

Species of Human Actions in Aquinas Determined by Both Object and End

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IN HIS MORAL WRITINGS, St. Thomas Aquinas dedicates much effort to identifying various kinds of human actions (e.g., almsgiving, murder, liberality, robbery, etc.) and to examining what determines such species.¹ Among the various aspects of human action, the two he considers most important for determining moral species are “object” (what an agent is doing) and “end” (an agent’s purpose in acting).²

Objects specify for Aquinas when they possess a morally relevant formal character (*ratio*) revealed by a comparison to right reason. An object with such a formal character will either realize or oppose some moral good if willed. Suppose that a married man is considering “having sexual relations with a woman.” This description of his possible action may be accurate, but it is insufficient for a determination about whether it would be good or evil in kind. When the action under consideration is compared with right reason—in this case, a correct understanding of how sexual powers ought to be used—aspects of the man’s action relevant to this comparison will come to light; St. Thomas holds that these aspects should be included in the object’s formal character. Sometimes the comparison will reveal

¹ This article is focused on human actions, but because what Aquinas asserts about specification of virtues and vices, he also typically asserts about the specification of human actions, we will in this article sometimes make use of texts about specification of virtues and vices to illuminate Aquinas’s teaching on specification of human actions.

² For a more detailed study of the use of “object” and “end” in specification of human actions, see Joseph Pilsner, *The Specification of Human Actions in St. Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

aspects which indicate conformity with right reason; for example, the man's object might be "having sexual relations with his own spouse." This object (with its formal character now identified) will determine a morally good human action of marital love. At other times, however, the comparison with right reason might reveal something discordant: the object might be "having sexual relations with another's spouse." This object has a distinctive opposition to the good of marriage as discerned by right reason; it defines or specifies an evil kind of human action, adultery.³

What role does an end play in specification? For Aquinas, in some cases, a human action will receive a moral species from its object, and no further determination relevant to this moral species will be added by an end. For example, a man may have as his object "to present himself as other than he is." If the man wills this object simply from the pleasure of carrying out this deception and for no further end, then according to St. Thomas, this object by itself will determine the moral species of dissimulation (*simulatio*).⁴ On another occasion, this man might have a further end for dissimulating, but if this end has no special relation to right reason, then here too, the object will determine the action's only moral species.

If, however, the end on account of which some object is chosen possesses its own distinctive relation to right reason, then, according to Aquinas, this end would determine an additional moral species. For example, in a case where a man is "having sexual relations with another's spouse" (object) as a means to "appropriating secretly some possession" of his paramour (end), the human action would have the species of adultery from its object and theft from its end.⁵ The end, like the object, is opposed to right reason, but the evil brought about by willing the end is essentially distinct from the evil brought about by willing the object. An end in such a case has a special importance in specifying the human action: since the object is willed for the end's sake, the species from the end has a certain formal primacy over the species from the object. Note, however, that for St. Thomas, the species from this end does not subsume, alter, or contribute to the species that the action receives from its object. The human action in this case remains adultery from its object, even when it is determined to be theft (the more prominent species) from its end.

³ See *De malo*, q. 2, a. 4, resp.

⁴ *Summa theologiae* [ST] II-II, q. 111, a. 3, resp. and ad 3. Sometimes, Aquinas uses "object" and "proximate end" as equivalents, so in ST II-II, q. 111, a. 3, resp., he refers to a species of dissimulation being determined by a "proper object" and in ad 3 by "a proximate end." For object as proximate end, see *De malo*, q. 2, a. 4, ad 9.

⁵ ST I-II, q. 18, a. 7, resp.

There is a third way, according to St. Thomas, in which an object and end can be related to the specification of human actions, and this third way is the primary concern of this article. In certain species of human action, Aquinas holds that an object and end together contribute to the determination of a single moral species. One example is the human action (and virtue) of religion. St. Thomas identifies religion's object as "offering something in worship." Unlike the object that determines the species of dissimulation, however, the object of an action of religion cannot by itself determine a species; a certain end is also necessary. Only if a worshipper is "offering something" (object) "to honor the one, true God" (end) is this action specified as religion.⁶ If the worshipper were "offering something" (object) "to honor a creature" (end), then the human action would be in the species of idolatry, a kind of human action falling under superstition.⁷ For St. Thomas, then, one cannot define the species of religion without including both its characteristic object and end.

In this article, a number of species of human action—scandal (as a "special sin"), fraternal correction, reviling, backbiting, derision, tale-bearing, religion, superstition (including divination and its numerous subspecies), and penance—will be proposed as requiring both an object and end for their specification according to the Angelic Doctor. We will try to discern the nature of each of these species of human action and consider their similarities and differences regarding how they are specified.⁸

⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 5, resp.

⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 92, a. 2, resp.

⁸ A number of authors have treated the end's role in specification of human actions. For instance, see: William E. May, "Aquinas and Janssens on the Moral Meaning of Human Acts," *The Thomist* 48, no. 4 (1984): 566–606; John Finnis, "Object and Intention in Moral Judgments According to Aquinas," *The Thomist* 55, no. 1 (1991): 1–27; Steven Jensen, "A Defense of Physicalism," *The Thomist* 61, no. 3 (1997): 377–404; Steven A. Long, "A Brief Disquisition Regarding the Nature of the Object of the Moral Act According to St. Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 67, no. 1 (2003): 45–71; Tobias Hoffmann, "Moral Action as Human Action: End and Object in Aquinas in Comparison with Abelard, Lombard, Albert, and Duns Scotus," *The Thomist* 67, no. 1 (2003): 73–94; Kevin L. Flannery, "The Multifarious Moral Object of Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 67, no. 1 (2003): 95–118; Jensen, "A Long Discussion Regarding Steven A. Long's Interpretation of the Moral Species," *The Thomist* 67, no. 4 (2003): 623–43; Martin Rhonheimer, "The Perspective of the Acting Person and the Nature of Practical Reason: The 'Object of the Human Act' in Thomistic Anthropology of Action," trans. Joseph T. Papa, *Nova et Vetera* (English) 2, no. 2 (2004): 461–516, repr. in Rhonheimer, *Perspective of the Acting Person: Essays in the Renewal of Thomistic Moral Philosophy*, ed. William F. Murphy Jr. with intro. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 195–249; Jensen, "When Evil Actions Become Good,"

An Examination of Various Species of Human Action in Aquinas Determined by Object and End

Scandal as a "Special Sin"

Scandal [*scandalum*] is leading another person to commit sin.⁹ In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas defines scandal as "a deficient [*minus rectum*] word or deed providing an occasion of downfall."¹⁰ One might ask why St. Thomas does not simply assert that scandal is any kind of sinful action

Nova et Vetera (English) 5, no. 4 (2007): 747–64; Steven Brock, "Veritatis Splendor §78, St. Thomas, and (Not Merely) Physical Objects of Moral Acts," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 6, no. 1 (2008): 1–62; William F. Murphy Jr., "A Reading of Aquinas in Support of *Veritatis Splendor* on the Moral Object," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 11, no. 1 (2008): 100–126; Murphy, "Aquinas on the Object of and Evaluation of the Moral Act: Rhonheimer's Approach and Some Recent Interlocutors," *Josephinum Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (2008): 205–42; Andrew Jaspers, "Intentio and Praeter Intentionem in the Constitution of the Moral Object in Thomas Aquinas," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 81 (2008): 149–59; Joseph A. Selling, "Object, End and Moral Species in S.T., I-II, 1–21," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 84, no. 4 (2008): 363–407; Jensen, "The Role of Teleology in the Moral Species," *Review of Metaphysics* 63, no. 1 (2009): 3–27; Selling, "Looking Toward the End: Revisiting Aquinas' Teleological Ethics," *Heythrop Journal* 51, no. 3 (2010): 388–400; Kevin F. Keiser, "The Moral Act in St. Thomas: A Fresh Look," *The Thomist* 74, no. 2 (2010): 237–82; Matthew Levering, *The Betrayal of Charity: The Sins that Sabotage Divine Love* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011); Flannery, "Thomas Aquinas and the New Natural Law Theory on the Object of the Human Act," *National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (2013): 79–104; Long, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, 2nd ed. (Naples, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015). Most of these authors do not address the various species of human actions explored in this article. A few do take note of the importance of end in one of the human actions we are addressing. For example, regarding the end and scandal, see Levering, *Betrayal of Charity*, 134–39, and Flannery, "Thomas Aquinas and New Natural Law," 91; regarding superstition, see Jensen, "Role of Teleology," 23–24. The only author above who adverts specifically to the topic addressed in this article is Keiser, who notes briefly that some sins "for their very definition, require some ordering to an end in order to entail a disorder of reason," and then shows how detraction and scandal exemplify this ("Moral Act in St. Thomas," 262, 275; he also mentions murder, which we do not treat here).

⁹ For a fine summary of Aquinas's teaching on scandal, see Levering, *Betrayal of Charity*, 127, 131–42.

¹⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 43, a. 1, resp: "Et ideo convenienter dicitur quod dictum vel factum minus rectum praebens occasionem ruinae sit scandalum." Latin texts in this article come from Thomas's *Opera Omnia* collected for Fr. Roberto Busa's *Index Thomisticus*, now posted at corpus Thomisticum.org. Translations into English are the author's own.

occasioning another's downfall; why the expression "a deficient word or deed"? There are two reasons. First, the word "deficient" is used rather than "sinful" because morally good or indifferent actions can sometimes be scandalous: an action with only the appearance of evil is sometimes sufficient to lure another into sin.¹¹ Second, the phrase "word or deed" is used because these two name external human actions; a wholly internal action such as a thought or a desire is imperceptible to others, and hence cannot be a source of temptation for them.¹²

St. Thomas distinguishes in the *Summa* between two different kinds of scandal, active and passive. He does so because scandal may involve two human actions: the inordinate word or deed of the one who tempts another (active), and the sin of the one who succumbs to temptation (passive). If the person scandalizing another is successful, then active scandal occasions passive scandal; for instance, Bill may shoplift in order to lead Jane into sin, and she may give in to this temptation by stealing something herself. In this case, both Bill and Jane are guilty of scandal. It is not a foregone conclusion, however, that both agents will be involved in a sin. The "deficient word or deed" of the first person may not lead the second person to sin: Bill may shoplift to lure Jane into wrongdoing (active scandal), but Jane may resist this temptation (passive scandal avoided). Conversely, passive scandal can sometimes occur without active scandal: Bill may perform a deed having no deficiency, and Jane may find in this deed an occasion for sinning anyway (passive scandal).¹³

Active scandal is further divided by St. Thomas into two types, *per se* and *per accidens*. St. Thomas has two ways of understanding *per se* scandal. In the first, an agent says or does something with the precise intention of leading another to sin. For example, Bill, envious of Jane's innocence, may form the precise intention of leading Jane to a spiritual downfall and may drink wine excessively in the hope that his action will induce her to follow his lead. In the second kind of *per se* scandal, an agent speaks or acts without an intention that another person sins, yet the agent knowingly wills a word or deed of such a nature that it will very likely occasion another's sin. For instance, Bill may drink excessively without intending that his friends also become drunk, but his sin is still *per se* scandal if he knows that his companions are very likely to find the prospect of being drunk with him attractive enough to follow his lead, and he drinks excessively anyway,

¹¹ *ST* II-II, q. 43, a. 1, ad 2; see also *In IV sent.*, d. 38, q. 2, a. 2, qa. 2, ad 1.

¹² *ST* II-II, q. 43, a. 1, obj. and ad 1.

¹³ *ST* II-II, q. 43, a. 1, ad 4; a. 2, resp.

heedless of this serious temptation to his friends.¹⁴

By contrast, *per accidens* active scandal occurs when an agent through his word or deed neither intends to lead another to sin nor believes that what he says or does will likely lead another to sin, yet his words or actions provide an occasion for someone else's downfall anyway. For instance, Bill may innocently drink a glass of wine with dinner, neither intending to lead his companion, Jane, to intemperate consumption nor realizing that such drinking in itself might be a grave temptation; yet Bill's glass of wine may still be the occasion of Jane's succumbing to drunkenness.¹⁵

Are any of these kinds of scandal just distinguished (active, passive, *per se*, *per accidens*) included among the kinds of human action we are considering in this article where both a human action's object and end are necessary to determine its species? In an article from the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas asks whether scandal is a "special sin," that is, a human action distinctively opposing some moral good and consequently possessing its own species of moral evil. Thomas determines in this article that neither passive scandal nor *per accidens* active scandal belongs to this category. Passive scandal is not a "special sin," he reasons, because someone presented with an occasion of sin could be tempted to fall into sins of a number of different species. For instance, although a person learning about Bill's committing adultery might be tempted to do the same, he or she might also reason: "If even Bill can commit a sin as serious as adultery, then surely I can commit another, less serious sin, such as petty theft." Since in passive scandal the kind of sin occasioned by another sin does not necessarily belong to a particular species, passive scandal cannot determine a distinctive opposition to a particular moral good that is characteristic of a "special sin." In addition to passive scandal, *per accidens* active scandal is also not a "special sin," according to St. Thomas, because the agent in *per accidens* active scandal does not will

¹⁴ ST II-II, q. 43, a. 1, ad 4. St. Thomas uses the example of a person eating meat offered to idols even though he or she has not sinned by participating in the idolatrous sacrifice. Someone observing the person eating this meat might suppose that the person had been involved in the sacrifice and be tempted to commit idolatry on this account (ST II-II, q. 43, a. 1, ad 2). Aquinas's example is surely an allusion to Paul's treatment of this question in 1 Cor 8.

¹⁵ ST II-II, q. 43, a. 1, ad 4. Aquinas proposes envy as an example, where a person is saddened by a neighbor's good; note here how one person's good is an occasion of another person's sin. One might ask how a person's good could be considered a "deficient word or deed," as required by Aquinas's definition. St. Thomas says here that *per accidens* scandal happens because the one scandalized is "badly disposed." For St. Thomas, then, it seems that a good action may sometimes not have the appearance of evil in itself, but only to a person whose bad disposition makes him or her susceptible to being tempted by it.

the spiritual harm characteristic of scandal (i.e., leading another into sin), and species of moral action are not determined by accidental relationships.¹⁶

There is still one kind of scandal remaining, namely, *per se* active scandal, and this kind of scandal does meet the definition of a special sin for Aquinas, since the agent wills another's spiritual downfall: "*Per se* active scandal [is a special sin] when someone by his own inordinate word or deed intends to draw another into sin. And thus from the intention of a special end [*finis*] is taken the *ratio* of a special sin, for an end [*finis*] gives the species in moral things."¹⁷

Notice how, in this text describing *per se* active scandal, St. Thomas recognizes two parts: (1) the inordinate word or deed (its object, though he does not use the word here) and (2) the intention of drawing another into sin. Notice also that he identifies "drawing another into sin" as scandal's "end [*finis*]," and proposes that it determines scandal's species. Scandal as a "special sin," then, meets the criteria for human actions of the kind we are exploring in this article.¹⁸

Aquinas also treats the question of whether scandal is a "special sin" in his earliest major writing, *Scriptum super Sententiis*. In this work, St. Thomas comments on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and addresses numerous theological questions using the scholastic method. We will examine now with special attention his teaching from this work. Why are we considering Saint Thomas's text from the *Scriptum super Sententiis* (hereafter, *Sentences*) after his text from the *Summa theologiae*, since this places his

¹⁶ ST II-II, q. 43, a. 3, resp.

¹⁷ ST II-II, q. 43, a. 3, resp.: "Per se autem est activum scandalum quando aliquis suo inordinato dicto vel facto intendit alium trahere ad peccatum. Et sic ex intentione specialis finis sortitur rationem specialis peccati, finis enim dat speciem in moralibus, ut supra dictum est." Aquinas also asserts that intention of the end defines special scandal in ad 1 and ad 3.

¹⁸ Recall that there is a second kind of *per se* active scandal according to Aquinas (see ST II-II, q. 43, a. 1, ad 4) where an agent knows that a word or action is of such a nature that it will very likely lead another to a spiritual downfall, though the agent does not intend it. This kind of *per se* active scandal does not seem to meet Aquinas's definition for special scandal above, since Aquinas includes explicitly in his definition the intention of another's downfall. We will therefore presume that Aquinas did not consider this second type of *per se* active scandal to be a special sin. We cannot dismiss as a possibility, however, that he would have been willing to extend his definition so as to include it. This second kind of *per se* active scandal does not share the deficiencies that Thomas identifies in passive or *per accidens* active scandal, and it also seems to oppose the same kind of moral good as the first kind of *per se* active scandal, suggesting that it might meet Aquinas's criteria for a special sin.

two treatments of scandal as a special sin in reverse chronological order? Aquinas's treatment of scandal in the *Sentences* is in some significant ways more complex, so presenting his teachings from the *Summa* first helps us to make better sense of his earlier teaching.

Here is St. Thomas's consideration of scandal as a special sin from the *Sentences*:

An action is determined to a moral species in two ways. In one way from its object, as fornication [is determined to its moral species] from this, that it is about pleasures of touch; and this determination is material and regards the habit eliciting the act. In another way [an action is determined to a moral species] from its end, and this is a formal specification and respects the habit commanding.

It happens sometimes that an act is determined to the same species from each part [i.e., from object and end], as when an act is elicited and commanded by the same habit; for example, someone fornicates on account of pleasure. Sometimes [an action] is determined by each part [i.e., from object and end], but to diverse species, as when an act is elicited by one habit and commanded by another. For instance, someone may fornicate on account of wealth: [this action] is determined to the species of lust from its object but to the species of avarice from its end. One does not find [in this act] two sins, but one twofold sin, since it is one act.

Sometimes an action is not determined to a certain species on account of its object, but on account of its end in the following way: it has a determined habit by which it is commanded but not by which it is elicited, such as "to build up a neighbor." Charity does not elicit this act, because charity only elicits interior acts through which building up [of a neighbor] is not accomplished, but [charity] commands [building up of a neighbor]. [Building up of a neighbor] is elicited materially by other virtues, not in a fixed way by some [virtue], but by all, because charity can command all [virtues].

And because active scandal is a sin opposed to building up neighbors, therefore, materially speaking, from the part of the matter and the habits eliciting, it is not a special sin, but only formally speaking, from the part of the end and habit commanding, which is the habit opposed to charity, namely, the vice of hate; and therefore when someone brings forth a deficient word or deed intending to present an occasion of ruin for a neighbor,

he commits a special sin by scandalizing.¹⁹

Before examining this passage, it will be helpful for the sake of those unfamiliar with Aquinas's moral writings to clarify some of the technical language he uses here. An elicited act is one that immediately proceeds from a particular power or from a habit disposing such a power.²⁰ Examples proposed by Aquinas of an act elicited from a power include "choosing" coming from will, or "knowing" coming from intellect;²¹ examples of acts elicited from a habit are "doing right," which the virtue of justice disposes, or "acting temperately," which the virtue of temperance disposes.²²

A commanded act, on the other hand, is one ordered to a (further) end. For example, legal justice, which concerns the common good, "commands" acts of other virtues to its end.²³ St. Thomas recognizes that ends (and human actions/habits associated with ends) "command" only in a secondary sense. "Command" is properly an act of reason, as when someone (through his reason) directs his own limbs, or tells another to

¹⁹ *In IV sent.*, d. 38, q. 2, a. 2, qa. 2, resp.: "Ad secundam quaestionem dicendum, quod actus aliquis determinatur ad speciem moris dupliciter. Uno modo ex parte objecti, sicut fornicatio ex hoc quod est circa delectabilia tactus; et haec determinatio est materialis, et respicit habitum elicentem actum. Alio modo ex parte finis; et haec est formalis specificatio, et respicit habitum imperantem. Contingit autem quandoque quod ad eandem speciem determinatur actus ex utraque parte, sicut quando aliquis actus ab eodem habitu elicitur et imperatur, ut cum quis fornicatur propter delectationem. Quandoque autem ex utraque parte determinatur, sed ad diversas species, ut quando actus ab uno habitu elicitur, et ab alio imperatur, sicut cum quis fornicatur propter lucrum; determinatur enim ad speciem luxuriae ex objecto, sed ad speciem avaritiae ex fine; non tamen sunt ibi duo peccata, sed unum peccatum duplex, cum sit unus actus. Quandoque etiam evenit quod aliquis actus non determinatur ad aliquam certam speciem ex parte objecti, sed ex parte finis, eo quod habet determinatum habitum a quo imperatur, sed non a quo elicitur, sicut aedificare proximum, quem actum caritas non elicit, quia ejus non est elicere nisi interiores actus, per quos non fit aedificatio, sed imperat eum, et ab aliis virtutibus elicitur materialiter, non determinate ab aliqua, sed ab omnibus, quia caritas omnibus imperare potest. Et quia scandalum activum est peccatum oppositum aedificationi proximorum; ideo, materialiter loquendo, ex parte materiae et habituum elicentium non est speciale peccatum, sed solum loquendo formaliter, ex parte finis et habitus imperantis qui est habitus caritati oppositus, scilicet vitium odii; et ideo quando aliquis dictum vel factum minus rectum facit intendens occasionem ruinae proximo praestare, speciale peccatum scandalizando committit."

²⁰ *In II sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 3, resp.

²¹ For choosing, see *ST I-II*, q. 71, a. 6, resp.; for knowing, see *In II sent.*, d. 25, q. 1, a. 3, resp.

²² *De virtutibus*, q. 2, a. 5, ad 3.

²³ *ST II-II*, q. 58, a. 6, resp.

do something.²⁴ An end can be said to “command” in a secondary sense in that the intellect’s commanding of a means to an end presumes that the will already desires this end, and in that the end’s nature will govern which means would be suitable for achieving it. In this secondary sense, then, Aquinas maintains that powers, habits, or actions related to an end “command” powers, habits, or actions related to a means/object willed for the sake of this end.²⁵

We now turn to the meaning of Aquinas’s text. In the passage above from the *Sentences*, St. Thomas distinguishes three categories of human action directed to object and end. The first is relatively simple to understand: a human action is elicited and commanded by the same habit, as when someone fornicates on account of pleasure. Here, because the agent is sufficiently motivated by the pleasure taken in his or her very action, no end related to a virtue or vice other than lust is needed to account for an agent’s action or its species.²⁶

The second category contains human actions determined by object and end, but where each determines a different moral species, as when an act is elicited by one habit and commanded by another. Aquinas’s example is someone fornicating on account of his own inordinate desire for enrichment.

This second category helps to illustrate the relation between habits commanding and eliciting. Fornication in this case may be elicited from the vice of lust, since this vice disposes an agent to seek sexual pleasures inordinately (that is, without concern for their proper place within marriage). But the fornication is “commanded” by another vice: since the agent’s primary aim is wealth, the vice of avarice, which facilitates inordinate accumulation of wealth, may be said to co-opt fornication into its service.

Beyond providing a good example of commanding and eliciting, actions in the second category are worth reflecting on as an aid to understanding Aquinas’s teaching on the specification of human actions with more than one goal. In the first category above, the human action has only one species, fornication. That a single human action should possess a single species should not at all surprise someone familiar with St. Thomas’s

²⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 17, a. 1, resp.; a. 3, ad 1.

²⁵ *In IV sent.*, d. 15, q. 4, a. 1, qa. 1, ad 3.

²⁶ Another comparable example mentioned earlier is where a dissimulator (*simulator*) feigns great things about him or herself for no other purpose than the pleasure of doing so: *ST* II-II, q. 111, a. 3, ad 3. Thomas also holds that lies can be told merely for pleasure: see *ST* II-II, q. 110, a. 2, resp.

teaching, since in other cases, such as natural substances, things possess only one species at a time. (A being cannot simultaneously be both a horse and an oak tree, for instance.) But as the passage from the *Sentences* illustrates, Aquinas believes that sometimes a single human action can have more than one moral species. Fornicating for the purpose of inordinately obtaining wealth is not two human actions performed in close sequence, but one act of the will, where the agent intends an end (namely, to possess wealth) *through* a willing of the means (fornication). The action's essential unity comes from the fact that the act of will to achieve the end is the same as the will's act to bring about the means: an agent in this case judges the means good and wills it *because* it is conducive to his or her end.²⁷ Even granted the unity this human action has from the will, however, St. Thomas holds that this human action possesses not one, but two distinct moral species, since end and object in this case oppose moral goodness in two specifically different ways.

Now an opponent might argue that if inordinate wealth is what an agent in this case is willing primarily, then the whole action should be specified as avarice, since St. Thomas considers an end to be formal with respect to a human action. But Aquinas maintains, to the contrary, that the species an action receives from its end cannot determine the whole formal character of the action: the sin of fornication and its evil do not disappear even if greed is the reason for its being sought. Rather, the one human action in this case possesses a twofold moral character: it is avarice (from its end) and fornication (from its object). As Aquinas maintains above in the passage from the *Sentences*, "one does not find [in this act] two sins, but one twofold sin, since it is one act."²⁸

Aquinas then introduces a third category of action/habit. Since special scandal belongs to neither of the two categories just examined, and since this *Sentences* article is dedicated to special scandal, Aquinas clearly presents the first two categories so that he can more clearly distinguish this third and final category of human action to which special scandal belongs. St. Thomas identifies two kinds of human action that fall in this category: special scandal and "building up a neighbor" (*aedificare proximum*). "Building up a neighbor" is scandal's mirror image, where someone's good words or deeds occasion good actions in another. An example Aquinas gives elsewhere is

²⁷ *In II sent.*, d. 38, q. 1, a. 4, resp., ad 1, ad 2; *ST* I-II, q. 12, a. 4, resp.

²⁸ Aquinas speaks about the possibility of a human action possessing two species of sin—a first from its object and a second from its end—in other texts as well: *ST* I-II, q. 18, a. 7, resp.; *Summa contra gentiles* III, ch. 138; *De veritate*, q. 23, a. 7, ad 2. For more on this topic, see Pilsner, *Specification of Human Actions*, 222–38.

when a person's public prayer leads others to do the same.²⁹

St. Thomas asserts that a human action in this third category is "not determined to a certain species on account of its object, but on account of its end in the following way: it has a determined habit by which it is commanded but not by which it is elicited." What does he mean? Active *per se* scandal can be used to illustrate. Scandal has as its end "to occasion another's [spiritual] downfall." Now, to try to induce a neighbor to commit sin is directly contrary to charity, which wills good to others.³⁰ Thomas therefore sees enticing another to sin as a special evil against charity, referred to the vice of hate. The end "another's spiritual downfall" and its associated vice of "hate" can then "command" the "inordinate word or deed" done for its sake. But what species of human action is associated with the object "deficient words or deeds," and what vice elicits these words or deeds? The answer is that they are not exclusively associated with any one vice. One can occasion a neighbor's spiritual downfall using theft, backbiting, drunkenness, or any number of other species of sin, and many of these kinds of sin are associated with different vices. This explains why scandal is said by Aquinas to have a determined habit by which it is commanded but not by which it is elicited. Scandal as a special sin involves committing

²⁹ *In IV sent.*, d. 15, q. 4, a. 2, qa. 1, ad 1. For "good example" leading to the building up of a neighbor, see *In IV sent.*, d. 38, q. 2, a. 3, qa. 3, ad 2. Why is "building up a neighbor" not counted among the human actions featured in this article? Is "building up a neighbor" not defined both by object and end in the *Sentences* text above? The reason it is not featured is that St. Thomas gives "building up a neighbor" so little attention in his later writings that it appears as though he may have reconsidered whether it is a special species of good human action and virtue. Thomas speaks about "building up a neighbor" in *Quodlibet* 10, q. 6, a. 2, resp., and *De malo*, q. 9, a. 1, resp., and a. 2, ad 9, but the references are minimal, and it is not even clear in these texts that he is treating "building up a neighbor" as a distinct species of good human action or virtue. Perhaps the most telling evidence is that "building up a neighbor" is not mentioned in the *Summa Theologiae* in spite of the fact that St. Thomas dedicates so much attention in the *Summa* to the cataloging and study of species of human actions and habits. One might expect, for example, that Thomas would at least address "building up a neighbor" in his treatment of special scandal in the *Summa*, since "building up a neighbor" features so prominently in his explanation of special scandal in the *Sentences*. He does not. Does any human action or virtue take the place of "building up a neighbor" as a contrary to special scandal? Aquinas continues to speak of scandal as especially opposed to charity (*ST II-II*, q. 43, pr.; a. 3, sc) and beneficence (*ST II-II*, q. 34, pr.; q. 43, pr.), which refers to external acts related to charity (*ST II-II*, q. 31, a. 4, resp.) described as "doing good to another" (*ST II-II*, q. 31, a. 1, resp.); see Levering, *Betrayal of Charity*, 127.

³⁰ For charity as willing good to others, see *ST II-II*, q. 23, a. 1, resp.

an act of hatred against a neighbor in desiring his or her spiritual downfall (hate here being the commanding habit), but the different possible inordinate external words or deeds willed as means to this downfall do not have a single vice from which they are elicited, since acts elicited from injustice, intemperance, or any number of other vices could serve to tempt another.

Aquinas in the *Sentences* article above emphasizes the preeminence of end in special scandal. The end is, after all, the most well-defined aspect of “special” scandal and has a certain formal primacy over scandal’s object in that the object is willed on account of the end. One ought not, however, to discount the necessity of special scandal’s object in its definition. “Willing a neighbor’s spiritual downfall,” its end, is by itself insufficient to define special scandal: this kind of sin requires some external deficient word or deed to serve as an occasion for another’s sin. “Performing a good deed that has no appearance of evil” or “committing a sin of thought” cannot achieve special scandal’s end. For there to be an act of special scandal, an agent must intend someone’s spiritual downfall (end) through some deficient word or deed (object) capable of tempting the hoped-for victim.³¹ A proper

³¹ How are we to understand Aquinas’s statement from the *Sentences* above that scandal is a kind of action “not determined to a certain species from its object, but from its end”? This statement seems to suggest that a certain kind of object is not required in scandal, but this is not so. St. Thomas does not mean by this assertion that scandal’s object can be anything at all and is irrelevant. After all, in his definition of special scandal above, he includes “a deficient word or deed,” which describes what the agent is doing (object). The point that St. Thomas is making in this quoted text is that object in the definition of special scandal does not determine a species of human action distinct from the one determined by the end, as happened in the preceding category where an object determines a species (fornication) distinct from the one determined by the end (avarice). So, in special scandal, although its end has a certain formal primacy, its object (“deficient word or deed”) is also necessary to its definition. What makes the case of special scandal especially perplexing, however, is that an individual act of special scandal will often possess two moral species. For example, in an act of having relations with another’s spouse in order to tempt an enemy to sin, two moral species can clearly be identified: adultery and scandal. But these two species belong to a particular act of special scandal, not to the definition of this sin/vice. As we have shown, the definition of special scandal requires a broadly defined object that includes many possible species, since many species of sin can occasion another’s downfall. Even in a particular act of special scandal, there is a sense in which the object is necessary. If we analyze the act just proposed of someone committing adultery in order to lead another to sin, the species of adultery would remain, even if the end of leading another astray were taken away, but scandal would not remain if the adultery were removed, since adultery in this particular human action is the word or deed being used to tempt the would-be victim, and if the adultery were taken away, the means in this action necessary to achieve the end of leading another astray would no longer be present.

definition of special scandal, then, cannot omit its object.

In sum, then, Aquinas in both the *Sentences* and the *Summa theologiae* recognizes that the special sin of scandal is defined by both its object and end. In the passage above from the *Sentences*, St. Thomas even identifies a category of human actions/habits where an end “commanding” an object determines a human action of a single moral species and identifies “scandal” (as a special sin) and “building up a neighbor” as two kinds of human action belonging to this category. He carefully distinguishes this category of sins from two other categories of human action where end and object play a different role in specification.

Fraternal Correction

We now turn our attention to a second species of human action defined by both its object and end, “fraternal correction.” Fraternal correction (*correctio fraterna*) is described by St. Thomas as an “act of charity that specially aims at the emendation of a transgressing brother through simple admonition.”³² An example he proposes is that someone subject to a religious authority (e.g., a bishop or abbot) might recognize a sin in this religious authority and bring it to his attention—gently and respectfully—in the hope of freeing him from this sin.³³ Aquinas distinguishes fraternal correction “properly so-called” from a second kind of correction done as a remedy for wrongdoing, as when a religious authority, obliged by his office, punishes the fault of a person subject to his authority. The former St. Thomas recognizes as an act of charity, the latter, as an act of justice.³⁴ Aquinas considers fraternal correction to be a virtue contrary to scandal. Scandal is defined primarily by an intention for a neighbor’s spiritual harm, whereas fraternal correction is defined primarily by an intention for a neighbor’s spiritual good, namely, his or her amendment from sin.³⁵

We can see two indications that fraternal correction is a kind of human action where both a distinctive object and end are required to determine its species. One obvious indication can be found in Aquinas’s descriptions of fraternal correction in his writings. Articles expressly dedicated to fraternal correction appear in the *Sentences*, the *Summa theologiae*, and

³² *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 3, resp.: “Actus caritatis, qui specialiter tendit ad emendationem fratris delinquentis per simplicem admonitionem.” In the *Sentences*, St. Thomas uses the phrase *correctio fraterna* rather than *correctio fraterna*; see, for example, *In IV sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 1, pr., versus *ST* II-II, q. 33, pr., and *De virtutibus*, q. 3, pr. 1.

³³ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 4, resp.

³⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 33, a. 1, resp.; a. 3, resp.

³⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 43, a. 3, resp.

De virtutibus.³⁶ In these works, St. Thomas includes two components in fraternal correction: (1) “admonition of a brother” (for the purpose of) (2) “emendation of transgressions” (or equivalent phrases).³⁷ The latter component is explicitly identified as fraternal correction’s end (*finis*) by Aquinas.³⁸ Though the former is not explicitly named by the word “object” (*objectum*), it clearly corresponds to “what an agent is doing.”

A second indication is the fact that an act of fraternal correction loses its species if its defining end (the emendation of a neighbor) is removed or changed to something substantially different, even if the means or object proper to fraternal correction (admonition) remains the same.³⁹ A good illustration can be found in an article from the *Summa theologiae* where Aquinas considers the question of whether someone ought to admonish a person likely to become worse from correction. (He is thinking of someone who so resents correction that another’s admonition would likely make him dig in his heels and sin all the more.) St. Thomas responds that the end of fraternal correction is the reform of the sinner, and “where it is judged that the sinner will probably not receive the admonition, but be drawn down to worse things, one ought to desist from correcting, because means to an end ought to be regulated according to what their end requires.”⁴⁰

What does this response tell us about the nature of fraternal correction? As we have shown earlier, one of the definitional elements of fraternal correction is that an agent seeks “another’s amendment” as an end. If someone “admonishing another” comes to the realization that this object/

³⁶ *De virtutibus* is an academic disputation or *quaestio disputata* roughly contemporaneous to the *secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*; see Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 1, *The Person and His Work*, trans. Robert Royal (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 336.

³⁷ See above for the definition from the *Summa theologiae*. See also *In IV sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 1, obj. 1 and resp. In *De virtutibus*, one can see the two parts of the definition in q. 3, a. 1, ad 1.

³⁸ Aquinas describes the end of fraternal correction with slight variations, none of which substantially changes its nature. For example, see: *In IV sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 1, ad 4; *ST II-II*, q. 33, a. 6, resp; *De virtutibus*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 7. For further references to the end of fraternal correction (including some references where the word *finis* is not used, although it is clearly implied), see: *In IV sent.*, d. 19, q. 2, a. 1, obj. 1 and resp.; *ST II-II*, q. 32, a. 2, ad 3; q. 33, a. 2, resp.; q. 33, a. 6, obj. and ad 2; q. 43, a. 7, ad 3; *De virtutibus*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1; q. 3, a. 2, resp.

³⁹ *ST II-II*, q. 33, a. 2, resp.; q. 33, a. 6, obj. and ad 2; *De virtutibus*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1.

⁴⁰ *ST II-II*, q. 33, a. 6, resp.: “Et ideo ubi probabiliter aestimatur quod peccator admonitionem non recipiat, sed ad peiora labatur, est ab huiusmodi correctione desistendum, quia ea quae sunt ad finem debent regulari secundum quod exigit ratio finis.” See also ad 2, ad 3, and *De virtutibus*, q. 3, a. 1, ad 1.

means is not achieving the end of the other person's amendment, then one of fraternal correction's essential defining characteristics (its proper end) is absent; hence, the action can no longer be identified as belonging to the species "fraternal correction." Indeed, if communicating a fault to another is tempting him or her to evil, then the action meets the definition of scandal, where someone's word or action occasions another's sin.⁴¹ (It would not be "scandal as a special sin," however, unless the spiritual harm were intended.) Such an action would actually be bringing about the contrary of what fraternal correction is supposed to accomplish.⁴² This is why Aquinas counsels that a person should desist in correcting when he or she becomes aware that another's amendment will probably not be achieved.

*Four Species of Sins of Speech: Reviling, Backbiting,
Derision, and Tale-Bearing*

Four further species of human action of the kind we are examining can be found among sins of speech. In the *secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*, questions 72–76 treat injuries done by words (outside of the judicial process).⁴³ Aquinas treats five species of sin in this category; we will here consider four of them: reviling (*contumelia*); backbiting (*detractio*); derision (*derisio*), and tale-bearing (*susurratio*).⁴⁴ St. Thomas observes the following: "Sins of speech principally ought to be considered according to the intention of the speaker. And therefore sins of this kind ought to be distinguished according to the diverse [ends] that someone speaking against another person intends."⁴⁵ Note Aquinas's point in this passage that

⁴¹ *ST* II-II, q. 43, a. 7, obj. and ad 3.

⁴² St. Thomas does not consider a case where the object of fraternal correction changes substantially instead of its end, but in such a case also, the action would presumably not belong to the species of fraternal correction. For example, if a person desired another's amendment (end), but instead of admonishing the other person (object), he or she complimented this other person's actions (alternate object), then this object/means could not reasonably achieve the end. The action surely would no longer be "fraternal correction"; after all, there would be no "correction."

⁴³ *ST* II-II, q. 67, pr.

⁴⁴ Thomas summarizes the distinction among these four sins according to their proper ends in *ST* II-II, q. 75, a. 1, resp. The fifth kind, *maledictio* (cursing), follows a somewhat different pattern.

⁴⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 75, a. 1, resp.: "Peccata verborum praecipue pensanda sunt secundum intentionem proferentis. Et ideo secundum diversa quae quis intendit contra alium loquens, huiusmodi peccata distinguuntur." "Ends" can be inserted in the translation because an end, by definition, corresponds to the act of intention: *ST* I-II, q. 12, a. 1, resp. and ad 4. For the primacy of intention in these kinds of actions, see

sins of speech can be considered together as a group—he refers to them collectively as “sins of this kind” (*huiusmodi peccata*)—and that a hallmark of their kind is that they are distinguished according to what the agent intends [i.e., ends].

Why do ends specify sins of this kind? In a different passage, St. Thomas uses the following line of reasoning: Sins harm others. [Sins of speech can have as their objects speaking ill about others.]⁴⁶ Words are not harmful to others in themselves, but insofar as they signify something. The agent’s intention in using the words, then, will determine the kind of harm the words are meant to inflict. So, sins of speech should be distinguished especially according to an agent’s intent in using his words (i.e., the agent’s end).⁴⁷

We can now consider how Aquinas defines and distinguishes reviling, backbiting, derision, and tale-bearing, with special attention to each sin’s proper end. Let us turn to the first two. Reviling (*contumelia*) is speaking ill about another person in public with the intention of dishonoring him or her.⁴⁸ For instance, someone might call another person “thief” to his face.⁴⁹ Backbiting (*detractio*) is speaking ill of a person without his or her

also *ST* II-II, q. 73, a. 2, resp.: “Sins of speech most especially (*maxime*) ought to be judged from the speaker’s intention.” Sometimes Thomas makes the same point using *affectus* as an equivalent for *intentio*; see *ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 2, resp., and q. 76, a. 3, resp.

⁴⁶ One of these sins, tale-bearing, can also include in its object things with the appearance of evil, as we shall soon see.

⁴⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 2, resp. Additionally, St. Thomas recognizes that some verbal expressions may be so grave in themselves that they will likely cause serious injury even if this is not the speaker’s intention. In such a case, the speaker will be responsible for the harm done. (For this point in the context of reviling and railing, see *ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 2, resp.; for this point in the context of backbiting, see *ST* II-II, q. 73, a. 2, resp.) Aquinas compares this situation to a person hitting another in jest: such a blow may do serious harm even if the agent did not intend the harm. The agent must therefore be aware of the power of the blow in itself and accept responsibility for any foreseeable harm done by it (*ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 2, resp.). Note the similarity here to Thomas’s treatment of scandal, where certain kinds of actions may tempt others even though the agent may not intend it (*ST* II-II, q. 43, a. 1, ad 4).

⁴⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 1, resp.; a. 2, resp. The evil spoken in reviling is the defect of guilt, as when a person’s sin is exposed (*ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 1, ad 3). Although “words” was used in the definition above, Thomas recognized that an evil about another could also be communicated by deeds, since deeds can also serve as signs (*ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 1, resp.).

⁴⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 1, ad 3. Although reviling often happens in front of a crowd (thereby exacerbating the sin’s seriousness), Thomas believes it is sufficient for this kind of sin that the evil be spoken in the offended party’s presence; see *ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 1, ad 1, and q. 73, a. 1, ad 2.

knowledge in order to denigrate this person's reputation.⁵⁰ For example, someone might either reveal a hidden fault or exaggerate the sin of another outside of this person's earshot.⁵¹

Two key kinds of "differences" distinguish these two sins. A first difference Aquinas uses is the fact that reviling is out in the open (i.e., to a person's face, perhaps in front of others), while backbiting is "secret" (behind a person's back). Thomas sees in these two conditions distinctive ways in which a victim's will can be opposed, either by force or by ignorance.⁵²

A second difference between reviling and backbiting—and the one more significant for our purposes—concerns the speaker's end. According to Aquinas, someone who reviles another speaks ill with the intention of dishonoring (*dehonoratio*),⁵³ whereas someone who backbites speaks ill with the intention of denigrating another's reputation (*famam denigret*).⁵⁴ St. Thomas is here drawing a subtle distinction between two kinds of human goods that can be violated: honor refers to the public signs and testimonies of a person's excellence,⁵⁵ whereas reputation is the knowledge (of good qualities) about a person that others possess.⁵⁶ He believes that acting contrary to either of these goods could do serious (though distinct) harm to a victim, so he posits two species of sin. St. Thomas considers these two species of sin to be quite serious. To illustrate, when Aquinas compares the sins of reviling and backbiting to the sin of theft, he reasons that reviling and backbiting are worse sins in kind than theft because one's honor and good name are of greater value than external things.⁵⁷

The other two species of sin against speech mentioned earlier are also determined especially by their ends. Derision (*derisio*) involves speaking ill of another with the intention of shaming him or her (through jest);

⁵⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 73, a. 2, resp.

⁵¹ *ST* II-II, q. 73, a. 1, ad 3.

⁵² *ST* II-II, q. 73, a. 1, ad 1. For a second example where Aquinas uses "openly" and "secretly" to distinguish sins, see his treatment of robbery and theft in *ST* II-II, q. 66, a. 4, resp.: the former is committed "openly," with a victim's possession being wrested from him by force (against his will), while the latter is committed "secretly," with a victim's possession being taken without his knowing (again against his will).

⁵³ *ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 2, resp.

⁵⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 73, a. 2, resp.

⁵⁵ *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 2, resp.

⁵⁶ Thomas sometimes uses *gloria humana* as an equivalent of *fama*. In one such text, he describes *gloria* as "manifest renown with praise" (*clara notitia cum laude*) following Ambrose; see *ST* I-II, q. 2, a. 3, resp.

⁵⁷ *ST* II-II, a. 72, a. 2, resp.; *ST*, II-II, q. 73, a. 3, resp.

an example would be making fun of another's defect.⁵⁸ This sin can also be grave under some circumstances; for instance, Thomas maintains that derision can be more serious than reviling if the derider "judges another person so vile that he ought not to care about his evil but treats it as if a game."⁵⁹ Thus, derision may involve greater contempt for the victim than reviling does.

Tale-bearing (*susurratio*) is like backbiting in that it involves speaking ill of another behind his or her back, but differs in intention: instead of denigrating another's reputation, the tale-bearer's aim is to break apart friendship. For example, a tale-bearer might approach two friends separately and speak ill of each to the other in order to cause a rift in their relationship.⁶⁰ Regarding its gravity, Aquinas considers tale-bearing to be a more serious sin in kind than either reviling or backbiting: a friend for him is more precious than even honor or reputation, so a friend's loss is a more grievous harm.⁶¹

There is a second difference between backbiting and tale-bearing that is especially of interest to our study. In addition to having distinctive ends, Aquinas holds that these two sins can also at times have a difference in their respective objects.⁶² Although St. Thomas recognizes that the object of both sins could be "speaking evil" of another person, he concedes that a tale-bearer, because his aim is not besmirching another's good name but breaking apart a friendship, may at times say something good about another person, if this good has the appearance of evil in that it is somehow unpleasant to the hearer and capable of causing a division between friends.⁶³

The fact that backbiting and tale-bearing may at the same time differ in both end and object raises the question of whether end or object holds more sway in determining the species and relative gravity of these two sins. An objection in the *Summa theologiae* challenges Aquinas's position that tale-bearing is a worse sin in kind than backbiting. The objection

⁵⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 75, a. 1, sc, resp.; for making fun of another's defect, see *ST* II-II, q. 75, a. 2, resp.

⁵⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 75, a. 2, resp.: "... eum tam vilem aestimare ut de eius malo non sit curandum, sed sit quasi pro ludo habendum." In this article, Thomas asserts that derision can be venial if the fault derided is slight. This would presumably be true of all sins of speech.

⁶⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 74, a. 1, resp., ad 3.

⁶¹ *ST* II-II, q. 74, a. 2, resp.

⁶² Both these kinds of sin, on the other hand, share the fact that they are done behind the victim's back; see *ST* II-II, q. 74, a. 1, resp.

⁶³ *ST* II-II, q. 74, a. 1, resp., obj. and ad 1.

agrees with St. Thomas's argument that between the two ends, severing a friendship is a worse evil than ruining another's reputation, but points out that the backbiter may say worse things about another person, since a tale-bearer's words sometimes have only the appearance of evil. To answer the objection, Aquinas must weigh the relative influence of end and object in these two species of sin. Here is his reply: "The species and gravity of a sin are taken more from its end [*ex fine*] than from its material object [*ex materiali obiecto*]. And therefore by reason of its end tale-bearing is more serious, although the backbiter sometimes says worse things."⁶⁴ In this brief response to the objection, then, Aquinas shows clearly that backbiting and tale-bearing possess both an object (*objectum*) and an end (*finis*); this, of course, is the hallmark of the kinds of human actions we are examining in this article. His answer also shows that end here has a more important formal influence than object in these two instances.⁶⁵

In addition to this text comparing backbiting and tale-bearing, other texts can be found in Aquinas's writings where an end is shown to have primacy over what is being said (object) in determining a species of a sin against speech.⁶⁶ For example, regarding reviling, Aquinas says in the *Summa theologiae*: "If someone says a word of . . . reviling to another, not for the purpose of dishonoring him, but perhaps as a correction or something of this kind, it is not . . . reviling formally and *per se*."⁶⁷

⁶⁴ ST II-II, q. 74, a. 2, ad 1: "Species et gravitas peccati magis attenditur ex fine quam ex materiali obiecto. Et ideo ratione finis susurratio est gravior, quamvis detractor quandoque peiora dicat." The description *materiale obiectum* is uncommon in Aquinas. For a passage where *materia* (used sometimes by Aquinas as an alternative term for *objectum*) and *finis* appear together in the same passage describing the two parts of backbiting and tale-bearing, see ST II-II, q. 74, a. 1, resp.

⁶⁵ Although St. Thomas asserts that end plays a more important and formal role than object in determining the species and gravity of backbiting and tale-bearing, he does not reject an object's possible influence in specification. Rather than asserting that object is irrelevant, he asserts rather that the species and gravity of these kinds of sin are taken "more" from end than object. This leaves open the possibility that that object could have a more important influence on species and gravity in other cases. (In fact, we will see species of actions later where "object" is more influential than "end" in determining species.)

⁶⁶ Although St. Thomas focuses on "end" in these passages and does not use the word "object," we know from texts already studied how he applies the end-and-object paradigm to sins of speech.

⁶⁷ ST II-II, q. 72, a. 2, resp.: "Si vero aliquis verbum convicii vel contumeliae alteri dixerit, non tamen animo dehonoriandi, sed forte propter correctionem vel propter aliquid huiusmodi, non dicit convicium vel contumeliam formaliter et per se." The word *convicium* (omitted in the translation of this passage) is a synonym for *contumelia*. Thomas says that a corrective action as described above without its defining

In his treatment of backbiting, Aquinas shows that an end has such a determinative influence for this sin that substituting a good end for “denigrating another’s reputation” can change the character of the action from evil to good. An objection argues that backbiting cannot be a mortal sin because revealing another’s sin is virtuous: it is fraternal correction if done from charity, and a rightful accusation if done from justice. Thomas does not disagree with the objection’s point that revealing another’s sin could be virtuous if done for certain morally good ends. Instead, he contends that the objection’s argument fails because once one of the two morally good ends identified (charity or public justice) has been intended instead of denigrating another’s reputation, the human action no longer belongs to the species of backbiting as the objection has been presuming; instead, the two alternative ends (charity and justice) define respectively two species of human action different from backbiting: fraternal correction and rightful accusation.⁶⁸ Note here that the object “revealing another’s sin” remains the same, whether the species of action is backbiting, fraternal correction, or rightful accusation. An end holds such sway over the formal character of these kinds of human action that it can even determine whether this object will be a part of a sinful kind of human action (backbiting), or a good kind of human action (fraternal correction or just punishment).

Religion and Superstition

Further species of human actions relevant to our investigation are religion (*religio*), superstition (*superstitio*), and various species of human action related to these two. Religion is a good human action/virtue in which due worship (i.e., religious ceremony) is offered to honor God.⁶⁹ Superstition is the contrary sin/vice; it has a number of species falling

end of dishonoring another may “sometimes be a venial sin, sometimes without any sin” (*ST* II-II, q. 72, a. 2, resp.). Thomas also proposes something comparable with regard to backbiting in *ST* II-II, q. 73, a. 2, resp.: “Nevertheless it sometimes happens that a person speaks some words through which the reputation [*fama*] of another is diminished, not intending this but something else. This, however, is not to backbite *per se* and formally speaking, but only materially and as if *per accidens*. And if indeed a person speaks words through which the reputation of another is diminished on account of something good or necessary, due circumstances being observed, it is not a sin, nor can it be called backbiting.” Note the similarity between (1) the two texts here concerning reviling and backbiting and (2) the text treated earlier about fraternal correction, where a different end changed the action’s character.

⁶⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 73, a. 2, obj. 1 and ad 1.

⁶⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 5, resp.

under it, depending on various kinds of defect in religion.⁷⁰

A good place to begin in explaining the structure of religion in Aquinas's thought is to consider his reason for associating religion with justice rather than with one of the theological virtues. In St. Thomas's moral theory, seven virtues have special preeminence: the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity). In the second part of the *Summa theologiae*, St. Thomas undertakes the considerable project of explaining how the many human virtues and vices are related to these seven central virtues. Following Cicero's lead in *Rhetorica*, the Angelic Doctor associates religion with the virtue of justice.⁷¹ Religion, he concedes, is not an act of justice strictly speaking because justice strictly speaking is defined as giving another person his or her due, and human beings are incapable of giving God his due: human beings cannot adequately compensate God for his goodness in creating and governing them and the rest of the universe. Still, human worship in religion does at least offer some return to God for his beneficence to us. So, Aquinas holds that religion ought to be associated with justice, since religion's admittedly inadequate response to the debt owed to God makes religion more like justice (considered strictly) than like any other cardinal or theological virtue.⁷²

An objection in an article about religion in the *secunda secundae* challenges St. Thomas's decision to associate religion with justice.⁷³ This objection begins by reminding readers that theological virtues have God as their object. (In the *prima secundae* of the *Summa*, St. Thomas distinguishes the theological virtues from the moral virtues, including justice, by showing that the former have God as their object, whereas the latter have things comprehensible by reason as their object.)⁷⁴ The objection then recalls St. Thomas's teaching that religion directs worshippers to God alone.⁷⁵ Since religion concerns God, the objection concludes, it should be associated with one of the three theological virtues, which are also directed to God. (With this conclusion, the objection implicitly refutes the proposal that religion should be associated with justice, since justice and the other cardinal virtues are not directly about God.)

Aquinas's *responsio* in the article provides a presentation of religion that

⁷⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 92, a. 1, resp.; a. 2, resp.

⁷¹ *In* III *sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4, sc 1; *In* IV *sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 5, resp.

⁷² *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 5, sc, resp., and ad 3.

⁷³ *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 5, obj. 2.

⁷⁴ *ST* I-II, q. 62, a. 2, resp.

⁷⁵ See *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 1.

he will refer to when answering this objection. Note especially his description of religion's object and end:

Religion offers due worship to God. Two things, therefore, are considered in religion. One is what religion offers to God, namely worship [*cultus*], and this relates to religion as matter and object. Another, however, is the one to whom it is offered, namely God. . . . Whence it is clear that God is not compared to the virtue of religion as matter or object, but as end. And therefore religion is not a theological virtue, whose object is the ultimate end, but is a moral virtue, whose object concerns means to an end.⁷⁶

St. Thomas's point here is that although the three theological virtues and religion can all be said to relate to God, there is a critical difference in how they do so. The theological virtues relate to God as object, since God is what these three virtues are directly about: a person believes, hopes in, and loves God. Religion, he maintains, relates to God differently. The virtue of religion does not have God as its object; rather, its object is "offering something in worship," since this is religion's immediate concern. This understanding of religion's object does not mean, however, that God's relation to religion is merely circumstantial: God is indispensable as religion's end, since worship should be offered to him and him alone.⁷⁷ So, God is

⁷⁶ *ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 5, resp.: "Religio est quae Deo debitum cultum affert. Duo igitur in religione considerantur. Unum quidem quod religio Deo affert, cultus scilicet, et hoc se habet per modum materiae et obiecti ad religionem. Aliud autem est id cui affertur, scilicet Deus. . . . Unde manifestum est quod Deus non comparatur ad virtutem religionis sicut materia vel obiectum, sed sicut finis. Et ideo religio non est virtus theologica, cuius obiectum est ultimus finis, sed est virtus moralis, cuius est esse circa ea quae sunt ad finem"; see also ad 2. Thomas explains this relation between object (or matter) and end in the virtue of religion in other texts as well: *De virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 12, ad 11; *Super Boethium de Trinitate* II, q. 3, a. 2, corp. 5.

⁷⁷ There is an apparent ambiguity about what *finis* means in this context. The way St. Thomas speaks about religion here and elsewhere, it sometimes seems as if God, whom Thomas identifies as end, is what would be referred to in English grammar as an action's indirect object, as in the sentence: "I am offering something (direct object) to you, God (indirect object)." Based on Aquinas's teaching elsewhere, however, his descriptions can also be interpreted as shorthand for an understanding of God as end in the proper sense of the word, namely, as an agent's aim and reason for acting, as in the sentence, "I am making this offering of divine worship (object) in order to honor you, God" (see, for example, *ST II-II*, q. 92, a. 2, resp., discussed below).

an object for the theological virtues, but an end for religion.⁷⁸ From this reasoning, St. Thomas concludes that religion should be associated with the virtue of justice rather than with faith, hope, or charity.

Not surprisingly, a similar way of viewing object and end will appear in Aquinas's treatment of superstition, the vice contrary to religion:

The vice of religion consists in this, that the mean of virtue is exceeded with respect to some circumstances. As is said above, however, not every difference of corrupt circumstances varies the species of sin, but only when they are referred to different objects or different ends: for according to this, moral acts receive a species, as is held above. A species of superstition is differentiated, therefore, first, on the part of its object. For divine worship can be offered either to whom it ought, namely to the true God, but in an undue way: and this is a first species of superstition. Or [divine worship can be offered] to what it ought not to be offered, namely to whatever creature. And this is another genus of superstition, which is divided into many species, according to the different ends of divine worship. For, firstly, divine worship is ordered to offering reverence to God. And in relation to this, the first species of this genus is idolatry, which offers divine reverence unduly to a creature. Secondly, [divine worship] is ordered to this, that man is instructed by God, whom he worships. And to this is related the superstition of "divining," which consults demons through some pacts entered into with them, whether tacit or expressed. Thirdly, divine worship is ordered to a certain guidance of human actions according to the commands of God, who is worshipped. And the

⁷⁸ Thomas elsewhere also distinguishes between justice and the theological virtues by showing that God is related to these four virtues according to different *rationes* or formal characters. To illustrate, when distinguishing the theological virtues, Aquinas proposes that God is the object of faith insofar as he is *first truth*, the object of charity insofar as he is *highest good*, and the object of hope insofar as he is *of highest difficulty [to attain]* (see: *In III sent.*, d. 26, q. 2, a. 3, qa. 1, ad 1; *ST II-II*, q. 17, a. 6, resp., ad 1). Similarly, God as religion's object is said by St. Thomas to possess a distinctive formal *ratio*: God is object insofar as he is "first principle of creation and of the governance of things" (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 3, resp.) These four formal *rationes*, then, allow faith, hope, charity, and religion all to relate to God, but each in a distinctive way that determines its respective species. St. Thomas apparently sees no contradiction between this way of considering religion's object and the way he presents religion's object in *ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 5, above. (For a discussion of the different ways in which "object" is used in this context, see Pilsner, *Specification of Human Actions*, 137–40.)

superstition of certain observances pertains to this.⁷⁹

This response is of interest for a few reasons. For one thing, in explaining the species of superstition, Aquinas proposes two more specialized ways in which religion can be understood. These two more specialized ways are not as easy to discern as the basic way proposed in the treatment of religion itself. Nonetheless, it is important to identify them before turning to the species of superstition.

We have seen already from the earlier text that religion can refer to the offering of religious rites (object) to honor the one, true God (end).⁸⁰ In the article on superstition above, Thomas adds that religion can also have as its end receiving instruction from the God who is worshipped. The instruction Aquinas has in mind here is especially God's revealing to human beings what will happen in the future, though he will also in later texts refer to God's revealing of "hidden things."⁸¹ Although St. Thomas does not mention here how this instruction might occur, later articles suggest that reading prophecy in the Scripture or receiving a direct revelation from God would be examples of suitable means.⁸² A second,

⁷⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 92, a. 2, resp.: "Vitium religionis consistit in hoc quod transcenditur virtutis medium secundum aliquas circumstantias. Ut autem supra dictum est, non quaelibet circumstantiarum corruptarum diversitas variat peccati speciem, sed solum quando referuntur ad diversa obiecta vel diversos fines, secundum hoc enim morales actus speciem sortiuntur, ut supra habitum est. Diversificatur ergo superstitionis species, primo quidem, ex parte obiecti. Potest enim divinus cultus exhiberi vel cui exhibendus est, scilicet Deo vero, modo tamen indebito, et haec est prima superstitionis species. Vel ei cui non debet exhiberi, scilicet cuicumque creaturae. Et hoc est aliud superstitionis genus, quod in multas species dividitur, secundum diversos fines divini cultus ordinatur enim, primo, divinus cultus ad reverentiam Deo exhibendam. Et secundum hoc, prima species huius generis est idololatria, quae divinam reverentiam indebite exhibet creaturae. Secundo, ordinatur ad hoc quod homo instruatur a Deo, quem colit. Et ad hoc pertinet superstitio divinativa, quae Daemones consulit per aliqua pacta cum eis inita, tacita vel expressa. Tertio, ordinatur divinus cultus ad quandam directionem humanorum actuum secundum instituta Dei, qui colitur. Et ad hoc pertinet superstitio quarundam observationum."

⁸⁰ Acts of religion are not only acts of worship proper to it, but other acts commanded by religion that are directed to God's honor (*ST* II-II, a. 81, a. 1, ad 1).

⁸¹ *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 4, obj. and ad 1; obj. and ad 3; for a fuller discussion of various things revealed in prophecy, see *ST* II-II, q. 171, a. 3, resp.

⁸² *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 2, ad 3. In this passage, the New Testament is said to contain knowledge about future events taken from those who possess the spirit of prophecy. See also the passage in *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 4, resp. Note the passage from Athanasius (quoted with approval by St. Thomas) asserting that human beings

more specialized way of understanding religion is receiving guidance (or assistance) for human actions (*directionem humanorum actuum*) from the true God who is worshipped.⁸³ Although St. Thomas in this passage again does not give an example of how this could happen, he suggests in a later article that God can guide human beings through divinely instituted signs, such as sacraments, or by granting human knowledge or wisdom directly, as he did with King Solomon or with early Christians whom he enlightened through the Holy Spirit.⁸⁴ So, for St. Thomas, although religion is primarily performing some external act of worship (*cultus*) as a way of honoring God, by extension, religion can include certain additional aims associated with reverence for God, such as receiving divine instruction or divine guidance/assistance.

Given that religion is such a complex virtue for Aquinas, it is not surprising that he identifies a number of ways in which the good of religion can be opposed. In the passage on superstition above, St. Thomas names four basic species of superstition. Each species possesses both an object and end. Aquinas describes them briefly in the passage above, but he will dedicate whole questions to them later in the *secunda secundae*.⁸⁵

The first species of superstition proposed by Aquinas has no name. Aquinas describes it (in another text) as “undue worship of the true God.”⁸⁶ As the description suggests, this species is determined when the proper end for religion is intended (i.e., honoring the one, true God), but this end is sought by an inappropriate object or means. An example St. Thomas gives is a Christian who attempts to honor God (end) by participating in Old Testament religious ceremonies (object). Christians, of course, believe that such Old Testament rites have been superseded by the Eucharist and other New Testament rites.⁸⁷ Notice that this species of superstition has both an

act wickedly in seeking knowledge from the devil when they can consult divine Scriptures. For a person being directly enlightened by God, see *ST* II-II, q. 171, a. 3, resp.

⁸³ “Assistance from God” is added to “guidance” here because in later articles from the *Summa*, Thomas shows that he understands “observances” (the vice related to this sense of religion) to include seeking demonic assistance in alteration of bodies, such as a restoration of health. Such manipulation of physical things shows that Aquinas’s understanding of this sense of religion extends beyond what one would ordinarily associate with “direction” or “guidance”; see *ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 2, obj. 1 and resp.

⁸⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 1, resp.

⁸⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 93–96.

⁸⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 93, pr.: “indebiti cultus veri Dei.”

⁸⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 93, a. 1, resp.; for the Eucharist as the principle form of worship for Christians, see *ST* III, q. 63, a. 6, resp.

object and end, and that the species is determined precisely because of a defect in its object (rather than its end), something we have not seen in the various species of human actions/habits considered so far in this article.

The other three basic species of superstition concern a defect in the end of religion (rather than its object). The first such species is idolatry. This sin is determined when acts of worship are given, not to God, the proper end of religion, but to a graven image or some creature, such as a demon.⁸⁸

The next two, divination and observances, are contraries to the two specialized senses of religion that Aquinas proposed above. (Like these two specialized senses of religion, divination and observances are a bit more challenging to understand from the texts.) As noted above, the first more specialized way of understanding religion involves the end of receiving instruction from God. The species of superstition called “divination” (*divinatio*) is contrary to right reason in that a human agent seeks instruction, not from God, but rather from demons. According to St. Thomas, divination has both an object and end, and each can involve a person in a kind of sin. When addressing divination’s end, he notes that seeking knowledge of the future improperly is a sin of curiosity.⁸⁹ (It is unlawful/wrong for a person to have knowledge inappropriate for him or her to possess.)⁹⁰ It is the object, however, which primarily opposes the good of religion: in order to obtain knowledge of the future (end), a person committing the sin of divination dishonors God by entering into some association with demons.⁹¹ Aquinas considered pacts with demons, explicit or tacit, to involve some worship (*cultus*) of demons (though he does not explain how).⁹²

The third species of superstition regarding religion’s end is observances (*observantiae*). Here, an agent, instead of seeking guidance (*directionem humanorum actuum*) appropriately (for example, from God), seeks it by using certain undue means. An example of such guidance by undue means would be a person seeking from a demon knowledge about the world that he or she might otherwise learn appropriately through discovery and/or instruction.⁹³ Another example of such inappropriate *directio* is seeking the restoration of a person’s body to health, not by natural means, but

⁸⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 94, a. 1, resp.

⁸⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 2, obj. and ad 1.

⁹⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 167, a. 1, resp.

⁹¹ *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 2, resp. and ad 2; a. 3, resp.

⁹² *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 2, obj. and ad 2. St. Thomas distinguishes the harm done by entering into a compact with demons (as by invoking them) and the additional harm done by offering them sacrifice or reverence; see *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 4, resp.

⁹³ *ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 1, resp.

by some improper agency, such as demonic power.⁹⁴ The aims of worldly knowledge and health, of course, would be licit if they were achieved through natural means or if God intervened to grant them.⁹⁵ The problem in “observances” is that a person believes he or she can achieve what is beyond natural human power through certain words (e.g., by using incantations associated with the magical arts), certain deeds (e.g., by gazing on certain shapes), or certain things (e.g., by wearing amulets).⁹⁶ Thomas believes that all these have no power in themselves, and at least implicitly involve an entanglement with the demonic.⁹⁷ The primary wrongfulness of observances, then, and what makes them to be superstition, seems to be the honor implied for demons in using these various inappropriate means. Such means are contrary to the honor owed to the true God whom believers should seek for guidance/assistance.⁹⁸

Recall that both divination and observances are species of human action possessing an object and end. It is worth underscoring that in both cases, an object has the predominant role in defining the species as a kind of superstition. To illustrate, divination has two parts in its definition: (1) consulting demons (object) for the purpose of (2) knowing the future (end). Between object and end, it is the former which especially opposes one of the specialized ends of religion proposed by Aquinas, namely, that we seek instruction from the true God whom we worship. The object, then, seems to be the more important element in determining divination to be a species of superstition. (Something comparable could be said of observances.)⁹⁹

⁹⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 2, resp. It is admittedly difficult to understand why some sins under “observances” would not be included under species of divination instead. For example, some practices related to fortune telling (*ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 3) that Aquinas places under observances seem comparable to kinds of sins falling under sortilege (such as seeking future knowledge by casting of dice), which Thomas places under divination (*ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 3, resp.).

⁹⁵ *ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 1, resp.

⁹⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 96.

⁹⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 1, sc and resp.

⁹⁸ *ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 1, obj. and ad 1. Even if it were true that demons could provide something useful for human beings, Aquinas believes that it is wrong in itself to create the fellowship with them necessary to obtain such a thing (see obj. and ad 3).

⁹⁹ Aquinas’s description in *ST* II-II, q. 92, a. 2, resp., of the kinds of religion related to instruction and guidance is quite brief. Understanding how these definitions of religion relate to their contrary vices is not easy. To illustrate, the definition of religion related to instruction seems to be “to offer due worship (religious rites) in order to honor God for the good of his divine instruction.” Divination, the

The predominance of object in the definition and specification of divination can be recognized with even greater clarity in Aquinas's consideration of the various (sub)species under divination. St. Thomas dedicates a whole question to divination in the *secunda secundae* of the *Summa theologiae*. In an article from this question, entitled "On the Species of Divination," he maintains that divination is not only a species of the genus "superstition," but that divination is also a genus under which many additional species are found.¹⁰⁰ St. Thomas did not devise these many species under divination, but rather adopted them from the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville.

Aquinas organizes the species of divination into three basic groups. The first group concerns seeking knowledge of the future through explicit consultation and pacts with demons. These species are divided according to the various ways in which demons can communicate with human beings, for example, through (1) apparitions or (2) dreams.¹⁰¹

The second basic group of species under divination includes actions where knowledge of the future is sought through observation of various natural things. These species here are divided by the kinds of natural things that diviners observe, such as the (1) movement of stars or (2) the cries of birds. Although this group does not involve an explicit consultation with demons, Aquinas believes there is a demonic connection in that "demons involve themselves in futile questionings about the future in

contrary vice, is defined as "using means that explicitly or implicitly invite demonic assistance for the purpose of seeking future or hidden knowledge." A virtue that mirrors divination according to this definition would seem to be "using appropriate means (such as reading prophecy in Scripture) to seek instruction (from God) about future or hidden things." Such appropriate means would seem necessary to religion related to instruction, given what is defective in the corresponding vice. For Aquinas, then, does the honoring of God through appropriate religious rites in this case imply somehow using appropriate means for receiving instruction?

¹⁰⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 3.

¹⁰¹ Aquinas believed that the direct involvement with demons characteristic of this first group of sins was certainly a more serious offense against God than the indirect involvement characteristic of the next two groups; see *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 3, ad 1. Aquinas teaches that demons ought not to be consulted about the future both because they are ignorant of future things and because any relationship with them is spiritually dangerous (*ST* II-II, q. 96, a. 1, ad 3). When he says that demons are ignorant here, he does not mean that they have no knowledge of the future, but rather that they can only know the future insofar as they can understand how effects usually proceed from their causes (e.g., the sun will rise tomorrow), and even then, not with unerring accuracy as God can. For imperfect angelic knowledge of the future, see: *ST* I, q. 57, a. 3, resp.; II-II, q. 172, a. 5, a. 6.

order that they might entangle people's minds with vain things."¹⁰²

The third basic group, which Thomas calls "sortilege" (*sors*), concerns observing some external human action performed for the purpose of discovering the future. Species in this group are divided by St. Thomas according to the different possible external actions (or the results of these actions) through which the future is sought, such as (1) the drawing of lots or (2) the casting of dice. As with the previous group, Aquinas considers there to be demonic involvement, even though demons are not explicitly invoked or consulted.

All told, St. Thomas in this article names fourteen different species under divination. If one counts as species kinds of human action that Aquinas describes but does not name, the number grows to twenty or so.

Unsurprisingly, the way object determines these numerous species under divination parallels the way an object determines the (more general) sin of divination considered as a genus for these species. A telling demonstration of this can be found in an objection and response in Aquinas's article concerning the various species under the genus divination. An objection begins by recalling the principle that a human action's species is taken from its end. It then observes, however, that the various species falling under divination all have the same end, namely, to know the future. The objection concludes that, based on St. Thomas's own principle for specification of human action, all types of divination should belong to a single species determined by this common end.¹⁰³

Aquinas's succinct response is as follows: "Knowledge of future or hidden things is the ultimate end from which is taken the general formal character [*ratio*] of divination. Diverse species [of divination] are distinguished according to their proper objects or matters, namely insofar as in diverse matters knowledge of hidden things is considered."¹⁰⁴

As we can see from his reply, St. Thomas understands that the various species of divination all have both an object and an end. His description of knowledge of future or hidden things as an "ultimate" end might initially lead a reader to believe that this "knowledge" is remote and irrelevant to the determination of these various species under divination.¹⁰⁵ In

¹⁰² *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 2, resp.: "Daemones se ingerunt vanis inquisitionibus futurorum, ut mentes hominum implicent vanitate."

¹⁰³ *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 3, obj. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 3, ad 2: "Cognitio futurorum vel occultorum est ultimus finis, ex quo sumitur generalis ratio divinationis. Distinguuntur autem diversae species secundum propria objecta sive materias, prout scilicet in diversis rebus occultorum cognitio consideratur."

¹⁰⁵ In some contexts, when St. Thomas speaks about an "ultimate end," he is referring

his response, however, Aquinas explicitly states that the end of seeking “knowledge of future or hidden things” constitutes a dimension of the formal character (*ratio*) of these various species of action. For Aquinas to assert this makes sense. The various objects of these species of divination do not by themselves define what is characteristic of these sins; as related to divination, these objects would not be sought unless they led to the end of knowledge of future or hidden things. Since all of these species share the same end, only the objects could differentiate the various species. Further, the different means are the various ways in which demons are consulted, or at least given an opportunity to insinuate themselves; any such inappropriate relation with a demon is the reason that these actions offend against religion, which gives honor only to God. The key differences for these many species under divination, therefore, are not their common end, but their distinctive objects.¹⁰⁶

So, to sum up, the many and various human actions and habits belonging to religion and superstition possess an object and end. Although an end is sometimes predominant, as when idolatry is defined by offering worship (object) to a creature (end), in the majority of species, the predominant role in specifying is played by their objects. This is in marked contrast to the species of human actions addressed earlier, where ends always played the predominant role in determining their species.

to the final end of a human being, namely, happiness. For instance, he states in *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 8, resp.: “If therefore we speak about the ultimate end of man insofar as it is that thing which is the end, thus all other things concur in the ultimate end of man, because God is the ultimate end of man [*Deus est ultimus finis hominis*] and of all other things”; see also *ST* I-II, q. 3, a. 1, resp. In the text about divination considered above, however, Aquinas does not seem to be thinking of “future knowledge” as though it were an ultimate end for a human being, that is, a kind of false god substituting for the true God in whom happiness is found. Instead, “ultimate end” here seems simply to mean the final end in a series of related ends; in other words, “knowledge of the future” is the goal a human agent is aiming at, and various means for obtaining such knowledge are the objects or proximate ends that conduce to it. Aquinas also uses “ultimate end” in this way elsewhere. For example, he asserts in *ST* I-II, q. 12, a. 3, resp., that a sick person’s “ultimate end” is “health”: “For intention is not only of an ultimate end, as is said, but also of an intermediate end. Someone intends at the same time both the proximate and ultimate end [*finem proximum, et ultimum*], say, preparing medicine and health.” “Health” here is not intended to be that in which a person’s happiness consists, but rather the final end of two goals where one is willed for the sake of obtaining the other.

¹⁰⁶ *ST* II-II, q. 95, a. 2, ad 1.

Penance

A final species of human action to be considered is penance (*poenitentia*). Penance is sorrow for an offense committed against God with a view to eradicating this past sin and to living a new life free from sin. (When St. Thomas refers to eradicating “past sin,” he is not referring to the sin itself, which cannot be undone, but rather to sin’s effects, such as the offense against God and the debt of punishment.)¹⁰⁷ As we shall see, the inclusion and arrangement of certain elements in Aquinas’s definition will vary a bit in his different presentations of this virtue. Regardless of the variations, however, St. Thomas’s definition of penance will always include both an object and end.

St. Thomas first treats penance in his *Sentences*, writing two questions (ten articles) on this virtue. In significant respects, Aquinas’s teaching about penance in this work resembles his teaching about religion. For instance, as with religion, penance is annexed to justice. Why? Although penance lacks the full character of justice since a human being can never adequately recompense God for the offense sin brings against the divine majesty, nevertheless, penance is better associated with justice than with any of the other preeminent virtues (cardinal and theological) because penance involves response to a debt—a defining mark of justice—even if this debt cannot be fully satisfied.¹⁰⁸ But as with religion, the question arises as to why the theological virtues have been overlooked when associating penance with a virtue. Is not penance directed to God, much as faith, hope, and charity are?¹⁰⁹ And if so, would not penance be better associated with one of these three? Aquinas’s reply in the *Sentences* resembles closely his reply regarding religion from the *Summa* above:

A theological virtue has the same reality for its object and end. In penance, however, this is not the case, because its object is the sin committed, which [penance] intends to expiate; its end, however, is God, to whom [the penitent] intends to be reconciled; and therefore it is not a theological virtue, but ought to be numbered among the moral virtues.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *ST* III, q. 85, a. 1, ad 3.

¹⁰⁸ *In IV sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 5, resp. and ad 1; see also *ST* III, q. 85, a. 3, resp. and ad 2.

¹⁰⁹ *In IV sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4, obj. 1.

¹¹⁰ *In IV sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4, resp.: “Virtus theologica habet idem pro objecto et pro fine. Hoc autem non est in poenitentia: quia objectum ejus est peccatum commissum, quod intendit expiare; finis autem est Deus, cui intendit reconciliari;

Appearing in the same article is a more specific version of the objection which argues that penance ought to be associated with charity rather than with justice. Aquinas's reply to this objection is of interest for our investigation because, before he addresses the virtue of penance directly, he makes a distinction concerning where object and end can be found in various kinds of infused virtues:

Virtues that are infused relate to God in three ways. For certain ones have God as object and end, as the theological virtues do. Others have God not for that object in which their act passes, but for a proximate end, as is clear concerning the act of worship [*latría*], which has some demonstration of servitude as if for its matter, which it immediately ordains to God as if to an end; and such virtues are closest to the theological. . . . Certain others, however, hold God neither as object, nor as proximate end, but for the ultimate end; as temperance which has passion for its matter, and quiet of the soul for its proximate end; but this is further ordained to God. Penance, however, although it does not have God for its object, nevertheless has God for its proximate end: because for this [a man] is moved in destroying the sins [he has] committed, that he might be reconciled to God.¹¹¹

"Worship" (*latría*) mentioned here is a virtue closely associated with religion: *latría* involves the servitude human beings give to God, while

et ideo non est virtus theologica, sed inter morales virtutes numeranda est." See also ad 1, where the object is described more precisely as grieving for sins committed. Elsewhere in his *Sentences*, Aquinas seems to view the intention to expiate as an aspect (*ratio*) of the object; see *In IV sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 3, resp.

¹¹¹ *In IV sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4, ad 2: "Virtutes infusae tripliciter se habent ad deum. Quaedam enim habent deum pro objecto et fine, sicut theologicae. Quaedam non pro objecto in quod transeat earum actus, sed pro fine proximo: sicut patet de latría, quae aliquas servitutis protestationes quasi materiam habet, quas immediate ordinat in deum quasi in finem; et tales virtutes propinquissimae sunt theologis: unde et actus harum virtutum attribuuntur virtutibus theologis, sicut proximis imperantibus. Unde dicitur in augustino, quod fide, spe et caritate colitur deus. Quaedam autem non habent deum pro objecto, neque pro fine proximo, sed ultimo; sicut temperantia quae habet passiones pro materia, et quietem animi pro fine proximo; sed hanc ulterius ordinat ad deum. Poenitentia autem quamvis non habeat Deum pro objecto, habet tamen Deum pro fine proximo: quia ad hoc in peccata commissa destruenda movetur ut Deo reconcilietur; et ideo actus ejus, scilicet peccatum expellere, vel justificare, quandoque fidei, quandoque caritati ascribitur."

religion involves the ceremonial rites (*cultus*) by which God is honored. (At times, Aquinas refers to these two virtues almost interchangeably.)¹¹² Although St. Thomas in the text quoted above is only addressing infused virtues, it is noteworthy for our purposes that he explicitly recognizes worship (*latría*) and penance as belonging to a special category of habits: those possessing both an object and a special “proximate end” (here God). This kind of habit is differentiated from the theological virtues, which have God as their object, and from virtues possessing their own matter/object and proximate end, but which are related to God as an ultimate end, as happens when an action is commanded by charity.¹¹³ Aquinas here again identifies a category of habit (and by extension, human action), defined by an object and a (proximate) end, which he distinguishes from other categories of habit which are related to object and end in a different way.

When St. Thomas addresses penance later in his career in the *Summa theologiae*, his descriptions are somewhat different from what one finds in the *Sentences*. He does not call God an “end” (*finis*) of penance, even when considering whether penance should be affiliated with the theological virtues, the question that occasioned Thomas’s identification of God as a proximate end of penance in the *Sentences*.¹¹⁴ In the *Summa theologiae*, Aquinas identifies the removal of sin as an end of penance.¹¹⁵ For example, in one text, he states that penance “assumes a (properly) moderated sorrow for past sins with the intention of removing them.”¹¹⁶ In a second

¹¹² For the distinction between *latría* and *religio*, see: *ST* II-II, q. 94, a. 1, ad 2; q. 81, a. 1, obj. and ad 3; *In* III *sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4, sc 1. Thomas acknowledges that *latría* and *religio* belong to the same virtue (*In* III *sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 1, resp.). In the *Sentences*, he describes *latría* as possessing both an object and end in a way nearly identical to his depiction of *religio* in *ST* II-II, q. 81, a. 5, above: in addition to *In* IV *sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4, ad 2, just quoted, see *In* III *sent.*, d. 9, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 3, resp. and ad 2. For *latría* and *religio* as closely related alternatives, see: *In* IV *sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 5, resp.; *ST* II-II, q. 88, a. 5, sc and resp.; q. 89, a. 4, resp.

¹¹³ This passage also presents temperance as having both matter (object) and end, raising the question of whether temperance and virtues related to it can also be conceived of according to this model.

¹¹⁴ When St. Thomas addresses whether penance should be a theological virtue in the *Summa*, he identifies the matter of penance as “human acts through which God is offended or placated.” He identifies God as “he to whom justice [is due],” but avoids the word *finis* when describing God. See *ST* III, q. 85, a. 3, obj. and ad 1.

¹¹⁵ The intention to expiate sin is present in Thomas’s description from the *Sentences*; however, it is not given the prominence that God as an end is accorded. (See the text from *In* IV *sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4, resp. above.)

¹¹⁶ *ST* III, q. 85, a. 1, resp: “Poenitens assumit moderatum dolorem de peccatis praeteritis, cum intentione removendi ea.”

text, St. Thomas is discerning how displeasure of past sin relates to two virtues, charity and penance. He draws a distinction, asserting that while displeasure for past sin in itself pertains to charity, displeasure with “an intention for working for the eradication of past sin” requires a special virtue, penance.¹¹⁷

A case might also be made that Aquinas sometimes suggests “amendment” as an end for penance. He says that penance involves “detesting past sin, with a purpose [*proposito*] of changing life for the better, which is as if [*quasi*] the end [*finis*] of penance.” St. Thomas continues that “because moral matters receive a species according to an end . . . it follows that diverse species of penance are taken from diverse changes [of life] that the penitent intends.”¹¹⁸ He then proposes three species of penance based on such different ends: penance before baptism, penance for mortal sin, and penance for venial sin.¹¹⁹

The differences in how the end of penance is identified in the *Sentences* and the *Summa theologiae* do not seem to involve a significant re-conceiving of penance by Aquinas. In both works, the penitent chooses to grieve past sin against God, to remove the punishment due to sin through expiation (with God’s assistance), and to amend his or her life. The variations in description may simply be the result of the challenge of applying the object-and-end paradigm to a complex virtue whose definition possesses

¹¹⁷ ST III, q. 85, a. 2, ad 1: “Sed intentio operandi ad deletionem peccati praeteriti requirit specialem virtutem.” Although Thomas does not use the word “end” (*finis*) in the two passages just cited, “removal of sin” can be identified as end because Thomas asserts that the agent “intends” removal of sin, and, as we noted earlier, intention for him by definition is a will act directed to an end (see ST I-II, q. 12, a. 1, resp., ad 4).

¹¹⁸ ST III, q. 90, a. 4, resp.: “. . . detestetur peccata praeterita, cum proposito immutandi vitam in melius, quod est quasi poenitentiae finis. Et quia moralia recipiunt speciem secundum finem . . . ; consequens est quod diversae species poenitentiae accipiantur secundum diversas immutationes quas poenitens intendit.”

¹¹⁹ ST III, q. 90, a. 4, resp. Thomas uses “as if” (*quasi*) when describing “the purpose of changing life for the better” as an end for penance, which might suggest that he is using “end” in some qualified way, but he then goes on to identify three different “purposes” in which life is changed for the better as the very elements by which three further species of penance are defined. Another *Summa* passage seems to propose *emendationis proposito* as the end of penance without using *finis*: “A penitent sorrows over sin committed insofar as it is an offense to God, with a purpose of amendment [*cum emendationis proposito*]” (ST III, q. 85, a. 3, resp.). Aquinas sometimes also calls this “purpose of amendment” the “proper act” of penance, presumably because this act related to the end of penance differentiates the virtue of penance from other sorrow for sin not related to this virtue; see ST III, q. 85, a. 4, resp.

a number of essential components. While the description of the end of penance varies somewhat in the different texts where it is addressed, for our present purposes, we need only to note that St. Thomas does not seem to have proposed in any of his works a definition of penance that possesses only an object without a related (proximate) end. Whatever variation we consider, then, penance should be included among the species of human actions and habits treated in this article.

Some General Considerations

Now that we have examined individually a number of different species of human action where object and end are required for their definition, we can consider some general observations about them.

Review of Evidence

The evidence that some species of human action proposed by Aquinas require an object and end for their definition can be summarized as follows.

First, for each of the species of human action proposed above, Thomas identifies two elements in its definition, with one element corresponding to what an agent is doing (object), and the other corresponding to an agent’s further purpose in acting (end). Here is a table summarizing these various species of human actions. (This table includes all the species of divination, even those we only referred to generally above.)¹²⁰

Species of action	What an agent is doing (object)	An agent’s purpose in acting (end)
1. scandal (<i>scandalum</i>) as a special sin	A deficient word or deed	to draw another into sin

¹²⁰ Regarding the many species of divination, the Latin names will be used in the table because in a number of cases no obvious or familiar English equivalents exist. Did Aquinas consider the six unnamed descriptions of actions under *sors* (sortilege) to be distinct species of divination or just illustrations of the species *sors*? Thomas seems to consider them distinct species. At the end of the article, Aquinas names *sors* as a genus, and notes that “many” (*multa*) are contained under it (*ST*, II-II, q. 95, a. 3, resp.). Presumably, he means “many species,” since species fall under a genus. This would follow the pattern of the other two genera named by St. Thomas, *nigromanticus* (nigromancy) and *augurium* (augury), both of which have many named species under them.

2. fraternal correction (<i>correctio fraterna</i>)	admonition of another	to persuade him or her to repent from sin
3. reviling (<i>contumelia</i>)	speaking ill of another	to dishonor him or her
4. backbiting (<i>detractio</i>)	speaking ill of another	to denigrate his or her reputation
5. derision (<i>derisio</i>)	speaking ill of another	to shame him or her (through jest)
6. tale-bearing (<i>susurratio</i>)	speaking ill (or at least an unpleasant good) about one friend to another	to break apart the friendship
7.a. religion (<i>religio</i>)	offering due worship (i.e., <i>cultus</i> , religious ceremony)	to honor God
7.b. religion	offering due worship ¹²¹	to honor God for his instruction
7.c. religion	offering due worship	to honor God for his guidance ¹²²
Species of Superstition (<i>superstitio</i>)		
8.a. [unnamed species of superstition related to undue means]	offering some inappropriate ceremony (in worship)	to honor God
8.b. idolatry (<i>idololatria</i>) (superstition from a first kind of undue end)	offering something (in worship) ¹²³	to honor a creature (in ways that only God should be honored)

¹²¹ See note 99 above.

¹²² These three are not identified as three different species of religion by St. Thomas, so all of them may be variations in understanding the one species of religion.

¹²³ The means here is not "offering due worship," as above, since the action would presumably still be idolatry, even if what is offered would be inappropriate if it were offered to God.

8.c. divination (<i>divinatio</i>) (superstition from a second kind of undue end)	using means that explicitly or implicitly invite demonic assistance	to seek knowledge of the future or hidden knowledge (beyond what a human being ought to possess)
8.d. observances (<i>observantiae</i>) (superstition from a third kind of undue end)	engaging in practices that explicitly or implicitly invite demonic assistance	to bring about certain desired effects (that a human being ought only to seek from God or in accord with his direction)
Species of Divination: 8.c.(i). <i>praestigium</i>	attending to demonic apparitions	to seek knowledge of the future or hidden knowledge beyond what a human being ought to possess (hereafter, abbreviated as “to seek knowledge of the future”)
8.c.(ii). <i>divinatio somniorum</i>	interpreting dreams influenced by demons	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(iii). <i>nigromantia</i>	attending to apparitions and/or locutions from the dead (which are really demonic manifestations)	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(iv). <i>divinatio per Pythones</i>	attending to messages from possessed persons	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(v). <i>geomantia</i>	interpreting demonically produced shapes or signs appearing in earth (e.g. wood, iron, or polished stone)	to seek knowledge of the future

8.c.(vi). <i>hydromantia</i>	interpreting demonically produced shapes or signs appearing in water	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(vii). <i>aeromantia</i>	interpreting demonically produced shapes or signs appearing in air	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(viii). <i>pyromantia</i>	interpreting demonically produced shapes or signs appearing in fire	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(ix). <i>aruspicium</i>	interpreting entrails of animals immolated on altars of demons in which appear shapes or signs produced by demons	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(x). unnamed sin (but since it is said to <i>pertinet ad astrologos</i> , perhaps <i>astrologia</i>)	interpreting the position and movement of stars in relation to the day of a person's birth	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xi). <i>augurium</i>	interpreting natural motions or sounds, such as movements or cries of birds or animals, the sneezing of men, or sudden movements of limbs	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xii). <i>omen</i>	interpreting human words (with a different meaning from the one intended by the speaker)	to seek knowledge of the future

8.c.(xiii). <i>chiromantia</i>	interpreting lines in the hand	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xiv). <i>spatulimantia</i>	interpreting shoulder blades of animals	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xv). <i>sors</i>	interpreting some human action (or the result of such an action)	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xvi). unnamed	using the drawing of lots	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xvii). unnamed	using the creation of shapes resulting from molten lead poured into water	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xviii). unnamed	using the drawing of one sheet of paper among several	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xix). unnamed	using the drawing of one stick among several sticks of unequal length	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xx). unnamed	using the casting of dice	to seek knowledge of the future
8.c.(xxi). unnamed	reading a text that catches one's eye when a book is opened	to seek knowledge of the future
9. penance (<i>poenitentia</i>)	sorrow for past sin	to reconcile with God (variation 1) to remove the sin (i.e., to satisfy the punishment due to sin) (variation 2) to make amends (variation 3)

(Sub)species of penance		
10.a. penance before baptism	detesting one's past sins	to change one's life for the better in a regeneration to a new life (in baptism)
10.b. penance for mortal sin	detesting one's past sins	to change one's life for the better through reparation for a past life already corrupted (by mortal sin)
10.c penance for venial sin	detesting one's past sins	to change one's life for the better to a more perfect operation of life (by removing venial sin)

For many of the species in this table, Thomas in at least one text uses the terms *objectum* and *finis* to identify the two elements.¹²⁴ For all of these species, Aquinas identifies an element of the action as its *finis*.¹²⁵

That *finis* (end) is named for each species above is, in itself, significant. In cases where a species of human action is defined only by its object (e.g., dissimulation, as noted in the introduction), an end will not be included in its definition for obvious reasons.

It is true that a species defined only by its object may be willed for the sake of a (further) end that provides an additional moral species if this end conforms with or is opposed to right reason in some distinctive way, as in the example earlier from the *Sentences* of someone who fornicates for

¹²⁴ Thomas uses the terms *objectum* and *finis* to identify the two elements in the following: scandal (*In IV sent.*, d. 38, q. 2, a. 2, qa. 2, resp.), backbiting (*ST II-II*, q. 74, a. 2, ad 1), tale-bearing (*ST II-II*, q. 74, a. 2, ad 1), religion (*ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 5, resp.), penance (*In IV sent.*, d. 14, q. 1, a. 1, qa. 4, resp; see also ad 1), and superstition (*ST II-II*, q. 92, a. 2, resp.). In describing generally the various species of divination, he also uses *objectum* and *finis* to name the two elements (*ST II-II*, q. 95, a. 3, ad 2).

¹²⁵ In addition to the texts in the previous note, one can see *finis* used in fraternal correction (*ST II-II*, q. 33, a. 6, resp.), reviling (*ST II-II*, q. 75, a. 1, resp.), derision (*ST II-II*, q. 75, a. 1, resp.), and the three species of penance (*ST III*, q. 90, a. 4, resp.) Thomas in these texts uses *finis* to name "end," but does not use *objectum* to refer to what is being done. Even in these cases, however, his definition of the kind of human action or habit clearly includes an element corresponding to "what is being done" or "object."

the sake of (undue) wealth. This further end is not necessary, however, to define the species associated with its object. The agent could commit fornication for any number of ends.

In the species of human actions studied in this article, however, end plays a different role. The end is essential (together with the object) for defining a species of human action or habit, and often is the most important element for the specification. Aquinas in all the examples included in the table identifies an end (*finis*) as contributing to the definition/specification of the action or habit under consideration. (The ends proposed do not determine some further species.) This in itself is a clear sign that all of these species belong to the special kind of human actions (and habits) examined in this article.

A second piece of evidence that Aquinas posits human actions determined by both object and end is that on rare occasions, he will identify, not just a single species of human action/habit defined this way, but a category of such species. One recalls, for example, how St. Thomas in the *Sentences* places “scandal as a special sin” and “building up a neighbor” together in a category of actions defined by object and end, and how in a different passage from the *Sentences*, he does something comparable with “worship” (*latría*) and “penance.” In both of these examples, Aquinas will even compare human actions/habits defined by both object and end with other categories of human action/habits where object and end specify differently, as when he compares “scandal as a special sin” (defined by object and end) to “fornication done simply for pleasure” and “fornication for the sake of wealth”.¹²⁶

Finally, the most obvious and persuasive evidence that St. Thomas proposes the kinds of actions we are considering is found on those occasions when he identifies by name both an object and end for a species of human action/habit and then explains how both object and end should be understood in determining the species and/or its gravity. We saw this above in Aquinas’s treatment of backbiting, tale-bearing, religion, and superstition (including divination with its numerous [sub]species).

Features of Specification in Different Kinds of Human Actions Studied

The kinds of human action that we have considered in this article have

¹²⁶ Another example of Aquinas grouping kinds of human action defined by object and end is where he states that reviling, backbiting, derision, and tale-bearing are together sins of a “certain kind.” He also groups together many different species under divination and shows how they follow a similar pattern in their specification.

important similarities, but also some differences in how they are specified.

Scandal, for instance, has some distinctive features. As we noted earlier, scandal's object can contain as possibilities human actions (and habits) belonging to species of many kinds. For example, one can lead another to sin through murder, theft, drunkenness, and so forth. When proposing the object in his definition of scandal, Aquinas must use a broad description which includes them all: "words or deeds that are evil or have the appearance of evil." When St. Thomas addresses scandal, he asserts that end (rather than object) is preeminent in specification. The end for him is formal, while the various possible sins in scandal's object are as if material.¹²⁷ Why might St. Thomas assert this? Firstly, Aquinas argues that an end has a greater formal influence over an object in human action because the object is chosen for the end's sake.¹²⁸ To illustrate, in scandal as a special sin, the reason someone is choosing a deficient word or deed is the hope that this word or deed will occasion another's spiritual downfall. The agent in this case would not choose this object if he or she did not will this end, since the end is the overarching aim of his or her action.

Secondly, the end of scandal (as a special sin) provides the one consistent defining feature of this sin when considering various individual acts of scandal. To illustrate, the end of "occasioning another's spiritual downfall" will always be present and help to define a human action as "scandal," regardless of which of many species of human action (murder, lying, stealing, etc.) might be determined by an object in particular acts of scandal.

The way scandal as a special sin is defined and specified can be compared and contrasted with the way that fraternal correction, reviling, backbiting, derision, and tale-bearing are defined and specified. With these five sins, the end is also preeminent in definition and specification. As with scandal, the object is chosen for the end's sake. In his various writings on this subject, including the text comparing backbiting and tale-bearing, St. Thomas shows that end has the greater formal influence over object in determining the species and gravity of these kinds of sin.¹²⁹

When considering fraternal correction and the four sins of speech, one also notices some differences regarding the influence of the end over the object as compared with scandal. First, the object for fraternal correction and the four sins of speech—"communicating someone's fault," or some similar expression—is much narrower as compared to the object of scandal, which can include a whole range of possible species of human action.

¹²⁷ *ST* II-II, q. 43, a. 3, ad 1.

¹²⁸ *ST* I-II, a. 75, a. 4, resp.; see also *ST* II-II, q. 110, a. 1, resp.

¹²⁹ *ST* II-II, q. 74, a. 2, ad 1.

Second, the object of the sins of speech and fraternal correction is usually more open to the formal influence of the end regarding the goodness or evil of the action than is the object of scandal. In scandal, the object typically defines a species of evil human action (though in some cases, it may have only the appearance of evil). Where an object is sinful, the action as a whole will be marked by this evil. For instance, someone who takes the life of an innocent person in order to occasion another's downfall cannot make this action good simply by willing a good end instead of an evil one. (The agent will still be murdering someone to achieve his or her good end.)

The objects of fraternal correction and the four sins of speech, however, do not define either a good or bad kind of human action: Aquinas proposes no species of human action determined only by this object. The various ends of fraternal correction and the four sins of speech, therefore, exercise a strong formal influence on the goodness or evil of the action: a person who "communicates someone's fault" (object) can change the species of the whole action from an evil species to a good one by changing his or her intention. For instance, someone communicating another's fault to dishonor him or her (the evil species of human action called "reviling") could decide instead to communicate the same fault with a view to the other person's repentance (a good species of human action called "fraternal correction"). As one can see, since the object does not in itself determine a moral species, the end has more influence in determining the fundamental moral character of the species of human action as good or evil. The end in sins of speech and fraternal correction, then, is the preeminent factor for determining whether the species of the human action (or habit) will be a good or evil one.¹³⁰

We can also consider human actions/habits where object plays a more prominent role: religion and superstition. As we noted above, Aquinas attributes two elements to religion: what is offered in worship (object) and the honoring of the one, true God (end). In the kinds of human actions (and habits) we have addressed already, end plays such a prominent role in specification that the contribution of the object is minimal. Although none of the species treated above could have been defined without its object, no object had sufficient formal influence to be the primary element in determining a species. Religion and superstition, however, are different in this regard. This is not to assert that end no longer plays a significant

¹³⁰ A change of end could mean a change in the moral character (good or evil) of the overall action in scandal, though this would be atypical. It could happen if the object is not sinful in itself, but only has the appearance of evil. In this case, a new good end could determine the whole action to be good.

role in some cases. If someone had asked Thomas whether the object in religion or superstition is willed for the sake of the end, he would surely have said it is. Furthermore, some species under religion and superstition are clearly differentiated by their ends, as when idolatry is defined and specified because an agent offering religious rites intends as end a creature rather than the creator.

Nevertheless, Aquinas understands “object” in religion and superstition to have a significant enough formal influence over the action that it can sometimes play the predominant role in determining a species. We saw this clearly when Aquinas identified a species of superstition that is determined by its object: offering an inappropriate rite as a means (such as when a Christian offers an Old Testament sacrifice) to God (as end). We also saw this above in Aquinas’s consideration of divination. The various species of divination share a single end of seeking future or hidden things. It is the objects, that is, the various illicit means for knowing the future, which determine the many species under divination. This way of defining divination makes sense both because each of these means involve entanglement with demons—the very thing that opposes the good of religion—and because the means is the element that differs among the species, since they share a common end of seeking knowledge of the future. If the end had formal preeminence in determining species here, all divination would belong to a single species. In religion and superstition, then, both object and end play an important role in definition and specification, though in different ways, depending on the species.

Regarding penance, Aquinas’s various descriptions of this kind of action make it more difficult to analyze and summarize. The end here also seems to have a formal priority in the sin’s definition. For example, as we noted earlier, Aquinas argues that “sorrow for sin” can sometimes be associated with charity, but belongs to penance when this sorrow is related to penance’s end of working for the eradication of past sin.

Concluding Reflections

What has been learned from this investigation? First, and most obviously, this study has cast more light on the nature of the species of human action in Aquinas under examination and how object and end contribute to their definition and specification.

Second, it helps us to understand better St. Thomas’s moral principles in specification. For instance, when examining a text where Aquinas claims that an action’s end specifies, one should now consider whether he means that the end brings an additional moral species, or is an essential component that helps to determine a single moral species.

Third, this study helps us to appreciate Aquinas's prudence as a moralist in addressing these complex species of human actions (and habits). St. Thomas inherited and used certain basic moral terms from the tradition, including *objectum* and *finis*. These two terms are relatively easy to use in more straightforward cases. But the species we explored above are complex, and "object" and "end" cannot be applied simplistically when defining and specifying them. Aquinas's approach is not to deny the complexity of these human actions and to insist on a more simple use of object and end. Instead, he cleverly adapts the terms and principles at his disposal to these more complex kinds of human action. In doing so, he maintains what is at the heart of his approach to specification. St. Thomas held that what is willed by a human agent has certain key formal features discovered by a comparison to right reason, and that these formal features define and determine the species of human actions. In some cases, such as dissimulation or adultery, only an object of a human action is needed in a comparison to right reason because everything necessary for defining and determining the species of a human action is found there. In the species of human action we have been examining, however, formal aspects key to understanding how an action either realizes or opposes a moral good fall both in the object and in a related end. Thomas appreciates this difference and adjusts his approach accordingly. He avoids the mistakes of either ignoring this related end in specification or of thinking that he needs to take into account in specification every possible end or effect, no matter how remote. What is essential to defining and specifying these kinds of human action/habit is found in both its object and its related end, and he tailors his approach accordingly.¹³¹ So, when treating these complex species, St. Thomas remains faithful to his key insight for how species of human actions are defined and determined, while making reasonable accommodations to account for the more complex structure of these species of human action.

Further work can certainly be done in studying the species of human actions we have just considered. Additional species of human actions that share their characteristic traits may be discovered in Aquinas's writings.¹³²

¹³¹ These kinds of action defined by an object and related end have a kind of integrity such that they can even serve as if a means for further ends. For example, St. Thomas proposes that penance and/or religion can be further commanded by charity (for penance, see *In IV sent.*, d. 17, q. 1, a. 5, qa. 3, ad 2; and *ST III*, q. 85, a. 2, ad 1; for religion, see *ST II-II*, q. 81, a. 5, ad 1). Aquinas also identifies two acts as particular to religion, devotion and prayer, and then shows how they can be directed further to charity (*ST II-II*, q. 82, a. 2, ad 1; q. 83, a. 15, resp.)

¹³² For example, this study may prove helpful in sorting out some of Aquinas's texts

This may include species of human actions (or habits) where St. Thomas does not use the terms “object” or “end,” but where it is clear from the context that the human action possesses essential elements which correspond to “what an agent is doing” (object) and “why an agent is doing this” (end). Also, there are kinds of human action which Aquinas presents as possessing both an object and end in his early writings, but treats them without reference to a related end in his later writings. These kinds of actions and the reasons for St. Thomas’s reappraisal of them would also benefit from further investigation.¹³³ 

addressing species related to killing. For example, see: *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 3, obj. and ad 3; II-II, q. 64.

¹³³ My thanks to Steven and Christine Jensen for their capable proofreading of this article. I would also like to thank Brett Kendall and Katie Takats for their competent editorial assistance in preparing this article for publication.