CREATED RECEPTIVITY AND THE PHILOSOPHY
OF THE CONCRETE

KENNETH L. SCHMITZ

John Paul II Institute
Washington, D.C.

G ABRIEL MARCEL gave his phenomenological
enquiries the name "Philosophy of the Concrete,"[1] and
he made no bones about the distance between his phi-
losophy and that of Thomism.[2] Between these philosophies there
can be no question of an *approchement* of tone, nor even of manner,
but at most a convergence of truths shared differently. Moreover,
there can be no doubt that the two philosophies differ in their
relation to experience. Within the broad sense of "Christian
experience," Thomas drew upon *experientia (empiria)* in the
narrower sense in order to derive by way of conceptual abstrac-
tion the principles of his philosophy, including those of act and
potency. Marcel's relation to experience was more immediate,
more deliberate, and more explicit. Yet his philosophy has

---

[1] Actually, he usually referred to "concrete philosophy," and preferred "approaches to
the concrete." See the "Author's Preface to the English Edition" of the *Metaphysical
Journal* (Paris: Gallimard, 1927; London: Rockliff, 1952), viiif.

[2] In his "Autobiography" (in *The Philosophy of Gabriel Marcel*, ed. A. Schilpp and L.
E. Hahn [La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1984], 3-68) he writes: "the essentially Thomist dog-
matism I found in Abott Altermann aroused my unalterable protest. At the time, I made
several attempts to understand St. Thomas's thinking better and to read some of his con-
temporary disciples. But I am obliged to acknowledge that this effort was not crowned
with success, and the most elementary fairness forces me to add that I did not carry it
out with the requisite earnestness and tenacity. It was at this time that Charles Du Bos
and I had weekly meetings with Jacques Maritain, who took great pains to help us
understand Thomist thought better and to appreciate it more. All three of us showed
good will, but the result was meager indeed" (30). Nonetheless, he showed a certain
reservation in his criticism of St. Thomas without, however, much sympathy.

provided an articulate basis in contemporary experience for many of the ideas that underlie St. Thomas's thought in a very different way.

There may not have been a need in the society and culture of thirteenth-century Europe to make explicit in a methodical, *descriptive* manner the direct experiential underpinnings of such notions as mystery, fidelity, vocation, and community. They were in the cultural air and had taken institutional form as dogmas, vows, art and architecture, religious orders, and a sense of the transcendent in everyday life in and through the visible presence of the Church. These notions were accessible to lived experience and were given realistic expression in the public speech in a way that they are not in the more secularized contemporary society in which we live and think. With us they have, for the most part, taken refuge in the private sphere.

I. INTRODUCING RECEPTIVITY

Especially important in Marcel's approach to the concrete are the concepts of availability (*disponibilité*), recognition (*reconnaître, reconnaissance*) (cf. reconnoiter), and receptivity (*recevoir*) (cf. *accueillir:* to welcome). Originating from quite different considerations, receptivity has recently been brought into relation with the thought of St. Thomas, through further philosophical reflection upon his texts and through reflection upon the theology of the Trinity.[3]

In an article entitled "The First Principle of Personal Becoming,"[4] I had sought to identify the mark of spirit in a thought-world that, for the most part, rejects the metaphysical understanding of the person as spirit. I had pointed to the capacity of the human spirit to "communicate without loss," as when we do not unlearn what we have known in teaching it to others. This was meant to indicate the traditional sphere of immanent

---

[3] This is particularly true for David Schindler. See Norris Clarke, *Person and Being* (Milwaukee: Marquette, 1993); and David Schindler, "Norris Clarke on Person, Being and St. Thomas," *Communio* 20 (Fall 1993): 580ff.

[4] *Review of Metaphysics* 47 (June 1994): 757-74.

activity as distinct from transitive (productive) physical action.[5] The correlate of communication without loss is reception without (physical) mutation: receptivity. Both together point to a distinctive mode of existence. I had taken the term *receptivity* in Marcel's sense and had used the term *non-passive receptivity* to designate this feature of the human spirit.

The critique of my own writing on the person by Mr. Steve Long has brought the issue of the relation between these two philosophies to a head. I might formulate the question thus: Are the principles of act and potency (so central to the metaphysics of St. Thomas) adequate to interpret the contemporary experience of the person?[6] Mr. Long finds the aforesaid notion of *receptivity* to be in conflict with the thought of St. Thomas, and he charges me with three faults: (1) I am alleged to find the principles of act and potency inadequate to account for the personal mode of being; (2) I make of receptivity a third principle that is neither act nor potency; and (3) the error derives from a too-active view of the person as *causa sui*. I am further alleged to have unwittingly accepted the modern divorce between person and nature and the consequent abandonment of analogy.[7]

What comes in for trenchant criticism is the double term *non-passive receptivity* which I used to describe the way the human

---

[5] Cf. Marcel's notion of "meta-problematical" or "secondary reflection": "The Ontological Mystery," in *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, 6th ed. (New York: Citadel, 1966), 16, 22; and in more detail, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 1: *Reflection and Mystery* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 77-102.

[6] See Steven A. Long, "Personal Receptivity and Act: A Thomistic Critique," *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 1-31. Mr. Long has rendered a service to all who are interested in the philosophy of the person and in St. Thomas's thought. With characteristic thoroughness he has amassed an impressive set of texts from the saint's works. His argument deserves careful consideration. As to his critique of my own writing on the person, I can only thank him for pointing up the ambiguities that may well dog not only my style but my thought as well. I should make it clear, however, that, while I have always acknowledged my debt to the great saint, I have also always avoided claiming the honorific "Thomist" for my own thought. Still, I must confess that I experience a certain uneasiness whenever my own thought seems to be in contradiction with the balanced and profound thought of St. Thomas. Now it is just such uneasiness that arises as I read Steve Long's criticism of my own essay on the person, for he clearly finds me delinquent in fidelity to the principles of Thomistic thought, and precisely in regard to the principles of act and potency.

[7] Norris Clarke's Aquinas lecture, *Person and Being*, also comes in for criticism as well as his "Person, Being, and St. Thomas," *Communio* 19 (Winter 1992): 601-18.

person relates to others, insofar as he or she is a *spiritual* being. I must confess that the double term is a new term for me, but it is not a new concept.[8] The choice of the adjective *non-passive* was determined in large part by the context, background, and audience in which I first employed the term. In its original version the essay on personal becoming was read to a meeting of the Metaphysical Society of America whose conference theme was that of "Becoming" in its several senses. I anticipated that the audience would be made up very significantly of American naturalists, pragmatists, and process philosophers. I thought there was a need to disengage the notion of "spirit" from the general view of becoming as process, change, alteration, and mutation, without however losing the sense of the dynamism of spirit. For that reason I spelled out what I meant by *non-passive receptivity,* stressing the distinctive character of becoming without mutation. The term was meant to be correlative with "communication without loss," which I took to be a clear if initial sign of the spiritual order. The passivity that the term *non-passive* was meant to reject, then, is precisely *material*, mutable passivity.

I did not reject the quasi-passivity to which Mr. Long refers in quoting St. Thomas.[9] That so-called passivity (*potest dici pati*) is the very sense of passivity in which there is no loss.[10] The translator renders *pati communiter* as "passive in a wide sense." That is fair enough, but the condition is better served by understanding it to mean "analogously passive," remembering with the

---

[8] Mr. Long's criticism makes me aware of the term's potential for misunderstanding. His criticism would have been more telling, however, had he taken into consideration both parts of the combined term. Instead he has fastened upon the adjective *non-passive* to the neglect of the verbal substantive *receptivity,* and has transferred to the combined term a rejection of all potency. Hence the charge that I have invented a new third principle that is neither act nor potency and have divorced the person from nature as entirely active *causa sui*.

[9] *STh* I, q. 79, a. 2: "Tertio [modo], dicitur aliqui pati communiter, ex hoc solo quod id quod est in potentia ad aliquid, recipit illud ad quod erat in potentia, absque hoc quod aliquid abiiciatur. Secundum quem modum, omne quod exit de potentia in actum, *potest dici pati,* etiam cum perficitur. Et sic intelligere nostrum est pati" (emphasis added).

[10] Towards the close of the article (see n. 4 above) I do recognize certain forms of loss that afflict an incarnate spirit, such as the loss of memory due to its physical basis and the deliberate spiritual loss entailed in moral evil. But the proper mode of spiritual being is communication without loss.

Fourth Lateran Council that analogy emphasizes the diversity of meanings rather than the identity.[11] Far from departing from St. Thomas on this score, the burden of my essay was to recover precisely that sense of non-deprivation proper to personal becoming and to the order of spiritual being. Belatedly, I must admit that with suitable nuances the term *non-privative* would have fit my intent better. Still, the sense of "communication without loss" fits well with St. Thomas's clause, *absque hoc quod aliquid abiiciatur*. It seems to me that the phrase "communication without loss" is a contemporary metaphysical term for distinguishing the spiritual mode of personal being and immanent activity from the sub-personal modes of physical nature with their alteration and generation. It seems to me, too, that the correlative terms "non-passive [or better, non-privative] receptivity" and "communication without loss" carry the weight of St. Thomas's *absque . . . abiiciatur.*

II. THE NEED FOR A METAPHYSICAL GROUNDING OF PERSONALISM

Personalist philosophies are a feature of twentieth-century thought. Many have taken non-traditional form through one or another variant of idealism,[12] or by way of phenomenology.[13] But it seems to me that many forms of personalism in this century are rather "free-floating," using a notion of spirit that would benefit by being situated in the context of a more traditional metaphysics of being.[14] What is more, the absence of such a contemporary resolution favors the modern tendency to reduce personal

[11] Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, no. 806 (32d ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1963), 262: "quia inter creatorem et creaturam non potest similtudo notari, quin inter eos maior sit dissimilitudo notanda."

[12] For example, the philosophy of Josiah Royce or of Ralph Flewelling Tyler.

[13] Cf. also Maurice Nedoncelle's existential personalism and the sociological personalism of Emmanuel Mounier.

[14] An outstanding exception is the metaphysical personalism of Jacques Maritain, which owes its originating principles to St. Thomas. See, for example, *The Person and the Common Good* (New York: Scribners, 1947). An interesting use of the metaphysics of St. Thomas and phenomenology is found in Karol Wojtyla, *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979).

modes of being and acting to a dynamic network of physical forces.[15] Thus, for example, there is the tendency among popularizers of the natural sciences to reduce knowing to brain chemistry or to computers. And, what amounts to the same reductionism in reverse, the absence of an adequately contemporary notion of spirit encourages the modern tendency to inflate the notion of physical energy and physical process, so that a vague notion of matter is called upon to explain properly spiritual activities.[16] There is need, then, to recover a properly metaphysical sense of spirit in order to meet the present situation, and it is fitting to ask, given the objection of Mr. Long, whether the principles of act and potency (indispensable to the metaphysics of St. Thomas) are adequate to articulate a contemporary metaphysics of the person.

· The last great attempt to restore the concept of spirit to philosophical discourse was made by Hegel with his notion of cosmic self-determination (*der absolute Geist*). There was, however, no role for potency in the system, since instead of a movement from potency to act the determinate was drawn forth from the indeterminate which already *somehow* contained its determinations. Without dismissing the thought of this great philosopher, yet without detailing my own particular criticisms here,[17] I may be excused in saying that the attempt failed through its immodesty. Nevertheless, to its credit, it did try to take into account modern developments and to reconcile the *being* of the ancients with the *subjectivity* of the moderns. Unfortunately, its widespread rejection

----

[15] Examples are numerous, especially among the materialists, positivists, and naturalists.

[16] I have in mind a work such as that of James K. Feiblemann, *The Pious Scientist: Nature, God and Man in Religion* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1958): "All matter is divine, because it constitutes the world and thus serves the reason for the world; and the higher forms are only its complications. . . . If matter in the old sense is gone, so is the concept of spirit, which lived largely on its opposition to matter. . . . Matter is far more complex than we had supposed. . . . The old materialism was insufficient, but the new is capacious" (70f.)

[17] See "On a Resistant Strain within the Hegelian Dialectic," *The Owl of Minerva* 25 (Spring 1994): 147-54. The strain is a full-fledged nominalism without which the dialectic will not work.

(along with the present rejection of all "grand narratives")[18] has
seemed to discredit further the very notion of spirit itself in many
quarters of contemporary philosophy. The roots for this incom-
prehension lie, however, not simply in the rejection of Hegel's
philosophy but in the career of modern thought.

III. TAKING THE RECENT HISTORY OF BEING INTO ACCOUNT

In attempting to recover a metaphysical understanding of
spirit it is important to take the modern background into
account, given that things have happened in the seven hundred
years since St. Thomas re-interpreted Aristotle; not even being
itself has stood still. Nor has everything that has happened been
a falling away from being. If being is truly universal, then mod-
ern developments must have occurred *within* being and be in
some sense connected with the *history of being*.[19] The more so if
Marcel's maxim is true—that being is precisely that which
withstands every assault upon it.[20]

It is important for those who value the great tradition, and
who are acutely aware of the deficiencies in modern thought, to
appreciate the great advance in self-understanding that has been

[18] See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*
(French original, 1979; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984), 31-41 and passim.

[19] Cf. the oft-quoted text from *De Potentia Dei* q. 7, a. 2, ad 9: "Ad nonum dicendum,
quod hoc quod dico esse est inter omnia perfectissimum: quod ex hoc patet quia actus est
semper perfectior potentia. . . . Unde patet quod hoc quod dico esse est actualitas
omnium actuum, et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum. Nec intelligendum
est, quod ei quod dico esse, aliquid additur quod sit eo formalius, ipsum determinans,
sicut actus potentiam: esse enim quod hujusmodi est, est aliud secundum essentiam ab eo
cui additur determinandum. Nihil autem potest addi ad esse quod sit extraneum ab ipso,
cum ab eo nihil sit extraneum nisi non ens, quod non potest esse nec forma nec materia.
Unde non sic determinatur esse per aliud sicut potentia per actum, sed magis sicut actus
per potentiam."

[20] "The Ontological Mystery" (1933), in *The Philosophy of Existence*, 14. In fact,
Marcel says that "Being is that which is—or should be—necessary," and "what with-
stands—or would withstand—an exhaustive analysis bearing upon the data of
experience." That "should" and "would" indicates that there is no sure guarantee of the
continuing presence of being (*bene esse*) but that there are grounds for the hope that it
will survive even the most reductionist onslaught.

The "should/would" reminds us that Marcel's thought concentrates not on *esse sim-
pliciter* so much as upon *bene esse* in keeping with his emphasis on being as full.

brought about—as a by-product, so to speak[21]—through an admittedly exaggerated emphasis upon self-identity and self-reference.[22] The human person has become more prominent, even as its full spiritual nature has been obscured by the parade of terms used during the modern period to disguise its specificity: mind, *ego*, self, receptacle of sensory impressions, consciousness, will, *Dasein*, and subjectivity. Literature has done better.[23] There can be no doubt that modern novels and poems, along with modern psychology, present a heightened portrait of the distinctive character of the human person, sometimes in the darkest colors. At the same time, a metaphysical understanding of the person has been all but lost. Admittedly, many of these presentations still follow from the modern sense of self as wholly self-determining (*causa sui*). Either they still presuppose the confident assurance of the primacy of the self or they react against the shadow of self that still fascinates more recent critics of modernity. Or yet

[21] Or, to speak providentially, by the mysterious process in which God draws truth out of error, good out of evil, and unity out of disunity. We human beings do not seem capable of advancing in a straight line, so that He makes our crooked paths somehow straight and our wanderings reach an often unexpected goal; for hope, as Marcel tells us, consists in lending "credit" to being, whereas despair declares its bankruptcy. Is this not a rational act of faith in the ultimate intelligibility of being without which there would be no philosophy?

[22] Jacques Maritain serves as a guide in this. For critical as he was of modern developments, he nonetheless was able to see the positive results as well as the negative. For example, in *Religion and Culture* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1931), 84f., he writes: "To denounce a fundamental spiritual deviation in a period of culture is not to condemn that period. . . . During the same [modern] period there is an evolution in human affairs, an expansion of history; there are, conjoined to certain evils, gains and achievements of mankind that have an almost sacred value since they are produced in the order of divine providence; we must acknowledge these attainments and these gains." And, in *True Humanism* (Freeport, N.Y., 1938), 18f., he writes: "Much progress has thus been made, above all in the world of reflection and self-consciousness, revealing often by lowly means, in science, in art, in poetry, in the very passions and even the vices of man, his proper spirituality. Science has undertaken the conquest of created nature, the human soul has made a universe of its subjectivity, the secular world has been differentiated according to its own proper law, the creature has come to know itself. And such progress taken in itself was entirely normal."

[23] Milan Kundera in *The Art of the Novel* argues that while the philosophers (chiefly Husserl and Heidegger) have underscored the loss of the sense of being (cf. Marcel also), the tradition of the European novel, beginning with Cervantes, has preserved the sense of being. For all that, Kundera's own sense of being seems "unbearably light."

again, they are filled with the reductionist tendencies already mentioned.

There can be no doubt that the classical modern period, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, from Descartes to Kant, exaggerated the relation of self-reference, and presented a relatively closed sense of subjectivity. This was so, even as I began my own studies fifty years ago, though the criticism was already underway. This primacy of self-reference obscured the role of the other in knowing and willing, turning the other into the pale shadow of the self in the form of ideas (Descartes), sensations (Hume), or phenomena (Kant). Nowadays, the deficiencies of the emphasis upon the self-same are familiar to all who have read contemporary philosophers from Heidegger on. And though it had long been criticized by scholastic philosophers on other grounds, this subjectivist tendency has recently come in for further criticism by postmodern thinkers. Indeed, the current effort seems to be to restore some sense of otherness beyond the horizon of the human subject.[24]

Nevertheless, the exaggeration of self-same subjectivity ought not to prevent us from recognizing a genuine increase in the appreciation of the distinctiveness of being human. What is more, even though this modern recognition is distorted, it must be conceded that it does lodge the distinctiveness, if not exactly in the classical *differentia* (the *rationale*), at least in the region of consciousness. This modern development has yielded a more intensive appreciation of the (sometimes dangerous) constructive energies of the person, which express themselves in an expansion of freedom of choice and a recognition of a certain dizzying depth of human freedom which is not simply a matter of thought but of life as well.

Given the climate of latter-day nominalism and the loss of contact with nature in favor of an urban technical environment, the distinctiveness of the human person has led to a quite general

[24] Cf. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne, 1969), 212f.; and in a quite different sense the effort of Derrida and others to equate otherness with linguistic heterogeneity, but offering us little more than equivocity and a reduction of meaning to non-meaning. See, for example, Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 3-27.

sense of divorce between person and nature. The prevalent alter-
natives seem to be either a materialist reductionism or an anti-
metaphysical historicism. Both alternatives dismiss the metaphysics
of being and its understanding of the spiritual dimension of the
person. Moreover, these alternatives are often coupled with a
dialectical tendency that turns otherness into conflict.[25]

IV. THE RECENT SHIFT TO THE CONCRETE AMONG THOMISTS

Reflecting these developments, there has been a rather wide-
ranging shift in the understanding of rationality and the
expectation of meaning, and this shift finds its expression in a
somewhat different emphasis regarding the task of philosophy.
Among contemporary philosophers from a number of tradi-
tions—including dialectics, pragmatics, existential analysis,
ordinary language analysis, phenomenological description,
hermeneutic interpretation, and deconstructive criticism—there
has been an engagement with the concrete order and a general
avoidance of strong systematic claims. It seems to me that this
recent approach to the concrete has been fed not so much by the
general empirical emphasis of modern science, which considers
the instance rather than the singular, as by the recognition of the
more historical mode of being and meaning that has engaged
modern thought, from Dilthey on, especially in aspects of the
social, cultural, and historical disciplines.[26] In philosophy, it
seems likely that the shift to the concrete has been in response to
the inadequacies in evidential practice and theory that have

[25] Echoing Nietzsche's "Homer's Contest," Lyotard places speech not in the category
of communication but in that of the *agon,* with the slogan "to speak is to fight," softening
Nietzsche's "noisy philosophical hammer," however, by adding, "in the sense of playing"
(*Report on Knowledge,* 10, nn. 34, 35).

A common objection by German Catholic philosophers in the second quarter of this
century (Romano Guardini, Gustav Siewerth, Eric Przywara, and others) was that, in the
wake of Hegel, difference was turned into dialectical conflict instead of into analogous
diversity.

[26] Within the broad uniformity of logical reasoning, a different epistemology is more
suitable to the properly historical aspect of the human disciplines insofar as they do not
attempt to model themselves upon the natural sciences. The reason is that the empirical
practice in the natural sciences can be accommodated to, though not identified with, the
classical division of terms into universal and particular, in the form of class and member

brought about the rise of phenomenology, not only of the Husserlian variety but of the broader type according to which Marcel might be said to be a phenomenologist of the concrete.[27]

Now, it seems to me that the charge that "receptivity" introduces a new principle which is neither act nor potency fails to take account of the shift in the level of philosophical reflection. Receptivity is not to be understood simply at the general and abstract level of act and potency. My argument is that receptivity is a principle of personal being at the concrete level. Far from being a principle that is neither act nor potency, I mean by it an *integral mode* constituted of both act and potency.[28]

Nor has this trend towards the concrete left recent interpreters of St. Thomas unaffected. Indeed, the shift is observable over the past sixty years, as witnessed by, among others, the works of Aimé Forest (1931),[29] Cornelio Fabro (1938),[30] Joseph de Finance (1938),[31] L.-B. Geiger, O.P. (1941),[32] Etienne Gilson (1942),[33]

---

or law and instance, whereas historicity calls for the recognition that the human person in his or her freedom is more than a particular instance of a law or member of a class, and that concrete meaning is more than an instantiation of a general law or class, just because, as we shall see, the concrete incorporates these abstract divisions within its sense of the singular.

[27] I have in mind the circle in Munich around Pfänder. See Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement: A Historical Introduction*, Phaenomenlogica, nos. 5-6, 2 vols. (2d ed.; The Hague: Nijhoff, 1969).

[28] Mr. Long seems to recognize this when he attributes to me a "symbiosis" of act and potency; but he dismisses the value of such analysis by discounting its results as "merely" symbiotic. In so doing he fails to take into account the transformation of the principles at the concrete level as they are operative in the human person.

[29] *La structure métaphysique du concret selon S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Paris: Vrin, 1931): "Ainsi la réalité de l'essence n'est veritablement pas indépendante du rapport qu'elle soutient avec existence" (164). And more succinctly in his summary: "L'être de l'essence est d'être relative à l'existence" (376).

[30] *La nozione metafisica de partecipazione* (3d ed.; Turin, 1963).

[31] *Etre et agir dans la philosophie de saint Thomas* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1945).

[32] *La participation dans la philosophie de St. Thomas* (2d ed.; Paris: Vrin, 1953). What I have called the shift to the concrete has come about in association with the retrieval of the modified Platonic elements in St. Thomas's thought. Platonic exemplarism is integrated into existential causality.

[33] *Le Thomisme* (4th ed.; Paris, 1942). A comparison with the earlier editions shows that the shift came gradually. See my Gilson Lecture, *What Has Clio to do with Athena? Etienne Gilson: Historian and Philosopher* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1988).

Thomas Gilby, O.P.,[34] the later work of Jacques Maritain (1947),[35] and the essays of Josef Pieper.[36] It seems to me, then, that the recent development of existential Thomism finds its tendencies realized in a metaphysics of the concrete singular.

Providing one recognizes that this shift to the concrete incorporates the recent history of being, and therefore provides a selective interpretation of St. Thomas, this seems to me to be a legitimate and consequential reading of the saint. There are solid grounds in the study of St. Thomas for such an emphasis, even though the emphasis has been brought about by the modern history of being, providing that the end result stands in continuity with St. Thomas as the source of the development, and providing that continuity does not mean simply the repetition but rather the development of his thought.

There can be no doubt, however, that a comparison with St. Thomas's sense of *concretum* and its variants discloses a certain difference of weight or emphasis within the term as it is now reflected in the tendencies of the above-mentioned Thomists. For St. Thomas, the primary signification of the term in creatures is composition.[37] Nevertheless, he tells us that the term contains two elements: composition and perfection (i.e., completeness or

---

[34] *The Phoenix and the Turtle* (London: Longmans Green, 1950; mostly written, however, during the war years).

[35] *Existence and the Existent* (New York: Pantheon, 1948; Doubleday/Image 1957).

[36] In *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1987), Pieper introduces a further level of concreteness without obliterating the distinction between philosophy and theology: "If Thomas' theological interpretation of this divine name [He Who Is] is a whole dimension deeper than St. Augustine's interpretation, is Thomas indebted to philosophy (or even to Aristotle)? Or is it the philosophical conception of Being which here profits by the experience of theology? Must we not say that what takes place is a unitary act, or *a compound of acts which is no longer separable* into its philosophical and theological 'components'? Of course the philosophical element can still be distinguished theoretically from the theological element. But *concretely* the situation is that a living man, confronted with the Whole of reality—one Thomas Aquinas—as believer and thinker (and experiencer of sense perceptions), as a man reflecting upon his belief and at the same time observing man and the universe with all his powers of natural cognition, asks himself: 'What is all this about?'" (152; emphasis added). The word "separable" should draw attention to the fact that philosophy and theology can be distinguished without being separated in a thinker. Such theoretical distinction is not only possible; it is necessary and provides the charter for the traditional metaphysics of being.

[37] I *Sent.*, d. 1, q. 4, a. 2, expositio textus: "concreta [nomina] autem significant quid compositum."

subsistence, *per se existens*).[38] The present shift to the concrete is
already signaled by the recognition of the primacy of judgment
in the metaphysics of St. Thomas.[39] Indeed, the development is
called for by St. Thomas's own understanding of act (*esse*) which
is *at once both comprehensive and intimate*,[40] for it recognizes
being in its actuality as the ultimate horizon of all reality, truth,
and goodness, and at the same time also recognizes *esse* as most
inward within being, as the intensive excellence of being itself.[41]
And it is this paradox of utter comprehensiveness and radical
inner presence that calls for an epistemology and a metaphysics
that attend to the concrete singular and its tensions.

Closely allied with this sensitivity to the singularity of the
human person is the modern recognition of the historical mode
of being, an awareness that has been fostered in modern life as
well as in modern thought. This has prompted essays among
recent Thomists regarding the tension between being and history
in the attempt to accommodate the properly historical mode of
being within a metaphysics of being.[42] And, indeed, there are
sources within Thomism for the recognition of the historical
mode of being. The intimacy of act (*esse*) in St. Thomas's
thought has drawn interpreters towards the not always explicit
concreteness in his Aristotelian vocabulary, a concreteness that
does not simply belong to its empirical character. To be sure, the
abstract nature of thought is rooted in the human condition, for

[38] I *Sent.*, d. 33, q. 1, a. 2: "In concreto autem est duo considerare in rebus creatis:
scilicet compositionem, et perfectionem, quia quod significatur concretive significat ut
per se existens."

[39] Benoit Garceau, *Judicium: Vocabulaire, sources, doctrine de saint Thomas d'Aquin*
(Toronto: PIEM 20, 1968). Despite the earlier controversy over certain insufficiently
thought-through expressions in the first edition of Gilson's *L'être et l'essence,* the primacy
of judgment need not threaten the importance of conceptual knowledge; rather it
completes conceptualization.

[40] *STh* I, q. 8, a. 1: "Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod
profundius omnibus inest. . . . Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus, et intime."

[41] Cf. Marcel's insistence on the global character of being and the intimacy of its
presence.

[42] See for example, M. D. Chenu, O.P., "Création et Histoire," in *St. Thomas Aquinas:
1274-1974. Commemorative Studies*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval
Studies, 1974), 391-99.

the grandeur and the misery of metaphysics is that it always has to speak in limping syllables of abstraction even as it has always intended—at least for St. Thomas—the most concrete of realities.[43] This disproportion takes ultimate form in St. Thomas's own thought as the distinction between our *modus significandi* and the *res significata* in our predication to and about God.

If the foregoing is true, then the translation of reflection from the general principles of act and potency to the concrete order of integral modes is far from a "mere" shift. Neither need it be an abandonment of those principles. Still, in keeping with the general tendencies of St. Thomas's thought, the shift to the concrete does call for a further deepening of the sense of act and potency constitutive of all creatures as well as a refinement of the properly personal sense of these terms. But, first, we need to take into account the implications of such a shift to the concrete, for it transforms the nature of the subject of metaphysics and calls for a different epistemology from the familiar one. It is not easy to set forth this difference.

V. Towards an Epistemology of the Singular

As the natural sciences broke away from philosophy during the late medieval period, the shift began to alter the character of the methodology associated with the study of nature, giving an increasingly mathematical character to what was already an evolving empirical study.[44] But, while this changed the "coloration" of the method, it left the received distribution of

---

[43] *STh* I, q. 12, a. 4, ad 3: "intellectus creatus per suam naturam natus sit apprehendere formam concretam et esse concretum in abstractione." And in the *In Boethium De hebdomadibus* 2: "ipsum esse significatur ut abstractum, id quod est ut concretum." Cf. *STh* I, q. 13, a. 1, ad 2: We apply to God abstract names to indicate his simplicity and concrete names to indicate his subsistence, and so "attribuimus ei [i.e., to God] . . . nomina concreta ad significandum subsistentiam et perfectionem ipsius, quamvis utraque nomina [i.e., concrete as well as abstract names] dificiant a modo ipsius." Also *STh* I, q. 3, a. 3, ad 1.

[44] Olaf Pedersen, *Early Physics and Astronomy* (rev. ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 182-213, remarks that "the history of scholastic mechanics is thus not only an account of how Aristotelian theory was repeated again and again, it is also the history of a critical movement gaining more and more strength until Galileo and the physics of the Renaissance administered its deathblow" (191). And he traces in some

meaning basically intact. That is, while it moved away from the ontological understanding of universal and particular, it kept the generic basis for the distribution of meaning intact. It modified the understanding of universal and particular into that of generality and instance, class and member, and eventually into law and case, where law as repetitive regularity eventually replaced causality in explanatory power.

Although the basic distribution of meaning into a modified version of the universal and the particular remained in play, the way meaning was distributed in the natural sciences was modified. The result was to displace natural philosophy as the study that resolved motion into the principles of being (ens mobile) in favor of the natural sciences which took motion itself as the basis of resolution. The unexpected result, only slowly and fitfully realized, indeed only during the past two centuries, was the recognition that there is another, more concrete mode of thought open to philosophy. For as the continuum of meaning which subordinated the particular to the general drew away more and more from traditional philosophy in order to assert its own autonomy in the form, for example, of covering laws, a new possibility for philosophy emerged, the possibility of addressing, not the empirical order of tested knowledge, but the concrete order of being. No doubt, the general turn to history in our own time also favored this recognition of a distinctive mode of thought, since history does not rest easy with the view that its particular figures or events are instantiations of a general law or even of a universal category.[45]

detail the separation of motion *quo ad causam* (dynamics) from motion *quoad effectum* (kinematics) remarking that "at the beginning of the fourteenth century the emerging nominalist movement in philosophy had attempted to give the problem of motion a new basis" (193).

[45] This realization may have contributed to the importance given by some Thomists to the autograph terminology of St. Thomas's *In librum Boethii de Trinitate. Quaestiones Quinta et Sexta*, ed. P. Wyser (Fribourg, 1948); ed. B. Decker (Leiden, 1955). Stress is laid upon the move of St. Thomas away from the language of degrees of abstraction to recognition of a break between the natural and mathematical modes of thought, on the one hand, and, on the other, the metaphysical, which takes as its proper mode neither *abstractio totius* nor *abstractio formae* but *separatio*. See A. Maurer, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences* (Toronto: PIMS, 1963).

It is as though the search for the intelligibility of being has urged metaphysics on towards the singular, an exigency brought about by the history of being itself. But if most personalisms are in need of an adequate metaphysics of being, a Thomism that moves towards the concrete singular needs to think through to a modified epistemology in keeping with that metaphysics. Now, a finite being is more than an individual (*ens indivisum*) though not thereby a simple unit (*ens indivisibile*). A concrete finite being is, as Thomas acknowledges, a composite; but we have seen that he also asserted that it is complete. It is this completeness that, it seems to me, is the real terminus and attraction for the shift towards a metaphysics that seeks the intelligibility of the concrete. It is, as we will see, an open completeness.[46]

Now, the concrete singular is not the empirical particular, and certainly not an isolated atom. Insofar as it is composite, the singular includes within its constitution all manner of relations to others. So did Leibniz's monads; but the concrete metaphysical singular differs from Leibniz's monads in two very important ways. First, it is not without "windows," that is, real relations; indeed it is constituted by its relations to others, including relations of causality and participation.[47] Second, the Leibnizian monad mirrors the whole universe uniquely by way of exemplarity as its *exemplans*, whereas the metaphysical singular participates in a manifold of causalities. Nevertheless, each being is an ingathering (*esse-in*) of the principal causal energies, principles, and transcendentals of being as such. Unlike the monad, the singular does not mirror the universe, except insofar as it actualizes the requirements of being. This means that the

---

[46] Lest the notion of an open completeness seem too paradoxical for St. Thomas, we may recall his understanding of the human soul as an incomplete substance. *STh* I, q. 75, a. 2, ad 1: In contrast to a complete substance (pro subsistente completo in natura alicuius speciei), "potest dici [of the human soul] quod hoc aliquid . . . quasi subsistens." Also *Q. D. de Anima*, a. 1, ad 3: "anima humana non est hoc aliquid sicut substantia completiva [or completa]."

[47] I have earlier ("Is Liberalism Good Enough?" in *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. Bruce Douglass et al. [London: Routledge, 1990], 86-104) used the term "constitutive individual," but that remains too much within the orbit of the traditional theory of meaning, and too close to Hegel's concrete universal which operates within that traditional theory.

singular incorporates within itself those requirements without which no created being can be.

What are these requirements? Thomas sums them up with the words *esse et praeter esse*, existence and everything else.[48] *Praeter:* For that reason there should be no fear that the ontological ground of natural law is destroyed, since the requirement of finite being is to have a determinate nature. Nor are the principles of strict demonstration rendered ineffective, since they too are grounded in the causalities that are constitutive of the singular being. Finally, to assert that the inclination of metaphysical reflection terminates, not in the empirical, but ultimately in the singular, does not require a Scotistic intellectual intuition of the singular, but only a recognition of the singular character of being in a judgment that terminates in the actual existence of things.[49] All the principles remain in play.

We may well ask, then, what difference does this drive to the concrete singular make? First of all, metaphysics no longer hankers after a systematization of objective knowledge, even as an ideal, but rather attends to the gathering of the principles of being insofar as they terminate in the community of beings. *Ens commune* is understood principally as the community of beings and not merely as an *ens rationis*. Language is re-opened to the concrete and reverses the modern penchant which places second-order language in a position of dominance over first-order

---

[48] *ScG* II, cc. 52-54. See the remarks of Serge-Thomas Bonino, O.P., in *Revue Thomiste* 95 (1995): 495 regarding my own emphasis, to the effect that it risks rejecting the "by no means negligible" other aspects of St. Thomas's thought. It seems to me, however, that the risk must be undertaken to bring out the radically metaphysical character of his thought, especially now that the philosophical viability of the notion of creation is at stake. But an existential reading need not abandon these "by no means negligible" aspects (*praeter esse*), once the nature and status of essence is secured within its relation to existential act.

[49] Maurer, *Division and Methods*, xxi: "For judgment is primarily pointed to the act of existing of things, whereas simple apprehension has to do rather with their essences or natures. As a result, the subject of metaphysics will have an existential character not found in those of the other two speculative sciences." It may help to distinguish the real as extra-mental (objective), which the natural sciences address, from the real as existential, which is the domain of metaphysics.

language.[50] Such a metaphysics of the singular becomes more descriptive of actual situations than abstracted from them. It recognizes contingent relations not only as accidental to a substance, but even more as historical developments within concrete beings. The principal difference is this: *esse*, since it is *formalissime* in each singular being, since it is the superabundance of act within the limits of the received nature of the singular, thereby *opens up from within each being the intelligibility of its singularity*,[51] opens to its circumstances and contingencies, in a word, to its history—properly to human history, but in an extended sense to the recognition that all created beings have a "history." *Esse*, more formal, indeed transformal, and so more actual than anything else in the being, charges the other principles with a kind of hyper-determinacy that realizes itself only in the concrete order of being, in a certain fullness or completeness.[52]

VI. FURTHER REFLECTION ON ACT AND POTENCY IN CREATURES

The charge that I have introduced a third principle forces the issue, then, of whether act and potency are adequate to provide

---

[50] I have made the distinction between *epistemic* and *noetic* discourse in several essays. The former proceeds with a more or less definitive prior demand for what counts as evidence (e.g., only quantified data), for proof (e.g., verification or falsification), and for truth (e.g., what is fruitful for further experimental research), whereas the latter approaches reality with a more open yet not less rigorous expectation of meaning in search of the concrete. See "Metaphysics: Radical, Comprehensive, Determinate Discourse," *Review of Metaphysics* 39 (June 1986): 675-94. Again, compare Marcel's distinction between primary and secondary reflection, or between problematic and meta-problematic discourse.

[51] Cf. de Finance, *Etre et agir,* 321: "Mais si la forme n'est pas l'actualité la plus profonde de l'être, la vision des essences ne peut plus combler un esprit dont l'ambition est de posséder l'être dans ses profondeurs. La connaissance de la réalité concrète présente pour moi un double intéret: un intérêt pratique, puisque ce monde réel forme le cadre de ma vie et l'ensemble des moyens qui me serviront à conquérir ma fin;—mais aussi, semble-t-il un intérêt spéculatif. Fondement de l'intelligibilité, se peut-il que l'existence n'ait aucune valeur intelligible? Le concret, dans une métaphysique de l'*esse* doit-il pas être la pâture par excellence de l'esprit?" The passage brings out the integration of praxis and theoria in the concern for the concrete.

[52] Marcel remarks ("The Ontological Mystery," 12): "Providing it is taken in its metaphysical and not its physical sense, the distinction between the *full* and the *empty* seems to me more fundamental than that between the *one* and the *many.*"

a basic account of personal being. But before that, it raises the issue of whether these principles are universally adequate to account for created being; for if the real composition of act and potency fails to account for the constitution of created personal being, then such a composition cannot lay claim to complete universality in the order of created being. Moreover, we cannot resolve the relation of act and potency within created persons without first determining the character of that relation as it holds for all creatures. It remains, therefore, to probe the precise character of the transformation in the meaning of act and potency that occurs in the shift to the concrete, as it discloses first the general condition of the creature and then that of the created person.

A brief, if well-known and no doubt unneeded, reminder of the history of these principles illustrates the radical nature of the transformation in the understanding of act and potency brought about by the recognition of being *qua* created. The insight into *potency* (*dunamis*) had initially come about through Aristotle's reflection upon change and the principles needed to resolve the apparent impasse of the Eleatics. His distinction (already anticipated by Plato) within the unanalyzed notion of non-being between what we might call the simple privative meaning (the absolute negation, *ouk on*) and the qualified or relative negation (*mê on*) released the notion of qualified non-being to indicate a potential principle in the explanation of change:[53] for the potential is the able-but-not-yet of the subject in accidental change and analogously the able-but-not-yet of primary matter in substantial change. With his sense of creation *ex nihilo*, St. Thomas interprets the distinction by situating potency within a more radical context of being.[54]

---

[53] *Metaphysics* XII (L), 2, 1069b15-20; also VII (Z), 7-9, 1032a12-1034b19. Cf. the many senses of potency in St. Thomas, V *Metaphys.*, lect. 13. It is characteristic of St. Thomas's project of commenting upon Aristotle that (as far as I can tell) he entirely avoids discussion of the principle of potency in relation to creation, not only in this work but in all of the Aristotelian commentaries.

[54] See St. Thomas, XII *Metaphys.*, Parma ed. (1868), lect. 2, 624: "Solvit autem hanc dubitationem antiquorum naturalium philosophorum, qui removebant generationem propter hoc, quod non credebant quod posset aliqui fieri ex non ente, quia ex nihilo fit nihil; nec etiam ex ente, quia sic esset antequam fieret. Hanc ergo dubitationem

With the entry of the doctrine of creation, however, comes a
deeper sense of potentiality: for the potential is not potentiality
to the reception of form (*eidos*) on the part of matter (*hyle*) or
subject (*hypokeimenon*), but the reception of being where there
had been none at all (*esse absolute seu simpliciter*).[55] In this
sense, one might say, not without a touch of paradox, that the
recognition of creation gives new meaning to the notion of
absolute non-being without returning the notion to the dead-end
ouk on.[56] God's creative act is so powerful that, after the fact, it
throws light even upon absolute non-being, and endows the very
contingency of the creature (its always present non-being that
constitutes its contingency) with the abundance of the Creator's
own gift. And it draws our attention to the fragility and utter
gratuity of any and all created existence, so that in a mysterious

Philosophus solvit, ostendendo qualiter aliquid fit ex ente et ex non ente; dicens, quod
duplex est ens, scilicet ens actu, et ens potentia." I am aware of a certain difference in
emphasis between Thomas's account and my own, insofar as mine places an emphasis
upon non-being that is absent from St. Thomas's, though the emphasis, I believe, is
compatible with his understanding of creation *ex nihilo*.

    [55] *STh* I, q. 44, a. 2, ad 1: "Dicendum quod Philosophus in I *Phys.* (7, c. 9, 190b1)
loquitur de fieri particulari, quod est de forma in formam, sive accidentalem sive sub-
stantialem; nunc autem *loquimur* de rebus secundum emanationem earum ab universali
principio essendi" (emphasis added).

    [56] For the insightful texts of St. Anselm on the new sense of "nothing," see *Monologium*
8-9 (*S. Anselmi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt [Stuttgart: Fromann, 1968], vol. 1, pp. 22-
24; English translation, 2d ed. by J. Hopkins and H. W. Richardson [Toronto: Edwin
Mellen, 1975], 15-18). See also my reflection upon these texts in *The Gift: Creation*
(Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1982), 28-34, esp. 32: "The term [*de nihilo*]
denotes *after the fact* the state of affairs before the endowment. It makes no strict sense
to say, before I have received a gift, that I am giftless, as though there is a lack in me in
the way that a painting lacks the right colour. . . . Certainly, before I have received a gift,
I am without a gift; I simply do not have one. But I do not lack something due me. And
yet, viewed after the fact, after the endowment, the lack of that endowment is more than
a simple negation. . . . We have more here than a simple negation, but we have it only
after the fact, not before. The gift is not as such a remedy for some lack, but is rather an
unexpected surplus that comes without prior conditions set by the recipient. The element
of gratuity indicates that there is no ground in the recipient for this gift, so that the gift
is strictly uncalled for. It is not compensation for anything. . . . Creation is to be under-
stood as the reception of a good not due in any way, so that there cannot be even a [pre-
existent] subject of that reception. It is absolute reception, there is not something which
receives, but rather sheer receiving." Incidentally, this new sense of non-being is also the
condition for the modern sense of dialectics; though, because it repudiates a notion of
creation, dialectics gives too much to the power of the negative within non-being.

way we draw fresh meaning from the contrast of being with that dark region of absolute non-being. It is as though the very gift of being does not leave the creature's non-being untouched; its very non-being is gifted too.

This is not to give some pseudo-positive reality to non-being; quite the opposite, it is to highlight its utter negativity by deepening the sense of contingency. The early Fathers of the Church were conscious of the distinctive character of God's creative act. They insisted that creation *ex nihilo* is not a motion, neither an alteration nor a generation, because these require a pre-existent subject. Even more, they insisted that creation is not a labor at all,[57] and that it is an effortless actuation at the most fundamental level of reality: divine "communication without loss."

What, then, has happened to potency? We must look to act, in keeping with its primacy, in order to determine the character of the indeterminacy and otherness that is characteristic of potency. For the Aristotelian understanding of potency posits a pre-existent recipient (ultimately, underived matter) whereas potency to being simultaneously demands that there can be no recipient before the reception itself has been achieved.[58] And so creation *ex nihilo* is to be understood as the endowment of the capacity to receive being in the very communication in which that actuality is being received. Nature, or properly the essence (*essentia*), functions as the potential principle that marks the finitude (receptive dependency, radical contingency) of created being and ensures its limited integrity (*per essentiam/naturam*). A creature, then, is nothing but the relation of dependence upon the proper cause of its being: *tantum esse ad Deum*. But that "nothing but" is everything for the creature!

[57] Cf. St. Athanasius, *Contra Arianos* 2, c. 17, n. 1 (Oxford, 1844), 315f. (PG 26:197), writes, "For God is not wearied by commanding . . . but he willed only; and all things subsisted." Also Hyppolytus, *Against Noetus,* c. 10 (PG 10:818) insists that "the divine will in moving all things is itself without motion." Then, too, St. John Damascene, *On the Orthodox Faith* 2, c. 29 (PG 94:964) remarks, "He wills all things to come to be and they are made." Cf. Judith 16:17: "You spoke and things came into being."

[58] Without in any way suggesting that Marcel thinks in terms of act and potency, it is perhaps worth noticing his remark that I must already be and be within being before I can question being. That is the basic feature of ontological mystery, that it encroaches upon its own data; "The Ontological Mystery," 19-20 and passim.

VII. THE CREATURE AS SUBSISTING RELATION

It is in this sense that I dare to say that a creature is a subsisting relation, knowing full well the privileged use of the term for the persons of the Trinity.[59] The inequality and limitation inherent in the relation of dependence is such as to ensure the distinction between God and creatures. The advantage of the term is that it removes all suggestion of *absolute* autonomy from the creature at the originating level of its being. The foregoing reflection on the creature as subsisting (yet dependent) relation is meant to remove all traces of potency as in any way a *prius* to God's creative act. For His is the act which, with the touch of eternity, endows the being of the creature simultaneously with essence and existence.

Once again, as with the turn to the concrete singular and its historicity, it is noteworthy that this emphasis upon the primacy of relation parallels the emphasis on relationality which has become a basic theme—one might well say, a preoccupation—of twentieth-century thought. Not surprisingly, the shift to relationality in contemporary thought arises from different considerations

[59] I recognize that this term is privileged by St. Thomas for the divine persons of the Trinity and that it is one of his keenest and most fruitful insights (*STh* I, q. 29, a. 4: "Persona igitur divina significat relationem ut subsistentem"). I also recognize that in his argument he refers the designation *human person* to the individual substance and with the impeccable logic of genus and specific difference excludes subsistent relation from the term *person* when applied to man. It is only the identity of the relations with the divine essence itself that permits him to conclude that the divine persons are subsistent relations, or more precisely, distinct relations subsisting in the divine essence. Of course, the term *relation* in the two denominations is analogously diverse. Moreover, there are sufficient ways of avoiding confusion with created beings. Ian Ramsey (*Religious Language* [New York: Macmillan, 1957], 182ff.) has indicated the linguistic ways in which such a distinction is made: the divine person of Christ is Son of the Father, but He is *begotten not made, only* Son of the Father, *eternally* begotten, *one in being* with the Father, etc. These are "qualifiers" of the original model (father-son). The Father and the Spirit can be differentiated from creatures in similar ways through relations of origin. Or we can phrase the difference expressed by many of the Fathers of the Church in terms of Christ being equal to the Father in essence and His Son by nature (*kata physin*), whereas we are sons by the grace of adoption (*kata charin*) (cf. St. Athanasius, *De Decretis*, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2d ser., vol. 4 [repr.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 156). The value of the term *subsistent relation* as applied to creatures is that it manifests the radical dependence for all that is in them through participation in the *communicatio entis* flowing from the First Being.

and has taken forms other than the metaphysical relation of creation. Thus, for example, in first philosophy there is Heidegger's *In-der-Welt-Sein*; in philosophy of science, Ernst Cassirer's notice of the withering away of substance in favor of function and law; in philosophy of religion, Buber's relation of I-Thou and I-It; and most recently, in the philosophy of language, the postmodern stress on intertextuality.

In much of the thought of the past two centuries, however, otherness has been understood in terms of conflict (dialectics) or equivocity (deconstruction). It is as though nominalism has turned twice upon itself: first in modernity which, having given the primacy to self-identity in the form of self-reference, yet re-established unity as totality through a comprehensive system of external relations among utterly simple self-identical units.[60] Then, the first post-Kantian attempts to overcome the restrictive self-reference understood otherness in terms of conflict (dialectics), whereas the full-blown rejection of self-reference and totality has given primacy to otherness in the form of a modified equivocity (deconstruction). In rejecting the modern fascination with totality, postmodernism seeks to prolong nominalism by reinstating the reign—not so much of the other, and certainly not of the Other—but of otherness in the form of relations of contrast. It seems that nominalism eats its own children. It will undoubtedly produce further variations, but what seems likely is that it will turn all relations into features that are arbitrary and quasi-external.[61]

Not unaffected by the widespread promotion of relationality, Thomists of the concrete have followed their own path, drawing however upon the thought of St. Thomas. All Thomists agree that the creature exists in total dependence upon the Giver of being, and that dependence is to be understood in terms of the

[60] Newton's *Principles of Natural Philosophy* gives us the paradigm, but Kant's architectonic system provides its philosophical justification by moving towards an incomplete internalization of relations determined by the "needs of reason."

[61] The root of much linguistic theory is, of course, de Saussure, who sought a theory of language in which meaning played a minimal part, if at all, and who found in language "only [arbitrary] differences" (*Course in General Linguistics* [La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986], 118; cf. 67-69, 115).

category of primary cause and effect. This is to look at the onto-logical relation from the point of view of the communication of being. What is it to look at it from the point of view of the recep-tion of being? Since the dependence is total, everything in the creature is *gifted*, so that even act itself is included in that recep-tion; *created esse* is itself receptive.[62] The meaning of all the causes and principles within the being are thereby transformed.

What, then, is the inner content of that relation? Certainly the potentiality of the creature (*essentia* in the broad sense)[63] is included within that ontological relation, and it plays its role as a co-principle of "ontological reception"; essence is the principle within the created being that is the intrinsic "receptor" of being.[64] But it is not only potency that is received; the act is received as well, because the whole being (essence and existence) is received. God creates beings whole and entire, singular beings in commu-nity. He does not put together principles of act and potency that are antecedent in any sense. The ontological relation determines the act at its very core as a *received* act. We must, then, include created act within the notion of ontological reception.[65] Created act is a received act. Moreover, everything in the created being is

[62] See the exchange between David Schindler and Norris Clarke regarding Clarke's Aquinas lecture, *Person and Being,* and in particular Schindler's insistence upon a three-fold moment within the relation of creation: *esse-ab, esse-in,* and *esse-ad,* in which the latter two have as their *prius* the first, so that the *esse* of the creature is through and through receptive (Schindler, "Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas," 586-88).

[63] What, as we have seen, in a felicitous phrase St. Thomas calls *praeter esse. ScG* 2, c. 52: "Esse autem, inquantum est esse, non potest esse diversum: potest autem diversificari per aliquid quod est praeter esse."

[64] At first glance, the terms *receptus* and *receptio* are not very suitable, for they mean the "re-taking" of something, "taking again." But the "re-" also functions as a reflexive intensifier, and there are usages in which the term means "taking upon oneself" (cf. *ens per se*) and even "taking up an obligation" (cf. Marcel's "answering a call"). This is surely the basis for the "re-sponse" to which all created beings, and in a special way, personal beings are called. The term can also mean "to accept" and "to preserve," and these latter senses are more suitable in the present context.

[65] David Schindler puts the question well in pressing Norris Clarke's fine analysis fur-ther: "How can relationality . . . be said to be . . . 'an equally primordial dimension of being' . . . if relationality begins not in first but in second act," that is, not in *esse* but in *agere* (Schindler, "Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas," 582). Clarke replies that the *agere* is an expression of *esse,* thus seeming to endorse a Thomistic version of the Dionysian principle that *esse* is expansive, as though to say: *esse est diffusivum sui*

penetrated by this receptive relation. Since act determines every-
thing within the being, it follows that the meaning of all the
causes and principles of the being reflect this reception.

It is not only the agency of the creature (its secondary activi-
ty) that is affected by its participation. All the causes are affected.
Matter is not uncaused nor out of itself but is *ex nihilo*;[66] finality, as
the first of causes, is no longer understood as only an immanent
principle specifying the end, but is also simultaneously that
immanent/transcendent principle by which the being is called
forth into existence;[67] and form participates in *esse* as the first
formal perfection of finite[68] substantial being. When the
seventeenth-century philosophers threw out the four causes,
they not only cast aside Aristotle, they also disavowed the trans-
formed senses of these principles and thereby began the elimina-
tion of intelligibility from the very notion of creation, which
ceased to play a role in the modern understanding of reality.

So far, then, through its total dependence upon God, we have
understood the creature as a subsisting relation. The creature is
an effect of God's communication of being and stands in causal
dependence upon God as upon the Cause of its being. The
absolute nature of ontological dependence entitles us to use the
category of gift to articulate the implications of the relation, since
it belongs to a gift to be uncalled for, to be given without prior
conditions. Now reception is integral to the very character of a
gift, for a gift refused is an unfinished gift. At this absolute level
of the reception of being the refusal can only occur within the
primordial reception, even as the non-being of privation can

(ibid., 593). I find the invocation of the expansive principle an interesting opening to fur-
ther reflection, but at the same time I agree with Schindler that we must press home the
received character of created act in the most explicit and intensive manner, finding its
receptive character not simply in the expression of the creature's activity or its tendency
towards expression but in the very character of the instituting act itself.

[66] *STh* I, q. 44, a. 2: "Utrum materia prima sit creata a deo."

[67] See the analysis of finality by Gerard Smith, S.J., *The Philosophy of Being* (New
York: Macmillan, 1961), ch. 8, esp. p. 109, which brings out the double determinant in
final causality, its formal and its existential role. The whole book considers the trans-
formed meanings of act, potency, and the causes in the light of existential act.

[68] See Hegel's acute discussion of the difference between the mere limit (*die Grenze*,
Aristotle) and the positive finite (*das Endliche*, Christianity) in *The Science of Logic*,
book 1, sect. 1, ch. 2, B.

arise only on the supposit of finite being. And just as non-being threatens the destruction of being, so too the refusal can penetrate to the depths of a received being, distorting it in the most radical way.[69] On the other hand, the acceptance completes the gift, fulfills it. This creaturely acceptance takes the form of ontological self-affirmation (*ens per se subsistens*).[70] And, since it is first act that is being received, it is received *as act* at a level deeper and more original than secondary activity which is grounded in and expressive of first act. It follows, then, that both first act and secondary activity are re-sponses.

At the level of first act, however paradoxical it sounds, the creature accepts its being in the very reception of it (*esse-ab*). How are we to understand this, since the creature does not stand outside the relation so as to receive being before it even exists? We must understand the acceptance as expressed by its subsistent self-reference (*autos, per se*) and within its primordial ordination towards the Source of the being communicated to it without which there would be no self (*autos*), so that its original reception is communicated to it in its very institution. This relation to self and Source is the tension—one might say, paradox—of finite being.

Metaphorically, the flow from God (*influxus entis, esse-ab*) is such that it is completed only in a flow back towards the source (*reditus entis, esse-ad*). This means that the created "self" of each being is preserved only through reference to the Creative Other. This communication and response is the initial generosity, the initial deposit of being, that is inseparable from the creative endowment and that weights created being towards the actual

[69] Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Du refus à l'invocation*. And so, at the personal level, there can be loss through generosity refused, or through abuse of freedom (moral evil), but this spiritual loss does not of itself entail physical mutation. Cf. St. Thomas's *"absque ... abiiciatur"* (above, n. 9). At the subpersonal level the "refusal" is manifest in the privations endemic to the rule of finitude (ontological evil), which God freely respects for the good of the finite.

[70] Cf. Schindler's *esse-in* ("Norris Clarke on Person, Being, and St. Thomas," 586, 582). I find this acceptance recognized in the popular and subsequently the learned sense of *ousia* and *substantia* which take the form of an ontological self-reference (*autos*). See my "Selves and Persons," *Communio* 18 (Summer 1991), esp. 184-96.

good (i.e., the good of its own being and the Good that is its Source). And this is the meaning of final causality in the onto-logical relation, that is, insofar as final causality bears first of all on created being and only then on its agency. For there is more than passivity in reception; there is also self-possession and ordi-nation to the good. *Esse* as the supposit of secondary activity already possesses the integral mode of potency and act in the form of an integral ordination towards (*esse-ad*).

The notion of an integral mode of act and potency is not entirely alien to Thomistic metaphysics. If one considers the elu-sive concept of active potency,[71] we recognize here a principle that is not simply that of passive potency. Created active potency needs initiation in order to be actuated and in that aspect may be said to be passive, but the power itself (*potentia activa*) is not simply a mutable subject, a capacity awaiting in-formation; it is a *capability*, the ability to respond to the initiative that first institutes it. The notion of active potency is usually considered at the level of secondary activity, insofar as it is the potency of specific powers; but if it is deepened to mean the re-sponse to the primary institution of created being, its pri-mordial reception, such active potency is enfolded within the integral mode of non-privative receptivity.

Now, this endowment and reception of being is constitutive of the created being and cannot, therefore, be understood as an external relation. It is the very inner constitution of the being itself. It is imperative, therefore, to release interiority from its modern prison in human subjectivity and to restore to natural things (*res*) the appropriate kind of interiority which they have in a metaphysics of being, where they are not mere objects stand-ing before the human subject. For the principles that constitute a created being comprise the complex depth appropriate to the things we have not made. Indeed, they lead us back to the Source of being, so that the depth in created things is without measure.

[71] Cf. the many senses of the term *potency* (*dunamis*) considered by Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 5, c. 13, 1019a15ff. The privileged sense is the active, in keeping with the primacy of act over passivity. Nevertheless, the distinction is between *poiein* and *paschein* within the analysis of change and not within that of creation. Compare St. Thomas on the many senses of potency in note 53.

It is not only human subjectivity that has an interior, then; things do too.[72] Once that interiority is recognized, things receive the name of "subject" (*suppositum entis*), the privileged name we give to primary centers. And this ontological interiority lends its character to all interior relations, including the spiritual interiority encountered in personal beings.

If, however, the very subsistence of a creature is relational, then the understanding of the reality of created substance is thereby transformed. For substance is now understood to rest ultimately not on uncreated matter, nor does it have the ambiguous status of an *ens possibile*. Instead, substance is determined in and through its radical participation in and relation to the Source of its existence. The supposit of the creature does not stand in any way "outside" of or "prior" to the ontological relation, not even as a possibility, but is brought into being within that relation. "Before" the world came to be it was not "possible" for it to be (*potentia passiva*), except in the actual power (*potentia activa*) of God.

The primacy of the ontological relation may seem to threaten the reality of substance by undercutting it. That would be so only if the notion of created substance were thought somehow to retain a sort of quasi-independence apart from the ontological relation. Nonetheless, given the proven effectiveness of the logic of substantive predication and its prominent use by St. Thomas the concern is legitimate and more needs to be said in order to offset the charge that substance itself is being dissolved in this radical relation. Such a defense is especially important today, if only because the metaphysical sense of substance is not readily understood or tolerated in the contemporary thought-world.

A full defense of the pre-eminence of relation needs to show that the integrity of created substance is not dissolved in the relation.[73] This requires an adequate notion of spirit which brings forward the intransitive character of spiritual relations. Creation is the effect of Perfect Intelligence, but it is not a motion. The

[72] On natural interiority, see Schmitz, "The First Principle of Personal Becoming," 763-68.

[73] I have indicated the basic outlines of the argument in *The Gift: Creation*, 81-86.

relations of intelligence and love, with their spiritual nature, are
the specific ways in which God communicates being to his crea-
tures. The traditional first way names him the First Mover, but
it adds, Unmoved, meaning that He "moves" without moving.
Now, even human intelligence can enter into relation with its
objects without mutating them; so too human love. Indeed the
search for truth demands that the knower respect the integrity of
the known, even when (as in experiments) the search for knowl-
edge calls for the manipulation of the knowable. But if even the
incarnate human spirit can enter into such relations imperfectly,
how much more can the divine intelligence and love communi-
cate, institute, and preserve the integrity and actual existence of
its creatures?

Indeed, *at the level of creative causality and existential effect*
there is no mutation: creation is not a motion. And so the "law"
of creative causality may be stated thus: the non-invasive yet
creative activity of (divine) spirit brings about its correlate in the
non-privative receptivity of the creature.[74] Created spirit com-
municates without loss just because it is known (and with God
this "knowing" is a creative knowing) without the creature being
mutated, and is loved by a (divine) love which respects the
beloved (which the Creator's free act brings into being). Spiritual
relations are not transitive; the knowledge and love that sustains
creatures, far from being a threat to their existence and integrity,
is the very ground of their being, nature, and substance.

The ontological relation as understood in creation not only
rejects the primacy of external relations; it also introduces a new
sense of internality that transcends the spatially restricted set of
"inside-outside." In the order of constitution or creation there is
nothing "outside" such a primordial relation, for the simple rea-
son that there is literally nothing outside being. What there is is
finitude, formal difference among purely spiritual creatures and
formal and spatio-temporal diversity among physical beings.
The immanence of the principles provides the basis for

[74] In physical creatures this receptivity is the mark of the presence of the Creator
within them. In created persons the receptivity is the mark of their spiritual nature and
the image of the creative presence within them.

understanding relations of interiority. And, just as the transcendental ontological relation comes to prominence, so too there comes to prominence the interior character of all fundamental relations, both in the Creator and in the creature.

How are we to understand an interiority that is not merely an internality correlative with an externality (inside-outside)? What we are dealing with is the notion of incomplete principles,[75] not simply correlative or reciprocal, but radically open to each other in the constitution of a *single* entity. They do not achieve this unity by themselves. If God's creative act is left out of the picture, it is impossible to explain how a non-existent and merely possible essence can determine the creature's act of existence. Once the co-determination of principles is situated within God's creative activity, however, these two incomplete principles play the role assigned to them by their Agent-Creator. Each principle taken in itself is incomplete; but even more, taken together they constitute a being that is no being except in relation to its primordial cause. Each principle is inherently implicated in the other through the causal activity of the First Cause, and by a subordination of the one (potency) to the other (act) rather than by a reciprocity of two complete principles.

VIII. TRANSFORMATION OF THE PRINCIPLES IN CREATED PERSONS

Nonetheless, the reception that is common to all creatures must be refined further, if it is to fit the analogical modes of being, and if it is to be of use in determining the proper character of spiritual being. For while there is a general sense of receptivity appropriate to all creatures, there is a special sense, a proper sense, in which human beings as spiritual creatures are receptive. What marks a created spirit from other created beings is that it has been endowed with an ability to respond in accordance with the "law" of spirit, that is, the capacity for freedom. It is here that the integral concept of non-privative receptivity seems especially appropriate, for it illuminates the distinctive

[75] See n. 46.

relation between God and spiritual creatures. The human crea-
ture receives along with its very capacity to exist (*essentia*) the
capability of responding (*actus essendi*) in a way that, insofar as
it is spiritual, does not involve mutation or loss.[76] The evidence
for this is just the normal operations of association proper to
human beings: love and knowledge, understanding and commu-
nication, which rise from the creature's primordial receptivity.

In the creation of a human person, the otherness (*praeter esse*)
is proportionate to the act that is communicated; and being pro-
portionate it follows along lines of (incarnate) spiritual being, in
which there is communication without loss and non-privative
receptivity. At the level of personal being this is more adequately
expressed by receptivity than by pure passive potency. In per-
sonal beings, the receptivity takes the form of a specific
response. The response is in no way a *causa sui*, it is a *re-sponse*;
that is, it is the primordial acknowledgment of a gift received
and is expressed in the "acceptance" (i.e., the subsistence and
ordination) of the creature. At the level of secondary activity this
receptivity is expressed in a variety of individual and cultural
ways as a seeking out of the Giver, in the search for the true and
the good in the community of beings.

The consequence of such an intrinsic relation is a higher
degree of unity of the constitutive principles than in subpersonal
beings. Here lies the ontological ground for the proper imma-
nence of spiritual being, whereby the unity of personal being is
a conscious, deliberate integrity. From this ground there follows
at the level of activity the non-privative nature of personal
dynamism, first manifested in communication without loss. The
absence of loss is coordinate with the power of retrieval. This is
seen in the distinctive relation to temporality that is characteris-
tic of personal being. Memory, and even more the *memoria* of
which St. Augustine wrote, is the retrieval of past time, even as

---

[76] I add the qualifier "insofar as it is spiritual" in order to acknowledge the incarnate
nature of human spirituality, which is itself a sort of integral mode of being, so that
human spirituality operates within the larger context in which there is physical mutation.
The physical order is given over to mutation. In created persons, on the other hand, the
creature itself is properly endowed with non-privative receptivity and response in
accordance with the "law" of spiritual existence.

anticipation perfected in hope is the appropriation of the structure of future time. The indefinite scope of the time-scale at the root of human culture and human history is made possible by the capability of cognition, which liberates the universal in abstract form but within the horizon of being.

And so, there is a special sense in which the created person responds, for he responds in his very being through intelligence and freedom, and this response is constituted of an appropriate and proportionate act and potency, both in the constitution of its being and the overflow of its activity.[77]

Here we approach once again one of the prominent themes of Marcel's philosophy of the concrete, that the fortunes of being depend in some significant way upon the use we make of our freedom. Marcel's distance from Thomism seems to have arisen from a view that it was too "objective" a mode of thinking to be sensitive to the most profound truths and realities of human existence. Moreover, his opposition was heightened by the modern dichotomy between passivity and activity, which he attributed to Kant, and which he thought approximated most closely to inanimate objects, as when the wax is utterly passive to receiving the imprint of the wholly active seal. He countered the reduction of receptivity to passivity by invoking the experience of the host who welcomes (i.e., receives) a guest into his home. This reception is no mere metaphor, nor is it mere passivity;[78] it is a genuine receptivity that transcends the gulf between activity and passivity without destroying their real distinction. It does this by including them within what I have

---

[77] It is this recognition that is so prominent among many German Catholic philosophers, who make of freedom a primary ontological principle.

[78] Reflecting upon the nature of feeling (*sentir*), Marcel remarks that it is not only a passive submitting to sensory impulses (sensation), but also an active opening out onto . . . (*s'ouvrir à* . . .). This is precisely the transition from the empirical to the concrete. Cf. Marcel, *Du refus à l'invocation*, 43: "Dès le moment où nous avons clairement reconnu que sentir ne se réduit pas à subir, tout en maintenant que c'est en quelque façon recevoir, nous sommes en mesure de déceler en son centre la présence d'un élément actif, quelque chose comme le pouvoir d'assumer, ou mieux encore, de s'ouvrir à . . ." Now one "opens out onto" what is able to receive one, and that cannot be an object in the modern sense, for the objectivity of the object reflects back to the knowing subject the criteria already brought to it by the subject. (See the canonical expression of this view in Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, preface to the second edition, vii-xii.)

called an integral mode of being. The sense of receptivity has deeper ontological roots than either created act or potency considered in themselves. These roots are opened up to the light of a metaphysics of the concrete, a light that situates the human person and all created beings within the community as gift.

REPLY

STEVEN A. LONG

D
R. SCHMITZ'S response to my criticism of his writing on receptivity is a model of the way in which philosophers from diverse traditions can enrich one another's reflections and understanding. Indeed, his observation (see his note 6) that he has always refused the honorific title "Thomist" will not impede the astute observer from discerning the extent and facility of his command of the texts of St. Thomas. Still, one must observe that the very approach chosen to articulate his metaphysical case—the metaphysics of *esse* as context for a view of creatures as themselves being "subsisting relations"—is, whatever its other merits, a clear departure from the realism of St. Thomas. Why?

Moderns used to poke fun at Scholastic distinctions by saying that these were like attempts to answer the question "how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?" Their point—or at least the point of those among them who were knowledgeable enough to have a point—was not that such an absurd formulation ever found currency among the various schools of Scholasticism. Rather, they sought to suggest that realist metaphysics tends to generate abstruse and unreal distinctions and questions. Now, a hard look at either continental or analytic thought reveals that this criticism is far more applicable to either than to the thought of St. Thomas. Analytic philosophy in recent years has fallen, after Wittgenstein, into abstruse discussions of what it means to have a toothache; and continental thinkers frequently articulate their accounts in a vocabulary that is almost mystagogically obtuse. By contrast St. Thomas articulates the adequacy of both sense knowledge and of intellectual knowledge, always resolving both into our knowledge of being. It is in this context that one

takes pause at finding personalist theorists of the *Communio* school transignifying Thomas's metaphysics via the dialectical absorption of substance into relation.

I should like to note only three things about the proposition that the creature *is* a subsisting relation. These points are, I am persuaded, the critical ones for understanding the distance between the continental appropriation of Thomas and the character of Thomas's own teaching.

(1) According to St. Thomas the terminus of the divine act is a *being* that is really related to God—not a *subsisting relation*. If we treat the creature as itself a subsisting relation, then is this relation itself further related—that is, do we not end up with a Platonic "third man" difficulty? Further, *what* is related? The divine gift of *esse* posits a being that is related: but its real relation does not alter the datum that we intrinsically predicate being of the creature, nor that there is a distinction between a being's total dependence upon God and its very substantiality itself. Indeed, in creatures substance and *esse* are really distinct, not identical. Nor is the *esse* merely a relation but rather a *quasi-formal principle of being*. Created substance is really related to God; but the substance is not this relation, any more than formal causality is final or efficient causality.

The idea of the creature as subsisting relation is not only unfounded in Thomas's text, but indeed contrary to his teaching. As Dr. Schmitz admits about the view that the creature is a subsisting relation, "I recognize that this term is privileged by St. Thomas for the divine persons of the Trinity." Moreover, he observes that this construction is positively excluded by St. Thomas's teaching: "I also recognize that in his argument he refers the designation *human person* to the individual substance and with the impeccable logic of genus and specific difference excludes subsistent relation from the term *person* when applied to man" (see his note 59). In short—and in precision from its further assessment—the idea of the creature as "subsisting relation" not only is not Thomas's metaphysics, but is excluded by his metaphysics.

The value of viewing the creature as a subsisting relation is alleged to be its manifestation of the radical dependence of the

creature upon "the *communicatio entis* flowing from the first Being" (ibid.). But it is important that the status of creatures as *beings* be affirmed—which is that whereby they *are really ordered to God*. Convert the substance to a relation, and Thomas's whole account of the terminus of the divine creative act, the character of his defense of the dignity of secondary causality, and, indeed, even his path to the discovery of the real distinction are altered. Whatever else we may say, we must refuse to this doctrine the designation "Thomistic."

(2) Dr. Schmitz's masterful scholarly articulation of the idea of creature as subsisting relation, and of its pedigree in the history of ideas, should highlight one salient philosophic datum: that this idea occurs when something cognate with Hegelian dialectics is inseminated into the Thomistic metaphysics of *esse* at its highest point. The metaphysical category of substance is marked for abandonment in favor of relation as itself a subject of being, so that substance is absorbed into relation.

But it was part of the gravamen of my case—and remains so—that we have no epistemic warrant for the metaphysics of *esse* itself once we separate ourselves from the ontology—including the ontology of knowledge—whence it derives. Hence if we are importing dialectics within our constitutive understanding of *esse* so late in the game, it must be that the *path* to *esse* rendering such a move possible has been already and diversely articulated. But insofar as such a distinct path to a dialectically altered account of *esse* is articulated, I suggest that it will more and more clearly be seen to have its roots in a thought-world quite distinct from—and indeed contrary to—St. Thomas's own. The principles of being, on Thomas's account, are immutable: substance is not relation, not even transcendental relation; formal causality is not final or efficient causality. Ontology is not a mere provisional set of distinctions on the way to a new *Gestalt*—it is the permanent structure of being, whose permanence derives from its participation in the immutable divine wisdom.

Dr. Schmitz well challenges not only Thomists but all other philosophers to grapple with continental theories whose significance for an understanding of the person is central. Whether the *lingua franca* of the Thomistic metaphysics of being can any

longer signify its native propensities within a regime of thought transignified by a combination of Hegelian dialectic and the *aversio abstractae* typical of personalist phenomenology is another issue.

Of course, the idea of the creature as subsistent relation is itself a highly abstract notion—and it is in this sense unclear that it coheres more closely with the philosophy of the concrete than do more traditional Thomistic formulations. Still there is a tendency of some phenomenologists to void metaphysical conclusions solely owing to their "abstraction" or, more properly, superior remotion from matter—real principles of being are "out," *Gestalt* is "in." One point is clear: for St. Thomas metaphysical verities are neither tentative nor annulled in some higher synthesis: they are, indeed, the necessary rational prerequisites for any higher synthesis.

(3) The last point leads directly to the issue of St. Thomas's ontology and theoretic account of human knowledge. The very terms in which Thomas articulates his own account of *esse*—especially given his teaching that the proper object of the human intellect is quiddity as found in corporeal matter—contrasts sharply not only with the continental appropriation of his thought, but with much contemporary Neoscholasticism amongst medieval historians as well. The idea that Thomas meant to articulate a real distinction between essence and existence that is ungrounded in the ontology of knowing—as though the real distinction could sink its roots in the direct intuition of spiritual verities, or proceed from terms exclusively logical—is not supported by his writing. But were it true, I for one cannot see what would stand to impede the work of appropriation of Thomas's thought so elegantly and reconditely articulated by Dr. Schmitz. If my criticisms are only the *felix culpa* meriting so scholarly and lucid a response, this may yet serve to measure the distance separating Thomistic realism from its transubstantiation within the rhythm and gait of continental reflection.

A DEFENSE OF PHYSICALISM

STEVEN J. JENSEN

University of Mary
Bismarck, North Dakota

THE CHARGE OF PHYSICALISM is often made in discussions of sexual ethics. Some people, so the accusation runs, mistakenly explain the evil of certain sexual actions, contraception in particular, in merely physical terms, while ignoring the truly human element of actions, that element essential to all moral good and evil, namely, the will. But physicalism, while especially rampant in sexual ethics, is not confined to it. It is an ailment that can afflict an entire moral outlook. And, like any affliction, philosophers hope to avoid it, making sure that they themselves are not physicalists.

It seems to me that perhaps physicalism should be defended. The problem is that the accusation seems to have as many senses as there are accusers. I am forced, therefore, to settle upon a definition of physicalism with which not everyone will agree, and perhaps I will end up with a defense not of physicalism but of a physicalist look alike.[1] Physicalism, then, according to my designation, claims that the moral good or evil of an action can be determined merely by its physical features, *physical* features being contrasted to acts of the will. My precise definition of physicalism will involve Aquinas's distinction between exterior and interior actions within one human action. When someone opens a door, for example, he has the interior action of choosing

---

[1] I will not focus upon natures, functions, and teleology, elements that are often seen as essential to physicalism (see Charles Curran, *Transitions and Traditions in Moral Theology* [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979], 31), although teleology is implied in my account.

to open the door and the exterior action of physically opening the door.

Concerning the relationship between these two actions, there are two general approaches. According to the first, the exterior action has its own moral good and evil, by its very nature, and it bestows this moral character upon the will. The exterior action of killing an innocent human being, for example, is evil by its very self. On account of this evil, the will becomes evil, so that the interior act of intending to kill an innocent human being is evil only because the exterior act of killing is first of all evil.

The second account is exactly opposed. The exterior action has no moral good or evil of its own but receives its moral character from the will, which is itself inherently good or evil. What matters in the act of murder is not so much the physical activity performed as the evil intention of the agent.[2]

Now physicalism is the view that an action takes its moral character from its physical features, apart from the good or evil of the will. Put in terms of the interior and exterior actions, physicalism is the view that the exterior action has a moral character in itself, by the very nature of its physical features, and that acts of the will receive their good or evil from the exterior action. The opposite view I will call Abelardianism, for the common counter-accusation to physicalism often brings in Peter Abelard. In this paper I do not exactly wish to defend physicalism, to show that physicalism is true in the very nature of things; I want only to show that Aquinas thought it was. In other words, I hope to show that Aquinas was a physicalist.

When we move the debate into the arena of the philosophy of Aquinas, it takes on the nature of a disagreement over what Aquinas calls "the specification of human actions." According to Aquinas human actions are good or evil in their very species or essence. Physicalists claim that this moral specification moves from the exterior act to the interior while Abelardians claim that it moves from the interior to the exterior. For example, the physi-

calists claim that the exterior action of killing is good or evil in its very species, and the intention to kill takes its moral species from the exterior action. Abelardians, on the other hand, claim that the act of killing receives its moral species only from the will, which has moral character by its very nature.

I. THE CASE FOR ABELARDIANISM

I do not presume to give every argument in favor of Abelardianism; I give, instead, what seems to be the strongest case, which depends upon the role of intention in the specification of human actions, especially as it is exemplified in the principle of double effect.[3] Consider the common example of the tactical bomber, who bombs a munitions factory located within a residential district. He not only destroys the factory and all inside it; he kills some innocent civilians as well. According to the principle of double effect, he most properly destroys the factory, while he kills the innocent civilians only as a side effect. In precise Thomistic terms, he destroys the factory *per se* while he kills the civilians *per accidens*. Of course the significant feature of his action is his intention, for he intends to destroy the factory, but the civilian deaths are outside his intention. As Aquinas puts it, what is within intention is *per se* and what is outside intention is *per accidens*. He adds that what is *per se* belongs to the species of an action.[4] The species of the tactical bomber's action, then, is destroying the munitions factory, for that is what he intends. Killing the civilians is *per accidens* and so must be something outside the essence of his action.

---

[3] See Louis Janssens, "Ontic Evil and Moral Evil," in *Readings in Moral Theology: No. 1*, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 49; and Joseph M. Boyle, *"Praeter Intentionem* in Aquinas," *The Thomist* 42 (1978): 653.

[4] *STh* II-II, q. 64, a. 7: "Morales autem actus recipiunt speciem secundum id quod intenditur, non autem ab eo quod est praeter intentionem, cum sit per accidens, ut ex supradictis patet"; and *STh* I-II, q. 72, a. 8: "Dicendum quod cum in peccato sint duo, scilicet ipse actus et inordinatio eius, prout receditur ab ordine rationis et legis divinae; species peccati attenditur non ex parte inordinationis, quae est praeter intentionem peccantis, ut supra dictum est." See also *STh* I-II, q. 72, a. 5; II-II, q. 43, a. 3; II-II, q. 70, a. 4, ad 1; II-II, q. 109, a. 2, ad 2; II-II, q. 110, a. 1; II-II, q. 150, a. 2.

The picture we get is of an action—the deed that was done—and then certain things that are beyond the action itself but are related to it. As Aquinas puts it, certain things "stand around" an action; they are its circumstances. He compares an action to a substance and its circumstances to its properties. Just as my dog Fido is a substance who has many properties, so our actions—or the substance of our actions—have certain properties. The deed that the tactical bomber performs, for instance, is destroying the munitions factory. The killing of innocent lives that results is not precisely his action, but a circumstance of his action.

Abelardianism notes that the tactical bomber's exterior action does not have moral species in and of itself; it must be specified by his intention. We cannot tell, just by looking at the exterior action, what the tactical bomber's action is. It might be merely the destruction of the factory or it might also be the killing of innocents. The exterior action by itself gives no indication. Indeed, the very same action, with a different intention, might give us a terror bomber, who intentionally kills innocent civilians in order to lower the enemy's morale, thereby bringing a quick end to the war. Both tactical bomber and terror bomber kill innocent civilians; they might even do so in the same suburban neighborhood. And yet these *externally* identical actions are entirely distinct in moral species. The essence of the tactical bomber's action is the destruction of the factory, while the killing of innocents is merely a circumstance. For the terror bomber, on the other hand, the killing of innocent civilians belongs to the very essence of his action. The two acts are distinguished in moral species not by any physical features, but only by the interior act of the will. Physicalism, therefore, must be false. The physical features alone of an action do not determine its moral character; the agent's intention must be included in any moral evaluation.

Before we turn to what physicalism might say in its defense, I want better to understand precisely what Aquinas means by an action, its essence, and its circumstances. I will examine what he means by a *per se* action, since the substance of an action is what belongs to it *per se* and not *per accidens*.

II. Per Se Actions

Aquinas lists three marks of a *per se* action, or rather, of a *per se* cause. He says first that a *per se* cause intends its effect; second, that a *per se* cause is similar to its effect; and finally, that a *per se* cause has a determinate order to its effect.[5] We have already seen the first point, that the agent's intention determines what is *per se*, in the case of the tactical bomber. The second point, that a *per se* cause is similar to its effect, is best illustrated through one of Aquinas's own favorite examples, fire heating. Consider four effects of a fiery furnace upon wet clay and upon a block of wax: the clay becomes hot, the wax becomes hot, the clay hardens, and the wax melts. The fire is itself hot, and through its own heat it makes the clay and wax hot as well. But the fire is neither hard nor soft, although it causes the clay to become hard and the wax to become soft. The effect of *heat*, then, is indeed similar to the cause, but the other effects, being hard or soft, are not similar to the cause, and as such they must be *per accidens* effects. While the fire heats *per se*, through its own heat, it may be said to harden and to soften *per accidens*.

According to Aquinas the similarity between cause and effect need not be absolute. Consider a man building a shed. Clearly he is not absolutely similar to the shed. Nevertheless, he does

---

[5] *De Malo*, q. 1, a. 3. "Sciendum est enim quod malum causam per se habere non potest. Quod quidem tripliciter apparet. Primo quidem, quia illud quod per se causam habet, est intentum a sua causa; quod enim provenit praeter intentionem agentis, non est effectus per se, sed per accidens; sicut effossio sepulcri per accidens est causa inventionis thesauri, cum provenit praeter intentionem fodientis sepulcrum. Malum autem, in quantum huiusmodi, non potest esse intentum, nec aliquo modo volitum vel desideratum; quia omne appetibile habet rationem boni; cui opponitur malum in quantum huiusmodi. Unde videmus quod nullus facit aliquod malum nisi intendens aliquod bonum, ut sibi videtur; sicut adulterium bonum videtur quod delectatione sensibili fruatur. Et propter hoc adulterium committit. Unde relinquitur quod malum non habeat causam per se. Secundo idem apparet, quia omnis effectus per se habet aliqualiter similitudinem suae causae, vel secundum eamdem rationem, sicut in agentibus univocis, vel secundum deficientem rationem, sicut in agentibus aequivocis; omnis enim causa agens agit secundum quod actu est, quod pertinet ad rationem boni. Unde malum, secundum quod huiusmodi, non assimilatur causae agenti secundum id quod est agens. Relinquitur ergo quod malum non habeat causam per se. Tertio idem apparet ex hoc quod omnis causa per se, habet certum et determinatum ordinem ad suum effectum; quod autem fit secundum ordinem non est malum, sed malum accidit in praetermittendo ordinem."

already possess the likeness of the shed, and through this likeness he acts. For in building the shed he has some conception of what the shed will be like, and it is by means of this idea that he builds the shed.[6]

The third mark of a *per se* action, that it is determinately ordered to its effect, is illustrated through a man writing with a pen upon a piece of paper. The pen does not move of its own accord; we would say that it is moved by the man, who gives the pen impetus to move and thereby to act. More than that, the man directs the pen so that it moves precisely to form letters and then words.

Aquinas speaks of two ways that something might be directed or ordered to an end: either from an intrinsic characteristic or from an external impetus. An archer aims at the target from an internal impetus—knowledge and intention—while an arrow aims at the target only because it receives external direction.[7] Similarly, both the man writing and the pen are directed toward writing. But the man's direction arises from an internal source— his knowledge and intention—while the pen receives a guiding impetus from outside.

This example epitomizes human actions in the world around us, for we act by moving events toward some desired effects. Just as the man moves the pen to write, so the tactical bomber moves events to destroy the factory. These actions do not result randomly in some effect; they are directed toward it.

We can now picture a *per se* action as a certain movement, arising in an agent, directed toward some end effect. The tactical bomber's action, for example, is a certain movement that he initiates, directed toward the effect of the destruction of the munitions factory. The heart of an action, its substance or essence, is a movement from an agent to an end. If we understand the direction of an action, where it is headed, then we have grasped its substance, and all else is merely accidental. Besides destroying the factory, for instance, the tactical bomber kills

---

[6] This "intellectual" likeness is expressed in *ScG* III, c. 2, no. 5, "Adhuc. Omne agens."

[7] *De Verit.*, q. 22, a. 1; *STh* I, q. 103, a. 8; and *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

innocent civilians, but his action does not originate from this goal nor is it headed in that direction. It is moving toward the destruction of the factory and no more. The species of an action, then, is taken from its direction, and all that is extraneous to this order to an end is *per accidens* and a circumstance.

We are now in a position to consider the arguments in favor of physicalism.

III. The Case for Physicalism

Physicalism often bases its claim that the exterior action has moral character in itself, apart from the will, upon another specifying element of human actions beyond intention, namely, the object. Indeed, the whole debate before us is sometimes cast in terms of two different ends or objects, namely, the *finis operis* and the *finis operantis*.[8] The *finis operis*, the end of the action, refers to the end of the exterior action; for example, the *finis operis* of killing is death. The *finis operantis*, on the other hand, refers to the end intended by the agent. Physicalism says that moral actions are specified by the *finis operis*, and that the *finis operantis* is merely a circumstance. For instance, the terror bomber's action is specified by its end, which is the death of innocent human beings, and the bomber's intention to shorten the war is merely a circumstance.

Abelardianism responds to this claim in two different ways. One response, which I will call extreme Abelardianism, may be associated with the proportionalists, who claim that the end of the action does indeed give species to the act, but not its moral species; it determines merely the natural species of an action.[9] For example, the natural act of killing is indeed specified by the *finis operis* of death. But moral actions must include the end intended within their object, so that the moral action of murder

[8] See Janssens, "Ontic Evil," 42-43; and Peter Knauer, "The Hermeneutic Function of the Principle of Double Effect," in Curran and McCormick, eds., *Readings in Moral Theology: No. 1*, 5.

[9] See Janssens, "Ontic Evil," 49; and Knauer, "Hermeneutic," 5 (although Knauer defines the *finis operis* so that it includes the *finis operantis*).

must include, within its specification, not only the end of death, but the reason why the agent has chosen to kill. Natural actions are specified by the *finis operis,* moral actions are specified by the *finis operantis.* The terror bomber, for instance, intends to end the suffering of war. Perhaps his action should not, therefore, be described as murder. It is better, suggests extreme Abelardianism, to describe the action through the *finis operantis,* perhaps as saving lives.[10]

A second response from the Abelardians gives us yet a third view, moderate Abelardianism,[11] which insists that there is really not much difference between the *finis operis* and the *finis operantis.* In the final analysis the end of the action reduces to the end of the agent. The appropriate distinction to be made is between the proximate end and the remote end, both of which are ends of the agent. The proximate end of the terror bomber, for instance, is the death of innocents; the close of the war is his remote end. The moral species of actions is taken not from this remote end, as the proportionalists would have it, but from the proximate end.[12]

Let us begin, then, to consider the case for physicalism by examining how the *finis operis* specifies human actions. Aquinas says repeatedly that an action is specified by its end;[13] for example, we identify the action of heating through its end, which is

---

[10] The proportionalists themselves might not wish to defend terror bombing, but in principle they should allow that under some circumstances it might be permissible.

[11] This view seems to be expressed by Boyle, *"Praeter Intentionem";* John Finnis, *Moral Absolutes: Tradition, Revision, and Truth* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 37-40; and Sullivan, "Active and Passive."

[12] We should note that we need not get caught up with the terms *finis operis* and *finis operantis.* It has been pointed out that Aquinas himself rarely uses these two terms (see Servais Pinckaers, "La role de la fin dans l'action morale selon Saint Thomas," in *Le renouveau de la morale* [Paris-Tournai, 1964], 129). The terms are irrelevant, for the ideas are clearly present in Aquinas, who tends to speak of the end of the action and the end of the will. We will see shortly that even the term *finis* will be discarded. Nevertheless, one idea will remain intact, namely, that the exterior action has a term of its own, through which it is specified.

[13] *Q. D. de Anima,* a. 13: "Actus autem ex obiectis speciem habent, nam si sint actus passivarum potentiarum, obiecta sunt activa; si autem sint activarum potentiarum, obiecta sunt ut fines"; and *STh* I, q. 77, a. 3: "Ad actum autem potentiae activae comparatur obiectum ut terminus et finis; sicut augmentativae virtutis obiectum est quantum perfectum, quod est finis augmenti." Also see *In De Anima* II, c. 6, nos. 137-44; *STh* I, q. 14, a. 2; and I-II, q. 18, a. 2.

heat. Similarly, the act of killing is characterized through its end, which is death. The end of building is some structure, and the end of growth is increased size. In general, it seems that many actions have a defining effect.

The importance of the end is no surprise, for it fits neatly into our picture of a *per se* action. We said that actions are not just random but are headed toward some end. It follows that an action is characterized through its end. Just as a trip to Chicago is characterized by its goal, so an action is characterized through the end toward which it is headed.

This explanation of physicalism, however, is at best incomplete. Aquinas not only says that actions are specified by their ends; he often says that actions are specified by what he calls the "material" of the action. What he means may be understood through a few examples. The action of adultery is specified by the material "another's spouse."[14] Similarly, the action of theft is specified through the material "another's property."[15] The material, clearly, is not the same thing as the end or effect of an action. The act of adultery does not end up with another's spouse the way that killing ends up with death. Rather, the material is, as Aquinas puts it, that which is acted upon.[16]

While it is fairly clear that many actions are defined by the effect they bring about, even as killing is defined through death, it is not so clear that actions are defined through the material upon which they act. The act of heating, for instance, is clearly characterized by heat, but appears not to be characterized by the material of wax or clay. Of course, one might point out that a complete description of the fire's action must include the wax. The fire did not merely heat; it heated wax. Perhaps the material of an action, then, specifies by providing a complete description of an action.

[14] *STh* II-II, q. 154, a. 1.

[15] *De Malo,* q. 2, a. 6.

[16] *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 2, ad 2. Even the term *finis* has now been eliminated. We are no longer speaking of the end of the exterior act, but of its material. Still, the essence of physicalism remains: the exterior act is specified by some feature of its own, a feature Aquinas calls the "object" of the action. The physical features of the exterior action, either its end or its material, give moral character to the action independently of the will.

This explanation, however, fails to answer the most important question: why should the material be included within the essence of the action? Talk of a "complete description" of an action simply will not do, for a complete description will include all the circumstances. Heating wax is a more complete description of the fire's action than is merely heating, but heating wax at twelve o'clock is more complete yet. If what we want is a complete description, then we will be left with no distinction between what is essential and what is accidental to an action. No doubt a complete description of an action will include the material, but that does not explain why the material specifies an action. A good explanation must show that the material belongs to the essence of an action.

The importance of the material can be understood through the example of basketball. The activity of shooting the basketball is, in general, directed toward the end of scoring. But the precise direction that the action takes depends upon its material, namely, the basket that is shot at. If it is basket A, then the action is directed toward team A scoring; if it is basket B, then it is directed toward team B scoring. In the realm of basketball, these two different kinds of scoring are completely different goals. The material of the act, then, belongs to the essence of shooting because it determines the precise direction that the action takes.

We will see that this view, that the material specifies an action insofar as it determines the direction of the action, is in fact Aquinas's own. Fornication, for instance, is specified by its material, namely, an unmarried woman, because that material determines that the action is not directed toward the full education of the offspring.[17]

---

[17] We can see the view worked out in Aquinas's commentary on the *De Anima*, where he discusses the activity of digestion. The material of digestion is food, but this single material can lead to different effects, either the sustenance of the organism or the growth of the organism. Therefore, depending upon the formality under which it is considered— as sustaining or as leading to increased size—this same material serves as the object of two activities, sustenance or growth. In other words, the material of food specifies the activities, as we have suggested, because it directs the activity to the diverse effects of sustenance or growth. See *In De Anima* II, c. 9, nos. 125-30 and 165-78.

IV. THE CASE OF EXTREME ABELARDIANISM

First, however, we must consider extreme Abelardianism's insistence that the *finis operis*, and we might include the material as well, gives merely the natural species of actions. Since moral actions are voluntary, involving deliberation and will, they are specified through the end of the will, not by the end of the action.[18]

Evaluating the arguments of extreme Abelardianism requires a precise determination of the moral object of human actions. Must the moral object include the end intended or can it be constituted merely through the *finis operis* and material? Or more generally, we might ask, what belongs to the moral object of human actions, as opposed to the natural object?

Aquinas answers this question when asking whether moral actions are good and evil in their very species.[19] He says that the same features will sometimes specify an act and sometimes not. It depends upon the active principle from which the act arises. Consider the action of knowing red and knowing a sound. Should we say that these two features, the color and the sound, give rise to two distinct species of knowing? That depends, says

---

[18] This position may be supported, as Janssens ("Ontic Evil") does, by noting Aquinas's own strong emphasis upon the role that the end of the will plays in moral actions. He says that moral actions are specified by the end of the will (*STh* I-II, q. 1, a. 3); he says that the most important feature of an action is the end intended (*STh* I-II, q. 7, a. 4); and he says that the further end intended gives the species to moral actions more than the immediate material upon which the action bears, even going so far as to say that someone who steals in order to commit adultery is more an adulterer than a thief (*STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 6).

[19] *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 4. "Ad cuius evidentiam considerandum est, quod cum actus recipiat speciem ab obiecto, secundum aliquam rationem obiecti specificabitur actus comparatus ad unum activum principium, secundum quam rationem non specificabitur comparatus ad aliud. Cognoscere enim colorem et cognoscere sonum sunt diversi actus secundum speciem, si ad sensum referantur; quia haec secundum se sensibilia sunt; non autem si referantur ad intellectum; quia ab intellectu comprehenduntur sub una communi ratione obiecti, scilicet entis aut veri. Et similiter sentire album et nigrum differt specie si referatur ad visum, non si referatur ad gustum; ex quo potest accipi quod actus cuiuslibet potentiae specificatur secundum id quod per se pertinet ad illam potentiam, non autem secundum id quod pertinet ad eam solum per accidens. Si ergo obiecta humanorum actum considerentur quae habeant differentias secundum aliquid per se ad rationem pertinens, erunt actus specie differentes, secundum quod sunt actus alicuius alterius potentiae." See also *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 5.

Aquinas, upon what power is doing the knowing. If we are speaking of the senses, then knowing red is one kind of action, namely, seeing, and knowing sound is another kind of action, namely, hearing. But if we are speaking of the intellect, then there is only one kind of action. Knowing red and knowing sound are both instances of understanding or intellection.

What matters in each case, says Aquinas, is whether the feature under consideration refers *per se* or *per accidens* to the active principle. Color and sound refer *per se* to the power of sensing, and so they give rise to distinct acts of sensing, but they refer *per accidens* to the intellect, so in that instance they do not give rise to distinct kinds of actions.[20]

There are many features that appear in the objects of moral actions. For instance, the people killed by the terror bomber are innocent, German, and under eight feet tall. Our problem is to discover which of these features determine the species of moral actions. And Aquinas says that it depends upon how each refers to the active principle from which the action arises. If being German refers *per se* to reason, the active principle of moral actions, then the bomber's action, in its moral species, will be "killing Germans." On the other hand, if innocence refers *per se* to reason, then the moral species of the action will be "killing innocent human beings."

An upshot of this doctrine, pertinent to the claims of extreme Abelardianism, is that two actions might be morally distinct in species but naturally of the same kind. For example, the two actions of having intercourse with one's own spouse and having

___

[20] We have already run across the terms *per se* and *per accidens* in reference to the specifying role of intention, but we can be sure that the terms are not being used identically here. Without precisely spelling out how something refers *per se* to an active principle, Aquinas draws out certain intuitions. Since he is here talking about *differences* in objects, I think that when he uses the term *per se* he is referring to a *per se* difference. When dividing the genus of animal, for instance, we should not divide the category non-rational into those that have wings and those that do not, for this is not a *per se* division. But if we divided animal into those having legs and those without legs, then a further *per se* division would be those with two legs and those with more (see *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 7). The intuition at work becomes plain through a literal rendering of *per se* as "through itself." A division of feet is divided through itself by another division of feet, but the division of winged and non-winged is incidental to the non-rational.

intercourse with someone else's spouse are indeed morally dis-
tinct species, for Aquinas says that the features "one's own" and
"someone else's" refer *per se* to reason. However, these same fea-
tures do not refer *per se* to the sexual power, so on a natural level
these two actions both belong to the same kind, namely, sexual
intercourse.[21]

Extreme Abelardianism's claim, then, that the *finis operis* and
material of an action determine its natural species but not its
moral species amounts to the claim that the end and material
refer *per se* to a natural active principle but not to reason. The
heart of the matter, as far as physicalism is concerned, is whether
the *finis operis* and material, by themselves, without including
the end intended, can ever refer *per se* to reason. If they can, then
they give moral species and some exterior actions will be morally
characterized through their own physical features. Before we
can determine whether the end and material give moral species,
therefore, we must better understand what Aquinas means by
something referring *per se* to reason.

Aquinas says that something refers *per se* to reason when it is
according to reason or when it is contrary to reason, when it is
fitting or not fitting to reason,[22] when it is repugnant to reason,[23]
and when it is consonant or dissonant to reason.[24] I wish to fol-
low up on what seems to be his most helpful description. He says
that something refers *per se* to reason if it is fitting to the order
of reason or if it is repugnant to the order of reason.[25] He further
explains this by saying that an action is fitting to the order of rea-
son if it is ordered to the appropriate end; it is unfitting if it is not
ordered to the appropriate end.[26]

Elsewhere Aquinas explains that the order of reason is noth-
ing other than the order to the end, for it is reason that directs

---

[21] *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 5, ad 3; and *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 4.
[22] *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 5.
[23] Ibid., ad 4.
[24] *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 10, ad 3.
[25] *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 9.
[26] *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 10.

our desires to the end.[27] The idea is best illustrated through an analogy to another field that involves an order to an end, for instance, medicine. Medical acts, Dr. Kevorkian aside, should be ordered to the end of health, and those that lack the order are bad medical acts. If a doctor prescribes a medication that will only make you worse, then his action is not ordered to health and is a bad medical act; it is, we might say, contrary to medicine. Good medical acts, on the other hand, conform to what might be called the medical order, that is, the order to health. Human actions, then, are like medical acts. Just as medical acts must conform to the medical order, so human acts should conform to the order of reason.

All of this talk of orders to an end should remind us that actions are, in their essence, a movement toward an end, and that they are specified by the end to which they are directed, even as killing is specified by the end of death. Now we can add another detail. Not just any difference in the end constitutes a new kind of action. Heating to 90 degrees and heating to 100 degrees, for instance, are not two different kinds of action. The difference must refer *per se* to the active principle, which for human actions is reason.

How this works out in practice is best illustrated through Aquinas's own practice. The end of reason, it seems, is constituted through diverse human goods, for example, human life, material possessions, friendship, offspring, and so on,[28] and actions directed toward or away from these diverse ends are distinct in kind. Aquinas says, for instance, "Since virtue is ordered to the good, there is a special virtue wherever there occurs a special formality of the good."[29] And again, "When there is a special

---

[27] *STh* II-II, q. 153, a. 2: "Peccatum in humanis actibus est quod est contra ordinem rationis. Habet autem hoc rationis ordo, ut quaelibet convenienter ordinet in suum finem"; and II-II, q. 141, a. 6: "Bonum virtutis moralis praecipue consistit in ordine rationis: nam bonum hominis est secundum rationem esse, ut Dionysius dicit, iv cap. *De Div. Nom.* Praecipuus autem ordo rationis consistit ex hoc quod aliqua in finem ordinat, et in hoc ordine maxime consistit bonum rationis: nam bonum habet rationem finis, et ipse finis est regula eorum quae sunt ad finem." See also II-II, q. 161, a. 5.

[28] See *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.

[29] *STh* II-II, q. 114, a. 1: "Cum virtus ordinetur ad bonum, ubi occurrit specialis ratio boni, ibi oportet esse specialem rationem virtutis."

formality of the good in a human act, a person must be disposed to this good through a special virtue."[30] Furthermore, he says that there is a distinct sin when an action is opposed to a distinct good. Sedition, for example, is a special sin because it is opposed to the good of unity.[31]

Our problem is to determine which features of an action to include within the object. The terror bomber, for instance, kills people who are German, innocent, and under eight feet tall. Which of these features, if any, specify the bomber's action? Aquinas answers, those that refer *per se* to reason. But which refer *per se* to reason? Those that are fitting or repugnant to the order of reason. And how is an action fitting or repugnant to reason? By its order to a new good or away from a distinct good. Those features should be included within the object, therefore, that provide a new direction to an action.

Our previous example illustrates the point. We said that in basketball the material specifies the act of shooting because the material indicates the order of the action. The act of shooting at basket A is ordered to team A scoring, while the act of shooting at basket B is ordered to team B scoring. We might now add that these two orders are distinct in kind because they refer *per se* to the active principle of a basketball player. Likewise, the distinct materials, basket A and basket B, refer *per se* to basketball because they give rise to distinct orders.

Similarly, the material of fornication, an unmarried woman, refers *per se* to reason because it indicates the order of the action, namely, that fornication lacks the order to the education of the child. The material of a homosexual act, someone of the same sex, lacks even the order to offspring. Since these actions are opposed to distinct human goods, they are distinct in kind.

These examples and many others like them confirm the physicalists' claim: the material determines the *moral* species of human actions, for the material by itself, apart from the agent's

[30] *STh* II-II, q. 109, a. 2: "Ubi in actu hominis invenitur specialis ratio bonitatis, necesse est quod ad hoc disponatur homo per specialem virtutem."

[31] *STh* II-II, q. 42, a. 1: "Seditio, quia habet speciale bonum cui opponitur, scilicet unitatem et pacem multitudinis, ideo est speciale peccatum." See also *De Malo,* q. 2, a. 10; q. 7, a. 4; *STh* I-II, q. 88, a. 5; II-II, q. 154, a. 1, ad 1; and II-II, 154, 6.

intention, determines the order of the action.[32] And for this rea-
son, physicalism points out, Aquinas repeatedly says that an
action has moral good and evil apart from the end intended,
simply from its material.[33]

The case for physicalism, then, stands firm against the attack
of extreme Abelardianism. The *finis operis* and material give
moral species, and not merely natural species, to the exterior
action, and therefore the exterior action has moral species

---

[32] We should not, however, a priori exclude the end intended from the object of the
moral act. It should be treated like any other circumstance: if it refers *per se* to reason,
then it must be included within the moral object. For example, the sins of speech are
often specified by the end intended. Detraction and whispering are morally distinct
because the detractor seeks to dishonor while the whisperer seeks to end a friendship
(*STh* II-II, q. 74, a. 1). The material alone, namely, the unkind words spoken, is insuffi-
cient to determine the moral species of the action. The material does not, by itself, order
the act against a distinctive good; the end intended must be included to determine which
good is being opposed. In fact, the end intended has a special role in morals, for it will
always refer *per se* to reason. Therefore, Aquinas says, every action in the concrete must
be either good or evil—none can remain indifferent—because some circumstance, at
least the end intended, will refer *per se* to reason by determining the order of the action
(*STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 9).
[33] See *STh* I-II, q. 20, a. 1: "Dicendum quod aliqui actus exteriores possunt dici boni
vel mali dupliciter. Uno modo, secundum genus suum et secundum circumstantias in
ipsis consideratas; sicut dare eleemosynam, servatis debitis circumstantiis, dicitur esse
bonum. Alio modo dicitur aliquid esse bonum vel malum ex ordine ad finem, sicut dare
eleemosynam propter inanem gloriam dicitur esse malum"; I-II, q. 20, a. 2: "Dicendum
quod, sicut iam dictum est, in exteriori actu potest considerari duplex bonitas vel mali-
tia: una secundum debitam materiam et circumstantias; alia secundum ordinem ad
finem. Et illa quidem quae est secundum ordinem ad finem, tota dependet ex voluntate.
Illa autem quae est ex debita materia vel circumstantiis, dependet ex ratione, et ex hac
dependet bonitas voluntatis, secundum quod in ipsam fertur"; I-II, q. 20, a. 4; and so on.
In fact, Aquinas says that the end intended is a circumstance of the moral action. (See
II-II, q. 111, a. 3, ad 3: "Dicendum quod lucrum vel gloria est finis remotus simulatoris,
sicut et mendacis. Unde ex hoc fine speciem non sortitur, sed ex fine proximo, qui est
ostendere se alium quam sit." See also *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 7, ad 8; q. 2, a. 4, ad 9; q. 2, a. 6,
ad 9; *STh* I-II, q. 1, a. 3, ad 3; I-II, q. 60, a. 1, ad 3; II-II, q. 11, a. 1, ad 2; II-II, q. 66, a.
4, ad 2.) He also says, as is sometimes pointed out by extreme Abelardians, that the end
intended formally specifies the moral act, so that someone who steals in order to commit
adultery is more an adulterer than a thief (see n. 18). Such a person is, nevertheless, a
thief, and so the exterior act of stealing still has a moral species independent of the end
intended. When Aquinas speaks of the formal role of the end intended, he is not imply-
ing an essential role; that is, he is not saying that the end intended falls within the essence
of the exterior action. Rather, the end is the form of the exterior act in the way that char-
ity is the form of the virtues, namely, as an efficient cause (see II-II, q. 23, a. 8, ad 1).

through its own physical features, apart from the interior act of the will.

But just when physicalism seems to be at its strongest, moderate Abelardianism sneaks in to take all its glory away.

V. THE CASE FOR MODERATE ABELARDIANISM

Moderate Abelardianism reminds us of what we may have forgotten, namely, that moral actions are specified by their intention. Our whole edifice of physicalism, constructed through a lengthy analysis of the object of actions, seems to melt before the approach of moderate Abelardianism, which does not attack or question anything we have so far said in support of physicalism. It grants that actions are specified by their objects; it grants the role of reason in determining what belongs to the object; it denies, however, that any of this establishes the independence of the exterior act from the interior. Moderate Abelardianism admits, for instance, that actions are specified by their ends, even as killing is specified by the end of death. The trouble is determining precisely what is meant by the end of the action. The end cannot be identified simply with the effect of an action, for then the tactical bomber's action would have as many ends as it has effects. His action, no doubt, destroys the munitions factory, but it also kills innocent civilians. It also does a host of other things, such as make a loud noise and a bright flash. Which among these many effects is to be counted as the end? The action *ends up* with all of them. Indeed, if by "end" we merely mean what an action effects, then the act of the tactical bomber can hardly be distinguished from that of the terror bomber, for both end up with the death of civilians. Yet because the tactical bomber intends to destroy the factory, but not to kill the civilians, we say that the end of his action is merely the destruction, while the deaths are a side effect. This role of intention fits perfectly into our earlier account of *per se* actions. We said that *per se* actions are directed toward an end like the arrow, for they receive their direction from the agent's intention. The tactical bomber's action, for instance, is directed toward the destruction of the factory but not

to the death of civilians. What provides this direction? The bomber's intention.[34]

Moderate Abelardianism is careful to distinguish itself from extreme Abelardianism, for it agrees wholeheartedly with physicalism that the end intended, that is, the remote end intended, does not give moral species. The proximate end intended, on the other hand, gives species to moral actions, as Aquinas himself says.[35] The terror bomber's action, for instance, is not specified by the lives he wishes to save, which remain a circumstance of the action, but by the innocent lives that he takes. His intention to kill the civilians is more proximate than his intention to save lives.

According to moderate Abelardianism, then, exterior actions are indeed specified by their ends. The end, however, does not belong to the exterior action in and of itself. Rather, the end is determined by the agent's proximate intention. Ultimately, exterior actions have no independent species of their own. By themselves they are merely series of events, even as the tactical bomber's action, apart from his intention, is simply a series of effects. His action receives direction and order, becoming a *per se* action, only through his intention. In effect, moderate Abelardianism has taken the apparent strength of physicalism, the object which gives species to the action, and transformed it into a mere servant of the interior act of will. Nothing remains to give independent species to the exterior action, and moderate Abelardianism appears triumphant.

VI. THE DYING EFFORT OF PHYSICALISM

But physicalism will not go down without a fight. And since it is a firm believer that the best defense is a good offense, physicalism attacks the coherence of moderate Abelardianism. It looks at the agent's intention and wonders how it is specified. How else but by the exterior action itself?

---

[34] Aquinas says that the object must itself be a *per se* object (see *STh* II-II, q. 59, a. 2).
[35] See note 32.

Consider how we characterize the terror bomber's intention. Most naturally we say that he intended to kill innocent civilians. Notice that he intended an action, the act of killing innocent civilians. It seems that his intention is characterized by this action, which can be nothing other than an exterior action. The only other plausible option is to describe his intention in terms of an end state rather than an action: for example, saying that he intended the death of innocent civilians. We do, quite naturally, describe his intention in either way, either through the exterior action of killing or through the end state of death. But, physicalism insists, there are several reasons to suppose that most properly the exterior action, and not the end state, specifies the interior act of intending.

First, there is moderate Abelardianism's own claim that moral actions receive their species from the proximate end intended, not from the remote end. But between these two, the act of killing and the state of death, the exterior action of killing is more proximate in the bomber's intention. His intention, then, should be characterized by the action and not by the end state.[36]

Second, it sometimes seems incoherent to describe proximate intentions in terms of end states. Consider the intention involved with adultery. Described in terms of an action, we simply say that the adulterer intends to have intercourse with another's spouse. But it is unclear how to describe this intention in terms of an end state. He does not intend simply, in itself, another's spouse. Perhaps we might say that he desires another's spouse, but we cannot say that he intends another's spouse. We might say that he intends pleasure, but then it seems we are describing his remote intention. In short, there seems to be no way to describe this proximate intention except in terms of the exterior action of intercourse.

Finally, and most conclusively, physicalism points out that Aquinas states, straight-away, that the interior act of the will is

[36] Aquinas himself, while asking whether the act of choosing is of some act or end state, says that intentions are always of actions (*STh* I-II, q. 13, a. 4). He points out that when we want to achieve some goal, we must invariably do so through some action. If the terror bomber wants to achieve his goal of dead civilians, he must perform the act of killing.

specified by the exterior action, for the exterior action serves as the object of the will.[37]

Let us take it as established, then, that the agent's intention is specified, not through some end state, but by an exterior action. What does this imply for moderate Abelardianism? Defeat, or so it would seem. For moderate Abelardianism claims that the interior action has moral character first, and it bestows this character upon the exterior action. But now it appears that the interior action is specified by the exterior act, which serves as its object.

If we survey the battlefield before us we see that no one remains standing. Proportionalism has fallen to the attacks of physicalism and moderate Abelardianism alike. Physicalism was mortally wounded by the claim that exterior actions are specified by the agent's intention, and moderate Abelardianism was slain by the claim that intentions are specified by the exterior action. We are left in perplexity for both the exterior and interior actions seem to take priority. The exterior action specifies intention but intention in turn specifies the exterior action.

VII. THE DILEMMA RESOLVED

Two distinctions are needed to unravel this philosophical Gordian knot. First, there are two senses in which something may be said to specify. We say of both the agent's intention and the object that they specify an action, but we should not presume that the single word *specify* has but a single meaning. Both intention and the object in some manner determine what direction an action takes, but each in a different way.

The agent's intention determines the direction of an action by giving rise to it, by being its efficient cause. Just as the archer

_____

[37] *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 3: "Quia actus exterior comparatur ad actum voluntatis ut obiectum quod habet rationem finis." See also earlier in the article, "Sic enim in se consideratus [exterior actus] comparatur ad voluntatem ut obiectum, prout est volitus"; *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 3, ad 8: "Dicendum quod actus interior dicitur esse malus propter actum exteriorem, sicut propter obiectum"; and ad 1. Also *STh* I-II, q. 20, a. 1, ad 1: "Dicendum quod actus exterior est obiectum voluntatis, inquantum proponitur voluntati a ratione ut quoddam bonum apprehensum et ordinatum per rationem, et sic est prius quam bonum actus voluntatis."

directs the arrow, so the tactical bomber's intention directs his action. Without intention his action would be directionless; it would simply be an event. And without direction, there would be no *per se* action; everything would be accidental, and no species would remain. The agent's intention, then, specifies by giving direction to the exterior action.

The object of the action plays a different specifying role. While intention *gives* direction to the act, the object *characterizes* the direction so given. For a movement or direction, being a relational term, has no inherent character; it must be characterized by its end. A trip, for instance, is characterized by its destination, even as my trip to Chicago is specified by Chicago. Similarly, the terror bomber's action receives its character from its end, namely, the death of innocent civilians.

Both of these specifying roles, that of intention and that of the object, are exemplified in my trip to Chicago. My intention to go to Chicago specifies my trip by giving it a direction. The destination itself, however, also specifies the trip by giving it a determinate character.[38]

While this distinction between two different senses of specifying is insufficient to resolve our perplexity, it does reveal the weaknesses of both physicalism and moderate Abelardianism. Each of the two views fails in one of the two specifying roles. Physicalism seems to say that the exterior action has direction in and of itself, thereby forgetting the specifying role of intention, which gives direction to the action. Moderate Abelardianism does not fail with respect to the exterior action, for it allows intention and object to work in concord to specify the exterior action. The terror bomber's action is specified, for instance, both by his intention and through its end; the intention gives direction

---

[38] The two senses of specification are explained by Aquinas when he says that something may be determined in two ways: to be or not to be and to be this or to be that (*STh* I-II, q. 9, a. 1). The direction of a *per se* action must be rather than not be, and it receives this existence from intention. But given that it exists the direction must be this or that, and it receives this determinate characteristic from the object. The agent's intention brings the action into existence, but it does not clothe it with characteristics; these it receives from its object.

to his action while the end defines that direction. Moderate Abelardianism, therefore, fails with the interior act. And even there it fails only with the second sense of specifying, the specification from the end or object. It does name an object of the interior act; but it misidentifies the object as a state rather than an action. It claims that the bomber's intention is specified by the end state of death rather than by the action of killing.

In the end, one might suppose, it all amounts to the same thing. Whether we say that he intends to kill or that he intends death we mean the same thing. Moderate Abelardianism should not be faulted on such a minor point, such a hair-splitting distinction that amounts to nothing in practice.

While it is not exactly my purpose to determine whether the difference between moderate Abelardianism and physicalism amounts to much practically—I merely wish to determine which view is held by Aquinas—I will note, nevertheless, that the difference is significant. The difference between specifying intention through an end state and specifying it through an action is crucial. If, say, the intention to kill innocent human beings is specified by an action, then we can say that the action itself is evil; the intention becomes evil on account of this evil inherent in the act of killing. If the intention to kill is specified by an end state, the death of innocent civilians, then the act is not evil in and through itself. What is evil is the intention toward death; the act of killing becomes evil on account of its association with this intention.

On either view, of course, we might be able to say that killing innocent human beings is always evil, but our accounts would be quite distinct. On the first account, killing would be evil inherently, by its very nature. On the second account, killing would be evil almost accidentally. It would be evil because the intention toward death is evil and the act of killing must always arise from the intention toward death. The analysis of good and evil actions, therefore, on the two accounts, is entirely distinct. The first seeks to examine actions as good or evil; the second

wishes to examine intentions toward some end state as good or evil.[39]

Our distinction between two senses of specifying has clarified our problem, but yet a further distinction is needed to resolve it. Aquinas says that the exterior action may be considered in two ways, either as it is conceived or as it is performed.[40] Consider the tactical bomber. Before he actually bombs the munitions factory, he thinks about it. He plans exactly where he must fly and judges when he must drop the bomb. After planning his attack, he then executes it. In effect, he first plans to destroy the factory, and then he actually destroys it. His action occurs twice, once in his deliberation and then again in actuality.

Now these two actions, the exterior action as conceived and as performed, have different relations to the agent's intention. The exterior action performed is specified by intention, for intention gives it a *per se* direction. The exterior action conceived, on the other hand, specifies intention after the manner of an object.

Let us follow the specification of the terror bomber's action. He first conceives of the possibility of killing the innocent civilians, perhaps even planning some details of his attack. Only after so conceiving can he then intend to kill the civilians, for we cannot desire or intend anything unless we have first of all conceived of it in some manner or other. His intention, then, is specified by the exterior action that he has conceived. After he intends to kill civilians, he actually executes his plan. And the exterior action that he now performs receives its direction from his intention.

We can already see our knot beginning to unravel. Our perplexity took the form of a circle involving two actions, the exterior

---

[39] The difference between the two views may be seen in the disagreement between Janet Smith and Grisez, Finnis, Ford, May, and Boyle, as expressed by Smith in *Humanae Vitae: A Generation Later* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 348-61. The latter, in *The Teachings of Humanae Vitae: A Defense* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), attribute the evil of contraception to an anti-life will—a will defined in terms of an end state—while the former attributes the evil of contraception to the unnatural character of the action itself.

[40] *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 3: "Actus exterior dupliciter considerari potest: uno modo secundum quod est in apprehensione secundum suam rationem; alio modo secundum quod est in operis executione"; see also ad 1, ad 3, ad 8; and *STh* I-II, q. 20, a. 1.

action specifying intention and intention specifying the exterior action. But now rather than two actions we have three, the exterior act performed, intention, and the exterior act conceived, and our circle has disappeared. Of these three actions only the specification of the last poses any difficulty. For we have already seen moderate Abelardianism explain both senses of specification for the exterior action performed. The two senses of specification are also easily explained for intention. It has the exterior action for its object, and it needs no external source to give it direction, for unlike the exterior action, the act of the will is inherently directed toward an end.

Even for the exterior action conceived we have no problem from the specification after the manner of an object, for the exterior action conceived is specified by the end or material. A problem arises only when we come to the specification after the manner of an efficient cause. Unlike the action performed, the exterior act conceived cannot receive direction from intention, for during the stage of planning the intention itself has not yet been specified. From whence, then, does the exterior act conceived receive its direction? Rather simply, it does not. Or, if that answer is unsatisfactory, then we might say *from reason.*

First, the action conceived does not *receive* its direction. It just has it. It is, after all, *abstract.* It is not a concrete reality needing existence; it is an abstract idea, conceived precisely as abstracted from existence. In effect, when we consider the abstract action conceived, we are considering merely the essence of the action. We are considering, for instance, the "what it is to be" of "killing an innocent human being." Intention specifies after the manner of an efficient cause, by determining the existence of an action; therefore, the abstract action, having no existence, need not be specified by intention. We can consider the direction of an action without bothering to note the intention that might give rise to the direction.

If one does not like the idea of the abstract action just having a direction, then we might say that it receives its direction from reason. For reason conceives an action in a certain way, thereby

determining its direction.[41] Reason, for instance, conceives the act of killing as directed toward death.

VIII. THE TRIUMPH OF MODERATE PHYSICALISM

We have now made enough distinctions that we ought to be able to resolve our problem. We began by wondering which was true, physicalism or Abelardianism. Common to either view was a concern over what belonged to the essence of an action as opposed to what was outside the action itself, which Aquinas calls a circumstance. We found that the heart of a *per se* action involves an agent that possesses some form and moves to pass that form on, even as fire moves to pass on heat. It followed that, although an action might have many effects, a *per se* action was directed to a determinate end, even as the activity of the fire was directed toward heat and not toward making the wax soft. The essence of an action was simply this movement to an end; all else stood around the action and was designated a circumstance.

We discovered two primary specifying causes of an action, one at either pole of an action. At the beginning we found the agent's intention determining the order of an action; at the end, we found the object of the action, clothing an action with its precise characteristics. The action of killing, for instance, begins with the intention to kill and ends with the effect of death. The intention directs the action, even as an archer directs an arrow. The object, on the other hand, defines the direction given by intention.

The specifying role of intention seemed to favor Abelardianism, for without the interior act of intention, the exterior action had no direction, relegating every feature of an action to a circumstance. The exterior actions of the terror bomber and

---

[41] One might suppose that the action receives its direction from its very nature, as, for instance, homosexuality by its very nature lacks the order to procreation. But a homosexual action has a twofold order, one from reason and another from its material. A basketball shot has a twofold order: it is ordered to a certain material, such as basket A, and consequently it is ordered to a certain score. Similarly, a homosexual act is ordered to a certain material, namely, someone of the same sex, and consequently it lacks the order to procreation. The first order arises from reason; the second arises from the nature of the material.

tactical bomber were indistinguishable without the specifying element provided by intention. On the other hand, the specifying role of the object seemed to favor physicalism, for the object appeared to be a physical feature of an action, independent of the will, that defined its moral character. Murder, for instance, could be defined entirely through its object, the death of an innocent human being.

We can now see that physicalism is true in one sense but false in another. What might be called extreme physicalism, the claim that the exterior action *performed* has moral character independently of the will, is false, for the exterior action *performed* has no *per se* character, moral or otherwise, without the intention that gives it direction. But moderate physicalism, the claim that the exterior action *conceived* has moral character independently of the act of the will, is true, for we can conceive of an action as directed toward a certain end or material, and from this end or material the action takes on moral character.

We should not, on account of the abstract nature of the act conceived, fall into yet another instance of extreme physicalism. The exterior action, while considered in abstraction from existence, is nevertheless conceived precisely insofar as it is a human action, that is, as it is voluntary. It would be a grave error to suppose that the act of killing an innocent person is evil no matter what the active principle from which it arises, be it a tiger or a human being. The exterior action takes its species from what refers *per se* to its active principle, which is reason. Therefore, it must be conceived under the formality of arising from reason and will, as a human act and not as an act of man.[42]

We will close by quoting the text of Aquinas that most closely addresses our problem. Aquinas is concerned with sins, and he is

---

[42] The action may be conceived in varying degrees of abstraction. A more concrete action, including various circumstances, may require a consideration of intention "conceived" in order to determine its species. For instance, even in our deliberations we will need to consider the intention of the terror bomber in order to determine what he did. But once we determine that he killed innocent civilians, then we consider this action in itself, just the killing of innocent civilians, in order to determine its moral character. We consider the act as voluntary, but we do not consider the will insofar as it determines what is act and what is circumstance.

wondering whether sins are found primarily in the interior action or in the exterior action.

For some sins the exterior actions are not evil in themselves, but only because they arise from an evil intention or will, for example, when one gives alms for vainglory. For these sins it is plain that in every way the sin is primarily in the will. But there are some sins in which the exterior acts are evil in themselves, as with theft, adultery, murder, and so on. Regarding these sins two distinctions should be made. First, the word "primarily" has two senses, either what is first or what is most completely. The second distinction concerns the exterior action, which may be considered in two ways, either as it is conceived according to its essence or as it is actually performed.

If we consider an action evil in itself, as theft or murder, as it is conceived according to its essence, then the formality of evil is found first of all in the exterior action, for it is not clothed with the appropriate circumstances (and from the very fact that the act is evil, deprived of its proper mode, species, and order, it is essentially a sin). For considered in itself the exterior action is compared to the will as its object, as the very thing willed. And just as acts are prior to potencies, so objects are prior to actions. Therefore, the formality of evil and of sin is found first of all in the exterior action as conceived and only secondarily in the will. However, the formality of sin and moral evil is completed only when the act of the will is added. Therefore, the complete evil of sin is in the act of the will.

If, on the other hand, we consider the exterior act as it is performed, then sin is in the will both first of all and most completely.

In summary, then, if we are speaking of the exterior act conceived then evil is in the exterior act first of all, but if we are speaking of the exterior act performed then evil is first of all in the will. For when compared to the will the exterior action is an object, which is an end. But the end is posterior in existence but prior in intention.[43]

---

[43] *De Malo*, q. 2, a. 3: "Dicendum, quod quaedam peccata sunt in quibus actus exteriores non sunt secundum se mali, sed secundum quod ex corrupta intentione vel voluntate procedunt. Puta, cum quis vult dare eleemosynam propter inanem gloriam; et in hujusmodi peccatis manifestum est quod omnibus modis peccatum principaliter consistit in voluntate. Quaedam autem peccata sunt in quibus exteriores actus sunt secundum se mali, sicut patet in furto, adulterio, homicidio et similibus; et in istis duplici distinctione opus esse videtur. Quarum prima est, quod *principaliter* dicit, scilicet primordialiter et completive. Altera distinctio est, quod actus exterior dupliciter considerari potest: uno modo secundum quod est in apprehensione secundum suam rationem; alio modo secundum quod est in operis executione. Si ergo consideretur actus secundum se malus, puta furtum vel homicidium, prout est in apprehensione secundum suam

The exterior action of a sin, then, has evil first of all, and bestows this evil on the will. This evil of the exterior action, however, is not actual evil but only evil in kind or formality. The completion of this evil must await the act of the will, just as essence must await existence.

A survey of our battlefield now reveals one figure standing: moderate physicalism. The fatal blow that was dealt to physicalism, namely, that the agent's intention must give order to the action, was a blow only to extreme physicalism, which claims that the exterior act *performed* has moral character independently of the will. Moderate physicalism claims that the formality of moral good and evil arises first of all from the exterior action *conceived*; and this moral species is then bestowed upon the will.

rationem, sic primordialiter in ipso invenitur ratio mali, quia non est vestitus debitis circumstantiis; et ex hoc ipso quod est actus malus, id est privatus debito modo, specie et ordine, habet rationem peccati. Sic enim in se consideratus comparatur ad voluntatem ut obiectum, prout est volitus. Sicut autem actus sunt praevii potentiis, ita et obiecta actibus; unde primordialiter invenitur ratio mali et peccati in actu exteriori sic considerato, quam in actu voluntatis; sed ratio culpae et moralis mali completur secundum quod accedit actus voluntatis; et sic completive malum culpae est in actu voluntatis; sed si accipiatur actus peccati secundum quod est in executione operis, sic primordialiter et per prius est culpa in voluntate. Ideo autem diximus per prius esse malum in actu exterior in apprehensione consideretur; e converso autem, si consideretur in executione operis; quia actus exterior comparatur ad actum voluntatis ut obiectum quod habet rationem finis. Finis autem est posterior in esse, sed prior in intentione."

MARITAIN, THE INTUITION OF BEING, AND THE PROPER STARTING POINT FOR THOMISTIC METAPHYSICS

MATTHEW S. PUGH

University of St. Thomas
Houston, Texas

I

ALL THOMISTS AGREE that being *qua* being is the proper subject of metaphysics, and few would deny that *separatio* is the means by which the intellect judges that being, in order to be such, need not be material, or changing. But certainly not all Thomists agree on what *separatio* presupposes. Some, such as John Wippel, deny that *separatio* presupposes knowledge of the existence of some being such as God or the soul.[1] Others, such as Joseph Owens, maintain that only by knowing in advance that immaterial being exists can one conclude that being need not be realized in matter.[2]

Excellent arguments can be established on both sides of the debate, as its history has shown. But the arguments of neither side are entirely satisfactory, for each position has its disadvantages. Those who maintain that *separatio* presupposes knowledge of the existence of immaterial being hold metaphysics hostage to proofs for the existence of God, while those who maintain that *separatio* alone is sufficient for beginning metaphysics base metaphysics upon an empty concept, namely, negatively immaterial, neutral *ens*.

---

[1] John F. Wippel, "Metaphysics and *Separatio* in Thomas Aquinas," *Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 82.

[2] Joseph Owens, *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1963).

Are Thomists, then, caught between the horns of a dilemma? Not necessarily. I contend that Jacques Maritain's philosophy of the intuition of being points the way out of the impasse, because Maritain's metaphysics provides a truly adequate account of how being *qua* being is apprehended by the mind. Both of the above-mentioned schools of thought fail to see that being *qua* being can be truly apprehended only in an eidetic visualization occurring at the third degree of formal abstraction, but grounded in a unique positive judgment of existence whose real import is gratuitously given to the intellect by nature.

In particular, Wippel fails to understand the nature of *separatio* by severing its connection to the notion of primitive being taken from the intellect's apprehension of *esse* in judgment, and by failing to recognize that *separatio* is in itself a kind of formal abstraction. Owens, on the other hand, conceives being after the manner of a universal grasped via total abstraction, but some-how also super-generic.[3] This intellectual operation, of course, presupposes the existence of at least one immaterial being; hence Owens's claim that one must first demonstrate God's existence before beginning metaphysics. Given the importance of this issue for Thomistic metaphysics, it is worth examining these claims in greater detail.

II

Maritain would agree with Wippel that because basic positive judgments of existence have sensibles for their subjects, the notion of being formulated from these judgments is never able to transcend the concrete, the changing, the material—never able to grasp being *qua* being. Wippel calls the notion of being based upon such judgments the primitive notion of being,[4] while Maritain calls it the "vague" notion of being.[5] Maritain would also agree that appeal must be made to a negative judgment

---

[3] Ibid., 63-64.

[4] According to Wippel, the metaphysician "may have arrived at what might be termed a primitive notion of being, that is, of being as restricted to the material and changing" ("Metaphysics and *Separatio*," 78).

[5] Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1948), 29-33.

(Thomas's *separatio*), if the vague or primitive notion of being is to be overcome. Furthermore, he would have no qualms about accepting Wippel's characterization of *separatio,* as far as it goes. For Wippel, *separatio* is

The process through which the mind explicitly acknowledges and asserts that that by reason of which something is recognized as being need not be identified with that by which it is recognized as material being, or changing being, or being of a given kind. One may describe it as a negative judgment in that it denies that that by reason of which something is described as being is to be identified with that by reason of which it is being of a given kind, for instance material and changing being, or quantified being, or for that matter, spiritual being. One may describe it as *separatio* because by reason of this judgment one distinguishes or separates that intelligibility in virtue of which something is described as being from all lesser and more restrictive intelligibilities that indicate its kind of being. As a result of *separatio*, therefore, one asserts that in order for something to be or to be real, it need not be material, or changing, or quantified. Thus one asserts the negative immateriality, the neutral character of being.[6]

Wippel correctly interprets St. Thomas's *separatio* as being a negative judgment which separates in the mind what can or does exist separately in reality. In effect it is a judgment that asserts that being need not exist in matter and motion. Hence his designation of its negative immateriality, its neutral character. Only through this negative judgment of separation, says Wippel, can the intellect overcome the restrictions involved in the primitive notion of being.[7] And, precisely because being need not be identified with matter or quantity, being in and for itself can be the proper object of a science.

For Maritain, however, it is difficult to see how being of negative immateriality, neutral in character, can be the proper object for any science, let alone Thomistic metaphysics. For what does it mean to say that being as being is negatively immaterial and neutral in character? If the concept of being as being lacks positive immaterial content, does it have any metaphysical content at all? Certainly the notion of being can be given positive

---

[6] Wippel, "Metaphysics and *Separatio*," 79.

[7] Ibid., 80.

content, if being is confined to the notion of primitive being. But Thomistic metaphysicians are interested in attaining a notion of being *qua* being having positive content. That does not mean that being *qua* being need be conceived as *a* being. But Wippel's concept of negatively immaterial, neutral being is simply empty. As such, it cannot be the proper object of a science.

Certainly Wippel is right in recognizing that *esse* is apprehended in positive judgments of existence and that *separatio* pertains to metaphysics, but he is wrong in severing the link between them. Maritain, on the other hand, retains a link. For Maritain, *separatio* cannot be understood without taking into consideration "what" is apprehended in positive judgments of existence; that is, *separatio* must be seen in light of what positive existential judgments apprehend. Wippel, of course, is bound to separate the two kinds of judgment, for he will not allow that *separatio* is itself a kind of abstraction. But the *esse* apprehended in judgment is not nothing! Judgment apprehends "something" which can become the object for a real concept, even though that "something" is not itself an essence. This "something," of course, is a being's act of existing, and it is the *esse*, the act of existing of a being, analogously understood, that forms the basis for the science of metaphysics. In effect, for Maritain, the positive immaterial content apprehended in judgment must (under the special impact of this apprehension gratuitously occasioned by nature) become the object of an eidetic visualization at what Maritain calls the third degree of formal abstraction. Thus Maritain attempts to link the two kinds of judgment through an eidetic intuition of being.

To make this critique work, however, two questions have to be answered. The first has to do with the eidetic intuition of being, the second with the notion of the three degrees of formal abstraction.

III

How can being meant as *esse* ever become the object of intuition, if judgment (not simple apprehension) is the act of the intellect by which *esse* is known? By claiming that metaphysical being is known only through eidetic intuition, isn't Maritain guilty of

turning being (*esse*) into an essence, thereby violating the existential thrust of Aquinas's metaphysics? Not at all, for according to Maritain the *esse* apprehended in judgment (though not itself an essence) can become the object of a *real* concept in the following way.

At the same time that the intellect makes its first judgment in regard to existence (*esse*), it forms its first idea, the idea of being (*ens*). By forming the idea of being (*ens*), the intellect, through simple apprehension, "crosses over" to judgment and lays hold of what properly belongs to judgment.[8] In effect, through simple apprehension the intellect takes what is originally grasped in judgment and makes of it an idea, or object of thought. This idea is not the result of simple apprehension alone though, for here the intellect lays hold of what it affirms in judgment, namely, a being's act of existing. Existence (*esse*) becomes the object of the concept "to exist."[9] It must be kept in mind that this object of the concept "to exist" is not an essence, not an essential intelligible, but, as Maritain says, a super-intelligible intelligible in a higher analogical way.

Nevertheless, the concept "to exist" cannot be cut off from the concept of being (*ens*). Here being (*ens*) means that which is, that which exists, or that whose act it is to exist.[10] "To exist" (*esse*) cannot be cut off from being precisely because judgment, which makes possible the concept of existence (*esse*), is itself a composition—a composition of a subject with existence. Judgment does not simply say "exists," it says "something exists." Hence the concept of existence (*esse*) is first apprehended in and through the concept of being (*ens*).[11] This is just another way of saying that the concept of existence cannot be detached from the concept of essence. Together they make up the concept of being, whose

---

[8] Jacques Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, trans. Lewis Galantiere and Gerald B. Phelan (New York: Pantheon, 1948), 23.

[9] Ibid., 24.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

object, as revealed in judgment, is a "one in many." It is this con-
cept, the concept of being (ens)—that whose act is to exist—that
is the first of the intellect's concepts.[12]

Being, then, comes to light in the same moment that the intel-
lect makes its first judgment. For example, in the judgment "this
being is," "this being" refers to the something, the what, or thing,
that has existence (in other words, what the essential definition
signifies), while the "is" refers to the object of the concept of exis-
tence. At the same moment the intellect says "being" (ens), or
"that which is." Thus the concept of being and the judgment
reciprocally condition each other.[13]

However, only a specially heightened judgmental apprecia-
tion of existence[14] gratuitously given by nature to the intellect
leads to the eidetic intuition of being and its subsequent expres-
sion in the form of a negative judgment about metaphysical
being. In other words, only the third degree of abstraction and
the intuition it evokes can disengage being from the sensible and
see being in its proper light; only these can cause the intellect to
see in the concept of being (ens) the object of the concept of exis-
tence (esse) in its true nature, that is, as an analogical reality
existing beyond the limits and conditions of material existence
(esse) through that concept's coming to birth in the concept of
being (ens), as existence is disengaged for itself by the metaphysical
intuition of being.

But what is the eidetic intuition of being? In short, it is an
intellectual visualization lying at the summit of eidetic intellec-

---

[12] Ibid., 25.

[13] Ibid., 25-26.

[14] As long as the basic judgment of existence is confined to being clothed with the sen-
sible, that judgment can never count as evocative of the intuition of being. Existence can
only be apprehended in judgment, and the basic judgment of existence apprehends exis-
tence, but existence as empirical. Hence, it is never constitutive of the intuition of being.
Yet it is only in the concrete that the intuition of being takes place.

> It is in things themselves that metaphysics finds its object. It is the being of sen-
> sible and material things, the being of the world of experience, which is its
> immediately accessible field of investigation; it is this which before seeking its
> cause, it discerns and scrutinizes—not as sensible and material, but as being.
> Before rising to the level of spiritual existence, it is empirical existence, the exis-
> tence of material things, that it holds in its grasp—though not as empirical and
> material but as existence. (Ibid., 31-32)

tuality. It is a "vision" because it is direct, immediate, and non-discursive. It is eidetic because it is evoked by a concept, which presents its object (being) directly to the intellect. It lies at the summit of eidetic intellectuality because it deals with the proper object of metaphysics—being *qua* being.[15] But to say that the intuition of being is an eidetic or ideating visualization is the same as to say that it is an abstractive visualization. And because it is an abstractive visualization of the proper object of metaphysics, it must be eidetically visualized at what Maritain calls the third degree of abstraction.

Wippel, however, would reply that being *qua* being can never be the object of any kind of abstraction, for the simple reason that being is a universal notion which actually contains all of its inferiors. If being is abstracted away from ever-increasing fine degrees of matter, then it would lie outside all of these abstracted-away-from realities. Nothing, however, can come from outside being to differentiate being which is not also in being. Therefore, being cannot be gotten at through abstraction. This conclusion is inevitable, he would say, given that abstraction refers to that intellectual operation which separates in the mind what is joined in reality.

IV

A number of questions thus need to be answered about the third degree of abstraction. For example, is a third degree of abstraction possible, and if so, is it Thomistic? Maritain would say that it is both, for even though Aquinas identifies three distinct operations—*abstractio totius, abstractio formae,* and *separatio*—as specificative of the intellect's ways of apprehending the formal objects of the three sciences (physics, mathematics, and metaphysics, respectively),[16] once the distinction between

---

[15] Ibid., 31. It should also be noted that because the intuition of being lies at the summit of eidetic intellectuality, it must not be confused with the preconscious, sense-based intuition of being and the intuition of the experience of poetry which Maritain discusses in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. Unfortunately, some prominent Thomists have made this mistake; see Ambrose McNicholl, "On Judging," *The Thomist* 38 (1974): 789-825; idem, "On Judging Existence," *The Thomist* 43 (1979): 507-80.

[16] *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3; translated by Armand Maurer as *The Division and Methods of the Sciences* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1962), 32-34.

total and formal abstraction is properly understood, there is no reason not to view *abstractio totius, abstractio formae*, and *separatio* as three degrees of formal abstraction.[17] Nor is there then any reason to claim that Maritain has mistaken being for an

---

[17] There are many passages in the works of Aquinas where he uses *abstraction* and *separation* interchangeably to refer to all three levels of science. Some of these passages are used to defend the doctrine of the three degrees of formal abstraction in an article by Edward D. Simmons, "The Thomistic Doctrine of the Three Degrees of Formal Abstraction," *The Thomist* 22 (1959): 37-67. (The following passages use Simmons's translation.)

For example, Aquinas uses *abstraction* to refer to the three sciences:

> Intellect therefore abstracts [*abstrahit*] the species of a natural thing from the individual sensible matter, but not from common sensible matter. . . . Mathematical species, however, can be abstracted [*abstrahi*] by the intellect not only from individual sensible matter, but also from common sensible matter: not however from common intelligible matter. . . . But certain things can be abstracted [*abstrahi*] even from common intelligible matter, such as being, unity, potency, act, and the like, which can exist without matter, as is evident in the case of immaterial substances. (*STh* I, q. 85, a. 1, ad 2)
>
> Therefore it must be known, since every science is in the intellect, that something is intelligible in act insofar as it is abstracted [*abstrahitur*] from matter; thus, insofar as things are diversely related to matter, they pertain to different sciences. (I *Phys.*, lect. 1, n. 1)

But St. Thomas also uses *separatio* to refer to each level of science:

> And since the habits of any potency are distinguished in kind according to a difference in that which is formally the object of that potency, it is necessary that the habits of science, by which the intellect is perfected, be distinguished according to a difference in separation [*separationis*] from matter. Therefore, the Philosopher in the sixth book of the Metaphysics distinguishes the genera of the sciences according to the diverse modes of their separation [*separationis*] from matter. For those things which are separated [*separata*] from matter insofar as they exist and insofar as they are known pertain to metaphysics; those which are separated [*separata*] insofar as they are known but not insofar as they exist pertain to mathematics; and those which in their very meaning include sensible matter pertain to natural science.

In other places, Aquinas uses both abstraction and separation in the same passage to refer indiscriminately to all three levels of science:

> Those things are separated [*separata*] from matter to the greatest degree, which not only abstract [*abstrahunt*] from individual matter as the natural forms received in the universal about which natural science is concerned, but from all sensible matter; not only insofar as they are known, as is the case with mathematical objects, but also insofar as they exist, as is the case with God and the angels. (*Metaphys.* prooem)
>
> And since the truth of the intellect consists in a correspondence to reality, it is evident that according to the second operation the intellect cannot truly abstract [*abstrahere*] what is conjoined in reality, because in abstracting

essence and thereby missed the crucially important existential thrust of St. Thomas's metaphysics.[18]

Abstractio totalis is the abstraction of a logical whole from its subjective parts: for example, the abstraction of the logical whole *man* from its subjective parts Peter, Paul, and Mary, or *animal* from man, horse, and dolphin. The logical whole abstracted is the result of the intellect's reflexion to what has been grasped in simple apprehension and its identification of the relation of universality which such a whole bears to its inferiors. In effect, *abstractio totalis* yields the universal *qua* universal, that is, *qua* communicable.[19] *Abstractio totalis* thus yields a

> [*abstrahendo*] thusly there would be an existential separation [*separationem*] signified, as when I abstract [*abstraho*] man from white by saying "the man is not white" I signify a separation [*separationem*] in the real. . . . By this operation the intellect can truly abstract [*abstrahere*] only those things which are separated [*separata*] in the real, as when I say "the man is not an ass." (*In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3)

These passages indicate that when speaking generally one may use *abstraction* and *separation* interchangeably. However, because of the real difference between the first two kinds of abstraction and the third, when speaking strictly it is best to make a distinction, and this is precisely what Aquinas does in his Boethius commentary where he emphasizes the difference between transcendentals, which can exist separately, and mathematicals and universals, which cannot:

> And because certain men (for example, the Pythagoreans and the Platonists) did not understand the difference between the last two kinds of distinction and the first, they fell into error, asserting that the objects of mathematics and universals exist separate from sensible things. (*The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, 33-34)

See also *STh* I, q. 85, a. 1, ad 1, where Aquinas refers to the same Platonic error but without using the strict definition. Instead, he speaks of modes of abstraction—one being composing and dividing, the other being abstraction by simple and absolute consideration.

[18] Gerald McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1989), 155-56.

[19] Edward D. Simmons, "In Defense of Total and Formal Abstraction," *The New Scholasticism* 29 (1955): 437. In total abstraction, the universal abstracted is not considered under the aspect of its being a nature with an intelligible content, as being a reality considered precisely as intelligible. Rather, it is considered under the aspect of its being predicable of the particulars from which it has been drawn. In other words, it is considered precisely from the standpoint of its being able to enter into logical relation with its inferiors. This is why total abstraction is said to abstract a logical, as opposed to an ontological, whole from its subjective parts. Of course "logical" and "ontological" here are being used to refer to the same universal, but under different lights. Total abstraction, therefore, yields the universal as communicable, because the movement of discursive reasoning it makes possible proceeds precisely via the logical interrelationships of inferiority and superiority which these objects of thought bear to each other; see Simmons, "In Defense of Total and Formal Abstraction," 434-37.

commonality having logical relations with its inferiors. When abstracted from material substances, this commonality is abstracted from matter as the principle of individuality. *Abstractio totalis,* then, directs the intellect toward ever-greater potentiality.[20]

Formal abstraction, *abstractio formalis,* is the abstraction of an intelligible object, the essence or formal *ratio,* from the unintelligible matter that cloaks its intelligibility. Formal abstraction centers on the ontological dimension of the universal,[21] for it identifies the intelligible content of an essential whole, as this represents an actually existing entity. To clarify, *abstractio totalis* abstracts from matter as the principle of individuality, while formal abstraction abstracts from matter as the principle of unintelligibility. Consequently, *abstractio formalis* bears on real natures and moves the intellect in the direction of ever-greater actuality.[22]

Even though the sciences make use of both types of abstraction, *abstractio formalis* is most proper to the sciences, since it identifies their formal objects, both as formal perfections making the definitions of the subjects of the sciences possible, and in turn as specifying the degrees of formal separation from matter of the objects of the sciences.[23]

Indeed, St. Thomas's notion of what constitutes a science demands a doctrine of formal abstraction, since for Aquinas a science is specified by the degree to which the objects constituting its subject are separable from matter. In other words, the degree of intelligibility of a science is determined by the degree

---

[20] What is common is taken from the matter in an essential whole; see Joseph Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1965), 88-92.

[21] Simmons, "In Defense of Total and Formal Abstraction," 438. In other words, *abstractio formalis* abstracts the actual content of the object of thought, and considers it precisely from the standpoint of its being intelligible. *Abstractio formalis* abstracts the universal as ontological, then, because the intelligible content it isolates bears on the real nature of the being under consideration.

[22] Jacques Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature,* trans. Imelda C. Byrne (New York: Philosophical Library, 1951), 20-21.

[23] See *In Boet. de Trin.,* q. 5, a. 1. See also Simmons, "Three Degrees of Formal Abstraction," 50-55.

to which its formal objects are separable from matter,[24] given that matter is the principle in things not only of individuality,[25] but also of unintelligibility. Thus Aquinas's *abstractio totius, abstractio formae*, and *separatio*, as distinct intellectual operations determinative of the three degrees of separation from matter of the proper objects of the sciences and their characteristic modes of defining, must be viewed as specific types of formal abstraction (*abstractio formalis*) applying to specific formal objects having specific degrees of remotion from matter.[26]

For Maritain, then, *abstractio totius* is the first degree of formal abstraction,[27] for the whole which it abstracts is the essence of a concrete substance, for example *man*, abstracted from all the non-essential, individuating characteristics that shroud its intelligibility. At the first degree of formal abstraction, those non-essential characteristics, or parts, are designated matter, "this flesh" and "these bones," while common or non-designated matter is retained in the definition as an essential part of the whole. However, such an essence, or whole, can also be likened to a form, for as a substantial form/prime matter composite drawn or abstracted from designated matter, it must be received into that designated matter before it can exist concretely, or actually.[28] Given then, that the substantial form/prime matter composite is

[24] Simmons, "Three Degrees of Formal Abstraction," 50-51. For Aquinas, the sciences are divisible into three genera based on the degree of remotion from matter of their respective formal objects. The degree of remotion from matter of their respective formal objects in turn determines their characteristic modes of defining. And because the proper objects of the speculative sciences are formal (not material objects), the kind of abstraction necessary for specifying these intelligible objects is formal abstraction. In effect, without formal abstraction there can be no science. Since metaphysics is a science, formal abstraction must obviously also pertain to its proper objects.

[25] That is, matter may be said to be in a general sense the principle of individuation. It is more accurate, however, to speak of designated matter as being the principle of individuation. Hence, what accounts for the possibility of numerical plurality of natural substances is quantified matter, while what accounts for their factual numerical plurality is designated matter; see Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence*, 74-79.

[26] Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*, 21-22.

[27] Ibid., 17-20.

[28] This aspect of the abstraction of an essential whole, substantial form/prime matter composite, being like the abstraction of a universal from its particulars, is noted by Aquinas in the following places: II *Phys.*, lect. 5, n. 179; *STh* I, q. 85, a. 1; *ScG* IV, c. 81.

that which *abstractio totius* disengages and presents to the mind for scientific investigation (substantial form alone, of course, cannot be such an object, for its dependence on prime matter is such that it cannot be understood without the latter), Aquinas's *abstractio totius* may be viewed as a kind of formal abstraction that applies specifically to the objects of natural philosophy, dependent as these are for their being and their being known on sensible matter.[29]

Abstractio formae can likewise be viewed as a kind of formal abstraction, indeed the purest kind, since what it abstracts is specifically a form, namely, the accidental form quantity, considered as such and not as it exists in a subject. Thus this kind of formal abstraction is proper to mathematics, which has for its subject objects which depend for their being on sensible matter, but for their being known only on common intelligible matter.[30]

Given that the formal objects of natural philosophy and mathematics are dependent for their being on matter, the formal operations that apply to these sciences abstract or separate in the mind formal objects that must be joined in reality. The formal

---

[29] It is important at this point to keep in mind the very real differences between *abstractio totalis* and *abstractio totius*. The object of thought yielded by total abstraction is a logical whole, while the object yielded by *abstractio totius* is a "nature." Thus *abstractio totalis* is said to be posterior to *abstractio totius*; see Leo Ferrari, *"Abstractio Totius* and *Abstractio Totalis," The Thomist* 24 (1961): 72-89. At the first degree of abstraction, however (i.e., when dealing with material substances), both *abstractio totalis* and *abstractio totius* abstract from the same thing, namely, matter; the first from matter as the principle of individuation, that is, from those characteristics of matter which make it responsible for individuation, the second from matter as the principle of unintelligibility, that is, from all those characteristics of matter that shroud a nature's intelligibility (in this case, designated matter). Thus *abstractio totalis* yields its objects precisely as more universal than its inferiors. For this reason, *abstractio totalis* may abstract *man* as meaning "rational animal"—in which case it would also have correctly identified man's real nature—but it could just as easily abstract *man* as meaning "featherless biped," which, though a common mark among all men, hardly signifies man's true nature; see Maritain, *Philosophy of Nature*, 18-19. *Abstractio totius* thus yields its object as an intelligible formality that includes the real content, for example, of the notion *man*. In regard to physical things, these objects are intelligible only when universal, since at this level dematerialization yields both universality and intelligibility.

[30] Simmons, "Three Degrees of Formal Abstraction," 60-62. For a fuller treatment of the second degree of formal abstraction, see Bernard L. Mullahy, "Thomism and Mathematical Physics" (Ph.D. diss., Laval University 1946), 84-85, 91-98, and ch. 6). See also Maritain's *Philosophy of Nature*, 27-30.

abstractive operation that applies to metaphysics, however, abstracts or separates in the mind a formal object that is actually separate in reality.[31] Consequently, the abstractive operation that pertains to metaphysics is unique, for its object, as traditionally conceived, is being *qua* being.

Because the object of metaphysics is not dependent on matter either for its existence or its being known (since it can be found in matter but need not be in matter)[32] the formal abstraction that apprehends this object expresses itself in a negative judgment, or *separatio*, which says that being need not be linked to matter.[33] However, this expression is only made possible by the fact that the formal abstraction that is the intuition of being is an eidetic intuition which sees the true character of being as that which makes something be, sees that this act is immaterial, and sees at the same time that though each being's act of existing is its own, there is nevertheless a similarity or proportionality among beings in the sense that *a* is to its act of existing as *b* is to its act of existing.[34] In other words, the negative judgment of separation attributed to the formal abstractive operation pertaining to metaphysics is the result of the intellect's apprehension in that operation of the positive analogical character of being. The unique formal abstraction that is the intuition of being disengages being from its material matrix, that is, enables being to be seen in its true non-material and analogical character. Hence, the abstraction that occurs at the third degree of abstraction is also a separation— an abstraction taken generally, but *separatio* taken strictly.[35]

Thus the abstraction/separation that is the third degree of formal abstraction yields an object not only formally separate from

---

[31] *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3.

[32] Ibid., q. 5, a. 4.

[33] Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 28-30 n. 14.

[34] Ibid., 28-34, especially n. 14 where, in reference to *separatio,* Maritain says, "if it can be separated from matter by the operation of the negative judgment, the reason is that it is related in its content to the act of existing which is signified by the positive judgment and which over-passes the line of material essences—the connatural object of simple apprehension."

[35] *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, Aquinas stresses the ontological as opposed to the merely formal separation of being at the third degree, and this is why he calls it *separatio* taken strictly; see Simmons, "Three Degrees of Formal Abstraction," 62-65.

matter, but ontologically separate from matter. That is, it yields a real object which specifies a real science—metaphysics. It is not therefore a second intention resulting from the intellect's reflexion to previously apprehended contents, but a real nature. However, because being is most definitely not to be taken as being a Platonic universal, or a being[36] (even though it can exist as actually separate from all matter—this is what makes it purely intelligible), "what" is apprehended in the abstraction/separation that is the third degree of formal abstraction, in and through the concept of being *(ens),*[37] is the *esse* component of being[38] grasped in a special judgment, and revealing itself as a non-material reality existing as an analogous commonality among beings. Clearly, then, Maritain's conception of the third degree of abstraction/separation, based as it is on the formal abstraction/separation of the *esse* component of being,[39] does not make being an

[36] Maritain confirms this when he says of being disengaged at the third degree,

> its being more universal than the other sciences is but a quasi-incidental consequence of the immateriality of its object and its vision. . . . The worst metaphysical heresy is that which regards being as the *genus generalissimum* and makes of it at one and the same time a univocal thing and a pure essence. Being is not a universal; its infinite amplitude, its super-universality . . . is that of an implicitly multiple object of thought which, analogically, permeates all things and descends, in its irreducible diversity, into the heart of each; it is that which they are, but is also their very act of existing. *(Existence and the Existent,* 32-33)

[37] Ibid., 34 and 26-28 n. 13.

[38] Maritain makes it clear in *Existence and the Existent* that *esse* and *essentia* together make up *ens* (22-25, 33-35). It is the *esse* known in judgment, as this comes to light through the concept of being, and disengaged for itself from its material matrix by the intuition of being, that forms the basis for the notion of being *qua* being (31-32). Here being is signified after the manner of a part, since it is meant to identify a formal content disengaged, or separated from its material matrix. What is being disengaged, then, is being meant as entity or "beingness," which though signifying after the manner of a part is nevertheless itself composed, namely of *esse* and essence. Here, then, it is the *esse* component that is known and conceptualized in being when said after the manner of a part. In this case being designates the formal object of what is determinately expressed when predicated of its subject (as opposed to what is unexpressed but unexcluded, i.e., the other part), but in reference to its *esse,* which belongs to the subject, though is not identical to the subject. Thus we may say "X is a being" and "X has existence" but not "X is existence." See Bobik, *Aquinas on Being and Essence,* 94-95, 199-204. It is to be noted that neither of the two parts composing being meant as entity is more universal than the other, and that *esse* is not being spoken of here as part of the essence.

[39] We are indebted to John F. X. Knasas for this expression, *Preface to Thomistic Metaphysics* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1990), 15.

essence, nor does it overlook the existential thrust of St. Thomas's metaphysics.[40]

In effect, there are two dimensions to the third degree of formal abstraction. The first is an eidetic visualization based upon a heightened judgmental appreciation of *esse*, gratuitously given to the intellect by nature, which produces an idea, a concept— being (*ens*)—which presents to the intellect in that concept analogous being.[41] The second dimension is constituted by the negative judgment. Of course these dimensions are merely two sides of the same coin.[42] To see that being is transempirical is to see that being need not actuate only material beings, that is, it is to recognize the possible existence of non-material beings. The first positive realization thus makes the negative judgment possible. Both realizations are the result of judgments, and so both are given in judgments.[43] Maritain, however, clearly wishes

[40] The entire aim of *Existence and the Existent* is to present St. Thomas's metaphysics as the authentic, or true, existentialism, which respects *esse* without losing sight of essences. This work can give no one grounds for claiming that Maritain was unaware of the existential thrust of Aquinas's metaphysics, or that Maritain's use of the three degrees of formal abstraction somehow turns *esse* into an essence (33-38).

[41] Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 28-32; *Preface to Metaphysics*, 33-38, 87; *Philosophy of Nature*, 22-25. See *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 3, where Aquinas writes, "And because certain men (for example, the Pythagoreans and Platonists) did not understand the difference between the last two kinds of distinction and the first, they fell into error, asserting that the objects of mathematics and universals exist separate from sensible things" (trans. Maurer, *The Division and Method of the Sciences*, 33-34). Again, as Maritain says in *Existence and the Existent*, Aquinas here makes reference to the Pythagoreans and Platonists in order to differentiate the nature of transcendentals, such as being, from universals and mathematicals. The former can exist without matter, the latter cannot (28-30 n. 14; see also *Philosophy of Nature*, 24).

[42] McCool, *From Unity to Pluralism*, 118, 155-56. Simmons writes,

These are not as they are sometimes popularly misconceived to be, three uni- vocal steps in progressively stripping away outer layers of reality to reveal in turn different inner layers. Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather they are three radically different mental separations of distinctly different intelligi- ble objects from distinctly different degrees of matter. The three degrees of abstraction are only analogically like one another, meaning of course that they are basically diverse in kind and only proportionally the same. ("In Defense of Total and Formal Abstraction," 65)

See also Maritain, *The Philosophy of Nature*, 24-25; and *Existence and the Existent*, 29-30.

[43] Maritain, *Existence and the Existent*, 20-28.

to emphasize the positive dimension of the third degree of formal abstraction—*what* is separated—for that content evokes in the mind the intuition of being.[44] Consequently, the third degree of formal abstraction and the intuition of being go hand in hand.[45]

In sum, *separatio,* conceived in a exclusively negative way, that is, as disjoined from the eidetic intuition of being grounded in judgment but grasped at the third degree of formal abstraction, is for Maritain not only empty, but also impossible.

V

Joseph Owens believes that the notion of being operative in Thomistic metaphysics is formed via total abstraction, or abstraction without precision, and that it is therefore a common universal notion like *animal,* though it has the peculiarity of lying outside all genera. He bases this on a number of important passages found in Aquinas's *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate.* There, Aquinas clearly indicates that metaphysics studies beings that depend neither for their being nor their being known on sensibles. In other words, metaphysics studies beings separate from matter in both existence and thought. But Aquinas also draws a distinction between two kinds of beings that depend neither for their being nor their being known on matter. The first are beings such as God and the angels, which can never exist in matter and motion. The second are beings which can but need not exist in matter and motion, such as being, substance, etc. Now the first are commonly said to refer to spiritual realities, while the second are commonly said to refer to intelligibles. We must ask, however, if referring to the second as intelligibles is the best interpretation of Aquinas's text. Aquinas says:

We say that being and substance are separate from matter and motion not because it is of their nature to be without them, as it is of the nature of ass to be without reason. Rather we say that they are separate

---

[44] Maritain, *Preface to Metaphysics,* 86-87.

[45] Ibid., 58, 61, 84: "You should understand what is meant by the term abstraction. It must never be separated from the intuition which it effects. This is why in many cases I prefer the term visualization" (86).

because it is not their nature to be in matter and motion, although sometimes they are in matter and motion, as animal abstracts from reason, although some animals are rational.[46]

At first glance it might seem that this passage equates being (*ens*) with an intelligibility such as animal. But if this is so, what are the consequences of the equation? Intelligibilities like animal are common or universal notions; as such they are separate in the mind only. Animal, for instance, depends on sensible matter for both its being and its being understood. It is quite clear, however, that when Aquinas talks about something being separate at the third degree of abstraction, he is talking about something separate in both thought *and* existence.

Furthermore, when Aquinas compares being (*ens*) to animal, it is not his intention to equate being with an intelligible; he is rather simply using animal as an example of something whose nature is to be neither with rational nor without rational, but which is nevertheless found in instances of rational as well as non-rational. Thus unlike ass, which by definition is non-rational, animal cannot by definition be called either material or non-material. If being follows the same pattern, then by definition it cannot be called either material or non-material. In effect, being and animal are alike in that they both have natures which cannot be equated with any of their differences. Yet Aquinas also says that being is separate in existence, whereas he never says that animal is separate in existence, and this must give us pause. For if being is separate in existence, then Aquinas cannot mean that it is the nature of being to be neither material nor non-material, because that which is neither material nor non-material is never separate in both thought *and* existence. In comparing being to animal, he therefore must mean that being is like animal only in so far as being cannot by definition be confined to rational animal. But whereas it is the nature of animal to be neither rational nor non-rational (since it is a genus and cannot exist separately), it is not the nature of being to be neither material nor non-material, since being is not a genus but does exist

[46] *In Boet. de Trin.*, q. 5, a. 4, ad 5; trans. Maurer, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, 48.

separately. This is a subtle though very important difference. If animal were separate in the way that being is separate, from its differences (i.e., in existence), then animal would be a being, a thing, a Platonic form. But having said this, are we then suggesting that being itself is a being, a Platonic universal? Absolutely not; one could hardly make a greater mistake in regard to St. Thomas's understanding of being. Yet the only way to avoid such an error is to see that what Aquinas is calling separate in the second sense at the third degree of abstraction is the *esse* component of being. *Esse*, a being's act of existing, can actualize either material or non-material beings, for its "nature" is to be neither with nor without matter, that is, it is not *esse*'s nature to be confined to matter. But this does not mean that the nature of *esse* is to be neither material nor non-material. On the contrary, *esse*, as that which makes something be, as a being's act of existing, is always non-material. Material beings, of course, have being, they exist, but their acts of existing are always non-material.

In addition, it is precisely because what is separate in the second sense at the third degree of abstraction is the *esse* component of being that it must be apprehended by a negative judgment which says that that which makes a being be need not be identified with that which makes a being be material, or changing, or non-material. If being were like animal, that is, in being neither material nor non-material, then metaphysics would have as its proper object that which could be grasped in a universal concept via total abstraction. It is clear, though, that such a notion does not truly grasp being meant as *esse,* that it is as such a mere pseudo-concept.

This is not all, however. For if the Thomist metaphysician fails to understand that *esse* can be grasped only through the eidetic intuition made possible by a specially heightened judgmental appreciation of being given to the intellect by nature, and insists instead on viewing being as a universal, then he will also be forced to prove the existence of God before beginning metaphysics, and for two reasons.

First, an intelligible distinction of being and thing cannot be the basis for a metaphysics that builds on the bedrock of the real distinction. Because a univocal notion of being fails to capture

esse (its entire content is taken from simple apprehension), if one would demonstrate the validity of the real distinction one must put Owens's whole program into play: only by knowing that a being exists whose essence is its existence could one then understand that the being of creatures is due to the free gift of the former to the latter.

Second, if being is conceived via total abstraction, in other words as a mere intelligible, then one must first know of the existence of the species that the genus is said to subsume. One could not, for example, apply *animal* to instances of non-rational and rational being, nor base a non-prescinding abstraction upon them, if one did not first know of the existence of such instances. Thus, if being is a universal notion subsuming both material and non-material beings, then the existence of at least one non-material being must be known in advance.

Yet as we have seen, Maritain has shown that being is not the object of this kind of univocal abstraction. It is, rather, the object of an eidetic intuition. Therefore, one need not prove the existence of God before doing metaphysics. However, it is necessary to do so if one is content to view *separatio* as Wippel does, that is, as a strictly negative judgment whose result is a concept of negatively immaterial, neutral being.

VI

In conclusion, I wish to re-emphasize that Maritain's philosophy of the intuition of being is able to overcome the current impasse in Thomistic metaphysics, not merely by rejecting either alternative, but by taking the best of both and then transcending them. For example, Maritain's position does full justice to the importance of *separatio* in Aquinas's metaphysics. It takes the statements about *separatio* in the *Commentary on Boethius's De Trinitate* seriously, but has the advantage of seeing *separatio* in its proper epistemological context. At the same time, the philosophy of the eidetic intuition of being—that is, of the *esse* component of being—though making a proof of the existence of God unnecessary for beginning metaphysics, nevertheless has a very important part to play in all such proofs, for according to Maritain it is the

intuition of being that inevitably leads the intellect to an intuitive awareness of the existence of God. This intuition in turn enlivens the "five ways" of Aquinas, by grounding these purely rational constructions in a deep ontological insight, taken from experience but eidetically revealed.

Consequently, focus on the intuition of being could supply the missing insight into being needed for real metaphysics—an insight so much a part of the ancient and medieval world views, but so conspicuously absent from modern/postmodern intellectual life. Thus, while it does not rely on a proof for the existence of God for beginning metaphysics, Maritain's metaphysics does rely on an intuitive recognition of transempirical being, and in turn, of the existence of God. Maritain's philosophy is laden with many fruitful possibilities for the revival of Thomistic metaphysics.

LAW, VIRTUE, AND HAPPINESS IN AQUINAS'S MORAL THEORY

MARIA CARL

Seattle University
Seattle, Washington

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, in *STh* I-II, q. 94, formulates his theory of the natural law as a system of primary and secondary principles or precepts that are accessible to human reason insofar as they are our imperfect and human, rational participation in God's eternal law. The primary precepts of the natural law are inflexible standards and guides for human conduct insofar as they are universal and exceptionless. Accordingly, Aquinas's moral theory is portrayed as an ethics of principles and rules and, often pejoratively, as "legalistic," and it is precisely as such that it is characteristically distinguished from virtue-based moral theories.[1]

In light of the recent, renewed interest in virtue ethics, however, a number of commentators have begun to highlight Aquinas's substantive discussions of virtue and to focus both on his account of the virtues in general and on his treatments of specific virtues such as courage, justice, and prudence.[2] There is an

---

[1] Alan Donagan, for example, associates Thomas's natural law theory with the "legalism" of Kantian ethics (see *The Theory of Morality* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977], 57-66; and "Teleology and Consistency in Theories of Morality as Natural Law," in *The Georgetown Symposium on Ethics*, ed. Rocco Porreco [Washington, D.C., University Press of America, 1981]), and Germain Grisez distinguishes his reformulation of Thomistic natural law from an ethics of virtue (see "A Contemporary Natural Law Ethics," in *Moral Philosophy*, ed. William Starr and Richard Taylor [Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1989], 125-43).

[2] For recent discussions of the role of virtue in Aquinas's moral theory, see E. A. Goerner, "On Thomistic Natural Law: The Bad Man's View of Thomistic Natural Right," *Political Theory* 7 (1979): 101-22; idem, "Thomistic Natural Right: The Good

offsetting tendency in many of these recent rereadings to down-
play, criticize, or repudiate particular elements in Aquinas's
moral theory that had typically garnered the preponderance of
attention in many standard readings, elements that are legalistic,
universal, and deductivist (e.g., the foundationalism of self-
evident first principles, the intuitionism of *synderesis,* the deduc-
tivism of the practical syllogism, the analogy between specula-
tive and practical reason). Daniel Mark Nelson, for example,
writes that "for Thomas, the moral life as well as reflection on it
depend on prudence and not on knowledge of the natural law—
at least not the versions of natural law commonly attributed to
him," and that "Thomas is not primarily concerned with teach-
ing a doctrine of natural law but with presenting an account of
moral understanding in which the cardinal virtues under the
direction of prudence have priority."[3]

Although discussions of Thomistic moral theory have typically
emphasized, and too often exclusively featured, the account of
law, it is clear that Aquinas's exposition of what is relevant to his
moral theory is not at all confined to his treatment of the natural
law. In order to present a genuinely comprehensive picture, it is
essential also to investigate Aquinas's description of the nature
of the good (which entails an excursion into metaphysics for a

Man's View of Thomistic Natural Law," *Political Theory* 11 (1983): 393-418; Thomas S.
Hibbs, "Principles and Prudence: The Aristotelianism of Thomas's Account of Moral
Knowledge," *New Scholasticism* 61 (1987): 271-84; Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?
Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); Kevin Staley,
"Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Ethics of Virtue," *Modern Schoolman* 66 (1989):
285-300; Lee Yearley, *Aquinas and Mencius: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of
Courage* (New York: SUNY Press, 1990); Joseph Boyle, "Natural Law and the Ethics of
Traditions," in *Natural Law Theory,* ed. Robert George (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992),
3-30; Russell Hittinger, "Natural Law and Virtue: Theories at Cross Purposes," in
George, ed., *Natural Law Theory,* 42-70; Daniel Mark Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence:
Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and the Implications for Modern Ethics*
(University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992); Pamela Hall,
Narrative and Natural Law (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).
   [3] Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence,* xii and 129. Nelson's point is that natural law
principles do not provide moral guidance, but rather function as a causal explanation of
practical reasoning. Although I criticize aspects of his interpretation of Aquinas's theory of
natural law, I believe that his study is a valuable treatment of Aquinas's discussion of
virtue.

full understanding of the notion that being and goodness are convertible)[4] and of the highest good of happiness, his pervasive teleology, his intricate and nuanced accounts of human psychology and human action (including his explanations of knowledge, inclinations, habits, passions, will, and choice), and his extended analogies between speculative and practical reason and knowledge and between the intellect and the will.

Of course, one must also incorporate into any complete synthesis of Aquinas's moral doctrine the elaborate account of the notions of virtue and vice.[5] Indeed, the often unnoted significance that Aquinas in fact accords the theory of virtue is marked when he goes so far as to say that there is a sense in which "we may reduce the whole of moral matters to the consideration of the virtues."[6] Statements such as these taken in isolation, however, can produce as truncated a version of Thomistic ethics as the more common fixation on the "Treatise on Law." It is as misleading to declare the simple priority of virtue over law as it is to assert the unconditional preeminence of law over virtue.

In this paper, I will examine Aquinas's own understanding of the relationship between the principles of the natural law and the intellectual and moral virtues, and I will demonstrate that in the context of his theory law and virtue are neither competing nor unrelated norms standing in need of reconciliation. Rather, his conceptions of natural law and virtue are based on the theory of natural inclinations and, more precisely, on the specifically and properly human inclination to reason. Thus, I will argue that Aquinas's notions of law and virtue are complementary in

---

[4] The fundamental significance of this aspect of Aquinas's thought may here be summarily noted by reference to the position articulated by Stump and Kretzmann: "The central thesis of Aquinas's metaethics is that the terms 'being' and 'goodness' are the same in reference, differing only in sense" (Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, "Being and Goodness," in Being and Goodness, ed. Scott MacDonald [Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991], 99).

[5] STh I-II, qq. 49-89. See also, De virtutibus in communi, henceforth Virtues.

[6] STh II-II, prologue. Texts from the Summa Theologiae are quoted in the translation of the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1912); I have used Anton Pegis's emended version (Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas [New York: Random House, 1945]) where possible, and I have standardized spelling and punctuation.

the strongest sense: They correspond insofar as they depend on and are expressions of his teleological conception of human nature, for both law and virtue are related to reason and to happiness.

Nevertheless, the theories of law and virtue are not redundant. Aquinas draws a distinction between acts of virtue and acts prescribed by the natural law: some acts of virtue are not prescribed by the natural law, since there are forms of virtuous activity that are not specified by the natural inclinations but need to be identified by the "inquiry of reason."[7] In addition, there are significant differences for Aquinas between an individual who performs a virtuous action in mere compliance with a natural-law precept (e.g., one who wishes to lie but tells the truth out of fear of being discovered) and a virtuous person who performs a lawful and virtuous action. Just as for Aristotle, for Aquinas an honest person's motivation is a commitment to truth; such a person knowingly and willingly tells the truth for its own sake and does so habitually, that is, with consistency, facility, and pleasure.[8] A virtuous disposition alters the agent and the agent's way of performing virtuous actions. Aquinas repeatedly expresses the fundamental relationship—and hence both the distinction and the intersection—between law and virtue: the precepts of law concern virtuous actions, and the goal of every valid law and every competent legislator is to lead those subject to the law to virtue.

I. AQUINAS'S ACCOUNT OF LAW

Aquinas considers the nature of law in general within the context of his treatment of the principles of human acts: God is the extrinsic principle moving us to good, and law as such is characterized as a means of instruction about the good.[9] Aquinas further describes law as a rule (*regula*) or measure (*mensura*) of acts, which binds or obligates one to act or to refrain from acting. He identifies the rule and measure of human acts also as reason and

---

[7] *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

[8] *Virtues*, a. 1.

[9] *STh* I-II, q. 90, introduction.

states that it belongs to the nature both of law and of practical reason to command, thus establishing the immediate connection between law and reason and also marking a difference between speculative and practical reason. Just as the speculative intellect is ordered to being through understanding, the practical intellect is ordered to good through commanding action.

Aquinas follows Aristotle in equating the principles of practical reason with the ends or goods at which actions aim and identifies the first principle of practical reason with the highest and most final end. Aquinas states that "the first principle in practical matters, which are the object of the practical reason, is the last end: and the last end of human life is happiness or beatitude";[10] therefore, it is to happiness "chiefly and mainly [that] law must needs be referred."[11] The dominant function and purpose of law in general is to command the performance of those actions which are ordered to the specifically human final end of happiness.[12] Aquinas states clearly,

Just as nothing stands firm with regard to the speculative reason except that which is traced back to the first indemonstrable principles, so nothing stands firm with regard to the practical reason, unless it be directed to the last end which is the common good. Now whatever stands to reason in this sense has the nature of a law.[13]

[10] *STh* I-II, q. 90, a. 2. Thomas distinguishes two senses of happiness: perfect or supernatural and imperfect or natural (*STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 2, ad 4; q. 4, a. 5; q. 5, a. 3; q. 62, a. 1; *De Verit.*, q. 14, a. 2; *ScG* III, cc. 37-63). The notion of imperfect happiness, the happiness that can be attained in this life, is a complex concept that explicitly accords with his understanding of Aristotle's definition of happiness: imperfect or natural happiness consists in the intellectual and moral virtues, pleasure, friendship, and external goods (*STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 6, ad 1; q. 4, aa. 1-8). Final and perfect happiness consists in the direct and immediate contemplation of God, which is attainable only through grace in the afterlife. In addition, Aquinas states that imperfect happiness consists primarily in the contemplation of God or in the intellectual virtue of wisdom and secondarily in the moral virtues (*STh* I-II, q. 3, a. 5). In what follows, I use the term "happiness" to refer to natural happiness in the comprehensive sense, that is, as a complex concept that most closely approximates the inclusive interpretation of Aristotle's notion of *eudaimonia*.

[11] *STh* I-II, q. 90, a. 2.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., ad 3. The notion of the *bonum commune* has a controversial history. I am assuming here only that there is an isomorphism between an individual's happiness and the notion of the common good or universal happiness. For further discussion of this point, see Gregory Froelich, "The Equivocal Status of *Bonum Commune*," *New Scholasticism* 63 (1989): 38-57.

Some discussions of the primary principles of Aquinas's natural law theory evade or marginalize the foundational importance of happiness and concentrate solely on the primary precepts of natural law delineated at *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2. However, the passages just cited signify that an essential element that defines even the primary precepts as laws is that they guide us to happiness. I will address the question of the correlation between the first principle of happiness and the first principles of practical reason, which are the basic precepts of the natural law, after discussing q. 94, a. 2.

Aquinas begins his treatment of the natural law by asking whether the natural law is a habit.[14] He answers that, properly speaking, it is not a habit; a habit is that *by which* we act, while law is a work or product, an accomplishment of the activity of practical reason, just as the elements of demonstrative science— definitions or terms, propositions, and syllogisms—are the products of speculative reason.[15] *Synderesis* is the habit, parallel to *intellectus* in the speculative order, by which we can be said to possess knowledge of the universal precepts of the natural law.[16]

In q. 94, a. 2, Aquinas says that there are several primary and self-evident principles or precepts of the natural law and presents his account of how they are known. The first principle of practical reason states that good is to be done and evil avoided, and Aquinas argues that what practical reason naturally apprehends as good is accordingly commanded by reason and articulated in the form of practical propositions or precepts which state that the goods apprehended by reason are to be done and pursued as a matter of obligation. These universal practical propositions are the self-evident primary principles of the natural law.[17]

---

[14] *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 1.

[15] *STh* I-II, q. 90, a. 1.

[16] *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 1, ad 2. See also II *Sent.*, d. 24, q. 2, a. 3; *STh* I, q. 79, a. 12; *De Verit.*, q. 16, aa. 1-3.

[17] Aquinas's use of the notion of self-evidence to justify the primary principles in q. 94, a. 2 is far more controversial than can here be adequately treated. I have argued in great detail for the interpretation of self-evidence I utilize in this paper in "The First Principles of Natural Law" (Ph.D. diss., Marquette University, 1989). In short, I argue that whenever Aquinas employs the criterion of self-evidence to assert that a proposition is known through itself, true, necessary, and certain—that is, that a proposition is a basic or first

Further, Aquinas states that what reason "naturally apprehends" as good are those goods to which every human being has a natural inclination.

Since, however, good has the nature of an end, and evil, the nature of the contrary, hence it is that all those things to which man has a natural inclination are naturally apprehended by reason as being good, and consequently as objects of pursuit, and their contraries as evil, and objects of avoidance. Therefore, the order of the precepts of the natural law is according to the order of natural inclinations.[18]

A human being is a natural substance and, as such, possesses a characteristic set of inclinations which arise from the substantial form, the rational soul. These inclinations determine and define the natural and appropriate human goods. In this sense the natural law is equivalent to Aquinas's teleology. This is the metaphysical sense of "natural law."

The essence of rational beings, however, is not merely to possess natural inclinations to their ends or proper goods, but also to understand these natural inclinations and rationally to desire or will these goods. Aquinas describes two ways in which something can participate in the eternal law: first, by way of knowledge; second, by way of action and passion, that is, by natural inclination.[19] Rational beings participate in and are subject to the eternal law in both ways, for "each rational creature both has some knowledge of the eternal law. . . . and it also has a natural inclination to that which is in harmony with the eternal law."[20] Since law properly speaking is in reason, it is insofar as we participate in the eternal law in "an intellectual and rational

principle—he means that the predicate term of the proposition is contained in the notion or essence or nature or definition of the subject. Therefore, when he describes the first practical principles as self-evident, he should present propositions that represent human nature through essential definition. And when we turn to the one text in all of his writings where he explicitly treats of the content and order of the primary practical precepts, we find that they in fact together comprise what he would take to be a complete and real definition of what it is to be human.

[18] *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 2.
[19] *STh* I-II, q. 93, a. 6.
[20] Ibid.

manner"[21] that our participation is properly called a law. This is
the moral and legal sense of "natural law."[22]

It follows that it is precisely insofar as we understand the tele-
ology of our own nature, articulated in the self-evident first
principles of the natural law, that we participate by reason in the
eternal law; and what we understand in the self-evident princi-
ples of the natural law is our formal nature or essence as mani-
fest through natural inclinations.[23] The natural inclinations
define goods because they are the tendencies to precisely those
ends that perfect a being as the kind of being it is. They are ten-
dencies to those ends because they arise from the form, which is
the metaphysical principle that specifies the being as the kind of
being it is. The self-evident first principles or precepts[24] of the
natural law express the goods that are the objects of the natural
inclinations arising from the form or essence of a rational being.

First, then, a human being is a substance and, in common
with every substance, possesses the natural inclination for self-
preservation. Reason apprehends the object of this natural incli-
nation—life and essentially related goods—as an end or good, as

---

[21] *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

[22] Aquinas restricts the subject matter of ethics to those actions "of which [one] is mas-
ter" and which are proper to a human being as such. He distinguishes properly human
actions (*actiones humanae*) from other actions (*actiones hominis*) that are non-voluntary
and non-deliberate, such as physiological operations and unconscious movements; prop-
erly human actions emanate from reason and will and are identified with moral acts (*STh*
I-II, q. 1, aa. 1 and 3).

[23] There is a recurrent tendency to associate the claim of self-evidence with the notion
that our knowledge of the principles is in some sense innate; such readings then deploy
textual evidence that knowledge of the principles is acquired to dispute that they are self-
evident. This is not Aquinas's view, however. It is clear even in his earliest treatment that
Aquinas never considered our knowledge of self-evident propositions to be innate. This
is, of course, consistent with his insistence that the human intellect is not furnished with
innate species, but is rather originally in potentiality to all intelligible things which it
comes to know through sensory experience and abstraction. For Aquinas, the founda-
tions of all knowledge are empirical, and our knowledge of self-evident propositions is no
exception.

[24] For Aquinas, the extension of *principium* is wider than *praeceptum; principium* is
his rendering of Aristotle's *arche* and thus possesses a similar richness of meaning. The
primary precepts of the natural law are principles in several senses explained below, but
they are precepts insofar as they convey that something ought or ought not to be done as
a matter of moral necessity or duty (see *STh* I-II, q. 99, a. 5; q. 92, a. 2, ad 1).

something to be pursued, and articulates corresponding pre-
cepts. Second, a human being is a living being with the powers
of sensation and appetite, and therefore has the natural inclina-
tion to pleasure and the various sensuous goods which all ani-
mals seek. Again, it is reason's apprehension of this end that
results in the formulation of precepts that moderate our sensuous
nature. Finally, a human being is uniquely and properly rational
and therefore has the inclination to reason—to know the truth
about God and to live in society; from our rational nature and
inclination arise precepts such as that one ought to shun igno-
rance and avoid offending others.[25] The universal first principles
of the natural law comprise a complete essential definition of
human nature precisely because and insofar as they specify the
basic natural generic and specific inclinations to the ends or
goods that arise from the human form or essence or nature.

As already noted, happiness is the most basic primary practical
principle because it is the ultimate end. In this sense, happiness
is the principle of principles in the practical order, for, in different
ways, happiness is the end and principle of law, virtue, practical
reason, and will. Reason, will, and virtue are principles or
sources of activity: reason and will as powers, and virtue as a
habit (a perfection of a power or disposition which gives rise to
activity). The first principles of the natural law are principles in
several senses: (a) they are underived from any prior principles,
that is, they are indemonstrable and self-evident; (b) they are
principles of action insofar as they articulate goods or ends to be
pursued and hence are action-guiding rules; and (c) they are the
foundation of other precepts (secondary natural-law precepts
and precepts of positive law).

In q. 94, a. 2, however, where Thomas discusses the first
principles of practical reason and the natural law, he does not
explicitly mention the ultimate end of happiness. What then is
the relationship between the primary precepts that articulate the

---

[25] The natural inclinations to existence and to the goods of life are shared with other
animals; the precepts that reflect these inclinations are articulated by practical reason,
and are accordingly unique to rational beings.

inclinations to the basic human goods of life, knowledge, and society, and the highest good and last end of happiness?

Elsewhere in the *Summa* Thomas suggests his answer to this question.

Now this is good in general, namely, that to which the will tends naturally, in the same way as each power tends to its object; and again it is the last end, which stands in the same relation to things appetible, as the first principles of demonstration to things intelligible; and, speaking generally, it is all those things which belong to the one willing according to his nature. For it is not only things pertaining to the will that the will desires, but also that which pertains to each power, and to the entire man. Therefore man wills naturally not only the object of the will, but also other things that are appropriate to the other powers, such as the knowledge of truth, which befits the intellect, and to be and to live and other like things which regard his natural well-being—all of which are included in the object of the will as so many particular goods.[26]

The "many particular goods" included in the general good or last end of happiness are necessarily and naturally willed as suitable to specific human powers and as essential components of happiness. "For the ends and the perfections of every other power are included under the object of the will as particular goods."[27] Aquinas recognizes that a human being is a complicated kind of being and that the faculty of reason has distinct operations and interactions with the powers of will and appetite; consequently, the ultimate end of a human being, happiness, is a complex good. Since Aquinas holds also that happiness is a unity, it is an integral whole;[28] the particular goods delineated in q. 94, a. 2 are its basic elements.

A human being does not merely exist, does not merely live—sense, perceive, and desire; a human being is not purely intellectual, but is dependent on the senses and imagination for the acquisition of knowledge and is discursively rational. The

---

[26] *STh* I-II, q. 10, a. 1. Also, "The last end moves the will necessarily, because it is the perfect good. In like manner whatever is ordained to that end, and without which the end cannot be attained, such as *to be* and *to live*, and the like" (*STh* I-II, q. 10, a. 2, ad 3). See also *STh* I-II, q. 11, a. 1, ad 2; and *De Verit.*, q. 22, a. 5.

[27] *STh* I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

[28] *STh* I-II, q. 1, a. 5.

human will is not only necessitated to happiness, but is attracted as well to particular intellectual and sensuous goods—both real and apparent—which are the concrete objects of deliberation and choice. Aquinas's simple claim that happiness is the principle of all human desire and action conceals the complexity of what happiness is and of "all those things which belong to the one willing according to his nature" which are requisite for its attainment. Still, happiness depends partly but essentially on acting in harmony with reason, which is both to act in agreement with law and to act according to virtue.[29]

II. AQUINAS'S ACCOUNT OF VIRTUE

Aquinas considers the nature of virtue in general within the context of his treatment of the principles of human acts: whereas law is an extrinsic principle, powers and habits are intrinsic principles of human acts.[30] His description of a virtue as a habit and his account of the intellectual and moral virtues, that is, of the acquired virtues which are in proportion to human nature as perfections of intellect or reason and of will or appetite, closely parallel Aristotle's theory of virtue. In addition, Aquinas discusses the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which are distinct from the intellectual and moral virtues insofar as the theological virtues transcend human nature, are infused by God and made known to us through the Divine Law, direct us to supernatural happiness, and have as their object God as our supernatural last end.[31] Insofar as I am here concerned with the relationship between Aquinas's doctrine on the natural law and virtue, I will examine only the virtues that are in proportion to human nature.

Aquinas holds that a virtue is the perfection of a power, a principle of operation, a good habit by which we work well.[32] He echoes Aristotle's characterization of virtue as a quality that renders both an agent and the agent's actions good,[33] and he

[29] STh I-II, q. 94, a. 3.
[30] STh I-II, q. 49.
[31] STh I-II, q. 62, aa. 1-3.
[32] STh I-II, q. 55, aa. 1-3.
[33] STh I-II, q. 55, a. 3.

distinguishes virtue and vice according to their relationship to human nature and reason:

A good habit is one which disposes to an act suitable to the agent's nature, while a bad habit is one which disposes to an act unsuitable to nature. Thus, acts of virtue are suitable to human nature, since they are according to reason, whereas acts of vice are opposed to human nature, since they are against reason.[34]

We have already seen that the primary precepts of the natural law reflect our understanding of our nature as properly rational. Similarly, what differentiates a good habit from a bad habit, a virtue from a vice, also depends on the criterion of what is appropriate to human nature or according to reason.

Aquinas draws also on Augustine's definition of virtue as "a good quality of the mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us without us,"[35] with the qualification that the last phrase characterizes only the infused virtues. He underscores the practical character of the notion of virtue by classifying the moral virtues and prudence, which is essentially an intellectual but also a moral virtue,[36] as virtues *simpliciter;* the virtues of the speculative intellect (wisdom, science, understanding) are virtues in a relative or imperfect sense.[37] The speculative virtues are perfections of powers, but while they enable one to do good work, namely the consideration of truth, they do not directly entail the rectitude of will which assures that one actually do and be good.[38] In light of this identification of prudence and the moral virtues as perfect instances of virtue, our ensuing discussion will center on them

[34] *STh* I-II, q. 54, a. 3.

[35] *STh* I-II, q. 55, a. 4; see also *Virtues*, a. 2.

[36] *STh* I-II, q. 58, a. 3, ad 1; II-II, q. 47, aa. 4 and 5.

[37] Although a full discussion of this question is not possible here, the complexity of Aquinas's position demands at least noting the following additional qualifications: Aquinas holds that the intellectual virtues are simply superior to the moral virtues because of the superiority both of their subject (the intellect) and their object (truth or God); the moral virtues are superior in their relation to action (*STh* I-II, q. 66, a. 3). In another context, he designates only the theological virtues as perfect instances of virtue since they direct us to perfect happiness or beatitude (*STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 2).

[38] *Virtues*, a. 7; *STh* I-II, q. 56, a. 3; q. 57, a. 4; II-II, q. 47, a. 4.

and on the intellectual virtue of practical understanding or *syn-deresis* on which they depend. This focus is also especially appropriate because it reflects the emphasis placed on prudence and the moral virtues by commentators reading Aquinas as a virtue ethician, and because the principles of the natural law are distinctively related to prudence and the moral virtues.

Even though the moral virtues are excellences of will and appetite and concern action and passion, reason remains central in the theory of moral virtue, for the motions of the will and appetite are consequent upon cognition and are subjects of virtue only insofar as they are directed by or participate in reason. Also, Aquinas concurs in Aristotle's description of moral virtue as a mean established by reason.[39] Moreover, the virtues are explicitly interconnected for Aquinas:[40] the moral virtues depend essentially on the virtue of prudence, prudence reciprocally requires the moral virtues, and prudence—and therefore the moral virtues as well—requires the intellectual virtue of understanding.[41] "There can be no moral virtue without prudence: and consequently neither can there be without understanding. For it is by the virtue of understanding that we know self-evident principles both in speculative and in practical matters."[42] This text establishes an essential interdependence among the self-evident principles of practical reason, prudence, and the moral virtues; the exact correlations between the principles and prudence will be discussed in greater detail in the final section of this paper.

Aquinas also agrees with Aristotle that the moral virtues are innate only in the sense that the powers of will and appetite of which the virtues are perfections are innate capacities.[43] The

---

[39] *Virtues*, a. 13; *STh* I-II, q. 64, aa. 1-2.

[40] The virtues are *disassociated* in the following ways: Aquinas concedes that the virtues of the speculative intellect do not guarantee that one will actually perform good actions; the intellectual virtues, except for prudence, do not require the moral virtues; and not all of the intellectual virtues are necessary for moral virtue (*STh* I-II, q. 58, aa. 4-5).

[41] *STh* I-II, q. 58, a. 5.

[42] *STh* I-II, q. 58, a. 4.

[43] *STh* I-II, q. 51, a. 1; q. 63, a. 1.

actualization of these capacities occurs through the performance
of specific actions (e.g., the power of the irascible appetite is per-
fected through actions wherein one endures danger appropriately,
that is, in accord with right reason); the repeated performance of
similar actions generates correlative stable dispositions or
virtues (a number of courageous actions engenders the habit of
courage); such habits are operative dispositions and thus are in
turn the source of actions analogous to those that generated the
habit (the virtue of courage is a principle of ensuing courageous
actions).[44]

This bare sketch of the formation of the moral virtues is the
familiar Aristotelian and Thomistic account. There are both
similarities and differences between the virtuous actions that are
the origin of a virtue and the virtuous actions of which the virtue
is in turn the principle. What concerns us now is the distinctive
contribution of the moral virtues to Aquinas's account of morality
and hence the difference between doing a good action and doing
a good action well.[45]

A virtuous disposition significantly alters the agent's mode or
manner of performing actions. As Aquinas explains, "A good life
consists in good deeds. Now in order to do good deeds, it matters
not only what a man does, but also *how he does it*; in other
words, it matters that he do it from right choice and not merely
from impulse or passion."[46] Aquinas's view here reflects
Aristotle's point that a fully virtuous act depends both on the
kind of action performed and on the presence of certain charac-
teristics in the agent and in the agent's performance, for "a
virtuous man acts as he should, and when he should."[47] These
characteristics are that the agent act *knowingly,* not accidentally
as when one acts from ignorance; *willingly* and *deliberately*,
which entails choosing the right action for the right reason, that
is, choosing the action for its own sake, for the love of virtue
itself, and not for a reason extrinsic to the action (for example, for

---

[44] *STh* I-II, q. 51, aa. 2-3; *Virtues*, a. 9.

[45] *STh* I-II, q. 65, a. 1.

[46] *STh* I-II, q. 57, a. 5; emphasis added.

[47] *STh* I-II, q. 18, a. 3. See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 2.4 (1105a28-b12).

money or out of fear of punishment); *consistently*, which is to act from a firm and stable principle or habit, and, as Aquinas further stipulates, it is to act with a facility that is marked by promptness and pleasure.[48] A virtuous disposition denotes also that the passions are moderated by reason; in this sense, Aquinas notes that it is a mark of virtue not to act *from* passion, but to act *with* the regulated passion which enhances the goodness of an action.[49]

So far we have seen Aquinas's portrayal of the important specific qualities of action and agent that a virtuous disposition secures. A more basic question remains: What is the place of the virtues in the account of moral action in terms of happiness, natural inclinations, and natural-law precepts, outlined above? I will address this question in two parts: first, in relation to the necessity of the habits as such; second, and in greater detail, in the full examination of the relationship between natural law and virtue.

Since the virtues are habits, in assessing the features of the rational powers which necessitate the habits in general Aquinas elucidates also the basic requirement for the virtues. Habits are required to mediate between the rational powers and their activities because, unlike a simple natural substance such as fire, the rational soul and its intellectual and appetitive powers are not naturally determined to only one action, but rather are open to a variety of acts.[50] A habit supplements nature and alleviates this natural indeterminacy by predisposing the power to an established range of actions; in this way, a habit is a developed inclination or tendency, similar to a natural inclination. As an acquired "second nature," however, a habit is unlike a natural inclination in that it is the outcome of free choice.[51]

The initial indeterminacy of the rational powers, however, is relative and not absolute. Aquinas's view is that properly human

---

[48] I have constructed this list of characteristics from a number of texts: II *Ethic.*, lect. 4; *STh* I-II, q. 95, a. 1; q. 96, a. 2; q. 100, a. 9; q. 107, aa. 1 and 4; q. 125, a. 2; II-II, q. 55, a. 7; *Virtues*, a. 8, ad 6 and 7; a. 9, ad 13.

[49] *STh* I-II, q. 59, esp. a. 5; see also q. 24, esp. a. 3, ad 1.

[50] *STh* I-II, q. 49, a. 4.

[51] *STh* I-II, q. 58, a. 1 and a. 4, ad 1; q. 65, a. 1; q. 78, a. 2; q. 108, a. 2.

or moral action, that is, action that proceeds from intellect and
will, transpires within a framework of contingency and necessi-
ty.[52] The power of the will, for example, is necessitated or deter-
mined to the good in general, but is free or indeterminate in
regard to particular goods.

Just as nature is the foundation of will, similarly the object of natural
appetite is the principle and foundation of the other objects of appetite.
Now among the objects of appetite the end is the foundation and prin-
ciple of the means to the end, because the latter, being for the sake of
the end, are not desired except by reason of the end. Accordingly what
the will necessarily wills, determined to it by a natural inclination, is
the last end, happiness, and whatever is included in it: to be, knowledge
of truth, and the like. But it is determined to other things, not by a
natural inclination, but by so disposing itself without any necessity.[53]

The necessity of the will is precisely the necessity of the ends
established by natural inclinations: happiness and "whatever is
included in it," that is, the basic goods of the primary principles,
here enumerated as existence, knowledge, "and the like." It is in
this sense that St. Thomas says that "the right ends of human life
are fixed; wherefore there can be a natural inclination in respect
of these ends."[54] The indeterminacy of the will, on the other
hand, regards "other things," that is, the infinitely varied, limited,
and contingent goods, which are the concrete objects of delibera-
tion and choice and the ends of particular actions. And it is to
these actions that the virtues and vices are related both as product
and principle.

A virtuous disposition represents a more specific determina-
tion to goodness than is given in the will's necessary inclination
to happiness or in the natural inclinations that define the basic
kinds of goods constitutive of happiness. Happiness and the
basic goods, as noted already, are related as a universal whole to
its particular constituents. Nonetheless, the natural inclinations
to the basic goods are not so determined that they operate as

---

[52] *STh* I-II, q. 1, aa. 1 and 3.
[53] *De Verit.*, q. 22, a. 5; *On Truth*, vol. 3, trans. Robert J. Schmidt, S.J. (Chicago: Henry
Regnery, 1954).
[54] *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 15.

propensities for concrete, individual good things; the basic goods are kinds of goods, they are pluralistic and diverse, and as such are appropriately described as the goods of life, the goods of knowledge, and the goods of society. A natural necessitation to finite, particular goods is incompatible with Aquinas's account of free choice.[55] Concrete goods are contingent and indefinitely varied; they are the objects of deliberation and choice and hence the special province of the virtue of prudence. Virtuous habits are cultivated through a recurrence of good deliberations and choices in relevantly similar, yet always different, circumstances. As the realization of the nascent directedness to good furnished by the natural inclinations, the virtues dispose us to act well in the concrete and depend on time and accumulated experience for their formation; yet the very possibility of the virtues depends both on the initial tendencies to good and also on our understanding of these inclinations articulated in the primary principles of the natural law. In this way, the natural inclinations and their articulation as precepts are necessary, but not sufficient, for a human being to live well and to be happy.[56]

III. AQUINAS'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LAW AND VIRTUE

Aquinas regularly describes the universal, self-evident first principles of the natural law as the "seeds" (*seminaria*) of the moral virtues.[57] This metaphor suggests that the principles of natural law are also principles of the virtues; its full implication is that the natural law is prior, both cognitively and ontologically, to virtue.

Aquinas states clearly that the purpose of law "is to lead its subjects to their proper virtue; and since virtue is 'that which makes its subject good,' it follows that the proper effect of law is

---

[55] *De Verit.*, q. 24, a. 7; *STh* I, q. 83, aa. 1 and 4; I-II, q. 10, a. 2; q. 13, a. 6.

[56] *Virtues*, a. 6.

[57] *STh* I-II, q. 63, aa. 1-3. The first principles of speculative reason are described as the "seeds" of the intellectual virtues. See also *De Verit.*, q. 14, a. 2.

to make those to whom it is given good."[58] The human, divine, and natural law realize this common purpose in distinctive ways, but law in general fulfills this function by commanding virtuous actions and by prohibiting vicious actions. "Since law is given for the purpose of directing human acts, insofar as human acts conduce to virtue, so far does law make men good."[59] Specifically, the natural law commands acts that are suitable to human nature and forbids acts that are opposed to human nature; a virtue is a habit that disposes to an act suitable to the nature of the agent and a vice is a habit that disposes to an act contrary to the nature of the agent. Therefore, the acts that the natural law commands are the acts that generate the habits of virtue; and since the virtues in turn dispose to the same good actions, as qualified above, the perfection of the virtues denotes that the agent also fulfills perfectly the precepts of the natural law.

The fundamental relationship between the natural law and the virtues, then, is twofold: The subject matter or content of the precepts—what they are about—is virtuous actions, and the end or final cause of the precepts is virtuous dispositions. Thus, while the natural law is ontologically prior to virtue in the order of generation as cause to effect, virtue is teleologically prior to law as final cause to that which is for the sake of the final cause.

The cognitive priority of the natural law is implicit in Aquinas's initial characterization of the function of law as such—law is God's means of instruction about the good. It is explicit in his simple but essential contention that the natural law enables us to discern what is good and what is evil.[60] Our discussion so far has attempted to grant fully the ways in which the natural law is insufficient for the attainment of happiness; interpretations that depreciate the significance of the theory of natural law, however, in effect undermine the ontological and epistemological foundations of Aquinas's theory. This foundational

---

[58] *STh* I-II, q. 92, a. 1; see also *ScG* III, cc. 115, 116, and 121.
[59] *STh* I-II, q. 92, a. 1, ad 1.
[60] *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 2.

status is not only theoretical, but characterizes the moral life itself; as Aquinas notes, the first direction of our acts to their ends and to the last end of happiness is through the natural law.[61]

In light of the significant intersection of law and virtue in the acts that law commands and the acts that generate the habits of virtue, it is not surprising that immediately following his discussion of the first principles of the natural law Aquinas asks whether in fact *all* the acts of the virtues are prescribed by the natural law.[62] The connection between law and virtue as distinct expressions of the teleology of human nature is most evident in his answer. The virtues are natural, that is, they are perfections of our natural capacities or inclinations; therefore, virtuous acts are subject to the natural law. And, in turn, as he states directly later, "To every definite natural inclination there corresponds a special virtue."[63] The natural law prescribes all the acts of virtue in that the law encompasses every good to which a human being has a natural inclination, including, of course, the goods that are the object of the specific human inclination to reason. And Aquinas holds that to act according to reason is to act according to virtue.

He elaborates this answer by drawing a distinction between two senses of "virtuous acts": first, virtuous acts as such, insofar as they are generically virtuous as excellences or perfections of reason fully understood (including will and appetite in the sense that they participate in or are regulated by reason); second, virtuous acts considered specifically and in particular. Aquinas states that in the first sense *all* virtuous acts belong to the natural law. His argument proceeds as follows:

(1) Everything to which a human being has a natural inclination belongs to the natural law.
(2) Each thing is naturally inclined to an operation that is suitable to it according to its form.

---

[61] Ibid., ad 2.

[62] *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 3. This question is subsequently restated in regard to the human (q. 96, a. 3) and the divine law (q. 100, a. 2). All references in the remainder of this paper which are not otherwise noted are to *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 3.

[63] *STh* II-II, q. 108, a. 2.

(3) The rational soul is the proper form of a human being; consequently, there is in every one a natural inclination to act according to reason.
(4) To act according to reason is to act according to virtue.
(5) Therefore, all virtuous acts are prescribed by the natural law.

The argument here establishes the correspondence of the notions of natural-law precepts and virtue. Both are expressions of the teleology of human, rational nature; in other words, both the precepts and the virtues are based in natural law in the metaphysical sense. The precepts are practical reason's articulation of the goods to which human beings are naturally inclined, the virtues represent perfections or excellences of these same inclinations; since the virtues are perfections that are also dispositive, they are not final perfections, but are themselves ordered to further perfection—that is, to activity and, ultimately, to happiness.

In the second sense (i.e., considered specifically), not every virtuous act is prescribed by the natural law, "for many things are done virtuously, to which nature does not primarily incline, but which, through the inquiry of reason, have been found . . . to be conducive to well-living." This is consonant with Aquinas's view that the natural law is changed "by addition," as human reason continually discovers and devises goods "for the benefit of human life."[64] Aquinas acknowledges also that the natural law does not specify particular virtuous acts insofar as the diversity of circumstances and the variety of human agents mean that "certain acts are virtuous for some, as being proportioned and becoming to them, while they are vicious for others, as not being proportioned to them." In addition to the universal precepts, the purpose of which is to command kinds of actions correlative with specific human nature, an individual's own nature presents unique possibilities for excellence that cannot be determined in general. What is virtuous in each particular case must be assessed by the individual, or by a particular society, according to the varying conditions and circumstances of human existence.

Because the "inquiry of reason" needed to amplify the notion of the human good and to discern what is virtuous in the con-

---

[64] *STh* I-II, q. 94, a. 5, ad 3.

crete concerns particulars, I will conclude this essay with a brief look at the precise relationship between the virtue of prudence and the primary precepts of natural law.

Prudence is the excellence of practical reason: It is right reason about things to be done, about human conduct as a whole, and is properly concerned with means to ends and above all to the highest end of happiness; therefore, the prudent person deliberates and chooses well in regard to means to the end of happiness.[65]

Prudence is right reason about things to be done, and this not merely in general, but also in the particular, where action takes place. Now right reason demands principles from which reason proceeds. But when reason is concerned with the particular, it needs not only universal principles of action, but also particular ones. For as to universal principles of action, a man is rightly disposed by the natural understanding of principles, by which he knows that he should do no evil.[66]

Prudence mediates between necessary universal principles and contingent particular cases and circumstances and requires both universal and particular knowledge. As both an intellectual and a moral virtue, prudence mediates also between intellect and will, between knowing the good and doing the good.

Consequently, Aquinas identifies two related but distinct kinds of ends and thus two sources of the principles on which prudence depends: first, the ends that are the first principles of practical reason articulated as the primary precepts of the natural law; second, the ends established by the moral virtues. Aquinas explains this duality:

Now, the end of things to be done pre-exists in us in two ways: first, through the natural knowledge we have of man's end. This knowledge, of course, as the Philosopher says, belongs to the intellect, which is a principle of things to be done as well as of things to be studied; and, as the Philosopher also points out, ends are principles of things to be done. The second way that these ends pre-exist in us is through our desires. Here the ends of things to be done exist in us in our moral virtues,

---

[65] *STh* I-II, q. 57, aa. 4-6; II-II, qq. 47-48.
[66] *STh* I-II, q. 58, a. 5.

which influence a man to live a just, brave, or temperate life. This is, in a sense, the proximate end of things to be done. We are similarly perfected with respect to the means towards this end: our knowledge is perfected by counsel, our appetite, by choice; and in these matters we are directed by prudence.[67]

In this passage Aquinas describes the collaboration of principles, moral virtues, and prudence: knowledge of the ultimate human end or good of happiness, rectitude of will and moderation of appetite in relation to the more proximate and particular ends or goods, and correct reasoning about the means to achieve the end, which entails also deliberating and choosing well—all are requisite for the achievement of happiness.

In asserting the priority of prudence, Daniel Mark Nelson maintains that the precepts of the natural law "contain no guidance for our conduct,"[68] and that the virtues without natural law are sufficient for one to lead a good life. As I have argued thus far, this kind of interpretation grants the virtues an autonomy that is utterly alien to Aquinas's perspective. Aquinas is explicit and consistent about the interdependence of prudence and *synderesis*. He asserts repeatedly that "it is necessary for the prudent man to know both the universal principles of reason, and the singulars about which actions are concerned";[69] and this knowledge is explicitly related to *synderesis,* for just as prudence "moves" the moral virtues, "*synderesis* moves prudence, just as understanding of principles moves science."[70]

Aquinas sustains the analogy between practical and speculative reason in his descriptions of the practical syllogism or the syllogism of prudence, as he sometimes terms it, and reaffirms the essential connection of prudence to principles.

The reasoning of prudence must proceed from a twofold understanding. The one is cognizant of universals, and this belongs to the understanding which is an intellectual virtue, whereby we know naturally

---

[67] *De Verit.*, q. 5, a. 1; *On Truth,* vol. 1, trans. Robert Mulligan, S.J. (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1952).
[68] Nelson, *The Priority of Prudence,* 100.
[69] *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 3; see also II-II, q. 47, aa. 6 and 16; q. 49, a. 2.
[70] *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 6, ad 3.

not only speculative principles, but also practical universal principles, such as "One should do evil to no man," as shown above. The other understanding, as stated in *Ethics* VI, is cognizant of an extreme, i.e., of some primary singular and contingent practical matter, viz., the minor proposition, which must needs be singular in the syllogism of prudence, as stated above.[71]

Aquinas clearly refers here to the principles of the natural law both by definite description—the practical universal principles which are the object of understanding and analogous to specu- lative principles—and by example—"One should do evil to no man." Thus, prudence depends essentially on knowledge of the first principles of the natural law. Any effort to disassociate pre- cept from prudence, law from virtue, produces an inadequate account of Aquinas's theory.[72]

[71] *STh* II-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad 1; see also *STh* I-II, q. 13, aa. 1 and 3. Nelson comments that the "deductive model of drawing conclusions from the natural law is somewhat mislead- ing" (*The Priority of Prudence*, 112). My view is that the deductive model is pervasive in Aquinas's account of practical reasoning, integral to his moral theory, and essential for his account of positive law. Because the speculative and practical sciences are analogous to one another, one should expect that there will be both significant similarities and sig- nificant differences between them and that practical deductions will be both similar to and different from the demonstrative syllogisms that characterize a speculative science such as geometry or physics.

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF INTELLECTUAL AND MORAL VIRTUE IN AQUINAS

JOHN PETERSON

University of Rhode Island
Kingston, Rhode Island

T HAT AQUINAS divided intellectual and moral virtue is well known. He also held that persons may be considered simply as natural beings, as, for example, Aristotle viewed them, or as natural beings that have a supernatural destiny. Viewed as the former, persons have a natural end just like every other thing. This natural end is identified by Aquinas with imperfect, as opposed to perfect or ultimate, happiness.[1] But viewed as the latter, persons have a supernatural end. The natural end is not their final, eternal end but their secondary, temporal end. It is an end that is means to the final end. Moreover, it consists in rational activity, including acting rationally. This rational action, which is virtuous action, consists in striking a mean between excess and defect. Aquinas seems to agree with the view he ascribes to Aristotle, that in exercising this natural end of rational activity in this life humans are as happy as they *can* be here on earth but not absolutely or ultimately happy.[2] But the supernatural end of persons is that in which they are ultimately happy. It is identified by Aquinas as acquaintance with God in the Beatific Vision.[3] For convenience, the former viewpoint may

---

[1] Aquinas agrees with the view he ascribes to Aristole that perfect happiness in this life is impossible. See *ScG* III, c. 48.

[2] Ibid.

[3] *ScG* III, c.37.

be called moral naturalism (MN) and the latter moral supernat-
uralism (MS).

MN is what Aquinas takes from Aristotle. He departs from
Aristotle only in making the end in MN secondary instead of
final. But MS is what he adds to Aristotle. And here the end he
speaks about *is* the final end. As is obvious, one cannot identify
the final end both with a life of reason on earth and with the
Beatific Vision in heaven. But since it is not the same end or hap-
piness that is concerned in MN and MS, Aquinas compatibly
espouses both MN and MS. In any case, the distinctions between
intellectual and moral virtue on the one hand and MN and MS
on the other are evident in Aquinas's ethics.

Not so evident is how these two distinctions are linked. In par-
ticular, I will show that intellectual virtue and moral virtue are
the condition of each other both on the level of MN and on the
level of MS. But though it holds on both levels, this interdepen-
dence on the level of MN is the converse of what it is on the level
of MS.

I

To begin, in MN the tie between intellectual and moral virtue
is the intellectual virtue of prudence. Through prudence, intel-
lectual and moral virtue condition each other, but in different
ways. Intellectual virtue is prior to moral virtue to the extent
that prudence *causally* conditions moral virtue; moral virtue is
prior to intellectual virtue to the extent that it *logically* condi-
tions prudence. In MS, the tie between intellectual and moral
virtue is not prudence but the Beatific Vision. Once again, intel-
lectual virtue and moral virtue condition each other. But con-
versely, intellectual virtue is prior to moral virtue to the extent
that the Vision *logically* conditions moral virtue; and moral
virtue is prior to intellectual virtue to the extent that it *causally*
conditions the Vision.

In MN, acting morally is a matter of striking a mean between
the extremes of excess and defect. This is rational action, natural
happiness, or the moral end. In order to effect that moral end,
care must be taken as regards the selection and ordering of

means. To the extent that one does this well, one has the intellectual virtue of prudence. Prudence, therefore, "is a virtue that is necessary for the good life."[4] But too often we meet persons who, though well disposed as regards the moral end, nonetheless fail to see or take the most appropriate means to that end. They aim at the golden mean but miss it due to ineptness in the use of means. Suppose a wealthy person, X, seeks to avoid both extravagance and stinginess in the matter of almsgiving. Not having the expertise to ascertain which persons deserve the most help, he delegates the task to Y without checking to see that Y is knowledgeable, objective, or honest. As it turns out, Y is none of these and ends up giving all the money to an undeserving person in return for a favor. Persons like X are well meaning, or have a virtuous disposition, but lack the intellectual virtue of prudence. In this way, the intellectual virtue of prudence, which Aquinas defines as "right reason in things to be done,"[5] is the condition of *acting* virtuously, even though it is not the condition of a virtuous *disposition*.[6]

Yet, it also runs the other way. Prudence, for its part, is conditioned by moral virtue. However, here the moral virtue concerned is not virtuous action but a virtuous disposition.[7] Persons evidently take prudent means to the end of moral action only if they have that action as their end from the beginning. And in having that action as their end they are *already* morally disposed. To recur to our example, suppose X seeks to strike a mean between extravagance and stinginess in giving money to certain persons and *does* make sure that Y, to whom he assigns the task, is knowledgeable, objective, and honest. X evidently takes this prudent means to the end of moral action, that is almsgiving, only because almsgiving is to begin with his end. And in having almsgiving as his end, X is already morally disposed. Thus, since X's prudent means includes and so is conditioned by X's moral end and since X has that end only because he is morally

---

[4] *STh* I, q. 57, a. 5.
[5] *STh* I, q. 57, a. 4.
[6] *STh* I, q. 57, a. 5.
[7] *STh* I, q. 55, a. 4.

disposed, it follows that X's prudence is conditioned by moral virtue in the sense of a virtuous disposition. As it is in this example, so is it in all cases. To the extent that the concept of taking prudent means to moral action includes the concept of being morally disposed to that action, moral virtue as virtuous disposition enters into the definition of prudence. As such, it is logically prior to prudence. It is included in prudence as any end is included in its necessary means. And so, while the intellectual virtue of prudence is a causal condition of moral virtue as action, moral virtue as disposition is the logical condition of the intellectual virtue of prudence.[8]

This is straightforward Aristotelianism. To this naturalistic assay of the relation of intellectual and moral virtue Aquinas adds the supernatural counterpart, which, as noted earlier, inverts the mutual conditioning of the intellectual and moral virtues.

II

Aquinas concurs with many other philosophers in according a higher place to knowing causes than to knowing facts.[9] One who knows causes has scientific and not mere factual knowledge. A child knows that the moon is darkened but her teacher knows that the darkened moon is due to the earth's passing shadow. Here we say that the child has factual knowledge while her teacher has causal knowledge. This is a loose distinction since even the teacher's knowledge is factual in a broader sense. He knows *that* the darkened moon is due to the earth's passing shadow. This is factual knowledge that includes causal knowledge. So it may be more correct to say that one type of factual knowledge is higher than another, namely, just that type of knowledge that includes knowledge of causes. In any case, factual knowledge, whether it involves causal knowledge or not, is evidently different from knowledge by acquaintance. I know that Nero was the Roman emperor who blamed the Christians

---

[8] *STh* I, q. 57, a. 4.

[9] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristole*, vol. 1, trans. J. P. Rowan (Chicago, 1961), no. 25, p. 13.

for torching Rome. But I am unacquainted with Nero. In Russell's words, I have in this case knowledge of description but no knowledge by acquaintance. If I were acquainted with Nero, then my knowledge of him would thereby be perfected. I could then say that, in addition to knowing things *about* Nero, I know Nero himself. Knowledge by acquaintance thus always gives us that desired immediate intuition that is lacking in knowledge by description.   .

Given the Thomistic theses (1) that God is the highest cause,[10] (2) that knowledge grows more perfect to the extent that it is knowledge of cause,[11] (3) that knowledge perfects the knower,[12] and (4) that knowledge by acquaintance adds to knowledge by description,[13] it follows (5) that persons reach ultimate intellectual virtue only in being acquainted with God in the Beatific Vision. But since that Vision is achieved only by the morally virtuous, it follows that acting virtuously is a causal condition of the Beatific Vision. I see God in heaven only if I act virtuously on earth. Just to that extent can it be said that moral virtue causally conditions ultimate intellectual virtue.

Just as in the case of the prudence and moral virtue in MN, the relation runs the other way as well. The intellectual Vision of God in heaven is for its part the condition of moral virtue on earth. It is so because it is the ultimate end to which, as means, moral virtue is directed. The concept of the Beatific Vision thus enters into the definition of moral virtue as any end enters into the definition of its necessary means. This being the case, ultimate intellectual virtue in MS is the logical condition of moral virtue.

[10] This claim is found throughout Aquinas's works. Two references are *ScG* II, c. 15, no. 5 and *On Being and Essence*, c. 4.

[11] *Commentary on the Metaphysics of Aristotle*, vol. 1, no. 35, p. 16.

[12] Aquinas held that knowledge is the actuation of the passive intellect and that act always perfects passivity or potentiality.

[13] Though these are Russell's and not Aquinas's words, Aquinas would have accepted the distinction behind them. For Aquinas, our knowledge that God is absolutely simple, wise, and omnipotent is knowledge by description. But this knowledge pales in comparison with our acquaintance with God in the Beatific Vision. By extension, he would say that my knowledge of, say, the Pope (which at present is knowledge by description only) would be enhanced when I actually met the Pope.

So it is that in MS the interdependence of intellectual and moral virtue is just the converse of what it is in MN. In MN, moral virtue conditions the intellectual virtue of prudence as an end logically or conceptually conditions the necessary means to that end. But the intellectual virtue of prudence conditions moral virtue as a means that is necessary to an end causally conditions the end. In MS, ultimate intellectual virtue, heavenly acquaintance with God, conditions earthly moral virtue as the end logically conditions its necessary means. And earthly moral virtue conditions ultimate intellectual virtue, the heavenly Vision, as a means that is necessary to an end causally conditions that end.

THOMISM AND THE QUANTUM ENIGMA

WILLIAM A. WALLACE, O.P.

University of Maryland
College Park, Maryland

T HE RECENT PUBLICATION of Wolfgang Smith's *The Quantum Enigma: Finding the Hidden Key*[1] has done more than propose a novel interpretation of quantum theory. It has also reopened a train of thought that has been somewhat muted in recent decades, namely, that of the relevance of the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas to solving problems raised by modern physics. What I have in mind are books published in the 1950s and 1960s by Jesuit professors at the Gregorian University in Rome[2] and by Vincent Edward Smith in the United States,[3] plus my own writings on the subject before I became heavily involved in the history of science.[4] Now, out of the blue, as it were, Aquinas's name is once again being invoked in the context of modern science, this time as originating concepts that provide a "hidden key" to the solution of the quantum

---

[1] Peru, Ill.: Sherwood Sugden & Company, Publishers, 1995, iii + 140 pp., with an appendix, a glossary, and an index of names.

[2] Especially the following, all published by the Gregorian University Press, Rome: Peter Hoenen, S.J., *Cosmologia,* 5th ed. (1956); idem, *De noetica geometriae* (1954); Philip Soccorsi, S.J., *De physica quantica* (1956); idem, *De vi cognitionis humanae in scientia physica* (1958); idem, *De geometriis et spatiis non-Euclideis* (1960).

[3] Notably his *Philosophical Physics* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1950); and *Footnotes for the Atom* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1951).

[4] See my "Newtonian Antinomies Against the *Prima Via,*" *The Thomist* 19 (1956): 151-92; "The Reality of Elementary Particles," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 38 (1964): 154-66; "St. Thomas and the Pull of Gravity," in *Science and the Liberal Concept* (West Hartford, Conn.: St. Joseph College, 1964), 143-65; and "Elementarity and Reality in Particle Physics," *Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 3 (1968): 236-71.

enigma. The author of this startling claim, a professor of mathematics at Oregon State University and apparently no relation to Vincent Edward Smith, surely deserves a hearing in these pages.

Wolfgang Smith's thesis is set out in six chapters: the first two, "Rediscovering the Corporeal World" and "What is the Physical Universe?," establish the terms of discourse; the next two, "Microworld and Indeterminacy" and "Materia Signata Quantitate," propose Smith's solution, which basically consists in explaining the significance of state vector collapse in quantum theory; and the last two, "On Whether 'God Plays Dice?'" and "In the Beginning," draw out metaphysical implications of this teaching. An appendix provides a brief mathematical introduction to quantum theory so that the reader can appreciate what is meant by state vector collapse and other technical terms. A glossary gives a handy index of such terms and where they occur in the text.

In Smith's view, the devil that needs to be exorcised from contemporary physics is the bifurcationism that took its origin from René Descartes, then was reinforced by a succession of philosophers from John Locke to Immanuel Kant (chap. 1). This is the split between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*, the first denuding the world of sensible qualities and the second creating the impression that all such qualities (and the nature that underlies them, *das Ding an sich*) are projected into the universe by the observer. The mind-set such bifurcationism puts into physicists is so strong, and has been reinforced in so many ways by their education and culture, that it is almost impossible for them to recognize it, let alone work at eradicating it. But eradicate it they must if they would solve the enigmas of quantum theory. And the only way they can do so, Smith argues, is by rediscovering the corporeal world. What this means is that they must learn what it is to perceive the world as it presents itself in sense experience, to experience in their own lives the "miracle" of sense perception (16).[5] The apple is outside us, but we perceive it nonetheless, with its colors and its other attributes, which are as real as we sense them to be (1-20).

[5] Numbers in the text refer to the page numbers of *The Quantum Enigma*.

What, then, is the actual universe of the physicist? Obviously it is different from the corporeal world (chap. 2). It is accessed, not through perception, but through measurements and the artificial instruments that yield them. But more than measurements are required; they must be complemented by theories and the models these invariably suggest. Such modes of knowing result in "representations" (somewhat analogous to sensible images) through which physicists know what Smith calls "physical objects," the entities that populate their universe and so are different from the "corporeal objects" of sense experience (23). The precise relationships between the two sorts of "objects" may be understood as follows. Every corporeal object X can be subjected to measuring procedures that will yield an "associated physical object" SX. X and SX are not the same thing, for X is perceptible whereas SX is not (25-26). Yet there is a similarity, a "resemblance," between the two, and this consists essentially in the likeness of a mathematical form, of an abstract structure.[6] Yet an asymmetry is found here also, in that one can always go from a corporeal to a physical object by metrical procedures, whereas one cannot always go the other way round. In the event that one can, the physical object is the SX of a corporeal object X, and X is referred to as a "presentation" of SX. Smith uses this asymmetry to divide "physical objects" into two further classes: physical objects that admit of presentation he refers to as "subcorporeal objects," whereas those that do not admit of presentation he calls "transcorporeal objects" (27). The requirement of presentation is essential, Smith insists, if there is ever to be intellectual knowledge of entities in the physical world (31, 21-42).

With this language presupposed, Smith moves on to consider problems of the microworld and indeterminacy (chap. 3). He first clears the ground by distinguishing a "generic physical object" from a "specific physical object," since it is only the latter with which the physicist actually comes to deal. Its

---

[6] Other connections between the two are that X and SX "occupy exactly the same region of space" and that they are also in "temporal continuity." Geometrical continuity, Smith further explains, entails that "every decomposition of a corporeal object X into corporeal parts corresponds to a congruent or geometrically isomorphic decomposition of SX" (31-32).

distinguishing note is that some type of observational contact has to already have been made with the object and in this sense can serve to "specify" it.[7] Precisely how this specification of a physical object is achieved can be rather complex, but for Smith it usually involves conceiving the object in terms of an abstract or mathematical representation, what he terms a "physical system" (23n., 45). It is this system that defines the observables, that is, quantities that can in principle be determined by physical means. And it is here that the problem of determinacy and indeterminacy in quantum theory has to be addressed.

Can the physical universe be divided into two subdomains, the macroworld and the microworld, and is the microworld really a "strange" world, different from that of ordinary experience? Smith's answer to the latter question is that the microworld is indeed strange in the sense that it can be neither perceived nor imagined, but it is not "quantum strange" as it is commonly thought to be. "For example," he goes on, "it is by no means the case that the electron is sometimes a particle and sometimes a wave, or that it is somehow particle and wave at once, or that it 'jumps' erratically from point to point, and so on" (48). This kind of talk "results from an uncritical and spurious realism—a realism which in effect confounds the physical and the corporeal planes." What is happening here is that the microsystem and its observables are being confused, and the observables are being treated as classical attributes of the electron, "which they are not, and cannot be." But this does not mean that Smith rejects realism itself. He is explicit on this: "the microworld is objectively real—as real, indeed, as the physical world at large, with which in fact it coincides" (49).

What then to do about the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, the common source of talk about indeterminism? In Smith's

[7] Smith's example of a generic physical object would be "the electromagnetic field," which exists only "in some abstract, idealized or purely mathematical sense"; his example of a specific subcorporeal object would be the planet Pluto, with which we already have some type of observational contact. Furthermore, there can be specification of a transcorporeal object, such as an elementary particle, but this must come about in two stages: the object must first interact with a subcorporeal entity, and then the latter must be observed (or rendered observable) through presentation as already described (43-44).

view that principle does not refer to the microworld as such. It refers to the result of measurements, and thus to the transition that takes place in passing from the physical to the corporeal plane. In the microworld itself, Smith maintains, there is no such thing as the Heisenberg principle. What is known about the electron, for example, is not its position or its momentum, but rather the state vector of the physical system in which it is being specified. In holding this Smith is not denying that a measurement performed on a physical system can cause the so-called collapse of the state vector (51). His point is rather that quantum mechanical systems still behave in a deterministic way, provided the type of determinism involved is properly understood:

Obviously enough, this quantum mechanical determinism is a far cry from the classical. However, what has been forfeited is not so much determinism as it is reductionism: the classical supposition, namely, that the corporeal world is "nothing but" the physical. It is this axiom that has in effect become outmoded through the quantum mechanical separation of the physical system and its observables. Quantum physics, as we have seen, operates perforce on two planes: the physical and the empirical; or better said, the physical and the corporeal, for it must be recalled that measurement and display terminate necessarily on the corporeal plane. There are, then, two ontological planes, and there is a transition from the physical to the corporeal resulting in the collapse of the state vector. The collapse, one could say, betokens—not an indeterminism on the physical level—but a discontinuity, precisely, between the physical and the corporeal planes. (52)

The discussion of Heisenberg brings Smith to another aspect of the former's teaching, one on which he expatiates throughout the rest of the book. This is Heisenberg's invoking of the Aristotelian notion of *potentia* when he suggests that microphysical systems constitute a kind of potency in relation to the actual world. From here on the discussion becomes more technical and is not easily summarized. Since our interests here are more ontological than mathematical, perhaps this brief excerpt from Smith will convey the flavor of the exposition.

Measurement . . . is the actualization of a certain potency. Now the potency in question is represented by the (uncollapsed) state vector, which contains within itself, as we have seen, the full spectrum of possibilities to be realized through measurement. To measure is thus to

determine; and this determination, moreover, is realized on the corpo-
real plane: in the state of a corporeal instrument, to be exact. Below the
corporeal level we are dealing with possibilities or *potentia,* whereas
the actualization of these *potentiae* is achieved on the corporeal plane.
We do not know how this transition comes about. Somehow a determi-
nation—a choice of one particular outcome from a spectrum of possi-
bilities—is effected. We know not whether this happens by chance or
by design; what we know is that somehow the die is cast. And this
"casting of the die" constitutes indeed the decisive act: it is thus that the
physical system fulfills its role as a potency in relation to the corporeal
domain. (56-57)[8]

An additional point may now be made on the subject of
determinism in relation to the electron. Smith had earlier noted
that dynamic attributes such as position and momentum are not
attributes of the electron. Now he clarifies his position on the
electron's so-called static attributes, such as mass, charge, and
spin. These quantities *do* belong to the electron as such, and they
are measurable with stupendous accuracy. "Of all the things, in
fact, with which physics has to deal, there is nothing more
sharply defined and accurately known than the electron" (60).

There can be no doubt that Smith takes inspiration from
Heisenberg, and yet he is not in agreement with every element of
Heisenberg's teaching. The German physicist obviously consid-
ered himself a member of the Copenhagen school, even though
he offered a distinctive interpretation of its doctrine. The dis-
tinctive element in that teaching, for Smith, was Heisenberg's
realist view of the microworld based on the Aristotelian concept
of potency. It was this that allowed Heisenberg to maintain that
there are two ontological domains in the discourse of physicists.
There is a gap between the two domains, and physicists manage
to bridge it by a measurement process. With this much Smith
agrees. But he faults Heisenberg for making "no sharp distinc-
tion between the physical universe on a macroscopic scale and
the corporeal world, properly so called" (63). Smith's own view

---

[8] In this citation a footnote is inserted at the end of the sentence that reads, "We do not
know how this transition comes about." The note states: "We shall return to this ques-
tion in chapters 5 and 6," that is, in the last two chapters, which address more meta-
physical issues.

is that the "macroscopic objects of classical physics are every bit as 'potential' as are atoms and subatomic particles," (64) a possibility Heisenberg fails to take into account.[9]

At this point we come upon Aquinas's famous expression, *materia signata quantitate,* "matter signed with quantity," which Smith makes the title of his fourth chapter. Here he uses the concept of nature as invoked by Heisenberg to explain the fundamentals of hylomorphic doctrine. Heisenberg's "nature," for Smith, touches a deeper level of reality than that represented in the corporeal and physical planes, a reality that points beyond the space-time continuum and suggests a way of dealing with "Bell's interconnectedness theorem" (68-69). The structure of this new reality, which Smith refers to as "metaphysical,"[10] is explained by Aristotle and Aquinas in terms of *hyle* (matter) and *morphe* (form), whence comes the English term "hylomorphic." *Hyle* designates a pure substrate unintelligible in itself; *morphe,* its correlative knowable principle which renders natures intelligible to the human mind. Aligned with the former, the material principle, is the accident of quantity, and aligned with the latter, the formal principle, is the accident of quality. Smith then goes on to explain Heisenberg's "nature" as a *materia secunda* in relation to the physical and corporeal planes:

As *materia,* thus, it stands "beneath" the spatio-temporal domain in an ontological sense, as the carrier or receptacle, that is, of its formal content. And yet it owns a form which it passes on to the universe at large as a universal law or principle of order; as the least common

---

[9] The precise difficulty is explained in more technical detail on pp. 62-64. This concerns, as I suggest, the problem of where one should situate the "potency" to which Heisenberg refers. Smith sees his distinction between X and SX as crucial in this matter. Smith is explicit that "SX exists as a potency, whereas X exists as a 'thing or fact.'" Heisenberg, on the other hand, "appears in effect to identify SX and X" (64).

[10] By his use of the expression "metaphysical realities" (73) Smith intends to designate realities that lie beneath the appearances, which is a common use of the term "metaphysical" today. This is not St. Thomas's usage, however, for he reserved the term for a science of "being as such," which he differentiated from "physics," the science that treats of material or changeable being and whose principles are *hyle* and *morphe.*

denominator, so to speak, of the sum total of manifested forms. Nature, thus, turns out to be a *materia quantitate signata* (a *materia* "marked by quantity"), if it be permitted to adopt this excellent Thomistic phrase. (78)[11]

Here Smith's explanation of the role of form is cryptic, but he clarifies it somewhat in his subsequent exposition. Qualities, he maintains, are ubiquitous on the corporeal plane, but they are missing completely on the physical plane. In his view "physical objects prove ultimately to be . . . [only] 'potencies' in relation to the corporeal world" (79). It is quality, as opposed to quantity, that betokens the "essence" of a corporeal entity (80). How Smith then sees the two as going together may be gleaned from the following:

Quantity and mathematical structure . . . refer to *materia*, or more precisely, to the material aspect of things. The concrete object is made up . . . of matter and form; and this ontological polarity is reflected on the plane of manifestation. The existent object bears witness, so to speak, to the principles by which it is constituted; to both the paternal and maternal principles, if you will. And that is the reason, finally, why there are both qualities and quantities in the corporeal domain: the one indicative of essence, the other of the material substrate. (81)

Once one understands this, it is easy to see why "the only thing about a corporeal object that one is able to understand in terms of physics are its quantitative attributes" (82). SX is all that physics perceives.

And that is no doubt the reason why physicists have been able to convince themselves (and the rest of the educated world!) that the corporeal object as such does not exist; or to put it the other way round: that

---

[11] Here Smith adds a footnote in which he disavows any claim that the meaning he assigns to this phrase coincides with its original Thomistic connotation, for obviously "the Angelic Doctor was not thinking of quantum field theory." Actually St. Thomas uses this expression to explain how natural substances, or "natures," are individuated within a species, and thus it is commonly referred to as his "principle of individuation." For Aquinas, *forma* in the sense of natural form or substantial form is a specifying principle, whereas *materia*, along with the *quantitas* that serves to put "part outside of part," is what differentiates one substance from another, despite their being the same in kind. Precisely how such individuation takes place is difficult to understand, and it is much disputed among Thomistic commentators. For a concise overview of the problem, see J. R. Rosenberg, "Individuation," *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* 7:475-78.

X is "nothing but" SX. It is the reason why corporeal entities are thought to be "made of" atoms or subatomic particles, and why the qualities are held to be "merely subjective." (82)

These excerpts from *The Quantum Enigma*, unsatisfying as they may be, will have to suffice for our present purposes. In the penultimate chapter, "On Whether God Plays Dice," Smith takes up problems of causality and determinism and "hidden variable" theories, and makes use of the concepts of *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* to resolve the apparent impasses that are discussed in the literature. In his view, the significance of quantum discontinuity as seen in state vector collapse is that it betokens an action of *natura naturans,* not *natura naturata* (85-97). And in the final chapter, "In the Beginning," he discusses the so-called big-bang theory and shows how it too involves a singularity and thus, like state vector collapse, gives witness to some type of "creative act" that lies well beyond the pale of the physical sciences (112, 99-113).

By a remarkable coincidence *The Quantum Enigma* came into my hands just as I was putting the finishing touches on the manuscript for a book, one that may lay the groundwork for understanding theses such as that advanced by Smith. This work has recently been published with the title *The Modeling of Nature: Philosophy of Science and Philosophy of Nature in Synthesis.*[12] In it I give some consideration to the quantum theory of the atom but I do not take up problems associated with quantum anomalies. Since I had the opportunity to insert a reference to Smith's book before mine went to press, I added a footnote that now appears on p. 414 and reads as follows:

No attempt has been made in this study to address the subject of quantum anomalies, since these presume technical competence beyond what can reasonably be expected of the general reader. A recent work that

---

[12] Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996, xx + 450 pp., with figures, bibliography, and index. What lies behind the subtitle is the fact that I have spent over forty years teaching both philosophy of science and philosophy of nature at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Much of my interest throughout that period has focused on Aquinas's commentaries on the *Physics* and the *Posterior Analytics* of Aristotle.

takes account of such knowledge and offers solutions that are conso-
nant with the Aristotelian-Thomistic perspective here adopted is that
of Wolfgang Smith, *The Quantum Enigma: Finding the Hidden Key*,
Peru, Illinois: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1995.

Having introduced that note, in the context of this discussion
article I now feel it incumbent on me to reflect further on Smith's
work and its relationship to my own.

Although the two books are concerned with different prob-
lems and addressed to different audiences, there are a number of
points they have in common and on which they mutually sup-
port each other. These are the strong realism both endorse with
respect to the corporeal object (X), the unequivocal rejection of
Cartesianism and Kantianism (along with the mindset they
introduce into modern physics), the need to address the status of
the physical object (SX) and how one can make the transit from
it to the corporeal world, the endorsement of Heisenberg's use of
the Aristotelian concept of *potentia* and the hylomorphism this
involves, and, in general, the replacement of logical positivism
by an Aristotelian Thomism that opens out to a metaphysics for
the eventual solution of problems now arising at the frontiers of
physics. (The reader is not to think that X and SX and other
technical terms introduced by Smith will be found in my book;
of course they will not. But their rough equivalents will be found
there, although conceptualized in a different way.)

The major difference between our two approaches is that
Smith begins with a philosophy of science and works his way to
a philosophy of nature at the end, whereas I do the reverse,
beginning with the concept of nature and then ending with a
philosophy of science based on that concept. His work addresses
a very specific problem, the enigma posed by state vector col-
lapse in quantum theory, whereas mine has the broadest possible
scope, that of relating all of the modern sciences (physical, life,
and human, including even ethics and politics) to the one con-
cept of nature. And whereas Smith uses Aristotle and Aquinas
mainly for their teachings on potencies and *materia signata
quantitate*, I expand generally on the way *analogia* underlies the
work of both thinkers, taking analogy as a synonym for "model"
and exploiting the use of models in all these areas of inquiry.

Although I nowhere mention this in my book, what is implicit in my treatment is the following idea. Aquinas, having been taught by Albert the Great, had an excellent grasp of Aristotle's science of nature. He upgraded the knowledge this gave him to organize, as it were, a science of supernature (that of revealed theology), making use of analogy and the Aristotelian concept of a "mixed science," combining propositions established by reason with propositions assented to by faith. My project would be to do something similar: to take knowledge we possess from ordinary experience of nature to organize the special type of knowing we call modern science, making use of analogy or modeling techniques and the "mixed science" of mathematical physics, which combines propositions established through the observation of nature with those of mathematics. Here I rely on a teaching that is distinctive of Thomism, in contrast to other Scholastic systems of thought, namely, that analogical middle terms are sufficient for a valid demonstration, no less in mathematical physics than in the science of sacred theology. Such terms, and the models they frequently employ, can provide us with insights into the microworld and the megacosm that are not unlike those Aquinas offered his contemporaries into the spirit world of the immaterial and the incorporeal.

Another premise I owe to Arthur Fine, who proposed to mediate between "realists" and "anti-realists" by having both sides of their ongoing dispute adopt a "natural ontological attitude," one that gives scientists the benefit of the doubt.[13] This entails taking the certified results of science as knowledge claims on a par with the findings of common sense. Working with the leverage such an attitude provides I explain first the concepts of *hyle* and *morphe,* then how both of these were regarded as "nature" by Aristotle, and how they constitute the "inner dimension" of all natural bodies. I go on to instantiate this teaching by modeling, in sequence, inorganic natures, plant natures, animal natures, and human nature, inserting between the last two a treatment of the modeling of mind. In common experience natures are

[13] See Fine's *The Shaky Game: Einstein, Realism, and the Quantum Theory* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986), 112-35.

grasped intuitively. My conviction is that, in the present day, people have a quasi-intuitive knowledge of the microworld and the megacosm based on the ways in which these are pictured for them in school and through mass media, particularly television. Indeed, they know more about natures than they give themselves credit for, once they are told what to look for and how to integrate what they see into their existing body of knowledge.

Generally I bypass both quantum and relativity theories because of the mathematics they require for proper understanding. I do make use, however, of the Bohr-Sommerfeld model of the sodium atom, and this in fact is illustrated on the cover of the volume. The point I make is that the quantum "jump" of electrons that can be pictured in that model illustrates very well how "form" (morphe) functions as an energizing and stabilizing principle in an inorganic nature. (Not that electrons really "jump," as Smith makes clear.) The models I employ are for the most part iconic or pictorial models, and they suffice to give some sense of the "miracles" nature performs not only here but at all levels of being. I steer clear of mathematical models, mainly because they might prove opaque to many readers. Smith, of course, is expert with them. He uses precisely such a model to explain state vector collapse, and that is the strength of his book. Here I would only remark on how well he explains that model in the appendix. He starts with the double-slit experiment; then he gives a carefully crafted exposition of finite-dimensional Hilbert spaces, complex numbers, and state vectors; he next applies this geometry to the Heisenberg uncertainty principle, Schrödinger's wave equation (having earlier discussed "Schrödinger's cat," 58), and the wave function of a particle; and he ends by going back to the double-slit experiment to show how matrix mechanics explains its findings precisely (115-36).

With regard to technical details, there is little I would disagree with in Smith's thesis. Although I too invoke Heisenberg in defending my models, and despite the fact that the latter has expressed qualified support for my views,[14] I endorse Smith's

---

[14] See The Modeling of Nature, 414 and esp. n. 39.

correctives to Heisenberg's teaching on the relevance of *potency* to macroscopic objects as well as to atoms and subatomic particles (64). I also think he is on the right track in his insights employing the concept of *esse*, but that is an area of Thomistic metaphysics on which much has been written and is beyond the scope of this brief essay.[15]

The Domestication of Transcendence: How Modern Thinking about God Went Wrong. By WILLIAM C. PLACHER. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996. Pp. 222. $19.99 (paper). ISBN 0-664-25635-X.

Yet another book on the question of modernity? Yes and no. Although the latest book by William Placher, a student and editor of the late Hans Frei and well-respected theological writer in his own right, does deal with this topic, its quest is not to explain how or why modernity began, but rather to renew the battle between the ancients and the moderns on a specific theme: how human beings should think and speak about God. In particular, Placher argues that at the dawn of the modern age in the seventeenth century, Christian theology lost its appreciation of divine transcendence, with its implications for the human knowledge of God. Placher does not suggest a wholesale retrieval of premodern theology of God, recognizing its support of oppressive social and cultural arrangements. Instead, through a detailed treatment of aspects of the thought of Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin—an ecumenical "heroes gallery"—he hopes to demonstrate that these pre-Enlightenment thinkers knew something their modern successors forgot and that must be retrieved by contemporary theology.

A set of interrelated questions focuses Placher's historical analysis: (1) how have theologians and philosophers thought about God? (2) how have they defined their language about God? and (3) what is God's relation to the world we experience and the lives we undertake? In each instance, he argues that premodern theologians possessed greater insight than those who first tangled with the Enlightenment. Placher summarizes what went wrong as a "domestication of God," an image he derives from a line by Thomas Hooker written while combating the doggedly undomesticated theology of Anne Hutchinson: "I know there is wilde love and joy enough in the world as there is wilde thyme and other herbes, but we would have garden-love and garden-joy, of God's own planting." In Placher's terms, God is domesticated when theology seeks a "clearly structured system . . . in which God plays a rather carefully defined role and we can grasp the principles behind God's actions" (39). This is the sin of modern theology to the extent that it rejected the mysterious and uncontrollable God, and settled for one who could be contained within a bower well-tended by human hands.

Prior to embarking on his historical project, Placher addresses the now common dismissal of "classical theism" and the ensuing call for a "postmodern theology." He argues that the identification of the God of classical theism as a distant, dominating, and decidedly patriarchal deity is a caricature indicative of a failure to do the hard work of truly understanding the thought of the leading premoderns, and to distinguish it from what followed. Moreover, while Placher applauds the sensitivity to divine transcendence

demonstrated by self-proclaimed theologians of postmodernity such as
Mark C. Taylor, he finds that it is often at the expense of appreciating the
epistemological repercussions of the self-revelation of the Trinity in the
Incarnation of Christ and the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.
Demonstrating a strong Barthian commitment, Placher insists that apart from
divine self-revelation theology becomes a "form of idolatry" which seeks to
bring the divine under human control (15).

For insight into how one can speak of God in light of self-revelation,
Placher suggests that close attention be paid to the efforts of Aquinas, Luther,
and Calvin. Admirably well-informed on current scholarship concerning the
theology of Aquinas (particularly that which rejects any description of
Aquinas as half philosopher and half theologian), he emphasizes Thomas's
deep appreciation for the consequences the simplicity of God has for theo-
logical knowledge. Since God is a simple reality, he cannot be known by
human reason, which attains truth by dividing and joining, distinguishing
potency from act, and abstracting accidental qualities from essential ones.
Yet, as a Christian theologian who believed God's revelation of Jesus Christ
as "the way of truth" and eternal salvation, Aquinas recognized the necessity
of saying something about God. His solution to the quandary of Christian
proclamation in the face of unavoidable ignorance was analogy. As an alter-
native to univocal or equivocal predication, analogy allows the theologian to
make positive statements about God in light of revelation while protecting
divine transcendence by admitting that the believer cannot understand how
such assertions apply to God. A theological response to divine revelation
requires some transference of experiential attributes to God (e.g., God is wise,
God is love), but the transcendence of God requires that "the mode of signi-
fying" remains beyond human comprehension. Placher argues that Aquinas's
appreciation of divine transcendence determined his description of faith as
neither knowledge nor opinion. Faith, a result of graced empowerment of the
will to believe God as revealer, is an act of God and what is believed about
God never comes under the control of the believer.

The level of Luther's agreement with Aquinas on these matters can be seen
in the young reformer's rejection of a "domestication of grace" by Gabriel
Biel. Biel had constructed a well-ordered system that purported to expose the
principles behind God's gift of grace. God gives grace to some and not others,
depending on whether the recipient does the best he or she can (*quod in se
est*) to make such a bestowal fitting (39). In rebuttal, Luther insisted that the
scriptures offer a God who bursts all human notions of what is appropriate by
using the folly of the cross to reveal himself as a God who loves those who are
unworthy. Impenetrable by human reason, the Christian God remains hidden
even as he reveals himself. Faith, then, becomes trust in a God whose actions
can be neither anticipated nor explained.

Calvin's refusal to domesticate God appears most clearly in what Placher
labels his "rhetoric of faith." Although often depicted as a theologian whose

theory of double predestination constitutes an inappropriate invasion of the counsels of God, Placher presents Calvin as a resolutely anti-speculative thinker content to leave any issue not resolved by scripture as he found it. Characteristically, he "reflected on particular biblical passages, living with apparent inconsistencies among them, drawing rhetorical conclusions about how we should relate to God and live our lives, and resisting the urge to excessive speculation" (63). This approach led Calvin to describe faith as an "assurance" supported by the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Given such consensus among the leading minds of Western Christianity, one must ask: what went wrong in the seventeenth century? Although Placher credits nontheological factors such as interconfessional debates whose intensity elicited overly precisely formulations, and the emergence of modern science with its univocal language and geometrical images of reality, he is mostly interested in the conceptual history of analogy after Aquinas. It is at this point that the villain of the narrative appears in the person of the Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez. Influenced by Cajetan's description of analogy as "proper proportionality" and Duns Scotus's insistence on the unavoidable univocity in the concept of being (God's "being" and a tree's "being" share the trait of existence), Suárez explained analogy in terms of degrees toward and away from divine perfection as one moves up or down the ontological ladder. Therefore, while analogy was Aquinas's way of denying any univocal core bridging human conceptions and divine reality, in the hands of Suárez it became a tool to define precisely how our ideas apply to God: God is perfectly wise, we humans are proportionally less so. Suárez's decisive falling away from Aquinas, however, did not prevent his theory of analogy from enjoying an effective history not only within Roman Catholic theology, but also in Lutheran orthodoxy, Reformed dogmatics, and modern philosophy.

The effects of Suárez's theory were felt in debates concerning the precise ways in which grace effects salvation. Placher offers informative treatments of Pietism (88-92) and Synergism (147) in Lutheranism; Puritanism (95-103), Arminianism (152-55), and Federalism (155-60) in Calvinism; and Jansenism (92-95) and Molinism (149-51) in Roman Catholicism. In each instance, he uncovers a refusal to accept the limits that divine transcendence sets on what theology can know, and a corresponding confidence that God and the principles of his action can be placed within a readily understood and defensible system of concepts. The most pernicious result is the tendency to give a "contrastive" (the term is Kathryn Tanner's) account of God's relationship to the world of experience. If divine being and created being are not as different as Aquinas thought them to be, then God and human beings can be viewed as agents operating within the same field of causation, either working together or against one another. Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin held that every human action is at once part of God's providential plan of salvation and an enactment of human freedom since we do not know how the concept of "causality" applies to God. Alternatively, theologians lacking an appreciation

of divine transcendence are compelled to explain exactly to what extent the act of faith is the result of divine or human action. In so doing they make "faith in God's sovereignty and grace the *enemy of human freedom,* since whatever we claim God does comes at the cost of our own free responsibility" (182).

The drift toward univocity in philosophy was more intense and yielded similar mistakes. René Descartes, whose admiration of Suárez was explicit, defended the existence of God by placing divine reality inside a metaphysical system of clear and distinct ideas that could overcome skepticism. While Descartes was unsure whether philosophy could articulate how God is infinite, Gottfried Leibniz expended great intellectual energy to demonstrate the complete intelligibility of God to human reason. Alas, this reasonable God bore little resemblance to the Triune God of Christian tradition.

Philosophical discussion of God's relationship to the world of nature also reflected a loss of analogical reasoning. This is especially clear in the many debates about miracles during the seventeenth century. Though the question of their occurrence was fiercely contested, miracles were defined by all the disputants in a way that would have shocked Aquinas, Luther, or Calvin, who saw miracles as events within God's creation which evoke wonder and reverence. A modern contrastive account of God's relationship to creation, however, begins with a world that normally runs by itself, defining miracles as occasional divinely produced interruptions of ordinary processes. Placher concludes his discussion of philosophy with an fascinating account of the Leibniz/Newton debate in light of his thesis (138-45). While they differed on the question of whether God must periodically correct creation, neither questioned the premise that divine and natural causation can be understood in basically the same way. The loss of analogy resulted in making theology "the *enemy of science*" (181), doomed to fight a rearguard battle against a science of nature which found increasingly less need for God.

Placher's argument is primarily an historical one: he postulates a thesis and marshals evidence covering an impressive array of past figures, many of whom have advocates today. Consequently, one could focus on whether he has done justice to this figure or that. In particular, Thomists will wonder whether Placher has sufficiently dealt with the philosophical aspect of Aquinas's thought. However, his overall point is larger than any particular interpretation, and singular attention to historical accuracy would result in missing it. Placher should be congratulated for having the courage to enter into areas where specialists dominate and too many theologians fear to tread.

The theological import of the book appears in its final two chapters. Here Placher addresses the themes of revelation and the problem of evil, assisted by the lessons his history has uncovered. To speak of revelation is to acknowledge that Christianity's proclamation of a Triune God understands itself as a response to divine action in the history of Israel and Jesus of Nazareth. This response has taken the form of biblical texts whose narrative structure reveals

the "character traits" of God and the pattern of salvation. When asked from outside of faith whether the notion of divine action in history makes sense, or why these narratives are to be accorded the status of divine self-revelation, Placher suggests that we heed the wisdom of the past, and balance our assertions of trust in God with a frank recognition that our explanations will never match the firmness of our convictions. He makes the same point with respect to all efforts to explain the presence of evil in creation.

If God has revealed himself, there is no question more decisive than how human beings ought to respond in word and action. Placher does the theologians grappling with this question service by demonstrating the existence of a premodern ecumenical consensus based on the character of divine transcendence. The premoderns teach, he argues, that theology must begin and end by trusting a self-revealing deity who remains beyond comprehension, and forego any hopes of explaining its assertions to the satisfaction of outsiders. The implication, of course, is that all such efforts inevitably confuse God with more familiar realities and ensnare God in systems of human thought. The danger is real, and Placher has shown the sorry results. However, I wonder whether the danger stems not solely from a desire to domesticate the transcendent, but also from the jarring claim of Christianity's universal significance. After all, it was the identification of the God of Jesus Christ with the one, true God that first led theologians to enter into dialogue with philosophy. Placher does not make this task his own, and thereby limits the effectiveness of his otherwise excellent book.

JAMES F. KEATING

St. Mary College
 Leavenworth, Kansas

Virtues of the Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century. By BONNIE KENT. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995. Pp. viii + 270. $44.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-8132-0829-7.

Today, the person enquiring in a bookstore about where to find scientific information on the origins of human behavior would most likely be directed to one of two sections. First, she may be sent to the shelves labeled "evolutionary psychology." There an interested researcher may choose among titles such as Robert Frank's *Passions within Reason* (1988) or Matt Ridley's more recent *The Origins of Virtue* (1996). Authors writing in the area of evolutionary psychology proceed on the assumption that, since physical matter in the form

of genes controls our emotional and motivational tendencies, biology not only provides the most reliable explanations for what human beings do but also constitutes the principal explanatory conception behind moral systems.

If, however, our enquirer finds the thought repugnant that material causes should provide the exclusive explanation of such apparently distinctive features of the human person as love, honesty, fidelity, and gratitude in the same way that genes are said, with due scientific evidence, both to produce a person's general physiognomy and to determine such features as hair color and cholesterol level, she can move to the sections marked anthropology and sociology. There the one interested in learning what makes human beings tick will encounter a massive collection of organized data on the practices of *homo sapiens*, accompanied by carefully annotated theories that explain human actions as the product of social construction. Can cultural diversity account for the inescapably present desire for a life beyond this life that Christian theology tells us arises in every member of the race? If not, then our enquirer needs to search elsewhere in order to attain complete information about human behavior.

Virtues of the Will also reports on the efforts of significant scholars to give an account of the causes at work in the comportment of human beings everywhere. But it is highly unlikely that the potential buyer interested in studying its subject matter will discover a volume like this in sections of most bookstores labeled human behavior. Bonnie Kent examines medieval authors who, despite the spectrum of opinions that their Scholastic debates generated, shared the view that specifically human actions flow from a spiritual principle, which informs every human person. In other words, these authors assume, in the words of the Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, that the human creature "carries within him the seed of eternity, which cannot be reduced to matter alone" (no. 18). Does this mean that *Virtues of the Will* discusses spirituality? No, the authors that Kent studies ponder the same questions that engage sociologists, anthropologists, and evolutionary psychologists. But with one important difference: unlike the majority of the foregoing, these medieval schoolmen did not think that the questions could be answered without appeal to the spiritual soul. Does this mean that each one repeats predictable platitudes? On the contrary, this study especially shows that to hold a common view about the spiritual character of human action by no means ensures agreement on how this spiritual principle and its several capacities work.

Kent focuses on theologians who were active in Europe during the period of High Scholasticism. Since the Scholastic method was committed to retrieval, the author's enquiry of course includes reference to pre-Christian thinkers, such as Aristotle, Plato, and the Stoics, as well as earlier Christian theologians, especially Augustine. Still, as the subtitle indicates, the major

focus of the text concentrates on late thirteenth-century Continental Scholastics.

An introductory chapter surveys the history of Scholastic ethics, and introduces "masters who disagreed with Aquinas" (34). As her title suggests, Kent aims to recover the late medieval debates about the place that will plays in shaping moral action. The second chapter summarizes the views developed by theologians who were less persuaded of Aristotle's value for exposing revealed truth than Aquinas was. The author presents material that the standard anthologies usually omit, and provides clear synopses of texts that are largely unavailable to those who are not proficient in Scholastic Latin. Kent furnishes detailed summaries of texts by teachers such as William de la Mare, Peter Olivi, Richard of Middleton, and others, so that the reader can examine the arguments set forth by these *magistri*. As a result, one is able to gain a certain independent perspective on the conclusions that past experts in medieval studies have turned into standard textbook accounts, for example, "The idea of Thomism as the mean between the extremes of Aristotelianism and Augustinianism" (7).

The third chapter examines the book's central question, namely, to what extent the rational appetite depends on human intelligence in order to proceed to moral judgment and action. Actually it is possible to read this book as an allegory on the fragmentation of consciousness. The medieval theologians, like Schopenhauer in the nineteenth century, pondered the interaction of intellect, will, and sense appetite (which corresponds to Schopenhauer's instinct), and they came up with significantly diverse accounts of the alchemy that produces the human act. Kent's study persuades us that categories are difficult to define. When Henry Adams published *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* in 1904, he could distinguish neatly between mystics and intellectuals, but Adams worked off broad intuitions about what characterized the spirits of medieval Europe. Kent, however, refuses such a priori categorizations, even if they may turn out to capture something of the truth. Instead, she lets the authors speak for themselves, and each of them, though they proceed on the assumption that the will embodies what is characteristically human in the person, adds his own nuances to explain how this capacity of the human soul directs human behavior. None, of course, are ready to accept the metaphysical irrationalism that emerges in thinkers such as Schopenhauer; for they have not yet reached the point of thinking that human reason constitutes an enemy for the will.

Chapter 4 turns to the question of moral weakness, and probes whether all choice constitutes deliberated willing. Again, most of the authors examined are inclined to think that the will expresses human subjectivity. Aquinas is not among them. A word of explanation on this. In the *tertia pars*, Aquinas speaks about *voluntas consiliativa* and *voluntas ut ratio* (see *Summa theolo-*

giae III, q. 18, aa. 3-6). Of course, to argue for the formative role of intellect in choosing recalls Aristotle's *Ethics*, but Aquinas is more influenced by an article of Christian faith. The Church teaches that the human will of Christ always acted in accord with the Divine Logos, though with true freedom, that is, without being overpowered by the divine will. The metaphysics of the Incarnation prompted Aquinas to insist that the human will always chooses the reasonable good, the *ratio bonitatis*. Thus for Aquinas intelligent decision precedes choice, in the same way that command, also an act of human intelligence, follows it, adapting a given choice to the particular action about to be performed. In other words, Aquinas wants to show how the intelligent creature moves toward an end that the agent can know to be true, just as Christ always knew and accomplished the will of his Heavenly Father (see John 6:38). Aquinas's moral theory is centered on the end that perfects the nature of the human person, which lies outside both moral striving and science. Recall that even legal science recognizes that precepts do not comprehend their proper purposes—*finis praecepti non cadit sub lege*. On the contrary, the theologians that Kent studies develop arguments, often as a result of having read a text from St. Augustine, that point not to the good of the human person, but rather focus on moral weakness and the dynamics of culpability.

The final chapter treats the "virtues of the will." The author here examines authors who obviously little considered Aquinas's *secunda pars*. We can only conclude that the decades immediately following Aquinas's death introduced a period of latency that thwarted the development of his moral theology. Again, the authors considered in chapter 5 are preoccupied with the dynamics of the human will in the formation of virtue, and so give the impression that virtue commands rather than shapes human character. But Kent avoids formulating final conclusions. Rather she remains faithful to her principally historical methodology, and concludes, modestly, that "the story of virtue ethics remains to be written" (254).

It took almost a century before Aquinas's teaching on the virtues once again found a prophetic voice. When the definitive history of virtue ethics is written, it will necessarily include the fifteenth-century Dominican John Capreolus (1380-1444), who alone launched a massive campaign against the direction that theology took in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. So I am pleased to announce that a volume of essays, *Jean Capreolus en son temps*, that Guy Bedouelle (Fribourg), Kevin White (Washington), and I have edited has recently been published by Editions du Cerf, Paris, and that a translation of Capreolus's "Treatise on the Virtues" also is currently in preparation. A careful study of this late medieval Scholastic will contribute a great deal to the history that Professor Kent has so marvelously begun to chronicle in *Virtues of the Will*.

One minor observation: Scholars not familiar with recent developments in Thomist studies should note that Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *Saint Thomas Aquinas: The Person and His Work* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996) has replaced Father Weisheipl's *Friar Thomas d'Aquino* (Washington, 1983), which Kent cites on p. 62, n. 51, as the standard work for dating the works of Aquinas and for other bibliographical and biographical material on the Angelic Doctor.

<div align="right">ROMANUS CESSARIO, O.P.</div>

St. John's Seminary
    Boston, Massachusetts

Commentary on the Book of Causes of St. Thomas Aquinas. Trans. by VINCENT A. GUAGLIARDO, O.P., CHARLES R. HESS, O.P., and RICHARD C. TAYLOR. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996. Pp. xxxvii + 193. $26.95 (cloth), $16.95 (paper).

Among his last writings, Aquinas's commentary on the *Liber de causis* is of particular interest for two reasons. First, it forms, together with the *De substantiis separatis*, Thomas's most mature expression of the participation metaphysics which he developed in good part from the *Liber's* creationist adaptation of Neoplatonism. Second, the commentary exemplifies what may be styled Aquinas's Neoplatonic hermeneutic, a hermeneutic which he took over from Neoplatonism, the aim of which was to reconcile in a higher synthesis Platonic participation and Aristotelian causality. The translation into English of the *Super librum De causis expositio* is thus a significant contribution to the corpus of an "English Thomas," a corpus that has been growing apace in this century with the waning of Christian Latinity.

This first English edition of the *Commentary on the Book of Causes* offers an extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources. It also includes literature on what Thomas himself first identified in the Middle Ages as the subtext of the *De causis*, namely Proclus's *Elements of Theology*. Upon the translation of the *Elements* into Latin by William of Moerbeke, Thomas saw that the anonymous author of what is probably an Arabic work of the ninth century was engaging in the same project as pseudo-Dionysius, namely the translation of Neoplatonic emanationism into monotheistic creationism. Whereas Dionysius translated the Platonic hierarchy of subsisting forms into an order of participated perfections unified in the intensively infinite existence of God, the author of the *De causis* sought to replace the hypostasized perfections of Proclean emanation with a creationist procession from the First Cause of Intellect and Soul, and then the material world. It is the author's

consequent preoccupation with the immanent principles of entity, and with
real composition and real causality at every level of entity, that most influ-
enced Aquinas's subsequent synthesis. If Dionysius provided Thomas with a
hermeneutic and lexicon for applying the metaphysical intuitions of the
Neoplatonists to the creator, then the author of the *De causis* can be credited
for doing the same for creatures. The profound influence of the *De causis* on
Aquinas's metaphysics of creation is well illustrated by Guagliardo's list of
the themes Thomas took over from its author (xxx), not least of which is that
esse is the first of created things and the most proper and universal effect of
God, and that God alone is absolutely infinite and simple, while intelligences
or angels are "form and being," or as Aquinas will say, essence and existence.

Omitting Proclus's prologue on the one and the many, the author of the *De
causis* begins his treatise on first causes with the work's seminal proposition:
"Every primary cause infuses its effect more powerfully than does a univer-
sal second cause" (5). That the author thus bypasses the Platonic antinomy
between unity and being intimates his creationist shift from a concern with
the formal determination of being to a concern with its efficient production,
together with the subordination of the former problem to the latter. The
author's concern with primary causes, from which came the nickname *Liber
de causis* (the proper title is *De bonitate pura*), indicates how he will explicate
the similitudes of formal exemplar causality in terms of relationships of
dynamic dependence and of a total subordination and unification of all
effects in the first Cause.

In both the introduction and notes of his translation, Vincent Guagliardo,
aided by the expertise of Charles Hess and Richard Taylor, draws the read-
er's attention to the hermeneutical strategies of Thomas's exegesis. Thomas
contextualizes the propositions of the *De causis* with comparisons to doctrines
of the Platonists, of Aristotle, and of pseudo-Dionysius, all the while correct-
ing each—sometimes overtly, sometimes only implicitly—and thus forging a
new synthesis that is his own, as Guagliardo rightly acknowledges (xiii).
Particularly useful for understanding Thomas's hermeneutic is the translators'
first note for each Proposition, in which they cite the parallel proposition in
Proclus's *Elements*. Other interesting citations are also provided, for example
from Thomas's other works, or from parallel propositions in Plotinus's
Enneads which, unknown to Thomas, is a second subtext for parts of the *De
causis*. Similarly useful is an appendix that lists Aquinas's citations of the *De
causis* in his other works.

I caution the reader, however, to approach the translators' notes critically.
For example, Richard Taylor's conclusions in an article on the important
Arabic term *anniya* are cited several times in the notes as the author's original
meaning (e.g., xvii n. 29; 6 n. 5). However, Taylor's lexicological corrections
of Thomas's exegesis should be distinguished from the debatable interpreta-
tion of the author's meaning which Taylor offers against Thomas's interpretation.
Taylor grants that Thomas correctly understood that the author of

the *De causis* rejects hylomorphic composition in separate substances and holds that the first Cause is pure being devoid of limiting form, but he maintains that Thomas superimposes his own teaching that form is related to *esse* as potency to act, whereas the author's *anniya* (or *esse*) stands rather as potential substrate for formal determination. However, that *anniya* or *esse* is asserted to be determined by perfections like intelligence and life is not sufficient to identify it as a "potential" substrate, any more than is Thomas's assertion in his own metaphysics that *esse* is contracted or determined according to essence. Thomas's construal of the *esse* of the *De causis* as act rather than as substrate is more consistent, at any rate, with the author's affirmation that the first Cause is most perfect precisely because it is *esse tantum* or *esse infinitum*, and that *ipsum esse* is the most perfect among created things because it is closest to *Esse purum*.

Guagliardo seems at times to treat Thomas's commentary as a species of Christian apologetics, in which Thomas is judging philosophical doctrines in the light of Christian faith. In his introduction, for example, he equates a monotheistic and creationist metaphysics with "a biblical view of the universe" (xii, xiv) and speaks of "issues from the side of Catholic faith" (xiii). Although Thomas does indeed insert into his exegesis epexegetical remarks concerning the consonance of the philosophical doctrines under consideration with Christian faith, the commentary is nonetheless primarily a work of philosophical exegesis and synthesis. Thus, whereas Guagliardo would have us relate the creationist view of the *De causis* to a biblical view, Thomas in his preface relates the author's intent to the aim of the philosophers to arrive at a knowledge of first causes, quoting scripture only once amid a dozen references to philosophers and their works, in a way that comments as much upon the beatitude promised by the gospel verse as upon the happiness sought by philosophers.

In this regard, there is a telling contrast between Aquinas's accent on exegesis in the preface of this mature work and his accent on Christian apologetics in the preface of his youthful commentary on Dionysius's *De divinis nominibus*. In this latter, he highlights Dionysius's use of the Platonic mode of discourse to correct the doctrines of the Platonists according to the faith, and he affirms the consonance of their doctrines about the highest things with the faith. If in his commentary on the *De causis* Thomas seems to invoke Dionysius as a theological authority and Aristotle as a philosophical authority in a similar correction of the *De causis*, a closer reading reveals that Aquinas's epexegetical juxtapositions and paraphrases often constitute an implicit correction of these sources themselves. Thus Aristotle is implicitly "corrected" by the Neoplatonic participation metaphysics of the other sources cited, and Guagliardo himself notes a "correction" by Aquinas of Dionysius's elevation of the good over being in his understanding of the divine essence (xxviii n. 61).

Accordingly, it is useful in understanding this commentary to distinguish a properly metaphysical creationist discourse from both a theological one and a doctrinal one. When the formulation that God is *Qui est* and the maker of all that exists is expounded scientifically in theology as meaning that God is in everything that exists according to his essence, presence, and power, the religious doctrine undergoes an important translation into philosophical terms that are analogically inflected by theology for its own purposes. On the other hand, when Aquinas in his commentary on *Propositio IV* of the *De causis* argues that the 'being' affirmed by the author to be the first and simplest of created things is not a Dionysian *esse participatum communiter in omnibus existentibus*, nor a Platonic *esse separatum*, but rather an immanent *esse participatum in primo gradu entis creati*, he is dealing with philosophical formulations that stand or fall on their philosophical merits. In a word, when a theologian does philosophy, it is still philosophy. In his commentary on the *De causis* Aquinas is performing the offices, not of a preacher of the faith, nor of a master of theology, but of a philosophical commentator, albeit always with the overarching concern to show the convergences and consonance among these different modes of knowing and speaking the same truth.

At any rate, the *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, read with the grain of salt called for by the traducements in any translation of another's words or thought, offers the English reader the benefit of a synoptic view of Aquinas's most mature metaphysics and hermeneutics.

JOHN TOMARCHIO

Boston University
Boston, Massachusetts

Aquinas and Empowerment: Classical Ethics for Ordinary Lives. Edited by G. SIMON HARAK, S.J. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996. Pp. 240. $60.00 (cloth), $23.95 (paper). ISBN 0-87840-604-2 (cloth), 0-87840-614-X (paper).

This collection of essays by five relatively young moral theologians is constructed around a capital idea: let us see how Aquinas might speak to moral matters much discussed in our time, matters such as child abuse, friendship, or the liberation of oppressed peoples. All the contributors argue that Thomas does indeed have something to say that surpasses in precision, truthfulness, and theological insight what one hears otherwise in modern parlance. By and large their arguments are well crafted and compelling. The book accomplishes

what is undoubtedly its most important task, namely, it demonstrates that Aquinas's work represents a key resource, perhaps still the very best one, for considering modern ethical questions.

Yet this last statement should not be taken to imply that Aquinas's insights can be appropriated into modern morality without disturbance; Thomas cannot be mingled in as one more voice in the cacophony of the contemporary discussion. To its great credit, the book resists the temptation to "apply" Aquinas to the top ten moral dilemmas of our time. As one of the contributors, Paul Wadell, points out, Aquinas's vision of the moral life is generally foreign to modernity. Hence, whatever modern moral concern we bring Thomas's thought to bear upon, we must expect a significant change in the way that concern is described, ordered, and understood.

There is some variation from essay to essay in how deeply this point is taken to heart. The book's first three essays are similar in structure: each has two parts, one in which Aquinas's ideas and texts are systematically discussed and another in which they are brought to bear on a contemporary concern. In the first essay, "Getting Egypt out of the People: Aquinas's Contributions to Liberation," Judith Kay begins by discussing Aquinas on habits, virtues, and vices. It is of benefit to the collection that Kay's relatively thin but broad discussion of Aquinas's ethics appears first. Readers cannot be entirely new to Aquinas's ethics and find their way in this book, but those for whom it lies shadowed in dim memory will find Kay's discussion a help in recalling its basic structure and an apt preparation for the treatments of more specific components of Aquinas's ethics in subsequent chapters.

Kay remarks on the contrast between Thomas's nuanced account of habits and the dominant current understanding in our therapeutic culture of habits as synonymous with "addictions." She also means to use Thomas to steer round the impasse of nature versus nurture, either side of which has difficulty explaining how a habit, particularly a bad habit, can be both strongly controlling and also occasionally breakable. As she points out, Aquinas holds that while bad habits induce rigidity of thought, they do not entirely destroy practical reason.

Kay proceeds in the second part of her essay to test what she has learned from Aquinas about bad habits on "internalized oppression," specifically that felt by white working-class men. His notion that through habit we acquire a sort of "second nature" proves particularly useful, for it explains how some come to love the bad habits acquired through behaviors their oppressors once required of them. In her final pages Kay feels obliged to tweak Aquinas for "the misogynist aspects of his own second nature" (35). While she has otherwise used Aquinas helpfully, when she chides Aquinas for "misogyny" or when she accepts without critical comment the label "internalized oppression" (arguably itself a product of the therapeutic culture she repudiates) Kay puts herself in the worrisome position of appearing to seek in Aquinas an

applied solution to a ready-made contemporary problematic, one that may require reformulation in the light of the Thomistic framework.

Diana Fritz Cates's "Taking Women's Experience Seriously: Thomas Aquinas and Andre Lorde on Anger" initially gives rise to a similar worry. Cates feels obliged to begin by defending the use of Aquinas's ethics to the likes of Mary Hunt, who "believes that '[traditional] sources only distract since they are rooted in patriarchal worldviews'" (49). (From this comment, we can assume Hunt will not receive the benefit of Cates's defense, for she will not read past the book's title.) Quickly, though, Cates moves to a sharp and careful exposition of Aquinas on anger, displaying as clearly as any account this reviewer has encountered how the irascible and concupiscible appetites are related. Moreover, she helpfully extends an element in Aquinas's exposition of anger, its desire for vengeance, to illumine an expressed contemporary concern in anger that others take us seriously (61). This provides the bridge Cates needs to Andre Lorde's work, for it is a key part of Lorde's anger as a black woman.

At the end of her essay Cates examines how Lorde's work might illumine or criticize Aquinas's. She discovers in Lorde a readiness to repudiate the categories of moral judgment that give rise to the "excellences" pursued by those who refuse to take her seriously, namely, the "guardians of a racist and sexist America" (66). Since anger arises for Aquinas from a slight to our excellence, Lorde's anger will differ materially from that had by these men since they differ so thoroughly on what the excellences are. All this seems correct—about the "guardians." But then Cates thoroughly surprises us by implying that Aquinas shares a vision of excellence with these men (she mentions wealth and power in particular).

Many will see significant difficulty with equating Aquinas's excellences with those of the racist and sexist guardians of America, including, we may suppose, the authors of the other essays in this collection. A difficulty for Cates is that if Aquinas's excellences are not rightly understood in this way (i.e., in connection with wealth and power) then the critical edge she hopes Lorde will introduce into the discussion of anger is blunted, and the structural integrity of the essay compromised.

At the end of these first two essays the feelings of the reader who is sympathetic to the book's innovative project will be somewhat mixed. Both essays engage parts of Aquinas's work well, drawing from them insights about the moral life that are unavailable in the contemporary discussion. However, when these insights are actually used to illumine a modern question, there is a slippage. What is produced by each essay seems less rich than what is promised, giving rise to a question about the project itself. Is it possible to mix the terms of Aquinas's analysis with those of the contemporary discus-

sion, or is the difference in the assumptions underlying each so deep that any attempt to do so will disappoint?

Simon Harak's "Child Abuse and Embodiment from a Thomistic Perspective" shows that the project can bear excellent fruit. Reversing the pattern employed by Kay and Cates, he begins not with Aquinas but with the contemporary issue of child abuse. He draws on Morton Schatzman's *Soul Murder*, a study of the nineteenth-century German judge Daniel Schreber, whose father attempted to "harden" him through well-planned and systematic abuse. Before eventually going mad, Schreber kept a detailed journal of his feelings as an adult including not merely mental distress but actual sensations related to the physical abuse he sustained as a child. As Schatzman describes him, Schreber's "body embodies his past" (93).

Modern psychology—on Harak's view, yet infused with Cartesianism—is hard pressed to explain how physically abusive childhood experiences such as Schreber's could work into the core of the soul, affecting powers of disposition, intention, and choice. In contrast, Aquinas's stalwart refusal to separate body from soul and his related insight that we are capable of suffering (i.e., of being moved by another) goes to the heart of the matter. Human beings have passions, bodily passions that involve physical change in response to another's movement, be it loving or abusive. Harak uses the Thomistic description of the passion "sorrow" to name the characteristic withdrawal of the victims of abuse, a withdrawal both of individual from community and of soul from body. But as the passions lie at the heart of our capacity to be wounded by abuse, so they are the seat of our healing, for we can receive hope from another, ultimately, for Harak and Aquinas, God—but a God embodied in the world, through Christ, the community that serves him (the church), and the sacraments it administers.

Like Harak, whose essay draws on his own book *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character,* Paul Wadell in his essay extends points made in his book *Friendship and the Moral Life.* After briefly noting some modern impediments to friendship in our world, Wadell moves to a consideration of Aristotelian friendship. The excursion into Aristotle's ethics is necessary, says Wadell, since in many respects Aristotle's account of friendship provides the "foundation on which Aquinas constructs his account of the moral life" (147). However, in Aquinas's Christian vision we ultimately are called to be friends with God, a point Aristotle explicitly denies. Friendship is therefore radically transformed by charity, for its end is in God, and in the kingdom of God, rather than in the society of the privileged virtuous ones or the Athenian *polis.* Not unlike Harak's concluding points, Wadell roots friendship with God firmly in this world: we are essentially bodily creatures who share ordinary lives in communities such as the family, neighborhood, or church, themselves forms of friendship with God.

Wadell's essay is in the end more a suggestion of how Aquinas's moral and theological views might offer an alternative to most modern ways of life than (as are the opening three essays) an application of this vision to some specific modern moral issue. Its form is almost mystical, proceeding less by sequential textual argument, more by suggestion and theological vision. (While Wadell writes about Thomas Aquinas, he writes more like, say, Thomas à Kempis.) In Romanus Cessario's "*Epieikeia* and the Accomplishment of the Just" we encounter a third style entirely. As Harak says in the introduction, Cessario's contribution "provides our volume with a satisfyingly robust academic conclusion" (xiv). Cessario works hardest of all the contributors to explore a Thomistic concept within its historical context as he traces *epieikeia* from Aristotle to Aquinas through Albert. For Aristotle, *epieikeia* signified the virtuous capacity to judge rightly and act justly when the written law directs in a particular case that something unjust be done. The concept proved useful to Aquinas, whose analysis of human acts otherwise had placed them in the realm of the concrete, thereby establishing their necessary particularity and infinite diversity. *Epieikeia* takes on, then, an important positive role, filling the place between legal justice and the just act that the just (virtuous) person sees fit to do in those exceptional cases where the written law, because of its necessary universality, fails rightly to direct.

Cessario is more reticent than the other contributors to sketch out the implications of his reading of Aquinas, regrettably, since there appear to be so many important ones. At the least, the essay navigates the confusing ground between justice understood (as it commonly is) as an objectively specifiable state of affairs and justice as a virtue of character. The attention to *epieikeia* suggests a tilt in the latter direction, although Cessario's analysis makes plain that *epieikeia* has a role alongside legal justice rather than in opposition to it. Cessario's essay, while the most expertly argued and (Harak is right) the most scholarly, remains the most opaque, although perhaps also the most pregnant for further development.

This is not to say the other essays are closed to further development. In fact, if one characterization fits the entire collection it is that it opens a wide range of new possibilities for a moral theology that seeks to harvest from the richness of Aquinas's work moral and theological insights that can help revise and perhaps even resolve some of our most perplexing modern moral questions. It is an important and worthwhile contribution.

CHARLES PINCHES

University of Scranton
   Scranton, Pennsylvania

Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge. By LINDA ZAGZEBSKI. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xvi + 365. $64.95 (cloth), $19.95 (paper). ISBN 0-521-57060-3 (cloth), 0-521-57826-4 (paper).

The standard division in contemporary epistemology pits internalism against externalism. The former demands that individuals have cognitive access to the justifying conditions of their belief and that the belief be formed in accord with appropriate rules. The latter eschews the need for internal access but requires that a belief be formed by a process, reliably aimed at the production of truth. With its emphasis upon epistemic rights and duties, internalism is similar to deontology in ethics; in its emphasis on the production and maximization of true beliefs, externalism resembles consequentialism (for a remarkably lucid classification and exposition of the welter of positions in contemporary epistemology, see Alvin Plantinga's *Warrant: The Current Debate* [Oxford, 1993]). Given the recent revival of virtue ethics, it was perhaps only a matter of time before virtue epistemology would emerge as an alternative to deontological and consequentialist epistemology. Linda Zagzebski's *Virtues of the Mind* is the first extensive description of what that alternative might look like.

Zagzebski defines a virtue as "a deep and enduring acquired excellence of a person, involving a characteristic motivation to produce a certain desired end and reliable success in bringing about that end" (137). The definition includes both externalist and internalist elements. The externalist emphasis on beliefs being formed through a reliable process is part of a virtue account of knowledge. Externalists fail, however, to give "due regard to the place of motives and governing virtues" in knowledge. In their exclusion of internal elements, they risk conflating understanding with a superficial grasp. The virtue approach, by contrast, identifies the pinnacle of knowledge with an ability to give a non-rule-governed account of reality. Unlike the rigorous internalism of the Enlightenment, a virtue approach can flexibly adopt different degrees of rigor. It also captures the many motives operative in our cognitive activity and avoids reducing all justifiable motives to that of duty.

In her criticisms of the dominant contemporary approaches to epistemology, Zagzebski goes so far as to put into question the very depiction of knowledge as true belief. Late in the book, she substitutes the notion of "cognitive contact with reality" for that of true belief, because the former is holistic and refers to one's "entire doxastic structure" not just to isolated propositions (316). On the true belief model, intellectual progress is the accumulation of more true propositions. This atomistic approach omits any consideration of the integration of knowledge or the role of our habitual cognitive dispositions. While knowing fewer individual propositions, one's "doxastic structure"

could be at a "higher level" because of the sorts of things one knows and the way one holds the knowledge. A final difficulty with contemporary episte-mology is its depiction of the influence of desire on reason as suspect, even irrational. But this ignores the myriad ways in which our dispositions and inclinations impede or assist our intellectual development. A virtue approach to epistemology is thus much richer and more capacious than the existing models.

Zagzebski considers two possible bases for her approach to the virtues: one grounded in a notion of happiness, the other in the self-evident motives at the root of particular virtues. Although she never completely rejects the former possibility, admits that it has some advantages over a motive-based view, and even at times seems to prefer it, she avoids a eudaimonistic basis because of the desuetude into which teleology has fallen. To ground the virtues in motives, she appeals directly to "experience," to the value of the motives that "shines forth" in human actions (83). As she is aware, the approach is not without difficulties of its own. Many of our contemporaries are indeed suspicious of teleology, but are not an equal number suspicious of intuitionism? In her discussion of why knowledge is valuable, for example, Zagzebski is reduced to saying that it "just is," that we simply acknowledge its value in many ways (336). Since no appeal is being made to a unifying conception of the good life, the goodness of each virtue must be seen on its own terms. This raises the question of how we are to see the virtues as complementary.

The deeper problem here is that Zagzebski occasionally seems to conflate eudaimonism with consequentialism. At one point, she states that "eudaimonia does not depend on the way we get there," a claim that would be unintelligible to Aristotle or Aquinas (272). In her own description of virtue, moreover, she seems to be combining a Kantian emphasis on motives with a consequentialist accent on results. She glosses Aquinas's statement that virtue makes the agent's "work good" as referring to states of affairs. But is this not to conflate the moral virtues with the virtue of *techne?* The confusion, however, may not be all that deep, as the discussion of the differences between virtues and skills is right on the mark (106-16).

The need to discern the value of individual virtues separately would seem to generate the sort of "fragmentation of value" that Zagzebski wishes to avoid (222). She turns to *phronesis*, which she calls a higher-level virtue, to perform functions of mediation with respect to the various virtues. But this only serves to shift the problem onto prudence. In light of what does prudence deliberate and mediate? In Aristotle and Aquinas, it is some unified conception of the good life. Prudence itself, however, cannot provide this conception; it is pro-vided, rather, by a theoretical account of human nature and the goods appro-priate to it. There is a complicated relationship between theory and practice. We need not view theory as static, nor the theorist as deducing relevant prac-tical conclusions from an abstract theory. (For a beginning statement on this,

see Stephen Salkever's *Finding the Mean: Theory and Practice in Aristotelian Political Philosophy* [Princeton, 1990].) Why not conceive of the speculative virtues as higher-level virtues, situated above even prudence? In the order of ethics, these virtues, while not ignoring particulars, locate them within an overarching vision of the good life.

Zagzebski is, nonetheless, right to note that there are confusions and gaps in the ancients. They depict the theoretical virtues as dealing only with universal and eternal matters and fail to treat thematically the virtues relevant to the order of the discovery of knowledge or to the intellectual apprehension of the contingent (214, 219). The practice of ancient philosophy may be more helpful here than its theoretical reflection on the intellectual virtues. Both Plato's dialogues and Aristotle's treatises focus on the discovery of knowledge. Aristotle, moreover, insists in both the *Posterior Analytics* and the *Physics* that the contingent is knowable, since there is order and necessity even in contingent matters.

Zagzebski's fundamental objection to Aristotle and Aquinas concerns the division of the soul into rational and irrational parts, an artificial division that engenders a disastrous bifurcation of the intellectual and the moral. Yet it is not clear how strictly they mean us to take this division. The most important portion of the non-rational, in which the passions are located, is not cut off from reason in a Kantian fashion, but is capable of participating in reason. There do, moreover, seem to be relevant distinctions here. Some virtues, such as courage and temperance, have to do more directly with the passions and play a more instrumental role in the good life. Aquinas reads the *Ethics* as a kind of ascent from these virtues to others, like justice (which resides in the will) and prudence (which is in the intellect), that are more constitutive of the good life. Furthermore, the division of the soul does not imply that the passions are irrelevant to the life of the mind. Indeed, Aquinas would concur with Zagzebski's assertions that moral appraisal applies to the "use of the passion for truth" and that the moral and the intellectual are "connected in their operation" (146, 158). Of course, he would not go so far as to say that prudence and the moral virtues are somehow constitutive of the content of the speculative virtues (217). More important, the ancients subsume what Zagzebski calls the "more rarefied and more valuable" purely theoretical operations of the mind (166 n. 41) under the contemplative life. Surely that to which one devotes one's entire life, its unifying and culminating good, could not be a matter of indifference. The ancients would agree with the passage Zagzebski quotes from Peirce: "Truth . . . is nothing but a phase of the *summum bonum* which forms the subject of pure Ethics" (338). Virtue ethics has led to the recovery of *phronesis*; what remains to be recovered is the connection between reason itself and the good.

I have taken issue with certain parts, especially those that bear directly upon Aquinas, of *Virtues of the Mind*. In this, I have been somewhat unfair, as the author does not describe her project as Aristotelian or Thomistic.

Indeed, I have omitted many of the issues that are crucial to her own attempt
to contribute to contemporary debates. I have not said a word, for example,
about her very interesting resolution of the vexing Gettier problems. I should
now add that her work suggests more promising avenues of exploration for
Thomists than some work in contemporary epistemology that purports to be
Thomistic (see, for example, Scott Macdonald's piece on Aquinas's "Theory
of Knowledge," in the *Cambridge Companion to Aquinas* [Cambridge, 1993],
160-95). Zagzebski's book brims with acute observations and is written in
such a way that even those not trained in analytic philosophy will find it an
enjoyable read. Her focus on the virtues leads her to avoid a style of philosophy
that endlessly generates counterexamples and engages in barren possible-
worlds speculation. Zagzebski brings the resources of premodern philosophy
to bear on contemporary issues and opens up a line of inquiry that could
prove as fruitful for epistemology as it already has for ethics. Throughout the
book, she notes that this is a large project and invites the assistance of
others. It is an invitation Thomists would do well to accept.

THOMAS S. HIBBS

Boston College
  Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts

Moral Action and Christian Ethics. By JEAN PORTER. Cambridge: Cambridge
    University Press, 1995. Pp. 235. $54.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-521-44329-6.

In this latest work, Porter argues that Aquinas's account of the virtues sup-
plies a more adequate model of moral reasoning than many contemporary
approaches, in that it avoids both the excessive rigors of a Kantian morality,
which seeks an apodictic certainty in moral rules, and a thorough moral
relativism. With this in mind she takes up the challenge of this series on
"New Studies in Christian Ethics," of which this book is the fifth: "to demon-
strate that Christian ethics can make a distinctive contribution to [the
contemporary] debate" (preface).

Taking her cue from Friedrich Waismann's work concerning the inherent
ambiguity of empirical concepts, Porter argues that a similar ambiguity lies
at the heart of moral reasoning. This means that Kantian-influenced systems,
that is, those which understand moral rules as apodictically determining the
uniquely correct answer to any moral question (9), are bound to fail. They fail
principally because "morally significant kinds of actions are indeterminate,
in the sense that we can never eliminate the possibility that a real doubt may
arise with respect to the scope of their application" (22).

Do we need an entire chapter (and then some) defending what should be known by any first-year student of Aristotle, namely, that we cannot expect more certainty than the discipline allows? It seems so; for while it is generally agreed that ethics does not yield necessary conclusions, the reason why is not always articulated. The inability of ethics to provide any apodictic certainty for all times and places comes from the fact that "there is no way that we can describe a particular (actual or contemplated) action so exhaustively that we can say that we have taken account of all the morally relevant details, and, therefore, have certainly arrived at the correct description of this action from the moral point of view" (39). This inability to capture specific actions, or even kinds of actions (ibid.), means that while it may be agreed in the broadest sense that "murder is wrong," there are a number of vital cases in which it is an open question for many as to whether or not a particular act (abortion or euthanasia, for example) constitutes an instance of murder. It is not usually, in other words, the major premise (murder is wrong) that is the problem; rather it is the truth of the minor premise (abortion is murder), or more specifically the un/clarity of the middle term (murder), that is the heart of the matter. It is difficult, Porter claims, to get a consistently sufficient description of "murder" such that one can claim with apodictic certainty that abortion is always wrong.

In chapter 2, she argues that this "open texture" of moral analysis does not suggest a moral relativism. We need not move from a univocal notion of moral concepts to an equivocal one. Rather, our moral concepts function analogically and are focused in the broader notions of non-maleficence and the respect for persons. Despite the ability of such concepts to illuminate moral situations, they do not themselves provide apodictic guides for action in every conceivable instance. As general concepts, they do not in themselves sufficiently "illuminate" one's practical reasoning. There remains the additional task of properly grasping the particulars of the situation.

Porter is willing to recognize that despite the fluid character of these guiding notions, there can be nonetheless real instances of a genuine failure in moral reasoning due to moral corruption (83). But her account here seems unusually weak. One criterion for distinguishing between one who honestly disagrees about the sufficient range of a moral concept and one who fails to embrace the truth due to malice is that the former "is capable of offering reasons that are publicly acceptable, because they are informed by some aspects of the moral notions that are shared by all parties to the debate. . . . [They] will exhibit some awareness of the importance and value of other persons, some sense of their sufferings and some readiness to share their joys" (83). Would such a criterion be sufficient for unmasking wickedness if one were in, for example, "a culture of death"? Classical Thomists, fortified by *Veritatis splendor*, argue that the criterion for assessing wicked proposals lies not in the ability of the proponent to display sincerity, but in the ability to discern the act's relationship to the true nature of the person. Later in the book, how-

ever, Porter will not endorse such "nature" talk and will instead advance a "socially constructed self" (179). Here is the foundation for her emphasis on employing criteria that are "publicly acceptable."

In chapter 3 Porter takes up Aquinas directly and argues that his own approach supports a kind of "middle" position between relativism and apodictic certainty. Practical reasoning, dealing in particulars, cannot move deductively from universal principles to an immediate program of action in every instance. The virtues are precisely those qualities of character that facilitate the person's ability to grasp all of the morally relevant details of the particular situation. Moral reasoning, from this vantage point, is not simply a matter of applying general rules with mechanical regularity, nor does it imply an ad hoc, arbitrary application of norms.

In chapter 4 Porter takes up the dialectical character of the virtues, noting especially how prudence works in tandem with the other moral virtues. The interconnection of the virtues sets up a process that is "self-corrective and expansive," providing a form of life that is at once coherent and rational (165). This self-corrective process is not guided by any notion of a normative human nature, however. As indicated earlier, Porter seeks to reformulate the notion of the virtuous person, drawing from more contemporary notions of the human person as a social construct (179). This is the Achilles' heel in her overall approach, for she provides no substantive criteria for discerning when these "socially constructed" accounts of action mask intrinsically disordered acts. History more than amply demonstrates the need to make this distinction.

There is much that is illuminating in her analysis, especially her determination in defending the on-going, open-textured character of practical reasoning. Still, some Thomists will rightly question the selective treatment of her approach. Many would question whether Thomas's doctrine of ensoulment marks an authentic "contribution" to the contemporary conversation of abortion, as Porter suggests in her defense of abortion (122), or whether it is one of those instances of an honest mistake in grasping fully the analogical depth of "human." In light of her remarks about the limitations of Thomas's analysis concerning his realistic metaphysics, chastity, the will, and social awareness, Porter's unwillingness to claim that Thomas may be mistaken on this point, honestly or otherwise, is enough to raise questions about this "open-textured" approach. A socially constructed self is not enough to keep the open-ended character of moral reasoning from simply unraveling. True enough, St. Thomas is not a Kantian; however, in defending this thesis, I think many will claim that Porter has dismissed much that is central to an authentic account of Thomistic moral reasoning.

<div align="right">CHRISTOPHER J. THOMPSON</div>

University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota

Religion and Revelation. By KEITH WARD. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994.
  Pp. 350. $65.00 (cloth), $19.95 (paper). ISBN 0-19-826466-6 (cloth),
  0-19-826375-9 (paper).

Keith Ward's *Religion and Revelation* is an uneven book. As a rule, it is
good when it puts forward views that are in line with traditional Christianity,
and bad when it sides with contemporary theological liberalism. No doubt
this is connected with the dominant outlook among academic theologians at
the present; since traditional Christian views are out of favor, intelligence and
rigor are needed in order to gain a hearing for them, but objections to such
views can be facile and superficial without running much risk of criticism.

Ward begins by addressing the question of method in theology, and
espouses what he calls comparative theology. He denies that the starting
point for theology can be a particular religious tradition; the existence of
competing claims to religious truth means that theologians must begin by
assessing these claims. From this denial he moves to the position that all the
religious traditions of the world should be considered to provide revelation of
some sort, and should be treated as data for the theologian. This move is
never properly justified. He argues for it on the grounds that "it is implausible
that the Real inspires prophets in only one tradition, and that it does so in a
wholly inerrant manner" (318). Ward's reason for asserting this implausibility
is that "exactly the same sorts of reasons can be, and are, given, albeit by dif-
ferent persons, for preferring incompatible revelations" (ibid.). But the rea-
sons given by Christians, Muslims, Hindus, etc. for believing their respective
traditions are not "exactly the same"; they differ notably. And even if this
alleged implausibility were to be demonstrated, it would not establish Ward's
conclusion. There could be a fallible tradition that is one of several inspired
traditions, but that nevertheless contains all the truths that the other tradi-
tions contain, and some truths that they don't contain. This tradition would
suffice as the subject for the study of revelation; and a Christian who main-
tains that Christ is the fullness of revelation would want to maintain that
Christianity is sufficient in this way.

Ward next discusses revelation. "Revelation in the full theistic sense
occurs when God directly intends someone to know something beyond nor-
mal human cognitive capacity, and brings it about that they do know it, and
they know that God has so intentionally caused it" (16). The content of reve-
lation is "the nature of an object of supreme value, of a final goal for human
life, and of the way to achieve this goal" (30). It is not clear how revelation
takes place on Ward's view, since Ward denies that God communicates propo-
sitions to mankind. Some of his arguments for this denial are perhaps not
meant entirely seriously, like his objection that the speeches that are ascribed
to God in the Pentateuch would have been too long for Moses to remember,
and that "when one turns to the New Testament, the Greek text is not in a

high literary style, such as one might expect God to use" (!) (210). More serious are his arguments that clear contradictions can be found in the biblical text (212), and that if revelation is thought of as providing well-evidenced information, then God has not done all he should have done to reveal truths (275). However, in order to have weight these arguments need to be backed up by a careful consideration of biblical hermeneutics and of God's duties with respect to humanity, which Ward does not provide.

Ward then proceeds to the examination of world religious traditions that his method demands. His assumption that they all provide revelation leads to certain distortions. His definition of religion as "concerned with authoritative knowledge of a suprasensory realm in its relation to human good or harm" (54) is inaccurate; many people have worshipped the heavenly bodies, which are not suprasensory. Many "primal religions," like pagan Roman religion, are not concerned with the final goal for human life, but only with securing from the gods ordinary human goods like life and health; they thus do not have the content that Ward demands from revelation. His account of Judaism does not do justice to its fundamental idea, which is that there is one God who is creator of all, who alone is divine and to whom alone worship is due, and that worship of anything else is evil and estranges us from God. Ward's description of the evil of idolatry fails to mention that the Jews rejected idolatry and described it as hateful, vile, a whoredom and an abomination, because it gave to creatures the worship due to God. This tenet of Judaism (and Christianity and Islam) poses a difficulty for Ward's view that revelation is to be found in all religions. If these monotheistic religions are revealed, this fundamental tenet of theirs must be true. But if it is true, the numerous religions that stand condemned by it are whoredoms and abominations, which cannot be in any way divinely revealed.

Ward faces up bravely to the difficulty of saying that both Christianity and explicitly atheistic forms of Buddhism are divinely revealed, although he does not surmount it. The implications that emerge from his method and his survey of world religions are not the ones he intends. He does not identify any valuable teaching that could not be arrived at by unaided human capacities and that is common to all world religions. This fact, together with the bewildering variety of human religions, should lead the "comparative theologian" to conclude that God has not revealed himself at all.

The revelation given in Christianity is accepted by Ward as being the fullest that God has given. He rightly insists that different religions hold incompatible views on important questions, and that it is impossible for them all to be right. He acutely and persuasively criticizes John Hick's form of pluralism (311-13). However, his form of Christianity leaves out the divinity of Christ. He posits a human subject of action and experience in Jesus, a subject that is not identical with the Divine Word (266). He identifies Jesus Christ with this human subject, and presents Christ as a man who somehow uniquely manifests God, not as a man who is identical with the Second

Person of the Trinity. His arguments for refusing to identify Christ and the Word are thin.

Lastly, Ward discusses the implications for religion of changes in thought since the Enlightenment. He makes a number of questionable generalizations about the implications of science for Christianity (e.g., "in a universe which is between ten and twenty thousand million light-years wide, human beings seem to shrink in virtual insignificance in the cosmic scheme of things" [285]), but gives a good defense of the reasonableness of believing on the basis of authority.

The shortcomings of *Religion and Revelation* do not result from the actual positions that Ward espouses. A strong case can be made for these positions, but when Ward agrees with the dominant liberal outlook he does not seem to feel a need to make such a case; it is more as if he simply goes with the flow.

JOHN LAMONT

Queen's College
   Oxford, England

Moral Truth and Moral Tradition: Essays in Honour of Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe. Edited by LUKE GORMALLY. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1994. Pp. ix + 246. $45.00 (cloth).

How does one put together a traditional festschrift that honors the life's work of not just one philosopher, but of two, especially when that cumulative life's work courses throughout a bevy of philosophical disciplines common in the Anglo-American philosophical tradition? This is the question that faced Luke Gormally as he planned a volume of studies to honor the philosophers Peter Geach and Elizabeth Anscombe, both important figures in English-speaking philosophy in the second half of this century. The answer to the question was to produce a volume of studies written by "Catholic philosophers known to value Peter and Elizabeth's work" (4). But the proposed principle of unity goes beyond appreciation by the various authors of Geach's and Anscombe's work, for Geach and Anscombe have been united together in fifty years of Catholic matrimony, a half century that has profoundly affected these two rigorous thinkers. Thus this volume of studies is an intellectual celebration of the couple's fifty-year marriage, and centers upon issues pertaining to ethics—largely because of the needs of the publisher to have some general category into which to place the book, even though ethical matters have not been main focus of either Geach's or Anscombe's work. But then, when the two have written on ethics, their contributions have been significant and lasting;

one thinks of Geach's *The Virtues* (Cambridge, 1977); Anscombe's seminal article "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1-19; and her *Intention* (Oxford, 1957). The title of this book, *Moral Truth and Moral Tradition*, therefore serves as the widest possible embrace for the thirteen articles that comprise it.

The editor has tried to provide some thematic unity among the contributions, clustering the thirteen papers into four categories: (1) Tradition and Truth; (2) Human Fulfillment, Divine Love, and Virtue; (3) Responsibility and Intention; and (4) Sex, Marriage, and Children. This, again, is a largely successful attempt to bring some order to the chaos that usually obtains in a festschrift, and at least has the merit of helping individuals and university libraries to categorize and catalogue the volume's contents for database searches, etc. But it is to be expected that, as also obtains in festschriften, the authors' contributions have no internal connection to one another, such that the ordering remains always *ab extra*. The volume commences with a graceful foreword by Cahal B. Daly, cardinal archbishop of Armagh, who learned from both Geach and Anscombe at philosophical retreats in the 1950s. His perspective is that of a once-teacher of philosophy, now a pastor of the Church, indebted to these two philosophers not only for their treatment of him as a young philosopher, but also for the contribution they have made to showing that "Catholic orthodoxy is philosophically respectable, as well as being a foundational element of integral European humanism" (ix). Luke Gormally's introduction to the volume sketches the careers of both Geach and Anscombe, the tenor of their interests, as well as his reasons for pursuing a volume of studies in their honor—partly out of "filial affection" (5), since he is married to Mary Geach, daughter of the honorees, and the only one of their seven children to pursue philosophy as a profession. It is difficult to see Gormally as a heavy-handed editor, since the volume does not have a uniformity of style; for example, some articles are chock-full of footnotes, others have few. But a constant is that all the contributions are detailed philosophical considerations of the topic at hand, not principally acts of philosophical exegesis. For this reason alone the volume deserves consideration, for its readers will be engaged by the reasoning that takes place in the many articles, and emerge the better for the philosophical conversation.

A list of the volume's contributors is found near the end of the volume (241-43), which provides institutional affiliations of the authors, their best-known writings, and works in press. In my view a short account of each author's contribution, such as I shall provide below, would have been a courtesy to the potential reader of the book, for the content of anthologies such as this is often not apparent. The book therefore runs the risk of having many of its essays lie unread, unless perhaps its title, the titles of the contributions, or name-recognition of its contributors is enough to attract a reader to thumb through its pages. An all-too-short index follows (245-46), containing names of authors or chief philosophical figures only, and no subjects or key philo-

sophical terms—a venial state of affairs, perhaps, given the nature of the volume, but inclusion of the latter might have been of some genuine scholarly use to the reader.

Readers of this journal may well recognize all the contributors, but they will surely know Alasdair MacIntyre (whose contribution fittingly leads off the volume), Benedict Ashley, Brian Davies, Joseph Boyle, and John Finnis. MacIntyre ("Moral Relativism, Truth, and Justification") addresses issues that readers of his work have long been interested in: how does one fashion a response to a claim of moral relativism, particularly when, say, two competing moral traditions have fundamentally different starting points? Using the implied appeal to truth and rational justification embedded in one moral tradition's assertion of its supremacy, MacIntyre investigates—using some of Geach's writings—what is necessary in order for a moral tradition to vindicate itself against challenges from outside itself, seeing in an adequate account of truth the seeds of a rational solution to fundamental disagreement.

Fernando Inciarte ("Discovery and Verification of Practical Truth") returns to the age-old aporia of practical truth. How is it possible to have truth in practical matters, which is something we all desire, but to which human moral action seems refractory? The essay uses the dialectic between Platonic and Aristotelian notions of truth to explore the issue. Andrzej Poltawski ("The Epistemological Locus of Moral Values") uses the work of Karol Wojtyla and seeks to find an appropriate intellectual category into which to place what phenomenological moralists call 'values,' and to relate that understanding to the whole of human moral becoming, seen within the Christian context.

Benedict Ashley ("What is the End of the Human Person? The Vision of God and Integral Human Fulfillment") addresses the claim of Germain Grisez and others that the human good is a collection of incommensurable goods, and that the traditional account of human happiness—in particular that of St. Thomas—which locates human happiness in the vision of God, leads to a kind of dualism. Ashley finds Grisez's account of integral human fulfillment—which he dubs 'polyteleologism'—to be unsatisfactory, assesses how it is possible to have an ethics detached from anthropology, and argues that a superordinating good of intellectual fulfillment in humans (i.e., the vision of God) can still serve as a unifying principle of order for the other distinct goods that comprise fulfillment in this life.

Brian Davies ("How is God Love?") investigates the contention that God is Love, either because he is "in love" with his creatures (an emotivist way of looking at God), or because his being morally good entails that he love his creatures (a kind of obligationist view). Davies finds shortcomings in each of these assertions, but still holds that the proposition "God is Love" is intelligible, even apart from scriptural authority; he uses Aquinas's account of God's knowledge and will, and the formality under which God finds creating willable (that it manifest his goodness). But Davies closes suggesting that a

philosophical approach to God's loving does not represent the fullness of his loving as found in the sacred scriptures.

Christopher Martin ("Virtues, Motivation, and the End of Life") uses Anscombe's "Modern Moral Philosophy" and Geach's *The Virtues* to consider a neo-Aristotelian, virtue-based moral system as an alternative to the "orthodoxy" of English-speaking consequentialism and a commitment to the fact/value dichotomy, a dichotomy which might have a grain of truth, even in an Aristotelian account. Robert Spaemann ("Christian Ethics of Responsibility") examines 'responsibility' as a moral concept in contemporary philosophy (Max Weber), its relationship to Christian accounts of responsibility, and the difficulties implied in a full-blown 'ethics of responsibility.'

Joseph Boyle ("The Personal Responsibility Required for Mortal Sin") picks up some themes from Anscombe's 1990 McGivney lectures, and provides a philosophical account of the voluntariness necessary in order that a morally serious act (i.e., grave matter) meet the traditional requirement of "full advertence and deliberation"—though mortal sin is, of course, a theological item, the action theory account of deliberation and choice it presupposes is not. Drawing on some recent magisterial documents that allow for the possibility that some acts concerning grave matter may not have full deliberation (e.g., the CDF's "Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics" regarding masturbation), Boyle looks to St. Thomas for some clarification before coming to his own, slightly different position.

John Finnis ("On Conditional Intentions and Preparatory Intentions") deals philosophically with the legal conundrum of a 'conditional intention,' which Britain's Court of Appeal in 1979 denounced as "pseudo-philosophical." Is it philosophically foolish to say that a thief has the intention to steal on the condition that he discover something worth stealing? Finnis deals with the legal material that produced this muddle, and sees in St. Thomas's account of consensus some possible clarification on this topic.

Mary Geach ("Marriage: Arguing to a First Principle in Sexual Ethics") works to provide a philosophical account of the exclusiveness that seems to us to follow immediately upon the relationship between the sexes. Hers is not an argument from first principles, but rather an assessment of the facts which for her constitutes the principle upon which sexual morality is based. James McEvoy ("Friendship with Marriage: A Philosophical Essay") uses Aristotle, Augustine, Grosseteste, and Aquinas to explore the modes of friendship within marriage, preparing the reader for the beautiful passages in *Gaudium et spes* (49) that address the "intimate community of marriage." Anselm Winfried Muller ("Has Moral Education a Rational Basis?") addresses, against the backdrop of having watched Anscombe and Geach raise their children, the imperative to provide moral education to children. Can we be certain of the things we teach to our children? Is the endeavor of parents to influence their children in moral matters based upon good reasons? The essay works to a

general solution to these questions. And closing the volume, David Braine ("The Human and the Inhuman in Medicine: Review of Issues Concerning Reproductive Technology") considers the many possible technologies that can be used in overcoming infertility, and appraises their morality from a perspective that links intimately the 'personal' in humans with the 'animal' in humans.

To conclude, this volume is a fitting tribute to the fruitfulness of a half-century of marriage between two respected philosophers. Each of the articles is stimulating and academically useful in its own right, and the volume as a whole can be read by ethicists in the full expectation that their own ethical thinking will be challenged and sharpened by it.

MARK JOHNSON

Marquette University
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

A TEXTUAL CORRECTION

Readers of *De Potentia* in the 1953 Marietti edition or in the 1980 Frommann-Holzboog edition must have been highly perplexed by a certain mistake in question 7 ("De divinae essentiae simplicitate"), article 1 ("Utrum Deus sit simplex"), response to objection 7.

operatio Dei potest considerari vel ex parte operantis vel ex parte operati. Si ex parte operantis, sic in Deo non est nisi una operatio, quae est sua essentia; non enim agit res per actionem aliquam quae sit media inter Deum et suum velle, quae sunt ipsius esse. Si vero ex parte operati, sic sunt diversae operationes, ipsum factum, sed per suum intelligere et diversi effectu divinae operationis. Hoc autem compositionem in ipso non inducit.

No one can pretend to understand this as it is written. One whole line needs to be rearranged and then the paragraph makes sense and becomes worthy of its place in this masterpiece. It should read:

... non enim agit res per actionem aliquam quae sit media inter Deum et ipsum factum sed per suum intelligere et suum velle, quae sunt ipsius esse. Si vero ex parte operati, sic sunt diversae operationes et diversi effectus divinae operationis. Hoc autem compositionem in ipso non inducit.

VINCENT J. DONDELINGER

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

The garbled version of the seventh response can be traced to the 1949 Marietti edition. It was continued in the 1953 edition, cited in the problem. However, the correct version, as given by Mr. Dondelinger, appears in the 1913 and 1931 Marietti editions. The correct version is also in the Parma edition (1852-73), the

Vives edition (1871-72), and that of Mandonnet, *Quaestiones disputatae,* vol. 2 (Paris, 1925). Thus the correct version is the reading of the manuscript tradition. The text of the Leonine edition of the *De Potentia* has been completed but is still unpublished.

J. F. HINNEBUSCH, O.P.

Leonine Commission
Washington, D.C.