is *at least* an intentional basic action, whereas the ontic elements of intentional basic actions (such as bodily movements, tools, material objects, physical events) are not means.”⁶³ McInerney seems to substantially agree with this vision when he says that “[c]hoice does not bear on a judgment but on an action judged to be good. The action judged to be good is not merely a natural process or event with its intrinsic teleology but a human involvement in that process; the rational appraisal is of it as something I might do. What is accidental to the natural process is essential to the moral action, namely, its being consonant with reason as performed in some ways and repugnant to

⁵⁶ G. ABBÀ, *Lex et virtus*, cit., p. 201: “Il fine buono, condizione necessaria per la giustezza della scelta, può esser formalmente perseguito solo da chi possiede la virtù, sicché la virtù è indispensabile per garantire la rettitudine della scelta stessa.”

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 180: “senza virtù la scelta non corrisponde compiutamente alla natura umana.”

⁵⁸ IDEM, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù*, cit., p. 294: “I concetti di trascendentale e di categoriale, usati nelle correnti teorie dell’opzione fondamentale, sono inadatti a esprimere la dinamica discorsiva della scelta.”

⁵⁹ Caffarra also agrees with Abbà on this point. Cf. C. CAFFARRA, *Concetti fondamentali dell’etica di S. Tommaso D’Aquino*, cit., p. 10: “La conoscenza del fine implica la conoscenza di ‘*ea quae sunt ad finem*.’ Alcuni – con mentalità moderna – pensano di tradurre tale espressione con ‘mezzi.’ Tuttavia *ea quae sunt ad finem* sta a significare *l’agire mediante il quale si realizza gradualmente il fine*, la perfezione cioè compiuta cui si tende” (Consciousness of the end implies consciousness of ‘*ea quae sunt ad finem*.’ Some – with a modern mentality – want to translate the latter expression as ‘means.’ Nonetheless *ea quae sunt ad finem* signify *the action through which one gradually realizes the end*, that is, the complete perfection to which one tends).

⁶⁰ E. COLOM - A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Scelti in Cristo per essere santi*, cit., p. 200: “l’unità della persona implica la coerenza etica tra l’intenzione e la scelta.”

⁶¹ *Ibidem*, p. 199: “in realtà chi vuole ottenere la giustizia attraverso mezzi che si conoscono come ingiusti, possiede una volontà ingiusta”; cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5.

⁶² Cf. M. RHONHEIMER, *Legge naturale e ragione pratica*, cit., p. 119: “il ‘*finis operis*’ non è nient’altro che l’oggetto della *electio*” (the “*finis operis*” is none other than the object of the *electio*).

⁶³ IDEM, *La prospettiva della morale*, cit., p. 90: “I “mezzi”, [...] sono *azioni concrete* che vengono scelte e compiute per raggiungere un determinato fine. Un mezzo è dunque *per lo meno* un’azione-base intenzionale, mentre non sono mezzi gli elementi ontici di azioni-base intenzionali (come movimenti corporei, strumenti, oggetti materiali, eventi fisici).”

reason as performed in other ways.”⁶⁴ Along the same lines Rodríguez Luño recalls that “the whole problem is in understanding choice (which is a voluntary action), as, besides, every human act is an intentional reality, which is to express in other words the metaphysical principle *omnes agens agit propter finem*.”⁶⁵ If “the intention receives its specification from its object, the same can be said of the choice or of consent or of any other voluntary act.”⁶⁶ Choice possesses, therefore, a specific intentionality which makes it a relevant reality in the *genus moris*. Conscious of this fact, Caffarra says that “the object of the concrete choice that realizes an end, is not only a means for reaching it, but also has its own particular relation with the order of reason.”⁶⁷

John of St. Thomas puts it clearly: “a choice receives its specification from the most proximate and immediate end, and not from the higher and more remote end. In fact the proximate end is properly the object to which a choice is referred, and can have in itself its own goodness or evil.”⁶⁸ More problematical seems to be the way the Dominican conceives the relation of the goodness of the *electio* with that of the *intentio*, in that he seems to assert an accidental unity between the two.⁶⁹ He says that “between these two goodnesses of the act, that which comes from the object and that which comes from the *finis operantis*, what comes from the object is essential and primary, substantial and constitutive, including in the internal act of the choice and elicited by the will. In fact, what comes from the *finis operantis* is a circumstance, but it is nonetheless the principal among the circumstances, and has the character of principle motive, given that the specific goodness of the act is subordinate to it, as an end.”⁷⁰ Rhonheimer, for example, says that “intentions are like the soul of acts of choice.”⁷¹ The “soul,” however, expresses an element in the action that is essential, not accidental. Rodríguez Luño says that “the choice, presupposing and preserving the ethical meaning of the intention, adds new elements; the intention becomes reality – or is renounced – through the

⁶⁴ R.M. MCINERNEY, *Thomistic Ethics*, cit., p. 86.

⁶⁵ E. COLOM - A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Scelti in Cristo per essere santi*, cit., p. 195: “tutto il problema sta nel capire la scelta (che è una azione volontaria), come del resto ogni atto umano, è una realtà intenzionale, il che è esprimere in altri termini il principio metafisico *omnes agens agit propter finem*.”

⁶⁶ A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Ética General*, cit., p. 189: “la intención recibe su especificación por su object; lo mismo puede decirse de la elección o del consentimiento o de cualquier otro acto voluntario.”

⁶⁷ C. CAFFARRA, *Concetti fondamentali dell'etica di S. Tommaso D'Aquino*, cit., p. 34: “L'oggetto della scelta concreta che realizza il fine non è soltanto un mezzo per raggiungerlo, ma ha anche un suo rapporto particolare con l'ordine della ragione.”

⁶⁸ J. DE ST. THOMAS, *Cursus theologicus*, t. 5, cit., p. 592: “electio habet suam specificationem ex fine magis proximo et immediato, non ex superiori et magis remoto [...]. Finis autem proximus est ipsummet objectum, quod electione attingitur; quod potest in se habere bonitatem vel malitiam propriam.”

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 584: “solum participative communicatur actui electionis, et accidentaliter, bonitas vel malitia intentionis” (only in a participative manner is communicated to the act of choice, and accidentally, the goodness or evilness of the intention)

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 583-584: “Inter duas bonitatis actus, altera proveniente ab object, altera a fine operantis, illa, quae est ab object, est essentialis et primaria, substantialiter et constitutive, etiam in actu interno electionis, et elicito a voluntate. Quae vero est ex fine operantis, est circumstantia; sed tamen inter circumstantias primaria est; et in ratione moventis principalior, quam bonitas specifica actus, quae illi subordinatur ut fini.”

⁷¹ M. RHONHEIMER, *La prospettiva della morale*, cit., p. 94: “Le intenzioni sono come l'amina degli atti si scelta.”

choices that are effected.”⁷² Thus the choice “preserves” the ethical significance of the intention. It is important to remember that “the intention of the end (of what one is truly interested in) is more significant and reflects better the disposition of the soul of the person who acts than does the choice of the means,”⁷³ even if often, “accompanying the principal intention, concomitant intentions or motives can insinuate themselves that, while not rendering vain the principle end, do make it more or less pure.”⁷⁴ In fact “the intentional plan is not only a finality, but also choice concerning purposeful actions and how to carry them out”⁷⁵ and “many times the intention and the choice of means are two moments in a single movement of the will.”⁷⁶

Can it happen, according to St. Thomas, that in a given action the object of the *intentio* and that of the *electio* coincide? In fact this question has not been much studied, probably because it does not present great difficulties. According to Brock “[s]ometimes [...] the *finis operis* and the *finis operantis* coincide,”⁷⁷ when I want for itself something that is realized in the chosen action. Joan Costa calls this case a “uni-actual” action. He says: “Uni-actual human acts are those in which the *intentio* and the *electio* are directed to the same *res volita*. One wants the action itself.”⁷⁸

3. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the first place, it seems clear to us that for St. Thomas there is a strong unity between the *electio* and the *intentio*. What we have in fact are two essential co-principles from which the morality of a single act derives. Only in this way does one understand that Aquinas says a single object of the will is formed from these two distinct realities. The *electio* has, then, the character of *materia* when considered in relation to the *intentio*, which for its part has the character of formal principle in relation to the *electio*. In acts in which various ends of the will (actions) are ordered amongst themselves, the more remote an end is, the more formal it will be. Intermediate ends can thus be considered an object of the *electio* or of the *intentio*, depending on the perspective adopted: if they are considered as the term of the action, even if considered the term not in an absolute but in a relative sense, they are considered to be the object of the *intentio*; if, on the other hand, they are considered

⁷² E. COLOM - A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Scelti in Cristo per essere santi*, cit., p. 200: “la scelta, presupponendo e conservando il significato etico dell’intenzione, aggiunge nuovi elementi; l’intenzione diventa realtà – oppure viene negata – attraverso le scelte prese.”

⁷³ *Ibidem*, p. 199: “l’intenzione del fine (di ciò che veramente interessa) è più significativa e riflette meglio la disposizione di animo della persona che agisce che non la scelta dei mezzi.”

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 198: “accanto all’intenzione principale, possono insinuarsi intenzioni concomitanti o motivi che non vanificano il fine principale, ma lo rendono più o meno puro.”

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 200: “la progettazione intenzionale non è solo finalizzazione, ma anche scelta intorno alle azioni finalizzate e al modo di eseguirle.”

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 198: “tante volte l’intenzione e la scelta dei mezzi sono due momenti di uno stesso moto della volontà.”

⁷⁷ S.L. BROCK, *Action and Conduct*, cit., p. 92.

⁷⁸ J. COSTA, *El discernimiento del actuar humano*, cit., p. 330: “Los actos humanos *uniactuales* son aquellos en los que la *intentio* y la *electio* se dirigen a la misma *res volita*. Se quiere el mismo obrar.”

as *ea quae sunt ad finem*, they are said to be the object of the *electio*.

Another idea worth highlighting is that St. Thomas frequently identifies the *intentio* with the internal act, and the *electio* with the external act. At other times when he distinguishes between internal act and external act he is referring to the elicited act of the will and the act commanded by it. A certain prudence is therefore needed in interpreting the texts. For example, the external act in the first sense – as a synonym of *electio* – is a voluntary act, and thus susceptible of moral evaluation, whereas the external act in the second sense – as a synonym of the act commanded by the will – is not of itself in the *genus moris*, but only insofar as it proceeds from an elicited act of the will as the *electio*. When St. Thomas treats of the morality of the external act, he is necessarily referring to the morality of the *electio* that animates that action. This whole question is better analyzed in the in my paper *Aquinas on Interior and Exterior Acts: Clarifying a Key Aspect of His Action Theory*,⁷⁹ in which we will examine more closely the concepts of internal act and external act.

Finally, another important idea is the fact of the substantial unity of the various intentional acts of the agent. For the moral goodness of a given concrete external act, the goodness of the *electio* considered in isolation is insufficient; also required is the goodness of all the further ends to which it is ordered. The concrete external act of “giving alms to a poor person” is an evil external act if animated by a less upright purpose, such as vainglory. This is not to say that the external act “to give alms to a poor person” considered in itself is evil, which of course it isn't. Here we only want to stress that with action *in concreto*, given the substantial unity between the *intentio* and the *electio*, the external act can only be called good if both acts of the will are good. If the *intentio* is evil the external act is evil, because it proceeds from a disordered will, even if nothing evil is observable externally.

⁷⁹ Cf. D. SOUSA-LARA, *Aquinas on Interior and Exterior Acts: Clarifying a Key Aspect of His Action Theory*, in «Josephinum Journal of Theology» 15 (2008), pp. 277-316.