

*Human Action and its Morality in Aquinas*¹

© Duarte Sousa-Lara

The objective of this paper is to provide a panoramic vision of some central elements of the *De actibus humanis*, in such a way as to permit an adequate contextualization for the analyses we propose to carry out in other papers. This article will therefore have a more synthetic and general character: we will not consider yet the various controversial points regarding the interpretation of Aquinas, something we will reserve for other papers. Here, rather, we will principally follow somewhat closely the structure with which these elements are expounded in the I-II of the *Summa theologiae*, since this is where St. Thomas gives them a more systematic treatment.

1. THE HUMAN ACT AND THE ACT OF MAN

St. Thomas makes an important distinction at the very beginning of the I-II between human acts and acts of man. In acts of man, as for example the digestion of a good lunch or the beating of the heart, the person does not exercise the dominion over his own action that he is capable of in virtue of his reason and will, faculties in which his being *imago Dei*² are especially manifest. We digest independently of being conscious of or willing it – which is why we are not morally responsible for this type of action.³ It would make no sense to call someone to account, asking: “Why did you digest your lunch today?”

¹ This essay was originally the third 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 Cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 16, q. 1, a. 2, ad 3: “similitudo divinae bonitatis, quantum ad nobilissimas participationes ipsius, non resultat in universo nisi ratione nobilissimarum partium ejus, quae sunt intellectuales naturae” (the similarity to divine goodness, in that which concerns the noble participation in itself, doesn’t occur in the universe unless in the its most noble part, which are the intellectual natures); *ibidem*, d. 30, q. 1, a. 1, c.: “Unde oportuit naturam humanam taliter institui ut non solum haberet illud quod sibi ex principiis naturalibus debebatur, sed etiam aliquid ultra, per quod facile in finem perveniret. Et quia ultimo fini amore inhaerere non poterat, nec ad ipsum tenendum pervenire nisi per supremam partem suam, quae est mens et intellectus, seu ratio, in qua imago Dei insignita est; ideo, ut illa pars in Deum tenderet, subjectae sunt sibi vires inferiores, ut nihil in eis accidere posset quod mentem retineret et impediret ab itinere in Deum.”

³ Cf. *Sententia Ethic.*, lib. 1, lect. 1, n. 3: “Dico autem operationes humanas, quae procedunt a voluntate hominis secundum ordinem rationis. Nam si quae operationes in homine inveniuntur, quae non subiacent voluntati et rationi, non dicuntur proprie humanae, sed naturales, sicut patet de operationibus animae vegetabilis, quae nullo modo cadunt sub consideratione moralis philosophiae. Sicut igitur subiectum philosophiae naturalis est motus, vel res mobilis, ita etiam subiectum moralis philosophiae est operatio humana ordinata in finem, vel etiam homo prout est voluntarie agens propter finem.”

It is different with human acts. According to St. Thomas “man differs from irrational animals in this, that he is master of his actions. Wherefore those actions alone are properly called human, of which man is master. Now man is master of his actions through his reason and will; whence, too, the free-will is defined as the *faculty of will and of reason*. Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will.”⁴ The person is morally responsible for these acts insofar as they are *conscious and free* actions,⁵ as for example the choice of a good restaurant to have lunch with friends.

In q. 6 of the I-II, “St. Thomas studies the nature of the voluntary, [which is] perfect in man, imperfect in animals, and which can exist even when one doesn’t act, as in the case of negligence. Secondly, he studies defects of the voluntary, on the part of the will (violence, fear and concupiscence) and the intelligence (ignorance).”⁶

In a broad sense, Aquinas applies the concept of voluntary to all those beings that not only act moved by an intrinsic principle, but are also the cause of their own movement.⁷ But “in order for a thing to be done for an end, some knowledge of the end is necessary,”⁸ as is the case with animals. Animals are the cause of their own movement insofar as they act for an apprehended end. With irrational animals, the knowledge of the end is real but very imperfect, since it “consists in mere apprehension of the end, without knowing it under the aspect of end.”⁹ We can thus say, analogously, that a sheep that flees after seeing a wolf acts voluntarily, insofar as its action proceeds from an intrinsic principle – its nature as a sheep – and by the fact of its having seen the wolf, which leads it *necessarily* to “will” to flee. There is no space in the sheep for deliberation and choice, as it has neither

⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1, c.: “Differt autem homo ab aliis irrationalibus creaturis in hoc, quod est suorum actuum dominus. Unde illae solae actiones vocantur proprie humanae, quarum homo est dominus. Est autem homo dominus suorum actuum per rationem et voluntatem, unde et liberum arbitrium esse dicitur facultas voluntatis et rationis. Illae ergo actiones proprie humanae dicuntur, quae ex voluntate deliberata procedunt.” Cf. *ibidem*, I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3: “homo per liberum arbitrium seipsum movet ad agendum” (by his free-will man moves himself to act); *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 40, q. 1, a. 5, c.: “Actus autem susceptibilis est bonitatis moralis, secundum quod humanus est: humanus autem est, secundum quod aliquatenus ratione deducitur: quod contingit in illis actibus tantum qui imperantur a voluntate, quae consequitur deliberationem rationis.”

⁵ Cf. *De malo*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 6: “In actibus autem hominis sunt aliqui quidem qui fiunt propter finem imaginatum, sed non deliberatum, sicut confricatio barbae vel aliquid huiusmodi, qui in genere moris quodammodo se habent sicut actus casuales in natura, quia non sunt a ratione, quae est per se causa moralium actuum” (some acts of human beings [...] are done for the sake of an imaginary rather than a rationally deliberate end, such as rubbing one’s beard or the like. And we consider such acts in the moral genus somewhat as we consider chance events in nature, since the acts do not proceed from reason, which is the intrinsic cause of moral acts); CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 18, a. 8, in “Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Doctoris Angelici opera omnia iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P. M. edita”, Typografia Polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide, Romae 1888-1907, t. 6, p. 137: “actus omnis qui actualiter a sola est imaginatione, quamvis possit subesse imperio rationis, non est in genere moris” (any act that proceeds exclusively from imagination, even if it can be the basis for a command of reason, it is not in moral dimension).

⁶ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note a, p. 117.

⁷ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 1, c.: “duo igitur sunt necessaria ad constituendam rationem voluntarii, nempe quod sit a principio intrinseco, et cum aliqua cognitione finis.”

⁸ *Ibidem*: “Ad hoc autem quod fiat aliquid propter finem, requiritur cognitio finis aliqualis.”

⁹ *Ibidem*, a. 2, c.: “in sola finis apprehensione consistit, sine hoc quod cognoscatur ratio finis.”

intelligence nor will; it in fact only flees if it sees (sensibly perceives) the wolf. In the sheep there is a *determinatio ad unum*, given that a particular form known sensibly is *necessarily* followed by a particular inclination; in this case, upon seeing the wolf, the sheep cannot not flee. For this reason we say that irrational animals are guided by the natural instinct God gave them with their nature.

Voluntariness, in the proper sense, is said of human acts.¹⁰ When a person acts moved by an intrinsic principle, he does it not only moved by the apprehension of a given concrete sensible good, as with the sheep, but also because his practical reason *grasps its nature as a good*, and he is thus capable of acting in view of an intelligible end.¹¹ Only the person knows that what he wills is good. Moreover, thanks to reason, the person is capable of knowing “the relationship of the means to [the] end,”¹² that is, he is capable of grasping the connection between the desired end and the means necessary for reaching it. To deliberate about an end grasped as a good and about the means to reach it belongs only to man, and not to irrational animals, and therefore only “man is master of his actions, [because he is] able to deliberate about them.”¹³

This being so, properly speaking “that is said to be voluntary, which is according to the inclination of the will,”¹⁴ and only analogously can one speak of the voluntary in irrational animals, since they do not have a rational appetite (will), but only a sensible appetite (concupiscent and irascible) that necessarily follows sensible knowledge. In the case of man, “[v]oluntariness requires an act of knowledge in the same way as it requires an act of will; namely, in order that it be in one’s power to consider, to wish and to act.”¹⁵

In aa. 4-7 of the same question, St. Thomas addresses the problem of whether external factors such as violence, fear or concupiscence can influence the voluntariness of human actions.¹⁶ Speaking of violence on voluntary actions, St. Thomas makes a distinction that is very important, morally, between the elicited act of the will and the commanded act of the will.¹⁷ The elicited act of the will is that which proceeds immediately from the will, as for example the act of “to will to run.” The

¹⁰ Obviously this is not to exclude the action of other beings endowed with intellect and will, i.e. that of angels.

¹¹ Also typically Aristotelian is the idea that every human action pursues a specific end. Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, liv. 1, cap. 1 (1049a, 4).

¹² *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 2, c.: “proportio eius quod ordinatur in finem ad ipsum.”

¹³ *Ibidem*, ad 2: “homo est dominus sui actus, quod habet deliberationem de suis actibus.”

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, a. 5, ad 2: “voluntarium dicitur quod est secundum inclinationem voluntatis.”

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 3, ad 3: “requiritur ad voluntarium actus cognitionis, sicut et actus voluntatis; ut scilicet sit in potestate alicuius considerare et velle et agere.”

¹⁶ By concupiscence St. Thomas understands, differently than the most common usage today, an act of the sensible appetite, a particular sensible desire, that considered in itself is not yet morally qualifiable, given that it has not yet been assumed by the rational and volitive sphere.

¹⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “duplex est actus voluntatis, unus quidem qui est eius immediate, velut ab ipsa elicited, scilicet velle; alius autem est actus voluntatis a voluntate imperatus, et mediante alia potentia exercitus, ut ambulare et loqui, qui a voluntate imperantur mediante potentia motiva” ([t]he act of the will is twofold: one is its immediate act, as it were, elicited by it, namely, “to wish”; the other is an act of the will commanded by it, and put into execution by means of some other power, such as “to walk” and “to speak,” which are commanded by the will to be executed by means of the motive power).

commanded act of the will is the act commanded by the will to the other faculties, which in our example would be the act of commanding the legs to actually run. This distinction is important because “as to the will’s own proper act, violence cannot be done to the will,”¹⁸ that is, no one can compel me to not “will to run”: the elicited act of the will is not susceptible to violence. It is different with the commanded act of the will, which in some cases can be violently hindered in its exercise by an external cause.¹⁹ Imagine, for example, that I will to run, but my legs are bound with chains. The chains prevent my legs from actually running, but they do not prevent my will from willing to run. For this reason, with respect to the elicited act, the will cannot suffer violence “[b]ut as to the commanded act, the will can suffer violence.”²⁰ This example helps us to see that an evaluation of the morality of a given action based on external observation is insufficient and often risky, since what is observed externally *may not coincide* with what one wills to do.²¹ It is thus necessary to put oneself in the perspective of the acting person²² in order to be able to adequately perceive

¹⁸ *Ibidem*: “quantum ad ipsum proprium actum voluntatis, non potest ei violentia inferri.”

¹⁹ In this sense there is no sin of omission when someone is prevented from fulfilling his duty because of violence with respect to his external act. Cf. *De malo*, q. 2, a. 1, c.: “si aliquis non agit quod agere debet, oportet huius esse aliquam causam. Si autem causa fuerit totaliter extrinseca, talis omissio non habet rationem peccati; sicut si aliquis a lapide cadente laesus, impediatur ne ad Ecclesiam vadat” (there needs to be a cause for a person not doing what the person should do. And if the cause was totally extrinsic, such an omission does not have the nature of sin, as, for example, would be the case if a falling rock prevents an injured person from going to church); R.M. MCINERNEY, *Thomistic Ethics. The Moral Philosophy of Thomas Aquinas*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C. 1997², p. 61: “St. Thomas makes a distinction between two senses of an act of will, and it is relevant here. In the first sense, there is what he calls the elicited act of the will: to want or which something. In such an act I use or exercise my will as such. In another sense, there are acts that are commanded by will and involve the exercise of some capacity other than willing, acts like walking, speaking, raising my hand, and the like. Only acts of will in the second sense can admit of violence.”

²⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 5, ad 1: “Sed quantum ad actum imperatum, voluntas potest pati violentiam.”

²¹ Cf. E. COLOM - A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Scelti in Cristo*, cit., p. 181: “based on its voluntariness one type of action is distinguished from another, which at times could be almost identical for the external observer.”

²² Cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 78: “proinde, ut actus obiectum deprehendi possit, quod ei morelem proprietatem tribuat, se collocare *neesse est in prospectu personae agentis*” ([i]n order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person). Emphasis added. The debate between the first-person perspective, typical of a virtue ethics such as that of St. Thomas, and the third-person perspective, typical of a legalistic morality centered on the “moral norm,” with casuistic tendencies, or also present in modern proportionalism based on a dualistic anthropology (J. Fuchs, F. Böckle, R.A. McCormick, etc.), has not yet been definitively concluded. Cf. M. RHONHEIMER, “*Intrinsically Evil Acts*” and the Moral Viewpoint: Clarifying a Central Teaching of “*Veritatis splendor*”, in “The Thomist” 58 (1994), p. 11: “This problematic [on the object of human action] consists in confusing the viewpoint of the “first person” (the agent’s prespective) with the viewpoint of the third person (the observer’s viewpoint). To a large extent, these two perspectives correspond to two quite different concepts of human action: the intentional and the causal-eventistic concept”; J.M. BOYLE - G. GRISEZ - J. FINNIS, “*Direct*” and “*Indirect*”, cit., p. 12: “Many theorists, even discussing actions in the context of moral assessment, do not adopt and steadily maintain the perspective of the acting person, and many do not adopt it at all. They consider actions, behavior, and outcomes from, so to speak, the outside – from the perspective of a spectator – in which primary or exclusive attention is given to casual relationships.” For this reason we think that the third-person perspective has serious limitations, as has become clear in various in-depth studies related in some way to this question, namely: L. MELINA, *La conoscenza morale*, Città Nuova, Rome 1987; A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *La scelta etica*, cit.; M. RHONHEIMER, *La prospettiva della morale*, cit.; G. ABBÀ, *Quale impostazione per la filosofia morale?*, cit.; L. MELINA, *Cristo e il dinamismo dell’agire. Linee di rinnovamento della Teologia Morale Fondamentale*, Pontificia Università Lateranense - Mursia, Rome 2001; A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Etica general*, Eunsa, Pamplona 2004⁵; M. RHONHEIMER, *La prospettiva della persona agente e la natura della ragione pratica*, cit.; J.-G. KERN, *L’objet de l’acte moral. Réflexions autour d’un paragraphe méconnu de l’encyclique Veritatis splendor et de sa difficile réception*, in “Revue Thomiste” 104 (2004), pp. 355-394.

what one wills or ceases to will.²³ It could even happen that I consent to have my legs bound, thus abandoning my will to run, and in this case “when action is brought to bear on something, by an extrinsic agent, as long as the will to suffer that action remains in the passive subject, there is not violence simply.”²⁴ Only the first-person perspective allows me to adequately distinguish between having one’s feet bound and still willing to run, and having one’s feet bound and consenting to their being bound. In the first case there is violence to the commanded act of the will since “the will does not consent,”²⁵ but in the second case there is no violence. If we were to evaluate the same situation from the perspective of an external observer (third-person perspective), we would be unable to adequately distinguish the first act from the second, since they are phenomenologically identical.²⁶ What is seen from the outside (the commanded act) is the same, or at least very similar, in both cases, while what the person with his legs bound truly “wills” (the elicited act) remains something of a mystery to the external observer.

Clearly more complicated is the question of whether fear negates or diminishes the voluntariness of human actions. According to Aquinas, acts executed in fear “are voluntary rather than involuntary;²⁷ for they are voluntary simply, but involuntary in a certain respect.”²⁸ Such an act is voluntary because “its principle is within”²⁹ – it proceeds from a deliberate will – but fear unquestionably affects the voluntariness, to the extent that it leads the human person to will what he would never desire under normal conditions. Under fear I end up willing, in particular circumstances, what I would never will normally. Willing and not willing seem to be mixed when we act with fear. “It is clear therefore that in what is done from compulsion, the will does nothing inwardly; whereas in what is done through fear, the will does something,”³⁰ because in what one does out of fear the will

²³ Cf. M. RHONHEIMER, *Legge naturale e ragione pratica*, cit., p. 382.

²⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 5, ad 2: “Unde cum actio infertur ab aliquo exteriori, manente in eo qui patitur voluntate patiendi, non est simpliciter violentum.”

²⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 6, ad 1: “voluntas non consentit.”

²⁶ Cf. T.G. BELMANS, *Le sens objectif de l’agir humain*, cit., p. 120: “the ambiguous character [of all external action] does not escape St. Thomas”; *ibidem*, p. 121: “this ambiguity [of all external action] has led certain authors to believe in the existence of authentic exceptions to the natural law”; *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3: “fines autem morales accidunt rei naturali; et e converso ratio naturalis finis accidit morali. Et ideo nihil prohibet actus qui sunt iidem secundum speciem naturae, esse diversos secundum speciem moris, et e converso” (moral ends are accidental to a natural thing, and conversely the relation to a natural end is accidental to morality. Consequently there is no reason why acts which are the same considered in their natural species, should not be diverse, considered in their moral species, and conversely).

²⁷ For St. Thomas the term “involuntary” is not a synonym of “without willing” but of “counter-voluntary,” which is to say “against the will.” “Without willing” should be expressed more precisely by the term “not voluntary,” and not with “involuntary” as is done today.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, q. 6, a. 6, c.: “magis sunt huiusmodi voluntaria quam involuntaria, sunt enim voluntaria simpliciter, involuntaria autem secundum quid.”

²⁹ *Ibidem*: “quia principium eius est intra.”

³⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 6, ad 1: “Patet ergo quod in eo quod per vim agitur, voluntas interior nihil agit, sed in eo quod per metum agitur, voluntas aliquid agit”; cf. *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 116, n. 3: “Voluntas autem est bona ex eo quod vult bonum: et praecipue maximum bonum, quod est finis. Quanto igitur huiusmodi bonum magis voluntas vult, tanto magis homo est bonus. Sed magis vult homo id quod vult propter amorem, quam id quod vult propter timo-

“does concur somewhat.”³¹ At the same time, however, “[h]e who acts from fear retains the repugnance of the will to that which he does, considered in itself,”³² and for this reason “that which is done out of fear is involuntary, to a certain extent.”³³ Often when we are fearful our use of reason is affected, and consequently our capacity to deliberate reasonably is diminished, which can lead us to see as a desirable good that which, considered in itself, is opposed to reason. Human action is “de-humanized” when the exercise of reason and will is conditioned by external factors.³⁴ Think, for example, of those desperate people who jump from a burning skyscraper: is it possible to speak of a deliberate choice in such an extreme case?

Concupiscence, as an appetitive act of the sensibility, “does not cause involuntariness, but on the contrary makes something to be voluntary,”³⁵ because “concupiscence inclines the will to desire the object of concupiscence”³⁶ sensibly, and therefore “the effect of concupiscence is to make something to be voluntary rather than involuntary.”³⁷ It is worth noting the positive and optimistic vision that St. Thomas has concerning the contribution that human sensibility offers to the reason, and through it to the free will. A “well educated” (oriented) sensibility favors growth in virtue. Pinckaers, commenting on this passage, says: “In his response, St. Thomas is clearly more favorable toward sensibility than many modern authors. For him, sensible desire, walking along the same path with the will toward a given good, contributes to an increase in the voluntary character of our actions. In this way sensibility, formed by virtue, can participate in good actions.”³⁸ This positive vision of a sensibility integrated with human freedom is well expressed in the psalmist’s cry: “My heart and my flesh cry out to the living God.”³⁹ It would be incorrect, however, to not mention the fact that concupiscence, to the extent that it takes away the use of reason, diminishes deliberation and the voluntariness of human actions. In the extreme case, “if concupiscence were to destroy knowledge altogether, as happens with those whom concupiscence has rendered mad, it would fol-

rem tantum: nam quod vult propter timorem tantum, dicitur mixtum involuntario; sicut aliquis vult in mari proiectionem mercium propter timorem.”

³¹ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 6, ad 1: “[voluntas timentis] aliquid confert.”

³² *Ibidem*, a. 7, ad 2: “dicendum quod in eo qui per metum aliquid agit, manet repugnantia voluntatis ad id quod agit, secundum quod in se consideratur.”

³³ *Ibidem*: “quod per metum agit, quodammodo est involuntarium.”

³⁴ Cf. C. CAFFARRA, *Concetti fondamentali dell’etica di S. Tommaso D’Aquino*, Dispensa ad uso degli studenti del Pontificio Istituto Giovanni Paolo II per gli studi su Matrimonio e Famiglia, Rome 1996, p. 12: “L’agire si disumanizza nella misura in cui non viene attraverso la ragione e la volontà. Tutto ciò che ostacola o impedisce sia la dimensione razionale che quella volontaria dell’agire ne diminuisce l’umanità: ignoranza, errore, pregiudizio, ecc. (contro la ragione); passione, paura, ecc. (contro la volontà)” (Action is de-humanized to the extent that it does not come from reason and will. Everything that hinders or prevents either the rational or the voluntary dimension of action diminishes its humanity: ignorance, error, prejudice, etc. [against reason]; passion, fear, etc. [against the will]).

³⁵ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 7, c.: “non causat involuntarium, sed magis facit aliquid voluntarium.”

³⁶ *Ibidem*: “Per concupiscentiam autem voluntas inclinatur ad volendum id quod concupiscitur.”

³⁷ *Ibidem*: “concupiscentia magis facit ad hoc quod aliquid sit voluntarium, quam quod sit involuntarium.”

³⁸ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note k, p. 131.

³⁹ *Ps* 84(83),3.

low that concupiscence would take away voluntariness.”⁴⁰ The use of reason prior to any act of the will *can* be disturbed and even blocked by the presence of acts of the sensible appetite that we normally call passions, though as we said above, “when the will is moved, according to its own inclination, by the appetible object, this movement is not violent but voluntary.”⁴¹

In the final article of q. 6, St. Thomas poses the question of whether ignorance can cause involuntariness. He responds affirmatively, inasmuch as “it deprives one of knowledge, which is a necessary condition of voluntariness.”⁴² No one can will or tend to something that is purely and simply unknown to him. The will is moved by a practical good that has the nature of an end.⁴³ Therefore, any object to which the will tends is always and *necessarily* presented to it by the practical reason.⁴⁴ It is also true, however, that “it is not every ignorance that deprives one of this knowledge. Accordingly, we must take note that ignorance has a threefold relationship to the act of the will: in one way, ‘concomitantly’; in another, ‘consequently’; in a third way, ‘antecedently’.”⁴⁵

Concomitant ignorance occurs “when there is ignorance of what is done; but, so that even if it were known, it would be done”⁴⁶ just the same. When, for example, I think I am throwing out yesterday’s newspaper, but it is actually the paper from three days ago, this fact, which I am unaware of, would not change my behavior in anything, because if I knew it was the paper of three days ago I would throw it out just the same. This “ignorance [...] does not cause involuntariness, since it is not the cause of anything that is repugnant to the will: but it causes ‘non-voluntariness’, since that which is unknown cannot be actually willed.”⁴⁷

Ignorance by consequence is that which proceeds from an act of the will. In this case, the moral subject who voluntarily remains in ignorance for some reason prefers not to know. This can happen in two ways: first, deliberately, as for example when I do not want to know if this wonderful dish was prepared with meat or not, because I know that today is a day of abstinence, and I do not want to pass up the dish. But it can also happen that the ignorance derives from some knowledge

⁴⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 7, ad 3: “si concupiscentia totaliter cognitionem auferret, sicut contingit in illis qui propter concupiscentiam fiunt amentes, sequeretur quod concupiscentia voluntarium tolleret.”

⁴¹ *Ibidem*, a. 4, ad 2: “quando voluntas movetur ab appetibili secundum propriam inclinationem, non est motus violentus, sed voluntarius.”

⁴² *Ibidem*, a. 8, c.: “privat cognitionem, quae praeexigitur ad voluntarium.”

⁴³ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 56, a. 3, ad 2: “bonum habet rationem finis” ([t]he good of each thing is its end).

⁴⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 19, a. 3, ad 1: “appetitus voluntatis non potest esse de bono, nisi prius a ratione apprehendatur” (the will cannot desire a good that is not previously apprehended by reason); E. COLOM - A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Scelti in Cristo*, cit., p. 178: “rational knowledge is presupposed by voluntariness and is as though immersed in it (nihil volitum nisi praecognitum): the will is a ‘to tend judging’.”

⁴⁵ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 8, c.: “Non tamen quaelibet ignorantia huiusmodi cognitionem privat. Et ideo sciendum quod ignorantia tripliciter se habet ad actum voluntatis, uno modo, concomitanter; alio modo, consequenter; tertio modo, antecedenter.”

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*: “ignorantia est de eo quod agitur, tamen, etiam si sciretur, nihilominus ageretur.”

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*: “ignorantia non facit involuntarium, [ut philosophus dicit,] quia non causat aliquid quod sit repugnans voluntati, sed facit non voluntarium, quia non potest esse actu volitum quod ignoratum est.”

that one should possess, but out of negligence doesn't. An example would be a doctor who prescribes a medicine based on penicillin to a patient who is allergic to it, and the patient dies. Since in these cases the "ignorance is voluntary, it cannot cause involuntariness simply,"⁴⁸ and for this reason the further consequences that derive from the action are imputable to the moral subject in question. It is also important to note that this deliberate or negligent ignorance affects the actual knowledge necessary for the formation of the moral object on the part of practical reason; that is, this voluntary lack of (practical) information many times influences the kind of moral object that is conceived by the practical reason. We can say that it voluntarily diminishes the collection of relevant practical information for the formation of the moral object.

Finally, antecedent ignorance causes acts in the will that one would not do if he had not been "mal-informed" by reason. An example would be when a boy crosses a train track when the signal says that no train is coming, but in fact a high-speed train passes that kills the boy. Obviously, this type of "ignorance causes involuntariness simply."⁴⁹

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF HUMAN ACTION

a) *The object of the will*

In q. 8, St. Thomas focuses his attention on the object of the will, though he already offered some important information on this theme in the preceding questions. At the beginning of the I-II, Aquinas says that "the object of the will is the end and the good. Therefore all human actions must be for an end."⁵⁰ The will, as a rational appetite, tends to the good that is proposed to it by the practical reason, and it is important that this practical goodness not be confused with ontological goodness.⁵¹ It is this good that is apprehended and ordered by the practical reason that has the nature of an end. Things being so, the will cannot tend toward any object except as it is considered under a particular aspect of the good, thus presenting itself as a desirable end.⁵² Even when the will sins,

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*: "ignorantia sit voluntaria aliquo istorum modorum, non potest causare simpliciter involuntarium."

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*: "ignorantia causat involuntarium simpliciter."

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, q. 1, a. 1, c.: "Obiectum autem voluntatis est finis et bonum. Unde oportet quod omnes actiones humanae propter finem sint."

⁵¹ Cf. M. RHONHEIMER, *La prospettiva della morale*, cit., p. 31: "Regarding the concept of 'practical good': a car or a computer as such are 'things.' And as things, they are in certain respects 'good.' But only insofar as a *practical* aspiration extends to these objects (to want to buy, to want to steal), do the car and the computer become a *practical* good. This way of being good is not based on the being-a-thing of these objects, but on their relation to a will. The practical good here is no longer the car or the computer, but their *possession*. It is not a 'car,' therefore, that is a practical good, but the "possession of a car." And the corresponding *actions* that can be formed in view of these practical goods are, for example, 'buy a car' or 'steal a car'."

⁵² Note that the term "end" is used by St. Thomas ordinarily with two principle meanings, the end as the object of the act of the will in general, and end as the object of the *intentio*.

“[t]hat to which the will tends by sinning, although in reality it is evil and contrary to the rational nature, nevertheless is apprehended as something good and suitable to nature”⁵³ and thus as a desirable end, as a good under the particular aspect considered.⁵⁴

In q. 8, a. 1, St. Thomas says that “[t]he will is a rational appetite,”⁵⁵ and as an appetite it is necessarily inclined to all the good that presents itself as suitable. Consequently, for the will to tend to something it is necessary “that it be apprehended as good.”⁵⁶ This good, apprehended and ordered by the practical reason, can in fact be a true good suitable to the human person, or only an apparent good not suitable to us. What is always necessary is that it be apprehended according to a particular aspect of the good, and thus have the nature of an end that can move the will. Evil (the privation of good) considered in itself can never be desired by the will. If someone seems to will evil, it is because in that particular choice he found a particular quality of good that was capable of moving his will. “[T]he object of the will is good”⁵⁷ and never evil. Even when we consider opposite actions – e.g., to speak or to remain quiet – they are always objects of the will under a particular aspect of the good.

Is the will concerned only with the end, or also with what is ordered to the end? To this question, St. Thomas responds that the will, considered as an operative power of the soul “extends both to the end and to the means.”⁵⁸ In short, what is willed as a means in view of the end is also an object of the will, and also in some way has an aspect of good, since “the aspect of good, which is the object of the power of the will, may be found not only in the end, but also in the means.”⁵⁹ If, however, we consider the act of the will itself, this properly concerns the end and not the means, because “that which is good and willed in itself is the end.”⁶⁰ When, for example, I take a train trip to visit a friend, what I will as an end is to visit my friend, and in view of this objective I take the train. Means are not willed for themselves, rather they are willed as ordered to the end, and thus “the will is directed to them, only insofar as it is directed to the end.”⁶¹ If I decide not to visit my friend, then it doesn’t make sense to take the train. If one ceases willing an end, he *necessarily* ceases willing the means to that end.

⁵³ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 6, a. 4, ad 3: “dicendum quod id in quod voluntas tendit peccando, etsi sit malum et contra rationalem naturam secundum rei veritatem, apprehenditur tamen ut bonum et conveniens naturae.”

⁵⁴ Disordered behavior, moral evil, is thus always and necessarily a *bonum secundum quid*, but never a *bonum simpliciter*.

⁵⁵ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 8, a. 1, c.: “voluntas est appetitus quidam rationalis.”

⁵⁶ *Ibidem*: “quod apprehendatur in ratione boni.”

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, ad 2: “Obiectum autem voluntatis est bonum.”

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, a. 2, c.: “se extendit et ad finem, et ad ea quae sunt ad finem.”

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*: “Ratio autem boni, quod est obiectum potentiae voluntatis, invenitur non solum in fine, sed etiam in his quae sunt ad finem.”

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*: “Id autem quod est propter se bonum et volitum, est finis.”

⁶¹ *Ibidem*: “voluntas in ea non fertur, nisi quatenus fertur in finem.”

Regarding the question of whether the will is moved to the means⁶² by the same act that is moved by the end, St. Thomas shows how it is possible that the will desire the end without necessarily presently desiring the means that lead to it. The contrary is not possible, however, because to desire the means presupposes the act of the will in relation to the end. It is possible to will to travel by bus and still not have decided, as a positive act of the will, to buy the necessary ticket, but it is not possible to buy the ticket to travel by bus without willing to go by bus. “[T]he means, as such, are only willed for the end.”⁶³ If this is true, then it must be recognized that the will can be led to the end in two ways, either desiring only the end, or desiring the means in view of the end.

b) The dynamism of the will

Regarding the dynamism of the will, St. Thomas begins his response to the question of how the will is moved by saying that one power of the soul can be moved by another, passing thus from potency to act, in two ways. The will can be in potency in two ways: with regard to doing or not doing, and with regard to doing this or that. Thus “[i]t needs a mover in two respects, viz., as to the exercise or use of the act, and as to the determination of the act.”⁶⁴ Based on this distinction, an act can be considered with respect to the order of execution or with respect to the order of specification. According to the order of execution, it falls to the will to move the other faculties to their own acts, as the *efficient cause* through its commanded act. “[G]ood in general, which has the nature of an end, is the object of the will. Consequently, in this respect, the will moves the other powers of the soul to their acts, for we make use of the other powers when we will.”⁶⁵ If we consider the order of specification, it falls to the practical reason to move the will through the object which has the nature of an end, and which, as willed, specifies the elicited act of the will as a *final cause*, making it a specifically determined type of willing.⁶⁶ In short, “the intellect moves the will, as presenting its object to it,”⁶⁷ which is the good that simultaneously has the nature of an end.⁶⁸

⁶² We use here “means” as a synonym of *ea quae sunt ad finem*, though we are aware that in contemporary usage “means” has a more restricted and instrumental meaning than that of St. Thomas’s expression. No one today, for example, would say that friendship is a means.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, a. 3, c.: “ea quae sunt ad finem, in quantum huiusmodi, non potest ferri, nisi feratur in ipsum finem.”

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, q. 9, a. 1, c.: “Indiget igitur movente quantum ad duo, scilicet quantum ad exercitium vel usum actus; et quantum ad determinationem actus.”

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*: “Bonum autem in communi, quod habet rationem finis, est obiectum voluntatis. Et ideo ex hac parte voluntas movet alias potentias animae ad suos actus, utimur enim aliis potentiis cum volumus.”

⁶⁶ Cf. J. PILSNER, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas*, cit., p. 54: “human action is specified by its final cause.”

⁶⁷ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 9, a. 1, c.: “intellectus movet voluntatem, sicut praesentans ei obiectum suum.”

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, I, q. 48, a. 1, ad 2: “bonum et malum non sunt differentiae constitutivae nisi in moralibus, quae recipiunt speciem ex fine, qui est obiectum voluntatis, a qua moralia dependent. Et quia bonum habet rationem finis, ideo bonum et malum sunt differentiae specificae in moralibus” (Good and evil are not constitutive differences except in morals, which receive their species from the end, which is the object of the will, the source of all morality. And because good has the nature of an end, therefore good and evil are specific differences in moral things). Emphasis added.

Regarding the sensitive appetite, it is clear that this cannot move the will directly, because the passions as acts of the sensitive appetite are outside the will, inasmuch as the latter does not have a sensibly known form for its proper object, but the aspect of universal good. It is certain, however, that the passions can move the will through the influence they exercise on the practical reason, which can consider them in their aspect of good and then move the will in virtue of the object.⁶⁹ This is why “according as man is affected by a passion, something seems to him fitting, which does not seem so when he is not so affected.”⁷⁰

It is clear, therefore, that “the movements of the sensitive appetite, passions, sentiments, cannot directly cause willing with regard to its exercise: they cannot make one will. From this perspective the will remains sovereign. On the side of specification, however, sentiment and imagination can act upon our representation of the good, making the object that attracts us appear as good and desirable, in this way soliciting the will and the desire. That representation of the sensible good is not necessarily contrary to reason, to the truth of the good, and thus a harmonious collaboration can be established between the will and the sensibility through the moral virtues. Nevertheless, there will frequently be conflicts, since the dominion of the will over the sensibility is limited. Then, passion seeks to disturb the supervision of reason and lead the will fail.”⁷¹

If we consider the order of execution, the will moves itself to will *ea quae sunt ad finem*, since it is in act with respect to a given end. Once the will is in act with respect to the final end, happiness, which is desired naturally and necessarily,⁷² “the will, through its volition of the end, moves itself to will the means.”⁷³ The same is true for intermediate ends willed in the act. Because I desire to be a doctor, I will to enroll in medical school. It is important to remember, however, that “[t]he will is moved by the intellect, otherwise than by itself. By the intellect it is moved on the part of the object: whereas it is moved by itself, as to the exercise of its act, in respect of the end.”⁷⁴

If we consider, however, the order of specification, then “[a]s far as the will is moved by the object, it is evident that it can be moved by something exterior”⁷⁵ to itself. The object, however, moves as a final cause and not as an efficient cause.⁷⁶ Once the will is in act with respect to happi-

⁶⁹ Cf. CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 9, a. 2, cit., t. 6, p. 77: “appetitus sensitivus movet voluntatem ex parte obiecti” (the sensitive appetite moves the will on behalf of the object).

⁷⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 9, a. 2, c.: “homo est in passione aliqua, videtur sibi aliquid conveniens, quod non videtur extra passionem existenti.”

⁷¹ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note c, p. 152.

⁷² Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, liv. 1, cap. 1 (1097a, 30).

⁷³ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 9, a. 3, c.: “movet seipsam ad volendum ea quae sunt ad finem.”

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “non eodem modo voluntas movetur ab intellectu, et a seipsa. Sed ab intellectu quidem movetur secundum rationem obiecti, a seipsa vero, quantum ad exercitium actus, secundum rationem finis.”

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “secundum quod voluntas movetur ab obiecto, manifestum est quod moveri potest ab aliquo exteriori.”

⁷⁶ The object when compared with the act of the will has the nature of a final cause, since it is to this that the will tends; cf. *ibidem*, q. 73, a. 3, c.: “Obiecta autem actuum sunt fines eorum” (the object of an act is its end). If, however, we con-

ness, it moves itself, as efficient cause, to will *ea quae sunt ad finem*, which are presented to it as suitable through the deliberation of reason.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, when we consider the first act of the will with respect to the final end, it is *necessary* to admit the existence of an efficient cause that is external to the will, which is already in act and is capable of moving the will from potency to act with respect to happiness. “Therefore, it must be admitted that for the first movement of the will, it departs from the instinct of an exterior mover,”⁷⁸ which St. Thomas identifies as God. It is God, the creator of human nature, who naturally inclines the will to its proper object, the rational good in all its universality, and who therefore puts the will in act in what regards the natural desire for happiness.⁷⁹ The fact that God moves the will to its proper act could lead us to believe that what we have here is an act of violence toward the will, but in fact God is able to move each thing according to its own nature, which is to say that God moves the will voluntarily,⁸⁰ since “it is the will that wills, though moved by another. But this movement would be violent, if it were counter to the movement of the will.”⁸¹ This instinct of the will directed toward the universal good is something natural, necessary and voluntary in man, and as we have said, it is the point of departure for the entire order of execution. Every concrete choice of the will necessarily presupposes a will in act with respect to happiness.⁸²

Regarding the question of whether the will can be moved by the stars, St. Thomas responds that these cannot move the will directly, but can move them indirectly through the object, since the heavenly bodies can influence the passions of the sensitive appetite, which in turn can influence the

sider, not the movement but the specification of the act of the will, then it can be said that the act receives its form from the reason; cf. L. LEHU, *A propos de la règle de la moralité*, cit., p. 465: “la rasion est le principe formel de l’acte humain” (the reason is the formal principle of the human act); *ibidem*, p. 458: “L’acte humain est un acte qui procède de la volonté, principe immédiat, et de la raison principe médiat. C’est pourquoi dans l’acte humain, la matière est fournie par la volonté, la forme par la raison” (The human act is an act that proceeds from the will, the immediate principle, and from reason, the mediate principle. This is why in the human act, the matter is provided by the will, the form by reason); O. LOTTIN, *Morale fondamentale*, cit., p. 51: “la volonté est la cause efficiente de l’acte humain, mais la raison en est, par la volonté, la cause formelle” (the will is the efficient cause of the human act, but the reason is, for the will, the formal cause).

⁷⁷ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 73, a. 3, c.: “ipsa [voluntas] movet seipsam, in quantum per hoc quod vult finem, reducit seipsam ad volendum ea quae sunt ad finem.”

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*: “Unde necesse est ponere quod in primum motum voluntatis voluntas prodeat ex instinctu alicuius exterioris moventis.”

⁷⁹ Obviously not everyone agrees regarding the *content* of the happiness that we naturally desire. Some put their happiness in something created, thus absolutizing a particular finite good. Others recognize that only God can satisfy, only He is the absolute and infinite Good.

⁸⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, I, q. 105, a. 4, ad 1: “Deus movendum voluntatem, non cogit ipsam” (God, while moving the will, does not force it); *ibidem*, I-II, q. 21, a. 4, ad 2: “homo sic movetur a Deo ut instrumentum, quod tamen non excluditur quin moveat seipsum per liberum arbitrium” (Man is so moved, as an instrument, by God, that, at the same time, he moves himself by his free-will).

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, q. 9, a. 4, ad 2: “nam ipsa est quae vult, ab alio tamen mota. Esset autem motus iste violentus, si esset contrarius motui voluntatis.”

⁸² Cf. *ibidem*, q. 1, a. 6, c.: “necesse est quod omnia quae homo appetit, appetat propter ultimum finem” ([m]an must, of necessity, desire all, whatsoever he desires, for the last end).

deliberation of practical reason,⁸³ as mentioned above. Given that “the majority of men are led by the passions, which the wise alone resist,”⁸⁴ it is not surprising that everything that excites the passions ends by having an indirect influence on human action.

“[T]hat alone, which is in some way the cause of a thing’s nature, can cause a natural movement in that thing.”⁸⁵ From this it follows that only God, as the creator of the human will, can naturally incline it to its proper object, which is to say, move it voluntarily to the good in all its fullness. God is the principle of the will as its creator, and he is simultaneously also its end,⁸⁶ because “the will is ordained to the universal good. Wherefore nothing else can be the cause of the will, except God Himself, Who is the universal good.”⁸⁷ God is thus the cause of the will in a preeminent way, since he determines its nature and orients it to its proper object. “God moves man’s will, as the Universal Mover, to the universal object of the will, which is good. And without this universal motion, man cannot will anything,”⁸⁸ since whenever we tend to a particular object, we do so insofar as it is presented to us as a good.

In q. 10 St. Thomas treats of the way the will moves itself, so as to understand in what way the various factors that influence the will act upon it. He begins by saying, once again, that the will has a natural inclination to the universal good. “The principle of voluntary movements [...] is good in general, to which the will tends naturally, as does each power to its object; and again it is the last end”⁸⁹ of human action. Man, however, is also naturally inclined to other things, as a function of his specific nature, and these also he naturally desires under the aspect of good. Here we refer to the natural inclinations which, naturally grasped by the practical reason⁹⁰ and ordered by it, form that which we ordinarily call the *bona humana*. “Wherefore man wills naturally not only the object of the will, but also other things that are appropriate to the other powers; such as the knowledge of truth, which befits the intellect; and to be and to live and other like things which regard the natural

⁸³ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 9, a. 5, c.: “eo modo quo voluntas movetur ab exteriori obiecto, manifestum est quod voluntas potest moveri a corporibus caelestibus” ([i]t is evident that the will can be moved by the heavenly bodies in the same way as it is moved by its object).

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “Plures autem hominum sequuntur passiones, quibus soli sapientes resistunt.”

⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 6, c.: “motum naturalem causare non potest nisi quod est aliquo modo causa naturae.”

⁸⁶ Cf. T.G. BELMANS, *Le sens objectif de l’agir humain*, cit., p. 223: “pour S. Thomas, notre orientation vers Dieu en tant que fin dernière n’a rien de facultatif” (for St. Thomas, our orientation to God is such that to the last there is nothing optional).

⁸⁷ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 9, a. 6, c.: “voluntas habet ordinem ad universale bonum. Unde nihil aliud potest esse voluntatis causa, nisi ipse Deus, qui est universale bonum.”

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “Deus movet voluntatem hominis, sicut universalis motor, ad universale obiectum voluntatis, quod est bonum. Et sine hac universali motione homo non potest aliquid velle.”

⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, q. 10, a. 1, c.: “est bonum in communi, in quod voluntas naturaliter tendit, sicut etiam quaelibet potentia in suum obiectum, et etiam ipse finis ultimus.”

⁹⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 94, a. 2, c.: “omnia illa ad quae homo habet naturalem inclinationem, ratio naturaliter apprehendit ut bona, et per consequens ut opere prosequenda, et contraria eorum ut mala et vitanda” (all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance).

well-being; all of which are included in the object of the will, as so many particular goods.”⁹¹ We must also not forget that “since the will is founded on some nature, it is necessary that the movement proper to nature be shared by the will, to some extent,”⁹² that is, it is necessary that the natural inclinations be integrated into the dynamic proper to the will, so that the person might act truly as a person.⁹³

To the question of whether the will is moved necessarily by its object, St. Thomas responds by distinguishing the two ways in which the will is moved, execution and specification. Regarding the “first way, no object moves the will necessarily,”⁹⁴ and as we have already mentioned, it is the will itself that moves itself in relation to *ea quae sunt ad finem*, since it is in act in relation to happiness. It can thus be said that according to the order of execution, the will is master of its acts.

If, however, we consider the order of specification, it must then be said that the will is necessarily moved by a particular object presented by the practical reason. We cannot forget that the will is a rational appetite, and as such, for its act to exist it must always follow a particular good presented by reason – a good which has the character of a final, and not an efficient, cause. There is no act of the will without an object; when one wills, one always wills a particular thing. At the same time, only when “the will is offered an object which is good universally and from every point of view, [does] the will tend to it of necessity,”⁹⁵ something which obviously occurs only with respect to our final end. “[A]ny other particular goods, insofar as they are lacking in some good, can be regarded as non-goods,”⁹⁶ and thus they are not willed necessarily, since they can be considered under diverse aspects by the practical reason.

Regarding the passions of the sensitive appetite, namely, the concupiscible appetite by which

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, q. 10, a. 1, c.: “Unde naturaliter homo vult non solum obiectum voluntatis, sed etiam alia quae conveniunt aliis potentiis, ut cognitionem veri, quae convenit intellectui; et esse et vivere et alia huiusmodi, quae respiciunt consistentiam naturalem; quae omnia comprehenduntur sub obiecto voluntatis, sicut quadam particularia bona.”

⁹² *Ibidem*, ad 1: “quia voluntas in aliqua natura fundatur, necesse est quod motus proprius naturae, quantum ad aliquid, participetur in voluntate”; cf. T. ALVIRA, *Naturaleza y libertad. Estudio de los conceptos tomistas de “voluntas ut natura” y “voluntas ut ratio”*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1985.

⁹³ Cf. S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note b, p. 162: “Na origem do movimento voluntário, São Tomás situa uma inclinação natural ao bem universal, assim como existe uma inclinação natural para a verdade universal na origem do movimento do intelecto. Essa inclinação primeira engloba aquelas que conduzem as outras faculdades para seus objects próprios. Assim, há no homem uma espécie de feixe de natural inclinations ligadas pela inclinação ao bem. Elas formarão a lei natural, e serão estudadas adiante na q. 94, a. 2. Consistirão na inclinação à vida e à conservação do ser, à geração, à verdade e à vida em sociedade” (At the basis of voluntary movement, St. Thomas situates a natural inclination to the universal good, just as there is a natural inclination to the universal truth at the basis of the movement of the intellect. That primary inclination encompasses those which lead the other faculties to their proper objects. Thus, in man there is a kind of bundle of natural inclinations, linked by the inclination to the good. These form the natural law, and will be studied further on in q. 94, a. 2. They consist in the inclination to life and to the preservation of one’s being, to generation, to truth and to life in society).

⁹⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 10, a. 2, c.: “Primo ergo modo, voluntas a nullo obiecto ex necessitate movetur.”

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*: “proponatur aliquod obiectum voluntati quod sit universaliter bonum et secundum omnem considerationem, ex necessitate voluntas in illud tendet.”

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*: “quaelibet particularia bona, in quantum deficiunt ab aliquo bono, possunt accipi ut non bona.”

we feel inclined to desire sensible good, and the irascible appetite by which we tend to overcome obstacles that separate us from the difficult sensible good, St. Thomas denies that these can necessarily move the will. If the passion moves the will, it does so always through the object proposed to the will by the practical reason, and never directly. As mentioned above, the object does not impose necessity on the will with respect to the order of execution, and thus the passion of the sensible appetite does not constrain the will to will, but “moves the will, insofar as the will is moved by its object: inasmuch as, to wit, man through being disposed in such and such a way by a passion, judges something to be fitting and good, which he would not judge thus were it not for the passion.”⁹⁷ Being extremely hungry and seeing a half-rotten apple on the ground, I am led to consider the goodness and suitability of “eating this half-rotten apple,” something I would never do if I weren’t hungry. We can say that the acts of the sensibility stimulate the activity of the practical reason, offering it themes upon which to deliberate.

The case can also occur of a passion so violent, almost always linked to a somatic disturbance, that it ends by depriving the moral subject of the use of reason necessary to speak of a properly human act. In these most extreme cases, the person is like the “irrational animals, which follow, of necessity, the impulse of their passions: for in them there is neither movement of reason, nor, consequently, of will”;⁹⁸ he acts by a pure impulse of the sensibility that is not assumed by the intelligence and the will.

More common is the case of a strong passion that reduces the use of reason but does not negate it completely, thus in some way conditioning the entire process of deliberation and choice, making the action less human. In this case “the reason is not entirely engrossed by the passion, so that the judgment of reason retains, to a certain extent, its freedom: and thus the movement of the will remains in a certain degree. Accordingly insofar as the reason remains free, and not subject to the passion, the will’s movement, which also remains, does not tend of necessity to that whereto the passion inclines it.”⁹⁹

In man wounded by sin, the passions of the sensibility are disoriented from the true good of the human person, and he experiences a difficult battle between that to which right reason is inclined and that to which the disordered passions incline.¹⁰⁰ Nonetheless, in the virtuous person we

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, a. 3, c.: “movet voluntatem ex ea parte qua voluntas movetur ab obiecto, inquantum scilicet homo aliquo modo dispositus per passionem, iudicat aliquid esse conveniens et bonum quod extra passionem existens non iudicaret.”

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*: “animalibus brutis, quae ex necessitate sequuntur impetum passionis, in his enim non est aliquis rationis motus, et per consequens nec voluntatis.”

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*: “ratio non totaliter absorbetur a passione, sed remanet quantum ad aliquid iudicium rationis liberum. Et secundum hoc remanet aliquid de motu voluntatis. Inquantum ergo ratio manet libera et passioni non subiecta, intantum voluntatis motus qui manet, non ex necessitate tendit ad hoc ad quod passio inclinatur.”

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *Rom 7,17-23*: “Indeed, it is no longer I who do the action, but the sin that lives in me. I know that good does not dwell in me, that is, in my flesh. Thus to desire the good is within my reach, but not to do it. In fact, I do not do the good that I want to do, but the evil that I do not want to do. Now, if I do the evil that I do not want, it is no longer I who

see a “well-educated” sensibility, oriented in the direction of the integral good of the human person. In the perfection of virtue, the passions of the sensibility are oriented and collaborate with the practical reason in leading the person to his true good.¹⁰¹

God, for his part, moves the will according to its proper nature, that is, “He does not determine it of necessity to one thing, but its movement remains contingent and not necessary, except in those things to which it is moved naturally”¹⁰² which, as we have mentioned, are the universal good and happiness. In this way, “St. Thomas establishes that the action of God, far from prejudicing the freedom of the person through a determinism external to him, on the contrary founds and develops that freedom. He can do this because he recognizes, in the origin of the voluntary free movement, a natural interior inclination, which leads the person to the good and which is a direct work of God in him. Therefore, the voluntary action will be as much of God as of the person.”¹⁰³ When I choose the good because I know it is a good for me, I do so freely, exercising a true causality over myself; at the same time, this action has God as a cause insofar as it was He who inclined me to naturally desire the universal good, an inclination which is absolutely necessary for me to be able to freely will a given particular good.

c) *The discursive structure of human acts*

There is a strong analogy between the way of proceeding proper to the human speculative intellect and that proper to the practical intellect. The human intellect proceeds discursively, which is why it is commonly called “reason,” to distinguish it from the angelic and divine intellects, which proceed intuitively. To say that it proceeds discursively is to observe that human reason departs from evident principles in order to reach, through theoretical or practical syllogisms, conclusions that are less evident, but equally true. Thus practical reason departs from the first practical principle – *bonum est faciendum et malum vitandum* – to reach, through practical syllogisms, immediately operative precepts such as: “do not drink this cup of gasoline.”¹⁰⁴

act, but the sin that lives in me. I find this law to be true: when I want to do good, it is evil that is at hand. I delight in the law of God according to the interior man; but I perceive another law in my members, which fights against the law of my reason and which binds me to the law of sin that is in my members.”

¹⁰¹ In this sense see the interpretation of Aquinas offered by Abbà; cf. G. ABBÀ, *Felicità, vita buona e virtù*, cit., p. 176: “To live a truly good life requires not only the exercise of reason and free will, but also the exercise of educated passions.”

¹⁰² *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 10, a. 4, c.: “non ex necessitate ad unum determinat, sed remanet motus eius contingens et non necessarius, nisi in his ad quae naturaliter movetur.”

¹⁰³ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note e, p. 169.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *De virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 12, ad 12: “sicut in speculativis sunt principia et conclusiones: ita et in operativis sunt fines et ea quae sunt ad finem” (in the same way that in the speculative matters principles are related to conclusions, so in operative matters ends are related to the means); *De malo*, q. 2, a. 5, arg. 9: “actiones in moralibus sunt sicut conclusiones in syllogisticis, in quibus est verum et falsum, sicut et in moralibus bonum et malum” (actions in moral matters are like conclusions in matters of deduction, in which there are truth and falsehood just as there are goodness and wickedness in

Reason and will collaborate very closely in the human act, as we have already shown. Moreover, in the genesis of the act, there are different acts of each of these operative powers of the soul. To the practical reason falls the function of discerning the true good to be done, a good which has the nature of an end and is presented to the will as such. To each specific act of the practical reason corresponds an act of the will. Because of their importance, we will now examine some of these acts of reason and will in somewhat more detail.

Fruition (or enjoyment) is an act of the will, given that it is a certain joy or delight that derives from the possession of an end to which it tends. Given that “the end and the good is the object of the appetitive power [...] it is evident that fruition is the act of the appetitive power.”¹⁰⁵ Fruition is in a proper sense said of the final end, since this is willed for itself absolutely.¹⁰⁶ It can also be said analogously, however, that one enjoys those goods in which the will delights not absolutely, but relatively. Only in God does the will rest definitively: only there will our joy be complete. One can also distinguish between perfect and imperfect fruition. The perfect occurs when one possesses the desired end, the imperfect when the will tends to an end, but this is as yet “possessed not really, but only in intention.”¹⁰⁷

“Intention, as the very word denotes, signifies, ‘to tend to something’.”¹⁰⁸ Now, the person “tends to” in virtue of his form: in virtue of his sensitive appetite and especially of his rational appetite. Only in the person, thanks to his reason, is it possible to “tend to” a given good that has the nature of an end, with a formal knowledge of it. Only the person knows to what he tends. “[I]t is evident that intention, properly speaking, is an act of the will,”¹⁰⁹ which as a rational appetite follows the end grasped and ordered by the practical reason. As an analogous concept, intention is said properly of the “act of the will in regard to the end”¹¹⁰ that is willed for itself, and not purely willed in view of another. Ordinarily this is a remote end which can only be reached through *ea quae sunt ad finem*; the latter, as presenting itself as a proximate end and immediately reachable by the subject, is properly the object of the choice (*electio*), and not of the intention (*intentio*). “Consequently

moral matters).

¹⁰⁵ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 11, a. 1, c.: “Finis autem et bonum est obiectum appetitivae potentiae. Unde manifestum est quod fruitio est actus appetitivae potentiae.”

¹⁰⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 3, c.: “ad rationem fructus duo pertinent, scilicet quod sit ultimum; et quod appetitum quietet quadam dulcedine vel delectatione. Ultimum autem est simpliciter, et secundum quid, simpliciter quidem, quod ad aliud non refertur; sed secundum quid, quod est aliorum ultimum. Quod ergo est simpliciter ultimum, in quo aliquid delectatur sicut in ultimo fine, hoc proprie dicitur fructus, et eo proprie dicitur aliquis frui” (the notion of fruit implies two things: first that it should come last; second, that it should calm the appetite with a certain sweetness and delight. Now a thing is last either simply or relatively; simply, if it be referred to nothing else; relatively, if it is the last in a particular series. Therefore that which is last simply, and in which one delights as in the last end, is properly called fruit; and this it is that one is properly said to enjoy).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “non habiti realiter, sed in intentione tantum.”

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, q. 12, a. 1, c.: “intentio, sicut ipsum nomen sonat, significat in aliquid tendere.”

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem*: “Unde manifestum est quod intentio proprie est actus voluntatis.”

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem*, ad 4: “intentio est actus voluntatis respectu finis.”

intention belongs first and principally to that which moves to the end.”¹¹¹ This fact does not exclude the use of the term in a broad sense to signify any act of the will in relation to anything that has some character of an end, as for example the object of the *electio*, which by its nature belongs to *ea quae sunt ad finem*.¹¹² In this case, its meaning practically coincides with the concept of voluntary. What we do voluntarily is exactly what we have the intention (in a broad sense) to do.¹¹³

In a strict sense “intention regards the end as a terminus of the movement of the will,”¹¹⁴ with the result that St. Thomas normally uses the term *intentio* to refer to those ends that are willed for themselves, and not in function of others. This occurs in an absolute way when we consider the final end, which is the absolute terminus of the will, but it is equally true that one can have the intention (in a strict sense), even if relatively and not absolutely, of various intermediate ends willed for themselves, as for example when I desire to recover my health. St. Thomas illustrates this idea by saying “in the movement from A to C through B, C is the last terminus, while B is [an intermediate] terminus, but not the last. And intention can be both.”¹¹⁵ If I take medication it is because I want to recover my health (intermediate end), and I want to recover my health because I want to be happy (final end). It must be borne in mind that “in modern moralists, the intention would designate the

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*, c.: “Unde intentio primo et principaliter pertinet ad id quod movet ad finem.”

¹¹² Cf. *ibidem*, II-II, q. 150, a. 2, c.: “moralia recipiunt speciem non ab his quae per accidens eveniunt praeter intentionem, sed ab eo quod est per se intentum” (morals take their species not from things that occur accidentally and beside the intention, but from that which is directly intended); *ibidem*, q. 110, a. 1, c.: “actus moralis ex duobus speciem sortitur, scilicet ex obiecto, et ex fine. Nam finis est obiectum voluntatis, quae est primum movens in moralibus actibus. Potentia autem a voluntate mota habet suum obiectum, quod est proximum obiectum voluntarii actus, et se habet in actu voluntatis ad finem sicut materiale ad formale” ([a] moral act takes its species from two things, its object, and its end: for the end is the object of the will, which is the first mover in moral acts. And the power moved by the will has its own object, which is the proximate object of the voluntary act, and stands in relation to the will’s act towards the end, as material to formal).

¹¹³ One of the central problems of proportionalism is the fact of not considering that the voluntariness present in the *electio* already configures the moral subject. The *electio* is never a pre-moral fact, because it is an act of the will that tends to a particular object (*finis proximus*). Cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 75: “erroneae solutiones sunt, coniunctae praesertim cum inepta intellectione obiecti actionis moralis. Nonnulli non satis existimant voluntatem definitis implicari delectionibus, quas ipsa operat: hae condicio sunt eius moralis probitatis eiusque ordinationis ad ultimum hominis finem” (there exist false solutions, linked in particular to an inadequate understanding of the object of moral action. Some authors do not take into sufficient consideration the fact that the will is involved in the concrete choices which it makes: these choices are a condition of its moral goodness and its being ordered to the ultimate end of the person); *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 14, a. 3, c.: “electio semper est humanorum actuum” (choice is always an human act); T.G. BELMANS, *Le sens objectif de l’agir humain*, cit., p. 115: “le subjectivisme régnant est commandé par une conception inexacte du terme intention” (the reigning subjectivism is guided by an inexact conception of the term intention); *ibidem*, p. 215: “la mauvaise fortune du terme *objet* a induit jusqu’aux meilleurs interprètes de S. Thomas à absolutiser l’importance du *finis operantis* aux dépens du *finis operis* assimilé à un facteur pré-moral” (the bad fortune of the term *object* has led even the best interpreters of St. Thomas to absolutize the importance of the *finis operantis* at the expense of the *finis operis*, considered similar to a pre-moral factor); CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 13, a. 6, cit., t. 6, p. 103: “Electio autem et quoad exercitium actus, et quoad specificationem, semper est libera” (Choice is always free, regarding either the execution of the action, either its specification); A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Universalidad e inmutabilidad de los preceptos de la ley natural*, cit., pp. 215-229; M. RHONHEIMER, “*Intrinsically Evil Acts*” and the Moral Viewpoint, cit., pp. 1-39; IDEM, *Intentional Actions and the Meaning of Object*, cit., pp. 279-311.

¹¹⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 12, a. 2, c.: “intentio respicit finem secundum quod est terminus motus voluntatis.”

¹¹⁵ *Ibidem*: “in motu quo itur de a in c per b, c est terminus ultimus, b autem est terminus, sed non ultimus. Et utriusque potest esse intentio.”

end which the subject explicitly proposes to himself in a given act: to will within this or that intention. For St. Thomas, the intention has a much greater reach, attaining, through the linking together of ends, to the final end. In this way, voluntary intentionality can interiorly link together all the acts a person does and all the ends he pursues, progressively realizing the unity of the moral life. [...] The intermediate ends to which St. Thomas refers as objects of the intention are not ‘means’, since they are willed as the terminus of the person’s activity in a certain order. [...] These realities, however, are also subordinate to the final divine end as intermediate or secondary ends, and not as means in the utilitarian sense of the word. The expression employed by St. Thomas, *ea quae sunt ad finem*, ‘that which is for the end’, is farther-reaching than ‘means’, as we have pointed out, and can encompass all of the intermediate ends.”¹¹⁶ The person can have the simultaneous intention of all of these ends, whether one speaks of ends that are ordered among themselves or ends not directly so ordered,¹¹⁷ as for example when I accept a drink both to please a kind friend and to quench my thirst.

Regarding the relation that exists between the *intentio* of a given end and the *electio* of *ea quae sunt ad finem*, St. Thomas says that “the object [of the *electio*], and that by reason of which it is an object [i.e., the object of the *intentio*], come under the same act,”¹¹⁸ and thus “when I say: ‘I wish to take medicine for the sake of health,’ I signify no more than one movement of my will.”¹¹⁹ It is necessary, however, that prior to any *electio* there be an *intentio* of an end, but the *intentio* of an end can already be in act without having yet chosen concretely how it will be reached.¹²⁰ It is pre-

¹¹⁶ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note d, p. 179.

¹¹⁷ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 12, a. 3, c.: “aliqua duo possunt accipi dupliciter, vel ordinata ad invicem, vel ad invicem non ordinata. Et si quidem ad invicem fuerint ordinata, manifestum est ex praemissis quod homo potest simul multa intendere. Est enim intentio non solum finis ultimi, ut dictum est, sed etiam finis medii. Simul autem intendit aliquis et finem proximum, et ultimum; sicut confectionem medicinae, et sanitatem. Si autem accipiantur duo ad invicem non ordinata, sic etiam simul homo potest plura intendere. Quod patet ex hoc, quod homo unum alteri praeeligit, quia melius est altero, inter alias autem conditiones quibus aliquid est melius altero, una est quod ad plura valet, unde potest aliquid praeeligi alteri, ex hoc quod ad plura valet. Et sic manifeste homo simul plura intendit” ([t]he expression “two things” may be taken in two ways: they may be ordained to one another or not so ordained. And if they be ordained to one another, it is evident, from what has been said, that a man can intend several things at the same time. For intention is not only of the last end, as stated above, but also of an intermediary end. Now a man intends at the same time, both the proximate and the last end; as the mixing of a medicine and the giving of health. But if we take two things that are not ordained to one another, thus also a man can intend several things at the same time. This is evident from the fact that a man prefers one thing to another because it is the better of the two. Now one of the reasons for which one thing is better than another is that it is available for more purposes: wherefore one thing can be chosen in preference to another, because of the greater number of purposes for which it is available: so that evidently a man can intend several things at the same time).

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “Idem autem actus cadit super obiectum, et super rationem obiecti”; cf. *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 38, q. 1, 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; unus enim particularis defectus sufficit ad hoc quod aliquid simpliciter malum dicatur. Sed verum est quod si vellet hoc quod est dare eleemosynam, ut rem quamdam non in ordine ad talem finem, actus ille voluntatis esset bonus, et esset alius actus voluntatis ab eo quo vult vanam gloriam.” Emphasis added.

¹¹⁹ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 12, a. 4, c.: “Cum enim dico, volo medicinam propter sanitatem, non designo nisi unum motum voluntatis.”

¹²⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, ad 3: “Sic igitur in quantum motus voluntatis fertur in id quod est ad finem, prout ordinatur ad finem, est

cisely the will, in act in relation to a given end, that moves itself to procure the adequate *ea quae sunt ad finem*, as we pointed out earlier.

Regarding the nature of the *electio*, St. Thomas would say that it is an act composed of reason and will, in which “an act belonging essentially to some power or habit, receives a form or species from a higher power or habit, according as an inferior is ordained by a superior.”¹²¹ This being so, “it is evident that, in a sense, reason precedes the will and ordains its act: insofar as the will tends to its object, according to the order of reason, since the apprehensive power presents the object to the appetite. Accordingly, that act whereby the will tends to something proposed to it as being good, through being ordained to the end by the reason, is materially an act of the will, but formally an act of the reason. Now in such like matters the substance of the act is as the matter in comparison to the order imposed by the higher power. Wherefore choice is substantially not an act of the reason but of the will: for choice is accomplished in a certain movement of the soul towards the good which is chosen. Consequently it is evidently an act of the appetitive power.”¹²²

It is important to recognize that “the choice is the key of the human act, but also the knot of all the difficulties in the analysis of action, both in theology and philosophy. Aristotle sees in it a desire and a judgment so intimately joined that he prefers not to attribute the choice [exclusively] to either the appetite or the reason. St. Thomas cuts the knot [...]: for him, the choice is substantially an act of the will, but so closely associated to the judgment of reason that they unite as matter and form, as body and soul, in a vital way.”¹²³ To speak properly of *electio*, there must be various alternatives that could be chosen, because “in those things which are altogether determinate to one there is no place for choice.”¹²⁴ Even in cases where we apparently have no choice, there are always at least two possibilities presented by the practical reason to the will, that of choosing to do a given action or choosing not to do it. Thus, if I am invited to a friend’s birthday party, I have to *choose* between “go to the party” and “don’t go to the party.” It falls then to the practical reason to consider

electio. Motus autem voluntatis qui fertur in finem, secundum quod acquiritur per ea quae sunt ad finem, vocatur intentio. Cuius signum est quod intentio finis esse potest, etiam nondum determinatis his quae sunt ad finem, quorum est *electio*” (Accordingly, insofar as the movement of the will is to the means, as ordained to the end, it is called “choice”: but the movement of the will to the end as acquired by the means, it is called “intention.” A sign of this is that we can have intention of the end without having determined the means which are the object of choice).

¹²¹ *Ibidem*, q. 13, a. 1, c.: “actus qui est essentialiter unius potentiae vel habitus, recipit formam et speciem a superiori potentia vel habitu, secundum quod ordinatur inferius a superiori.”

¹²² *Ibidem*: “Manifestum est autem quod ratio quodammodo voluntatem praecedat, et ordinat actum eius, in quantum scilicet voluntas in suum obiectum tendit secundum ordinem rationis, eo quod vis apprehensiva appetitivae suum obiectum repraesentat. Sic igitur ille actus quo voluntas tendit in aliquid quod proponitur ut bonum, ex eo quod per rationem est ordinatum ad finem, materialiter quidem est voluntatis, formaliter autem rationis. In huiusmodi autem substantia actus materialiter se habet ad ordinem qui imponitur a superiori potentia. Et ideo *electio* substantialiter non est actus rationis, sed voluntatis, perficitur enim *electio* in motu quodam animae ad bonum quod eligitur. Unde manifeste actus est appetitivae potentiae.”

¹²³ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note b, p. 186.

¹²⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 13, a. 2, c.: “in his quae sunt penitus determinata ad unum, *electio* locum non habet.”

and compare the various ways by which a given end can be reached, which is why in small children and irrational animals one cannot speak properly of deliberate choice, since they do not have the capacity to deliberate about *ae quae sunt ad finem*. They are moved by the sensitive appetite which, in virtue of the natural instinct, is determined in relation to the particular goods cognitively apprehended. “An irrational animal takes one thing in preference to another, because its appetite is naturally determinate to that thing,”¹²⁵ and something analogous occurs in children before the use of reason.

Can the person choose freely? Or is he determined by the object that is presented to him by practical reason as being the best? St. Thomas’s response to this question is both precise and balanced, and allows us to comprehend adequately his vision of human freedom. When the practical reason deliberates, considering and comparing various alternative objects in view of a given end, it is capable of recognizing various different aspects of the good. Thus a given object may present itself as being the best according to a given aspect of the good, but when the object’s goodness is considered from another perspective, another object might be the most acceptable. For example, a particular computer may present itself as being the best buy if we consider its performance, but when we consider price, the best choice will likely be another model. Given that no finite good is fully identified with the universal good, it is always possible for practical reason to find different options that are better, according to the different aspects of the good that are considered.¹²⁶ Only happiness, as an absolute good, is necessarily willed by the will. When the reason presents to the will different alternative objects in view of the same end, the question is only decided with the act of the will of the *electio* of one of the objects.¹²⁷ For this reason, “in no way can one conclude that the practical judgment is effected first, and the choice follows as a simple consequence or application. Indeed, the practical judgment and the choice are concomitant and correlated: the choice cannot exist without the judgment that presents the good, and neither can the practical judgment exist without voluntary choice, given that it affects what is suitable to the will, following its inclinations and dispositions.”¹²⁸ St. Thomas thus maintains that “[m]an does not choose of necessity,”¹²⁹ since “the will can tend to whatever the reason can apprehend as good.”¹³⁰ This is also true when one

¹²⁵ *Ibidem*, ad 2: “brutum animal accipit unum prae alio, quia appetitus eius est naturaliter determinatus ad ipsum.”

¹²⁶ Cf. J. of ST. THOMAS, *Naturalis philosophiae*, IV pars, Marietti, Turin 1937, p. 402: “Omnia autem bona, quae non repraesentantur ut plene bona vel connexionem necessariam habentia cum pleno bono, displicere possunt voluntati, et non necessitant illam” (Anything good, that doesn’t represent all the fullness of good or doesn’t have a necessary connection with the fullness of good, can unplease the will and doesn’t determine it).

¹²⁷ Cf. CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 13, a. 6, cit., t. 6, p. 104: “simpliciter namque et absolute voluntas a toto genere eligibilium libera est, ad nullum necessario inclinatur” (absolutely speaking the will is free of choosing anything within the choosable actions and she’s not incline necessarily to any choice).

¹²⁸ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note d, p. 189.

¹²⁹ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 13, a. 6, c.: “homo non ex necessitate eligit.”

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*: “Quidquid enim ratio potest apprehendere ut bonum, in hoc voluntas tendere potest.” There is a great variety

chooses not to act, because a good is seen in that option.

Since the will is in act with respect to a particular end that cannot be reached immediately, it moves the practical reason to deliberate over *ea quae sunt ad finem*, in an effort of discernment in view of the *electio*. “Deliberation properly implies the comparison of many things,”¹³¹ that is, the comparison of the various alternative means for reaching the desired end. However, “we must take note that in contingent particular cases, in order that anything be known for certain, it is necessary to take several conditions or circumstances into consideration, which it is not easy for one to consider.”¹³² By oneself it is difficult to discern what is the most virtuous choice, “[b]ut when not only the means, but also the way of using the means, is fixed, then there is no need of counsel”¹³³ of any kind, because there is essentially no choice to be made.

“[T]he principle in the inquiry of counsel is the end, which precedes indeed in intention, but comes afterwards into execution. Hence the inquiry of counsel must needs be one of analysis, beginning that is to say, from that which is intended in the future, and continuing until it arrives at that which is to be done at once.”¹³⁴ Recall that according to St. Thomas, in the order of intention one proceeds from the final end up to the most proximate end,¹³⁵ whereas in the order of execution one proceeds from the proximate end in the direction of the final end: “consequently the order of reasoning about actions is contrary to the order of actions.”¹³⁶

St. Thomas asserts that “consent is an act of the appetitive power,”¹³⁷ not the intellectual, i.e. it is an act of the will and not of the intellect, even if “[s]ense, properly speaking, belongs to the apprehensive faculty; but by way of similitude, insofar as it implies seeking acquaintance, it belongs

of ways under which the practical reason can consider the goodness of a given moral object, and this fact helps us to understand why people faced with objectively similar situations can follow such different choices. Everyone chooses what seems best to him, but each was led to consider a particular aspect of the good as the most important. Virtue disposes the moral subject to the excellent choice, but there are a plurality of virtues and not all possess them in the same way, which complicates things further. Thus the dictates of practical reason can vary from person to person, and this does not imply the denial of the objective dimension of morality. One can see that the question is complex, and very interesting.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, q. 14, a. 3, c.: “consilium proprie importat collationem inter plures habitam.”

¹³² *Ibidem*: “Est autem considerandum quod in particularibus contingentibus, ad hoc quod aliquid certum cognoscatur, plures conditiones seu circumstantias considerare oportet, quas ab uno non facile est considerari.”

¹³³ *Ibidem*, a. 4, ad 3: “Sed quando determinatur non solum res, sed modus, tunc non est opus consilio.”

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, a. 5, c.: “Principium autem in inquisitione consilii est finis, qui quidem est prior in intentione, posterior tamen in esse. Et secundum hoc, oportet quod inquisitio consilii sit resolutive, incipiendo scilicet ab eo quod in futuro intenditur, quousque perveniatur ad id quod statim agendum est.”

¹³⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 89, a. 6, c.: “primum quod tunc homini cogitandum occurrit, est deliberare de seipso. Et si quidem seipsum ordinaverit ad debitum finem, per gratiam consequetur remissionem originalis peccati. Si vero non ordinet seipsum ad debitum finem, secundum quod in illa aetate est capax discretionis, peccabit mortaliter, non faciens quod in se est” (the first thing that occurs to a man to think about then, is to deliberate about himself. And if he then direct himself to the due end, he will, by means of grace, receive the remission of original sin: whereas if he does not then direct himself to the due end, and as far as he is capable of discretion at that particular age, he will sin mortally, for through not doing that which is in his power to do).

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, q. 14, a. 5, ad 1: “ideo ordo ratiocinandi de operationibus, est contrarius ordini operandi.”

¹³⁷ *Ibidem*, q. 15, a. 1, c.: “consentire est actus appetitivae virtutis.”

to the appetitive power.”¹³⁸ The will being a rational appetite, it is not surprising that “to consent [...] implies a certain union to the object of consent. Hence the will, to which it belongs to tend to the thing itself, is more properly said to consent.”¹³⁹ At times the passions of the sensibility, presented by the practical reason as a desirable good to the will, lead one to consent, but as has already been said, they do not have necessitating force, as with irrational animals which necessarily follow their passions. The person can refuse to consent to the suggestions of passion.¹⁴⁰ Things being so, it might seem that the concepts of consent and of choice are identical, but in fact, “choice includes something that consent has not, namely, a certain relation to something to which something else is preferred: and therefore after consent there still remains a choice. For it may happen that by aid of counsel several means have been found conducive to the end, and through each of these meeting with approval, consent has been given to each: but after approving of many, we have given our preference to one by choosing it. But if only one meets with approval, then consent and choice do not differ in reality, but only in our way of looking at them.”¹⁴¹ For example, when I am buying a gelato, I can consent to many flavors, but in fact I choose two or three. Regarding this conceptual distinction between consent and choice, “one senses here the difficulty experienced by St. Thomas in introducing Augustinian consent into his analysis. For St. Augustine, consent was properly a choice, assuming the responsibility for sin. St. Thomas, consequently, reduces the nature of consent somewhat, distinguishing it from choice and associating it with deliberation. The final distinction between consent and choice is fine and a bit subtle, but he seeks to explain as exactly as possible the real data”¹⁴² of experience.

After examining the nature of consent and choice, St. Thomas focuses on “use”¹⁴³ as an act of the will. Use occurs when we apply ourselves to a particular chosen action, in which the will moves the other faculties of the soul, applying them to the action according to the nature of each faculty. “[The faculties] are compared to the will which applies them to act, as the instruments are compared

¹³⁸ *Ibidem*, ad 2: “dicendum, quod sentire proprie dictum ad apprehensivam potentiam pertinet, sed secundum similitudinem cuiusdam experientiae, pertinet ad appetitivam.”

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “consentire est simul sentire, et sic importat quandam coniunctionem ad id cui consentitur. Et ideo voluntas, cuius est tendere ad ipsam rem, magis proprie dicitur consentire.”

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 2, ad 3: “homines qui ex passione agunt, possunt passionem non sequi. Non autem bruta animalia” ([t]he man who acts through passion is able not to follow the passion: whereas irrational animals have not that power); *ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “consensus in actum pertinet ad rationem superiorem, secundum tamen quod in ratione voluntas includitur” (consent to the act belongs to the higher reason; but in that sense in which the reason includes the will).

¹⁴¹ *Ibidem*, a. 3, ad 3: “dicendum quod electio addit supra consensum quandam relationem respectu eius cui aliquid praeeligitur, et ideo post consensum, adhuc remanet electio. Potest enim contingere quod per consilium inveniantur plura ducentia ad finem, quorum dum quodlibet placet, in quodlibet eorum consentitur, sed ex multis quae placent, praeaccipimus unum eligendo. Sed si inveniatur unum solum quod placeat, non differunt re consensus et electio, sed ratione tantum.”

¹⁴² S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note d, p. 208.

¹⁴³ Cf. S.L. BROCK, *Action and Conduct*, cit., pp. 175 ff.

to the principal agent.”¹⁴⁴ Wanting to flee a dog that wants to bite me, I *use* my legs to run as fast as I can. We thus speak of use when the moment has arrived for executing the action, since “to use is to apply an active principle to action: thus to consent is to apply the appetitive movement to the desire of something [...]. Now he alone who has the disposal of a thing, can apply it to something else; and this belongs to him alone who knows how to refer it to something else, which is an act of the reason. And therefore none but a rational animal consents and uses.”¹⁴⁵ Use therefore involves applying oneself to a given action, and “consequently use always regards the means. For this reason things that are adapted to a certain end are said to be ‘useful’; in fact their very usefulness is sometimes called use.”¹⁴⁶ In this sense one can say that friendship is very useful, not because it is something purely instrumental, but, quite to the contrary, because it is among those things that contribute to attaining happiness.¹⁴⁷ The utilitarian rationality dominant in today’s culture would have a difficult time understanding the sense of the useful in St. Thomas. He would say, for example, that virtue is useful, something that would sound a bit bizarre to today’s utilitarian.¹⁴⁸ Finally, there is still another sense in which it can be said that the will uses. Given that the will is a spiritual faculty and can therefore refer to its own act, something which the faculties linked to a material organ cannot do,¹⁴⁹ one can say that the will uses itself in applying itself to its own acts. St. Thomas formulates this important idea by saying, “acts of the will react on one another, in each act of the will we can find consent and choice and use; so that we may say that the will consents to choose, and consents to consent, and uses itself in consenting and choosing.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 16, a. 1, c.: “quae comparantur ad voluntatem, a qua applicantur ad agendum, sicut instrumenta ad principale agens.”

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 2, c.: “uti est applicare aliquod principium actionis ad actionem, sicut consentire est applicare motum appetitivum ad aliquid appetendum, ut dictum est. Applicare autem aliquid ad alterum non est nisi eius quod habet arbitrium super illud, quod non est nisi eius qui scit referre aliquid in alterum, quod ad rationem pertinet. Et ideo solum animal rationale et consentit, et utitur.”

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, a. 3, c.: “ideo uti semper est eius quod est ad finem. Propter quod et ea quae sunt ad finem accommodata, utilia dicuntur; et ipsa utilitas interdum usus nominatur.”

¹⁴⁷ Cf. CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 19, a. 2, cit., t. 6, p. 143: “id quod est ad finem, dupliciter comparari potest ad voluntatem. Uno modo, ut sic: et non habet aliam bonitatem, sed finis est eius ratio fundamentalis. Alio modo, secundum aliquam aliam propriam bonitatem: et sic non est ut ad finem, sed ut seorsum volitum.”

¹⁴⁸ Recent decades have seen the attempt to import a utilitarian rationality coming from the sphere of economics into ethical and moral discourse. Fruits of this attempt are utilitarian ethics, consequentialism and proportionalism, which claim to evaluate the morality of actions considering, from a third-person perspective, the consequences that derive from them. They propose to maximize the “output” of our actions, especially with regard to optimizing personal and social well-being. This effort ends by eliminating the perspective proper to morality. Cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 77: “Reputatio bonorum atque malorum, quae ad actionem quadam praevideri possunt, methodus apta non est ad statuendum sitne delectio certae se gerendi rationis “secundum speciem suam” vel “in se ipsa” moraliter bona an mala, licita an illicita” (The weighing of the goods and evils foreseeable as the consequence of an action is not an adequate method for determining whether the choice of that concrete kind of behavior is “according to its species,” or “in itself,” morally good or bad, licit or illicit); M. RHONHEIMER, *Legge naturale e ragione pratica*, cit., p. 335: “utilitarian ethics is a eudaimonistic ethics, but as such it has in fact never elaborated a theory of happiness, i.e. it has no criteria for determining in what might consist human happiness.”

¹⁴⁹ For example, whereas the will can will this act of willing, the vision cannot see this act of seeing.

¹⁵⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 16, a. 4, ad 3: “actus voluntatis reflectuntur supra seipsos, in quolibet actu voluntatis

d) Acts commanded by the will

In q. 17 of the I-II, St. Thomas studies, in nine articles, the nature of acts commanded by the will through the reason to the other human faculties. He states, “[C]ommand is essentially [...] an act of the reason: for the commander orders the one commanded to do something, by way of intimation or declaration.”¹⁵¹ It is the practical reason that says, “do this,” or, “you must not do that.” As, however, “the first mover, among the powers of the soul, to the doing of an act is the will [...] it follows that the very fact that the reason moves by commanding, is due to the power of the will. Consequently it follows that command is an act of the reason, presupposing an act of the will, in virtue of which the reason, by its command, moves (the power) to the execution of the act.”¹⁵² It should be emphasized that “the definition of ‘command’ or ‘to command’ as an act of the reason containing a voluntary impulse is very important, since this determines the definition of law, precepts and commands as being a work of reason primarily, and not a work of the pure will of the legislator, as will be said later.”¹⁵³ St. Thomas, though he acknowledges that “the root of liberty is especially in the will,”¹⁵⁴ gives a decisive place to the practical reason because it is this that forms the practical judgment about the good to be pursued and the evil to be avoided. In this way he avoids denying the freedom of the will, because “the will can tend freely towards various objects, precisely because the reason can have various perceptions of good”;¹⁵⁵ he also avoids a conception in which freedom is defined as a pure act of the will, separating it from the practical truth concerning the good to be done and the evil to be avoided, with the attendant danger of falling into an absolute arbitrariness.¹⁵⁶ Aquinas also opportunely distinguishes between the way of acting proper to human beings and that

potest accipi et consensus, et electio, et usus, ut si dicatur quod voluntas consentit se eligere, et consentit se consentire, et utitur se ad consentiendum et eligendum.”

¹⁵¹ *Ibidem*, q. 17, a. 1, c.: “Imperare autem est quidem essentialiter actus rationis, imperans enim ordinat eum cui imperat, ad aliquid agendum, intimando vel denunciando.”

¹⁵² *Ibidem*: “Primum autem movens in viribus animae ad exercitium actus, est voluntas, ut supra dictum est. Cum ergo secundum movens non moveat nisi in virtute primi moventis, sequitur quod hoc ipsum quod ratio movet imperando, sit ei ex virtute voluntatis. Unde relinquitur quod imperare sit actus rationis, praesupposito actu voluntatis, in cuius virtute ratio movet per imperium ad exercitium actus.”

¹⁵³ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note b, p. 219. It is well known that a profoundly voluntaristic vision of law entered after William of Ockham. For Ockham, precepts emanated by the legislator have the force of law, independently of the *ordo rationis*. In this line of reasoning the virtue of obedience tends to take the place of the *auriga virtutum* that St. Thomas attributes to prudence.

¹⁵⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 17, a. 1, arg. 2: “radix libertatis est maxime in voluntate.”

¹⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, ad 2: “voluntas libere potest ad diversa ferri, quia ratio potest habere diversas conceptiones boni.”

¹⁵⁶ Cf. *De veritate*, q. 24, a. 2, c.: “bruta nullo modo sunt liberi arbitrii. Ad cuius evidentiam sciendum est, quod cum ad operationem nostram tria concurrant, scilicet cognitio, appetitus, et ipsa operatio, tota ratio libertatis ex modo cognitionis dependet. Appetitus enim cognitionem sequitur, cum appetitus non sit nisi boni, quod sibi per vim cognitivam proponitur. [...] Iudicium autem est in potestate iudicantis secundum quod potest de suo iudicio iudicare: de eo enim quod est in nostra potestate, possumus iudicare. Iudicare autem de iudicio suo est solius rationis, quae super actum suum reflectitur, et cognoscit habitudines rerum de quibus iudicat, et per quas iudicat: unde totius libertatis radix est in ratione constituta. Unde secundum quod aliquid se habet ad rationem, sic se habet ad liberum arbitrium”; CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 17, a. 2, cit., t. 6, p. 119: “radix libertatis formaliter est voluntas, causaliter est ratio.”

of irrational animals, asserting that “the impulse of man to action arises from the directing reason; wherefore his impulse is one of command. On the other hand, the impulse of irrational animals arises from natural instinct; because as soon as they apprehend the fitting or the unfitting, their appetite is moved naturally to pursue or to avoid. Wherefore they are directed by another to act; and they themselves do not direct themselves to act. Consequently in them is impulse but not command.”¹⁵⁷

Regarding the relationship between use and command, Aquinas maintains that “use of that which is directed to the end, insofar as it is in the reason referring this to the end, precedes choice, as stated above. Wherefore still more does it precede command. On the other hand, use of that which is directed to the end, insofar as it is subject to the executive power, follows command.”¹⁵⁸ According to the order of intention, therefore, use precedes command, but if we consider the order of execution, use follows command. We should bear in mind that these distinctions made by St. Thomas are at the structural level of human action, and do not imply a necessary temporal differentiation: they can perfectly well occur simultaneously in a particular concrete action.

Regarding the unity between the command and the commanded act, St. Thomas would say that they form a single human act in which “the act of a lower power is in the position of matter in regard to the act of a higher power.”¹⁵⁹ Thus the will applies the other faculties to its own act, informing them with its own act of willing. We can say that the act of the will forms as it were the soul of the action,¹⁶⁰ involving the various other human faculties with their proper acts, and “when one power is the mover of the other, then their acts are, in a way, one.”¹⁶¹ When I run from the dog, my will to flee from the dog by running is the “soul” or the form of my entire action, an action which incorporates the use of various faculties coordinated among themselves, which form the “body” or the matter of the action.

If with respect to the order of execution the reason cannot apply the will to its own act, since

¹⁵⁷ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 17, a. 2, ad 3: “Homines enim faciunt impetum ad opus per ordinationem rationis, unde habet in eis impetus rationem imperii. In brutis autem fit impetus ad opus per instinctum naturae, quia scilicet appetitus eorum statim apprehenso convenienti vel inconvenienti, naturaliter movetur ad prosecutionem vel fugam. Unde ordinantur ab alio ad agendum, non autem ipsa seipsa ordinant ad actionem. Et ideo in eis est impetus, sed non imperium.”

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, a. 3, c.: “usus eius quod est ad finem, secundum quod est in ratione referente ipsum in finem, praecedit electionem, ut supra dictum est. Unde multo magis praecedit imperium. Sed usus eius quod est ad finem, secundum quod subditur potentiae executivae, sequitur imperium.”

¹⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “actus inferioris potentiae materialiter se habet ad actum superioris.”

¹⁶⁰ Cf. E. COLOM, A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Scelti in Cristo*, cit., p. 177: “la azione morale non é un semplice evento esterno al quale seguono certi effetti. L’evento e gli effetti sono solo la componente fisica dell’azione, il corpo dell’azione, ma l’azione volontaria é costituita anche, e in senso formale, dalla volontarietà, che é come la sua anima” (moral action is not a simple external event, to which certain effects follow. The event and the effects are only the physical component of the action, the body of the action, but the voluntary action is also constituted, and in a formal sense, by the voluntariness, which is like its soul); S. RAMÍREZ, *De actibus humanis*, cit., p. 561: “Ita se habet moralitas actus interioris ad moralitatem actus exterioris sicut anima ad corpus.”

¹⁶¹ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 17, a. 4, ad 1: “quando una potentia est movens alteram, tunc actus earum sunt quodammodo unus.”

it is the latter than moves itself, the same cannot be said of the will, since in some cases it is in the will's power to will to apply or not to apply the reason to its own act – i.e., I can will to think or not to think, to think about this or about that. When the human intellect considers evident truths, as for example the first principles, it cannot fail to assent to them; “But some things which are apprehended do not convince the intellect to such an extent as not to leave it free to assent or dissent [...]; and in such things assent or dissent is in our power, and is subject to our command.”¹⁶² Thus “the exercise of the intellect depends on us: the effort to study, to seek, and to assent to a truth that is not obvious. This is so, to a greater or lesser degree, in what pertains to our concrete acts, which are contingent and complex, as also in the act of faith, human or divine. Commanded assent would not be an obligation of the will, but would proceed from a superior light, perceived inchoately but surely, as the wisdom or knowledge of the master is for the disciple.”¹⁶³ Along these lines “Reason commands itself, just as the will moves itself [...], that is to say, insofar as each power reacts on its own acts, and from one thing tends to another.”¹⁶⁴

Regarding the control we have over acts of the sensibility, St. Thomas acknowledges that “the reason governs the irascible and concupiscible not by a ‘despotic supremacy,’ which is that of a master over his slave; but by a ‘politic and royal supremacy,’ whereby the free are governed.”¹⁶⁵ We have some power over our sensible faculties, but our passions can at times resist and “make war” against the political control of reason and will. The virtues, namely temperance and fortitude, are needed so as to “educate” the sensibility to cooperate with greater docility with the command of practical reason, thus helping the person to more easily reach his true good.

Regarding the motor faculty, as a human faculty this is clearly subject to reason,¹⁶⁶ “whereas those movements of members, that arise from the natural powers, are not subject to the command of reason,”¹⁶⁷ as for example the heart muscle,¹⁶⁸ which is not subject to the command of reason.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, a. 6, c.: “Sunt autem quaedam apprehensa, quae non adeo convincunt intellectum, quin possit assentire vel dissentire, vel saltem assensum vel dissensum suspendere, propter aliquam causam, et in talibus assensus ipse vel dissensus in potestate nostra est, et sub imperio cadit.”

¹⁶³ S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note g, p. 226.

¹⁶⁴ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 17, a. 6, ad 1: “dicendum quod ratio hoc modo imperat sibi ipsi, sicut et voluntas movet seipsam, [ut supra dictum est,] in quantum scilicet utraque potentia reflectitur supra suum actum, et ex uno in aliud tendit.”

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 7, c.: “quod ratio praeest irascibili et concupiscibili non principatu despotico, qui est domini ad servum; sed principatu politico aut regali, qui est ad liberos.”

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 9, c.: “omnes motus membrorum quae moventur a potentiis sensitivis, subduntur imperio rationis” (all movements of members, that are moved by the sensitive powers, are subject to the command of reason).

¹⁶⁷ *Ibidem*: “motus autem membrorum qui consequuntur vires naturales, non subduntur imperio rationis.”

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, ad 2: “motus cordis est secundum naturam, et non secundum voluntatem” (the movement of the heart is according to nature, and not according to the will).

e) *Final considerations*

How does St. Thomas conceive of the human act? For Thomas, the human act is a free act, since it is an act over which the person has dominion in virtue of his reason and will;¹⁶⁹ he thus says that in the voluntary act, the person is truly master of his acts.¹⁷⁰ This free act is an act that *proceeds from a deliberate will*, concretized in a particular *electio*. The human will is an appetitive power of the rational soul that *by nature* has as its proper object the universal good apprehended and ordered by human reason. Human reason, the cognitive faculty of the human soul, has as its proper object *ens* – that which is – and consequently the truth concerning being. This same reason, however, which is by nature speculative, is called practical by extension in that it considers the good to be done and the evil to be avoided, presenting to the will the goods to which it must tend. The universal or absolute good is also called the final end of human action, and presents itself as a reality that is transcendent to the moral subject, and not identified with the immanent act of the good will. The person is thus naturally inclined to an absolute transcendent good; on this inclination is based his natural desire for happiness,¹⁷¹ which presents itself as something necessary, that is, beyond human disposition or choice.

Any being, as an agent, acts necessarily for an end.¹⁷² Non-rational agents tend naturally and necessarily to the ends given them by their nature which, we must remember, is a concrete nature created by God.¹⁷³ Man's nature is to be a rational animal who, in virtue of his practical reason, is capable of grasping the aspect of good of various alternative ends – which at times are mutually exclusive¹⁷⁴ – and moving himself in pursuit of some of them. The person thus acts as the “parent” of his own choices, moving himself to his end with a formal knowledge of its goodness. To live faithfully his natural vocation to happiness, it is necessary that he arrive at the understanding that the final end to which we naturally tend can be none other than God himself, since only He is Good *sim-*

¹⁶⁹ Cf. CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 10, a. 1, cit., t. 6, p. 84: “liberum habet pro causa velle, naturalem autem esse: id enim solum libere fit, quod fit quia vult.”

¹⁷⁰ Cf. M. RHONHEIMER, *Legge naturale e ragione pratica*, cit., p. 174: “l'uomo è capace di indirizzare se stesso verso il bene, conoscendo e volendo il bene, e con il “dominium” dei suoi atti” (the person is capable of directing himself toward the good, knowing and willing the good, and with the “dominium” over his acts).

¹⁷¹ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 5: “naturaliter homo appetit ultimum finem, scilicet beatitudinem” ([man] naturally desires his last end, which is happiness).

¹⁷² Cf. *ibidem*, I-II, q. 1, a. 2, c.: “omnia agentia necesse est agere propter finem” ([e]very agent, of necessity, acts for an end).

¹⁷³ Cf. *Compendium theologiae*, lib. 1, cap. 100: “Deus res in esse produxit non per necessitatem naturae, sed per intellectum et voluntatem, omne autem tale agens agit propter finem, operativi enim intellectus finis principium est: necesse est igitur omnia quae a Deo sunt facta, propter finem esse. Adhuc. Productio rerum a Deo optime facta est: optimi enim est optime facere unumquodque. Melius est autem fieri aliquid propter finem quam absque finis intentione: ex fine enim est ratio boni in his quae fiunt. Sunt igitur res a Deo factae propter finem. Huius etiam signum apparet in his quae a natura aguntur, quorum nihil in vanum est, sed propter finem unumquodque.”

¹⁷⁴ Cf. CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 8, a. 3, cit., t. 6, p. 72: “idem actus voluntatis esset simul volitio et nolitio: ut patet cum quis odit peccatum propter Deum. Si enim est unus actus, erit simul velle Deum ut finem, et nolle peccatum ut repugnans fini.”

pliciter, in every sense. Only God can fully satisfy the desire for happiness present in the heart of each person.

For St. Thomas, “appetite” is a tendency proceeding from an intrinsic principle of the being, which can be to will a natural form,¹⁷⁵ a sensibly apprehended form or an intelligible form.¹⁷⁶ In virtue of its proper appetite each being tends to its good and, once attained, rests in it. In beings not endowed with sensible knowledge, the appetite follows only the inclinations determined by their natural form.¹⁷⁷ For irrational animals endowed with sensible knowledge, the appetite also inclines to follow sensibly known forms, which are slightly more adequately related to the nature of the *bonum*. Here it is said that the appetitive act belongs more intensely to the agent – it is more “his” – since it presupposes an act of sensible knowledge without which the agent would not be led to act. As mentioned previously, this is why St. Thomas analogously applies the concept of voluntariness to the acts of the sensible appetite of irrational animals, since they manifest a certain degree of immanence, and in fact proceed from an intrinsic principle and are accompanied by a sensible knowledge of the end. Only in man, however, is there voluntariness in the proper sense, given that only human reason grasps the *ratio boni* of a given action. This allows him to exercise a higher causality

¹⁷⁵ The substantial form determines the proper nature of each being, and also determines the dynamic of its appetite. All beings therefore have, in virtue of their proper nature, specific natural inclinations, which, in the case of man, the practical reason naturally grasps. Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2, c.: “Sicut autem ens est primum quod cadit in apprehensione simpliciter, ita bonum est primum quod cadit in apprehensione practicae rationis, quae ordinatur ad opus, omne enim agens agit propter finem, qui habet rationem boni. Et ideo primum principium in ratione practica est quod fundatur supra rationem boni, quae est, bonum est quod omnia appetunt. Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum. Et super hoc fundantur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae, ut scilicet omnia illa facienda vel vitanda pertineant ad praecepta legis naturae, quae ratio practica naturaliter apprehendit esse bona humana. Quia vero bonum habet rationem finis, malum autem rationem contrarii, inde est quod omnia illa ad quae homo habet naturalem inclinationem, ratio naturaliter apprehendit ut bona, et per consequens ut opere prosequenda, et contraria eorum ut mala et vitanda. Secundum igitur ordinem inclinationum naturalium, est ordo praeceptorum legis naturae” (Now as “being” is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, so “good” is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which is directed to action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of good, viz. that “good is that which all things seek after.” Hence this is the first precept of law, that “good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.” All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man’s good [or evil] belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided. Since, however, good has the nature of an end, and evil, the nature of a contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination, are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance. Wherefore according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law); *ibidem*, II-II, q. 47, a. 15, c.: “fines recti humanae vitae sunt determinati” (the right ends of human life are fixed).

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *ibidem*, I-II, q. 8, a. 1, c.: “omnis inclinatio consequatur aliquam formam, appetitus naturalis consequitur formam in natura existentem, appetitus autem sensitivus, vel etiam intellectivus seu rationalis, qui dicitur voluntas, sequitur formam apprehensam” (since every inclination results from a form, the natural appetite results from a form existing in the nature of things: while the sensitive appetite, as also the intellective or rational appetite, which we call the will, follows from an apprehended form).

¹⁷⁷ Cf. *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 3, cap. 2, n. 6: “Omne agens vel agit per naturam, vel per intellectum. De agentibus autem per intellectum non est dubium quin agant propter finem: agunt enim praeconciptes in intellectu id quod per actionem consequuntur, et ex tali praeconceptione agunt; hoc enim est agere per intellectum. Sicut autem in intellectu praeconciptente existit tota similitudo effectus ad quem per actiones intelligentis pervenitur, ita in agente naturali praeconciptente existit similitudo naturalis effectus, ex qua actio ad hunc effectum determinatur: nam ignis generat ignem, et oliva olivam. Sicut igitur agens per intellectum tendit in finem determinatum per suam actionem, ita agens per naturam.”

over his own action. In fact, the person not only knows the intrinsic finality of his action, but he is also capable of deliberating over the suitability of an end and over what is necessary to reach it, being then able to incline himself to it or not. We thus say that his inclination is free, since he does not have a *determinatio ad unum* as with irrational animals. Rather, the person can truly initiate, by his act of the will, his inclination in relation to a given object presented by the practical reason as a suitable good.¹⁷⁸ It can even occur that what is repugnant to the sensibility be apprehended by the reason as a desirable good, as, for example, when I drink a very bitter medicine to be healed of an illness, something an irrational animal would never desire naturally.¹⁷⁹

In the human act, reason and will (the rational appetite) work in a very united manner, and while various conceptual distinctions between them are useful, it would be erroneous to separate in reality the dynamic proper to each of these intellectual faculties of the soul. Human reason, which by extension has a practical application, enables us to elaborate various plans of action, taking into account our specific nature with its natural inclinations and our natural desire for happiness. These different moral objects can result from a sensible stimulus, as when I desire to eat a pizza after smelling the delicious aroma coming from an Italian restaurant, or it could originate from considerations of the reason not resulting from an immediate sensible stimulus, as for example when I consider the idea of visiting a sick friend in the hospital. In every case, the will always follows a particular practical judgment pronounced by reason, a fact which, as we saw above, does not nullify freedom of choice.¹⁸⁰ Without the use of reason, the will absolutely cannot move itself, because it would lack an object to which to tend.¹⁸¹ This is why it is said that without the use of reason we cannot speak properly of human acts, because there could be no deliberate act of the will. There would only be those acts of man in which the action does proceed from an intrinsic principle – from the natural appetite or from the sensible appetite, as with children before the use of reason – but which are not accompanied by a formal knowledge of the end.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 82, a. 2, ad 1: “voluntas in nihil potest tendere nisi sub ratione boni. Sed quia bonum est multiplex, propter hoc non ex necessitate determinatur ad unum” ([t]he will can tend to nothing except under the aspect of good. But because good is of many kinds, for this reason the will is not of necessity determined to one).

¹⁷⁹ Cf. CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 8, a. 1, cit., t. 6, p. 69: “Quod autem decipit oppositum dicentes, est quia sunt quaedam absolute volita vel nolita quae neutralia videntur, sed non sunt. Patet de hac vita martyrum, et proiectione mercium in mare: martyres enim volunt vivere absolute, et cum hoc volunt propter Deum privare vita; et similiter negotiatores nolunt proicere merces, et cum hoc nolunt perdere vita salvando merces. In istis enim videtur quod nec propter se, nec propter aliud sint volita aut nolita. Sed si quis diligenter inspiciat, martyr amat hanc vitam propter se, quoniam amat eam propter propriam ipsius vitae bonitatem, absque relatione ad alium finem: sed quia magis amat Deum, et Dei gloriam ac testimonium, quam propriam vitam, ideo vult oppositum vitae propter aliud, scilicet Deum.”

¹⁸⁰ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 83, a. 3, c.: “propriam libri arbitrii est electio” ([t]he proper act of free-will is choice).

¹⁸¹ Cf. L. LEHU, *Philosophia moralis et socialis praelectiones habitae in Pontificio Internationali Collegio Angelico de Urbe*, Lecoffre, Paris 1914, p. 103: “Nam voluntas non potest appetere bonum nisi praesentatum a ratione.” The opposite, however, is not true. Reason can know without being moved by the will, and also apply itself to its own act under the command of the will; cf. *De malo*, q. 6, c.: “intelligo enim quia volo.”

The practical reason is thus the formal cause of the act of the will and, as such, is said to specify the will's act, given that the directly willed "form" gives the act of the will its species.¹⁸² This is the order of specification. On the other hand, according to the order of execution, it falls to the will to move itself and the other powers of the soul as efficient cause. Note that to distinguish the order of execution from the order of specification should not lead us to think of distinct acts; rather, they are only two different perspectives from which a single human act is considered.

The human being is thus shown to possess a unique capacity that distinguishes him from all the rest of material creation: the capacity to move himself¹⁸³ at the level of action, to determine his concrete path in the search for happiness.¹⁸⁴ In this sense his life is in his own hands. He can realize his humanity through his choices, or corrupt it, denying in practice the truth of his orientation to the absolute Good, which is God Himself.

3. THE MORALITY OF HUMAN ACTS

Having clarified St. Thomas's understanding of the human act, we are now in a better position to consider its morality, i.e., its specific distinction from the moral perspective, which we will try to do briefly in the following paragraphs.

What, according to St. Thomas, is the moral species of the human act? The response to this question will allow us later to *specifically distinguish* human acts one from another, grouping them according to their moral species. This specific distinction among the various human acts is extremely important, especially in those cases where one seeks to discern whether a given action is good or evil according to its moral species. As we noted in the introduction to this study, our entire investigation has been animated and stimulated by the encyclical *Veritatis splendor*, in which Pope John Paul II clearly affirmed that "The morality of the human act depends primarily and fundamentally on the 'object' rationally chosen by the deliberate will, as is borne out by the *insightful analysis, still valid today, made by St. Thomas*"¹⁸⁵ *Aquinas*. Moreover, we are personally convinced that the resolution of a great many of the contemporary disputes concerning the moral object can be ob-

¹⁸² Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 88, a. 6, c.: "quia a ratione deliberata habet speciem moralis actus" (a moral act takes its species from deliberate reason). The expression *ratione deliberata* should not cause confusion, even if it is bit unusual. It is enough to bear in mind that it is the *form* that the practical reason proposes to the will as the conclusion of the deliberative process that is the at the root of the moral specification of the movement of the will.

¹⁸³ Cf. *ibidem*, I, q. 83, a. 1, ad 3: "homo per liberum arbitrium seipsum movet ad agendum" (by his free-will man moves himself to act).

¹⁸⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 82, a. 1, ad 3: "sumus domini nostrorum actuum secundum quod possumus hoc vel illud eligere. Electio autem non est de fine [ultimo], sed de his quae sunt ad finem" ([w]e are masters of our own actions by reason of our being able to choose this or that. But choice regards not the end, but "the means to the end").

¹⁸⁵ *Veritatis splendor*, n. 78: "actus humani moralitas pendet in primis et fundamentali modo ex "obiecto" deliberata voluntate rationaliter electo, sicut evincitur in acuta etiam nunc valida sancti Thomae investigatione." Emphasis added.

tained through a deeper scientific study of St. Thomas's doctrine on the moral species¹⁸⁶ of human acts.

Before considering qq. 18-21 of the I-II, we want to consider a. 3 of q. 1, in which St. Thomas poses a fundamental question: does the human act receive its species from the end, or not? Here is his response:

“Each thing receives its species in respect of an act and not in respect of potentiality; wherefore things composed of matter and form are established in their respective species by their own forms. And this is also to be observed in proper movements. For since movements are, in a way, divided into action and passion, each of these receives its species from an act; action indeed from the act which is the principle of acting, and passion from the act which is the terminus of the movement. Wherefore heating, as an action, is nothing else than a certain movement proceeding from heat, while heating as a passion is nothing else than a movement towards heat: and it is the definition that shows the specific nature. And either way, human acts, whether they be considered as actions, or as passions, receive their species from the end. For human acts can be considered in both ways, since man moves himself, and is moved by himself. Now it has been stated above that acts are called human, inasmuch as they proceed from a deliberate will. Now the object of the will is the good and the end. And hence it is clear that the principle of human acts, insofar as they are human, is the end. In like manner it is their terminus: for the human act terminates at that which the will intends as the end; thus in natural agents the form of the thing generated is conformed to the form of the generator. And since, as Ambrose says ‘morality is said properly of man,’ moral acts properly speaking receive their species from the end, for moral acts are the same as human acts.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Cf. S. RAMÍREZ, *De actibus humanis*, cit., p. 559: “species moralitatis actus interioris voluntatis fundamentaliter pendent ad obiecto morali.”

¹⁸⁷ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 3, c.: “Respondeo dicendum quod unumquodque sortitur speciem secundum actum, et non secundum potentiam, unde ea quae sunt composita ex materia et forma, constituuntur in suis speciebus per proprias formas. Et hoc etiam considerandum est in motibus propriis. Cum enim motus quodammodo distinguatur per actionem et passionem, utrumque horum ab actu speciem sortitur, actio quidem ab actu qui est principium agendi; passio vero ab actu qui est terminus motus. Unde calefactio actio nihil aliud est quam motio quaedam a calore procedens, calefactio vero passio nihil aliud est quam motus ad calorem, definitio autem manifestat rationem speciei. Et utroque modo actus humani, sive considerentur per modum actionum, sive per modum passionum, a fine speciem sortiuntur. Utrouque enim modo possunt considerari actus humani, eo quod homo movet seipsum, et movetur a seipso. Dictum est autem supra quod actus dicuntur humani, inquantum procedunt a voluntate deliberata. Obiectum autem voluntatis est bonum et finis. Et ideo manifestum est quod principium humanorum actuum, inquantum sunt humani, est finis. Et similiter est terminus eorum, nam id ad quod terminatur actus humanus, est id quod voluntas intendit tanquam finem; sicut in agen-

It is clear, therefore, that the moral species of a human act is a certain act, a form capable of actualizing a particular power of the soul – in this case the will, which has as its proper object the universal good, rationally apprehended. This good rationally apprehended by the practical reason has the nature of an end, since it acts on the rational appetite as a final cause, presenting itself as the terminus of its movement.¹⁸⁸ St. Thomas also speaks of the “object of the will,” saying that it is the good and the end. Unfortunately this Thomistic expression – “*obiectum*” – is susceptible to various interpretations, which can at times lead to contradictory conclusions regarding the morality of concrete human acts. These different interpretations will be examined in detail later in this work.¹⁸⁹ Here we only want to emphasize that the object of the will must be conceived of, not as a physical being considered in its ontological dimension, but above all as a *plan of action* susceptible of being chosen by the will. Such a conception of the object does not in any way exclude that it could fall on a particular physical being, but what must be maintained is that the object cannot be reduced to the physical being. Along these lines, St. Thomas says that “It is possible, however, that an act which is one in respect of its natural species, be ordained to several ends of the will: thus this act ‘to kill a man,’ which is but one act in respect of its natural species, can be ordained, as to an end, to the safeguarding of justice, and to the satisfying of anger: the result being that *there would be several acts in different species of morality*: since in one way there will be an act of virtue, in another, an act of vice. For a movement does not receive its species from that which is its terminus accidentally, but only from that which is its *per se* terminus. Now moral ends are accidental to a natural thing, and conversely *the relation to a natural end is accidental to morality*. Consequently *there is no reason why acts which are the same considered in their natural species, should not be diverse, considered in their moral species, and conversely.*”¹⁹⁰ Once more we note the absolute necessity of putting

tibus naturalibus forma generati est conformis formae generantis. Et quia, ut Ambrosius dicit, super Lucam, *mores proprie dicuntur humani*, actus morales proprie speciem sortiuntur ex fine, nam idem sunt actus morales et actus umani.”

¹⁸⁸ Cf. S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note m, p. 36: “O acto voluntário apresenta esta analogia com o movimento: proceder, como ele, de um princípio para atingir um termo que é o seu object. Pode-se considerá-lo, como uma acção, na medida em que o homem se autodetermina. Tem a sua espécie da forma que é seu princípio, isto é, do fim, object formal da will. Pode-se igualmente considerá-lo como uma paixão, na medida em que é movido por si mesmo. Nesse caso, obtém sua espécie de sua forma, que é o termo para o qual tende. Esse termo é ainda o seu fim. Qualquer que seja o enfoque que se considere, pode-se concluir que os human acts têm sua espécie do fim” (The voluntary act presents this analogy with movement: it proceeds, like [movement], from a principle to reach a term which is its object. It can be considered, as an action, insofar as the person is self-determining. It has its species from the form which is its principle, that is, from the end, the formal object of the will. It can also be considered as a passion, insofar as it is moved by itself. In this case, it gets its species from its form, which is the term to which it tends. That term is still its end. From whatever angle they are considered, one can conclude that human acts receive their species from the end); *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5, c.: “Finis autem dicitur ad quem actus proportionatus est”; *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 38, q. 1, a. 5, s.c. 1: “terminus actus voluntatis est finis.”

¹⁸⁹ Cf. chap. IV, pp. 234-262.

¹⁹⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3: “Possibile tamen est quod unus actus secundum speciem naturae, ordinetur ad diversos fines voluntatis, sicut hoc ipsum quod est occidere hominem, quod est idem secundum speciem naturae, potest ordinari sicut in finem ad conservationem iustitiae, et ad satisfaciendum irae. Et ex hoc erunt diversi actus secun-

ourselves in the first-person perspective in order to be able to evaluate the morality of a human act. Only from this perspective can we know what is the “proximate end, from which [the human act] has its species.”¹⁹¹ This proximate end that specifies the human act is exactly the same reality as the object of the *electio*,¹⁹² of which we just spoke briefly. We can say, therefore, that for St. Thomas, the human act receives its moral species from the proximate end to which the will tends.¹⁹³ For example, at the moment when John *deliberately chooses* “to eat this gelato,” the act of his will is spec-

dum speciem moris, quia uno modo erit actus virtutis, alio modo erit actus vitii. Non enim motus recipit speciem ab eo quod est terminus per accidens, sed solum ab eo quod est terminus per se. Fines autem morales accidunt rei naturalis; et e converso ratio naturalis finis accedit morali. Et ideo nihil prohibet actus qui sunt iidem secundum speciem naturae, esse diversos secundum speciem moris, et e converso.” Emphasis added.

¹⁹¹ *Ibidem*: “finem proximum, a quo habet speciem.”

¹⁹² Cf. *ibidem*, q. 72, a. 3, ad 2: “obiecta, secundum quod comparantur ad actus exteriores, habent rationem materiae circum quam, sed secundum quod comparantur ad actum interiorem voluntatis, habent rationem finium; et ex hoc habent quod dent speciem actui” ([o]bjects, in relation to external acts, have the character of matter “about which”; but, in relation to the interior act of the will, they have the character of end; and it is owing to this that they give the act its species); *ibidem*, q. 73, a. 3, ad 1: “obiectum, etsi sit materia circa quam terminatur actus, habet tamen rationem finis, secundum quod intentio agentis fertur in ipsum [...]. Forma autem actus moralis dependet ex fine” ([a]lthough the object is the matter about which an act is concerned, yet it has the character of an end, insofar as the intention of the agent is fixed on it. [...] Now the form of a moral act depends on the end); *De malo*, q. 2, a. 4, ad 5: “Actus autem moralis, sicut dictum est, recipit speciem ab obiecto secundum quod comparatur ad rationem; et ideo dicitur communiter, quod actus quidam sunt boni vel mali ex genere; et quod actus bonus ex genere, est actus cadens supra debitam materiam, sicut pascere esurientem; actus autem malus ex genere est qui cadit supra indebitam materiam, sicut subtrahere aliena; materia enim actus, dicitur obiectum ipsius” ([A]s I have said, moral acts take their species from their objects as the latter are related to reason. And so we commonly say that some acts are generically good or evil, and that generically good acts concern proper matter, such as feeding the hungry, and generically evil acts concern improper matter, such as stealing what belongs to another, for we call the matter of acts their object); *ibidem*, ad 9: “finis proximus actus idem est quod obiectum, et ab hoc [actus] recipit speciem” (The proximate end of acts is the same as the object of acts, and acts take their species from the object); *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 38, q. 1, a. 1, ad 3: “actus morales non specificantur a fine ultimo, sed a finibus proximis; hi autem plures diversorum sunt, sicut et fines naturales sunt plures”; *ibidem*, a. 2, ad 1: “finis operis est hoc ad quod opus ordinatum est ad agente, et hoc dicitur ratio operis”; 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 nothing other than the object of the electio); T.G. BELMANS, *Le sens objectif de l’agir humain*, cit., p. 41: “le terme finis peut signifier deux choses: ou bien la fin prochaine qui n’est autre chose que l’objet de l’agir, ou bien la fin éloignée poursuivie à travers ce dernier” (the term finis can signify two things: the proximate end, which is nothing other than the object of the action, or the remote end pursued via the former). Proximate end, end, moral object, object of the will, object of the *electio*, *materia circa quam*, *finis operis* are used by St. Thomas substantially as synonyms, even if each at times adds a particular emphasis to the common substantial meaning. The expression *finis operis* could be the source of some confusion because it can, erroneously, be understood as the finality of a given action considered in its *genus naturae*. This is probably why St. Thomas almost never uses this expression. M. RHONHEIMER, *Legge naturale e ragione pratica*, cit., p. 415: “la terminologia ‘finis operis’ e ‘finis operantis’ è da usare con prudenza. Bisogna dire infatti che il ‘finis operis’ è sempre anche un ‘finis operantis’” (the terminology “finis operis” and “finis operantis” should be used with care. It must be said in fact that the “finis operis” is always also a “finis operantis”), insofar as the act is voluntary; *ibidem*, p. 417: “solo se l’atto [coniugale] è stato volontariamente reso infecondo, questo ha conseguenze anche per il “finis operis” dell’atto coniugale: poiché infatti i coniugi allora con l’atto coniugale non vogliono più l’atto di un amore che è ordinato alla trasmissione di vita umana. [...] non si tratta del “finis” della potenza generativa, bensì di quello dell’amore coniugale” (only if the [conjugal] act has been voluntarily rendered infertile, does this also have consequences for the “finis operis” of the conjugal act: since in fact the spouses, with the conjugal act, no longer will the act of a love that is ordered to the transmission of human life. [...] this does not deal with the “finis” of the generative power, but that of conjugal love).

¹⁹³ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 8, c.: “actus omnis habet speciem ab obiecto; et actus humanus, qui dicitur moralis, habet speciem ab obiecto relato ad principium actuum humanorum, quod est ratio. Unde si obiectum actus includat aliquid quod conveniat ordini rationis, erit actus bonus secundum suam speciem” (every action takes its species from its object; while human action, which is called moral, takes its species from the object, in relation to the principle

ified by this desired proximate end.¹⁹⁴

a) The sources of the morality of the human act

St. Thomas begins q. 18 by defining the good and evil in human acts with the concepts of the *plenitude* and *privation* of a given due *perfection*, using an analogy with the good and evil in natural realities. Virtuous acts show themselves to be good in a full sense, whereas vicious acts are called evil because they lack some due good.¹⁹⁵

As we just noted above, “just as a natural thing has its species from its form, so an action has its species from its object.”¹⁹⁶ From this it follows that “the primary goodness of a moral action is derived from its suitable object,”¹⁹⁷ and “the primary evil in moral actions is that which is from the object.”¹⁹⁸ If, for example, my friend John says to me that tonight he is going to “steal a motorcycle” that he likes, there is no need to ask him the reason for this action, given that the action, considered in itself, already shows itself as an action that is unjust by reason of its object, and thus evil. It is in this sense that St. Thomas says that the first goodness or evil of a human action comes from its object.¹⁹⁹ Thomas does not deny that it is necessary that John have an *intentio* prior to the *electio*, but limits himself to observing that if the *electio* is disordered (evil), it is unnecessary to consider John’s *intentio* – that which he wants for himself – to know that his action is irremediably disordered according to its species.²⁰⁰ Unquestionably, the *intentio* has a more formal character than the *electio*. It is also very important to bear in mind St. Thomas’s clarification when he says, “[t]he object is not the matter ‘of which’ (*materia ex qua*), but the matter ‘about which’ (*materia circa*

of human actions, which is the reason. Wherefore if the object of an action includes something in accord with the order of reason, it will be a good action according to its species); *Super Sent.*, lib. 2, d. 40, q. 1, a. 1, c.: “Forma autem voluntatis est finis et bonum, quod est ejus objectum et volitum; et ideo oportet quod in actibus voluntatis inveniatur differentia specifica secundum rationem finis.”

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 72, a. 3, c.: “Finis autem est obiectum voluntatis, ostensum est enim supra quod actus humani habent speciem ex fine” (The end, indeed, is the object of the will. For it has been shown above that human acts take their species from the end).

¹⁹⁵ Cf. CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 18, a. 5, cit., t. 6, p. 132: “malum absolute loquendo, significat privationem boni debiti [...]. Malum autem in moralibus quandoque significat privationem boni secundum rationem debiti.”

¹⁹⁶ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 2, c.: “Sicut autem res naturalis habet speciem ex sua forma, ita actio habet speciem ex obiecto.”

¹⁹⁷ *Ibidem*: “prima bonitas actus moralis attenditur ex obiecto convenienti.”

¹⁹⁸ *Ibidem*: “ita primum malum in actionibus moralibus est quod est ex obiecto.”

¹⁹⁹ Cf. S. RAMÍREZ, *De actibus humanis*, cit., p. 561: “a solo obiecto morali pendet moralitas, idest, bonitas et malitia essentialis et specifica, actus interioris voluntatis.”

²⁰⁰ Cf. E. COLOM - A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Scelti in Cristo*, cit., p. 195: “quando l’intenzionalità costitutiva o di primo livello entra in contraddizione con una virtù morale (con la giustizia, la temperanza, ecc.), l’azione possiede una negatività morale che nessuna intenzione ulteriore o di secondo livello (finis operantis) può sanare” (when the constitutive or first-level intentionality enters in contradiction with a moral virtue [with justice, temperance, etc.], the action possesses a moral negativity that no ulterior or second-level intention [finis operantis] can heal).

quam); and stands in relation to the act as its form, as it were, through giving it its species”;²⁰¹ that is, “to will to steal a motorcycle” already has the quality of an end to which one can tend with a positive act of the will, an *electio* in view of a particular *intentio*, say, for example “to sell it to Charles at a good price.” For St. Thomas the difference between the *materia ex qua* and the *materia circa quam* is critical from the perspective of the moral specification of the act, given that the latter can be evaluated morally, whereas the former cannot. We will devote our attention to the interpretation of this important conceptual distinction in our paper '*Materia ex qua*' and '*Materia circa quam*' in *Aquinas*²⁰².

In considering the moral relevance of the circumstances, St. Thomas claims that the fully good action derives its moral goodness, not only from its object, but also from the presence of the due circumstances. It is not enough to say, for example, that “to give alms” is a good action according to its species, for it to be a completely good action; beyond a right intention, the due circumstances are also necessary.²⁰³ The presence or lack of the due circumstances, even if in itself it would not alter the moral species of the act, does increase or decrease its goodness – which is why the virtue of prudence plays an extremely important role in the growth of the other moral virtues. Thomas also distinguishes between the *circumstances* and the *conditions*, a distinction that we will study in more detail in our paper '*Circumstantia*' and '*Conditiones*' in *Aquinas*²⁰⁴. For Aquinas, the *conditions* are included in the substance of the object of the will, and thus do not characterize the human act accidentally, but contribute to its specific determination. Consider, for example, the specific difference between fornication and adultery. In this case the fact that one of the partners is married is not a simple accident, but a condition that contributes to the specification of a particular human act. Certainly an adulterous will has much in common with the will to fornicate, but the presence of a conjugal bond in an act of this kind is something substantially relevant.

When addressing the question of whether the *intentio* of the person who acts morally qualifies his act of *electio*, it is important to remember that the object of the *intentio*, which has the nature of an end, already shapes the will as a certain type of specific willing; we are therefore dealing with a

²⁰¹ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 2, ad 2: “obiectum non est materia ex qua, sed materia circa quam, et habet quodammodo rationem formae, in quantum dat speciem.”

²⁰² D. SOUSA-LARA, '*Materia ex qua*' and '*Materia circa quam*' in *Aquinas*, in www.eticaepolitica.net.

²⁰³ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 3, c.: “in rebus naturalibus non invenitur tota plenitudo perfectionis quae debetur rei, ex forma substantiali, quae dat speciem; sed multum superadditur ex supervenientibus accidentibus, sicut in homine ex figura, ex colore, et huiusmodi; quorum si aliquod desit ad decentem habitudinem, consequitur malum. Ita etiam est in actione. Nam plenitudo bonitatis eius non tota consistit in sua specie, sed aliquid additur ex his quae adveniunt tanquam accidentia quaedam. Et huiusmodi sunt circumstantiae debitae” ([i]n natural things, it is to be noted that the whole fulness of perfection due to a thing, is not from the mere substantial form, that gives it its species; since a thing derives much from supervening accidents, as man does from shape, color, and the like; and if any one of these accidents be out of due proportion, evil is the result. So it is with action. For the plenitude of its goodness does not consist wholly in its species, but also in certain additions which accrue to it by reason of certain accidents: and such are its due circumstances).

²⁰⁴ Cf. D. SOUSA-LARA, '*Circumstantia*' and '*Conditiones*' in *Aquinas*, in www.eticaepolitica.net.

human act, and consequently already a moral act. As we said above, for St. Thomas, after the *electio* is made, there continues to be a single movement of the will to the end (*intentio*) that passes through *ea quae sunt ad finem* (the object of the *electio*). From this it follows that, for the act of the will to be fully good, it is necessary a) that the object of the *electio* be good, b) that the object of the *intentio* be good and c) that the due circumstances be present. Thomas sums this up when he says, “[h]owever, an action is not good simply, unless it is good in all those ways.”²⁰⁵

In a. 5 of q. 18,²⁰⁶ St. Thomas places the question of whether the human action is good or evil in virtue of its moral species. This is obviously another important question for our study, to which Aquinas responds:

*“Every action derives its species from its object. [...] Hence it follows that a difference of object causes a difference of species in actions. Now, it must be observed that a difference of objects causes a difference of species in actions, according as the latter are referred to one active principle, which does not cause a difference in actions, according as they are referred to another active principle. Because nothing accidental constitutes a species, but only that which is essential; and a difference of object may be essential in reference to one active principle, and accidental in reference to another. Thus to know color and to know sound, differ essentially in reference to sense, but not in reference to the intellect. Now in human actions, good and evil are predicated in reference to the reason; because as Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv), ‘the good of man is to be in accordance with reason,’ and evil is ‘to be against reason.’ For that is good for a thing which suits it in regard to its form; and evil, that which is against the order of its form. It is therefore evident that the difference of good and evil considered in reference to the object is an essential difference in relation to reason; that is to say, according as the object is suitable or unsuitable to reason. Now certain actions are called human or moral, inasmuch as they proceed from the reason. Consequently it is evident that good and evil diversify the species in human actions; since essential differences cause a difference of species.”*²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 4, ad 3: “Non tamen est actio bona simpliciter, nisi omnes bonitates concurrant.”

²⁰⁶ An excellent analysis of this article is offered by L. LEHU, *A propos de la règle de la moralité*, cit., pp. 449-466.

²⁰⁷ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 5, c.: “omnis actus speciem habet ex suo obiecto, [sicut supra dictum est]. Unde oportet quod aliqua differentia obiecti faciat diversitatem speciei in actibus. Est autem considerandum quod aliqua differentia obiecti facit differentiam speciei in actibus, secundum quod referuntur ad unum principium activum, quod non facit differentiam in actibus, secundum quod referuntur ad aliud principium activum. Quia nihil quod est per accidens, constituit speciem, sed solum quod est per se, potest autem aliqua differentia obiecti esse per se in comparatione ad unum activum principium, et per accidens in comparatione ad aliud; sicut cognoscere colorem et sonum, per se differunt

This being the case, it can be said that a good act and a bad act are distinguished by the existence of two essentially different moral objects, susceptible of being distinguished, according to their moral species as measured against reason,²⁰⁸ as two specifically different types of action. Along these lines St. Thomas offers the example that “[t]he conjugal act and adultery, as compared to reason, differ specifically and have [moral] effects specifically different; because one deserves praise and reward, the other, blame and punishment. But as compared to the generative power, they do not differ in species,”²⁰⁹ even producing the same biological effect. Therefore, just as “a dead body and a living body are not of the same species. In like manner, good, inasmuch as it is in accord with reason, and evil, inasmuch as it is against reason, diversify the moral species.”²¹⁰

In the next article St. Thomas places the question of whether or not the intention in view of which the subject acts morally specifies his action. His response:

“[A]ctions are called human, inasmuch as they are voluntary. [...] Now, in a voluntary action, there is a twofold action, viz. the interior action of the will, and the external action: and each of these actions has its object. *The end is properly the object of the interior act of the will: while the object of the external action, is that on which the action is brought to bear.*²¹¹ Therefore just as the external action

per comparationem ad sensum, non autem per comparationem ad intellectum. In actibus autem humanis bonum et malum dicitur per comparationem ad rationem, quia, ut Dionysius dicit, IV cap. de Div. Nom., bonum hominis est secundum rationem esse, malum autem quod est praeter rationem. Unicuique enim rei est bonum quod convenit ei secundum suam formam; et malum quod est ei praeter ordinem suae formae. Patet ergo quod differentia boni et mali circa obiectum considerata, comparatur per se ad rationem, scilicet secundum quod obiectum est ei conveniens vel non conveniens. Dicuntur autem aliqui actus humani, vel morales, secundum quod sunt a ratione. Unde manifestum est quod bonum et malum diversificant speciem in actibus moralibus, differentiae enim per se diversificant speciem.” Emphasis added.

²⁰⁸ Cf. L. LEHU, *A propos de la règle de la moralité*, cit., p. 453: “Dans les actes, ce qui diversifie l’espèce, c’est la différence essentielle dans les objets considérés par rapport avec le principe de l’acte” (In acts in which the species differs, there is an essential difference in the objects, considered in their relation with the principle of the act); S. RAMÍREZ, *De actibus humanis*, cit., p. 546: “per se primo seu essentialiter, pro omni actu humano, sive interiori seu elicito sive imperato, obiectum est in ordine ad quod essentialiter constituitur in propria specie; [...] distinctio essentialis prima et fundamentalis actus humani ut sic, sive interior sive exterior sit, sumitur a distinctionem obiecti moralis in esse morali, id est per comparationem ad rationem regulantem, prout est conveniens seu concordans rationi vel disconveniens aut neutrum.” Emphasis added.

²⁰⁹ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 5, ad 3: “actus coniugalis et adulterium, secundum quod comparantur ad rationem, differunt specie, et habent effectus specie differentes, quia unum eorum meretur laudem et praemium, aliud vituperium et poenam. Sed secundum quod comparantur ad potentiam generativam, non differunt specie.”

²¹⁰ *Ibidem*, ad 1: “corpus enim mortuum et corpus vivum non sunt eiusdem speciei. Et similiter bonum, in quantum est secundum rationem, et malum, in quantum est praeter rationem, diversificant speciem moris.” Pinckaers, commenting on this article, opportunely points out that “São Tomás contrapõe-se aqui aos seus antecessores e afirma que a diferença entre o act bom e mau é específica e essencial” (St. Thomas opposes himself to his predecessors here, saying that the difference between a good and an evil act is specific and essential) (S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note h, p. 246).

²¹¹ There is no consensus on the interpretation of the concepts of internal act and external act, as I show on my paper *Aquinas on Interior and Exterior Acts: Clarifying a Key Aspect of His Action Theory*, in «Josephinum Journal of Theology» 15 (2008), pp. 277-316. In this passage we think that the expression “end” is here used by St. Thomas in the strict sense, that is, to refer to the object of the *intentio*, and then the expression “interior act of the will” would refer to the act

takes its species from the object on which it bears; so the interior act of the will takes its species from the end, as from its own proper object. *Now that which is on the part of the will is formal in regard to that which is on the part of the external action: because the will uses the limbs to act as instruments*; nor have external actions any measure of morality, save insofar as they are voluntary. Consequently *the species of a human act is considered formally with regard to the end, but materially with regard to the object of the external action*. Hence the Philosopher says (*Ethics* v, 2) that ‘he who steals that he may commit adultery, is strictly speaking, more adulterer than thief’.²¹²

With this Aquinas stresses with great clarity that the object of the *intentio* is the true cause of the action, and since the will is in act in relation to that end, it “commands” the choice of *ea quae sunt ad finem*, from which an external act (an *electio*) with its corresponding object will result. It is worth recalling that in morality, ends have the nature of principles,²¹³ and this is why what the moral subject desires with greater intensity – what he truly seeks – is the object of his *intentio*. This remote end is thus more formal, because it is more the cause than the proximate end that is the object of the *electio*, and consequently it specifies the interior act of his will. Note that in St. Thomas’s example, he does not say that the one who steals so as to commit adultery is not a thief, or that the act of theft must be considered adultery, but he simply wants to emphasize that the agent is *more* adulterer than thief, to the exact degree that he *seeks more* to commit adultery than to steal.²¹⁴ To steal is only chosen in view of adultery, while the adultery is wanted for itself as the terminus of the action.

of the *intentio*. The “exterior action” as a commanded act of the will, receives its moral species from the object of the *electio* as this is compared with right reason.

²¹² *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 6, c.: “[Respondeo dicendum quod] aliqui actus dicuntur humani, in quantum sunt voluntarii, [sicut supra dictum est]. In actu autem voluntario invenitur duplex actus, scilicet actus interior voluntatis, et actus exterior, et uterque horum actuum habet suum obiectum. Finis autem proprie est obiectum interioris actus voluntarii, id autem circa quod est actio exterior, est obiectum eius. Sicut igitur actus exterior accipit speciem ab obiecto circa quod est; ita actus interior voluntatis accipit speciem a fine, sicut a proprio obiecto. Ita autem quod est ex parte voluntatis, se habet ut formale ad id quod est ex parte exterioris actus, quia voluntas utitur membris ad agendum, sicut instrumentis; neque actus exteriores habent rationem moralitatis, nisi in quantum sunt voluntarii. Et ideo actus humani species formaliter consideratur secundum finem, materialiter autem secundum obiectum exterioris actus. Unde philosophus dicit, in V Ethic., quod *ille qui furatur ut committat adulterium, est, per se loquendo, magis adulter quam fur.*” Emphasis added.

²¹³ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 89, a. 4, c.: “In appetibilibus autem, sicut multoties dictum est, fines sunt sicut principia; ea vero quae sunt ad finem, sunt sicut conclusiones” ([I]n matters of appetite, as we have often stated, ends are like principles, while the means are like conclusions); CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 12, a. 3, cit., t. 6, p. 96: “finis in operabilibus sit ut principium in speculabilibus.”

²¹⁴ Cf. *De malo*, q. 8, a. 1, ad 15: “Intentio autem hominis provenit ex habitu; et ideo quando aliquis furatur ut moechetur, committit quidem actu peccatum furti, sed tamen intentio procedit ab habitu; et ideo non denominatur fur, sed moechus” ([T]he intentions of human beings come from their habits, and so when one steals in order to commit adultery, one indeed actually commits the sin of theft. And yet the intention derives from the habit of adultery, and so we call the person an adulterer, not a thief).

These considerations agree completely with the fact that St. Thomas considers that the more remote a given end is according to the order of execution, the more formal it is in the order of intention.²¹⁵ This means that objects that are more immediately ordered to happiness have a greater character of good, and consequently produce in the will an elicited act of greater intensity.

Another very interesting question posed by St. Thomas is whether or not the moral species that derives from the object of the *intentio* is contained in the moral species that derives from the object of the *electio*, just as the species is contained in its genus.²¹⁶ St. Thomas's response is precise. He says that "[t]he object of the external act can stand in a twofold relation to the end of the will: first, as being of itself (*per se*) ordained thereto; thus to fight well is of itself ordained to victory; secondly, as being ordained thereto accidentally; thus to take what belongs to another is ordained accidentally to the giving of alms"²¹⁷ or to "committing adultery." "[W]hen the object is not of itself ordained to the end, the specific difference derived from the object is not an essential determination of the species derived from the end, nor is the reverse the case."²¹⁸ This basically involves an accidental orientation between two ends that are not *per se* ordered among themselves, an orientation which only practical reason can accomplish. This is what occurs when someone "steals" so as "to commit adultery." "To steal" is not a human action that is *per se* ordered to "committing adultery," but nothing prevents it from being so accidentally, independently of its morality. "Wherefore one of these species is not under the other; but then the moral action is contained under two species that are disparate, as it were. Consequently we say that he that commits theft for the sake of adultery, is guilty of a twofold malice in one action. On the other hand, if the object be of itself ordained to the end, one of these differences is an essential determination of the other. Wherefore one of these species will be contained under the other,"²¹⁹ as in the cited example of "fighting courageously so as

²¹⁵ Commenting on this article Pinckaers says: "Aqui, São Tomás opera uma inversão de perspectivas com relação à tradição: encara o act moral não mais a partir do exterior act, como dar esmola, cometer adultério, seguindo os exemplos clássicos, mas a partir do act interior, do movimento voluntário, que considera como a fonte da moralidade. Do mesmo modo, concede o primado ao act interior sobre o exterior. Ele reúne-os, contudo, como forma e matéria, como alma e corpo. Tal primado da interioridade voltará a encontrar-se na prioridade das virtudes sobre os mandamentos da lei evangélica sobre o decálogo" (Here, St. Thomas performs an inversion of perspectives with respect to the tradition: he no longer considers the moral act departing from the exterior act, as to alms or to commit adultery, following the classical examples, but departing from the interior act, the voluntary movement, which he considers to be the source of morality. In the same way, he grants the primacy to the interior act over the exterior. He joins them, however, as form and matter, as soul and body. This primacy will in turn be found in the priority of the virtues over the commandments, and of the evangelical law over the Decalogue) (S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note i, p. 248).

²¹⁶ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 7.

²¹⁷ *Ibidem*, c.: "obiectum exterioris actus dupliciter potest se habere ad finem voluntatis, uno modo, sicut per se ordinatum ad ipsum, sicut bene pugnare per se ordinatur ad victoriam; alio modo, per accidens, sicut accipere rem alienam per accidens ordinatur ad dandum eleemosynam."

²¹⁸ *Ibidem*: "quando obiectum non est per se ordinatum ad finem, differentia specifica quae est ex obiecto, non est per se determinativa eius quae est ex fine, nec e converso."

²¹⁹ *Ibidem*: "Unde una istarum specierum non est sub alia, sed tunc actus moralis est sub duabus speciebus quasi disparatis. Unde dicimus quod ille qui furatur ut moechetur, committit duas malitias in uno actu. Si vero obiectum per se or-

to win the battle.” The more specific end will be determinative of the more generic end, as winning a particular battle is ordered to winning the war.²²⁰

There are choices which, when considered in their moral species, are seen to be indifferent with respect to the moral order, given that they include nothing relevant in relation to the order of practical reason.²²¹ Nonetheless, it is important to recall that in real life there are no choices that do not have a particular end. Consequently, even if certain objects may be indifferent when considered in their species, the human act is never so when considered in its totality, since its morality also depends on the end aimed at by the subject and on the circumstances.²²² “Consequently every human action that proceeds from deliberate reason, if it be considered in the individual, must be good or bad,”²²³ since “[w]henver an end is intended by deliberate reason, it belongs either to the good of some virtue, or to the evil of some vice.”²²⁴

b) The morality of the interior act of the will

In q. 19, St. Thomas proposes to study the morality of the “interior act of the will.”²²⁵

The first idea Aquinas emphasizes is that, in the interior act of the will, “Good and evil are *per se* differences of the act of the will,”²²⁶ and therefore not accidental differences. In fact a “good willing” and an “evil willing” are two specifically different kinds of “willing,” based on their different moral objects. “Consequently good and evil will are acts differing in species. Now the specific

dinetur ad finem, una dictarum differentiarum est per se determinativa alterius. Unde una istarum specierum continebitur sub altera.”

²²⁰ Cf. *ibidem*: “Si vero obiectum per se ordinetur ad finem, una dictarum differentiarum est per se determinativa alterius. Unde una istarum specierum continebitur sub altera. Considerandum autem restat quae sub qua. Ad cuius evidentiam, primo considerandum est quod quanto aliqua differentia sumitur a forma magis particulari, tanto magis est specifica. Secundo, quod quanto agens est magis universale, tanto ex eo est forma magis universalis” ([I]f the object be of itself ordained to the end, one of these differences is an essential determination of the other. Wherefore one of these species will be contained under the other. It remains to be considered which of the two is contained under the other. In order to make this clear, we must first of all observe that the more particular the form is from which a difference is taken, the more specific is the difference. Secondly, that the more universal an agent is, the more universal a form does it cause).

²²¹ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 8, c.: “Contingit autem quod obiectum actus non includit aliquid pertinens ad ordinem rationis, sicut levare festucam de terra, ire ad campum, et huiusmodi, et tales actus secundum speciem suam sunt indifferentes” ([I]t may happen that the object of an action does not include something pertaining to the order of reason; for instance, to pick up a straw from the ground, to walk in the fields, and the like: and such actions are indifferent according to their species).

²²² Cf. T.G. BELMANS, *Le sens objectif de l’agir humain*, cit., p. 70: “il existe des agirs indifférents quant à leur espèce abstraite ; [...] un tel agir est toujours ou bien honnête ou bien déshonnête; ce qui décidera en premier lieu de sa qualification, c’est la fin visée” (the existence of indifferent acts with respect to their abstract species; [...] such an action is always an honest or a dishonest good; what in the first place decides its qualification is the end in view).

²²³ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 18, a. 9, c.: “Unde necesse est omnem actum hominis a deliberativa ratione procedentem, in individuo consideratum, bonum esse vel malum.”

²²⁴ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “omnis finis a ratione deliberativa intentus, pertinet ad bonum alicuius virtutis, vel ad malum alicuius vitii.”

²²⁵ *Ibidem*, q. 19, prol.: “actus interioris voluntatis.”

²²⁶ *Ibidem*, a. 1, c.: “bonum et malum sunt per se differentiae actus voluntatis.”

difference in acts [of the will] is according to objects, as stated above. Therefore good and evil in the acts of the will is derived properly from the objects²²⁷ of the will. Specifically different moral objects, as, e.g., “to steal a chocolate bar” or “to buy a chocolate bar,” at the moment in which they become the end of a positive act of the will – i.e., at the moment in which they are willed – produce specifically different types of voluntary acts;²²⁸ in this case, “to will to steal a chocolate bar” is different, according to its moral species, from “to will to buy a chocolate bar.” The first is shown to be an evil act, as the will tends to an apparent good²²⁹ that is contrary to the virtue of justice, whereas the second is a good act of the will, since the object of the will’s act is in accord with virtue.²³⁰

A decisive role is played in this entire process by practical reason, which presents to the will its proper object.²³¹ To grasp the *aspect of good* of the various possible objects and *order them in view of the final end*²³² is an operation exclusively of the practical reason, which is why it can be said that the practical reason is like the root of the morality of human actions, since through it the will’s object is presented to it. The goodness of the act of the will will depend on reason, then, to the same degree that it depends on the object.²³³ Without the use of practical reason the question of the morality of actions cannot even be asked, given that “the will cannot desire a good that is not previously apprehended by reason,”²³⁴ which moves the will through the object,²³⁵ as has been said. The morality of a given moral object will depend in a definitive way on its agreement with the ends of the moral virtues,²³⁶ that is, its moral species will depend on the virtue(s) one intentionally proposes

²²⁷ *Ibidem*: “Unde voluntas bona et mala sunt actus differentes secundum speciem. Differentia autem speciei in actibus est secundum obiecta, ut dictum est. Et ideo bonum et malum in actibus voluntatis proprie attenditur secundum obiecta.”

²²⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, ad 3: “bonum per rationem repraesentatur voluntati ut obiectum; et in quantum cadit sub ordine rationis, pertinet ad genus moris, et causat bonitatem moralem in actu voluntatis” ([g]ood is presented to the will as its object by the reason: and insofar as it is in accord with reason, it enters the moral order, and causes moral goodness in the act of the will).

²²⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, ad 1: “voluntas non semper est veri boni, sed quandoque est apparentis boni, quod quidem habet aliquam rationem boni, non tamen simpliciter convenientis ad appetendum. Et propter hoc actus voluntatis non est bonus semper, sed aliquando malus” ([t]he will is not always directed to what is truly good, but sometimes to the apparent good; which has indeed some measure of good, but not of a good that is simply suitable to be desired. Hence it is that the act of the will is not always good, but sometimes evil).

²³⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, s.c.: “bona voluntas est quae est secundum virtutem” (a good will is one which is in accordance with virtue).

²³¹ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 3, c.: “Obiectum autem voluntatis proponitur ei per rationem” ([T]he will’s object is proposed to it by reason).

²³² Cf. *ibidem*, q. 4, a. 4, c.: “rectitudo voluntatis est per debitum ordinem ad finem ultimum” (rectitude of the will consists in being duly ordered to the last end); *Contra Gentiles*, lib. 1, cap. 40, n. 4: “finis igitur ultimus est quo omnia rationi boni accipiunt.”

²³³ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 3, c.: “bonitas voluntatis dependet a ratione, eo modo quo dependet ab obiecto” (the goodness of the will depends on reason, in the same way as it depends on the object).

²³⁴ *Ibidem*, ad 1: “appetitus voluntatis non potest esse de bono, nisi prius a ratione apprehendatur.”

²³⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, ad 3: “voluntas quodam modo movet rationem; et ratio alio modo movet voluntatem, ex parte scilicet obiecti” ([t]he will moves the reason in one way: the reason moves the will in another, viz. on the part of the object).

²³⁶ What accords with virtue, essentially accords with right reason; cf. *ibidem*, q. 56, a. 4, c.: “virtus quae est in irascibili et concupiscibili, nihil aliud est quam quaedam *habitualis conformitas* istarum potentiarum *ad rationem*” (the virtue which is in the irascible and concupiscible powers is nothing else but a certain *habitual conformity* of these powers *to reason*). Emphasis added.

to realize and/or the virtue(s) to which it is objectively opposed.

St. Thomas's reflections on the relation between the goodness of the will and the eternal law are extremely important.²³⁷ We will thus offer a very brief parenthesis to our discussion in order to examine this theme, which will later help us to better understand Aquinas's idea that the morality of the human act and its moral specification depend on the *commensuratio* of the *finis proximus* with the natural law.

For St. Thomas, "Wherever a number of causes are subordinate to one another, the effect depends more on the first than on the second cause: since the second cause acts only in virtue of the first. Now it is from the eternal law, which is the Divine Reason, that human reason is the rule of the human will, from which the human derives its goodness. Hence it is written (Psalm 4:6-7): 'Many say: Who showeth us good things? The light of Thy countenance, O Lord, is signed upon us': as though to say: 'The light of our reason is able to show us good things, and guide our will, insofar as it is the light (i.e. derived from) Thy countenance.' It is therefore evident that the goodness of the human will depends on the eternal law much more than on human reason: and when human reason fails we must have recourse to the Eternal Reason."²³⁸ We can participate in this eternal law, which we do not know directly,²³⁹ through the natural light of reason (natural law) and through the light of faith, by which we accept divine Revelation, rich in moral implications.²⁴⁰

In what does this measure of the morality of human acts which we call the natural law consist, essentially? For St. Thomas the "natural law is nothing more than the light of the intelligence infused in us by God. Thanks to it, we know what we must do and what we must avoid. God gave

²³⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 21, a. 1, s.c.: "bonitas actus humani, ut supra ostensum est, principaliter dependet a lege aeterna, et per consequens malitia eius in hoc consistit, quod discordat a lege aeterna" (the goodness of a human action depends principally on the Eternal Law: and consequently its malice consists in its being in disaccord with the Eternal Law).

²³⁸ *Ibidem*, q. 19, a. 4, c.: "in omnibus causis ordinatis, effectus plus dependet a causa prima quam a causa secunda, quia causa secunda non agit nisi in virtute primae causae. Quod autem ratio humana sit regula voluntatis humanae, ex qua eius bonitas mensuretur, habet ex lege aeterna, quae est ratio divina. Unde in Psalmo IV, dicitur, *multi dicunt, quis ostendit nobis bona? Signatum est super nos lumen vultus tui, Domine*, quasi diceret, lumen rationis quod in nobis est, in tantum potest nobis ostendere bona, et nostram voluntatem regulare, in quantum est lumen vultus tui, id est a vultu tuo derivatum. Unde manifestum est quod multo magis dependet bonitas voluntatis humanae a lege aeterna, quam a ratione humana, et ubi deficit humana ratio, oportet ad rationem aeternam recurrere."

²³⁹ Cf. E. COLOM - A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Scelti in Cristo*, cit., p. 265: "il concetto teologico di legge eterna é di strema importanza per spiegare il fondamento teonomico dell'ordine morale. Tuttavia, dal punto di vista del nostro sapere, occorre tener presente che noi non possiamo conoscere direttamente l'*ordinatio* della Sapienza divina *in se stessa*" (the theological concept of the eternal law is of extreme importance for explaining the theonomical foundation of the moral order. Nevertheless, from the point of view of our knowledge, we must bear in mind that we cannot know directly the *ordinatio* of the divine Wisdom *in itself*).

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 4, ad 3: "lex aeterna sit nobis ignota secundum quod est in mente divina; innotescit tamen nobis aliquantulum vel per rationem naturalem, quae ab ea derivatur ut propria eius imago; vel per aliqualem revelationem superadditam" ([a]lthough the eternal law is unknown to us according as it is in the Divine Mind: nevertheless, it becomes known to us somewhat, either by natural reason which is derived therefrom as its proper image; or by some sort of additional revelation); *De malo*, q. 2, a. 4, c.: "bonum et malum in actibus humanis consideratur secundum quod actus concordat rationi informatae lege divina, vel naturaliter, vel doctrinam, vel per infusionem" (we consider the good and evil in human acts as they are in accord with reason informed by the divine law, whether by nature or by instruction or by infusion).

this light and this law to human beings at creation.”²⁴¹ In his infinite wisdom, the Creator ordered all the works of his hands to His glory. It is this ordination of all creation – carried out and promulgated in the divine Word, in view of whom everything was created and through whom everything was redeemed – that we call the eternal law. Nothing created exists that is not subject to this law. In inanimate beings this eternal law manifests itself through the physical laws that govern them, in irrational animals it is expressed through their instinctive tendencies, and in human beings in the free pursuit of virtue and of the absolute Good, which is God.

This being so, the supreme norm of human life is precisely the objective and universal divine law with which God in his wise and loving design orders, directs and governs the entire universe and the paths of the human community. God makes human beings participants of the law in such a way that, in accordance with the gentle disposition of Divine Providence, they can come to know unchanging truth ever more fully.²⁴² “Wherefore, since all things subject to Divine providence are ruled and measured by the eternal law [...], it is evident that all things partake somewhat of the eternal law, insofar as, namely, from its being imprinted on them, they derive their respective inclinations to their proper acts and ends. Now among all others, the rational creature is subject to divine Providence in the most excellent way, insofar as it partakes of a share of providence, by being provident both for itself and for others. Wherefore it has a share of the Eternal Reason, whereby it has a natural inclination to its proper act and end: and this participation of the eternal law in the rational creature is called the natural law.”²⁴³ The natural law is therefore, for St. Thomas, a true *participation* of the rational creature in the eternal law. The promulgation of the natural law is realized by the use of practical reason, through which human beings become increasingly conscious of the divine law that governs all of creation.

The eternal law thus shows itself to be an *ordinatio* established by the divine Wisdom that moves all things, each according to their proper nature, to their due end.²⁴⁴ This law remains mysterious to us, and is moreover revealed to us with the historical actuation of divine Providence, which

²⁴¹ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *De decem praeceptis*, prooemium: “lex naturae; et haec nihil aliud est nisi lumen intellectus insitum nobis a Deo, per quod cognoscimus quid agendum et quid vitandum. Hoc lumen et hanc legem dedit Deus homini in creatione.”

²⁴² Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 1; q. 93, aa. 1-2.

²⁴³ *Ibidem*, a. 2, c.: “Unde cum omnia quae divinae providentiae subduntur, a lege aeterna reguntur et mensurantur, ut ex dictis patet; manifestum est quod omnia participant aliquantulum legem aeternam, in quantum scilicet ex impressione eius habent inclinationes in proprios actus et fines. Inter cetera autem rationalis creatura excellentiori quodam modo divinae providentiae subiacet, in quantum et ipsa fit providentiae particeps, sibi ipsi et aliis providens. Unde et in ipsa participatur ratio aeterna, per quam habet naturalem inclinationem ad debitum actum et finem. Et talis participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura lex naturalis dicitur.”

²⁴⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 93, a. 1, c.: “ratio divinae sapientiae movens omnia ad debitum finem, obtinet rationem legis. Et secundum hoc, lex aeterna nihil aliud est quam ratio divinae sapientiae, secundum quod est directiva omnium actuum et motionum” (the type of Divine Wisdom, as moving all things to their due end, bears the character of law. Accordingly the eternal law is nothing else than the type of Divine Wisdom, as directing all actions and movements).

in admirable ways leads all to the glory of the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit. It can therefore be said that “[t]here are two ways in which a thing is subject to the eternal law [...]: first, by partaking of the eternal law by way of knowledge; secondly, by way of action and passion, i.e. by partaking of the eternal law by way of an inward motive principle: and in this second way, irrational creatures are subject to the eternal law.”²⁴⁵

The natural law is thus a rational participation in the *ordinatio rationis divinae* in view of the final end of the work of creation. This statement assumes that “the first principle in practical matters, which are the object of the practical reason, is the last end: and the last end of human life is bliss or happiness. [...] Consequently the law must needs regard principally the relationship to happiness.”²⁴⁶ This does not deny that the concept of law, which is an analogous concept, also applies to positive human laws made in view of the common good of a particular community,²⁴⁷ but indeed confirms it, bearing in mind however that “in human affairs a thing is said to be just, from being right, according to the rule of reason. But the first rule of reason is the law of nature. [...] Consequently every human law has just so much of the nature of law, as it is derived from the law of nature. But if in any point it deflects from the law of nature, it is no longer a law but a perversion of law.”²⁴⁸ The concepts of eternal law, natural law and positive human law cannot be separated. If we ignore this fact it cannot but lead to grave practical consequences, both in the lives of individual persons and in the life of the various human communities.²⁴⁹

The light of natural reason, therefore, is a key element when we consider the theme of natural law. Through it the person can know his final end and freely order his action to it.²⁵⁰ This is why St.

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 6, c.: “duplex est modus quo aliquid subditur legi aeternae, ut ex supradictis patet, uno modo, in quantum participatur lex aeterna per modum cognitionis; alio modo, per modum actionis et passionis, in quantum participatur per modum principii motivi. Et hoc secundo modo subduntur legi aeternae irrationales creaturae.” Cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 72.

²⁴⁶ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 90, a. 2, c.: “Primum autem principium in operativis, quorum est ratio practica, est finis ultimus. Est autem ultimus finis humanae vitae felicitas vel beatitudo, ut supra habitum est. Unde oportet quod lex maxime respiciat ordinem qui est in beatitudinem.”

²⁴⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “definitio legis, quae nihil est aliud quam quaedam rationis ordinatio ad bonum commune, ab eo qui curam communitatis habet, promulgata” (the definition of law [...] is nothing else than an ordinance of reason for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated).

²⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, q. 95, a. 2, c.: “In rebus autem humanis dicitur esse aliquid iustum ex eo quod est rectum secundum regulam rationis. Rationis autem prima regula est lex naturae, ut ex supradictis patet. Unde omnis lex humanitus posita intantum habet de ratione legis, in quantum a lege naturae derivatur. Si vero in aliquo, a lege naturali discordet, iam non erit lex sed legis corruptio.” Cf. S. RAMÍREZ, *De actibus humanis*, cit., p. 515: “si natura confirmatura ius non erit, virtutes omnes tollantur.”

²⁴⁹ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 91, a. 1, c.: “nihil est aliud lex quam quoddam dictamen practicae rationis in principe qui gubernat aliquam communitatem perfectam” (a law is nothing else but a dictate of practical reason emanating from the ruler who governs a perfect community).

²⁵⁰ Cf. A. RODRÍGUEZ LUÑO, *Ética general*, Eunsa, Pamplona 1989³, p. 82: “[la ley moral] es una ordenación de la razón: ordenar es disponer los diversos actos en función de un fin, y esto es propio de la razón, que conoce ese fin, la naturaleza de los actos, y su proporción respecto al fin intentado, ya se trate de algún fin particular (leyes artísticas, técnicas, etc.) o del fin último del hombre (ley moral)” ([the moral law] is an ordination of reason: to order is to dispose the different acts in function of an end, and this is proper to reason, which knows that end, the nature of the acts, and their proportion with respect to the intended end, whether this is some particular end [artistic or technical laws, etc.] or

Thomas says that “the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human acts, [...] since it belongs to the reason to direct to the end, which is the first principle in all matters of action.”²⁵¹ We can thus conclude that the rule of the morality of human acts is not exclusively the founding and supreme rule that is the eternal law, but also the proximate and immediate rule that is precisely practical reason.²⁵² To order all of his choices in view of the final end of the human creature thus becomes one of the person’s essential tasks, a disposition which reaches its perfection as a habit in the virtue of prudence, which in its turn presupposes the moral virtues.

We can say, then, that the eternal law is present in human beings in two ways: as a rational participation²⁵³ (natural law), and as a natural inclination²⁵⁴ of the person to a particular set of goods of the human person. These natural inclinations, determined²⁵⁴ by the *mensura omnia* function of the divine Intellect, are an object of knowledge for the moral subject, and as such are an *epiphania* of the eternal law.²⁵⁵ The ends of the natural inclinations as ordered and regulated by practical reason in view of the final end are nothing other than the moral virtues; there is therefore a close relationship between the moral virtues and the natural law.²⁵⁶ The simple observation that the person forms himself as a moral being impels him to inquire about the meaning of these natural inclinations and about how to integrate them into a coherent plan of life. The cognitive possession of the ends of the moral virtues can be said to be a true participation in the *ordinatio ad gloriam Dei* of the eternal law, that is, part of the natural law.²⁵⁷ This law in human reason is a *necessary and objective presupposition* from which the practical reason must not prescind at the moment of ordering a particular choice to the final end of human life. St. Thomas affirms this succinctly and profoundly when he says that “in the practical reason, certain things pre-exist, as naturally known principles, and such are the ends of the moral virtues, since the end is in practical matters what principles are in speculative matters.”²⁵⁸

It falls then to the light of reason to establish what is the relationship of suitability between a

of the final end of man [moral law]).

²⁵¹ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 90, a. 1, c.: “Regula autem et mensura humanorum actuum est ratio, quae est primum principium actuum humanorum, ut ex praedictis patet, rationis enim est ordinare ad finem, qui est primum principium in agendis.”

²⁵² Cf. *ibidem*, q. 17, a. 1, c.: “regula voluntatis humana est duplex. Una propinqua et homogena, scilicet ipsa humana ratio; alia vero est prima regula, scilicet lex eterna, quae est quasi ratio Dei.”

²⁵³ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 94, a. 1, c.: “lex naturalis est aliquid per rationem constitutum, sicut etiam propositio est quoddam opus rationis” (the natural law is something appointed by reason, just as a proposition is a work of reason).

²⁵⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, II-II, q. 47, a. 15, c.: “fines recti humanae vitae sunt determinati” (the right ends of human life are fixed).

²⁵⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, I-II, q. 94, a. 2, c.: “secundum igitur ordinem inclinationem naturalium est ordo praeceptorum legis naturalis” (according to the order of natural inclinations, is the order of the precepts of the natural law).

²⁵⁶ The natural law is an *ordo rationis* according to the moral virtues. Cf. *ibidem*, q. 67, a. 1, c.: “formale in omnibus virtutibus est ipse ordo rationis” (the formal element [of the virtues] is precisely this order of reason).

²⁵⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, q. 100, a. 2, c.: “ordo virtutis, qui est ordo rationis” (the order of virtue, which is the order of reason).

²⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, II-II, q. 47, a. 6, c.: “in ratione practica praexistunt quaedam ut principia naturaliter nota, et huiusmodi sunt fines virtutum moralium, quia finis se habet in operabilibus sicut principium in speculativis.”

given object of the will and the ends of the moral virtues, and thus with the natural law,²⁵⁹ in this way determining what kind of willing is in question. “[W]hatever is contrary to the order of reason is, properly speaking, contrary to the nature of man, as man; while whatever is in accord with reason, is in accord with the nature of man, as man. Now ‘man’s good is to be in accord with reason’ [...]. Therefore human virtue [...] is in accord with man’s nature, for as much as it accords with his reason: while vice is contrary to man’s nature, insofar as it is contrary to the order of reason.”²⁶⁰ Without this law of reason it would be impossible to evaluate the suitability of a given proximate end to the integral good of the human person as such. The goodness or evil of the human act thus depends on its conformity with the eternal law, which in human beings is participated in through the light of natural reason.²⁶¹

It is true that some scholars tend to give little attention to, or even ignore, the fact that the natural inclinations are a morally relevant expression of the eternal law. Without an adequate consideration of the natural inclinations the moral subject becomes deformed and will easily attribute to the reason a function of *ordinatio* that is too creative, since he does not consider the natural inclinations as morally relevant for the integral good of the human person, for his happiness. This position, which we might call rationalistic, is usually based on a dualistic anthropology. As everyone knows, in such an anthropology the bodily dimension of the human person is not adequately integrated as a constitutive element of the moral subject. The human person is not only his rational soul.²⁶² It is also opportune to recall that the *ordo rationis* that constitutes the natural law does not create the natural inclinations, but discovers them. They are in fact ontologically rooted in the structure of the being, and manifest themselves as inclinations determined by the Creator of human nature, inserted in the

²⁵⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, I-II, q. 92, a. 2, c.: “sunt autem tres differentiae humanorum actuum. Nam sicut supra dictum est, quidam actus sunt boni ex genere, qui sunt actus virtutum, et respectu horum, ponitur legis actus praecipere vel imperare; praecipit enim lex omnes actus virtutum, ut dicitur in V Ethic. Quidam vero sunt actus mali ex genere, sicut actus vitiosi, et respectu horum, lex habet prohibere. Quidam vero ex genere suo sunt actus indifferentes, et respectu horum, lex habet permittere” (there are three kinds of human acts: for, as stated above, some acts are good generically, viz. acts of virtue; and in respect of these the act of the law is a precept or command, for “the law commands all acts of virtue” (*Ethics* v, 1). Some acts are evil generically, viz. acts of vice, and in respect of these the law forbids. Some acts are generically indifferent, and in respect of these the law permits).

²⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, q. 71, a. 2, c.: “id quod est contra ordinem rationis, proprie est contra naturam hominis in quantum est homo; quod est autem secundum rationem, est secundum naturam hominis, in quantum est homo. Bonum autem hominis est secundum rationem esse [...] unde virtus humana [...] in quantum est secundum naturam hominis, in quantum convenit rationi: vitium autem in quantum est contra naturam hominis, in quantum est contra ordinem rationis.”

²⁶¹ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 6, ad 4: “ius naturale, quod continetur primo quidem in lege aeterna, secundario modo in naturali iudicatorio rationis humanae” (the natural law, which is contained primarily in the eternal law, but secondarily in the natural code of the human reason).

²⁶² Cf. *Veritatis splendor*, n. 49: “Doctrina quae moralem actum a corporeis condicionibus disiungit Sacrae Scripturae praeceptis repugnat et Traditioni: eiusmodi doctrina, immutata specie, veteres errores instaurat, quos Ecclesia semper respuit, quia personarum humanorum redigunt ad quandam libertatem “spiritualem” mere formalem” (A doctrine which dissociates the moral act from the bodily dimensions of its exercise is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and Tradition. Such a doctrine revives, in new forms, certain ancient errors which have always been opposed by the Church, inasmuch as they reduce the human person to a “spiritual” and purely formal freedom).

context of the divine plan that orders all things, that is, they derive from the ordering power of the eternal law.²⁶³

On the other hand, there are scholars who offer a reading of St. Thomas that tends to legalism, stressing almost unilaterally the fact that reason discovers and describes the eternal law that governs all of creation, and ignoring the fact that the principle work of the practical reason is essentially to *order* human choices in view of the final end. “Frankly, the ignoring of the concept of natural law as an *ordinatio* of the *ratio naturalis* is part of the tradition of a particular interpretation of Thomas.”²⁶⁴

In our view, a correct interpretation of Aquinas on this point would be situated between these two equally reductive positions. On the one hand it is fundamental to recognize the natural inclinations as an epiphany of the eternal law. To not do so could lead us, for example, to affirm that marriage between two persons of the same sex who love each other is legitimate, which is clearly false. On the other hand, it would be reductive to attribute to the natural light of reason a role that is merely descriptive of the eternal law, and not recognize in it also an active role, proper to its nature, which is that of being capable of ordering human action, in accord with the natural inclinations, in view of the end.²⁶⁵

After this brief parenthesis, which has been necessary for clarifying St. Thomas’s concept of the natural law, we can now pose the question of whether one must always follow the judgment of practical reason on the morality of a concrete act, even when that judgment is erroneous. According to Thomas, “[w]e must therefore conclude that, absolutely speaking, every will at variance with reason, whether right or erring, is always evil,”²⁶⁶ given that it acts against what it thinks to be the good

²⁶³ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 94, a. 4, ad 3: “sicut ratio in homine dominatur et imperat aliis potentiis, ita oportet quod omnes inclinationes naturales ad alias potentias pertinentes ordinentur secundum rationem” ([a]s, in man, reason rules and commands the other powers, so all the natural inclinations belonging to the other powers must needs be directed according to reason).

²⁶⁴ M. RHONHEIMER, *Legge naturale e ragione pratica*, cit., p. 265: “fa parte, a dire il vero, della tradizione di una determinata interpretazione di Tommaso il trascurare il concetto di legge naturale come *ordinatio* della *ratio naturalis*.”

²⁶⁵ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 90, a. 2, c.: “rationis enim est ordinare ad finem”; *ibidem*, q. 91, a. 2, ad 2: “omnis operatio, rationis et voluntatis derivatur in nobis ab eo quod est secundum naturam, ut supra habitum est, nam omnis ratio-cinatio derivatur a principiis naturaliter notis, et omnis appetitus eorum quae sunt ad finem, derivatur a naturali appetitu ultimi finis” ([e]very act of reason and will in us is based on that which is according to nature, as stated above: for every act of reasoning is based on principles that are known naturally, and every act of appetite in respect of the means is derived from the natural appetite in respect of the last end).

²⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, q. 19, a. 5, c.: “[cum conscientia sit quodammodo dictamen rationis (est enim quaedam applicatio scientiae ad actum, ut in primo dictum est), idem est quaerere utrum voluntas discordans a ratione errante sit mala, quod quaerere utrum conscientia errans obliget. Circa quod, aliqui distinxerunt tria genera actuum, quidam enim sunt boni ex genere; quidam sunt indifferentes; quidam sunt mali ex genere. Dicunt ergo quod, si ratio vel conscientia dicat aliquid esse faciendum quod sit bonum ex suo genere, non est ibi error. Similiter, si dicat aliquid non esse faciendum quod est malum ex suo genere, eadem enim ratione praecipuntur bona, qua prohibentur mala. Sed si ratio vel conscientia dicat alicui quod illa quae sunt secundum se mala, homo teneatur facere ex praecepto; vel quod illa quae sunt secundum se bona, sint prohibita; erit ratio vel conscientia errans. Et similiter si ratio vel conscientia dicat alicui quod id quod est secundum se indifferens, ut levare festucam de terra, sit prohibitum vel praeceptum, erit ratio vel conscientia errans. Dicunt ergo quod ratio vel conscientia errans circa indifferentia, sive praecipiendo sive prohibendo, obligat, ita quod voluntas discordans a tali ratione errante, erit mala et peccatum. Sed ratio vel conscientia errans praecipiendo ea quae sunt per se mala, vel prohibendo ea quae sunt per se bona et necessaria ad salutem, non obligat, unde in talibus voluntas discordans

to do or the evil to avoid that has been proposed to it by the reason as an object.²⁶⁷ For example, if John thinks that “to eat meat that was previously sacrificed by others to pagan idols” is an offense against God and he eats it just the same, he sins,²⁶⁸ not because to eat meat sacrificed to idols, considered in itself, is a sin (which it is not, as we well know), but because he deliberately chooses a moral object that he considers – erroneously – to be contrary to the *ordo rationis*, which consequently causes a disorder in the act of the will. The act of the will is always necessarily morally specified by the moral object that is presented to it as suitable or not by the practical reason, independently of whether the judgment concerning the morality of the object is correct or not. If I think that a given action is immoral, whether I am right or wrong in my judgment about its morality, I may never choose to do it. To do so would be to act against the dictates of practical reason, something which we must never do²⁶⁹ since it implies rejecting the order in relation to the final end.

a ratione vel conscientia errante, non est mala. Sed hoc irrationabiliter dicitur.] [...] dicendum est simpliciter quod omnis voluntas discordans a ratione, sive recta sive errante, semper est mala” ([s]ince conscience is a kind of dictate of the reason (for it is an application of knowledge to action, as was stated in the I, 19, 13), to inquire whether the will is evil when it is at variance with erring reason, is the same as to inquire “whether an erring conscience binds.” On this matter, some distinguished three kinds of actions: for some are good generically; some are indifferent; some are evil generically. And they say that if reason or conscience tell us to do something which is good generically, there is no error: and in like manner if it tell us not to do something which is evil generically; since it is the same reason that prescribes what is good and forbids what is evil. On the other hand if a man’s reason or conscience tells him that he is bound by precept to do what is evil in itself; or that what is good in itself, is forbidden, then his reason or conscience errs. In like manner if a man’s reason or conscience tell him, that what is indifferent in itself, for instance to raise a straw from the ground, is forbidden or commanded, his reason or conscience errs. They say, therefore, that reason or conscience when erring in matters of indifference, either by commanding or by forbidding them, binds: so that the will which is at variance with that erring reason is evil and sinful. But they say that when reason or conscience errs in commanding what is evil in itself, or in forbidding what is good in itself and necessary for salvation, it does not bind; wherefore in such cases the will which is at variance with erring reason or conscience is not evil. But this is unreasonable. [...] We must therefore conclude that, absolutely speaking, every will at variance with reason, whether right or erring, is always evil).

²⁶⁷ Cf. *ibidem*: “In indifferentibus enim, voluntas discordans a ratione vel conscientia errante, est mala aliquo modo propter obiectum, a quo bonitas vel malitia voluntatis dependet, non autem propter obiectum secundum sui naturam; sed secundum quod per accidens a ratione apprehenditur ut malum ad faciendum vel ad vitandum. Et quia obiectum voluntatis est id quod proponitur a ratione, ut dictum est, ex quo aliquid proponitur a ratione ut malum, voluntas, dum in illud fertur, accipit rationem mali. Hoc autem contingit non solum in indifferentibus, sed etiam in per se bonis vel malis. Non solum enim id quod est indifferens, potest accipere rationem boni vel mali per accidens; sed etiam id quod est bonum, potest accipere rationem mali, vel illud quod est malum, rationem boni, propter apprehensionem rationis” (in matters of indifference, the will that is at variance with erring reason or conscience, is evil in some way on account of the object, on which the goodness or malice of the will depends; not indeed on account of the object according as it is in its own nature; but according as it is accidentally apprehended by reason as something evil to do or to avoid. And since the object of the will is that which is proposed by the reason, as stated above, from the very fact that a thing is proposed by the reason as being evil, the will by tending thereto becomes evil. And this is the case not only in indifferent matters, but also in those that are good or evil in themselves. For not only indifferent matters can received the character of goodness or malice accidentally; but also that which is good, can receive the character of evil, or that which is evil, can receive the character of goodness, on account of the reason apprehending it as such).

²⁶⁸ Cf. *ICor*, 8,7: “Some, only recently accustomed to worshipping idols, eat the meat of sacrifices as though it really had been offered to idols, and their conscience, which is weak, is defiled.”

²⁶⁹ Cf. S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note h, p. 268: “Devido à análise do papel do intelecto no movimento voluntário, do lado de seu object, São Tomás pode conceder à razão uma participação ativa na função legisladora que deriva da eternal law. Atingir a razão é necessariamente, para ele, atingir a lei divina. É por isso que não podemos jamais agir contra a nossa razão ou contra a nossa consciência” (Based on the analysis of the role of the intellect in voluntary movement, on the part of its object, St. Thomas can grant to reason an active participation in the legislative function that derives from the eternal law. To grasp reason is necessarily, for him, to grasp the divine law. This is why we can never act against our reason or against our conscience).

At the same time, it is also true that an erroneous conscience does not always excuse an objectively disordered choice. This occurs only when there is an invincible involuntary ignorance concerning the aspects that determine the morality of the moral object.²⁷⁰ When “reason or conscience err with an error that is voluntary, either directly, or through negligence, so that one errs about what one ought to know; then such an error of reason or conscience does not excuse the will [...] from being evil.”²⁷¹

Passing from the theme of the erroneous conscience to the question of the overall goodness of the human act, another important idea for Aquinas is that of an evil intention (i.e., object of the *intentio*) being sufficient to cause an evil will in the act of the *electio*, even if the object of the latter, considered in itself, is good. It is important to recall once again that in the order of intention, ends have the nature of principles, and thus “[t]he act of the will cannot be said to be good, if an evil intention is the cause of willing. For when a man wills to give an alms for the sake of vainglory, he wills that which is good in itself, under a species of evil; and therefore, as willed by him, it is evil. Wherefore his will is evil.”²⁷² Any disordered act of the will is enough to make the entire action evil. “If the will has for its object [of the *electio*] what is evil in itself, even under the species of good [due to the object of the *intentio*], or what is good [according to the object of the *electio*] under the species of evil [due to the object of the *intentio*], the will is evil in either case. For the will to be good, it is necessary that it have for its object the good under the species of good, that is, that it will the good for the sake of the good.”²⁷³

In St. Thomas’s vision of human action, the good will is easily integrated with the divine will, given that for the will to be good it is necessary that it be oriented to its final end, which is God.²⁷⁴ “[T]he goodness of the will depends on the intention of the [final] end,”²⁷⁵ an end that was established by the divine will. In fact the natural inclination to happiness is not subject to our free choice. When the human will, therefore, orders itself to the final end that has been destined for it by the di-

²⁷⁰ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 19, a. 6, c.: “Si autem sit error qui causet involuntarium, proveniens ex ignorantia alicuius circumstantiae absque omni negligentia; tunc talis error rationis vel conscientiae excusat, ut voluntas concordans rationi erranti non sit mala” ([I]f the error arise from ignorance of some circumstance, and without any negligence, so that it cause the act to be involuntary, then that error of reason or conscience excuses the will, that abides by that erring reason, from being evil).

²⁷¹ *Ibidem*: “Si igitur ratio vel conscientia erret errore voluntario, vel directe, vel propter negligentiam, quia est error circa id quod quis scire tenetur; tunc talis error rationis vel conscientiae non excusat quin voluntas concordans rationi vel conscientiae sic erranti, sit mala.”

²⁷² *Ibidem*, a. 7, ad 2: “dicendum quod voluntas non potest dici bona, si sit intentio mala causa volendi. Qui enim vult dare eleemosynam propter inanem gloriam consequendam, vult id quod de se est bonum, sub ratione mali, et ideo, prout est volitum ab ipso, est malum. Unde voluntas eius est mala.”

²⁷³ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “sive voluntas sit eius quod est secundum se malum, etiam sub ratione boni; sive sit boni sub ratione mali; semper voluntas erit mala. Sed ad hoc quod sit voluntas bona, requiritur quod sit boni sub ratione boni; idest quod velit bonum, et propter bonum.”

²⁷⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 9, c.: “Finis autem ultimus voluntatis humanae est summum bonum, quod est Deus” ([T]he last end of the human will is the Sovereign Good, namely, God).

²⁷⁵ *Ibidem*: “bonitas voluntatis dependet ex intentione finis.”

vine will, it is truly upright. “Therefore, in order that man’s will be good it needs to be conformed to the Divine will”²⁷⁶ in all of the ends (the final end and the ends of the moral virtues) that the latter determines for man’s perfection. Regarding this conformity of the human will with the divine will “it should be said that a man who conforms his will to God’s, in the aspect of reason of the thing willed, wills what God wills, more than the man, who conforms his will to God’s, in the point of the very thing willed; because the will tends more to the end, than to that which is on account of the end.”²⁷⁷ Thus, for example, one who chastises his neighbor for his correction and salvation acts more in conformity with the divine will than one who gives alms so as to no longer be bothered by a beggar. And, the more “ultimate” the end in question, the more important is conformity with the will of God. On the other hand, when we consider a proximate end, which is less formal and determinative for the right orientation of the will, “we know not what God wills in particular: and in this respect we are not bound to conform our will to the Divine will. But in the state of glory, every one will see in each thing that he wills, the relation of that thing to what God wills in that particular matter. Consequently he will conform his will to God in all things not only formally, but also materially.”²⁷⁸

c) *The morality of the exterior act of the will*

The exterior act of the will, as we explained above, is the de facto realization of an *electio* that has been made after the process of deliberation. Normally the exterior act involves the use of other faculties of the person which respond to the will’s command, though this is not necessarily the case, as with an *electio* of omission. It is also important to remember that the exterior act of the will is not necessarily externally observable, as for example when “I will to recall the title of a film” that I saw. Here the will commands the memory to remember, though no one externally “sees” this effort of the memory. Finally, it is opportune to recall once more that there are exterior acts of the will whose meaning it is difficult for an external observer to interpret, and thus it is necessary that we put ourselves in the *perspective of the person who acts* in order to be able to correctly discern what is the moral object in question.

In q. 20, St. Thomas addresses the theme of the morality of the exterior act, asserting that its

²⁷⁶ *Ibidem*: “Ergo ad hoc quod voluntas hominis sit bona, requiritur quod conformetur voluntati divinae.”

²⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, a. 10, ad 4: “dicendum quod magis vult quod Deus vult, qui conformat voluntatem suam voluntati divinae quantum ad rationem voliti, quam qui conformat quantum ad ipsam rem volitam, quia voluntas principaliter fertur in finem, quam in id quod est ad finem.”

²⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, ad 1: “[in particulari] nescimus quid Deus velit. Et quantum ad hoc, non tenemur conformare voluntatem nostram divinae voluntati. In statu tamen gloriae, omnes videbunt in singulis quae volent, ordinem eorum ad id quod Deus circa hoc vult. Et ideo non solum formaliter, sed materialiter in omnibus suam voluntatem Deo conformabunt.” Cf. S. RAMÍREZ, *De actibus humanis*, cit., p. 571: “non semper cognoscimus in concreto quanam sit voluntas Dei.”

morality depends both on the object of the *electio*, as for example “to give alms,”²⁷⁹ and on the object of the *intentio*, as for example “out of vainglory.” “[S]ince the end is the will’s proper object, it is evident that this aspect of good or evil, which the external action derives from its relation to the end, is to be found first of all in the act of the will, whence it passes to the external action.”²⁸⁰ He thus concludes that, in the order of execution, the interior act of the will communicates its goodness to the exterior act, since “the will is compared to the exterior action, as its efficient cause. Wherefore the goodness of the act of the will, as existing in the active [efficient] cause, is the form of the exterior action.”²⁸¹ If, on the other hand, we consider the order of intention instead of that of execution, then “[t]he exterior action is the object of the will, inasmuch as it is proposed to the will by the reason, as good apprehended and ordained by the reason: and thus it is prior to the good in the act of the will.”²⁸² In this order, the exterior act has the nature of an end, that is, of the object proper of the will *that exists in the practical reason* prior to any act of the will and to the effective realization of the action. Along these lines, St. Thomas says that “the goodness or malice which the external action has of itself, on account of its being about due matter and its being attended by due circumstances, is not derived from the will, but rather from the [practical] reason.”²⁸³ In his example, “to give alms out of vainglory” is a plan of exterior action grasped and ordered by the practical reason even before any act of the will (“*to will to give alms out of vainglory*”), and as such already represents a moral evil that derives from its disorder in relation to the ends of the moral virtues, and consequently in relation to man’s ultimate end. “Therefore, if we consider the goodness of the external action, insofar as it comes from reason’s ordination and apprehension, it is prior to the goodness of the act of the will.”²⁸⁴

With human action, “for it to be good simply, it is not enough for it to be good in one point only, it must be good in every respect. If therefore the will be good, both from its proper object and

²⁷⁹ Cf. *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 20, a. 1, c.: “aliqui actus exteriores possunt dici boni vel mali dupliciter. Uno modo, secundum genus suum, et secundum circumstantias in ipsis consideratas, sicut dare eleemosynam, servatis debitis circumstantiis, dicitur esse bonum. Alio modo dicitur aliquid esse bonum vel malum ex ordine ad finem, sicut dare eleemosynam propter inanem gloriam, dicitur esse malum” ([e]xternal actions may be said to be good or bad in two ways. First, in regard to their genus, and the circumstances connected with them: thus the giving of alms, if the required conditions be observed, is said to be good. Secondly, a thing is said to be good or evil, from its relation to the end: thus the giving of alms for vainglory is said to be evil).

²⁸⁰ *Ibidem*: “Cum autem finis sit proprium obiectum voluntatis, manifestum est quod ista ratio boni vel mali quam habet actus exterior ex ordine ad finem, per prius invenitur in actu voluntatis, et ex eo derivatur ad actum exteriorem.” In this passage we think St. Thomas uses the expression “finis” in a strict sense, i.e., to refer to the object of the *intentio*.

²⁸¹ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “Voluntas autem comparatur ad actum exteriorem sicut causa efficiens. Unde bonitas actus voluntatis est forma exterioris actus sicut in causa agente existens.”

²⁸² *Ibidem*, ad 1: “dicendum quod actus exterior est obiectum voluntatis, inquantum proponitur voluntati a ratione ut quoddam bonum apprehensum et ordinatum per rationem, et sic est prius quam bonum actus voluntatis.”

²⁸³ *Ibidem*, c.: “Bonitas autem vel malitia quam habet actus exterior secundum se, propter debitam materiam et debitas circumstantias, non derivatur a voluntate, sed magis a ratione.”

²⁸⁴ *Ibidem*: “Unde si consideretur bonitas exterioris actus secundum quod est in ordinatione et apprehensione rationis, prior est quam bonitas actus voluntatis.”

from its end, it follows that the external action is good.”²⁸⁵ Now, given that “the interior act of the will, and the external action, considered morally, are one act,”²⁸⁶ the goodness of the elicited acts of the will – concretely of the *intentio* and of the *electio* – is communicated to the exterior act through the *imperium* to the other faculties.²⁸⁷

A human act can have *as many moral specifications as there are aspects of good* of the various moral objects that the practical reason conceives and orders among themselves. Among these objects some can be purely instrumental, considered in themselves possessing no aspect of good other than being simply a means to reach another good. In this case, they are only good because they are ordered to reaching a virtuous end, from which, consequently, they derive their goodness.²⁸⁸ For example, the action “to start the car,” considered in itself, presents no particular aspect of good, deriving its goodness from the end to which it is ordered, as for example “to go to work.” When, however, the exterior act, which according to the order of intention has the nature of a moral object,²⁸⁹ “has goodness or malice of itself [...], then the goodness of the external action is distinct from the goodness of the will regarding the end.”²⁹⁰ For this reason, recalling an example given ear-

²⁸⁵ *Ibidem*, a. 2, c.: “quod sit simpliciter bonum, non sufficit unum singulare bonum, sed requiritur integritas bonitatis. Si igitur voluntas sit bona et ex obiecto proprio, et ex fine, consequens est actum exteriorem esse bonum.” Cf. *ibidem*, q. 58, a. 4, c.: “Ad hoc autem quod electio sit bona, duo requiruntur. Primo, ut sit debita intentio finis, et hoc fit per virtutem moralem, quae vim appetitivam inclinat ad bonum conveniens rationi, quod est finis debitus. Secundo, ut homo recte accipiat ea quae sunt ad finem, et hoc non potest esse nisi per rationem recte consiliantem, iudicantem et praecipientem; quod pertinet ad prudentiam et ad virtutes sibi annexas” (in order that a choice be good, two things are required. First, that the intention be directed to a due end; and this is done by moral virtue, which inclines the appetitive faculty to the good that is in accord with reason, which is a due end. Secondly, that man take rightly those things which have reference to the end: and this he cannot do unless his reason counsel, judge and command aright, which is the function of prudence and the virtues annexed to it).

²⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, q. 20, a. 3, c.: “actus interior voluntatis et actus exterior, prout considerantur in genere moris, sunt unus actus.”

²⁸⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, ad 4: “a bonitate voluntatis derivatur bonitas actus exterioris” (the goodness of the external action is derived from the goodness of the will).

²⁸⁸ Cf. CAJETAN (Cardinal), *Commentary on the “Summa theologiae”*, I-II, q. 20, a. 3, cit., t. 6, p. 159: “bonitas moralis rectae rationis *de ipso fine virtutum*, idest de eodem de quo est virtus moralis, non est alia a bonitate morali ipsius virtutis moralis; ac per hoc, actus pendens ex recta ratione et recto appetitu, non propterea habet duas bonitates morales.”

²⁸⁹ Cf. *De malo*, q. 2, a. 3, c.: “per prius esse malum in actu exteriori quam in voluntate, si actus exterior in apprehensione consideretur: e converso autem si consideretur in executione operis quia actus exterior comparatur ad actum voluntatis ut obiectum quod habet rationem finis” (evil is primarily in external acts rather than the will if we should consider external acts as understood regarding their nature, and conversely if we should consider external acts as they are carried out. This is because external acts are related to acts of the will as objects that have the nature of ends). In these articles it is very important to bear in mind the difference between the order of intention and that of execution. At times, St. Thomas “jumps” from one to the other without warning, a fact that can give rise to confusion and ambiguity. Look, for example, at the use of the expression “external act,” which according to the order of intention is nothing other than moral object and is therefore the formal cause of the interior act of the will, but if we consider the order of execution the “external act” is caused by the internal (elicited) act of the will which has the nature of efficient cause; T.G. BELMANS, *Le sens objectif de l’agir humain*, cit., p. 44: “la distinction entre l’acte interne et l’acte externe permet de préciser la thèse citée: le dernier constituant l’objet du premier, chacun des deux communique à l’autre sa propre bonté, l’acte interne au point de vue de l’exécution, l’acte externe à celui de la spécification” (the distinction between the internal act and the external act allows the cited thesis to be made more precise: the latter constitutes the object of the former, with each communicating to the other its own goodness, the internal act from the point of view of the execution, the external act from that of the specification).

²⁹⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 20, a. 3, c.: “[actus exterior] habet bonitatem vel malitiam secundum se, scilicet secundum materiam vel circumstantias, tunc bonitas exterioris actus est una, et bonitas voluntatis quae est ex fine, est alia.”

lier, one who “steals so as to commit adultery” is clearly more adulterer than thief – though he does not cease to be a thief – as opposed to one who “drinks a bitter remedy to cure an illness,” who has only one specific type of goodness, “to will to cure,” given that the goodness of the cure and that of the remedy do not differ specifically from the perspective of the aspect of good.²⁹¹ The only aspect of good that “to drink a bitter remedy” (*finis proximus*) possesses is that which derives from its ordination to the “recovery of health” (*finis operantis*); considered in isolation it possesses no intrinsic relation of suitability or unsuitability with the order of reason, which is clearly the case with the theft, which considered in itself is contrary to the order of reason, independently of the subsequent end to which it is ordered by the acting subject.

The exterior act, according to St. Thomas, though it never alters the moral species, can affect the interior act of the will, increasing or decreasing its goodness. This can happen in three ways. First, when to a choice that has not been executed is followed another choice that is carried out. Here, the external act would affect the *number* of internal acts, which are doubled.²⁹² Second, when a given external act requires great perseverance on the part of the will, obviously this “continued perseverance” in good or in evil increases the voluntariness of the action.²⁹³ Third, it can affect the intensity of the interior act: “[T]here are certain external actions, which, insofar as they are pleasurable, or painful, are such as naturally to make the will more intense or more remiss.”²⁹⁴

We can also consider the exterior act as the terminus or end of the movement of the will. From this point of view the exterior act “adds to the goodness or malice of the will; because every inclination or movement is perfected by attaining its end or reaching its terminus. Wherefore the will is not perfect, unless it be such that, given the opportunity, it realizes the operation. But if this prove impossible, as long as the will is perfect, so as to realize the operation if it could; the lack of perfection derived from the external action, is simply involuntary. Now just as the involuntary deserves neither punishment nor reward in the accomplishment of good or evil deeds, so neither does

²⁹¹ Cf. *ibidem*: “potio amara ex hoc solo est bona, quod est sanativa. Unde non est alia bonitas sanitatis et potionis, sed una et eadem” (a bitter draught is good merely because it procures health. Wherefore there are not two goodnesses, one the goodness of health, and the other the goodness of the draught; but one and the same).

²⁹² Cf. *ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “Uno modo, secundum numerum. Puta, cum aliquis vult aliquid facere bono fine vel malo, et tunc quidem non facit, postmodum autem vult et facit; duplicatur actus voluntatis, et sic fit duplex bonum vel duplex malum” (First in point of number; if, for instance, a man wishes to do something with a good or an evil end in view, and does not do it then, but afterwards wills and does it, the act of his will is doubled and a double good, or a double evil is the result).

²⁹³ Cf. *ibidem*: “Alio modo, quantum ad extensionem. Puta, cum aliquis vult facere aliquid bono fine vel malo et propter aliquod impedimentum desistit; alius autem continuat motum voluntatis quousque opere perficiat; manifestum est quod huiusmodi voluntas est diuturnior in bono vel malo, et secundum hoc est peior vel melior” (Secondly, in point of extension: when, for instance, a man wishes to do something for a good or an evil end, and is hindered by some obstacle, whereas another man perseveres in the movement of the will until he accomplish it in deed; it is evident that the will of the latter is more lasting in good or evil, and in this respect, is better or worse).

²⁹⁴ *Ibidem*: “Sunt enim quidam actus exteriores qui, in quantum sunt delectabiles vel poenosi, nati sunt intendere voluntatem vel remittere.”

it lessen reward or punishment, if a man through simple involuntariness fail to do good or evil.”²⁹⁵

Regarding the moral relevance of the consequences of an act, a theme that we will have occasion to return to more than once in our study,²⁹⁶ St. Thomas maintains that these do not change the moral species of the act, but in the case of foreseen consequences they are clearly accidents that increase or decrease the act’s goodness or malice.²⁹⁷ If, however, the consequences were not foreseen by the acting subject, it is necessary to distinguish those that derive *per se* from the action from those that derive accidentally. The former increase or decrease the goodness or evil of the act, whereas the latter do not.²⁹⁸

Another very important question is that of whether a single exterior act can be good and evil simultaneously. To avoid confusion, St. Thomas distinguishes the act in its *genus naturae* from the act in its *genus moris*,²⁹⁹ so as to then be able to say that “nothing hinders an action from being one, considered in its *genus naturae*; whereas it is not one, considered in its *genus moris*; and vice versa.”³⁰⁰ In the case already cited, for example, of adultery, fornication and the conjugal act, all have the same *genus naturae* but are specifically different according to their *genus moris*. If we

²⁹⁵ *Ibidem*: “addit ad bonitatem vel malitiam voluntatis, quia omnis inclinatio vel motus perficitur in hoc quod consequitur finem, vel attingit terminum. Unde non est perfecta voluntas, nisi sit talis quae, opportunitate data, operetur. Si vero possibilitas desit, voluntate existente perfecta, ut operaretur si posset; defectus perfectionis quae est ex actu exteriori, est simpliciter involuntarium. Involuntarium autem, sicut non meretur poenam vel praemium in operando bonum aut malum, ita non tollit aliquid de praemio vel de poena, si homo involuntarie simpliciter deficiat ad faciendum bonum vel malum.”

²⁹⁶ See, for example, my paper ‘*Per se*’ and ‘*Praeter Intentionem*’ in Aquinas, in «Josephinum Journal of Theology» 18 (2011), pp. 418-453.

²⁹⁷ Cf. *ibidem*, a. 5, c.: “Si est praecogitatus, manifestum est quod addit ad bonitatem vel malitiam” (If they are foreseen, it is evident that they increase the goodness or malice).

²⁹⁸ Cf. *ibidem*: “Si autem eventus sequens non sit praecogitatus, tunc distinguendum est. Quia si per se sequitur ex tali actu, et ut in pluribus, secundum hoc eventus sequens addit ad bonitatem vel malitiam actus, manifestum est enim meliorem actum esse ex suo genere, ex quo possunt plura bona sequi; et peiorem, ex quo nata sunt plura mala sequi. Si vero per accidens, et ut in paucioribus, tunc eventus sequens non addit ad bonitatem vel ad malitiam actus, non enim datur iudicium de re aliqua secundum illud quod est per accidens, sed solum secundum illud quod est per se” ([I]f the consequences are not foreseen, we must make a distinction. Because if they follow from the nature of the action and in the majority of cases, in this respect, the consequences increase the goodness or malice of that action: for it is evident that an action is specifically better, if better results can follow from it; and specifically worse, if it is of a nature to produce worse results. On the other hand, if the consequences follow by accident and seldom, then they do not increase the goodness or malice of the action: because we do not judge of a thing according to that which belongs to it by accident, but only according to that which belongs to it of itself). Commenting on this passage Pinckaers says that “a consideração das consequências do act moral é um complemento aos olhos de São Tomás. Assume talvez mais importância para nós, hoje, que estamos melhor informados e atentos às consequências psicológicas, sociológicas e políticas de nossas acções. Certos moralistas chegarão ao ponto de julgar os acts por estimativa de seus efeitos mais ou menos favoráveis e a um prazo mais o menos longo. Sua perspectiva é com frequência de tipo mais técnico e utilitário do que propriamente moral” (the consideration of the consequences of the moral act is a complement in the eyes of St. Thomas. It perhaps assumes more importance for us today, who are more informed about and attentive to the psychological, sociological and political consequences of our actions. Certain moralists have reached the point of judging acts by an estimation of their more or less favorable effects over a more or less lengthy period. Their perspective is often more of a technical and utilitarian than properly moral) (S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note e, p. 288).

²⁹⁹ We analyze the useful distinction that St. Thomas makes here in greater detail in our paper *Genus naturae* and *Genus moris* in Aquinas, in www.eticaepolitica.net.

³⁰⁰ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 20, a. 6, c.: “nihil prohibet aliquem actum esse unum secundum quod refertur ad genus naturae, qui tamen non est unus secundum quod refertur ad genus moris, sicut et e converso.”

consider the external act in its *genus moris*, then the external act coincides with the object of the *electio* as we saw above, and it is obvious that the same object of the will cannot be both good and evil at the same time. “If therefore we consider one action according to the *genus moris*, it is impossible for it to be morally both good and evil. Whereas if it be one as to natural and not moral unity, it can be both good and evil,”³⁰¹ because there are two specifically distinct acts of the will, and not just one.

d) Consequences deriving from the morality of human acts

The goodness or evil of human actions have important consequences for the moral subject who produces them. It is by his actions that the person becomes good or evil. Good actions are those which show themselves to be ordered to the due end, and evil actions are those that include some disorder with respect to the due end.³⁰² This ordination of acts to the due end is measured according to a rule³⁰³ which, as we have already shown, in the case of human beings manifests itself on two reciprocally ordered levels: “the proximate rule is the human reason, while the supreme rule is the Eternal Law. When, therefore, a human action tends to the end, according to the order of reason and of the Eternal Law, then that action is right: but when it turns aside from that rectitude, then it is said to be a sin. Now it is evident from what has been said that every voluntary action that turns aside from the order of reason and of the Eternal Law, is evil, and that every good action is in accord with reason and the Eternal Law. Hence it follows that a human action is right or sinful by reason of its being good or evil.”³⁰⁴ It is important to note the central role that the concept of the final end plays for the integration of the rational dimension of the eternal law (natural law) with the revealed dimension of the eternal law, to which we have access by theological faith.³⁰⁵ God gives us

³⁰¹ *Ibidem*: “Si ergo accipiatur unus actus prout est in genere moris, impossibile est quod sit bonus et malus bonitate et malitia morali. Si tamen sit unus unitate naturae, et non unitate moris, potest esse bonus et malus.”

³⁰² Cf. *ibidem*, q. 21, a. 1, c.: “peccatum proprie consistit in actu qui agitur propter finem aliquem, cum non habet debitum ordinem ad finem illum” (sin consists properly in an action done for a certain end, and lacking due order to that end).

³⁰³ Cf. *ibidem*: “Debitus autem ordo ad finem secundum aliquam regulam mensuratur” ([T]he due order to an end is measured by some rule).

³⁰⁴ *Ibidem*: “regula proxima est ratio humana; regula autem suprema est lex aeterna. Quando ergo actus hominis procedit in finem secundum ordinem rationis et legis aeternae, tunc actus est rectus, quando autem ab hac rectitudine obliquatur, tunc dicitur esse peccatum. Manifestum est autem ex praemissis quod omnis actus voluntarius est malus per hoc quod recedit ab ordine rationis et legis aeternae, et omnis actus bonus concordat rationi et legi aeternae. Unde sequitur quod actus humanus ex hoc quod est bonus vel malus, habeat rationem rectitudinis vel peccati.”

³⁰⁵ Cf. S.-Th. PINCKAERS, *Notas ao tratado sobre os human acts*, cit., note b, p. 292: “O cristianismo transformou profundamente a concepção do pecado e fez dele um act contrário à lei de Deus expressa na revelação. Para os gregos, o ‘pecado’ é antes uma falta, uma acção que não é correcta. São Tomás retoma a noção grega: o pecado é o contrário da rectidão. Ele a eleva, confere-lhe uma dimensão moral e religiosa conforme à concepção bíblica e cristã. A passagem é assegurada pelo ordenamento ao fim, em especial ao fim último verdadeiro, de acordo com a razão. Essa ordem serve ao mesmo tempo para definir a obra da lei divina e a natureza da rectidão moral, depois o desvio é o pecado. Este não é concebido em uma perspectiva legalista, que contrapõe o permitido e o proibido, mas em uma perspectiva finalista e dinâmica: é um defeito no movimento da will em direcção ao fim último verdadeiro.

these two ways of access to the plan of his Providence, by which the person can realize, with the help of grace, his vocation to eternal beatitude. “[T]he sin of the will always fails as regards the last end intended, because no voluntary evil action can be ordained to happiness, which is the last end.”³⁰⁶ And it is important to bear in mind that “[e]ach thing is ordained to its end by its action: and therefore sin, which consists in straying from the order to the end, consists properly in a [disordered] action.”³⁰⁷

“[T]o praise or to blame means nothing else than to impute to someone the malice or goodness of his action. Now an action is imputed to an agent, when it is in his power, so that he has dominion over it.”³⁰⁸ It is thus clear that we are morally responsible, and therefore imputable, for our free actions, since we exercise dominion over these. In these voluntary acts, a more intense elicited act of the will causes a greater goodness or evil in the person who performs it, and this is why the gravity of the guilt depends more on the intensity of the act of the will than on the consequences that derive from the action.³⁰⁹ The immanent effect of the human act is much more important, morally speaking, than the action’s transitive effect, a fact that is frequently overlooked today.³¹⁰

“Hence it follows that good or evil, in voluntary actions alone, renders them worthy of praise or blame,”³¹¹ acts which, insofar as they positively contribute to the realization or not of the common political good have the character of merit or demerit according to the virtue of justice,³¹² and as

O termo pecado conserva em São Tomás um sentido mais amplo do que para nós. De acordo com o vocabulário aristotélico, pode designar tanto uma falta na ordem da natureza, quanto na ordem moral. Também é mais extenso em sua acepção do que o termo culpabilidade.” (Christianity profoundly transformed the conception of sin, making of it an act contrary to the law of God expressed in revelation. For the Greeks, “sin” was a fault, an action that is not correct. St. Thomas returns to the Greek notion: sin is what is contrary to rectitude. He raises this notion, conferring on it a moral and religious dimension in conformity with the biblical and Christian conception. The passage is assured by the ordination to the end, especially to the true final end, in accord with reason. That order at the same time serves to define the work of the divine law and the nature of moral rectitude, after deviation and sin. This is not conceived of legalistically, opposing what is permitted and what is prohibited, but in a teleological and dynamic perspective: it is a defect in the movement of the will toward the the true final end.

The term sin preserves in St. Thomas a much broader sense than it has for us. In line with Aristotelian vocabulary, it can designate a fault in the order of nature, as well as in the moral ord. It is also broader in meaning than the term culpability).

³⁰⁶ *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 21, a. 1, ad 2: “in peccato voluntatis, semper est defectus ab ultimo fine intento, quia nullus actus voluntarius malus est ordinabilis ad beatitudinem, quae est ultimus finis.”

³⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “unumquodque ordinatur ad finem per actum suum, et ideo ratio peccati, quae consistit in deviatione ab ordine ad finem, proprie consistit in actu.”

³⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, a. 2, c.: “nihil enim est aliud laudari vel culpari, quam imputari alicui malitiam vel bonitatem sui actus. Tunc autem actus imputatur agenti, quando est in potestate ipsius, ita quod habeat dominium sui actus.”

³⁰⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, II-II, q. 13, a. 3, ad 1: “in gravitate culpae magis attenditur intentio voluntatis perversae quam effectus operis” (the gravity of a sin depends on the intention of the evil will, rather than on the effect of the deed).

³¹⁰ For example, from the moral perspective, it is much more serious to commit murder than to be murdered.

³¹¹ *Ibidem*, I-II, q. 21, a. 2, c.: “Unde relinquitur quod bonum vel malum in solis actibus voluntariis constituit rationem laudis vel culpae.”

³¹² Cf. *ibidem*, a. 3, c.: “meritum et demeritum dicuntur in ordine ad retributionem quae fit secundum iustitiam. Retributio autem secundum iustitiam fit alicui ex eo quod agit in profectum vel nocumentum alterius. Est autem considerandum quod unusquisque in aliqua societate vivens, est aliquo modo pars et membrum totius societatis. Quicumque ergo agit aliquid in bonum vel malum alicuius in societate existentis, hoc redundat in totam societatem sicut qui laedit manum, per consequens laedit hominem. Cum ergo aliquis agit in bonum vel malum alterius singularis personae, cadit ibi dupli-

also being ordered to God “our actions, good and evil, acquire merit or demerit, in the sight of God. On the part of God Himself, inasmuch as He is man’s last end; and it is our duty to refer all our actions to the last end. [...] Consequently, whoever does an evil deed, not referable to God, does not give God the honor due to Him as our last end.”³¹³ There are differences, however, in the merit before the political community and before God, given that “[m]an is not ordained to the body politic, according to all that he is and has; and so it does not follow that every action of his acquires merit or demerit in relation to the body politic. But all that man is, and can, and has, must be referred to God: and therefore every action of man, whether good or bad, acquires merit or demerit in the sight of God, as far as the action itself is concerned.”³¹⁴ How can we not recall here the famous words of St. Paul: “whether you eat, or drink, or do any other thing, *do all for the glory of God*”?³¹⁵

citer ratio meriti vel demeriti. Uno modo, secundum quod debetur ei retributio a singulari persona quam iuvat vel offendit. Alio modo, secundum quod debetur ei retributio a toto collegio. Quando vero aliquis ordinat actum suum directe in bonum vel malum totius collegii, debetur ei retributio primo quidem et principaliter a toto collegio, secundario vero, ab omnibus collegii partibus. Cum vero aliquis agit quod in bonum proprium vel malum vergit, etiam debetur ei retributio, in quantum etiam hoc vergit in commune secundum quod ipse est pars collegii, licet non debeatur ei retributio in quantum est bonum vel malum singularis personae, quae est eadem agenti, nisi forte a seipso secundum quandam similitudinem, prout est iustitia hominis ad seipsum. Sic igitur patet quod actus bonus vel malus habet rationem laudabilis vel culpabilis, secundum quod est in potestate voluntatis; rationem vero rectitudinis et peccati, secundum ordinem ad finem; rationem vero meriti et demeriti, secundum retributionem iustitiae ad alterum” ([w]e speak of merit and demerit, in relation to retribution, rendered according to justice. Now, retribution according to justice is rendered to a man, by reason of his having done something to another’s advantage or hurt. It must, moreover, be observed that every individual member of a society is, in a fashion, a part and member of the whole society. Wherefore, any good or evil, done to the member of a society, redounds on the whole society: thus, who hurts the hand, hurts the man. When, therefore, anyone does good or evil to another individual, there is a twofold measure of merit or demerit in his action: first, in respect of the retribution owed to him by the individual to whom he has done good or harm; secondly, in respect of the retribution owed to him by the whole of society. Now when a man ordains his action directly for the good or evil of the whole society, retribution is owed to him, before and above all, by the whole society; secondarily, by all the parts of society. Whereas when a man does that which conduces to his own benefit or disadvantage, then again is retribution owed to him, insofar as this too affects the community, forasmuch as he is a part of society: although retribution is not due to him, insofar as it conduces to the good or harm of an individual, who is identical with the agent: unless, perchance, he owe retribution to himself, by a sort of resemblance, insofar as man is said to be just to himself. It is therefore evident that a good or evil action deserves praise or blame, insofar as it is in the power of the will: that it is right or sinful, according as it is ordained to the end; and that its merit or demerit depends on the recompense for justice or injustice towards another).

³¹³ *Ibidem*, a. 4, c.: “actus nostri boni vel mali habent rationem meriti vel demeriti apud Deum. Ratione quidem ipsius, in quantum est ultimus hominis finis, est autem debitum ut ad finem ultimum omnes actus referantur, ut supra habitum est. Unde qui facit actum malum non referibilem in Deum, non servat honorem Dei, qui ultimo fini debetur.” The reflections that St. Thomas makes in these articles concerning human merit are still only on the natural level.

³¹⁴ *Ibidem*, ad 3: “homo non ordinatur ad communitatem politicam secundum se totum, et secundum omnia sua, et ideo non oportet quod quilibet actus eius sit meritorius vel demeritorius per ordinem ad communitatem politicam. Sed totum quod homo est, et quod potest et habet, ordinandum est ad Deum, et ideo omnis actus hominis bonus vel malus habet rationem meriti vel demeriti apud Deum, quantum est ex ipsa ratione actus.”

³¹⁵ *1 Cor* 10,31. Emphasis added.