

## St. Thomas Aquinas

# The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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[Index](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Question: 13](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

### OF CHOICE, WHICH IS AN ACT OF THE WILL WITH REGARD TO THE MEANS (SIX ARTICLES)

We must now consider the acts of the will with regard to the means. There are three of them: to choose, to consent, and to use. And choice is preceded by counsel. First of all, then, we must consider choice: secondly, counsel; thirdly, consent; fourthly, use.

Concerning choice there are six points of inquiry:

- (1) Of what power is it the act; of the will or of the reason?
  - (2) Whether choice is to be found in irrational animals?
  - (3) Whether choice is only the means, or sometimes also of the end?
  - (4) Whether choice is only of things that we do ourselves?
  - (5) Whether choice is only of possible things?
  - (6) Whether man chooses of necessity or freely?
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[Index](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Question: 13](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Article: 1](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

### Whether choice is an act of will or of reason?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that choice is an act, not of will but of reason. For choice implies comparison, whereby one is given preference to another. But to compare is an act of reason.

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**Objection 2:** Further, it is for the same faculty to form a syllogism, and to draw the conclusion. But, in practical matters, it is the reason that forms syllogisms. Since therefore choice is a kind of conclusion in practical matters, as stated in Ethic. vii, 3, it seems that it is an act of reason.

**Objection 3:** Further, ignorance does not belong to the will but to the cognitive power. Now there is an "ignorance of choice," as is stated in Ethic. iii, 1. Therefore it seems that choice does not belong to the will but to the reason.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 3) that choice is "the desire of things in our power." But desire is an act of will. Therefore choice is too.

**I answer that,** The word choice implies something belonging to the reason or intellect, and something belonging to the will: for the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 2) that choice is either "intellect influenced by appetite or appetite influenced by intellect." Now whenever two things concur to make one, one of them is formal in regard to the other. Hence Gregory of Nyssa [\*Nemesius, De Nat. Hom. xxxiii.] says that choice "is neither desire only, nor counsel only, but a combination of the two. For just as we say that an animal is composed of soul and body, and that it is neither a mere body, nor a mere soul, but both; so is it with choice."

Now we must observe, as regards the acts of the soul, that 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: for if a man were to perform an act of fortitude for the love of God, that act is materially an act of fortitude, but formally, an act of charity. Now it is evident that, in a sense, reason precedes the will and ordains its act: in so far 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.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Choice implies a previous comparison; not that it consists in the comparison itself.

**Reply to Objection 2:** It is quite true that it is for the reason to draw the conclusion of a practical syllogism; and it is called "a decision" or "judgment," to be followed by "choice." And for this reason the conclusion seems to belong to the act of choice, as to that which results from it.

**Reply to Objection 3:** In speaking "of ignorance of choice," we do not mean that choice is a sort of knowledge, but that there is ignorance of what ought to be chosen.

**Objection 1:** It would seem that irrational animals are able to choose. For choice "is the desire of certain things on account of an end," as stated in Ethic. iii, 2,3. But irrational animals desire something on account of an end: since they act for an end, and from desire. Therefore choice is in irrational animals.

**Objection 2:** Further, the very word "electio" [choice] seems to signify the taking of something in preference to others. But irrational animals take something in preference to others: thus we can easily see for ourselves that a sheep will eat one grass and refuse another. Therefore choice is in irrational animals.

**Objection 3:** Further, according to Ethic. vi, 12, "it is from prudence that a man makes a good choice of means." But prudence is found in irrational animals: hence it is said in the beginning of Metaph. i, 1 that "those animals which, like bees, cannot hear sounds, are prudent by instinct." We see this plainly, in wonderful cases of sagacity manifested in the works of various animals, such as bees, spiders, and dogs. For a hound in following a stag, on coming to a crossroad, tries by scent whether the stag has passed by the first or the second road: and if he find that the stag has not passed there, being thus assured, takes to the third road without trying the scent; as though he were reasoning by way of exclusion, arguing that the stag must have passed by this way, since he did not pass by the others, and there is no other road. Therefore it seems that irrational animals are able to choose.

**On the contrary,** Gregory of Nyssa [\*Nemesius, De Nat. Hom. xxxiii.] says that "children and irrational animals act willingly but not from choice." Therefore choice is not in irrational animals.

**I answer that,** Since choice is the taking of one thing in preference to another it must of necessity be in respect of several things that can be chosen. Consequently in those things which are altogether determinate to one there is no place for choice. Now the difference between the sensitive appetite and the will is that, as stated above ([Question \[1\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#), ad 3), the sensitive appetite is determinate to one particular thing, according to the order of nature; whereas the will, although determinate to one thing in general, viz. the good, according to the order of nature, is nevertheless indeterminate in respect of particular goods. Consequently choice belongs properly to the will, and not to the sensitive appetite which is all that irrational animals have. Wherefore irrational animals are not competent to choose.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Not every desire of one thing on account of an end is called choice: there must be a certain discrimination of one thing from another. And this cannot be except when the appetite can be moved to several things.

**Reply to Objection 2:** An irrational animal takes one thing in preference to another, because its appetite is naturally determinate to that thing. Wherefore as soon as an animal, whether by its sense or by its imagination, is offered something to which its appetite is naturally inclined, it is moved to that alone, without making any choice. Just as fire is moved upwards and not downwards, without its making any choice.

**Reply to Objection 3:** As stated in Phys. iii, 3 "movement is the act of the movable, caused by a mover." Wherefore the power of the mover appears in the movement of that which it moves. Accordingly, in all things moved by reason, the order of reason which moves them is evident,

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archer goes straight towards the target, as though it were endowed with reason to direct its course. The same may be seen in the movements of clocks and all engines put together by the art of man. Now as artificial things are in comparison to human art, so are all natural things in comparison to the Divine art. And accordingly order is to be seen in things moved by nature, just as in things moved by reason, as is stated in Phys. ii. And thus it is that in the works of irrational animals we notice certain marks of sagacity, in so far as they have a natural inclination to set about their actions in a most orderly manner through being ordained by the Supreme art. For which reason, too, certain animals are called prudent or sagacious; and not because they reason or exercise any choice about things. This is clear from the fact that all that share in one nature, invariably act in the same way.

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[Index](#) [ << | >> ]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [ << | >> ]

[Question: 13](#) [ << | >> ]

Article: 3 [ << | >> ]

## Whether choice is only of the means, or sometimes also of the end?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that choice is not only of the means. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 12) that "virtue makes us choose aright; but it is not the part of virtue, but of some other power to direct aright those things which are to be done for its sake." But that for the sake of which something is done is the end. Therefore choice is of the end.

**Objection 2:** Further, choice implies preference of one thing to another. But just as there can be preference of means, so can there be preference of ends. Therefore choice can be of ends, just as it can be of means.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 2) that "volition is of the end, but choice of the means."

**I answer that,** As already stated ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 2), choice results from the decision or judgment which is, as it were, the conclusion of a practical syllogism. Hence that which is the conclusion of a practical syllogism, is the matter of choice. Now in practical things the end stands in the position of a principle, not of a conclusion, as the Philosopher says (Phys. ii, 9). Wherefore the end, as such, is not a matter of choice.

But just as in speculative knowledge nothing hinders the principle of one demonstration or of one science, from being the conclusion of another demonstration or science; while the first indemonstrable principle cannot be the conclusion of any demonstration or science; so too that which is the end in one operation, may be ordained to something as an end. And in this way it is a matter of choice. Thus in the work of a physician health is the end: wherefore it is not a matter of choice for a physician, but a matter of principle. Now the health of the body is ordained to the good of the soul, consequently with one who has charge of the soul's health, health or sickness may be a matter of choice; for the Apostle says ([2 Cor. 12:10](#)): "For when I am weak, then am I powerful." But the last end is nowise a matter of choice.

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end. And thus it is that they can be a matter of choice.

**Reply to Objection 2:** As stated above ([Question \[1\]](#), [Article \[5\]](#)), there is but one last end. Accordingly wherever there are several ends, they can be the subject of choice, in so far as they are ordained to a further end.

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[Index](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Question: 13](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Article: 4](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

## Whether choice is of those things only that are done by us?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that choice is not only in respect of human acts. For choice regards the means. Now, not only acts, but also the organs, are means (Phys. ii, 3). Therefore choice is not only concerned with human acts.

**Objection 2:** Further, action is distinct from contemplation. But choice has a place even in contemplation; in so far as one opinion is preferred to another. Therefore choice is not concerned with human acts alone.

**Objection 3:** Further, men are chosen for certain posts, whether secular or ecclesiastical, by those who exercise no action in their regard. Therefore choice is not concerned with human acts alone.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 2) that "no man chooses save what he can do himself."

**I answer that,** Just as intention regards the end, so does choice regard the means. Now the end is either an action or a thing. And when the end is a thing, some human action must intervene; either in so far as man produces the thing which is the end, as the physician produces health (wherefore the production of health is said to be the end of the physician); or in so far as man, in some fashion, uses or enjoys the thing which is the end; thus for the miser, money or the possession of money is the end. The same is to be said of the means. For the means must needs be either an action; or a thing, with some action intervening whereby man either makes the thing which is the means, or puts it to some use. And thus it is that choice is always in regard to human acts.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The organs are ordained to the end, inasmuch as man makes use of them for the sake of the end.

**Reply to Objection 2:** In contemplation itself there is the act of the intellect assenting to this or that opinion. It is exterior action that is put in contradistinction to contemplation.

**Reply to Objection 3:** When a man chooses someone for a bishopric or some high position in the state, he chooses to name that man to that post. Else, if he had no right to act in the appointment of the bishop or official, he would have no right to choose. Likewise, whenever

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[Index](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Question: 13](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Article: 5](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

## Whether choice is only of possible things?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that choice is not only of possible things. For choice is an act of the will, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). Now there is "a willing of impossibilities" (Ethic. iii, 2). Therefore there is also a choice of impossibilities.

**Objection 2:** Further, choice is of things done by us, as stated above ([Article \[4\]](#)). Therefore it matters not, as far as the act of choosing is concerned, whether one chooses that which is impossible in itself, or that which is impossible to the chooser. Now it often happens that we are unable to accomplish what we choose: so that this proves to be impossible to us. Therefore choice is of the impossible.

**Objection 3:** Further, to try to do a thing is to choose to do it. But the Blessed Benedict says (Regula lxviii) that if the superior commands what is impossible, it should be attempted. Therefore choice can be of the impossible.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 2) that "there is no choice of impossibilities."

**I answer that,** As stated above ([Article \[4\]](#)), our choice is always concerned with our actions. Now whatever is done by us, is possible to us. Therefore we must needs say that choice is only of possible things.

Moreover, the reason for choosing a thing is that it conduces to an end. But what is impossible cannot conduce to an end. A sign of this is that when men in taking counsel together come to something that is impossible to them, they depart, as being unable to proceed with the business.

Again, this is evident if we examine the previous process of the reason. For the means, which are the object of choice, are to the end, as the conclusion is to the principle. Now it is clear that an impossible conclusion does not follow from a possible principle. Wherefore an end cannot be possible, unless the means be possible. Now no one is moved to the impossible. Consequently no one would tend to the end, save for the fact that the means appear to be possible. Therefore the impossible is not the object of choice.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The will stands between the intellect and the external action: for the intellect proposes to the will its object, and the will causes the external action. Hence the principle of the movement in the will is to be found in the intellect, which apprehends something under the universal notion of good: but the term or perfection of the will's act is to be observed in its relation to the action whereby a man tends to the attainment of a thing; for the movement of the will is from the soul to the thing. Consequently the perfect act of the will

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Wherefore the complete act of the will is only in respect of what is possible and good for him that wills. But the incomplete act of the will is in respect of the impossible; and by some is called "velleity," because, to wit, one would will [vellet] such a thing, were it possible. But choice is an act of the will, fixed on something to be done by the chooser. And therefore it is by no means of anything but what is possible.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Since the object of the will is the apprehended good, we must judge of the object of the will according as it is apprehended. And so, just as sometimes the will tends to something which is apprehended as good, and yet is not really good; so is choice sometimes made of something apprehended as possible to the chooser, and yet impossible to him.

**Reply to Objection 3:** The reason for this is that the subject should not rely on his own judgment to decide whether a certain thing is possible; but in each case should stand by his superior's judgment.

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[Index](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Question: 13](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Article: 6](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

## Whether man chooses of necessity or freely?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that man chooses of necessity. For the end stands in relation to the object of choice, as the principle of that which follows from the principles, as declared in Ethic. vii, 8. But conclusions follow of necessity from their principles. Therefore man is moved of necessity from (willing) the end of the choice (of the means).

**Objection 2:** Further, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 2), choice follows the reason's judgment of what is to be done. But reason judges of necessity about some things: on account of the necessity of the premises. Therefore it seems that choice also follows of necessity.

**Objection 3:** Further, if two things are absolutely equal, man is not moved to one more than to the other; thus if a hungry man, as Plato says (Cf. De Coelo ii, 13), be confronted on either side with two portions of food equally appetizing and at an equal distance, he is not moved towards one more than to the other; and he finds the reason of this in the immobility of the earth in the middle of the world. Now, if that which is equally (eligible) with something else cannot be chosen, much less can that be chosen which appears as less (eligible). Therefore if two or more things are available, of which one appears to be more (eligible), it is impossible to choose any of the others. Therefore that which appears to hold the first place is chosen of necessity. But every act of choosing is in regard to something that seems in some way better. Therefore every choice is made necessarily.

**On the contrary,** Choice is an act of a rational power; which according to the Philosopher (Metaph. ix, 2) stands in relation to opposites.

**I answer that,** Man does not choose of necessity. And this is because that which is possible not to be, is not of necessity. Now the reason why it is possible not to choose, or to choose, may be

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[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS013.html](#), he can will this or that, and do this or that. The reason of this is seated in the very power of the reason. For the will can tend to whatever the reason can apprehend as good. Now the reason can apprehend as good, not only this, viz. "to will" or "to act," but also this, viz. "not to will" or "not to act." Again, in all particular goods, the reason can consider an aspect of some good, and the lack of some good, which has the aspect of evil: and in this respect, it can apprehend any single one of such goods as to be chosen or to be avoided. The perfect good alone, which is Happiness, cannot be apprehended by the reason as an evil, or as lacking in any way. Consequently man wills Happiness of necessity, nor can he will not to be happy, or to be unhappy. Now since choice is not of the end, but of the means, as stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)); it is not of the perfect good, which is Happiness, but of other particular goods. Therefore man chooses not of necessity, but freely.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The conclusion does not always of necessity follow from the principles, but only when the principles cannot be true if the conclusion is not true. In like manner, the end does not always necessitate in man the choosing of the means, because the means are not always such that the end cannot be gained without them; or, if they be such, they are not always considered in that light.

**Reply to Objection 2:** The reason's decision or judgment of what is to be done is about things that are contingent and possible to us. In such matters the conclusions do not follow of necessity from principles that are absolutely necessary, but from such as are so conditionally; as, for instance, "If he runs, he is in motion."

**Reply to Objection 3:** If two things be proposed as equal under one aspect, nothing hinders us from considering in one of them some particular point of superiority, so that the will has a bent towards that one rather than towards the other.