

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF MAN'S LAST END (EIGHT ARTICLES)

In this matter we shall consider first the last end of human life; and secondly, those things by means of which man may advance towards this end, or stray from the path: for the end is the rule of whatever is ordained to the end. And since the last end of human life is stated to be happiness, we must consider (1) the last end in general; (2) happiness.

Under the first head there are eight points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) Whether it belongs to man to act for an end?
 - [\(2\)](#) Whether this is proper to the rational nature?
 - [\(3\)](#) Whether a man's actions are specified by their end?
 - [\(4\)](#) Whether there is any last end of human life?
 - [\(5\)](#) Whether one man can have several last ends?
 - [\(6\)](#) Whether man ordains all to the last end?
 - [\(7\)](#) Whether all men have the same last end?
 - [\(8\)](#) Whether all other creatures concur with man in that last end?
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Whether it belongs to man to act for an end?

Objection 1: It would seem that it does not belong to man to act for an end. For a cause is naturally first. But an end, in its very name, implies something that is last. Therefore an end is not a cause. But that for which a man acts, is the cause of his action; since this preposition "for" indicates a relation of causality. Therefore it does not belong to man to act for an end.

Objection 2: Further, that which is itself the last end is not for an end. But in some cases the last end is an action, as the Philosopher states (Ethic. i, 1). Therefore man does not do everything for an end.

Objection 3: Further, then does a man seem to act for an end, when he acts deliberately. But man does many things without deliberation, sometimes not even thinking of what he is doing; for instance when one moves one's foot or hand, or scratches one's beard, while intent on something else. Therefore man does not do everything for an end.

On the contrary, All things contained in a genus are derived from the principle of that genus. Now the end is the principle in human operations, as the Philosopher states (Phys. ii, 9). Therefore it belongs to man to do everything for an end.

I answer that, Of actions done by man those alone are properly called "human," which are proper to man as man. Now 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 and will of reason." Therefore those actions are properly called human which proceed from a deliberate will. And if any other actions are found in man, they can be called actions "of a man," but not properly "human" actions, since they are not proper to man as man. Now it is clear that whatever actions proceed from a power, are caused by that power in accordance with the nature of its object. But the object of the will is the end and the good. Therefore all human actions must be for an end.

Reply to Objection 1: Although the end be last in the order of execution, yet it is first in the order of the agent's intention. And it is this way that it is a cause.

Reply to Objection 2: If any human action be the last end, it must be voluntary, else it would not be human, as stated above. Now an action is voluntary in one of two ways: first, because it is commanded by the will, e.g. to walk, or to speak; secondly, because it is elicited by the will, for instance the very act of willing. Now it is impossible for the very act elicited by the will to be the last end. For the object of the will is the end, just as the object of sight is color: wherefore just as the first visible cannot be the act of seeing, because every act of seeing is directed to a visible object; so the first appetible, i.e. the end, cannot be the very act of willing. Consequently it follows that if a human action be the last end, it must be an action commanded by the will: so that there, some action of man, at least the act of willing, is for the end. Therefore whatever a man does, it is true to say that man acts for an end, even when he does that action in which the last end consists.

Reply to Objection 3: Such like actions are not properly human actions; since they do not proceed from deliberation of the reason, which is the proper principle of human actions. Therefore they have indeed an imaginary end, but not one that is fixed by reason.

Whether it is proper to the rational nature to act for an end?

Objection 1: It would seem that it is proper to the rational nature to act for an end. For man, to whom it belongs to act for an end, never acts for an unknown end. On the other hand, there are many things that have no knowledge of an end; either because they are altogether without knowledge, as insensible creatures: or because they do not apprehend the idea of an end as such, as irrational animals. Therefore it seems proper to the rational nature to act for an end.

Objection 2: Further, to act for an end is to order one's action to an end. But this is the work of reason. Therefore it does not belong to things that lack reason.

Objection 3: Further, the good and the end is the object of the will. But "the will is in the reason" (De Anima iii, 9). Therefore to act for an end belongs to none but a rational nature.

On the contrary, The Philosopher proves (Phys. ii, 5) that "not only mind but also nature acts for an end."

I answer that, Every agent, of necessity, acts for an end. For if, in a number of causes ordained to one another, the first be removed, the others must, of necessity, be removed also. Now the first of all causes is the final cause. The reason of which is that matter does not receive form, save in so far as it is moved by an agent; for nothing reduces itself from potentiality to act. But an agent does not move except out of intention for an end. For if the agent were not determinate to some particular effect, it would not do one thing rather than another: consequently in order that it produce a determinate effect, it must, of necessity, be determined to some certain one, which has the nature of an end. And just as this determination is effected, in the rational nature, by the "rational appetite," which is called the will; so, in other things, it is caused by their natural inclination, which is called the "natural appetite."

Nevertheless it must be observed that a thing tends to an end, by its action or movement, in two ways: first, as a thing, moving itself to the end, as man; secondly, as a thing moved by another to the end, as an arrow tends to a determinate end through being moved by the archer who directs his action to the end. Therefore those things that are possessed of reason, move themselves to an end; because they have dominion over their actions through their free-will, which is the "faculty of will and reason." But those things that lack reason tend to an end, by natural inclination, as being moved by another and not by themselves; since they do not know the nature of an end as such, and consequently cannot ordain anything to an end, but can be ordained to an end only by another. For the entire irrational nature is in comparison to God as an instrument to the principal agent, as stated above ([FP, Question \[22\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#), ad 4; [FP, Question \[103\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#), ad 3). Consequently it is proper to the rational nature to tend to an end, as directing [agens] and leading itself to the end: whereas it is proper to the irrational nature to tend to an end, as directed or led by another, whether it apprehend the end, as do irrational animals, or do not apprehend it, as is the case of those things which are altogether void of knowledge.

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS001.html](#) he is directed or led by another, for instance, when he acts at another's command, or when he is moved under another's compulsion, it is not necessary that he should know the end. And it is thus with irrational creatures.

Reply to Objection 2: To ordain towards an end belongs to that which directs itself to an end: whereas to be ordained to an end belongs to that which is directed by another to an end. And this can belong to an irrational nature, but owing to some one possessed of reason.

Reply to Objection 3: The object of the will is the end and the good in universal. Consequently there can be no will in those things that lack reason and intellect, since they cannot apprehend the universal; but they have a natural appetite or a sensitive appetite, determinate to some particular good. Now it is clear that particular causes are moved by a universal cause: thus the governor of a city, who intends the common good, moves, by his command, all the particular departments of the city. Consequently all things that lack reason are, of necessity, moved to their particular ends by some rational will which extends to the universal good, namely by the Divine will.

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Whether human acts are specified by their end?

Objection 1: It would seem that human acts are not specified by their end. For the end is an extrinsic cause. But everything is specified by an intrinsic principle. Therefore human acts are not specified by their end.

Objection 2: Further, that which gives a thing its species should exist before it. But the end comes into existence afterwards. Therefore a human act does not derive its species from the end.

Objection 3: Further, one thing cannot be in more than one species. But one and the same act may happen to be ordained to various ends. Therefore the end does not give the species to human acts.

On the contrary, Augustine says (De Mor. Eccl. et Manich. ii, 13): "According as their end is worthy of blame or praise so are our deeds worthy of blame or praise."

I answer that 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

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS001.html](#) is 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 ([Article \[1\]](#)) 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, in so far 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 (Prolog. super Luc.) "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.

Reply to Objection 1: The end is not altogether extrinsic to the act, because it is related to the act as principle or terminus; and thus it just this that is essential to an act, viz. to proceed from something, considered as action, and to proceed towards something, considered as passion.

Reply to Objection 2: The end, in so far as it pre-exists in the intention, pertains to the will, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 1). And it is thus that it gives the species to the human or moral act.

Reply to Objection 3: One and the same act, in so far as it proceeds once from the agent, is ordained to but one proximate end, from which it has its species: but it can be ordained to several remote ends, of which one is the end of the other. 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.

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Whether there is one last end of human life?

Objection 1: It would seem that there is no last end of human life, but that we proceed to infinity. For good is essentially diffusive, as Dionysius states (Div. Nom. iv). Consequently if that which proceeds from good is itself good, the latter must needs diffuse some other good: so that the diffusion of good goes on indefinitely. But good has the nature of an end. Therefore there is an indefinite series of ends.

Objection 2: Further, things pertaining to the reason can be multiplied to infinity: thus mathematical quantities have no limit. For the same reason the species of numbers are infinite, since, given any number, the reason can think of one yet greater. But desire of the end

Objection 3: Further, the good and the end is the object of the will. But the will can react on itself an infinite number of times: for I can will something, and will to will it, and so on indefinitely. Therefore there is an infinite series of ends of the human will, and there is no last end of the human will.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Metaph. ii, 2) that "to suppose a thing to be indefinite is to deny that it is good." But the good is that which has the nature of an end. Therefore it is contrary to the nature of an end to proceed indefinitely. Therefore it is necessary to fix one last end.

I answer that, Absolutely speaking, it is not possible to proceed indefinitely in the matter of ends, from any point of view. For in whatsoever things there is an essential order of one to another, if the first be removed, those that are ordained to the first, must of necessity be removed also. Wherefore the Philosopher proves (Phys. viii, 5) that we cannot proceed to infinitude in causes of movement, because then there would be no first mover, without which neither can the others move, since they move only through being moved by the first mover. Now there is to be observed a twofold order in ends---the order of intention and the order of execution: and in either of these orders there must be something first. For that which is first in the order of intention, is the principle, as it were, moving the appetite; consequently, if you remove this principle, there will be nothing to move the appetite. On the other hand, the principle in execution is that wherein operation has its beginning; and if this principle be taken away, no one will begin to work. Now the principle in the intention is the last end; while the principle in execution is the first of the things which are ordained to the end. Consequently, on neither side is it possible to go to infinity since if there were no last end, nothing would be desired, nor would any action have its term, nor would the intention of the agent be at rest; while if there is no first thing among those that are ordained to the end, none would begin to work at anything, and counsel would have no term, but would continue indefinitely.

On the other hand, nothing hinders infinity from being in things that are ordained to one another not essentially but accidentally; for accidental causes are indeterminate. And in this way it happens that there is an accidental infinity of ends, and of things ordained to the end.

Reply to Objection 1: The very nature of good is that something flows from it, but not that it flows from something else. Since, therefore, good has the nature of end, and the first good is the last end, this argument does not prove that there is no last end; but that from the end, already supposed, we may proceed downwards indefinitely towards those things that are ordained to the end. And this would be true if we considered but the power of the First Good, which is infinite. But, since the First Good diffuses itself according to the intellect, to which it is proper to flow forth into its effects according to a certain fixed form; it follows that there is a certain measure to the flow of good things from the First Good from Which all other goods share the power of diffusion. Consequently the diffusion of goods does not proceed indefinitely but, as it is written (Wis. 11:21), God disposes all things "in number, weight and measure."

Reply to Objection 2: In things which are of themselves, reason begins from principles that are known naturally, and advances to some term. Wherefore the Philosopher proves (Poster. i, 3) that there is no infinite process in demonstrations, because there we find a process of things having an essential, not an accidental, connection with one another. But in those things which are accidentally connected, nothing hinders the reason from proceeding indefinitely. Now it is

Wherefore in such like things nothing hinders the reason from an indefinite process.

Reply to Objection 3: This multiplication of acts of the will reacting on itself, is accidental to the order of ends. This is clear from the fact that in regard to one and the same end, the will reacts on itself indifferently once or several times.

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Whether one man can have several last ends?

Objection 1: It would seem possible for one man's will to be directed at the same time to several things, as last ends. For Augustine says (De Civ. Dei xix, 1) that some held man's last end to consist in four things, viz. "in pleasure, repose, the gifts of nature, and virtue." But these are clearly more than one thing. Therefore one man can place the last end of his will in many things.

Objection 2: Further, things not in opposition to one another do not exclude one another. Now there are many things which are not in opposition to one another. Therefore the supposition that one thing is the last end of the will does not exclude others.

Objection 3: Further, by the fact that it places its last end in one thing, the will does not lose its freedom. But before it placed its last end in that thing, e.g. pleasure, it could place it in something else, e.g. riches. Therefore even after having placed his last end in pleasure, a man can at the same time place his last end in riches. Therefore it is possible for one man's will to be directed at the same time to several things, as last ends.

On the contrary, That in which a man rests as in his last end, is master of his affections, since he takes therefrom his entire rule of life. Hence of gluttons it is written ([Phil. 3:19](#)): "Whose god is their belly": viz. because they place their last end in the pleasures of the belly. Now according to Mt. 6:24, "No man can serve two masters," such, namely, as are not ordained to one another. Therefore it is impossible for one man to have several last ends not ordained to one another.

I answer that, It is impossible for one man's will to be directed at the same time to diverse things, as last ends. Three reasons may be assigned for this. First, because, since everything desires its own perfection, a man desires for his ultimate end, that which he desires as his perfect and crowning good. Hence Augustine (De Civ. Dei xix, 1): "In speaking of the end of good we mean now, not that it passes away so as to be no more, but that it is perfected so as to be complete." It is therefore necessary for the last end so to fill man's appetite, that nothing is left besides it for man to desire. Which is not possible, if something else be required for his perfection. Consequently it is not possible for the appetite so to tend to two things, as though each were its perfect good.

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS001.html](#) is naturally known, so in the process of the rational appetite, i.e. the will, the principle needs to be that which is naturally desired. Now this must needs be one: since nature tends to one thing only. But the principle in the process of the rational appetite is the last end. Therefore that to which the will tends, as to its last end, is one.

The third reason is because, since voluntary actions receive their species from the end, as stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)), they must needs receive their genus from the last end, which is common to them all: just as natural things are placed in a genus according to a common form. Since, then, all things that can be desired by the will, belong, as such, to one genus, the last end must needs be one. And all the more because in every genus there is one first principle; and the last end has the nature of a first principle, as stated above. Now as the last end of man, simply as man, is to the whole human race, so is the last end of any individual man to that individual. Therefore, just as of all men there is naturally one last end, so the will of an individual man must be fixed on one last end.

Reply to Objection 1: All these several objects were considered as one perfect good resulting therefrom, by those who placed in them the last end.

Reply to Objection 2: Although it is possible to find several things which are not in opposition to one another, yet it is contrary to a thing's perfect good, that anything besides be required for that thing's perfection.

Reply to Objection 3: The power of the will does not extend to making opposites exist at the same time. Which would be the case were it to tend to several diverse objects as last ends, as has been shown above (ad 2).

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Whether man will all, whatsoever he wills, for the last end?

Objection 1: It would seem that man does not will all, whatsoever he wills, for the last end. For things ordained to the last end are said to be serious matter, as being useful. But jests are foreign to serious matter. Therefore what man does in jest, he ordains not to the last end.

Objection 2: Further, the Philosopher says at the beginning of his Metaphysics 1,[2] that speculative science is sought for its own sake. Now it cannot be said that each speculative science is the last end. Therefore man does not desire all, whatsoever he desires, for the last end.

Objection 3: Further, whosoever ordains something to an end, thinks of that end. But man does not always think of the last end in all that he desires or does. Therefore man neither desires nor does all for the last end.

I answer that, Man must, of necessity, desire all, whatsoever he desires, for the last end. This is evident for two reasons. First, because whatever man desires, he desires it under the aspect of good. And if he desire it, not as his perfect good, which is the last end, he must, of necessity, desire it as tending to the perfect good, because the beginning of anything is always ordained to its completion; as is clearly the case in effects both of nature and of art. Wherefore every beginning of perfection is ordained to complete perfection which is achieved through the last end. Secondly, because the last end stands in the same relation in moving the appetite, as the first mover in other movements. Now it is clear that secondary moving causes do not move save inasmuch as they are moved by the first mover. Therefore secondary objects of the appetite do not move the appetite, except as ordained to the first object of the appetite, which is the last end.

Reply to Objection 1: Actions done jestingly are not directed to any external end; but merely to the good of the jester, in so far as they afford him pleasure or relaxation. But man's consummate good is his last end.

Reply to Objection 2: The same applies to speculative science; which is desired as the scientist's good, included in complete and perfect good, which is the ultimate end.

Reply to Objection 3: One need not always be thinking of the last end, whenever one desires or does something; but the virtue of the first intention, which was in respect of the last end, remains in every desire directed to any object whatever, even though one's thoughts be not actually directed to the last end. Thus while walking along the road one needs not to be thinking of the end at every step.

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Whether all men have the same last end?

Objection 1: It would seem that all men have not the same last end. For before all else the unchangeable good seems to be the last end of man. But some turn away from the unchangeable good, by sinning. Therefore all men have not the same last end.

Objection 2: Further, man's entire life is ruled according to his last end. If, therefore, all men had the same last end, they would not have various pursuits in life. Which is evidently false.

Objection 3: Further, the end is the term of action. But actions are of individuals. Now although men agree in their specific nature, yet they differ in things pertaining to individuals. Therefore all men have not the same last end.

On the contrary, Augustine says (De Trin. xiii, 3) that all men agree in desiring the last end, which is happiness.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS001.html](#) of last end; secondly, considering the thing in which the aspect of last end is realized. So, then, as to the aspect of last end, all agree in desiring the last end: since all desire the fulfilment of their perfection, and it is precisely this fulfilment in which the last end consists, as stated above ([Article \[5\]](#)). But as to the thing in which this aspect is realized, all men are not agreed as to their last end: since some desire riches as their consummate good; some, pleasure; others, something else. Thus to every taste the sweet is pleasant but to some, the sweetness of wine is most pleasant, to others, the sweetness of honey, or of something similar. Yet that sweet is absolutely the best of all pleasant things, in which he who has the best taste takes most pleasure. In like manner that good is most complete which the man with well disposed affections desires for his last end.

Reply to Objection 1: Those who sin turn from that in which their last end really consists: but they do not turn away from the intention of the last end, which intention they mistakenly seek in other things.

Reply to Objection 2: Various pursuits in life are found among men by reason of the various things in which men seek to find their last end.

Reply to Objection 3: Although actions are of individuals, yet their first principle of action is nature, which tends to one thing, as stated above ([Article \[5\]](#)).

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Whether other creatures concur in that last end?

Objection 1: It would seem that all other creatures concur in man's last end. For the end corresponds to the beginning. But man's beginning---i.e. God---is also the beginning of all else. Therefore all other things concur in man's last end.

Objection 2: Further, Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv) that "God turns all things to Himself as to their last end." But He is also man's last end; because He alone is to be enjoyed by man, as Augustine says (De Doctr. Christ. i, 5,22). Therefore other things, too, concur in man's last end.

Objection 3: Further, man's last end is the object of the will. But the object of the will is the universal good, which is the end of all. Therefore other things, too, concur in man's last end.

On the contrary, man's last end is happiness; which all men desire, as Augustine says (De Trin. xiii, 3,4). But "happiness is not possible for animals bereft of reason," as Augustine says (Questions. 83, qu. 5). Therefore other things do not concur in man's last end.

I answer that, As the Philosopher says (Phys. ii, 2), the end is twofold---the end "for which" and the end "by which"; viz. the thing itself in which is found the aspect of good, and the use or acquisition of that thing. Thus we say that the end of the movement of a weighty body is either

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as "thing," or possession of money as "use."

If, therefore, we speak of man's last end as of the thing which is the end, thus all other things concur in man's last end, since God is the last end of man and of all other things. If, however, we speak of man's last end, as of the acquisition of the end, then irrational creatures do not concur with man in this end. For man and other rational creatures attain to their last end by knowing and loving God: this is not possible to other creatures, which acquire their last end, in so far as they share in the Divine likeness, inasmuch as they are, or live, or even know.

Hence it is evident how the objections are solved: since happiness means the acquisition of the last end.