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Natural Law & Right Reason in the Moral Theory of St. Thomas Aquinas

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1990

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NATURAL LAW AND RIGHT REASON IN THE MORAL THEORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Religion and Philosophy

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Craig A. Boyd

March 1990

NATURAL LAW AND RIGHT REASON IN THE MORAL THEORY OF

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Recommended April 9, 1990
(Date)

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NATURAL LAW AND RIGHT REASON IN THE MORAL THEORY OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

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A major problem with current discussions on the moral theory of St. Thomas Aquinas is the fact that many interpreters present Thomas's thought as a natural-law morality. While natural law is an element of Thomas's moral theory, it plays a subordinate role to the virtue of prudence.

The natural law interpreters of St. Thomas's moral theory hold that (1) natural law is the dominant element, (2) natural law can be treated in isolation from Thomas's account of virtue, and (3) the principles of natural law make Thomas's moral theory abstract and deontological. These interpretations rarely consider the virtue of prudence.

Natural law, in Thomas's moral theory, makes general statements about human nature and also sets the parameters for morally good human activity. However, it fails to function adequately on the level of an agent's particular moral problems. The general precepts of natural law do not function as proximate principles of human action. But the special function of moral virtue is to provide the agent with

the necessary proximate principles of human action.

Virtue is an acquired disposition of the soul that functions as a proximate principle of action. Holding a special place in Thomas's moral theory, prudence is primary among the moral virtues. It is defined as "right reason concerning things to be done." Prudence holds a middle place between the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues. It requires right thinking about moral matters, but it also requires the possession of a right appetite.

This essay includes some discussion of human nature, as ethics is subordinated to psychology. Furthermore, we must show how the human agent engages in moral activity, and this requires discussing the psychological processes involved in human action.

It is my purpose to explore the functions of natural law and virtue and to take account of the relationship between them in Thomas's moral theory. After establishing a proper understanding of Thomas's view, it will be clear that the natural-law interpreters have missed a crucial element in his ethical theory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CG. Book, chapter.	Summa Contra Gentiles.
Part, question, article, reply.	Summa Theologiae, without title.

Philosophical Commentaries

Aristotle: Title, Book, chapter, and lecture as required.

In Ethic.	Commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics
In Meta.	Commentary on the Metaphysics
In Periherm.	Commentary on Interpretation
In Physic.	Commentary on the Physics
In Post.	Commentary on the Posterior Analytics
In Prior.	Commentary on the Prior Analytics

Boethius:

In De Trin.	Commentary on the Trinity

Main titles are given in full for On Truth and On the Virtues in General. All abreviations follow the notation as found in the Summa Theologiae (in 61 vols.), ed. Thomas Gilby et al. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964-76.

INTRODUCTION

Some twentieth-century historians of philosophy (e.g. W.D. Hudson and Norman Robinson)[1] assign Thomas Aquinas the role of "the father of Natural Law Ethics." According to these historians the dominant element in Thomas's moral theory is an emphasis on a divinely ordained natural law which governs man's actions.

This "natural law" interpretation contends that (1) natural law is the dominant element of Thomas's moral theory; (2) that natural law can be treated in isolation from Thomas's doctrine of virtue and right reason, and (3) that the principles of natural law provide humanity with abstract, deontological rules of moral behavior.

Both Hudson and Robinson contend that natural law is the dominant element in Thomas's moral theory. In reference to Thomas's thought, Hudson claims: "It (Thomistic ethics) is dominated by the concept of natural law."[2] Agreeing with this perspective, Robinson states, "St. Thomas is chiefly regarded as an exponent of the theory of natural law."[3]

Secondly, the proponents of this natural law interpretation of Thomas's moral philosophy think that a discussion of natural law, in isolation from Thomas's account

of virtue and right reason, is a sufficient treatment of Thomas's moral theory. Robinson never mentions Thomas's "Treatise on the Virtues." The term "prudence" is ignored altogether. And "reason" is mentioned only as a vague entity that comes to understand "the good" and the "natural law."[4]

Finally, the natural law interpreters take Thomas's moral theory as providing all humans with only abstract, deontological principles of moral behavior. They claim that reason apprehends "man's natural good."[5] Humans come to recognize the natural law, as founded upon their own nature. The agent derives all norms of behavior from the natural law, seemingly as deontological principles. The principles of natural law are intuited and construed as incommensurable and absolute moral norms that never admit of exception ("Do not kill, ever."). From the natural law we get the prohibitions against murder, theft, and adultery, without any consideration of how to incorporate these prohibitions into our daily affairs. Robinson claims that the natural law "is . . . highly abstract. The concept of human nature . . . operative in the thought of St. Thomas, was much less concrete than to be found in . . . Thomas Hobbes."[6]

In the early 1970s this traditional view was challenged by Vernon Bourke and James Weisheipl.[7] While Bourke and Weisheipl agree that Aquinas has been viewed as a natural law ethicist, Bourke claims that <u>recta ratio</u> (i.e. "right reason") is the essential element in Thomas's ethical theory.

Hence, it is better called "orthological" ethics.[8] A correct understanding of the relationships between various moral agents and the universe with which these agents come into contact is the foundational principle in orthological ethical theory. Specifically, Thomas's moral doctrine is based on man's ability to use his reason in a correct manner so that he behaves in an ethical fashion (i.e. so that his actions are in accordance with his rational faculty). When man departs from right reason, he is no longer acting in a moral manner.

In this discussion I will deal with the problems of interpretation of Natural law as found in St. Thomas's writings in the following manner. I will begin by giving, in chapter one, a brief summary of Thomas's account of Natural law. In the second chapter, I will discuss how demonstration works in moral science. In chapter three, I will consider the nature of the human act. To understand the nature of the human act, I will consider the nature of habit and virtue in chapter four. In chapter five, I will note how prudence is the primary moral virtue. And in chapter six, I will relate the Natural law to Thomas's account of virtue, and I shall relate my position to Hudson's and Robinson's interpretation of Thomas's moral theory.

One point that should be noted before embarking on this project is that the notion of right reason is crucial to the entire discussion. Right reason is not only central to the

practice of moral science, but it is also crucial to Thomas's account of prudence.

Through the discussion I hope to show that (1) natural law is an important element in Thomas's moral theory but it is not the most important element; (2) virtue or prudence has pride of place in Thomas's moral philosophy, and (3) Thomas's moral theory is neither abstract nor deontological.

NOTES

1. W.D. Hudson ed. Aquinas and Natural Law, D.J. O'Connor. (London: Macmillan, 1968). Norman Robinson The Groundwork of Christian Ethics. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971). See also Michael Bayles and Kenneth Henley eds. Right Conduct: Theories and Applications. (New York: Random House, 1983).

2. Hudson, editor's preface.

3. Robinson, 36.

4. Bayles and Henley, in Right Conduct, do mention the notion of virtue. However, it is obvious from their treatment of Thomas that they fail to understand the importance of virtue. This failure is seen by simply noting that they use the "Treatise on Law" for their selection from Thomas. No reference is made to the "Treatise on the Virtues."

5. Robinson, 125.

6. Ibid.

7. Vernon Bourke "Is Thomas Aquinas a Natural Law Ethicist?" in The Monist Vol. 58 (1974). James Weisheipl Friar Thomas D'Aquino: His Life, Thought and Works. (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1974).

8. Bourke, 66.

CHAPTER 1

THE NATURAL LAW

Natural law is one type of law, and so both shares some qualities with other kinds of law and has some unique properties. As law it has similarities for Thomas to the eternal law, human law, and divine law. First, I will set natural law in the context of law in general and then look at the elements that are unique to this law.

All laws share certain common characteristics. The four common elements of all law include that it is (1) "an ordinance of reason," (2) "for the common good," (3) "made by the authority who has care of the community," and (4) "promulgated." Each of these must be considered separately.

One of the primary elements of law is that it is an "ordinance of reason" that guides human activity.

> Law is a rule and measure of acts, whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting: for lex (law) is derived from ligare (to bind), because it binds one to act. Now the rule and measure of human acts is the reason, which is the first principle of human acts. . . . Consequently it follows that law is something pertaining to reason (Summa Theologiae 1a2ae. 90,1).

Law is an order that issues from reason on more than one level, and in more than one context. God orders the structure of the universe; the laws that govern the universe

are derived from divine reason. The nature of the universe is limited by God's reason. Human law is likewise an order that issues from human reason, that prohibits, or restrains, certain actions. Since it is reason's function to command and guide action, law sets limits to what actions that can be commanded.

Law is a rational command of the intellect. Now to act rationally is to have a purpose, to act for an end. Therefore, command always operates with a view to an end. But to what end is law ordered? All laws are ordered to the common good as their end, according to Thomas.

Secondly, law is ordered for the common good. In other words, a law is a command given by a ruler that benefits an entire community. All laws are ordered to the common good. Ideally, human laws are ordered for the common good of individual communities. For example, the law of the city is ordered to the good of the city; the law of society is good for the whole society. As regards the universe, law is such that all beings are ordered in relation to a common good. Humans are ordered to the good of their communities (e.g. meeting each other's needs and living peacefully). The common good of non-rational animals is the perpetuation of the species.

The individual finds his or her good in the common good of the community. This principle holds true especially of human communities.

> Whoever promotes the common welfare of the community promotes his own welfare at the same time: and this for two reasons. First, because individual well-being cannot exist without the welfare of the family, or city, or realm. . . . Secondly, because man, being part of the family, or of the city, it is right that he should consider his personal well-being in the light of what prudence advises with regard to the common welfare (2a2ae. 47,10,ad2).

And again,

> You assess the goodness of any part in relationship to its whole. . . . Since every person is part of a political community he cannot be good unless he be well adjusted to the common good, nor can the community be sound unless its parts are in keeping (1a2ae. 92,1,ad2).

Human beings are social beings by their very nature as they "require relationships with others." Furthermore, all humans depend on others for their needs.[1] The individual good does not exist apart from the common good. Law provides the framework whereby all members are ordered to the common good.

Thirdly, law finds its origin in the one who has charge of the community. The authority who is in charge of the community may be either an individual or a group, "[T]o make law is the office of the entire people or of the public personage who has care of them" (1a2ae. 90,3). God has charge of the universal community of all beings. The source of legitimate human law is the ruler of the individual society, as he has in his care all the citizens of that community. A father has the responsibility of caring for his family.

The authority who has charge of the community must be able to enforce the law. A law without enforcement is no law at all. Penalties and rewards are attached to the precepts of law. For example, a law requiring taxation must be enforced. Taxes are no longer obligatory if no punishments are meted out to those who refuse to pay. The ruler must be able to punish the tax evader.

The one who makes law must be in a position such that his authority is greater than any individual within the community. Thus, the entire people or the public ruler, or God, has an authority that is greater than any individual.

Finally, laws must be promulgated. A law must be made known to those to whom it applies, as in the case of subjects being made aware of a king's law regarding taxes.

The natural law is promulgated from the fact that humans come to know it by means of their own cognitive abilities, without direct divine revelation. Human laws are promulgated as they apply to each member of the community by means of official declaration. Yet, sometimes humans are subject to law and sometimes they make law.

Law can be found in something in two different ways, according to Thomas. The first way is "in that which rules and measures," (1a2ae. 90,1) which Thomas believes is characteristic of reason. The second way is found in that "which is measured and ruled."(1a2ae. 90,1) In other words, law may apply to entities essentially or by way of

participation.

> Taken as a rule and measure, law can be present in two manners, first, and this is proper to the reason, as in the ruling and measuring principle, and in this manner it is in the reason alone; second, as in the subject ruled and measured, and in this manner law is present wherever it communicates a tendency to something, which tendency can be called derivitively, though not essentially, a 'law' (1a2ae. 90,1).

This distinction is made in order to point out that law is found essentially in reason. Law is a fuction of reason's active ordering capacity. The capacity to enact law is found only in those beings that are essentially rational. However, law also can be seen at work in those things that are ruled by law. In this second sense we find that law governs the behavior of the animal kingdom, as the animals are governed by laws of nature. Rational beings (e.g. God and humans) have the capability of instituting laws, as law is found in them essentially (i.e. in their reason). God promulgates the eternal and natural laws, while man promulgates human law. So while humans are subject to divine law and their nature manifests natural law, they formulate human law.

Law is an essential element for humans in two ways. Humans participate in the eternal and natural laws, as they are governed by God's reason. Humans necessarily seek "the good." As human beings, we have no choice but always seek what is perceived to be good. God determines the nature of the cosmos and humanity and in this way humans participate in God's reason as a part of God's creation.

There is no choice about being created to seeking the good. But what good is chosen can be governed by human mind and will.

> The rational creature directs his own life by mind and will, each of which needs to be ruled and bettered by God's mind and will. This is why over and above the guidance by which he rules himself as master of his actions, the rational creature needs to be ruled by God (1a. 103,5,ad3).

So in addition to being governed by divine reason, humans also have the capacity to act, and institute laws, on their own.

We can contrast humanity with an inanimate object. For example, a rock must obey the law of gravity when it is dropped from a cliff because mass and weight are part of the rock's characteristics. In this way it participates in the law of gravity, which God's reason instituted. However, the rock has no power of its own to choose, as it does not possess a rational soul. The rock is governed by God's legislation regarding laws of nature.[2] Non-rational beings merely participate in the laws governing the universe. They do not have the capacity to govern their own behavior.

In summary, law is a command of reason, for the common good, coming from one who has charge of the community, and is promulgated. Having seen how law functions, we may now turn our attention to the purpose of law.

Thomas claims that the purpose of law is the universal good, or end, of things. Now this may be taken in two ways.

Humans have a natural common good and a supernatural common good.

The supernatural common good is communion with God, i.e. the beatific vision. "Now the last end of human life is bliss or happiness" (Contra Gentiles I,25). And this is a common good (i.e. all humans desire this end, which is ultimately found in God). This is the desire of all intellectual beings.

Human life also has another common good. This common good is the natural good of all human societies. It is living in peace with other human beings.

Since all laws are directed for the common good, someone must institute these laws. There must be a lawmaker, if we perceive a law at work. On the cosmic level, God is the one who establishes laws of the universe, while on the human level, either a king or the general will of the people institute the laws of a state.

All law is for an end, but since ends differ, there are different types of law. There are three primary types of law: eternal, natural and human. The eternal law is the first and most important law. This law presupposes an omnipotent, omniscient, eternal, Christian God (i.e. a pantokrator). As this God is the all knowing one, God also possesses what Thomas calls "Divine Reason" (1a2ae. 91). Aquinas defines the eternal law in the following manner:

> Now it is evident, granted that the world is ruled by Divine Providence . . . that the whole community of the universe is governed by Divine Reason. Wherefore the very Idea of the government of things in God the Ruler of the universe, has the nature of a law. And since the Divine Reason's conception of things is not subject to time but is eternal... it is that this kind of law must be eternal (1a2ae. 91,1).

The eternal law is that which governs the entire universe, which issues forth from God, the Divine Ruler. It is by the eternal law that the laws of physics, animal behaviour, and plant growth are all promulgated.

> God impresses on the whole of nature the principles of the proper activities of things . . . every act and every motion is subject to the eternal law. In this fashion even non-rational creatures are subject to it through being moved by divine Providence (1a2ae. 93,5).

The eternal law, therefore, is the activity of "Divine Wisdom, as directing all actions and movements" (1a2ae. 93,5). Does this mean that all laws derive from divine reason? In response, Thomas states that "Every law is derived from the eternal law" (1a2ae. 93,3). The problem is to understand how the eternal law relates to the natural law. The overarching principle of law is the eternal law. Next in importance is the natural law, which applies specifically to human beings. This law also remains unchanged unless God decides to change human nature. The natural law "is a participation in the eternal law on the part of a rational creature" (1a2ae. 91,2). The rational creature's capacity to act freely and to direct himself to various activities is

mankind's participation in the eternal law. Non-rational animals are governed by God in a different way than humans are because they do not possess reason. They are governed by divine reason by way of obedience (1a2ae. 93,5). Humans, on the other hand, can "participate" in the eternal law simply because they have minds. It is due to the human's rational capacity that persons participate in eternal law. Therefore, only the acts of rational creatures fall within the scope of the natural law. The natural law is the unique element of the eternal law that governs the activity of human beings.

Among the precepts of natural law, the most important precept is that humans seek to find what is good, according to the dictates of reason. Humans are the only corporeal creature that can choose actions in accordance with reason.

> And so this is the first command of (natural) law, 'that good is to be sought and done, evil to be avoided'; all other commands of natural law are based on this. Accordingly, then, natural-law commands extend to all doing or avoiding of things recognized by the practical reason as being human goods (1a2ae. 94,2).

This basic principle (i.e. that good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided) serves as Thomas's initial statement of natural law. Moreover, this precept serves as the foundation of all other precepts of natural law. These other precepts of natural law are formulated and used in guiding humans to human goods. Of what, then, does human nature consist and what are human goods?

The human soul consists of three different levels of being: the vegetative, the sensitive and the intellectual. Each level has a specific function that it must fulfill.

The vegetative power must maintain the human being's existence. It maintains man's own body. Humans share this element with all other forms of life, as self-preservation is essential to every living being.

In addition to the vegetative power found in all living beings, all animals have a sensitive soul. The sensitive soul has two primary appetites: the irascible and the concupiscible. These appetites direct the agent to sensory goods and away from sensory evils. So, to a certain extent, animals have cognitive sensory powers, insofar as they apprehend objects as desirable or as avoidable.

The concupiscible appetite inclines the agent to pursue easily attainable goods and avoid pains. In reference to this appetite Thomas says that

> through which the soul is inclined absolutely to seek what is suitable, according to the senses, and to fly from what is hurtful, and this is called concupiscible (1a. 81,2).

The concupiscible appetite seeks the sensory goods of food, drink and sex. This appetite has for its proper object the "pleasurable or the painful" (1a. 81,2). This appetite is presented with a sensory good and inclines to it. For example, a thirsty man desires a glass of water and so seeks a nearby drinking fountain. This inclination is the

concupiscible appetite at work.

The irascible appetite is seen when we struggle to a good. It seeks the difficult good. Thomas defines the irascible appetite as that

> whereby an animal resists the attacks that hinder what is suitable, and inflict harm, and this is called irascible (1a. 81,2).

The irascible appetite has as its proper object the "sense-good or sense-evil qua arduous, i.e. in so far as the acquisition or avoidance involves some kind of difficulty or struggle" (1a. 81,2). For example, a female wolf sees her cubs about to be eaten by a bear. She throws herself in front of the bear in order to save the cubs. The irascible appetite has prompted her to pursue the difficult good of saving the cubs' life at her own expense. It is in this way that the irascible appetite inclines individuals to pursue difficult goods.

The sensory appetites humans share with all other animals. Klubertanz says that we could call the concupiscible appetite the "pleasure-appetite" and the irascible the "aggressive-appetite."[3]

Humans are rational animals. So, in addition to having vegetative and sensitive powers, they also have rational powers. It is rationality that distinguishes humans from all other animals.

Rationality is the salient element of human life. In general, rationality allows a creature capacity to govern its

own behavior. Human beings, therefore, are autonomous beings insofar as they can direct their own behavior (1a. 103,5). Rationality is a principle of such action.

> Something . . . acts for an end in two ways. The first consists in a self-direction towards the end, characteristic of man and other intelligent creatures; it is their nature to know the meaning of end and of what is related to it (1a. 103,1).

Rationality provides human beings with an autonomous principle of action with the result that they are capable of knowing ends and directing themselves toward these ends. But what are these ends?

Any good that transcends the goods of the vegetative or sensitive souls is a rational good. Knowing truths about God and living in society are two examples of rational goods (1a2ae. 94,3). However, pursuing intellectual truth, acquiring virtue, developing technology, exercising one's free will, etc. all qualify as rational goods.[4] All these goods are rational because they are appetites that transcend the sensory level of animal existence. Non-rational animals do not possess reason, and thus, they cannot desire to know truth about God, acquire virtue, etc. Rationality, therefore, sets the human being apart from all other forms of life.

Ralph McInerny further clarifies this notion of rationality. A rational activity is such "because it is the activity of reason itself or because it is an activity which comes under the sway of reason."[5] Reason has activities of

its own, e.g. contemplating God and using one's free will. However, other activities, namely our sensitive appetites, can be regulated by reason. Reason can determine where, with whom, and when one may engage in sexual activity. Sexuality is an activity of the sensitive soul but in humans it should be regulated by reason.

But how does each type of good relate to the natural law? We find that any inclination found in the human being by nature has a precept of the natural law to govern it. The natural law is the guiding rational principle for all human behaviors. Inclinations concerning sexuality are governed by the precept "Do not commit adultery." "Do not steal" is a precept that is based on man's rational, communal nature. These commands and prohibitions are precepts that all humans, insofar as they are rational, recognize as being essentially ordered to the pursuit of happiness. Each inclination has a precept of the natural law to govern it. Insofar as a person apprehends a good, there is a precept of the natural law that relates to that inclination of the perceived good.

But do these precepts apply to all humans? Thomas answers that the most basic principles of natural law apply to all human beings.

> It is therefore evident that, as regards the common principles whether of speculative or of practical reason, truth or rectitude is the same for all, and is equally known by all . . . as to the conclusions of the practical reason, neither is the truth or rectitude the same for all, nor, where it is the same is it equally known by all (1a2ae. 94,4).

Leaving aside for the moment the question of how the principles of natural law are known, we should point out that the first principles of the practical reason (i.e. the natural law) are the same for all humans. The common principles of the natural law apply universally. However, we find that the conclusions from the first principles do not apply universally. The common, or first principles of natural law are known as primary precepts. The conclusions are known as secondary precepts of the natural law. As humans are rational, they have the capacity to reason from these first principles to conclusions. The specifics of this process will be dealt with at length in the next chapter.

All humans know that it is wrong to murder. This type of principle of the natural law is a primary principle. Hence, it is known by all humans to be a part of the natural law. These primary precepts admit of no exceptions. One may never murder, or engage in sexual relations with another's spouse.[6] These absolute primary precepts propel humans toward their perfection as humans. Transgressing a primary precept is never permissible because it will "always and everywhere thwart the ideal."[7]

However, there are also secondary precepts of the natural law. Secondary precepts are "more specific precepts which are like conclusions lying close to premises" (1a2ae. 94,6). These secondary precepts in most cases promote

goodness and avoid evil. However, one finds instances where the primary and secondary precepts come into conflict. Thomas gives the example of an individual who has lent a weapon to a friend and wants it returned so that he can use it against the state.

> Thus, it is right and true for all to act according to reason, and from this principle it follows, as a proper conclusion, that goods entrusted to another should always be returned to their owner. Now this is true in the majority of cases. But it may happen in a particular case that it would be injurious, and therefore unreasonable, to restore goods held in trust; for instance if they are claimed for the purpose of fighting against one's country (1a2ae. 94,4).

The primary precept is "Be just." But the secondary precept is that "One must return borrowed items." Justice, in this case, requires that the weapon should not be returned because an injustice will result. That is, the result of returning the weapon would be injurious to the common good, and thus, an injustice. Thomas makes this claim because

> The practical reason . . . is concerned with contingent matters, which is the domain of human actions; and, consequently, although there is necessity in the common principles, the more we descend towards the particular the more frequently we encounter defects (1a2ae. 94,4).

Practical science and its subject matter must be distinguished from speculative science, as practical science deals with contingent matters whose conclusions lack the certainty of those in the speculative sciences. In short, in the practical order one will often find exceptions to the rule, which is not the case in the intellectual order. We

need to be able to reason about moral problems in a detailed manner so that we can overcome the defects of practical science. Our next chapter will deal with these issues.

To sum up, the natural law issues from God, is ordered for the common good of humanity, coming from God, who has charge of the human community, and is promulgated by God.

The most basic precept of the natural law is that "Good is to be done and pursued and evil to be avoided." All other precepts of the natural law are based on this first principle. Goods are in proportion to the kind of being one is. Vegetative, sensitive and rational goods are all human goods. However, it is a rational good to order all goods pursued by the the various appetites of the soul. As we recall that natural law is a dictate of reason, we find that the natural law must rationally order and unify all desires.

The natural law contains primary precepts and secondary precepts. Primary precepts always direct us to the human ideal and never permit of exceptions. We may never fail to "Be just." Secondary precepts may allow of exceptions, as they only generally guide us to the moral ideal for humanity. These secondary precepts are more specific and provide us with various ways to fulfill the obligation to be just.

We have just given a brief account of the natural law. However, we have not dealt with the important issues of how the natural law is known and how natural law is employed in the demonstrative process of the practical intellect. We

must observe how the demonstrative process works and how natural law is used in this process. Our next chapter will consider this issue.

NOTES

1. Jacques Maritain, The Person and the Common Good, trans. J. Fitzgerald (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 47ff. Maritain holds that humans, as rational animals, require "development through character training, education, and the cooperation of other men, and . . . society is thus indispensable to the accomplishment of human dignity."

2. Bourke notes that we must distinguish between "laws of nature" which include physical laws, like gravity, and the natural law which is essentially a moral law pertaining specifically to humanity. Ethics, 167.

3. George Klubertanz, The Philosophy of Human Nature (New York: Appleton Century Crofts Inc., 1953), 262.

4. Bourke, Ethics, 178.

5. Ralph McInerny, Ethica Thomistica: The Moral Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 22.

6. Thomas holds that God may dispense with certain precepts of natural law. In the Old Testament God dispenses with the prohibition on adultery. The important issue is that only the lawgiver may grant a dispensation. "Again Osee, by taking unto himself a wife of fornications, or an adulterous woman, was not guilty either of adultery or fornication; for he took unto himself one who was his by command of God, who is the Author of the institution of marriage."(1a2ae. 100,8,ad3) But Hosea's actions were based on knowledge gained by revelation, not on those moral principles gained solely through the use of unaided reason.

7. McInerny, Ethica Thomistica, 60. McInerny distinguishes between three levels of morality. The first is the moral ideal, which is that which all humans aim. The second level contains the primary precepts of the natural law. These precepts, without fail, direct humans to the ideal. The third level regards the secondary precepts of natural law, which usually, directs us to the ideal.

CHAPTER 2

DEMONSTRATION IN THE PRACTICAL INTELLECT

In the first chapter we gave a brief account of the natural law. The concept of a natural law raises several questions. First, how are the principles of the natural law known? How do they function in deliberative moral reasoning? How are we to derive conclusions from these first principles? In order to answer these questions we will begin by discussing how it is that individuals come to acquire knowledge. Secondly, we will discuss the nature of the speculative and practical intellects. We will then consider how demonstration functions in both intellectual processes. We will also observe how it is possible to derive conclusions from the first principles of the practical intellect. And finally, we will take note of the limitations of moral science.

The process of knowledge is complex. A bare account of this process in Thomas's own terms runs as follows. Material singulars affect the sense organs. "Every power of the sensitive part can have knowledge only of particulars" (1a. 85,1). This apprehension of the singular by the senses produces a phantasm, i.e. an image, in the imagination.

The intellect then abstracts from the phantasm the universal element in the singular. The intellect "illumines" the phantasm. This abstraction is accomplished by means of the agent intellect. The universal element is then impressed on the passive intellect (1a. 85,1). Thus, the phantasm and the agent intellect function together to produce the universal in the passive intellect.

If we consider how the universal "tree" is formed, we must start with individual trees, e.g. oak, elm or pine. These singulars affect the sense of sight. The sense of sight, however, perceives the tree only in its singularity. The image of the tree is produced in the imagination. This image is the phantasm. The agent intellect then turns to the phantasm and illumines it. That is, by means of the agent intellect's natural capacity, it makes the universal element of the phantasm intelligible. The universal formal elements of "tree" are then abstracted and impressed on the passive intellect. The resulting concept is known as the impressed species. The intellect now understands the term "tree" not as singular, but as universal. "Tree" is understood not as this tree or that tree, but as a "type of leafy vegetative life." Thus, we have arrived at knowledge of terms. Owen Bennett summarizes the process by saying

> The percepts of sense attain to material individuals as individuals. The eye sees this individual color, the ear hears this individual sound, and so on. The form of sense is grasped in its individuality, hence, as subject to constant change or variation. The intellect in conceiving its simple notion also considers individual really existing things, but it does not consider them in their material individuality. It prescinds rather from that material individuality, and considers in its concept or notion intelligible aspects of these individual things, aspects that do not change or vary.[1]

This process of knowledge begins with the material singular entity. The intellect, then abstracts the universal form from that singular. It is through empirical knowledge, with the necessary functioning of the active and passive intellect, that one gains universal knowledge. Once one is in possession of the universal term one has the capacity to grasp self-evident principles. For example, one knows that to be an agent, is of necessity, to act for an end. This is an analytically true proposition. The capacity to understand these statements as analytically true is a function of rationality. Yet, rationality functions in a variety of ways.

Rationality, as it relates to these self-evident principles, has three different functions. The first function of rationality is apprehension (In Periherm. I,1). Apprehension is the simple act of presenting an idea to the intellect. Following apprehension, the intellect judges what is apprehended (In Periherm. I,1). This act of judgment either affirms or denies what is apprehended. By judgment

one discerns whether a thing is or is not. Now the understanding apprehends and judges self-evident principles. As soon as the meanings are presented to the intellect, it must judge that what the two terms refer to are identical in some way.

Judgment either affirms or denies that a thing is. Of the apprehended thing, judgment either affirms or negates its existence. For example, if one considers "man," apprehension simply grasps the qualities of the man. Judgment affirms or denies whether a "rational animal" is the object of apprehension. As man is a rational animal, judgment affirms that man is rational animal. Judgment's affirmation or denial is fundamental to the agent's ability to understand.

The understanding grasps first principles of both the speculative and practical intellects. In the speculative realm the understanding grasps those self-evident principles of thought, while in the practical intellect the understanding apprehends the first principles of action. The apprehension of the first principles is an intellectual habit. The purely speculative habit is known as intellectus while the habit of the practical reason is called synderesis.

> Hence it is that human nature, insofar as it comes in contact with the angelic nature, must both in speculative and practical matters know truth without investigation. And this knowledge must be the principle of all the knowledge which follows, whether speculative or practical, since principles must be more stable and certain (On Truth XVI,1).

These first principles of knowledge are indemonstrable. For a principle to be indemonstrable it must be (1) necessary and self-evident and (2) naturally known and not acquired by demonstration (In Meta. IV,6). Indemonstrable principles are understood immediately by the intellect. That is, the intellect does not require a process of reasoning in order to grasp these principles. Furthermore, "immediate" is not to be understood in a temporal sense. Immediate knowledge is always grasped by the understanding in the sense that to understand the terms is to understand the truth of the principle. Principles that are grasped immediately by the understanding are known as self-evident principles.

A proposition can be understood as self evident in two ways. In one way it is self-evident in itself "when the predicate is of the essence of the subject" (1a2ae. 94,2). The truth of a self-evident proposition manifests itself in the definition of the terms it uses. For example, "Every agent acts for an end." By definition, an agent is one that acts for an end.

In a second way, a principle is self-evident as it exists in one's mind. In this second sense, a proposition is self-evident only to those who are educated in a specific discipline. Such is the case of the geometer who claims that "The square of the hypotenuse of a right triangle is equal to the square of the other two sides." But it is in the first sense that Thomas wants to claim as being the one found in

those first principles of the intellect. Thus,

> Certain axioms or propositions are universally self-evident to all; and such are the propositions whose terms are known to all, as, Every whole is greater than its part, and Things equal to one and the same are equal to one another (In De Trin. V,1).

These self-evident propositions are known universally by all rational beings. Insofar as one is rational, one cannot be mistaken about these first principles (On Truth XVI,2). Furthermore, these principles are used as the foundation for all subsequent knowledge. If one wishes to demonstrate any other truths, one must ultimately appeal to this immediate knowledge.

The first fundamental principle of the speculative intellect concerns being. The first self-evident principle of the speculative intellect is, Thomas claims, the principle of non-contradiction.

> It is impossible . . . for anyone to be mistaken in his own mind about these things and to think that the same thing both is and is not at the same time. And it is for this reason that all demonstrations reduce to this proposition as the ultimate opinion common to all: for this proposition is by nature the starting point and axiom of all axioms (In Meta. IV,6).

The principle of non-contradiction provides the groundwork for all subsequent demonstrations of the speculative intellect. Moreover, all learning on the intellectual level prescinds from pre-existent knowledge (In Meta. IV,6). The principle of non-contradiction provides us with a criterion by which all subsequent truth claims are judged. There are

other self-evident axioms in the speculative intellect which serve as a starting point for various demonstrations. "The sum of the parts are never greater than the whole," and "Two things equal to a third thing are equal to each other" are examples of these other first principles on the speculative level.

Thomas notes that the practical and speculative intellects seem to function in similar ways. But exactly what do the speculative and practical intellects do? Thomas notes that

> The same procedure takes place in the practical and in the speculative reason, for each proceeds from principles to conclusions . . . just as in the speculative reason, from naturally known indemonstrable principles we draw conclusions of the various sciences, the knowledge of which is not imparted to us by nature, but acquired by the efforts of reason, so too it is that from the precepts of natural law, as from common and indemonstrable principles, the human reason needs to proceed to the more particular determination of certain matter (1a2ae. 91,3).

In the above passage a parallel is drawn between the precepts of the natural law as found in the practical reason and those first principles of demonstration as found in the speculative reason. In addition both the precepts of the natural law and the first principles of demonstration are self evident. Therefore, a brief account should be given regarding the nature of the speculative and practical intellects. Secondly, a consideration of how the understanding grasps self-evident principles and how these principles are used in

the various sciences will be helpful. This will enable the discussion to move to the point where we will study how the demonstrative process unfolds.

The speculative and practical intellects are distinguished because of different functions in the understanding. This distinction is explained in the commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate.

> The theoretical or speculative intellect is properly distinguished from the operative or practical intellect in this, that the speculative intellect has for its end the truth under consideration, while the practical intellect directs the truth under consideration to operation as to its end. So the Philosopher says in the De Anima that they differ from each other with regard to their end. And he says again in the Metaphysics "The end of speculative science is truth, while the end of practical science is action" (In De Trin. V,1).

The practical intellect is directed to operation, or activity, as its end. On the other hand, the speculative intellect "directs what it apprehends, not to operation, but to the sole consideration of truth" (In De Trin. V,1). Practical knowledge results in an activity such as building a house or giving money to the poor. But speculative knowledge terminates in contemplation, or more broadly, knowing or learning something.

The sciences are bodies of knowledge that employ demonstration. Furthermore, the purpose of science is to demonstrate conclusions from given premises.

> The object of which scientific knowledge is sought through demonstration is some conclusion in which a proper attribute is predicated of some subject, which . . . is inferred from principles (In Post. I,2).

Practical science seeks operation as its end, while speculative science seeks truth. The two different sciences employ different methods of demonstration and seek different kinds of knowledge (In Meta. II,5). Furthermore, the precision of a science, and its method of demonstration, is determined by the subject matter of that science (In Ethic. I,3).

The speculative sciences are of three types: natural science, mathematics and metaphysics (In De Trin. V,4). Natural science investigates changing being. Mathematics deals with accidental, quantitative, being. Metaphysics deals with being qua being. All of the speculative sciences concern being. The proper object of the speculative intellect is being as such.

> Since the intellect is a power, it must have a determinate object which it naturally and necessarily possesses. Now this object must be the aspect under which everything is known by the intellect . . . this formal aspect is nothing else than being. Thus our intellect naturally knows being and its properties and in this knowledge is rooted the knowledge of first principles (CG. II,83).

Being is the formal object of the intellect. As such, all subsequent knowledge must derive from the manner in which being is known. Being is grasped necessarily by the understanding in the form of first principles.

Resolution is the mode of demonstration most proper to the speculative sciences. Resolution moves from complex posterior principles to the universal prior simples (1a2ae. 14,5). Resolution, therefore, is that type of demonstration that reasons from effects back to their causes. We reason in the speculative sciences in this manner primarily because our intellects apprehend initially what is posterior in being and we must resolve what we apprehend back to its cause, being. An example of this type of knowledge is the cosmological proof for God's existence. The knowing agent initially apprehends the world. The agent then resolves the world back to a first cause, which is prior to the world's existence. The order of knowing is prior, relative to the knowing agent, to the order of being.

Although practical science also employs resolution, the other type of demonstration, composition, is most proper to the practical sciences. Composition moves from prior universal simples to the complex. Composition is especially needed for moral science, as we must actually construct the act (In Ethic. I,2).

The composition that is properly employed in practical science differs from the speculative primarily in terms of the end. The end of practical science is operation, not contemplation. Furthermore, causes are more simple and prior in being when compared to effects. When one demonstrates concerning practical science one must apply simple causes to

produce the desired effects. The order of knowing in composition, therefore, corresponds to the order of being. One must know what is to be done or made before actually doing or making.

In moral science we find that we must first employ resolution. We start with scientific knowledge of the end to be attained. Secondly, we reason back to those intermediary actions that will bring about the attainment of the end. This process is known as deliberation. Thomas points out that deliberation proceeds via resolution.

> If what is prior in knowledge is posterior in being, the process is one of resolution, as when we judge about effects which are manifest to us by resolving them back to their simple causes. Now the principle in the inquiry of deliberation is the end which, though prior in intention is nevertheless posterior in being. Accordingly, the inquiry of deliberation must be by way of resolution, namely, by beginning from what is intended in the future and continuing until one arrives at what must be done at once (1a2ae. 14,5).

The resolution proper to the practical sciences starts with the end to be achieved which is first in knowledge. It then proceeds to deliberate concerning the intervening causes that are appropriate to the attainment of that end until one arrives at that action that must "be done at once." The preliminary investigation is now completed and resolution gives way to composition.

Composition applies causes to actually produce effects that will bring about the attainment of the end. Composition, thus, is responsible for actually constructing

its object by applying universal simples to produce the complex, singular entity. For example, I desire to be a doctor. I must first investigate the notion of what a doctors is. Secondly, I must reason back to those intermediary causes that will produce the desired end. This will involve obtaining a bachelor's degree with appropriate biology and chemistry courses. This process will therefore involve my entering college and earning an undergraduate degree. So, I must apply to various colleges that will provide me with the necessary training. Therefore, I must first contact these colleges, which will involve either making a telephone call to an admissions office or writing a letter. At this point, the resolution is completed.

At this point, we move to the composition that is proper to practical science. I must reason to the end intended by applying simple universal causes to produce the intermediary effects until I arrive at the end intended. This process is accomplished by the practical syllogism.

Demonstration always takes place via the syllogism. In general, a syllogism has two premises which logically lead to a third proposition, the conclusion. In the speculative sciences, all the terms of the syllogism are universal. Moreover, the conclusion of the speculative syllogism always produces a necessary conclusion (In Prior. 4).

If one employs a demonstration involving natural philosophy, one can see how demonstration takes place in the

speculative intellect.

Major: All mammals are animals.

Minor: All men are mammals.

CONC: All men are animals.

All of the terms in this syllogism are universal. Furthermore, the conclusion necessarily follows from the given premises. There is no room for error in the conclusion. Ultimately, each premise must be in conformity with the principle of non-contradiction. A premise that held "All men are not men" clearly violates the principle of non-contradiction and is not permissible in any syllogism. Demonstration in the speculative sciences is always necessary because the terms are always universal. This is not the case with the practical sciences.

We begin to see the connection now between the speculative and practical intellects. As being is the proper object to the speculative intellect, and the speculative sciences, so the good is the proper object of the practical intellect, and the practical sciences. For speculation seeks the truth which exists or has being, and practical science seeks the good.

The practical syllogism is used to apply the universal principles of the natural law to individual singular cases. The practical syllogism differs from the logical syllogism insofar as the conclusion of the practical syllogism is singular (1a. 78,1). Furthermore, the minor premise of the

practical syllogism must contain a particularized judgment.

According to Bourke there are two types of the practical moral syllogism: the purely cognitive moral syllogism and the operative moral syllogism.[2]

The purely cognitive moral syllogism terminates in a judgment of conscience. The syllogism starts with a universal major premise. A particularized judgment appears in the minor premise. And a particular judgment is reached in the conclusion.[3] Bourke gives the following example.

Major: Every evil is to be avoided

Minor: Adultery is evil

CONCL: This act of adultery is to be avoided

The major premise contains the universal first principle of the practical reason. The minor premise gives a particular judgment concerning a given type of behavior. This second premise gives a concrete action as contained within the scope of the universal. Finally, the conclusion terminates in a judgment of conscience, which is always particular. The conclusion is, however, only a cognitive act.

However, we find that demonstrative knowledge is not sufficient for virtue. That is, knowing the right thing to do simply is not enough to be considered virtuous. One must not only know the right thing to do, one must be able to command that action. As Wallace notes,

> Those who think that they can attain the end of moral science merely by reasoning about virtue, without doing anything to acquire it, make a

> serious error: they misconstrue the very nature of moral science as practical.[4]

We must constantly keep in mind that the end of morality is virtuous living, not merely correct thinking. Practical science, considered completely, includes not only knowledge of the operable, but also knowledge of how it is to be attained with the intent of acting upon this knowledge. We find the operative moral syllogism intends action.

The operative moral syllogism follows upon the judgment of conscience. The minor premise contains a particularized judgment. However, the particular conclusion is a judgment of choice. This judgment necessarily leads to the act of choosing and doing the action. The following example will help to illustrate the point.

Major: I should not kill my father

Minor: This man is my father

CONC: I should not kill this man

This train of reasoning follows from the prior cognitive syllogism which could be diagrammed as follows.

Major: Every evil is to be avoided

Minor: Patricide is evil

CONC: I should not kill my father.

In the cognitive moral syllogism we start with the first principle of synderesis, i.e. that "Good is to be done and evil avoided." We then use the more specific imperative of the natural law to avoid patricide. We conclude with the

judgment of conscience that I should not kill my father. However, this conclusion has an imperfection. I may know that patricide is wrong and yet consent to it. I must continue my thought process. I need to make my reasoning operative.

I must not only know that killing my father is wrong, I must intend not to do it. In the operative syllogism I begin with the judgment of conscience. In the minor premise I utilize the judgment of particular reason. My conclusion results in the judgment of choice. While the operative moral syllogism intends action in its conclusion, action has not yet taken place, as an individual may still be prevented from acting upon this knowledge. Action must result from one's knowledge. Unless the judgment of choice is produced in the concrete singular, morality is still incomplete. One must possess prudence in order to act upon the judgment of choice. We have discovered that there is more to morality than mere cognitive activity.

As the practical intellect deals with particulars, we find that the conclusions of the practical syllogism do not possess the same necessity found in the speculative syllogism.

> The practical reason . . . is concerned with contingent matters, which is the domain of human actions; and, consequently, although there is necessity in he common principles, the more we descend to the particular, the more frequently we encounter defects (1a. 78,1).

And again

> Therefore when a science approaches closer to singulars, as operative sciences like medicine, alchemy, and moral, they can have less certitude both because of the large numbers of things which must be considered in the sciences, (if one is omitted, often error creeps in), and because of their variability (In De Trin. VI,1).

The value of the common universal principles of the natural law are not in question here; rather, the issue is how to take into account the variability of practical science when it introduces the singular element?

Thomas provides a ready example using the principle that one should "Return borrowed items."

> Thus, it is right and true for all to act according to reason, and from this principle it follows, as a proper conclusion, that goods entrusted to another should be restored to their owner. But it may happen in a particular case that it would be injurious, and therefore unreasonable, to restore goods held in trust; for instance, if they are claimed for the purpose of fighting against one's country (1a2ae. 94,4).

A person has lent a weapon to you, but wants it returned for the purpose of using it in an insurrection against the state. Our practical syllogism might look as follows.

Major: The Good should be pursued

Minor: Returning borrowed items is good.

CONC: I should return this borrowed item.

But as Thomas points out, to return the item to its owner is unreasonable. The conclusion is unreasonable for two primary reasons.

The conclusion is unreasonable in one respect because reason has failed to take account of the relevant circumstances regarding who is involved, what the action is, why the action is taking place, when the action occurs, etc. These reflections recall the statement that when we are dealing with a practical science, the more we descend to the particulars the less certain we are of our conclusions.

In addition, the syllogism has confused primary and secondary precepts of the natural law, and so the conclusion is unreasonable in another sense. A primary precept of the natural law is that justice must always be done. This precept admits of absolutely no exceptions. However, if we consider the precept to return borrowed items, we discover that this is a secondary precept and only holds true most of the time. When one considers the secondary precepts of the natural law, one finds that individuals may be mistaken regarding the relevant knowledge available and the rectitude of the law's application. In the case where one mistakenly concludes that the borrowed item should be returned, one may fail to know that this is a wrong conclusion and one will not be correct in the application of this principle.

> We must say that the natural law, as to the first common principles, is the same for all, both as to rectitude and as to knowledge. But as to certain more particular aspects, which are conclusions, as it were, of those common principles, it is the same for all in the majority of cases . . . and yet in some few cases it may fail, both as to rectitude and knowledge (1a2ae. 94,4).

In the unreasonable practical syllogism above, these two types of precepts have not been understood properly. But even a correct syllogism is not enough for a moral agent to be considered virtuous.

A virtuous character is required for moral behavior. One must not only know the correct thing to be done, one must act upon one's knowledge. Thomas claims that moral science by itself does not make the agent moral. It needs to be complemented by prudence.

> Prudence means more than moral science. What pertains to practical science is a universal judgment concerning matters of action: for instance, that fornication is evil, that one should not steal, and the like. Even where this science is present, it is possible for the rational judgment to be impeded in the particular act, so that a right judgment is not made. For this reason, [moral science without prudence] is said to be of little value to virtue, for even where it is present man may sin against virtue (On the Virtues in General VI,ad1).

Moral science can tell us what to do in general, but it is not result in the agent applying the truth of the conclusion of his syllogism to any real situation encountered by the agent. As a science, moral science is a speculative virtue. Prudence, on the other hand, is a practical, and a moral, virtue.

Moral science considers the good under the formality of truth. That is, moral science affirms that certain actions are good actions. But moral science does not prompt action on the part of the moral agent. For example, moral science

is able to determine that any given act of adultery is wrong. Yet, moral science does not apply the truth of this statement to the agent's real situation. Prudence, on the other hand, requires that an agent act on his knowledge of the good. It is "right practical knowledge as immediately regulative of action," according to Maritain.[5]

In this chapter we have seen that the first principles of any type of science are grasped by the understanding as self-evident. Furthermore, these first principles serve as the foundation for all subsequent knowledge, i.e. all demonstrated knowledge.

The reasoning process of the practical intellect parallels that of the speculative intellect. As being is the proper object of the speculative intellect, the good is the proper object of the practical intellect. All subsequent knowledge is based on these primary concepts found in the intellect. Speculative truth consists in one's knowing about a given subject, while practical truth consists in the capacity to act on the basis of the knowledge of the principles of practical reason. In the speculative realm, all knowledge regarding non-operables is based on the principle of non-contradiction. In the practical realm, all knowledge concerning operables is derived from the natural law.

The modes of demonstration in each science will vary with the subject matter. Speculative sciences will

demonstrate with a good deal more certainty than the practical sciences. In the speculative sciences we reason concerning universal necessary principles, while in the practical sciences we are dealing with contingent singular matters.

The practical syllogism is utilized to determine whether the act in question is permissible. However, much of the time contingent circumstances alter the nature of the act so much that the practical syllogism is rendered useless- or previous practical syllogisms suited to another context.

For the moral agent, practical science is limited in its scope because it does not issue in action, but is merely knowledge of the good that should be done. Moral science simply considers the conclusion of a practical syllogism under the formality of truth, not as a good that should actually be pursued by the agent. The agent may fail to act on the conclusion of the practical syllogism due to inordinate passion or malice. Knowledge of the good that should be pursued is not sufficient for a virtuous character. The moral agent must have the capacity not only to think correctly about the morality of any given situation, he must also be able to act upon the conclusion of the operative moral syllogism.

NOTES

1. Owen Bennett, The Nature of Demonstrative Proof, (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1943), 4-5.

2. Bourke, Ethics, 225.

3. One is able to move from the universal principles of the natural law to the particulars of any given situation by means of the particular reason (vis cogitativa), sometimes known as the discursive power. Thomas discusses this power of the soul at ST 1a,2ae, 77,2. The particular reason applies the universal principles of an operative practical syllogism to the concrete singular act. "But practical reason is sometimes universal , sometimes particular. It is universal, when it says that such a thing should be done in such a way; for example: a son should honor his parents. But, particular reason says that this individual is such a thing, and that I am such a person (for instance, that I am a son) and that I should at this moment pay this honor to my parent. . . hence, it is necessary that universal opinion be applied to particular things, in order that a movement follow." On the Soul III, L16.

4. William Wallace, The Role of Demonstration, (Washington, D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1962), 104.

5. Jacques Maritain, The Degrees of Knowledge, trans. G. Phelan (London: Geoffrey Bles Press, 1959), 623.

CHAPTER 3

THE MORAL ACT

Thus far, we have seen that humans act for ends. Their actions are rationally ordered and deliberative. While knowledge is clearly necessary for virtue, we find that in itself it insufficient for virtue.

In this chapter we will first discuss the limitations on free human action. Secondly, we will discuss the process of the human act. And finally, we will consider goodness and evil in the human act.

What do we mean when we talk about human action? As we have seen, the salient elements of humans is their rationality. However, for Thomas, rationality includes the idea of volition, of an ability to choose.

> As Damascene observes, man is said to be made in the image of God, "image" in this context signifying an intellectual being who is free to judge what he shall do and has the power to act or not to act (1a2ae. Prologue).

In other words, man is capable of choosing something because he has the capacity to reason, the question is to grasp how this occurs (1a2ae. 6).

A first approach is to distinguish between voluntary, involuntary and nonvoluntary action (In Ethic. III, 1-4).

Voluntary actions are those that are performed with the relevant knowledge of the act and the freedom of the will. An action that lacks either element is not a voluntary action. Actions performed in ignorance or under coercion are not properly voluntary actions.

Some involuntary actions are coerced by an extrinsic principle. Coercion occurs when an individual is forced to perform an act against one's will. But the act of the will may be considered in two ways. We may talk of the "elicited act of the will" or the "act commanded by the will" (1a2ae. 6,4). The elicited act of the will is the will's act of inclining towards a perceived good, the will's desire for a good. The commanded act of the will, on the other hand, is the will's capacity to act in an efficient manner whereby other powers are moved to act. The elicited act of the will cannot be coerced by an external principle. No one can force me to desire something that I do not want to desire. However, the commanded act of the will may be coerced by external influence. I may desire, for my summer vacation, to drive across the continent. This initial desire is an elicited act of the will. However, I may be prevented from doing so for a number of reasons. My car may not work properly. I might not have the money to do so. I may be abducted and held for ransom. Any of these causes may result in the failure of the commanded act of the will. An external cause has forced me into a situation that I did not desire.

So, when we talk about the will being coerced, we must always refer to the commanded act of the will, and not the elicited act of the will.

There exists one final class of actions that have not yet been discussed. These are nonvoluntary acts. Nonvoluntary acts are those that come about due to a lack of knowledge on the part of the agent. Yet, the agent is not responsible for the act in question. A ready example is provided by Damascene.

> In the example given above, a man did want to kill his enemy, yet he killed him in ignorance, thinking he was killing a deer. Such ignorance does not make an act involuntary . . . because it does not cause anything contrary to the will: but it does make the act non-voluntary, since what is unknown cannot be actually willed (1a2ae. 6,8).

If the agent could not have prevented his ignorance, his act was properly nonvoluntary.

A problem crops up concerning the kind of knowledge that one responsible for. Thomas notes that there are three types of ignorance: concomitant, consequent, and antecedent. Concomitant ignorance is present with nonvoluntary action (1a2ae. 6,8). For example, a man out hunting shoots what he thinks is deer, but it turns out to be his enemy. In this case, the hunter is not responsible for killing his enemy, yet he is pleased with the outcome. Thus, even if he had the knowledge that it was not his enemy and not a deer that he was aiming at, the hunter would have shot anyway. Therefore, we cannot praise the hunter, nor can he take credit, for his

action, as it was not a voluntary act.

Consequent ignorance is a voluntary type of ignorance (1a2ae. 6,8). There are two types of consequent ignorance. The first type is when the agent simply chooses not to know. This is called "affected ignorance" according to Thomas. If a man finds a wallet on the side walk and chooses not to inquire who the owner is, this is affected consequent ignorance. The second type of consequent ignorance involves knowledge that all humans should be aware of (e.g. the primary precepts of the natural law). Thus, ignorance is no excuse. A man may not claim that he did not know that murder was wrong, but he should have known, and thus, his ignorance does not excuse him of the crime.

The third type of ignorance is known as antecedent ignorance (1a2ae. 6,8). Antecedent causes an action to be involuntary. In this case, one is not responsible for knowing facts that would have altered the course of action. For instance, if a hunter shoots at what he thinks is a deer and it turns out to be his favorite dog, the hunter was not responsible for the act of shooting the dog. For, had he known, the hunter would not have shot. The agent is responsible only for those actions that result from a free will and knowledge of the situation.

To sum up, an action that is voluntary one wherein the agent has the required knowledge and freedom to act. If coercion or ignorance are at work the action is not

voluntary. When the act that results is contrary to the agent's wishes and is due to either unavoidable ignorance or coercion, the act is involuntary. When the act that results is in accordance with the agent's desires but results from either coercion or ignorance the act is nonvoluntary. While we have seen that knowledge and free will are essential components of voluntary action, we have yet to see specifically how they function in a given moral action.

How do knowledge and free will function in the moral act? There exists a constant interplay between the acts of the intellect and the acts of the will according to Thomas's analysis of the moral act.[1] There are two acts of the intellect that bear on the end and there are two acts of the will that bear on the end. There are two acts of the intellect and two acts of the will that regard the means to the end. Finally, there are two acts each of the intellect and will that bear on the execution of the act. These acts will be analysed in the order in which the moral agent acts. We must start with those acts that bear on the end, secondly we will consider those acts that bear on the means, and finally we will discuss those acts that bear on the execution of the act.

The intellect must first apprehend the end as a good that should be pursued. The intellect presents this good to the will.

> For the intellect presents the will with its object and the will causes external action. Consequently, the intellect, which apprehends something as good in general, is regarded as being the principle of the will's movement (1a2ae. 13,5,ad1).

The object must first be known in the intellect before any action that is properly called moral can possibly take place. For example, one must first know that helping the needy is a good that should be pursued before any moral action results.

Secondly, the will must wish for the end. That is, the end must be desired. This act is simply the rational appetite for the good in view. Strictly speaking, this act of the will does not consider intending action toward the attainment of the end (1a2ae. 8). One simply wishes for the end, insofar as the end is good. I may wish for a new car without intending any kind of action that might bring about the attainment of this end.

Thirdly, the intellect judges whether or not the end in view is attainable (1a2ae. 12,3). The act of judgment regards possible objects to be pursued. A human being cannot pursue the end of becoming a pink elephant or should not pursue purchasing a car that would absorb all of one's money. Judgment determines those ends that are and are not attainable for the agent. If the end in question is attainable, then the process of the moral act will continue.

The fourth act is intention. This is an act of the will (1a2ae. 12,1). Intention moves the agent towards the end in such a way so that one is now considering the end as

attainable and wishes to act upon this knowledge. Intention has prompted the individual to deliberate regarding a means to the end in view. At this point the agent considers how it is possible to attain the intended end, and this involves deliberation concerning how one might obtain the end as intended.

Deliberation is an act of the intellect (1a2ae. 14). It is an intellectual inquiry that concerns the means to an end. This inquiry terminates in what one may do immediately. For example, I may desire an occupation that pays very well. I realize that I will need an M.B.A. degree. But before I earn an M.B.A., I will need to graduate from college. Therefore, I will need to apply to college and this act is the termination of deliberation. I must apply to a college. Moreover, deliberation is a mode of reasoning that proceeds via resolution. It is a resolutive process because "what is prior in knowledge (the end) is posterior in being" (1a2ae. 14,6). We move from the complex effects back to their simple causes. Deliberation is a discursive process that concerns the suitable means to the end. In the above example, the end to be attained is a well-paying occupation. This is the effect that is posterior in being, yet prior in knowledge. On the other hand, the application to a college is the termination of deliberation. In resolving the end to its simple causes, we find that application to college is a simple cause, conjoined with other simple causes, that will

bring about the desired end as an effect.

The will must consent to the means arrived at by deliberation (1a2ae. 15). Consent is the act of the will regarding the means. It is the "application of the appetitive movement to the determination of counsel" (1a2ae. 15,6). The will must be able to adopt the means to the end as determined by deliberation before any further action may take place.

Following upon consent, we find that the intellect makes a practical judgment of choice (1a2ae. 16). This practical judgment made by the intellect formally determines the choice that the will acts upon.

> The intellect moves the will in the way in which an end is said to move-- by conceiving beforehand the reason for acting and proposing it to the will (On Truth XXII, 12).

This judgment of choice is the conclusion of the operative practical syllogism. It is the formal intellectual determination of the act such as "I should not kill this man" (On Truth XXIV,2).

The will's act of choice sets into motion the execution of the moral act. The will adheres to the formal determination of the intellect as found in the conclusion of the operative syllogism. This act is known as "election." Election moves the agent to act. In the order of acts concerned with the means, election efficiently causes the action which is formally caused by the intellect.

> To move in the manner of an efficient cause, however, belongs to the will and not to the intellect (On Truth XXII,12).

However, the will is also the material cause of the act. Thomas comments on the relation of the intellect as formal cause and the will as material cause.

> For, whenever there are two principles of motion or action with an ordination to each other, that in the effect which is due to the higher agent is, as it were formal, and that which is from the lower agent is, as it were, material. This is clear both in physical things and moral matters (On Truth XIV,5).

In the act of choice the will is the material cause of the act in so far as it is determined in a particular way by the intellect, the formal cause. The will is also the efficient cause of the act, as it adheres to the formally determined decision of the intellect in the actual production of the act.

The first of the acts concerned with execution is the intellect's command (imperium). This act issues from reason.

> Command is essentially an act of reason, for the one commanding, by enjoining or by declaring orders the one who is commanded to do something, and to order by way of enjoining or declaring belongs to reason (1a2ae. 17,1).

Command follows upon the act of choice, an act of will. Furthermore, command must come from reason, as reason is that faculty by which one orders.

Use follows command. Use is also an act of the will (1a2ae. 16). It is the efficient cause of the commanded action, in the order of execution. Thomas explains:

> The use of something implies its application to some activity, and hence the activity to which we apply a thing is called its use, just as to go horseback riding is to make use of a horse, and to hit is to make use of a stick. Now we apply the interior principles of action to activity, namely, the powers of the soul or the members of the body, for example, the intellect to understanding and the eye to seeing, as well as external things, such as the stick for hitting (1a2ae. 16).

From the text, it is clear that use not only applies to external objects (e.g. sticks) but it also applies to the internal powers of the soul (e.g. understanding and seeing). Other things and powers are "used" by the will in the execution of the commanded act.

The last intellectual step in the moral act is the attainment of the end. At this point the intellect judges whether or not the act performed was suitable to the attainment of the end in question (1a2ae. 11,2). And the final step of the moral act is the will's enjoyment of the end as attained. This act is called fruition (1a2ae. 11,2).

The analysis of the process of the moral act considers the act from a somewhat abstract perspective in the sense that the act is idealized. Not all actions go according to an agent's intent. Nor have we specifically considered how actions might be called good or evil.

In a good action there are four kinds of goodness. Good actions are such in so far as they (1) have being (2) are good in themselves (3) have a good end, and (4) take account of the relevant circumstances.

> A fourfold goodness can be considered in human action. The first is the goodness an action has in terms of its genus, namely, as an action, for it has as much goodness as it has of action and being...Second, an action has goodness according to its species, which it has from its appropriate object. Third, it has goodness from its circumstances--its accidents, as it were. Fourth, it has goodness from its end, which is related to it as a cause of goodness (1a2ae. 18,4).

Each of these types of goodness must be considered more carefully.

The goodness that an action possesses in so far as it has being is a generic kind of goodness. The generic goodness of an action is not strictly moral, but it is good only in the sense that the act exists, for existence is good. The notions of being and goodness are convertible terms for Thomas.[2] Hence, a deficiency in being brings about a deficiency of goodness.

> It should be said that every act as having something of being has something of goodness, but insofar as it lacks something of the fullness of the being a human action ought to have, it lacks goodness and to this extent is evil, for example if it lacks the quantity determined by reason, or a due place, or something of this kind (1a2ae. 18,1).

Thus, every action, whether specifically good or evil, has a generic element of goodness. An act of fornication is good in as much as it has being, but lacks the order of reason (i.e. the act is committed with the wrong person). Therefore, the generic notion of goodness fails to take account of the specific determinants of human action. So, in what specific ways can we say that an act is good?

The object of the action concerns the type of action that is being performed. What kind of action is under consideration? For example, is the act in question an act of murder or is it an act of capital punishment? The act in question must be one that is not prohibited by any of the primary precepts of the natural law. For instance, murder is always forbidden by a primary precept of the natural law. The very act of murder is, by definition, an evil act.

The circumstances are of extreme importance, as they affect the act accidentally (1a2ae. 7). Relevant circumstances include who is acting, where the act takes place, how the act is performed, when the act is performed, the reason for the action, and what is being done (1a2ae. 7,3). The circumstances affect the moral quality of the act. For example, the circumstance of "where" affects the moral quality of the act of sexual intercourse. This type of activity should take place in privacy, as is fitting. The act is disordered if it takes place in a public arena. Furthermore, if any relevant circumstance is lacking, the whole act may be disordered, and thus, an evil act.

The end for which the agent is acting also determines the moral goodness of the act. One must have a good end in view for the act to be called good. If one is kind to another only for the sake of later taking advantage of that person the act is evil. For an act to be morally good it must not lack in the object of the act (i.e. in the kind of

act that it is), the circumstances or the end which is to be achieved. In sum, all morally good actions are those actions that are permitted by natural law, performed in the right circumstances, and for the right reason.

By discussing the ways in which an action may be good, Thomas implies that there are specific ways in which actions may be evil. Ignorance, passion and malice are all causes of evil actions (1a2ae. 76-78). Each of these destroy the goodness of an act in a different way. In our previous discussion on the voluntary nature of human action, we found that ignorance may cause an evil action. This voluntary kind of ignorance is known as consequent ignorance. That is, the agent is responsible for having the relevant knowledge of a given situation. In this way, ignorance is a cause of evil action where the ignorance itself is willed by the agent (1a2ae. 76). Ignorance causes evil in the sense that the moral act is deficient in terms of knowledge that should be possessed.

Passion can also cause an evil act. Passion can influence the will's activity in two ways: by distraction and by altering the judgment of reason. Passion can distract the agent

> when the movement of the sensitive appetite is strengthened in respect of any passion whatever, the proper movement of the rational appetite or will must, of necessity, become relaxed or altogether impeded (1a2ae. 77).

The sensitive appetite has the power to distract the will's

desire to the point that the sensitive good is chosen in place of a higher good. For example, sexual desire may so distract an individual so that the individual fails to act temperately.

Passion may also influence the will by altering the judgment of reason. That is, the sensory good the sensory good presented to the will might be emphasized inordinately to the exclusion of reason choosing the higher good. The will, then, "has not been offered a proper object of choice."[3] In this second case, passion has pre-empted reason's capacity to choose. In either case, the sensitive appetite can only indirectly influence the will, as the will is still the higher power. In the case of passion's influence on the moral act, we find that the moral act is deficient in the ordering of the act. The sensitive appetite has usurped the place of reason.

The final cause of evil is malice (1a2ae. 78). A malicious act is one where the act of the will itself is disordered. In this case the person knowingly and freely chooses a lower good instead of a higher good. This type of evil action is the most serious of all.[4] The malicious will is not affected by either passion or ignorance, and thus, the person is more responsible for his or her own action than in any other faulty situation. In the case of the malicious will, order, and goodness, is lacking due to a disordered will. The act is deficient due to the knowing and voluntary

action of the will.

Good and evil actions do not take place in isolated incidents. Rather, they are best viewed as springing forth from the character of a given agent. We expect bad people to act consistently in evil ways; we expect good people to act consistently in morally good ways. This brings to light the fact that a moral act does not exist in isolation from all other moral acts. rather, morality is a matter of habitually doing good things and habitually doing evil things. This topic of habit is the subject of the next chapter.

In this chapter we have seen that human action involves the agent's knowledge of the situation and his ability to exert his will freely in attaining his purpose. If the action lacks either knowledge or freedom, the act may not be called moral. However, certain types of ignorance do enter the picture. If one willingly chooses not to inquire into a situation when one should, then the act does take on moral dimensions, and is an evil action.

The moral act involves an interplay between the faculties of the intellect, as cognitive, and the will, as volitional. These acts regard the end in question, the means to the end, and the execution of the act intended to achieve the end.

An action may be found to be lacking goodness in three specifically moral ways. The act itself may be evil. The circumstances relating to the act in question may be lacking

a due order. The end in view may be an evil end. Actions are evil in as much as they involve either willed ignorance, inordinate passion, or malice.

NOTES

1. Bourke, Ethics, 64 gives a "Table of Steps" that explicitly shows the chronological order, and relation, of the steps of the will and intellect in the moral act.

	INTELLECT	WILL
In Regard to End	I. Apprehension of end	II. Wishing the end
	III. Judgment of attainability	IV. Intention of end
In Regard to Means	V. Deliberation on means	VI. Consent to means
	VII. Judgment of Choice	VIII. Choice
In Regard to Execution	IX. Command	X. Use
	XI. Apprehension of Suitability	XII. Fruition

2. At 1a2ae. 18,1 Thomas expands on the idea that "good" and "being" are convertible terms. "We must speak of good and evil in actions the way we do of good and evil in things, for a thing produces the kind of action it does because of the kind of thing it is. Now with respect to things, each thing has as much good as it has being, for good and being are convertible. . . . some things may have being in some respect and yet lack something of the fullness of being they ought to have. For example, the fullness of a human being requires the composite of soul and body, having all the powers and instruments of knowledge and motion; hence if a man lacks any of these he lacks something of the fullness of his being."

3. Bourke, Ethics, 275.

4. Etienne Gilson, Moral Values and the Moral Life, trans. L. R. Ward (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Co., 1931), 191.

CHAPTER 4

HABIT AND VIRTUE

In this chapter we move to consider the principles of patterned human behavior: habit and virtue. These principles are acquired by the soul in the development of an individual's character. Virtue is a good habit of the soul. As such, it shares common characteristics with other habits, but also possesses certain unique elements. Therefore, we will begin by examining the nature of habit, an acquired disposition of the soul. Secondly, we will consider the elements unique to virtue. And, finally, we will investigate in detail the various kinds of virtues.

In his discussion of habit, Thomas draws upon Aristotle's teaching. "A habit is a disposition, or a quality, of the soul, " according to Thomas.(1a2ae. 57) The root idea of the concept is "to have"(1a2ae. 49,3). He states that

> The Philosopher says,"'having' or 'habit' means a disposition by which that which is disposed is either well or ill disposed, either in itself or with reference to something else (1a2ae. 49,4).

This type of quality is one that is acquired by an individual. This acquired disposition may be either a good disposition (i.e. virtue) or an evil disposition (i.e. vice).

But how is a habit "disposed" to something?

A habit is a disposition that is ordered to an act, a quality of the soul that enables an agent to perform an action with relative ease. For a habit to be disposed to an action it must possess three elements (1a2ae. 49,4). First, the habit must be distinct from the action that is performed under its influence.

> That which is disposed must be distinct from that to which it is disposed, and thus related to it as potentiality to act (1a2ae. 49,4).

This first condition brings an important point to light. A being that is pure act has no need of habit. Only those beings that are a combination of potency and act have need for habits. Thus, habits are necessary for humans but not for God, as God is pure act. The human being, in order to attain goods proper to his nature, must make use of habits.

In a second way, the agent must be determined to various objects in various ways. If a thing were in potency only to one object then there would be no need for a habit. However,

> that which is in potency to something must be able to be determined in several ways and to different things (1a2ae. 49,4).

There is an element of indeterminateness in human affairs such that any individual is not necessarily determined to act in one way. Determinism prevails in those entities that are disposed to only one kind of activity. But humans are disposed to a variety of activities (e.g. eating, drinking

and thinking).

Thirdly, the various powers residing in the subject must "concur in order to dispose the subject to one of the things to which it is in potency" (1a2ae. 49,4). A human being is a unity having vegetative, sensitive, and intellectual powers. These elements must function together in order to gain their various goods (e.g. food, drink, living together with other humans). A habit proportions, or harmonizes, the various elements of the soul with the result that they function well together. But what parts are there to the human soul that need to be disposed to activity?

A habit perfects that part of the soul which is ordered to a particular activity (1a2ae. 49,2). However, as the human being is a composite of body and soul we find that there are at least three possible ways that the soul could be ordered to an act: vegetatively, sensitively, or intellectually (1a2ae. 50,2).

Human habits relate precisely to those vegetative, sensitive and intellectual powers of the human soul. Each power has specific functions, so one can consider each power as related to the soul's various goods. The nutritive soul has no habits as it does not respond to the dictates of reason.

> The powers of the nutritive part of the soul do not have an innate aptitude for obeying the command of reason, and hence there are no habits in them. But the sense powers do have an innate aptitude to obey the command of reason, and hence there can be

> habits in them, for insofar as they follow reason they are said to be rational in a certain respect (1a2ae. 50,3).

The nutritive powers of the soul are distinguished from the sensitive by noting that while the nutritive power does not respond to the commands of reason, the sensitive power does to a degree. The oxygenation of the blood is beyond the control of human reason, as this process belongs to the nutritive soul. On the other hand, the appetite of hunger can, and should, be regulated by reason. An individual may feel the urge to eat, but one has the power to decide how much and what kind of food is suitable.

The sensitive soul has two primary appetites: the irascible and the concupiscible appetites (1a. 81,2). These appetites are the source of inclinations. They may be distinguished by noting that the irascible appetite enables one to pursue difficult goods resolutely, while the concupiscible appetite inclines one to pursue easy goods and avoid pains.

> Since the sensitive appetite is an inclination... there must needs be in the sensitive part two appetitive powers: one, through which the soul is inclined absolutely to seek what is suitable, according to the senses, and to fly from what is hurtful, and this is called concupiscible; and another, whereby an animal resists the attacks that hinder what is suitable, and inflict harm, and this is called irascible (1a. 81,2).

We might say that the concupiscible appetite seeks the "easy goods" of food, drink, and sex. On the other hand, the irascible appetite seeks to fight against difficult goods by

trying to "counteract the passions of the concupiscible appetite" (1a. 81,2).

We can also look at the appetites in a different way. The irascible and concupiscible appetites can be distinguished by their proper objects. The object of the concupiscible appetite is the "pleasurable or the painful" (1a2ae. 23,1). The concupiscible appetite pursues pleasures and avoids pains that are easily obtained or avoided. The irascible appetite has for its proper object "a sense-good or sense-evil qua arduous, i.e. in so far as the acquisition or avoidance involves some kind of difficulty or struggle" (1a2ae. 23,1). The irascible appetite must struggle in order to obtain pleasures and goods.

As we move on to consider the intellectual part of the soul, we discover that the appetite of the intellectual part of the soul is the will (1a2ae. 8,1). Thomas says

> the will is a rational appetite. Now an appetite is only for the good. The reason for this is that appetite is simply an inclination for something on the part of the one who desires it. Now nothing is favorably disposed to something unless it is like or suitable to it (1a2ae. 8,1).

The intellectual appetite, known as the will, inclines toward the good, or at least the perceived good (1a2ae. 8,1). The will, as residing in reason, also rules over the other appetites (i.e. over the irascible and concupiscible). The will is a higher power; it tends towards the greater, or more universal good. The sensitive appetites, on the other hand,

tend towards only the particular good (1a2ae. 9,2). Thus, there exist two principles of human action: appetite and reason itself.

The intellect also has non-appetitive habits. Since the intellect is an operative power in its own right, as distinct from will, it has the capacity to perform purely intellectual acts. Thus, there is a habit of first principles, a habit of demonstrative knowledge from first principles to conclusions, and a habit of reasoning from effects back to the first cause of being. These intellectual habits reside in the passive intellect (1a2ae. 50,4). The intellectual habits, as they are formed in the passive intellect, are responsible for the soul's grasping reality as presented to the intellect.

Habits are caused by repetition. They are efficiently caused by conscious, deliberate repetition. They may be increased or diminished after they have been acquired. Therefore, it can be said that "with repeated acts a habit grows" (1a2ae. 52,3). But to what are the various habits, as acquired dispositions, ordered to?

The various habits may be distinguished by their objects. That is, they are differentiated in terms of the end of their operations. The ends of sensitive habits are differentiated from the intellectual as they have different purposes. The intellectual habits direct man towards contemplation while the sensitive habits direct man to goods

in accordance with his sensitive nature.

Habits can be distinguished in terms of their active principle. Intellectual habits are distinct from sensitive habits, because the active principles of the intellect and the sensitive appetites are distinct. The active principles of the intellectual nature are the will and reason while the active principle of the sensitive nature are the irascible and concupiscible appetites.

Habits are also properly distinguished in terms of their nature. This can mean two different things. In one sense the nature of a habit can be either a good habit or a bad habit. Good habits are known as virtues and bad habits are known as vices. If the habit is suitable to a being's nature as perfective of that being, then this habit is a virtue. However, if the habit is not perfective of that being's nature, then it is a vice.

But the "nature" of habit may have a second meaning. If one considers the higher and lower elements of the soul, then the habits will have different natures. Man has a nature that concerns his natural ends (i.e. knowing truth, begetting children, etc.) However, man also has a supernatural end (i.e. the beatific vision). Therefore, while there exist habits of the lower nature (e.g. temperance) that enable him to live well according to his nature as rational animal, there are also habits of a higher nature (e.g. charity) that assist him in the attainment of

his supernatural end. But the first distinction between good and evil habits is clearly what concerns our discussion, as we are not going to delve into the theological virtues. Therefore, the next step in our discussion must be to analyze the nature of those good habits that enable man to live well in this life according to his natural ends.

Virtue is a good habit of an operative power of the human soul. Virtue, therefore, is the further specification of habit. Virtue can be considered in terms of its four causes.

> For the formal cause of virtue, as of anything, is taken from its genus, and difference, when it is defined as "a good quality," for the genus of virtue is quality and the difference is good. But the definition would be more appropriate if in place of quality, we use habit . . . the subject is given in place of the material cause when it is said that a virtue is a good quality of the mind. . . . Now the end of virtue is . . . operation. . . . [T]he distinction of virtue from habits which are related sometimes to good and at other times to evil is expressed by "of which no one can make bad use" (1a2ae. 55,4).

And the efficient cause of moral virtue is acquired by repeated actions.[1]

> Human virtue, as ordered to the good which is measured by the rule of human reason, can be caused by human acts insofar as acts of such virtue proceed from reason, under whose power and rule such good is established (1a2ae. 63,2).

Generically speaking, virtue is a habit of the soul. Specifically, it is a good habit. When the genus and species of a thing are given, the formal cause is known. Therefore, the formal cause of virtue is its genus and species, a good

habit.

Materially, it seems that there is no substance "out of which" virtue is formed. Therefore, the material cause of virtue is replaced by the subject of virtue. Virtue has only a subject "about which" it is concerned, the human soul.

The final cause of virtue is right living. A virtue can never be misused. Virtue is ordered to behavior that perfects an operative power of the soul. This end, or good, is correct action.

The efficient cause of human virtue is repeated action. Virtue is acquired by the agent performing repeated moral actions. The repetition grows into an acquired disposition and the virtue is formed efficiently in this manner.

The subject of virtue is the operative potency of the human soul. As the soul has certain powers, there will be virtues that correspond to those powers. "Virtue belongs to a power of the soul" (1a2ae. 56,1). There are three reasons why the subject of virtue is a power of the soul.

> First, because of the very nature of virtue, which implies the perfection of a power, and a perfection is in that of which it is a perfection. Second, from the fact that virtue is an operative habit, as we have said, and every operation comes from the soul through some power. Third, from the fact that virtue disposes to what is best, and the best is the end, which is either a thing's operation or something acquired by an operation proceeding from the power (1a2ae. 56,1).

As humans are in potency to various and indeterminate objects they need good habits in order to obtain these objects. For

example, these objects to be obtained included orderly family and social life, and proper contemplation of truth. Now, humans possess various powers that when enacted attain these objects. Therefore, as virtue is a perfection of a power that human's possess, virtue must concern a power of the human soul. Secondly, powers are ordered to operations. Furthermore, habits concerns operations of these powers. Therefore, good habits concern powers ordered to operation. Thirdly, virtue is a disposition to good operation. And this good operation regards a good end. Consequently, virtue must concern a power of the soul. But the question is what are the powers of the soul?

The virtues that concern the cognitive intellectual capacities of the agent are known as the intellectual virtues. These virtues will be the perfection of the operations of the passive intellect. These operative habits may concern non-operables or operables. Therefore, the speculative intellectual virtues include wisdom, understanding and science, while the practical intellectual virtues include prudence and art.

Understanding serves as a key analogue for Thomas's account of practical reason. Understanding is "the habit of first principles" (1a2ae. 57,2). Understanding grasps the truth as it is "known in itself" (1a2ae. 57,2) For instance, it is the understanding that grasps the principles "A being cannot be and not be at the same time" and "The good is to be

pursued and evil avoided." The understanding grasps these first principles of demonstration without knowing the ways they are employed in the various sciences.

The virtue of understanding perfects the intellect in two primary ways. In one way, understanding provides the intellect with the capacity to know indemonstrable truths in themselves. In a second way, understanding perfects the intellect in that it is a specific mode of knowing. It knows truth immediately, not by means of other truth.

Understanding is a habit in a different sense than the other virtues which are called "habits." Usually, virtue requires a considerable amount of repetition. Not so with understanding. The virtue of understanding is partly innate and partly acquired, as has been noted above.

As is the case with all the intellectual virtues, the subject of understanding is the possible intellect. Understanding is a perfection of the passive intellect insofar as the passive intellect receives the intelligible forms as given by the agency of the active intellect. However, these first principles are not limited exclusively to the realm of speculation.

Science is the habit of mediated knowledge. It concerns truth that is "understood by the intellect, not at once, but by means of the reasons's inquiry" (1a2ae. 57,2). Thomas clarifies this notion by stating that

> In regard to that which is last in this or that genus of knowable truths, it is science that perfects the intellect. Therefore, according to the diverse genera of knowable truths, there are diverse habits of the sciences (1a2ae. 57,2).

Furthermore, the intellect is

> perfected by a habit through which conclusions demonstrated from such principles are known. Demonstration may proceed from inferior causes, as in sciences or from the highest cause" (In De Trin. V,1).

Science is a "habit of conclusions."[2] As such a habit, it presupposes the first principles of understanding. As the first principles of the understanding will concern speculative and practical matters, science will also concern speculative matters as well as practical matters. Two of the major branches of speculative sciences are mathematics and natural science. One of the major practical sciences is moral science.

As science is mediated knowledge, it does not grasp truth immediately, but proceeds by a discursive process, that terminates in a conclusion. In this way it perfects the passive intellect. However, there is another type of reasoning process that also perfects the passive intellect, but this habit concerns the "highest cause." This special type of science is called "wisdom."

Wisdom is that habit of the speculative intellect that "considers the highest causes . . . it rightly judges and orders all truths, because there can be no perfect and universal judgment except by resolution to first causes"

(1a2ae. 57,2). Wisdom is the habit of the intellect's inquiry into first causes by way of resolution (e.g. the five ways of demonstrating God's existence). Furthermore, it judges and orders all truths, and in this respect it stands over and above the various types of sciences.

Wisdom is the highest of all the speculative intellectual virtues due to the nature of its object. It perfects the passive intellect in demonstrating first causes. However, wisdom is distinct from the virtue of science in two special ways.

First, wisdom has the highest authority over all of the other sciences. Other sciences are judged by the truths of wisdom. The wise individual knows that the truths of the first causes of being are the most fundamental. The recognition of these truths organizes and provides the structure for the demonstrated truths of the sciences. If there is a conflict between the two bodies of knowledge (i.e. science and wisdom), the truths of wisdom always have priority as their object is the highest of all possible causes (i.e. being itself). "For whatever is found in the other sciences contrary to the truth of this science (i.e. wisdom) miust be condemned as false" (1a. 1,6,ad2).

Second, wisdom has the greatest certainty of all demonstrated knowledge. It has the greatest certainty because its proper object is the first cause of all being in that it resolves all effects to their first cause i.e. God.

Therefore,

> The wise man knows that things have been made and ordered by God, and that, as a consequence, things are hierarchized by their relations to their Ultimate End Who is God (1a. 14,1,ad2).

Wisdom considers being as such. It transcends natural science and mathematics and deals solely with the object of metaphysics, i.e. being itself. Commenting on wisdom's function, Sr. Brennan notes that wisdom facilitates "the speculative intellect in those operations by which it considers the objects proper to the realm of metaphysics, that is, those of the third degree of abstraction."[3] Wisdom does not deal with quantitative being, or material being, but with being qua being.

However, the intellect does not merely contemplate speculative truths, it also contemplates operables that can be made or performed by the agent. There are two practical intellectual virtues: art and prudence.

Art is initially defined as "right reasoning about certain works to be made" (1a2ae. 57,3). Art differs from the speculative virtues in that art concerns products that can be made by the individual. The agent is viewed as an "active artisan, not as the spectator or rapt contemplator of beauty."[4] Art is the habit of producing various artifacts according to right reason. One must reason correctly in the production of an external object. The carpenter must reason rightly about the construction of a table. He must possess

the habit of art in order to produce a good table. The habit of art concerns the truth of things that can be produced by the agent. This kind of truth is practical and, thus, it will vary according to the circumstances.

Art is a virtue that perfects the passive intellect in two ways. First, it fosters the capacity for the mind to to operate immanently in production of various things. It enables the artist to produce his work according to the formal element of right reason that must precede his creation. Second, art directs the transient activity of the actual production of the artifact in question.

The purpose of art is to create a good artifact. The artist attempts to create a product that will fulfill its function. The carpenter desires to create a table that will support objects laid upon it. Bad art is a result of defect. That is, a bad table will not do what it was designed to do.

The good, then, of art is to be found primarily in the artifact, not in the agent. Art is concerned with exterior matter. "Making and doing differ in that making is an activity having an effect on exterior matter" (1a2ae. 57,4). Therefore, one does not need to possess a good will in order to be a good artist. A good carpenter may still be a very evil person.

The virtue that enables one to act well is the domain of prudence. Prudence is the last of the intellectual virtues. However, its function is of the greatest

significance as far as the moral life is concerned. Prudence is a unique virtue in that it functions both as an intellectual virtue and as a moral virtue. Essentially prudence is an intellectual virtue, but its subject matter is that of moral virtue. Thus, prudence "welds together, as it were, the moral and intellectual life of man . . . and is, in many respects, the key virtue of them all," according to Sr. Brennan.[5]

Prudence is defined as "right reasoning about what is to be done" (1a2ae. 57,4). This practical intellectual virtue differs from art in that prudence concerns actions, not production of things.

> Making and doing differ in that making is an activity having an effect on exterior matter, such as building, sawing, and the like, while doing is an activity remaining within the agent, such as seeing, willing, and the like (1a2ae. 57,4).

In other words art differs from prudence in that prudence is an activity that remains "within the agent," while art concerns "exterior matter." However, prudence and art both concern the habitual capacity to intellectually think through an operation.

The operation prudence is directed towards concerns right action. Its object is morally good behavior. Moreover, this kind of behavior is not limited to isolated areas of one's life, but is comprehensive in the sense that it concerns the entire moral life of the individual. Prudence regards deliberation "about matters pertaining to

the whole of human life and the ultimate end of human life" (1a2ae. 57,4,ad3).

Prudence is not merely concerned with right action in the abstract, but with what route of action must be taken now. The perfection of the practical intellect is always directed, ultimately, to action. Therefore, prudence will not consist of mere speculation about good behavior; rather it will facilitate the capacity to act here and now.

In sum, in this chapter we have shown that habits are acquired dispositions of the soul that facilitate human action. Habits are necessary for humans as the human agent is in potency to a variety of activities corresponding to the various powers of the human soul.

Good habits which reside in the soul are virtues. They are always directed toward good operation and acquired by repetition.

The powers of the soul that are the subjects of the virtues include reason, the will, and the sensitive appetites. Those good habits that perfect the rational powers of the soul are known as intellectual virtues.

Understanding, science and wisdom are speculative intellectual virtues. On the other hand, art and prudence are practical intellectual virtues. Art deals with the making of things. Prudence concerns right reasoning concerning human actions. Human actions involve not only intellectual habits, but the ordering of one's appetites as

well. Morally good action requires the possession of the cardinal, or moral, virtues.

NOTES

1. In the text quoted from St. Augustine, the type of virtue described is theological virtue. The efficient cause of theological virtue is divine agency. The human agent cannot acquire theological virtue without the direct infused activity of God.

2. Sr. Rose Emmanuella Brennan, The Intellectual Virtues According to the Philosophy of St. Thomas, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1941), 32.

3. Ibid., 47.

4. Ibid., 53.

5. Ibid., 55.

CHAPTER 5

PRUDENCE AND MORAL VIRTUE

Prudence has the unique position of being both an intellectual as well as a moral virtue. Prudence is essentially an intellectual virtue, but its subject matter is moral. In the last chapter we observed the intellectual nature of prudence. In this chapter we will investigate the notion of right reason and how right reason functions with prudence in moral virtue.

Prudence is defined as "right reason about things to be done" (recta ratio agibilium). Hence, we shall first give a brief account of right reason. Secondly, we will note why prudence requires the possession of the other moral virtues. Thirdly, we will give a detailed account of the virtual and component parts of prudence. And finally, we will see how prudence perfects the practical intellect.

The notion of right reason is not unique to prudence. The intellectual virtues of science and art are also defined in terms of right reason. Science, according to Thomas, is "right reason in conclusions to be drawn" (recta ratio scibilium) (2a2ae. 55). Art, on the other hand, is "right reason about things to be made" (recta ratio factibilium) (1a2ae. 57,3). Therefore, prudence cannot be strictly

identified with right reason. There must be more to the definition than the generic notion of right reason (1a2ae. 58,4,ad3).

> Consequently, although moral virtue is not right reason, as Socrates maintained, neither is it only being in accord with right reason, inasmuch as it inclines one to what is in accord with right reason, as the Platonists held, but it must also be present with right reason, as Aristotle says (1a2ae. 58,4,ad3).

Prudence is specifically different from science and art in that prudence concerns things to be done, not conclusions to be drawn or things to be made. But one who is able to draw conclusions well need not be virtuous. The same applies to the artist. However, the prudent character requires that one possess moral virtue (1a2ae. 57,4). Thus, art and science do not require the possession of moral virtue while prudence does. But why is this?

In order to fully understand Thomas at this very critical point we must recall that first principles function in the practical intellect in a parallel fashion to the first principles in the speculative intellect. Yet, there is a crucial difference. In the practical intellect, one's apprehension of those first principles can be altered by one's appetite. Thomas explains these points in a key passage.

> All other intellectual virtues can exist without moral virtue, but there cannot be prudence without moral virtue. The reason for this is that prudence is right reasoning about what is to be done-- and this not only in general, but also in

> particular, in respect to which man acts. Now right reasoning requires principles from which the reasoning proceeds. And reasoning about particulars must proceed not only from universal principles but from particular principles as well. As to universal principles about things to be done, man is rightly disposed by the natural understanding of principles, whereby he recognizes that no evil thing is to be done; or again by some practical science. But this is not enough for right reasoning about particular cases. For it sometimes happens that such a universal principle known by understanding or through some science, is perverted in a particular case by some passion; for example, to a person very desirous of something when the desire overcomes him, the object seems good to him, although it is contrary to the universal judgment of his reason (1a2ae. 58,5).

Prudence is concerned with particular cases. One always acts in a singular instance. However, there must be universal principles to which we can refer our behavior. These universal principles are supplied by the natural law. However, these singular cases also utilize particular principles. The problem is that in reasoning from the universal principle to the particular act of command, sometimes one is overwhelmed by passion to the extent that one does an evil act. For example, one may know that all acts of adultery are evils to be avoided. Yet, one may commit an act of adultery when under the influence of passion. So, how is it possible to act virtuously?

We must recall that that it is possible to possess all of the intellectual virtues without possessing the moral virtues, except in the case of prudence. Prudence requires the possession of moral virtue. If one did not possess moral

virtue, one would only be able to think about morality, one would not be able to act. Thus, it becomes clear that prudence requires that the agent must have right thinking as well as a right appetite if one is to be called prudent. One must acquire the right appetitive disposition.

> Consequently, just as a man is disposed rightly to universal principles by natural understanding or by the habit of science, so in order to be rightly disposed with regard to particular principles concerning things to be done, which are as ends or goals, he must be perfected by certain habits, so that it becomes connatural, as it were, to him to judge rightly about an end. This comes about through moral virtue, for the virtuous person judges about the end rightly, since "such as a man is, so does the end seem to him." Hence in order to reason rightly about what is to be done, which is prudence, man must have moral virtue (1a2ae. 58,5).

The person who has a rightly ordered appetite also possesses what Thomas calls "connatural knowledge" (2a2ae. 45,2). The meaning of this term is "knowledge in accord with nature." When applied to virtue it carries with it the idea that one acquires a second nature.

The area where connatural knowledge plays its most important role is the affective part of the soul. Moral virtue is a connatural disposition of one's appetite. Moreover, this disposition affects the judgment of reason either positively when one judges rightly or negatively when one judges wrongly. The meaning of the phrase "as a man is so does the end seems to him," becomes clearer. The condition of one's appetite will affect the moral judgments one makes.

> The suitability of an object is recognized much more often through concrete reactions of the appetite, by way of inclination, than through purely rational and cold knowledge.[1]

One's inclination to various objects of appetite are modified, either intensifying or attenuating, by the virtues or vices.

One may possess moral knowledge in two ways according to Thomas (2a2ae. 45,2). In one way, one may know a moral truth per modem cognitionis. In this case, one knows a moral truth in an impersonal way, by doing moral science. One may obtain a moral truth without actually experiencing it oneself. The moral philosopher may be able to render advice concerning chastity without having experiential knowledge of the issue. However, one may know moral truths per modem inclinationis. In this second way one knows a moral truth by means of his experience of it. Thus, one may ask the chaste individual questions concerning chastity and the virtuous person will tender advice gained from experience via per modem inclinationis. "One does not need a moral theory in order to be good and one can have a moral theory without being good," as McInerny observes.[2]

Prudence is primary among the virtues. It is the "mother and mold of the other moral virtues," as Pieper claims.[3] Thomas observes that "For what is proper to prudence overflows into the other virtues insofar as they are directed by prudence" (1a2ae. 61,4,ad1). Thus, if one

possesses any of the other moral virtues: justice, fortitude and temperance one must possess prudence. Prudence, therefore, charges all good human conduct with right reason. Conversely, "Every sin conflicts with prudence, as every virtue is charged with prudence" (2a2ae. 55). Let us take a brief look at how prudence operates in the other moral virtues.

Justice can be defined as right reason in relation to others. Justice has to do with rendering to others what is their due suum cuique. Thomas states that "among all the moral virtues it is justice wherein the use of right reason appears chiefly" (2a2ae. 55,8). That is, the just thing to do is always determined by the prudential individual using right reason.

The mean of justice is a real mean. That is, it renders to the other person exactly what is one's due. It renders neither more nor less than what is due. In rendering less than what is one's due we fail to reach the requirements of justice. And in rendering more than what is one's due we overstep the requirements of justice. Justice consists in rendering to another what is his or her due according to right reason.

Justice is that moral virtue that regards the will (1a2ae. 61,2). The good is the object of the will (1a2ae. 56,6). The will naturally acts for the good. However, this does not mean that all actions are, by definition, morally

good actions. The will needs the direction and guidance of right reason in order to insure that the good is pursued in the right way. But prudence not only regulates the "rational appetite" (i.e. the will), it also molds the sensitive appetites as well.

Prudence is responsible for regulating the irascible and concupiscible appetites. The virtues that correspond to these appetites are fortitude and temperance respectively. Their proper functions are to be in accord with right reason as determined by prudence.

> To be conformed to right reason is the proper purpose of any moral virtue. The intent of temperance is to prevent us from straying from reason because of our lusts; of fortitude lest we forsake the judgment of right reason because of fear or rashness . . . . Yet quite how and through what we strike the virtuous mean, this is the business of prudence (2a2ae. 47,7).

Temperance and fortitude are virtues in so far as prudence rationally regulates the concupiscible and irascible appetites.

In regulating the sensitive appetites, prudence chooses a mean between excess and deficiency. It is in this sense that "moral virtue observes a mean" (1a2ae. 64,1). The sensitive appetites concern the individual are "interior" passions, as they concern only the agent that has the appetite. The concupiscible and irascible appetites will vary from person to person. For example, a large person will require more food for a meal than a much smaller person.

Yet, it is just as wrong for a larger person to overeat as it is for a smaller person. Prudence should choose a mean relative to each person.

In reasoning rightly about any given moral issue, the moral agent must apprehend the moral principle involved, assesses the nature of relevant contingencies, applies the universal to the particular and acts upon his deliberation. Prudence fulfills these requirements by virtue of having three principal elements: (1) deliberation (2) judgment and (3) command (1a2ae. 57,5 & 1a2ae. 58,4).

There are three "virtual parts" of prudence, according to Thomas (2a2ae. 51). These principle parts include deliberation (euboulia), sound judgment (synesis), and the "wit to deal with exceptional cases" (gnome) (2a2ae. 51,4). We will consider these three allied virtues of prudence.

As regards deliberation, Thomas claims that it is an inquiry about certain things to be done (1a2ae. 14). Moreover, these "things to be done "are singular contingent matters" (1a2ae. 14). As an inquiry it proceeds according to a specific mode of demonstration. This mode of demonstration is that of resolution as our inquiry begins from "what is intended in the future" and it will "continue until one arrives at what must be done at once" (1a2ae. 14,5). Thomas means that we must act for that ultimate end that is desired. From that end, we reason until we find those actions that will accomplish the end in the most appropriate manner. We

deliberate until we arrive at that action that should be pursued immediately.

Deliberation, therefore, does not concern the ends to be attained, but only the most appropriate means to those ends (1a2ae. 14,1). Thomas calls the ability of good deliberation eubulia (In Ethic. VI,8). Thomas claims that this involves the "rectitude of deliberation in relation to an absolutely good end, by suitable methods and at an opportune time" (In Ethic. VI,8).

With regard to deliberation, the prudent individual will also possess four other characteristics. The prudent character will also possess a good memory, insight, docility, and acumen.

Memory is a component part of prudence because people notice what happens in the majority of cases when one does a certain activity. This must be accounted for in deliberation. In the majority of cases the idiom "honesty is the best policy" holds true as it makes for reliable and felicitous relations between individuals in community. Furthermore, we build upon these experiences and retain them for future reference (2a2ae. 49,1).

While deliberating the prudent individual will also gain insight, as insight correctly grasps certain ultimate principles that must be "assumed as self-evident" for prudence to function. Moreover, these self-evident principles are used as our first principles of demonstration.

However, Thomas notes that prudence does not simply use insight as the sole source of active principles. He claims that

> The reasoning involved in prudence draws on a double understanding. One, the understanding of general principles, which is for that understanding which is classed as an intellectual virtue; it is a habit of mind whereby nature we see general principles, not only of theory but of practice as well. . . . The other understanding is . . . seeing the ultimate particular or factual principle of practice, expressed in a proposition which is the minor premise in the reasoning of prudence (2a2ae. 49,2).

While insight provides us with our general principle of action, we find that we must also take the circumstances of the particular instance into consideration.

The third component part of prudence required for good deliberation Thomas calls "docility."[4] This component embraces the idea that certain aspects of prudence can be taught. That is, we need to be educated by our elders. The reason for this is simple. Older individuals usually have experience in moral matters. They know in what circumstances what principles, supplied by insight, should be employed. Their judgments are usually sound ones (2a2ae. 49,3).

Deliberation also requires acumen, or <u>eustochia</u>. Thomas notes that acumen is "a flair for finding the right course in sudden encounters" as developed by the prudent individual (2a2ae. 49,4). Acumen aims at the correct estimate of the results of a course of action. We gain these estimates either by learning from others or by actually

doing the estimation ourselves. Acumen is this latter type of estimation that manifests itself at a moment's notice.

We must now consider judgment. Thomas calls sound judgment, synesis (In Ethic. VI,9). This type of judgment concerns what is usually the case in moral reasoning. Generally, we should return borrowed items. From this general principle, we can judge that it is right to return the gun I borrowed from my neighbor when he requests it from me, under normal conditions. The judgment in this case is one of synesis. However, there is a kind of judgment used in exceptional cases. This is prudence's third allied virtue.

Thomas calls the third allied virtue to prudence gnome (2a2ae. 51,4). Gnome is used in exceptional cases where ordinary judgments do not suffice. When my neighbor, in a fit of rage, requests his gun back from me, I judge that the borrowed item in question should not be returned as my neighbor may harm someone with it. In this case, the judgment is one of gnome, as normal circumstances do not apply.

The component part of prudence that corresponds to the allied virtues of synesis and gnome is reasoned judgment (2a2ae. 49,5). This element is crucial as Thomas claims that we must have it "in order that general principles may be rightly applied to particular issues that are various and uncertain" (2a2ae. 49,5,ad1).

The key part of prudence, in terms of its virtual

parts, is command imperium. According to Thomas

> it is clear that in regard to things which are done by man, the principle act is command, to which the other acts are ordered (1a2ae. 57,6).

We find that both deliberation and judgment are ordered to command. Command is the end to which these other acts are ordered. Furthermore, command perfects the practical reason.

> The third act (i.e. command), however, is proper to the practical intellect insofar as it is productive (1a2ae. 57,6).

An agent must not only be able to deliberate well and judge well, but the agent must be able to command the action. If one cannot, or will not, command the action the practical intellect remains imperfect. While knowledge is indeed necessary for virtue, inasmuch as one can deliberate and judge well, it is insufficient for virtue if one does not command the act in question.

There are three component parts of prudence that correspond to command. These are foresight, circumspection and caution. These enable the prudent individual to see the consequences of any proposed action.

Prudence derives its name from foresight. Prudence comes from the latin porro videns which means "to look ahead." Foresight (provedentia) has two distinctive characteristics; (1) it always regards contingencies, and (2) it always has a purpose (2a2ae. 49,6). That is, foresight is the capacity to know how to adapt present situations in order to accomplish some purpose. Foresight regards the action we

undertake in the present as an attempt to bring about an expected future state of affairs.

A second component part of prudence is circumspection. Circumspection is the capacity to take account of those relevant circumstances of any given situation that might affect the moral nature of the act commanded.

The third and final component part of prudence regarding command Thomas calls caution. The prudent individual recognizes that some actions may have negative results, and is careful to avoid these problems.

In commanding action, the formal cause of the act is the will while the material and efficient cause is the will as noted above.[5] The intellect presents the act to the will, which assents to the command in question. So, prudence necessarily involves the intellect and the will. "And so there is included in prudence both the act of the will which concerns the end and knowledge of the end" (On Truth. V,1). "Prudence presupposes the willing of the right end." The will must be habituated in a right way so that the act is completed. Without the cooperation of the will, command will not result and the agent will not become moral.

Another way of looking at the issue is to consider how knowledge functions in moral virtue. One can consider knowledge from a variety of perspectives, according to Thomas. These perspectives include considerations of the mode, end, and object of any type of knowledge.

> Some knowledge is speculative only, some is practical only, and some is partly speculative and partly practical . . . it must be observed that knowledge can be called speculative in three ways: first, in relation to things known, which are not operable by the knower; such is the knowledge of man about natural or divine things. Secondly, as regards the manner of knowing--as, for instance, if a builder were to consider a house by defining and dividing, and considering what belongs to it in general: for this is to consider operable things in a speculative manner, and not as they are operable; for operable means the application of form to matter, and not the resolution of the composite into its universal formal principles. Thirdly, as regards the end; for the practical intellect differs from the speculative by its end, as the Philosopher says. For the practical intellect is ordered to the end of operation; whereas the end of the speculative intellect is the consideration of truth. Hence if a builder were to consider how a house can be made, but without ordering this to the end of operation, but only towards knowledge, this would be only a speculative consideration as regards the end, although it concerns an operable thing (1a. 14,16).

The mixtures of practical and speculative knowledge are exemplified by the "housebuilder" example. The first example of speculative knowledge regards "divine" things that are not operables. The second regards operables as definable, i.e. what we talk about when we discuss a particular operable, what we mean by "house." And the final example concerns how a house can be built, without the actual production of the house.

The first type of knowledge regards the object of knowledge. Is the object of knowledge an operable or a non-operable? If the object cannot be produced by the human agent (e.g. a rock), the object is a non-operable. If the

object can be produced by the human agent (e.g. a house), the object of knowledge is an operable.

The second way in which knowledge can be considered is by the manner of knowing. If one considers the house as an operable, one must inquire into the constituent parts of the house and how to make them. How is it possible to construct a house? However, the intent of the knower is not application but knowledge for its own sake.

The third way in which knowledge can be considered concerns the intent of the knower. Does the knower intend action? If the knower intends to actually use his knowledge of housebuilding in order to build a house, the knowledge is "completely practical knowledge."[6] This last type of knowledge, completely practical knowledge, is required for moral virtue. And the capacity to command the act in question makes this type of knowledge completely practical.

In this chapter we have seen that as prudence is right reasoning about things to be done, it has both a cognitive and an appetitive element. Furthermore, for virtue to function effectively one's thinking must be correct and one must possess rectitude of the will.

One obtains a rightly ordered will by cultivating the other moral virtues. In fact, prudence presupposes the possession of justice, fortitude and temperance. And in each of the other moral virtues, right reason plays a critical role.

Prudence has three essential elements: right deliberation, right judgment, and command. But it is command that sets prudence apart as a practical, moral virtue. Anyone can deliberate and judge well, but it is only the prudent individual who also commands the act in question.

NOTES

1. Naus, Practical Intellect, 143.

2. Ralph McInerny, Art and Prudence. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 107.)

3. Josef Pieper, The Four Cardinal Virtues. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 22.

4. Pieper, 16.

5. See Chapter 3.

6. McInerny, Ethica Thomistica, 40.

CHAPTER 6

NATURAL LAW, RIGHT REASON AND VIRTUE

In his important article, "Is Thomas Aquinas a Natural Law Ethicist?" Vernon Bourke observed that the "Treatise on Law" occupies a place of minor importance in the section on morality in the Summa Theologiae.

> All eighty-nine Questions preceding the treatise on law are devoted to the discrimination between good and evil in human conduct. The main burden of these twelve-hundred pages in the Latin text is not that natural law enables man to distinguish good from evil: rather, these eighty-nine Questions repeatedly state what is good for man, and what is evil, must be determined by the use of human reasoning.[1]

Bourke saw correctly that reason is the primary element in Thomas's moral theory. It is reason, rightly used, that accounts for the intelligibility of Thomas's teleological conceptions of natural law and virtue.

In this final chapter we shall briefly review the relationship between natural law and virtue and observe how right reason is foundational to both concepts. On this basis it will be easy to show how those who view Thomas solely as a natural law ethicist are mistaken.

From our discussion in the preceeding chapters, it can be seen Thomas bases his entire moral theory on a teleological conception of human nature. Teleology permeates

his account of the natural law, moral virtue and every moral act.

It is the function of right reason, first, to apprehend appropriate human goods. Secondly, right reason operates in the acquisition of moral virtue. And finally, it is seen most clearly in the particular case of a moral action. First, we shall observe how natural law is fundamentally teleological and how right reason is operative on this most general level. Next, we shall consider the teleological nature of moral virtue and right reason's role in the acquisition of moral virtue. Finally, we shall see how every moral action, ideally, seeks to achieve an end in accordance with right reason.

Law is a command of reason. When law operates correctly it orders agents to their appropriate ends. All laws can be viewed in this manner. The eternal law directs all beings to their appropriate ends. Natural law is the rational agent's participation in the eternal law. Human laws direct a citizenry to the ends of society. When we consider natural and human laws, we find that these rational commands facilitate persons in their pursuit of happiness. The reason for this is that these types of laws are founded on right reason, and ultimately upon divine reason.

Any action, or law, that is rational is good. It is proper for entities to act in accordance with their nature. As man is rational animal, it is fitting for him to act

rationally (i.e. in conformity with his formal nature). Laws, then, are good when they direct men according to reason and bad when they depart from reason. Thomas says that "all laws in so far as they share in right reason to that extent derive from the eternal law" (1a2ae. 93,3). Furthermore,

> A human law has the force of law to the extent that it falls in with right reason: as such it derives from the eternal law. To the extent that it falls away from right reason it is called a wicked law (1a2ae. 93,3,ad2).

If a law fulfills its function properly, it participates in right reason on a general level. Natural law, then, reasons rightly about the constitutive goods for humanity on a universal level, in accord with the requirements of eternal law. McInerny states that "it is the humble but important function of natural law to say obviously true things about moral agents, to sketch at a level of great universality the constituents of the human good."[2] Thomas states that

> in those things which are done voluntarily, the proximate standard is human reason, but the supreme standard is the eternal law. Therefore, whenever man's act proceeds to the end, in accordance with the order of reason and of the eternal law, then the act is right. . . . Now, that human reason is the standard, by means of which the goodness of the human will may be measured, is due to the eternal law, which is divine reason (1a2ae. 21,1)

Right reason operates on a general level in natural law. It states what the truly human goods are and it also states what kinds of actions always promote or thwart the pursuit of those goods.

In the most generic sense, the first principle of

natural law functions as a guide to all human activity. This first principle of the practical intellect (i.e. to pursue the good and avoid evil) provides the starting point for all human activity. In addition to the first principle of natural law, there are also primary precepts of the natural law that articulate, on the most universal level, those actions that are always right or always wrong. These primary precepts always direct the human agent to his or her good. These precepts include commands like "Do not murder" and "Be just."

These precepts are derived from human nature. The agent, by using reason, sees that some actions always result in destructive consequences. Murder, for example, always destroys community. As a sound community is necessary for happiness, murder cannot be tolerated. The reason why certain actions are always forbidden depends on a specific view of human nature and human ends.

The human being is a unity constituted of vegetative, sensitive and rational soul. Each power is directed to a particular function, or end. Yet, it is the rational part of the soul that must determine how each good is to be pursued.

The principles of natural law derive from the ends that are pursued by the various powers of the soul according to the rule of reason. Sexual reproduction is a human good. Yet, it ceases to be good when pursued in ways repugnant to reason: for example, with a partner who is not one's spouse,

or at an inappropriate time. The precepts of natural law, therefore, are based upon a particular view of human nature--a view that holds that ends are to be pursued in rational ways. The primary precepts of natural law do not specifically determine how one should pursue the various goods of the soul according to reason in particular situations.

Human law makes the precepts of natural law more specific. Human law is derived from the natural law, as "in the sciences demonstrated conclusions are drawn from the principles" (1a2ae. 95,2). Human laws are particular expressions of precepts falling under the general headings of natural law. They articulate on a more specific level what the natural law states on the universal level. Thus, we conclude from the principle "harm no one," as given by natural law, that "one should not kill." Yet, this attempt to provide humanity with practical norms for behavior is also inadequate.

There are two major problems with working out a moral theory based solely on the precepts of law. First, while human law gives us more specific norms, it fails to provide us with guidelines for action when two conflicting principles are needed, as in the case of the mentally disturbed neighbor who wants his weapon returned. Thus, human laws "cannot possibly be framed to meet some rare particular incidents" (In Ethic. V,16). If we consider two routes of deliberation

one might take in working through the problem case of the mentally disturbed neighbor, contradictory arguments can be generated. In one case, one concludes that the weapon should not be returned because the neighbor will use it for an evil purpose. In the other case, one may conclude that the weapon ought to be returned as "Borrowed items should be returned." There is clearly something wrong with this reasoning. The problem is that a secondary precept of natural law does not hold absolutely. It is possible that in some cases individuals may be inclined to work out their deliberation using this misguided premise. Thus, human law, like natural law, can fail to guide the agent correctly regarding some particular situation.

Morally good reasoning results only in conclusions, or judgments of conscience, that have been demonstrated from the first principles of natural law. Morality needs more than a judgment of what may or may not be right in a given situation. Furthermore, judgment does not necessitate action on the part of the agent. This is the Platonic problem of whether knowledge is sufficient for virtue. I may form a practical syllogism utilizing the precepts of natural law and human law when deliberating about any given action. For example, one may know that adultery is forbidden by the natural law and one can conclude that this act of adultery is to be avoided. However, one may know that the conclusion is true, and yet not act upon it (e.g. due to passion).

In order to complement what the general precepts of law say about human nature on the level of generality and universality and to provide a principle of action in addition to judgment, Thomas needs an account of human virtue.

Virtue involves "right reasoning about particular cases" and being "rightly disposed with regard to particular principles, which are ends or goals" (1a2ae. 58,5). The prudent individual, i.e. the virtuous person, must be able to reason well about how to act, and this person must be able to act upon the judgments of practical reason in a way that reflects the desire to do good.

First, the virtuous person must be able to reason rightly about particular cases. To understand particular cases the agent must be able to deliberate well about the means to a given end, taking into consideration the relevant circumstances. Following upon deliberation, the individual will judge correctly about what is to be done. But most importantly, the virtuous person will be able to command the judgment that is the conclusion of deliberation.

One is able to command action because one has acquired the moral virtues of justice, fortitude, and temperance. One must have appetites that are appropriately disposed to their proper objects. Since the virtuous person possesses appetites that are rationally ordered, this person is able to command action without being unduly influenced by passion or malice because the virtuous person desires what truly

perfects the agent.

The virtuous person desires the truly human goods because the desiring the goods has become connatural to the agent. The agent has developed a character that desires the good and is repulsed by the evil in particular situations.

As has been shown elsewhere (1a2ae. 94,3), Thomas holds that one can refer to acts of virtue in two ways. First, insofar as they are virtuous, and second, insofar as they are actions of a certain kind. When one considers acts of virtue in the first way, one finds that all acts of virtue are matters for natural law. Thomas claims that this follows because the natural law concerns everything to which man inclines by nature. All things incline to activities in accordance with their nature. Since man is a rational animal, it follows that he should act by using his reason. Yet virtue also concerns acting in accord with reason. He therefore concludes that all acts of virtue are matters of natural law. In other words, every act commanded by natural law is a virtuous kind of action.

While the natural law articulates the precepts of right reason on the universal level, virtue dictates what specifically is required of the agent. Natural law states that one is to "Be just." Virtue then tells the agent what the just thing is, given the present circumstances. For example, one may be required to pay one's parents respect, as this is a way of rendering to someone what is his or her due.

Virtue, then, is seen as right reason operating on the particular level. In this way, Thomas asserts that all acts of virtue are acts of natural law.

One can also consider acts of virtue insofar as they are a certain type of action. In this case not all acts of virtue are matters of natural law. This is proved from the following. Some acts are not immediately prompted by human nature. An example of this might be giving generously to a beggar who looks and smells offensive. Thus, as some actions are not prompted by human nature they must be reasoned out before so that one knows that they are helpful in the attainment of the good life. Natural law does not prompt all kinds of actions, only those that are universally accepted as promoting the good and avoiding the evil. One must possess virtue so that one may know what to do in each particular moral encounter.

The virtuous person's will is in accordance with law. His or her will harmonizes with the dictates of the law. The virtuous person finds murder repugnant because it conflicts with the good disposition of his or her rightly ordered will. Thus, the virtuous person needs no law as his or her will is already rightly ordered to the human good.

These observations regarding the relation of law to virtue raise an important point. The moral goodness of an action depends on the fourfold nature of goodness found in human action. Natural law determines the kind, or object, of

the act, according to right reasoning functioning on a universal level. Some actions are categorically wrong. However, right reason does not only function on the universal level of the primary precepts of natural law. Right reasoning functions when one considers particular cases. When one considers particular cases one must also consider the end for which one is acting, as well as the circumstances. The virtuous person (i.e. the agent who possesses right reason) will be aware of not only the kind of action in question, but wills it for the right end and in the right circumstances. But let us take a look at how the virtuous person acts in a particular instance.

Teleology explains all human action. The agent must first apprehend the end that is to be pursued. The end, thus, functions as a first principle for all action. For example, the agent apprehends that the poor should be helped. This apprehension depends on the moral character of the agent. Virtue provides a stable disposition from which all good actions will proceed. This good disposition affects the way in which the end is perceived. Thus, the virtuous person apprehends this end (i.e. helping the poor) as a good that is to be pursued by the agent. Furthermore, the agent not only wishes for the end but also proceeds to intend the end as an action that should be undertaken.

The agent naturally moves to deliberation. Deliberation inquires into the most appropriate means to

achieve the intended end. Good deliberation will consider only those means that are appropriate to rational beings. In this way, deliberation is a form of right reasoning about things to be done. The agent will exclude from his deliberation actions that are contrary to human nature, e.g. stealing and murder. In helping the poor one may never murder or steal in order to assist the poor, as these actions are repugnant to reason.

The agent, after deliberation, makes a choice about which action to perform, commands and wills that act. For example, the agent decides that he should help the poor by giving twenty percent of his income to the local charity. This act is chosen, commanded and willed. Furthermore, the agent is able to act because he possesses the moral virtues which make commanding and willing the act possible. Thus, we can see, even in the case of a particular act, teleology is primary, and right reason functions in the attainment of that end. It is clear that a fundamental teleology pervades his entire moral theory.

Not all interpreters see Thomas's moral theory in terms of the primacy of human teleology and right reason. The so-called natural law interpreters have completely neglected to consider the basic teleology of Thomas's moral theory. Furthermore, they fail to mention the primary significance of right reason. They claim that Thomistic ethics is primarily a moral theory based on natural law. Their claims are three.

The first of the three claims is that Thomistic ethics is dominated by the theory natural law.[3] These interpreters seem to think that natural law is the only element in Thomas's moral thought.

It is not accurate to regard natural law as the dominant element in Thomas's moral theory. While natural law supplies the moral agent with the first principles of morality it fails to account for the more salient elements of morality, i.e., that morality is concerned with reasoning rightly in specific situations and acting upon that reasoned conclusion in a habitual fashion.

As morality is a practical matter, either doing or making is required in order to perfect the practical intellect. It is possible to do moral science by reasoning to conclusions from the premises supplied by natural law. But it is possible to refuse to act on the conclusion, due perhaps to uncontrollable appetite. Knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for virtue. Prudence, as the chief virtue, is not only "mother to the [cardinal] virtues [of justice, temperance, and fortitude]", but it also enables the moral agent to act upon the conclusions given by practical right reasoning.[4] Therefore, it is possible to teach the principles of moral science using natural law as the first premise and reasoning to a judgment of conscience about what to do. Yet, we simply cannot teach prudence which is truly perfective of the moral agent. Prudence is not something

that can be taught, because one does not become good by doing moral philosophy; rather, one becomes good by acting upon one's moral knowledge of a given moral situation. Moreover, this capacity to act upon the basis of one's knowledge of the situation presupposes that the agent possesses justice, fortitude and temperance.

Secondly, we should note that natural law provides us with general guidelines only. It does not consider actions in specific situations. Moreover, it is in concrete situations that we make moral decisions. Natural law cannot be considered the dominant element in Thomas's moral theory because it deals only with the kind of act performed, i.e. the object of the act. The principles of natural law do not consider either the relevant circumstances surrounding the act or the agent's intention in performing the act. The circumstances and the agent's intention have everything to do with the morality of the action. For example, if an individual performs a courageous act, not for the sake of a good end (e.g. defending his or her children), but for the sake of vainglory, the act is disordered. If the act takes place in an inappropriate manner, the act is clearly morally deficient.

The second claim that the natural law interpreters assume is that natural law can be treated in isolation from Thomas's doctrine of virtue. We have already answered this claim in part by noting that prudence is the necessary

complement of natural law, not unnecessary intellectual baggage.

If one attempts to treat natural law separately from virtue in Thomistic ethics one ignores crucial elements of Thomas's moral theory. Natural law provides a rational starting point for Thomas but it does not provide the principles of virtue as the proximate principles of morality. Right reason takes us from the principles of natural law to the action in a particular situation. To treat natural law as the only element in Thomas's theory is like considering an auto without an engine -- a mere shell or skeleton without any power. The agent needs not only the first principles of ethics that natural law provides, but also the prudent experience of the "person of right reason."

In the case of the primary precepts of natural law, the agent is able to discern, by the use of right reason, that some commands always direct the agent to his or her human good. In the case of secondary precepts of natural law, the precepts do not hold with absolute certainty, sometimes these precepts do not direct the agent to an appropriate human good, as in the case of returning a weapon to a psychologically disturbed neighbor. Thus, "law cannot possibly be framed to meet some rare particular incidents." (In Ethic. V, 16).

Virtue enables the agent to know the correct thing to do in particular cases (1a2ae. 58,5). The natural law

directs the agent to those things that are perfective of humans, only by means of universal commands. The natural law fails to articulate what particular actions should be chosen in particular cases. Moral virtue serves, then, as articulating on a specific level what the natural law articulates on the universal level.

The third idea set forth by Thomas's natural law interpreters is that his moral theory provides humans only with abstract deontological moral norms. Robinson even claims that in comparison to Aquinas, Hobbes's moral theory is much more practical.[5] This last claim that the natural law interpreters make is parasitic upon the prior claims we have already dealt with. Again, we find the criticism arises because there is no awareness of Thomas's account of virtue.

If by deontological we mean a moral theory of the Kantian type, Thomas's theory is as conspicuously different from Kant's as Aristotle's is.

The precepts of natural law are not externally imposed upon the agent, but always guide the agent to goods that are perfective of him or her. The reason for these primary precepts is always in reference to the purpose of human activity. Murder always frustrates peaceful living among human beings. The natural law is not a maxim that simply is inscribed upon the hearts and minds of all humanity; rather, the natural law provides us with general rules of conduct that are constitutive of human good. To portray Thomistic

natural law as deontological is to completely disregard the fundamental teleology of human nature. The ends of human nature are family, procreation, intellectual knowledge, and community living (1a2ae. 94,2). The principles of natural law derive from the proper ends as prescribed by human nature. Thomas's moral theory is teleological in nature, not deontological. The deontologist claims moral norms are imposed externally and that we should act for the sake of what is right, not for the sake of an end. The whole purpose of deliberation and, thus, right reason, is to order actions rightly to appropriate ends that are perfective of the agent.

In conclusion we must admit that for Thomas natural law and virtue function together in a complementary fashion. However, we have proven conclusively that his moral theory is not dominated by the concept of natural law, nor can we treat natural law in isolation from his account of virtue without doing violence to Thomas's moral vision. Furthermore, Thomas's moral theory is neither abstract nor deontological. Only a truncated study of the Thomistic corpus could ever result in the claims the natural law interpreters have produced. Rather it is founded upon a teleological conception of human nature that utilizes right reason in the formation of not only natural law, but moral virtue as well.

NOTES

1. Bourke, "Is Thomas Aquinas a Natural Law Ethicist?", 58. McInerny also notes that "it is oddly true that there is only one place in the vast body of his writings where he engages in an extended and formal discussion of law and its various kinds." Ethica Thomistica, 40.

2. McInerny, Art and Prudence. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 121.

3. Hudson editor's preface in O'Connor's Aquinas and Natural Law

4. Pieper, The Four Cardinal Virtues, 22.

5. Robinson, The Groundwork of Christian Ethics, 36.

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