

STUDY MATERIALS: Introduction to Moral Philosophy

Ralph McInerny, Ph.D.

Terms of Use. Catholic Thinkers media is copyrighted material. However, we have made it free with the expectation that it will be shared and used by many. If you share what you see here, please acknowledge your source, and send people our way to find more. You or your organization may not benefit financially from use of our media without written consent. Please [continue reading](#) for full terms of use, and contact us with questions or requests: info@catholicthinkers.org

Contents

- [Introduction](#)
- 1. [Ethics and the Catholic Philosopher](#)
- 2. [Speculative and Practical](#)
- 3. [Degrees of Practical Knowledge](#)
- 4. [Ultimate End](#)
- 5. [Aristotle: The Function Argument](#)
- 6. [The Definition of Virtue](#)
- 7. [The Analogy of Virtue](#)
- 8. [On Virtues in General](#)
- 9. [Cardinal Virtues](#)
- 10. [The Structure of the Human Act](#)
- 11. [Natural Law](#)
- 12. [Weakness of Will](#)
- 13. [Conscience](#)
- 14. [Veritatis Splendor](#)
- 15. [Evangelium Vitae](#)
- 16. [Concluding](#)

Introduction

Prayer of Saint Thomas Aquinas before Reading and Study

*Grant me grace, O merciful God, to desire ardently all that is pleasing to thee,
to examine it prudently,
to acknowledge it truthfully,
and to accomplish it perfectly
for the praise and glory of thy name. Amen*

The eight videos you have watched, are watching, will watch, provide a skeleton of the moral philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas. This is quite close to that of Aristotle so the course puts you in possession of one of the main traditions of moral philosophy. But it is not the history of the discipline that is our interest here; rather we are setting forth as true a way of understanding and appraising ourselves as moral agents that you can assess by appeal to what you already know as well as to your expanding knowledge of the discipline.

Now you have decided to earn credit for this course. Obviously this requires much more of you than following the presentation of the taped lectures. In what follows, in sixteen steps, you are going to have to fulfill the requirements for three credits of graduate work in philosophy. More sophisticated arguments, further reading, and writing will be demanded of you.

The chief books for this course are:

Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings, Penguin Classic, 1998.

Thomas Aquinas: Disputed Questions on Virtue, translation and preface by Ralph McInerney, South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 1998. Students can get this book from Saint Augustine's Press: staugustine.net

Ethica Thomistica, Ralph McInerney, Catholic University of America Press, 1997.

John Paul II, *The Splendor of Truth*. St. Paul Books and Media, 1993.

John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, St. Paul Books and Media, 1995.

Each of the sixteen lessons that follow will allude to other titles and you will find as well a select bibliography to expand your knowledge beyond the specific demands of this course.

- *Ralph McInerney*

Lesson 1: Ethics and the Catholic Philosopher

This is an introduction to moral philosophy on the graduate level. There are a number of ways in which such a course might be taught.

* A series of real or fictional scenarios which pose a problem as to how one ought to act could be developed and discussed, with the principles of moral appraisal arising out of the analysis of them. This method has the merit of keeping moral philosophy closely tied to its ostensible purpose, namely, to be of help to us in the solving of moral problems. Its drawback is that we can get so caught up in the details of a problem that such theory as emerges may seem random and ad hoc.

* Several of the most important moral philosophers could be studied. For example, Plato, Aristotle, Abelard, Kant, Mill. The advantage of this is that it provides an opportunity to reflect on texts of the best of the best. The disadvantage might be that we end up with merely a variety of theories and the specifically philosophical question -- which if any of these men is a good guide in moral matters? Which of the positions is true? -- is postponed. We have knowledge about, but not knowledge of, moral philosophy.

* Or we might consider types of theory: Utilitarianism, Deontological Ethics, Pragmatism. The advantage is that we would be spending time on the principal rivals for dominance in modern society, but the disadvantage is much the same as with a course based on major figures. We would know how a Utilitarian would handle a problem and how a Deontologist would but leave unanswered the question as to which if either of these methods is true or adequate.

* Finally, moral philosophy might be taught from out of a particular tradition which the teacher holds and wishes to persuade his students to adopt. Thus, Kantian ethics might be taught not simply in order to get it right about what Kant taught, but also as the best way of handling moral problems. Such a course has the best chance, perhaps, of giving the student an opportunity to do moral philosophy, to engage in it, and not simply learn about it.

This course is an instance of this last method.

This is a course in Thomistic ethics.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) is the first among Catholic thinkers, both theologians and philosophers. For centuries the Church has recommended him to Catholics as their master in philosophy, arguing that following his lead will bring us more swiftly and surely to the goal of philosophizing, namely, the truth. In recent times, this recommendation

has been repeated with vigor. Leo XIII in 1879 issued the encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (often translated as *On Christian Philosophy*) and the modern revival of Thomism can be dated from that moment.

It will of course seem odd that a medieval friar is proposed as a guide to aspiring philosophers in the late twentieth century. Many of the specific moral problems people in the thirteenth century faced are all but unimaginable to us. And, as we are even more likely to think, they could not begin to foresee the complexities of modern society. But whatever the changes over time and however different one era is from another, there is the undeniable fact that our minds and imaginations reach across the ages and make contact with distant minds and imaginations. In the late twentieth century audiences respond to *Medea* and young men and women on campuses across the world read Plato and follow the intricacies of a Socratic argument. The differences are undeniable and real; but the thread of continuity of experience and thought are inescapable.

There is nothing, then, that makes it in principle impossible for us to understand a medieval author. But it is not simply our common humanity that makes this possible; there is also the Catholic faith we share with Thomas Aquinas. Much as in reading Dante or Chaucer, our shared faith provides a bridge across the ages, so too is it with Thomas Aquinas. Indeed, he is the preeminent interpreter of the contents of the faith. The Church calls him the *Doctor Communis* -- the universal teacher of the faith. Other Doctors of the Church are noteworthy in this area or that of Christian doctrine, but Thomas covers the gamut. But what has this to do with moral philosophy?

In the first video tape, you will have followed a discussion of the nature of philosophy and the way it is distinguished from theology. Theology was explained to be that intellectual inquiry which takes its rise from the faith, from believed truths, and brings to bear on them whatever seems relevant of human thought and culture. The aim is not to prove the truth of what God has revealed but to attain some understanding of it. Such an inquiry will interest those who share the faith of the inquirer. Theology is, to that degree, an in-house enterprise, the reflection of believers on their faith.

Philosophy, on the other hand, bases itself on what is in the public domain. It begins from what every human person can be presumed to know. As it progresses, Philosophy must always relate new claims to old, to those common principles everyone knows. This kind of inquiry is common to believer and non-believer; it is a discussion that goes on in terms of the shared experience and knowledge of human beings as human.

If the truths of faith could be established as true by appealing to nothing more than what everyone already knows, the whole of faith would be reduced to philosophy. But of course faith is the substance of things hoped for, it is the acceptance as true of a revelation beyond our comprehension. To accept as true that Jesus Christ is both God and Man is to rely on the veracity of God. I believe this because I cannot know it. So too with the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead. Each time we make the sign of the cross, we remind ourselves of this unfathomable mystery which we accept because God himself has revealed it to us.

Thomas Aquinas was a theologian. He was born in Roccasecca, south of Rome, in 1225, was schooled at Montecassino and then at Naples, where he first encountered members of St. Dominic's Order of Preachers. He joined the order and eventually was sent north to study, Paris, Cologne, Paris again, where he became a master of theology and, from 1256-1259, was regent master of theology. From 1259 through 1268 he was in Italy, Orvieto, Viterbo, Rome, and then returned to Paris for another three year stint as regent master. This unusual return was explained by a controversy that was raging over the thought of Aristotle. This Greek pagan philosopher, student of Plato, flourished in the mid-fourth century B.C. During Hellenistic times, his works faded from consciousness among the Greeks and in the Latin West, Greek became a rare accomplishment. From the Patristic period and through the Dark ages, a Christian culture had been slowly developed, reaching its fruition in the twelfth century. Some knowledge of pagan antiquity was had and became a component of Christian culture, the names of Plato and Aristotle were known, but their writings were not. That began to change in the twelfth century.

In various places, in Sicily, at Venice, in Spain, translations of Aristotle from Arabic into Latin began to be made. (Obviously, Aristotle had already found his way from Greek into Arabic.) First a few titles appeared in Latin and became known in the Christian schools, and then it became a flood. The University of Paris is usually dated from the year 1200, and it may be said that it was in the thirteenth century and in the university that the great task of reconciling Aristotle and Christian culture began.

From the outset of his career, first at Naples, then at Cologne where he studied with Albert the Great, Thomas saw in Aristotle a tremendous intellectual asset. Furthermore, we can say that for Thomas, Aristotle represented what the human mind can achieve independently of faith and revelation. A believer might imagine what the world looks like to an unbeliever, but how would he know for sure? In Aristotle, Thomas saw a man of towering intellect whose writings had a breathtaking range.

Others were more conscious of the difficulties. The errors of Aristotle began to be listed. And by error was meant a teaching of Aristotle that was in conflict with the Christian faith. In the beginning God created heaven and earth. But Aristotle taught that the world of change had always existed. His eye is on the sparrow; the very hairs of your head are numbered. But Aristotle described God as Thought Thinking Itself, as if it would be demeaning of God to notice sparrows and human pates. Furthermore, Averroes, a Muslim who was born in Cordova in Spain, in commenting on Aristotle, said that Aristotle does not teach personal immortality. What survives us is a separate intelligence that thinks through this human person and that, but when they are gone, it continues, thinking through future generations. But Christianity is meaningless if death is the end. If Christ is not risen, our faith is in vain.

Thomas's treatment of each of these "errors" was benign. We hold on faith that the world had a beginning in time; on the basis of science alone, we cannot prove it, one way or the other. God could have created an eternal universe. Therefore, Aristotle adopted a plausible view, but one the believer knows to be false, not because he

disproves it, but because it conflicts with what God has revealed. Aristotle was unaware of Genesis. And so on. As for the other "errors" mentioned, Thomas saw them as misreadings of Aristotle.

This receptivity brought Thomas into the target area when some bumptious young masters in the Faculty of Arts at Paris, with Siger of Brabant as their paladin, began to teach as true, and as Aristotelian, doctrines in conflict with the faith. They did not deny the faith; they seemed to think that something could be philosophically true while in conflict with a revealed truth. This position was called Latin Averroism, and it focused on the question of personal immortality. Thomas wrote a polemical refutation of Latin Averroism and sought to rescue Aristotle from distorted readings. A true reading of Aristotle, Thomas was convinced, provided a support of and complement to Revelation.

Thomas provides a model of the Christian believer confronted with philosophy. His serene conviction is that there is no possible conflict between the truths that can be attained by the human mind and those truths which God in his mercy has revealed to us. Sometimes they seem to conflict, but knowing that they cannot, the believer seeks to show their compatibility. Sometimes, what had seemed a proven truth shows itself not to be, and the possible conflict evaporates. Sometimes, a solid truth is thought to have implications destructive of the faith, and it is on those supposed implications that the Christian thinker will concentrate.

Obviously, to do this one must be a philosopher as well as a theologian. The theologian, it can be said, is a philosopher plus. He must have in his intellectual repertoire philosophical methods and achievements; only thus can the believer converse with the non-believer on common ground. The common ground, recall, is the shared experience and knowledge of the race.

In the area of morality, Thomas wrote both as a theologian and as a philosopher. Of course, his conception of theology involved incorporating philosophy into theological inquiry. But in order to be incorporated into theology, philosophy first had to exist. This is why we have such works as Thomas's Commentary on the *Ethics* of Aristotle, on the one hand, and the moral part (Part Two) of the *Summa theologiae*, as well as a host of other works. Many philosophical arguments occur within the theological writings, and while in the context they are put to a specifically theological purposes, taken as such they remain philosophical arguments.

The significance of this for our course is obvious. In conveying the moral philosophy of Thomas, we will mine the theological writings. But Thomas's philosophy meets the requirements of philosophy as set forth above and in the first video-taped lecture.

A word on the role Thomas plays for the Catholic philosopher. The fact that the Church has given advice on the best way to proceed in *philosophy* can only surprise if we imagine that philosophy and theology are not mutually important. Thomas's policy, mentioned above, is the assumption of the Church as well. Reason can never lead to conflict with the faith. Still, it would be naive to overlook the fact that many philosophers have adopted a hostile attitude toward religious belief. If you were about to begin the

study of philosophy, and you were to pick such a mentor as, say, Bertrand Russell, you would be reading many things which, covertly or overtly, are in conflict with Christian belief. If they are, and if the faith is true, the conflicting philosophical position is false. But showing this can be a difficult matter. But if we should begin our study of philosophy with such a one as Bertrand Russell, we would not become equipped with the needful knowledge to counter the drift of Russell.

The danger is that we might become fideists. That is, adopt the view that there is simply no relation between what we believe and what we do in philosophy. This was the error of Latin Averroism.

A worse danger is that, confronted with so many difficulties for the faith and unequipped to counter them, one might lose his faith.

It is because reason rightly used both complements and supports the faith, that the Church is interested in our getting off on the right foot. Starting with Thomas Aquinas is the right foot. Far from being embarrassed by the Church's guidance in this matter, we should both celebrate and be thankful for it. The Church's only motive is that we should arrive at the truth. A good beginning is more than half the journey in philosophy as in anything else. So, in this course, we follow the Church's guidance and take Thomas as our teacher.

Reading Assignment

Read the Introduction to the Penguin *Selected Writings of Thomas Aquinas*.

You might read either Jacques Maritain, *The Angelic Doctor* or Josef Pieper's *Guide to Thomas Aquinas* if you can find them in a library -- or used bookstore.

There will be an entry on Aquinas in the Stanford University online Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu>.

Writing Assignment

Write a memo to yourself on the major writings of Thomas Aquinas relevant for his moral thought.

Lesson 2: Speculative and Practical

When St. Thomas commented on Boethius's *On the Trinity*, chapter two of that little work provided him with an occasion to speak of the division of speculative philosophy into a number of different sciences. But before getting into that, he has this to say:

It should be said that theoretical or speculative intellect properly differs from the operative or practical in this, that the speculative has for its end the truth it considers, whereas the practical has for its end the putting into practice of a known truth. (In Boethii de trin., q. 5, a.1)

And he goes on to say that this is why Aristotle in *On the Soul* says that they differ from one another in their end. The reference is the chapter ten of Book Three of that Aristotelian work, and it can be taken as a classical expression of the doctrine. It is difficult to find a place where Thomas mentions the distinction between speculative and practical intellect that he does not refer us to this *locus classicus* in Aristotle.

Suggestion: You can compile a list of places where Thomas speaks of the speculative and practical by consulting the Index Thomisticus, the CD ROM data base containing all of Thomas's writings with an access program that enables us to compile such lists. The Past Master CD ROM database does the same for the works of Thomas in English translation. The old-fashioned way is far from being surpassed, of course, and you will be greatly aided by Peter of Bergamo Tabula Aurea.

Let us have before us the *locus classicus*:

10 These two at all events appear to be sources of movement: appetite and mind (if one may venture to regard imagination as a kind of thinking; for many men follow their imaginations contrary to knowledge, and in all animals other than man there is no thinking of calculation but only imagination.

Both of these then are capable of originating local movement, mind and appetite: (1) mind, that is, which calculates means to an end, i.e. mind practical (it differs from mind speculative in the character of its end); while (2) appetite is the stimulant of mind practical; and that which is last in the process of thinking is the beginning of the action. It follows that there is a justification for regarding these two as sources of movement, i.e. appetite and practical thought; for the object of appetite starts a movement and as a result of that thought gives rise to movement, the object of appetite being to it a source of stimulation. So too when imagination originates movement, it necessarily involves appetite.

[The text of Aristotle is conventionally referred to in this way: *On the Soul*, III, 10, 433a9-21. That is, Book Three, chapter ten, page 433, column a, lines 9 through 21. The page referred to is that of the 19th century Berlin Academy edition of the Greek text, whose editor was Bekker. Accordingly, such page references are called the Bekker numbers. By referring to the text in this way, a uniformity is retained across the many languages into which the work has been translated (later editions of the Greek text also retain Bekker's numbers), which is a great convenience for scholars.]

Text and Context

It is risky to assume that we can lift a passage like this from a book and easily grasp what it has to say. If it is the tenth chapter in the third book, an understanding of the preceding chapters is presumably presupposed. And an understanding of Book Three, doubtless requires understanding of Books One and Two. But there is more.

Aristotle's work *On the Soul*, is part of a vast project of his to understand the natural world. Not only that, but he had very definite ideas as to how we should go about this study. The study of nature begins with the *Physics* in which Aristotle studied natural things, physical objects -- that is, things that come to be as the result of a change -- in their common principles. That is, before getting into the difference between living and non-living natural things.

Perhaps you have heard that Aristotle taught something called the hylomorphic theory of physical objects. This does scant justice to what he says -- it is certainly not a theory in our sense of the term.

Aristotle is concerned with the macroscopic objects around us and our daily commerce with them. Of them all, he suggests, we would agree that they come into being, undergo ceaseless change and eventually pass out of being. Calling them physical -- *ta physika* -- captures that. What are the first and most obvious things that we can say of such things? We do not, Aristotle points out, first gain distinct and specific knowledge of one thing and then move on to another. Rather, we initially gather things into great predicable wholes, or genera -- for example, physical objects, all the things that come to be as the result of a change. Some things can be truly said of all of them prior to going into their differences from one another.

Aristotle takes as example the commonplace occurrence of someone's learning a skill, say, how to play the harp. This change can be expressed in three different ways.

1. Man becomes musical.
2. The non-musical becomes musical.
3. The non-musical man becomes musical.

Nothing at all profound is intended by this. It is simply the case that these are three different ways of expressing the same change. Of course Aristotle has a point in pointing this out.

All of these expressions involve the form: A becomes B. Sometimes, however, we speak of change in this way: From A, B comes to be. Can we re-express 1, 2 and 3 above in this second form? Of course we can. But Aristotle thinks we would be reluctant to express 1 as From man, musical comes to be, though we would have no such reluctance in putting 2 and 3 this way. Why?

The grammatical subject of 1 is also the subject of the change.

The grammatical subjects of 2 and 3 are not the subjects of the change expressed. The reason for this is what is meant by "subject of a change."

The subject of a change = df. that to which the change is attributed and which survives the change. Obviously only the person who learns how to play the harp survives; his inability to play the harp does not survive his learning how to play the harp, nor does the compound, "the non-musical man," i.e. the non-harp playing person.

Such considerations lead to the following observation. Every change involves minimally a subject, a privation in the subject, and a form which is the opposite of the privation. Man, non-musical, musical.

Subject, privation, property.

But the terminology Aristotle hits upon derives from another example he uses, that is, of unshaped wood being shaped into a likeness of someone. The Greek term for wood is hyle; morphe is Greek for shape. These become matter and form. That is why, the elements of any change are said to be matter, form and privation. And also why Aristotle is said to teach hylomorphism.

It is not only such existing units as persons and pieces of wood that are subject to change. These autonomous and self-standing things also come into being and pass out of being. While such a thing -- Aristotle calls it a substance -- exists its changes are incidental. That is, when Percy learns how to play the harp, the harp-playing Percy comes into being, but not Percy just as such. As the subject of such an incidental change, the subject or substance precedes it and survives it. But what about the coming into being of substance as such?

The things a substance has, acquires and loses, are called its accidents. They befall it, and they make it be this or that, but not to be absolutely speaking. We might think that when Percy comes into being, something that was not Percy has become Percy. But this would make being-Percy an accident of some substance, so Percy would not be an ultimate unit. Against this is the fact that, if you were asked to count up the basic things in the room, Percy would be among them -- if he is in the room. Human persons are basic units if anything is. And basic countable unit is a sort of synonym for substance. If there are substances and if substances come to be, and if the above analysis is valid, the result of such substantial becoming is a composite of matter and form. The matter here, what comes to have the form thanks to which a man is a man, cannot itself be a substance, since then this would not be an instance of substantial change, but only another example of accidental change. To make this point Aristotle called the subject of substantial change prime matter.

The form prime matter acquires in a substantial change -- the result of which is a new autonomous unit -- is called its substantial form. To be human is a far more fundamental thing to say of Percy than to be seated, to be hungry, to be tan, etc.

The substantial form of living things is called its soul. Among other things, this means that to be alive is of the essence of a living thing; it is not some attribute a non-living substance might acquire and lose. If the soul is the first principle of life in living things, and living things are distinguished from non-living things because they exhibit such activities as growing, taking nourishment, moving themselves, awareness, wanting, etc., it becomes necessary to distinguish the soul from its capacities, faculties or powers (those are synonyms). To see is to actuate a possibility; to hear is to actuate a possibility. The soul itself cannot be the potency that is actuated because if it were, seeing and hearing would be identical, that is, the same actuation.

One could go on, and in another course, one would. Meanwhile:

Reading Assignment

Penguin *Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings*, selection 17.

Writing Assignment

One page stating as clearly and succinctly as you can the difference between the theoretical and the practical.

Lesson 3: Degrees of Practical Knowledge

Thomas, like Aristotle, speaks of practical intellect and speculative or theoretical intellect, but he does not mean to suggest that these are two different capacities or powers of the soul. They are two different kinds of mental activity in which we can engage because we have a mind. It is because they have different aims or ends that we distinguish them.

The end of theoretical thinking is the perfection of the thinking process itself, namely, truth. Once we know what a thing is, how it is with that thing, the properties and activities of that thing, and the like, our intellectual quest is satisfied. What is it? Say, we discover the thing's definition. That ends that quest. But then we ask something else. What does it do that nothing else does? The answer to that satisfied that quest. In such cases, getting straight about the way things are, that is, acquiring the truth about them, is what we want. The end of theoretical thinking is truth.

Sometimes we use our minds in such a way that just knowing the way things are is not the end of the inquiry. Rather, we want that kind of knowledge in order to do something or in order to make something. Truth here looks to be a means to the perfection of activities other than thinking. I need a lot of truths, that is, I have to know lots of things --

about wood and plastic and displacement and shapes that cleave the water, etc. -- in order to build a boat, but I want to know such things in order to build a boat.

Their different ends are the basic way that theoretical and practical thinking are distinguished. Aristotle provided the text [*On the Soul*, III, 10] to which Thomas refers whenever this matter comes up. But there is another text in which he suggests a number of other criteria for distinguishing the theoretical from the practical, thus enabling us to speak of degrees of practical knowing. Thus, we needn't say simply that an instance of knowing just is or is not practical and that's the end of it; we can say that in one or more respects it is practical whereas in others it is theoretical.

The passage from St. Thomas that we examined in the previous lesson contrasts the practical and theoretical uses of our mind. The chief difference lies in the end or purpose of the two: when the end or thinking is simply to arrive at the truth of some matter, it is the perfection of thinking as such that is sought. But sometimes we seek the truth, not as a terminal goal, but with the eye to some activity other than thinking. This is what we mean by practical thought. Learning how to make a boat in your basement is knowledge whose fulfillment is had when you make a boat in your basement. Merely to annotate the article in *Boating*, to grasp how each step is to be taken, and do nothing about it, seems rather pointless. And it is, since the point of such knowledge is not just knowing, but doing. The knowledge is sought to govern or influence some activity other than thinking.

We are going to look at a passage from the *Summa theologiae* in which Thomas is asking whether God has theoretical or practical knowledge of things. That we should appeal to such a discussion for our present purposes may surprise, but it is not unusual for Thomas to flesh out and develop philosophical points prior to putting them to a theological purpose. This what goes on in the following text:

Summa theologiae, Ia, q. 14, a. 16

Utrum Deus de rebus habeat scientiam speculativam.	Whether God has speculative knowledge of things.
<p>Ad decimumsextum sic proceditur. Videtur quod Deus de rebus non habeat scientiam speculativam.</p> <p>1. Scientia enim Dei est causa rerum, ut supra ostensum est. Sed scientia speculativa non est causa rerum scitarum. Ergo scientia Dei non est speculativa.</p> <p>2. Praeterea, scientia speculativa est per abstractionem a rebus: quod divinae scientiae non competit. Ergo scientia Dei non est speculativa.</p>	<p>Turning now to the sixteenth article: it seems that God does not have speculative knowledge of things.</p> <p>1. For God's knowledge is the cause of things, as has been shown. But speculative knowledge is not the cause of what is known. Therefore God's knowledge is not speculative.</p> <p>2. Moreover, speculative knowledge arises from abstraction from things, which is not the case with divine knowledge. Therefore God's knowledge is not speculative.</p>

Sed contra, omne quod est nobilius, Deo est attribuendum. Sed scientia speculativa est nobilior quam practica, ut patet per Philosophum in principio *Metaphysicorum*. Ergo Deus habet de rebus scientiam speculativam.

Respondeo dicendum quod aliqua scientia est speculativa tantum, aliqua practica tantum, aliqua vero secundum aliquid speculativa et secundum aliquid practica. Ad cuius evidentiam, sciendum est quod aliqua scientia potest dici speculativa tripliciter. *Primo*, ex parte rerum scitarum, quae non sunt operabiles a sciente; sicut est scientia hominis de rebus naturalibus vel divinis. *Secundo*, quantum ad modum sciendi: ut puta si aedificator consideret domum definiendo et dividendo et considerando universalia praedicata ipsius. Hoc siquidem est operabilia modo speculativo considerare, et non secundum quod operabilia sunt: operabile enim est aliquid per applicationem formae ad materiam, non per resolutionem compositi in principia universalia formalia. *Tertio*, quantum ad finem: nam 'intellectus practicus differt fine a speculativo,' ut dicitur in III de anima. Intellectus enim practicus ordinatur ad finem operationis: finis autem intellectus speculativi est consideratio veritatis. Unde si quis aedificator consideret qualiter posset fieri aliqua domus, non ordinans ad finem operationis, sed ad cognoscendum tantum, erit quantum ad finem speculativa consideratio, tamen de re operabili. -- Scientia igitur quae est speculativa ratione ipsius rei scitae, est speculativa tantum. Quae vero speculativa est vel secundum modum vel secundum finem, est secundum quod speculativa et secundum quid practica. Cum vero ordinatur ad finem operationis, est simpliciter practica.

On the contrary. The more noble is always to be attributed to God. But speculative knowledge is more noble than practical, as is clear from the Philosopher at the beginning of the *Metaphysics*. Therefore God has speculative knowledge of things.

Response. It should be said some knowledge is speculative alone, some practical alone, and some in one respect speculative and in another respect practical. To see this consider that a science can be called speculative in three ways. *First*, with respect to the things known, which are not doable by the knower, e.g. man's knowledge of natural and divine things. *Second*, with respect to the manner of knowing: for example, if a builder were to consider a house by way of defining and dividing and considering its universal predicates. This is to consider operable things in a speculative manner and not insofar as they are operable: a thing is operable by the application of form to matter, not by analyzing the composite into universal formal principles. *Third*, with respect to the end, for 'practical intellect differs from speculative in its end,' as is said in 3 *de anima*. Practical intellect is ordered to activity as its end, whereas the end of the speculative intellect is the consideration of truth. Hence if a builder should consider how a certain house might come to be, without ordering it to the end of operation, but to knowing alone, this would be, with respect to its end, a speculative consideration, though of an operable object. -- Therefore knowledge which is speculative by reason of the thing known is speculative alone, but what is speculative with respect to either mode or end is speculative in one sense and practical in another. But when it is ordered to the end of operation it is simply practical.

Secundum hoc ergo, dicendum est quod Deus de seipso habet scientiam speculativam tantum: ipse enim operabilis non est. De omnibus vero aliis habet scientiam et speculativam et practicam. Speculativam quidem, quantum ad modum: quidquid enim in rebus nos speculative cognoscimus definiendo et dividendo, hoc totum Deus multo perfectius novit. Sed de his quae potest quidem facere, sed secundum nullum tempus facit, non habet practicam scientiam, secundum quod practica scientia dicitur a fine. Sic autem habet practicam scientiam de his quae secundum aliquod tempus facit. Mala vero, licet ab eo non sint operabilia, tamen sub cognitione practica ipsius cadunt, sicut et bona, in quantum permittit vel impedit vel ordinat ea: sicut et aegritudines cadunt sub practica scientia medici, in quantum per artem suam curat eas.

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod scientia Dei est causa, non quidem sui ipsius, sed aliorum: quorundam quidem actu, scilicet eorum quae secundum aliquod tempus fiunt; quorundam vero virtute, scilicet eorum quae potest facere, et tamquam nunquam fiunt.

Ad secundum dicendum quod scientiam esse acceptam a rebus scitis, non per se convenit scientiae speculativae, sed per accidens, in quantum est humana.

Ad id vero quod in contrarium obicitur, dicendum quod de operabilibus perfecta scientia non habetur, nisi sciantur in quantum operabilia sunt. Et ideo, cum scientia Dei sit omnibus modis perfecta, oportet quod sciat ea quae sunt a se operabilia, in quantum huiusmodi, et non solum secundum quod sunt speculabilia. Sed tamen non receditur a nobilitate speculativae scientiae: quia omnia alia a se videt in seipso, seipsum autem speculative cognoscit; et sic in speculativa sui ipsius scientia, habet cognitionem et speculativam et practicam omnium aliorum.

On this basis it should be said that God has of himself knowledge that is speculative alone; of other things he has speculative and practical knowledge. Speculative in manner, for whatever things we know speculatively by defining and dividing, God knows much more perfectly. But of the things which he could indeed make but at no time makes he does not have practical knowledge insofar as this is read from the end. Thus he has practical knowledge of things he at some time makes. Evils, though they are not doable by him yet fall under his practical knowledge, along with goods, insofar as he permits or impedes or orders them: thus do sicknesses fall to the practical knowledge of the physician, insofar as he can through his art cure them.

Ad 1. It should be said that God's knowledge is cause, not of himself, but of other things; of some actually, namely those which at some time come to be, of others virtually, namely those he can make yet never makes.

Ad 2. It should be said that it is not an essential note of speculative knowledge that it be taken from the things known, but only accidentally, insofar as it is human.

As for what was said ON THE CONTRARY, it should be said that perfect knowledge of operable things is had only insofar as they are operable. Therefore, since God's knowledge is in every way perfect, he must know things doable by him and not only insofar as they are speculables. Nor does this fall short of the nobility of speculative knowledge, because he sees all other things in himself and he knows himself speculatively and thus in the speculative knowledge he has of himself he has both speculative and practical knowledge of all other things.

In applying this division to moral thought, we would doubtless say that moral philosophy is practical in the sense that it deals with things to be done. It is also sometimes practical in that it treats such things in a practical way, giving us precepts and advice on how to behave. But practical knowledge in the fullest sense is only exemplified in singular acts.

If this is how practical knowledge is sorted out in the case of moral philosophy, it will lead to different expectations at different levels of moral knowledge. Clearly, general or abstract knowledge of what we ought to do does not, as such, produce good action. One of the oldest questions of moral philosophy has to do with this relationship between knowing what we ought to do and doing it. Plato thought that, if we really knew what we ought to do, then we would do it. So, if we are not doing what we ought to do, it looks as if we don't know what we ought to do. The remedy, then, would seem to be more knowledge. Maybe a course like this.

That is implausible, needless to say. But let this suffice for now. These are issues to which we shall return in what follows.

Reading Assignment

Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings, selection 26.

Writing Assignment

Write an essay on the theme: Moral Philosophy is Practical Knowledge in several senses.

Lesson 4: Ultimate End

There are two major ways of arguing on behalf of the view that there is one overriding end or purpose of all we do. The first is found at the outset of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the second is found at the beginning of the moral part of the *Summa theologiae*. We will examine each of these in turn and then ask how they relate to one another. That being done we will say some things about Thomas's distinction between perfect and imperfect happiness.

Aristotle on Ultimate End

Aristotle's *Ethics*, Book One, Chapter 1

1. Every art and every investigation, and likewise every practical pursuit or undertaking, seems to aim at some good: hence it has been well said that the Good is That at which all things aim.
2. (It is true that a certain variety is to be observed among the ends at which the arts and sciences aim: in some cases the activity of practicing the art is itself the

end, whereas in others the end is some product over and above the mere exercise of the art; and in the arts whose ends are certain things beside the practice of the arts themselves, these products are essentially superior in value to the activities.)

3. But as there are numerous pursuits in arts and sciences, it follows that their ends are correspondingly numerous: for instance, the end of the science of medicine is health, that of the art of shipbuilding a vessel, that of strategy victory, that of domestic economy wealth.

4. Now in cases where several such pursuits are subordinate to some single faculty -- as bridle-making and the other trades concerned with horses' harness are subordinate to horsemanship, and this and every other military pursuit to the science of strategy, and similarly other arts to different arts again -- in all these cases, I say, the ends of the master arts are things more to be desired than the ends of the arts subordinate to them; since the latter ends are only pursued for the sake of the former.

5. (And it makes no difference whether the ends of the pursuits are the activities themselves or some other thing beside these, as in the case of the sciences mentioned.)

I have divided this first chapter into five numbered sections to facilitate commentary.

1. The opening generalization is a very structured statement, not a random list to illustrate the generalization. Every art and every investigation -- that is, every productive skill and every intellectual investigation or science -- aims at an end; and so too does every practical pursuit or undertaking. St. Thomas observes that Aristotle thus covers the full range of the speculative and the practical in his generalization. Thus it is every human pursuit -- with the human being defined in terms of that which is most formal in us, namely reason -- that is said to aim at some good.

Aristotle adds that this is what we mean by 'good', namely, that at which all things aim. This aim or end and good are linked; the chief meaning of good is the end or aim which gives direction and meaning to any process and, in the case in point, to every human, that is, rational, endeavor.

Aristotle maintains that every agent, human or not, acts for the sake of an end, but in the present context the opening generalization asserts that every human act is for the sake of an end.

2. In this parenthetical remark, Aristotle distinguishes between the end aimed at by a productive art and the end of the sciences as well as moral actions. The artisan aims to produce something over and above the activity in which he engages. The whittler's activity is ordered to producing the image of his mother-in-law, say.

The house-builder aims to build a house, the dentist to fill a cavity, the surgeon to do a triple bypass. These activities are just as such ordered to a product beyond those activities which by and large outlasts them. [All of these agents may enjoy what he does, and a nervous whittler may simply produce a lot of wood shavings and no other product, but we don't take such examples as standard. A surgeon may say that he loves to operate whether or not he cures the patient, and we would rightly think something is wrong.] By contrast, there are activities which are their own end; we engage in them for the sake of engaging in them. Knowing has an aim, the truth of the matter, but this is not something over and above the activity. It is immanent to it.

3. Here Aristotle makes explicit that the opening generalization covers a multitude of instances, and if, as Thomas suggests, we think of the generalization in terms of three major kinds of human activity, each of these has numerous instances. Notice how Aristotle makes this point: the end of the medical art is health; the art of shipbuilding aims at producing a ship; military strategy aims at victory; domestic economy is ordered to wealth. The idea is that the list could be extended indefinitely. Every human activity is ordered to an end which has the character of good, but there are innumerable instances of human activity.

Aristotle has sometimes been charged with committing this fallacy: Every activity aims at some end; therefore there is some one end at which every activity aims. Paragraph 3 stands in the way of this misunderstanding. Aristotle rather says: Every activity aims at some end but there are numerous activities and therefore numerous ends.

4. Because of this, he sets out in 4 to introduce ordered finitude into the claim. It can be said of every human activity that it is engaged in for the sake of an end, but this covers an uncountable variety of particular aims and ends. Can we move from the unity of this general truth -- it applies to every human activity -- toward unifying activities in terms of connections between or among their ends?

Aristotle draws our attention to the way in which ends cluster or nest, the ends of some pursuits being brought under a common goal -- common now, not in the sense of predictably common, but some numerically one aim that is common to a number of pursuits each of which has its particular aim. Shoeing, making bridles, making stirrups -- each of these activities has its peculiar product: shoes, bridles, stirrups. But each of these activities and its product is aimed at horsemanship: the equestrian art whose performance depends on these subsidiary arts. So too we might say that the infantry and artillery and cavalry have their specific ends, but they are all subordinated to the end of victory to which the general directs them.

In this paragraph, Aristotle has taken us beyond the apparently undifferentiated claim that every human pursuit is for the sake of an end, to the ordering and hierarchy of ends that we recognize as gathering together subordinate arts under the end of some general art.

There are subordinate arts and there are master arts. The ends of the subordinate arts are pursued, not for their own sake, but for the sake of the master arts.

5. Aristotle concludes the chapter by observing that it makes no difference to such subordination whether the ends pursued are products beyond the activities or the activities themselves. This has the effect of making clear that Aristotle does not mean to confine such subordination to the arts; it is also exemplified in the sciences, to say nothing of moral acts.

Aristotle's *Ethics*, Book One, Chapter 2

1. If therefore among the ends at which our actions aim there be one which we will for its own sake, while we will the others only for the sake of this, and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (which would obviously result in a process *ad infinitum*, so that all desire would be futile and vain), it is clear that this one ultimate End must be the Good, and indeed the Supreme Good.

2. Will not then a knowledge of this Supreme Good be also of great practical importance for the conduct of life? Will it not better enable us to attain our proper object, like archers having a target to aim at? If this be so, we ought to make an attempt to determine at all events in outline what exactly this Supreme Good is, and of which of the sciences or faculties it is the object.

3. Now it would seem that this supreme End must be the object of the most authoritative of the sciences -- some science which is preeminently a master-craft. But such is manifestly the science of Politics; for it is this that ordains which of the sciences are to exist in states and what branches of knowledge the different classes of the citizens are to learn, and up to what point; and we observe that even the most highly esteemed of the faculties, such as strategy, domestic economy, oratory, are subordinate to the political science. Inasmuch then as the rest of the sciences are employed by this one, and as it moreover lays down laws as to what people shall do and what things they shall refrain from doing, the end of this science must include the ends of all the others.

4. Therefore, the Good of man must be the end of the science of Politics. For even though it be the case that the Good is the same for the individual and for the state, nevertheless, the good of the state is manifestly a greater and more perfect good, both to attain and to preserve.

5. To secure the good of one person only is better than nothing; but to secure the good of a nation or a state is a nobler and more divine achievement. This then being its aim, our investigation is in a sense the study of Politics.

1. This paragraph, brief as it is, is the very heart of the matter. Here we have Aristotle saying that, not only is it the case that each and every human action is for the sake of some end, and not only is it the case that actions can be clustered in terms of subordinate and master arts so that there is not simply unrelated variety -- over and above this, it can be seen that there must be a single overriding end of everything that we do.

We have already pointed that Aristotle does not establish this by the fallacious argument set down earlier: Every human act is for the sake of some end; therefore there is some one end for the sake of which each act is done. How does Aristotle arrive at the single overriding end of human life?

If there is an end which is willed only for its own sake and other ends are willed for the sake of it, this would be the ultimate end and supreme good. Can this hypothetical be stated categorically? That is, if Aristotle is establishing that there is an ultimate end of human action, how does he argue for it? No commentator is of more help than Thomas Aquinas following Aristotle's procedure:

First, he shows from the foregoing that there is a highest end in human affairs. Second, he shows that knowledge of it is necessary. Third, he shows to what science knowledge of it pertains.

He uses three arguments in making the first point, the chief of which is this.

[1] Whatever end is such that we will other things for its sake and will it for its own sake and not for the sake of anything else, is not only good but best.

[This is clear from the fact that the end for the sake of which others things are wanted is the more principal end, as the foregoing proves.]

[2] But there must be such an end in human affairs.

[3] Therefore there is some end that is good and best in human affairs.

That is the basic or principal argument. But [2] is in need of proof and, Thomas points out, Aristotle gives a proof that is a *reductio ad absurdum*:

* it is clear from the foregoing that one end is desired for the sake of another

* either [a] we arrive at some end which is not desired for the sake of something further, or [b] we do not.

** if [a] we do, the point is made

** if however [b] we do not, it follows that every end is desired for the sake of some other end. But this is to proceed to infinity, and that is impossible.

Therefore [a].

The argument form is: $a \vee b$. But b is impossible, therefore a . The disjunction is an *aut* and not a *vel*: that is, it is necessary that either a or b ; b is impossible, therefore a .

But why is it impossible to proceed to infinity? This assumption is also proved by a *reductio*.

If there should be an infinite process in the desire of ends, such that one end is desired for another and so on endlessly, a man will never arrive at the ends he desires, but one would futilely and vainly seek what can never be had; so the desire of the end would be futile and vain.

But this is a natural desire, since it was said above that the good is that which all things naturally desire.

It follows, therefore, that a natural desire is inane and vacuous.

But that is impossible because a natural desire is nothing else but an inclination inherent in things thanks to the ordering of the prime mover who cannot be frustrated.

Therefore it is impossible for there to be an infinite regress in ends.

Thomas's commentary, by stressing that it is by means of *reductiones* that Aristotle establishes the truth that there is an ultimate end of human acts, indicates a point that he does not explicitly make, perhaps because he considered it evident enough. What kind of truths are established or defended in the indirect manner of the *reductio*? When Aristotle confronts the fact that there are those who at least verbally contest the most fundamental truths of being and knowledge, he first makes the obvious point that nothing more evident than what is denied can be invoked to establish it. If first principles are first there are no principles prior to them. Secondary truths are established by arguing for them from prior truths, more evident and obvious than they. But this path is closed to us when it is first principles themselves that are at issue. What to do?

If first principles are what they are, that is, common truths that no one can fail to know, they must be held even by the one who verbally rejects them. The only way to handle the objector is to show that he cannot consistently deny the first principles, since in the course of doing this he must invoke them.

Is something like this going on in the case of ultimate end? Is the burden of proof on the one who would deny, rather than on the one who would affirm, that there is an overriding end of human action? How would you go about defending the claim that it is self-evident that there is an ultimate end of human behavior?

Among the difficulties you will have to confront are the following:

1. "Look, now I want A, now I want B, later C, and these are just different goals, unrelated to one another. They don't have to be subordinated either to one another or to something else."
2. "Isn't life an infinite regress? I mean, do I ever achieve or acquire some good that is the purpose of it all? Like is more like one damned thing after another, isn't it?"
3. "Any claim that it is self-evident that there is an ultimate end of human behavior has to be able to handle the seemingly infinite variety of overriding goals people do or could

pursue. Or is the claim that it is self-evident that everyone has some overriding goal -- already suspect on the basis of 1 and 2 -- or that there is some one ultimate end for all human beings?"

This last objection can be the occasion for our noticing that both Aristotle and St. Thomas observe that, as a matter of fact, human beings pursue a variety of ends as ultimate. Does 3 then lead us to say that the position is this: for anyone something or other functions as the ultimate reason for doing anything whatsoever, but of course this varies from person to person?

But this pluralism is not necessarily benign for Aristotle and Thomas. If they do indeed concede that some seek their ultimate end in pleasure, others in wealth, others in power, honor, etc., they do not think that all of these truly fulfill the role of ultimate end.

What is involved here is actually clearer in Thomas's approach at the beginning of the moral part of the *Summa theologiae*.

Thomas on Ultimate End

At the outset of the first part of the second part (I-II-IIae) of the *Summa theologiae*, Thomas asks a series of questions:

- * Is it the mark of the human agent that he act for an end?
- * Is an act the kind of act it is because of the end for which it is done?
- * Is there an ultimate end of human life?
- * Can one man have several ultimate ends?
- * Is everything sought, sought for the sake of the ultimate end?
- * Is there one and the same ultimate end for all men?

The activity that characterizes the human agent is for the sake of an end. It is not the case that some human acts are for the sake of an end and others not: for something to be a human act is for it to be aimed at some end or good.

Of any human act it can be asked, by the agent or someone else, why did I (you) do that? The answer will tell us the kind of act you performed. "To remove a malignant tumor." "To get some bug spray." "To move the runner from first to second." Acts are characterized by the purpose or end for which they are undertaken. This is how we distinguish them into kinds.

[The fact that we sometimes say, "No reason, I just like to hum," is not a counter-example, as your reflections on chapter one of Book One of Aristotle's *Ethics* have shown.]

The "Why did you do that?" question is always relevant to human action because human acts are deliberately and voluntarily performed: we know what we are doing -- bunting the ball -- and we do so freely.

[Activities that are truly predicated of human beings such as twitching, going bald, digesting, are indeed *activities of human beings* but not *human activities*. Such activities are not *performed* consciously and willingly; in a sense, they *happen* to us.]

If any human act is performed for the sake of some end or good, each end must be an instance of goodness. That is, any particular end is sought because it is good -- *sub ratione boni*. The concrete good is something other that has the note of goodness, that shares in or participates in goodness. This end is not goodness as such, nor is that, but each of them is desirable at all insofar as it has or shares in goodness.

This may seem a merely verbal point. The concrete noun is accounted for by appeal to an abstract expression: the good is that which has goodness; a being is that which has existence. And doesn't that take us back to the very beginning of the Aristotelian analysis? There are lots of different ends pursued; the fact that it is true of any human pursuit that it is for the sake of the end was not taken to prove that there is some end for the sake of which each of them is done. Is Thomas guilty of the fallacious transition of which we earlier exonerated Aristotle?

ST I-II, q. 1, a. 1 may be said to make the point that any human act is for the sake of some end or other and a. 3 that they are distinguished from one another because of the distinct ends that they pursue. The next step (a. 4) is to show that there is an ultimate end. How does Thomas do it?

He argues that just as an infinite series of efficient causes is impossible, so is an infinite series of ends. This is relevant to human action because of the distinction between the order of intention and the order of execution -- in both of these orders there must be something that is first. In the order of intention, that is first which moves will as a principle or starting point: if that be taken away, the appetite is unmoved. In the order of execution is that from which the activity takes its rise -- I go to the phone to dial the number that will bring us pizza within the hour. Take away my going to the phone and nothing happens.

The principle of intention is the ultimate end; the principle of execution is the first of the means ordered to that end. And on neither side is an infinite regress possible: if there were no ultimate end nothing would be desired nor would any act ever reach its term nor the intention of the agent come to rest; if there were not something first in the things ordered to the end, no one would begin to act nor would taking counsel come to an end but would go on forever. (I-II, q. 1, a. 4)

This argument can be taken to establish the kind of connection among actions that Aristotle speaks of in terms of subordinate and master arts. That is, it is not only the case that any action is for the sake of some end, the ends of some actions are so related that the ends of some are subordinate to that of another master art.

Thomas is quick to add that where there is no orderly connection among ends, there can be infinity.

Does this mean that Thomas reads the Aristotelian argument given above, reducing to absurdity the denial of ultimate end, is applicable only to those situations Aristotle had illustrated with horsemanship and the master builder?

How can we move from there being an ultimate objective in this set of actions and another in that, to there being a single overriding end of human action? That Thomas recognizes that there is more work to be done is clear from articles 5 and 6 of this opening question of the moral part of the *Summa theologiae*. Article 5 asks whether a given person can have more than one ultimate end. He denies that this is possible and does so, it is clear, because he does not restruct ultimate end to that which is ultimate in this range of actions (those making up the military and ordered to the end of victory, on the one hand, and the ends of all the building trades which, on the construction site, are ordered to the ultimate end of this edifice), but that which is comprehensive of all human actions.

This will surprise us. Needless to say, if there is an overriding, comprehensive end of human action, one will be enough and two will be too many. An examination of this article can prompt us to notice what we can overlook in what has gone before. Here is the first of three arguments why there cannot be a plurality of ultimate ends governing one's actions.

Whatever seeks its perfection, seeks it as its ultimate end, which it seeks as its perfect and fulfilling good. (A.5)

"Perfection?" you might say. "I thought we were sending out for pizza." Where did this notion of what is ultimately fulfilling come from, this perfect good? We thought we were awaiting an argument that there is such an end, and now it seems to have been snuck in without fanfare. We must accordingly back up and see what Thomas thinks we have already acknowledged in article 1.

Every human action is undertaken for the sake of some end which has the character of a good. This action differs from that because this pursues this good and that pursues that good. Verbally, we noticed, a particular good can be seen to be something that shares in goodness. That is, "good" = "x has goodness." It is because we are aware of the vast variety of things that x can stand for, that can be values of x, that we do not think the generalization, "Every pursuit is for the sake of some good" takes us very far, goods being as numerous and various as they are. But we have not taken sufficient account of what "goodness" commits us to here.

If I say that x is good and y is good and z is good, and I am speaking of things it is good for a human agent to do, however different x and y and z are from one another, they are being commended as constituents of my comprehensive good. When I say that x is good, I don't mean that y and z can be ignored; y and z are good even though x is good because x is a particular good and as particular it is part of a whole, my complete good.

Thomas is in effect pointing out that the account of the particular good, the *ratio boni*, is already the acceptance of the fact that there is a comprehensive, complete, perfect good which is sought in the pursuit of particular goods. It is their *raison d'etre*.

The pursuit of any particular good has latent in it the desire for the comprehensive good of which that particular good is a part.

So there is a sense in which Thomas argues from there being particular ends to their being a single comprehensive end. Not only is this not fallacious, it is self-evidently true.

Comparison of Aristotle and Thomas

If we continued our reading of Book One of Aristotle's *Ethics* we would find him setting down the characteristics of the ultimate end. It is sought for its own sake and all other things are sought for the sake of it; it is lasting; it is completely fulfilling of our desires.

So too we have seen Thomas Aquinas suggesting that the pursuit of any particular good is an implicit pursuit of the comprehensive, perfect good.

In their different ways, then, both Aristotle and Thomas argue for the necessity of an ultimate end and indeed that it is self-evidently true that there is such an end. Yet both must then confront the question: but in what does this ultimate end consist? What goal or good could possibly count as the comprehensive end of human action?

Their procedure makes it clear that they distinguish between (a) what is meant by "ultimate end" and the fact that there must be such an end, and (b) the identification or articulation of precisely what the ultimate end of human life is. Later on, for example, Thomas will claim both that there is a single ultimate end for all human beings and that there is disagreement as to what it is because it is not easy to achieve clarity in the matter.

Aristotle notices that we have a word for the ultimate end of human action, namely, happiness. But we still must make clear what happiness is and in what precisely it consists.

Reading Assignment

Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings, selections 12 and 21

Ethica thomistica, chapters 2 and 3.

Writing Assignment

What is Aristotle's argument for there being an ultimate end?

Lesson 5: Aristotle: The Function Argument

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is is still desired. This might perhaps be given if we could first ascertain the function of man. (NE, I.7)

The Concept of Function

Nothing is more characteristic of moral philosophy as we find it in Aristotle and St. Thomas than the assumption that the nature of an agent is a clue to what the good of that agent is. That this assumption is rejected by the mainstream of Anglo-American ethics in this century can be seen by consulting Chapter Three of *Ethica Thomistica*. The so-called Naturalistic Fallacy was invented to frighten off anyone who would make the common sense transition from what a thing is to what makes it to be good or bad. Earlier in Hume we find surprise that anyone would move from fact to value, from statements about what *is* the case, to judgements as to what *ought* to be.

Of course if one thinks that the world is a meaningless given without purpose and direction, factual statements will reflect this view and of course not cast any light on what ought to be. It is a bad ontology or metaphysics that underlies the so called is/ought or fact/value dichotomy and the Naturalistic Fallacy. If I should tell you that I am looking at a black plastic object with a wire emerging from it and then ask you whether it is a good one, you will of course be unable to answer. Your inability is due to the fact that I have not provided you with a description of a kind of thing. But if I complete the description, giving you not only what is material in the thing but that which makes such materials be a thing of a given kind -- a telephone -- then my description will be a sufficient base for you to decide whether this telephone is a good one or a bad one.

We are able to appraise a kind of thing, or an instance of a kind of thing, as good or bad, when we know what it is for, what its function is. The word Aristotle uses here is *ergon*. When we know the function of the eye, we have criteria that enable us to say whether an eye is good or bad.

For just as for a flute-player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the 'well' is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have a carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he born without a function? Or as

eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently have a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What can this be?

We have started with the second set of examples, parts of a man, his eye, hand and foot. When you know what a foot is, you know whether it is a good one, but of course what it is includes the function it plays. And so with the other parts. Of course, to repeat, if we simply stated the stuff that goes into the make-up of such parts, this would be insufficient for appraising them, but this is because a merely material account is an insufficient or inadequate statement of what a part is. Given the adequate account, given the role such organized stuff plays in the organism, and we are in possession of criteria of appraisal.

It is of course obvious that a view of nature that excludes *a priori* teleological and functional considerations will as a matter of course produce insufficient accounts of natural things and thus not provide criteria for appraisal. But this is due to the inadequacy of the account, not to any logical barrier between is and ought.

Nothing could be more wrongheaded than to wish this view of nature on to Thomas Aquinas and to argue that, for him as for Hume and Moore and so many others, there is no transition possible from Is to Ought, that the realm of Ought or Value is autonomous and does not repose of knowledge of the way things are. This is to accept as good money a bogus account of the natural world. On such a view, Aristotle's invocation of the function or *ergon* of a thing as the pivot from which we turn from what a thing is to deciding whether it is a good or bad instance of its kind must be regarded as a great obstacle. It is indeed an obstacle if our intention is to make Thomas agree with later thinkers whose thoughts are quite opposed to his.

If one wanted a phrase or slogan to sum up what has gone wrong in modern thought, and indeed in modern theology, the "Fact/Value Dichotomy" would serve.

This divorce between the being and the good continues to haunt the minds of men. Since the appearance of Peter Geach's essay "Good and Evil," which called attention to forgotten (by philosophers) commonplaces of appraisal, there is no excuse for a philosopher to speak as if we all know there is a unbridgeable gap between Is and Ought. Geach thought the sense of a gap was due to a failure to distinguish between two sorts of adjective, or the way in which 'good,' which is an attributive adjective, is mistakenly taken to be a predicate adjective.

If I say of someone that he is a fat philosopher, I could break this into two assertions, "He is fat" and "He is a philosopher." Both of the adjectives are predicated of the subject directly; the one doesn't belong to the subject because the other does. It just happens that the subject has both characteristics. Examples can be multiplied.

Geach felt that philosophers had been trying to understand "He is a good philosopher" in the same way, as if it were analyzable into two claims, "He is good" and "He is a philosopher." Knowing what a philosopher is doesn't help us understand why the same

subject is fat. By parity of reasoning, knowing what a philosopher is does not help us understand what good means.

But 'good', Geach observes, is not a predicate adjective; it is an attributive adjective. That is, it belongs to the subject by way of the other adjective. When someone is said to be a good philosopher, it is his philosophizing that is being appraised: good is attributed to the subject as a philosopher not independently. Rather than look all over the place for some independent meaning of 'good', we look to the adjective to which it adheres for the meaning it has.

Clearly what Geach is reminding his reader of is what Aristotle meant by function. The function provides the criteria for appraisal. This is why good varies so widely in meaning, from category to category, from kind to kind. To look for *the* meaning of good independently of the things and activities called good is chimerical. Aristotle criticized Plato's Idea of Goodness as just such an attempt to find a single univocal meaning of good. But as Geach reminds us, 'good' will get its meaning from the function to which it is attached. The Oxford English Dictionary will tell us that 'good' is the most common term of commendation, as indeed it is. But that is not its meaning; there is no single meaning of good.

The Function of Man

Aristotle reminds us of the notion of function and the role it plays in our appraisals of things in order to determine the human good, the good for man. We have seen that Aristotle regards the ultimate end as the keystone of moral thought. Only if we know the overall purpose of human life will we be able to appraise action as good or bad and to speak of good and bad men. When he puts the concept of function in play, Aristotle uses it as a springboard to speaking of the good man in two ways.

One way is to move from parts to whole. If such parts as eye, hand and foot have functions which enable us to say whether or not they are good, does not man too have a function thanks to which we will be able to say whether someone is a good man?

Another way is to mention different roles or functions played by the whole man, so to speak. Man as flute-player, man as tanner, man as sculptor. Over and above these particular functions, the suggestion is, there is the function of being a man. And just as knowing the role of the flautist enables us to appraise a musician, knowing the role of a sculptor enables us to appraise an artist, so knowing the role or function of man . . .

It is here that we can begin to lose confidence that Aristotle is on to something. The "function argument" as we might call it seems to provide just the clarification we need in order to speak of the good man or what is good for man.

But Aristotle seems to have in mind some such list as this:

1. Man as a flute-player

2. Man as a sculptor

3. Man as a tanner

And we could extend the list indefinitely thinking of bank-tellers, first basemen, logic instructions, marathon runners, on and on and on. And each new entry on the list will be another instance of the way that knowing the function provides criteria for appraisal. All of this, to be painfully explicit, is meant to help us explicate and clarify the good for man.

Man as man.

Could this be an entry on the above list? When Bernard Williams embraced the point that Geach had made in the article cited, Williams went on reluctantly to deny that it helped make Aristotle's point. Williams just could not see, in effect, how "Man as man" could show up on the list. His skepticism restricts the value of the function argument to particular roles because he denies that there is any discernible role of man as man.

Aristotle thought otherwise and he was right. Williams' difficulty is an important one. But its true role is not to exclude man's function but to clarify how it is like and how unlike particular functions.

What then can this be? Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude therefore the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but *it* also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal.

When we know the function of something we know what sets it off from other things. The function will be peculiar to it. If we said someone was a good flute-player because he followed the director well, it would occur to us that the violist, the oboist, the cellist and all the other members of the orchestra also ought to do that. What we have then is what makes someone a good member of an orchestra, not what makes him a good flute-player. For that we need a specific description of the function peculiar to the flute-player. This note of a function is prominently in play when Aristotle searches for the function of man. He is looking for an activity that is peculiar to man.

There are activities exemplified by human beings which are not peculiar to them as human beings. Aristotle mentions life, and by life he means the two most fundamental activities of the living organism, nutrition and growth. These activities may occur well or badly in a human being; if well, we say he is growing well, say. He has good growth. But this is an appraisal we can make of any living thing. Such activities do not provide us with man's function because they are not peculiar to him. If they are going well, this is not sufficient to say of him that he is a good man.

There are other activities which permit a more discriminating sense of the human being, namely, perception -- seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, smelling. But while such activities are found in men, and occur either well or badly, they do not give us man's

function, that is, the activity that is peculiar and defining of him as man. Animals see, hear, etc., and do so well or badly.

There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; of this, one part has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to one, the other in the sense of possessing one and exercising thought.

The analysis thus far makes it clear that Aristotle is looking at parts of man which, though they have a function, are not peculiar to man and thus are not his function. What sets man off from other living things, plants and animals, is reasoning. The Greeks defined man as a rational animal, citing the capacity to know and reason as his specific difference from other living things endowed with senses.

Very well. By proceeding carefully Aristotle has arrived at a statement of man's function: rational activity. The application of the concept of function to this activity is this: if rational activity is peculiar to a man, then to perform that activity well is what makes a man good as man.

But no sooner do we draw this conclusion that another uneasiness sets in. It is noteworthy that Aristotle, even as he states man's function, speaks of it as having different manifestations. This is what we will be dealing with in the next lesson.

There is as well Bernard Williams' objection. Of course he knows that Aristotle gives as man's function rational activity. Far from being something precise and definite, it could be said that all the examples on the list we were drawing up earlier -- Man as tanner, man as flute-player, man as sculptor -- provide *instances* of rational activity. That is why we hesitated to add "Man as man" to the growing list. Now we see the basis for our hesitation. If the activity of man as man is rational activity, it is obvious that playing the flute and making a statue and tanning hides, etc. etc. are instances of rational activity. There does not seem to be any rational activity we could simply distinguish from these. Our only recourse would be to go in the direction of the more general, as we say that there is a function of the member of the orchestra which is common to flautists, oboists, cellists, etc. Is some such more general description what Aristotle means by man's function? But what then of the function as what is peculiar, what sets a thing off, etc. etc.

Williams' objection may be stated thus. There are all kinds of roles or functions performed by a human being, activities that can only be performed by human beings, but there is no human function separate from these. The consequence would be that while we can say what we mean by calling a man a good flute player or tanner or sculptor, we could not similarly provide an account of calling him a good man.

We end this lesson with the difficulty. The following lesson will provide us with the wherewithal to address the difficulty.

Reading Assignment

Ethica Thomistica, chapter 2.

Writing Assignment

What is the "function argument" for the human good?

Lesson 6: The Definition of Virtue

Happiness as Virtuous Activity

Aristotle points out that the term *happiness* can stand for the ultimate end of human behavior. Like the ultimate end, happiness is sought for its own sake, not for the sake of anything further.

Let us again return to the good we are seeking, and ask what it can be. It seems different in different actions and arts; it is different in medicine, in strategy, and in the other arts likewise. What then is the good of each? Surely that for the sake of which everything else is done. In medicine this is health, in strategy victory, in architecture a house, in any other sphere something else, and in every action and pursuit the end; for it is for the sake of this that all men do whatever else they do. Therefore, if there is an end for all that we do, this will be the good achievable by action, and if there are more than one, these will be the goods achievable by action.

It is with this summary that Aristotle begins chapter seven of Book One. He has just completed his criticism of Plato's Idea of Goodness, a separate entity, and not something achievable by action. Returning to action, Aristotle again stresses the variety of the things we do and of the number of department ultimate ends, so to speak. In the passage just quoted he sounds as if he were willing to let ultimate end stand for the set of such regional ultimate ends. This is not quite true, as we shall see.

But having recalled the note of the human good -- that it is sought for its own sake and other things are sought for its sake -- he points out that we can say the same of happiness. "Now such a thing happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself, and never for the sake of something else, but honor, pleasure, reason, and every virtue we choose indeed for themselves (for if nothing resulted from them we should still choose each of them), but we choose them also for the sake of happiness, judging that by means of them we shall be happy." Self-sufficiency is another note of the ultimate end, and this too characterizes happiness. But it is the relation between virtue and happiness, embedded in the passage just quoted, that we want to examine.

The passage that we discussed in the previous lesson, that having to do with man's function, follows immediately on the identification of ultimate end and happiness. The concept of a function is introduced as providing a control over the meaning of good.

Something or other will be a good such-and-such if it performs well its characteristic function. A man is called a good shortstop because he performs well the function associated with that position. Good is attributed to the subject by way of an activity and the adverb 'well' as applied to that activity. The adverbial modification of the function -- its being well done -- indicates the perfection or *virtue (arete)* of the function. That is, the term virtue enters in as the adverbial modification of a function. The virtue or excellence of a function is for it to be well done or well performed.

The obvious conclusion of the function analogy, accordingly, would be this. If I want to know whether a man is a good banker, I ask what banking is, what role or function it plays. The man who fulfills this function well is called a good banker. And so too with all the myriad other practices and roles that human beings can play. They give us the necessary criteria for (a) assessing the performance, and (b) calling the agent good or bad. Aristotle spelled all this out because he is seeking to determine what makes one a good man. Well, if there is a human function, the same kind of procedure can be employed and, given man's function, we can say that one who performs it well is a good man. That's the idea.

Now, when we come to specifying the human function, we proceed by isolating one activity from among the many activities found in a man: we are looking for the activity that he alone engages in, not activities he shares with other things. Taking nutrition and growing are activities found in us, but their going well is not a sufficient basis for saying we are good men. Seeing and hearing, hoping and imagining, and other activities which fall to the realm of sensation are not a sufficient basis, when they occur properly, for saying that we are good men. The demands of the function argument is that the activity that is called a thing's function marks it, is peculiar to it, sets it off from other things. Quite rightly, Aristotle points to rational activity as the distinguishing activity of human beings.

Very well. The conclusion must be this. If rational activity is the specifically human function, then to perform that activity well is a sufficient basis for one's being a good man. And, since the 'well' or excellence of a performance is dubbed its *arete* or virtue, the human good will be read from the virtue of rational activity or, as we may put, from the virtuous performance of rational activity.

It is important to see how virtue entered the discussion. If we were unaware of the procedure just explained, we might think that Aristotle is pulling a little rhetorical legerdemain when he introduces virtue into the discussion. If it seems to be pulled in from we know not where just because the reader can be supposed to have a favorable attitude toward it, well, then the argument, or narrative, would be a good deal different than it is. Virtue is good performance; it is the adverbial 'well' modifying a function. The agent is thus called good because of his virtue.

More will be said of virtue, but it is imperative that we see how it enters the discussion in the first place. One of the dangers of a language with a long history is that words take on a flavor and valence at a later time which becomes an obstacle for understanding their earlier uses. C.S. Lewis in his perceptive little book *A Study in Words*, points out a

number of such 'dangerous senses' of words that can prevent our getting the point of, say, Shakespeare. When we encounter the term 'genius' in Shakespeare, we are likely to think of someone with an IQ of 142, but of course that is not how Shakespeare uses the word. So too with 'nature.' And, we can add, 'virtue'. Contemporary associations of the term reek of irony or the taint of prissiness. Or do we just think that to be virtuous is to be nice. Whatever those contemporary associations, there are certainly some that get in the way of our grasping what Aristotle means by the term. All the more reason to be as explicit as we have been about its origin in the text before us.

Let us return now to what might appear waffling on Aristotle's part when he applies the notion of function to rational activity. No sooner does he introduce the function than he seems to make it a set of activities rather than one alone. "There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; of this, one part has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to one, the other in the sense of possessing one and exercising thought." There is the activity of thinking, and there are other activities, which while not of the rational faculty itself, are amenable to or obedient to the direction of reason. We have, then several senses of rational activity, but they are connected and graded: activities obedient to the rational principle are called rational by way of derivation. Still, this gives us two forms of the activity and thus the possibility of at least two virtues, one of thinking itself, the other of an activity obedient to the rational principle.

Aristotle returns to this in the final chapter of Book One. "Since happiness is an activity of soul in accordance with perfect virtue, we must consider the nature of virtue; for perhaps we shall thus see better the nature of happiness."

But clearly the virtue we must study is human virtue; for the good we were seeking was human good and the happiness human happiness. By human virtue we mean not that of the body but of the soul; and happiness we call an activity of soul. But if this is so, clearly the student of politics must know somehow the facts about soul, as the man who is to heal the eyes or the body as a whole must know about the eyes or the body; and all the more since politics is more prized and better than medicine; but even among doctors the best educated spend much labor on acquiring knowledge of the body. The student of politics then must study the soul

Man is a unit of soul and body, but the activities associated with body are those man has in common with other things. Other living things have souls, of course -- soul is the principle of life in living things -- but only the human soul is the seat of reason which sets man off from all other things. Furthermore, Aristotle has argued that while thinking takes its rise from sensation, it is not itself an activity of a bodily organ. In Chapter 13, of Book One, Aristotle continues this discussion by recalling a rough but true account of soul.

Some things are said about it, adequately enough, even in the discussions outside our school, and we must use these; e.g. that one element of the soul is irrational and has a rational principle. Whether these are separated as the parts of the body or of anything divisible are, or are distinct by definition but by nature

inseparable, like convex and concave in the circumference of a circle, does not affect the present question.

On another occasion, Aristotle would quarrel with Plato and argue his own view of the matters just alluded to. But for purposes of moral or political philosophy, the round division, already introduced by Aristotle when he spoke of rational activity as man's function, will do. As he proceeds, we will want to keep in mind the procedure whereby Aristotle isolated man's function, that is, by distinguishing it from other activities found in us but not peculiar to us. He will seem to have forgotten this, but of course has not.

Of the irrational element one division seems to be widely distributed, and vegetative in its nature, I mean that which causes nutrition and growth; for it is this kind of power of the soul that one must assign to all nurslings and embryos, and this same power to full-grown creatures; this is more reasonable than to assign some different power to them. Now the excellence of this seems to be common to all species and not specifically human; for this part or faculty seems to function most in sleep, while goodness and badness are least manifest in sleep.... Enough of this subject, however; let us leave the nutritive faculty alone, since it has by its nature no share in human excellence.

The excellence of vegetative functioning does not manifest goodness and badness in the sense of human excellence. Why? Because its excellence does not depend on the direction of or in being obedient to reason.

There seems to be also another irrational element in the soul -- one which in a sense, however, shares in a rational principle. For we praise the rational principle of the continent man and of the incontinent, and, the part of their soul that has such a principle, since it urges them aright and toward the best objects; but there is found in them also another element naturally opposed to the rational principle, which fights against and resists that principle. For exactly as paralysed limbs when we intend to move them to the right turn on the contrary to the left, so it is with the soul; the impulse of incontinent people move in contrary directions.

Aristotle here recognizes that there is a given conflict within us, an effect of Original Sin, although of course that is not how he explains it. For him it is just naturally the case that desires consequent on sense knowledge should be in opposition to the rational direction of them to the good of the whole man. The incontinent man is one who is unable to control this contrary movement and, though he knows he should act one way, acts another. But the conflict between sense desires and reason antedates and is not caused by incontinence. However natural this opposition to the rational principle, nonetheless it can be made to obey it, as with the continent man who judges what he ought to do, feels the tug of sense appetite in the opposite direction, and manages to have the rational judgment prevail. The resulting act is rational by participation, by dint of obeying reason.

Therefore, the irrational element also appears to be twofold. For the vegetative element in no way shares in a rational principle, but the appetitive, and in general

the desiring element in a sense shares in it, in so far as it listens to and obeys it That the irrational element is in some sense persuaded by a rational principle is indicated also by the giving of advice and by all reproof and exhortation. And if this element also must be said to have a rational principle, that which has a rational principle (as well as that which has not) will be twofold, one subdivision having it in a strict sense and in itself, and the other having a tendency to obey as one does one's father.

Aristotle has thus shown us that there is a controlled ambiguity or equivocation involved in the use of rational activity and thus in talk of the human function. If this function were a simple one, its perfection would be one and there would be one virtue constitutive of the human good and thus of human happiness. The way Aristotle introduces the function argument may lead us to think that this is what is coming. However, as we saw, in the very identification of the human function with rational activity, Aristotle indicated that the latter is not some one thing. This does not make the phrase equivocal *tout court* because there is a control over the various meanings of the phrase.

Its first and chief meaning is rational activity as such, that is, the activity of the reasoning power; its secondary meaning is the obedience to rational direction on the part of some activity other than thinking. Are there then two virtues? There are many virtues and Aristotle prepares us for this with this sketch of the geography of the soul, so to speak, with which Book One of the Ethics ends.

Virtue too is distinguished into kinds in accordance with this difference; for we say that some of the virtues are intellectual and others moral, philosophic wisdom and understanding and practical wisdom being intellectual, liberality and temperance moral. For in speaking about a man's character we do not say that he is wise or has understanding but that he is good-tempered or temperate; yet we praise the wise man also with respect to his state of mind; of states of mind we call those which merit praise virtues.

Something remarkable occurs in this final remark. While 'rational activity' applies first and chiefly to the activity of reason, 'virtue' applies first and chiefly to that rational activity which is such only secondarily, by obeying the command of reason. Furthermore, Aristotle is reminding us that rational activity in the chief sense is divided first of all by speculative and practical uses, and that there are several virtues of each of these. But virtue in the strong sense will be that which exhibits a man's character, that which tells us what he loves.

Reading Assignment

Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, pp. 1-29.

Writing Assignment

How does Thomas Aquinas use St. Augustine's definition of virtue when he provides a general definition of virtue? (Augustine's definition seems confined to infused virtue.)

Lesson 7: The Analogy of Virtue

It is a characteristic of Thomas, as it was of Aristotle, to work with a relatively restricted vocabulary. Oftentimes, when Thomas is first presented to us, we can get the impression that there is a new language to be learned -- I don't mean Latin -- a technical language with stipulated meanings. Once you get the hang of this jargon, you will be able to speak Thomese. There could be no greater misunderstanding of Thomas's linguistic procedure.

He is guided by the obvious observation for which he always gives credit to Aristotle that our language relates to things by way of our knowledge of them. If a word related directly to a thing in a one to one correspondence, one word would do it. But there are obvious difficulties for such an account, among them the fact that I say many things of the same subject.

- Socrates is an Athenian.
- Socrates is a husband.
- Socrates is a war veteran.

On and on. I could also say that Socrates is Socrates, of course, perhaps to make the point that I am here talking of the same individual. A variety of predicates is possible because there is a variety of "takes" on the same thing; now we grasp it in this way, now in that way. Perhaps most strikingly, our predicates are such that they can apply to other subjects as well. Xanthippe is an Athenian too.

This possible sharing of a predicate, its predicability, its universality, is the most dramatic sign that our signs work via our knowledge and do not just adhere directly to the things of which they are signs.

Warning! Nota Bene! Caveat!

The recognition that our words relate to things via our knowing, grasping, conceiving them, should not be taken to mean that our words first of all **mean, signify or refer** to our thinking. The intermediary between word and thing is not opaque but transparent. We do not first know an idea and then wonder if it is the idea of something outside the mind. Modern philosophy could be characterized by that quixotic effort, to devise

arguments for getting out of our heads, out of our minds, to something other than thinking. One of the major motivations for the Thomistic Revival is to counter this. The problem of knowledge is not the first problem of philosophy, and thus is not the problem it has often been taken for.

It is by reflection that we come to see the intermediate role that knowledge plays between word and thing.

At the end of the last lesson, we were talking of the way in which it turns out that there is not just one thing that is rational activity and consequently not just one virtue of it. There will be different virtues insofar as 'rational activity' has different but connected meanings. Its chief and controlling meaning will be the activity of reason as such, and indeed of speculative reason. Practical reasoning is another sense of the phrase and activities other than reasoning which are amenable to the direction of reason are rational activity in a further sense. This is just a sketch of what we called the geography of the soul, but the sketch is slightly more complicated than this reminder suggests. Within speculative reasoning we distinguish between conceptualization, grasping self-evident principles, deriving conclusions from principles and reducing things to the first and ultimate causes. So too practical reasoning is sometimes manifested in art and sometimes in moral decision.

This proliferation of meanings of 'rational activity' is the basis for the proliferation of virtues which perfect the different forms of it. A virtue is, we remember, the perfection or excellence of an activity.

Virtue, then, being of two kinds, intellectual and moral, intellectual virtue in the main owes both its birth and growth to teaching (for which reason requires experience and time), while moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *ethike* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos* (habit).

Thus does Book Two of Aristotle's *Ethics* begin. If you should look at the First Part of the Second Part of the *Summa theologiae*, you would find this sequence:

1. Happiness and Ultimate End (Questions 1-5)
2. On voluntary action (Questions 6-17)
3. The Goodness or Badness of Voluntary Action (Questions 18-21)
4. The Passions of the Soul (Emotions) (Questions 22-48)
5. On Habits (Question 49-54)

After this lengthy prologue, the discussion of virtue begins. Obviously enough, the focus is on moral virtue. The chief examples Aristotle had given of moral virtues are

temperance and bravery. These virtuous acts are instances of rational activity of the shared kind, that is, activities which are called rational because they obey reason. Involved in these are the emotions, the appetites that follow on sense knowledge. There is an immediate response on the level of emotions to something that promises pleasure or that threatens pain. Such responses are not human acts; they occur whether or not we wish them to. It is because emotions can be responsive to rational direction that we have the amalgam of desire and reason in the virtuous act of temperance. My desire for pleasure is directed by reason so that pleasure is pursued in a way that accords with reason's judgment of my integral good. This is the humanizing of the emotions. This is not just a matter of having good thoughts; one must by dint of repetitive action acquire the habit whereby his emotions respond to rational direction. By way of habituation, a principle of action akin to nature itself is acquired -- a second nature, thanks to which we are what we morally are.

To call thinking well in the matter of deduction a virtue -- "science" is the name of that virtue -- is obviously to use the term in a different sense. It is ignorance, not contrary feelings, that is overcome by knowledge and it does not resist its replacement.

The Asymmetry of virtue and rational activity

What we want now to spell out is this: the perfecting of rational activity in the primary sense yields a secondary sense or use of "virtue" whereas the primary sense of virtue points to the perfection of what is rational activity in only a secondary sense. That is, the order of the analogy of "rational activity" is the reverse of the order of the analogy of "virtue."

Let us begin with ST I-II, q. 56, a. 3

Utrum intellectus possit esse subiectum virtutis	Whether the intellect can be the subject of virtue.
<p>Ad tertium sic proceditur: Videtur quod intellectus non sit subiectum virtutis.</p> <p>1. Dicit enim Augustinus in libro <i>De moribus Eccles.</i>, quod omnis virtus est amor. Subiectum autem amoris non est intellectus, sed solum vis appetitiva. Ergo nulla virtus est in intellectu.</p> <p>2. Praeterea, virtus ordinatur ad bonum, sicut ex supradictis patet. Bonum autem non est obiectum intellectus, sed appetitivae virtutis. Ergo subiectum virtutis non est intellectus, sed appetitiva virtus.</p> <p>3. Praeterea, <i>virtus est quae bonum facit habentem</i> ut Philosophus dicit. Sed habitus perficiens intellectum non facit bonum habentem: non enim propter scientiam vel artem dicitur homo bonus. Ergo intellectus non est subiectum virtutis.</p>	<p>On to the third article. It seems that intellect cannot be the subject of virtue.</p> <p>1. Augustine says in <i>The Morals of the Church</i> that every virtue is love. But intellect is not the subject of love; the appetitive power alone is. Therefore there is no virtue of intellect.</p> <p>2. Moreover, virtue is ordered to the good, as is clear from the foregoing. But good is the object, not of intellect, but of the appetitive power. Therefore, the appetitive power, not intellect, is the subject of virtue.</p> <p>3. Moreover, 'virtue is that which makes the one having it good,' as Aristotle says, but the habit perfecting intellect does not make one good, for a man is not called good because of knowledge or art. Therefore the intellect is not the subject of virtue.</p>
<p>Sed contra est quod mens maxime dicitur intellectus. Subiectum autem virtutis est mens; ut patet ex definitione virtutis supra inducta (55,4) Ergo intellectus est subiectum virtutis.</p> <p>Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, virtus est habitus quo quis bene operatur. Dupliciter autem habitus aliquis ordinatur ad bonum actum. Uno modo, inquantum per huiusmodi habitum acquiritur homini facultas ad bonum actum: sicut per habitum grammaticae habet homo facultatem recte loquendi. Non tamen grammatica facit ut homo semper recte loquatur: potest enim grammaticus barbarizare aut solecismum facere. Et eadem ratio est in aliis scientiis et artibus. -- Alio modo, aliquis habitus non solum facit facultatem agendi, sed etiam facit quod aliquis recte facultate utatur: sicut iustitia non solum facit quod homo sit promptae voluntatis ad iusta operandum, sed etiam facit ut iuste operetur.</p>	<p>On the contrary, mind especially is called intellect. But mind is the subject of virtue, as is clear from the definition of virtue given in q.55, a. 4. Therefore the intellect is the subject of virtue.</p> <p>Response. It should be said, and was earlier, that virtue is a habit by which one acts well. But a habit is ordered to a good act in two ways. First, insofar as through a habit of this kind a man acquired the capacity for the good act, as from the habit of grammar a man has the capacity of speaking correctly. However, grammar does not make a man speak correctly always, since a grammarian can commit a barbarism or solecism. The same is the case with the other sciences and arts. -- Second, a certain kind of habit not only give the capacity of acting, but also brings it about that one rightly uses the capacity; as justice not only makes a man's will be ready to do just things, but also makes him act justly.</p>

Et quia bonum, sicut et ens, non dicitur simpliciter aliquid secundum id quod est in potentia, sed secundum id quod est in actu; ideo ab huiusmodi habitibus simpliciter dicitur homo bonum operari, et esse bonus, puta quia est iustus vel temperatus; et eadem ratio est de similibus. Et quia virtus est quae bonum reddit, huiusmodi habitus simpliciter dicuntur virtutes: quia reddunt bonum opus in actu, et simpliciter faciunt bonum habentem.

Primi vero habitus non simpliciter dicuntur virtutes: quia non reddunt bonum opus nisi in quadam facultate, nec simpliciter faciunt bonum habentem. Non enim dicitur simpliciter aliquis homo bonus, ex hoc quod est sciens vel artifex; sed dicitur bonus solum secundum quid, puta bonus grammaticus, aut bonus faber. Et propter hoc plerumque scientia et ars contra virtutem dividitur: quandoque autem virtutes dicuntur, ut patet in 6 Ethic.

Subiectum igitur habitus qui secundum quid dicitur virtus, potest esse intellectus, non solum practicus, sed etiam intellectus speculativus, absque omni ordine ad voluntatem: sic enim Philosophus in 6 Ethic scientiam, sapientiam et intellectum, et etiam artem, ponit esse intellectuales virtutes.

Subiectum vero habitus qui simpliciter dicitur virtus, non potest esse nisi voluntas; vel alia potentia secundum quod est mota a voluntate. Cuius ratio est, quia voluntas movet omnes alias potentias quae aequaliter sunt rationales ad suos actus, ut supra habitum est: et ideo quod homo actu bene agat, contingit ex hoc quod homo habet bonam voluntatem. Unde virtus quae facit bene agere in actu, non solum in facultate, oportet quod vel sit in ipsa voluntate; vel in aliqua potentia secundum quod est a voluntate mota.

Good, like being, is not said absolutely of a thing insofar as it is only potentially, but insofar as it is actual; therefore, it is from habits of this kind that a man is said simply to do good things and to be good, for example, just or temperate; and similarly with the others. And since virtue is that which makes one good, such habits are called virtues simply speaking, because the cause an actual good act, and simply make the one having them good.

The first kind of habit is not called virtue simply speaking, because

it does not cause a good work save in sense of a certain capacity, nor does it simply make the one having it good. For a man is not called good simply speaking because he knowing or is an artisan, but is called good only in a sense, that is, a good grammarian or good maker. For this reasons science and art are often distinguished from virtue, but sometimes they are called virtues, as in Ethics 6.

Therefore intellect can be the subject of a habit that is called virtue only in a sense, both speculative and practical intellect, even without any ordered to the will: thus Aristotle in Ethics 6 numbers science, wisdom and understanding, as well as art, among the intellectual virtues.

Only the will can be the subject of a habit which is called virtue simply, or some power insofar as it is moved by will. The reason is that will moves all the other powers which are in any way rational to their acts, as was shown above; therefore, a man actually acts well because he has a good will. Hence virtue which makes one actually act well, as opposed to giving merely the capacity, must be either in the will or in a power insofar as it is moved by will.

Contingit autem intellectum a voluntate moveri, sicut et alias potentias: considerat enim aliquis aliquid actu, eo quod vult. Et ideo intellectus, secundum quod habet ordinem ad voluntatem, potest esse subiectum virtutis simpliciter dictae. Et hoc modo intellectus speculativus, vel ratio, est subiectum fidei; movetur enim intellectus ad assentiendum his quae sunt fidei, ex imperio voluntatis, nullus enim credit nisi volens.

Intellectus vero practicus est subiectum prudentiae. Cum enim prudentia sit recta ratio agibilium, requiritur ad prudentiam quod homo bene se habeat ad principia huius rationis agendorum, quae sint fines; ad quos bene se habet homo per rectitudinem voluntatis, sicut ad principia speculabilium per naturale lumen intellectus agentis. Et ideo sicut subiectum scientiae, quae est ratio recta speculabilium, est intellectus speculativus in ordine ad intellectum agentem; ita subiectum prudentiae est intellectus practicus in ordine ad voluntatem rectam.

Ad 1 ergo dicendum quod verbum Augustini intelligendum est de virtute simpliciter dicta non quod omnis talis virtus sit simpliciter amor; sed quia dependet aliquantulum ab amore, in quantum dependet a voluntate cuius prima affectio est amor, ut supra dictum est.

Ad 2 dicendum quod bonum uniuscuiusque est finis eius: et ideo, cum verum sit finis intellectus, cognoscere verum est bonus actus intellectus. Unde habitus perficiens intellectum ad verum cognoscendum, vel in speculativis vel in practicis, dicitur virtus.

Ad 3 dicendum quod ratio illa procedit de virtute simpliciter dicta.

The intellect, like the other powers, is moved by the will, for it actually considers something because it wills to. Intellect, therefore, insofar as it has an ordering to will can be the subject of virtue simply speaking. In this way the speculative intellect or reason is the subject of faith; for the intellect is moved to assent to those things which are of faith by the command of will: no one believes unless he is willing.

Practical intellect is the subject of prudence. For since prudence is right reason about things to be done, prudence requires that a man be well related to the principles of the reason of things to be done, and these are ends, to which a man is well ordered by rectitude of will, just as it is to the principles of speculabile things by the natural light of the agent intellect. Therefore just as the subject of science, which is right reason about things to be known, is speculative reason ordered to the agent intellect, so the subject of prudence is the practical intellect ordered to right will.

Ad 1. It should be said that the remark of Augustine should be understood as referring to virtue simply speaking, and not as meaning that every virtue is simply love; but because it depends in a certain way on love, insofar as it depends on will whose first affection is love, as was shown above.

Ad 2. It should be said that the good of anything is its end; therefore since the true is the end of intellect, to know the true is the good act of intellect. Hence the habit that perfects intellect so that it knows the true, whether in speculative or practical matters, is called a virtue.

Ad 3. It should be said that that argument works with virtue simply speaking.

It is not because of science or art that a man is called good. Therefore intellect is not the subject of virtue.

On the contrary mind is especially called intellect, but mind is the subject of virtue, as is clear from the definition of virtue given earlier. Therefore intellect is a subject of virtue.

This article gives a succinct statement of the way in which the term virtue ranges analogically over the various things called virtue. Taking the definition, "virtue is that which makes action good as well as the one performing it", Thomas draws our attention to the fact that the good is the object of will as such. That is why it is habits in the will which are called virtues in the primary sense of the term. Habits of powers other than will are called virtues insofar as they have a relation to will. Habits in the mind provide a capacity to think or speak a certain way, something the agent may or may not choose to do. That is, the object of such habits has to be grasped as a kind of good and chosen accordingly in order for there to be virtuous action.

These two senses of virtue -- habits which have appetite as their subject, (moral virtues) habits which have speculative or practical intellect (art) for their subject (intellectual virtues) which since they give only the capacity and not the use are virtues in a secondary sense -- are joined by a third kind which falls between the two but closer to virtues in the primary sense. Prudence, the virtue of practical intellect defined as right reasoning about things to be done, has for its starting points the ends, the goods, to which the moral virtues order one. Thus, prudence depends for its activity on the possession of moral virtues and is thus a virtue in a stronger sense than art.

In the speculative intellect, divine faith, the mind's acceptance as true of the mysteries revealed by God, can only occur insofar as the mind is moved by will -- "No one believes unwillingly," Augustine said -- which in its turn is moved by grace.

The analogy of virtue, then, ranges over the following:

1. Moral virtues
2. Prudence and faith
3. Intellectual virtues

Reading Assignment

Disputed Questions on Virtue, pp. 30-44.

Writing Assignment

In what sense are intellectual habits virtues?

Lesson 8: On Virtues in General

In the fifth video/audio lecture we discussed Thomas on the cardinal virtues with particular reference to a text in the *Summa theologiae*, I-II, q. 61, 2. You should either listen again to that lecture or at least consult the notes on which it was based, available on the ICU website. The present lesson points you toward the Disputed Question on the Cardinal Virtues which can be found in *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, St. Augustine's Press, 1998. This volume contains my translations of both the Disputed Question on the Virtues in General and the Disputed Question on the Cardinal Virtues.

In *Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings*, Penguin, 1998, you will find Questions 56-58 of the *Summa theologiae*, I-II.

The present lesson will deal with a number of general questions about virtue; the following lesson will speak of the cardinal virtues as such.

The Current Vogue of "Virtue Ethics"

In the past ten or fifteen years, a great deal has been written about "virtue ethics," a phrase which conveys a criticism of the way in which ethics has been done in Anglo-American philosophy throughout much of this century. Modernity in the arts is often discernible by the fact that the art-work becomes its own subject. The novel is about a novel about a novel, etc., the painting turns out to have the brushstrokes which create it as its subject, and so on. Similarly, for a very long stretch, philosophers occupied themselves not so much with ethics as with metaethics.

There were many books written on the language of morals, the vocabulary of ethics, the logic of moral discourse. The suggestion implicit in all this was that if only we could achieve clarity about how moral language works, the moral problem would be solved.

The general philosophical background for this was the so-called linguistic turn. Modern philosophy begins with the critical turn, that is, the notion that hitherto philosophy had been hopelessly naive, assuming that it was knowledge of the things that are. After Descartes, the center of gravity became knowledge itself and questions began to arise as to whether we could ever know things in themselves, that is, apart from the way we know them. Of course it seems redundant to say that we know things as we know them, but the phrase took on the force of a denial -- we cannot know them as they are in themselves.

Knowledge thus becomes the human construal of reality, what we make of whatever there is, rather than knowledge of that reality itself. With Kant things-in-themselves are merely a point of reference beyond thinking, not something we can know. In order for there to be things as we know them, Kant needed to contrast them with the things that are, not again as if the latter could be known: they amount to a negative reference.

The linguistic turn is taken when philosophers want to get out of the various mental topographies and epistemologies that succeed one another with such profusion. The rational animal is one who speaks, and language becomes the new focus of philosophical analysis. Indeed, Analytic Philosophy becomes all but equated with Linguistic Philosophy. The question of meaning becomes paramount and the thought occurs that we do not need reference to thought in order to explain language. In the Philosophy of Logical Atomism, Bertrand Russell united the formal logic that he and Alfred North Whitehead had developed in their *Principia Mathematica* with a view of language which analysed complex sentences into atomic sentences and maintained a one to one correspondence between the elements of such simple sentences and the elements of the corresponding fact. Philosophical problems were to be handled by such linguistic analysis.

A theory of meaning of a particularly rambunctious kind arose from this and may be seen in its most sophomoric spiritedness in A. J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic*. Words have meaning if they play a role in sentences which can be verified. There are two kinds of proposition: tautologies -- A is A is logically true -- and empirical propositions. If an empirical proposition is complex it must first be broken down into its atomic constituents, so we end with propositions of the form Fx (which might stand for x is red, the values of x being sense data). Empirical propositions are meaningful only if they can be thus verified; that is, if its constituents refer to sense data. Ayer blithely concluded that all metaphysical, religious and moral statements turn out to be meaningless on this criterion, and so be it.

This opened the way for any number of accounts as to why moral language actually does work, with some form of emotivism emerging. That is, the "moral" words, good and bad, ought and ought not, were interpreted as pointing to some subjective state or feeling of the speaker and not to any feature of the things called good or bad. Discussions of ethics became progressively more arid and of course bore less and less relation to the history of the discipline.

So-called virtue ethics is a revolt against this. The ethical task, we are reminded, is not so much a matter of knowing as it is of being in a certain way. What we seek to acquire is not some kind of abstract knowledge about ethical language, but a moral character. In the words of *The Imitation of Christ*, the aim is "to feel compunction, not define it."

Knowledge and Virtue

This opens a question to which we shall be devoting the next several lessons, that of the relation between knowledge and virtue, knowledge and action. Virtue ethics sometimes seems to be a quarrel with the relevance of general knowledge for the moral life. A theory which enjoyed a brief vogue in moral philosophy and perhaps still thrives in many minds, was called Situation Ethics. Of what good are general reflections on action or general rules for acting when each and every act is unique. Rules may seem to cover the singular action, but the fact is that singular actions escape any effort to tie them down to general characteristics. This came to seem almost definitionally true: the singular is not the general nor vice versa. Insofar as virtue ethics partook of the spirit of

Situation Ethics it would be antinomian and inimical to general reflections on action where such general reflections were thought to end in guidelines binding on all.

These are issues to which we shall be devoting much time a few lessons from now.

Acquired and Infused Virtues

Earlier we discussed Thomas's views on imperfect and perfect happiness. The happiness achievable in this life -- which consists in virtuous activity -- always falls short of the ideal of the human good that seems implicit in any action. If self-sufficiency and permanence are marks of the ultimate end, they do not seem to characterize in any strong way the good that we can achieve. By revelation however we learn of an ultimate condition that will perfectly fulfill the notion of ultimate end. Thus Thomas distinguished our condition *in via* -- in this life -- and *in patria* -- in the next.

But this contrast does not seem to be enough. The Christian in this life, living in a state of grace, already participates in the life that will be his permanently after this one. True, he can fall from grace. Nonetheless, it would seem that we must distinguish a perfect and imperfect possession of our true end. Isn't that what Thomas meant by the distinction between perfect and imperfect happiness.

Perhaps. But he also means something else. Imperfect happiness is constituted by the activity of virtues we acquire by our own powers. Such virtues characterize the human agent as such. But not all human agents are Christians. Therefore imperfect happiness does not necessarily mean an imperfect possession in this life of the happiness that will be ours in the next. The virtues which make possible in this life an imperfect participation in eternal life are called infused virtues, and they are contrasted with acquired virtues.

In Lesson 15 we will be discussing the notion of Christian Ethics. For now, let us consider a position which, while many have held some version of it, we will present as a logical possibility rather than as a criticism of others.

The human condition has been radically altered because of sin and even more because of Christ's salvific act. Augustine called Original Sin a *felix culpa*, a happy fault, because, however horrendous sin is, the remedy for Original Sin elevated us to a state that would not otherwise have been ours. Redemption does not merely restore the *status quo ante*, the state of original innocence enjoyed by Adam and Eve. Rather it lifts us to the supernatural realm and to an end which is beatific union with God, far exceeding anything even Adam could have dreamt of. The ultimate end of human beings is now the beatific vision. This being so, no discussion of the human good which prescind from our true ultimate end can have significance for human agents. In practical matters, the end is the controlling consideration. Principles and rules will have import to the degree that they correctly relate to the end. Principles and rules which do not relate to man's true end, his supernatural end, are misleading and indeed false.

That is the position, abstractly put. Many have held some version of it. Many do so today. It amounts to a denial that there is such a thing as moral philosophy. It is a mistake.

Is the realizable ideal that we find in the Nicomachean Ethics still describable as imperfect human happiness? Yes.

Is it possible for a human being to acquire the virtues which will order him to the imperfect happiness there described? Yes.

Are considerations of this imperfect end and rules and advice about how to achieve it necessarily false? No.

Are acquired virtues sufficient to relate us to our supernatural end? Emphatically not.

Is the moral life easier within the dispensation of grace and extremely difficult without the help of grace? Yes.

Can one say that without supernatural help it is practically impossible for human beings to attain their natural end? Yes.

We will return to all this. I want now to draw attention to Thomas's teaching on the interaction of infused and acquired virtues, an interaction possible only in the Christian. What is meant by an infused virtue? An infused virtue is a state of character that relates us to the supernatural end. The supernatural end by definition exceeds the capacity of our nature. We are incapable by our own efforts to attain the supernatural end just as we are incapable of forgiving our own sins and restoring ourselves to lost innocence. The infused virtues, accordingly, are not acquisitions, but gifts of grace.

There is of course something paradoxical in speaking of infused virtue. Thomas approaches such theological discussions against the background of philosophical doctrine: this follows from the very notion of theology as the bringing to bear on what God has revealed all relevant natural knowledge. Now this means that for Thomas as for us the term 'virtue' means in the first place a state of character that has been achieved by way of habituation, that is, by repeated acts of a certain kind. One learns how to play the harp by playing the harp, Aristotle famously said. So too one becomes temperate by performing temperate acts, just by performing just acts, courageous by acting bravely, and so forth.

All that seems called into question by the notion of infused virtues. These are simply given, infused into the soul by God, gratuitous, gifts. This means that the soul in the state of grace has all the virtues.

That in turn seems implausible. Here is a baby just baptized. On the doctrine of infused virtues, the child has faith, hope and charity as well as all the moral virtues, most notably the cardinal virtues, and so on. It would seem that living the Christian life should

be effortless. To have the virtues is to have the capacity and inclination to act in a certain way. How is it then that the Christian so obviously falters, that there is what Augustine called a spiritual combat to be engaged in. The Gospels and spiritual writers speak of the good life as one of effort and struggle. But how does that comport with the notion that we are simply given by infusion the virtues?

The infused virtues are actuated by acquired virtues. It is by repeated acts of a given kind that I become temperate, courageous, just, prudent. This seems to be as true of the infused cardinal virtues as it is of the acquired cardinal virtues. It is just here that a great danger arises.

If by acquired virtues here we mean simply our own natural efforts, independently of grace, we would be advancing the heretical position that grace is a natural acquisition, something we achieve on our own. But this is a denial of the very notion of grace. Any meritorious action -- any action that merits a supernatural reward -- is already a graced action. The interaction between acquired and infused virtues, therefore, is something that can only take place within the life of grace.

What then of acquired virtues considered apart from the realm of grace? It is possible for the human agent, even in the state of sin, to acquire virtues whose acts are constitutive of the imperfect happiness of which the philosophers speak.

It is also the case that the acquisition of such virtues may dispose a person for the supernatural order -- not merit it, of course -- but provide a setting in which the response to grace seems less surprising.

Reading Assignment

Disputed Questions on Virtue, pp. 45-84.

Writing Assignment

Describe the various kinds of virtue and how they are related.

Lesson 9: The Cardinal Virtues

The four chief moral virtues are temperance, courage, justice and prudence. The first two have their seat or subject in sense appetite, that is, the desire that follows on sense perception. The subject of justice is the will or intellectual appetite. And practical reason is the subject of prudence. The adjective derives from the Latin word for hinge, so these are the virtues on which the others swing, or they give entrance to a fulfilled human life. "A human life," Thomas Aquinas notes in the *Disputed Question on the Cardinal Virtues*,

"is one that is proportioned to man." Taking his cue from this, Thomas proceeds to examine the human make-up and its relation to these virtues.

<p>In hoc homine autem invenitur primo quidem natura sensitiva, in qua convenit cum brutis; ratio practica, quae est homini propria secundum suum gradum; et intellectus speculativus, qui non perfecte in homine invenitur sicut invenitur in angelis, sed secundum quamdam participationem animae. Ideo vita contemplativa non est proprie humana, sed superhumana; vita autem voluptuosa, quae inhaeret sensibilibus bonis, non est humana, sed bestialis. Vita ergo proprie humana est vita activa, quae consistit in executione virtutum moralium: et ideo proprie virtutes cardinales dicuntur in quibus quodammodo vertitur et fundatur vita moralis, sicut in quibusdam principiis talis vitae; propter quod et huiusmodi virtutes principales dicuntur.</p>	<p>In man there is found indeed a sensitive nature, in which he is one with the brutes, and practical reason which is proper to man according to his rank, and speculative intellect which is not found in man perfectly as it is in the angels, but only according to a kind of participation in the soul. That is why the contemplative life is not properly human, but superhuman. The voluptuous life, which is enmeshed in sensible goods, is not human, but brutish. The properly human life, accordingly, is the active life, which consists in the practice of the moral virtues. Therefore, the cardinal virtues are properly called those in which the moral life is founded and on which it turns. That is why they are also called the principal virtues.</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Higher than the brutes, a little less than the angels. This passage conveys the solid common sense of Thomas. He will argue, as will Aristotle, that the contemplative life represents the highest perfection of the defining characteristic of man, his reason -- man is a rational animal -- but our mind moves from point to point discursively, compares, derives, creates a whole congeries of concepts and interrelations among them to know reality. Our reason, however, begins and ends with a function that is found more perfectly in higher creatures, the function Thomas names *intellectus*, understanding, whose etymology, he suggests is *intus legere*, to read the innards of things. Intuition is sometimes suggested as its translation. Our grasp of first principles -- which are of course complex: S is P -- is immediate, underived. Furthermore, the term of our rational inquiry seems to resolve the vast complexity of reality into its first cause. Thus, contemplation, the culminating act of mind, is the seeing of all things in relation to the divine.

Both of these terminal acts are imperfect. First principles are sure and certain, but not informative of the many differences among things. Human wisdom and contemplation, desirable as they are, are a poor thing. This very poverty is invoked in praising wisdom. Aristotle notes that a little knowledge, however imperfect, of the highest being, is preferable to extended knowledge of lesser things. As it happens, the former depends upon the latter, so Aristotle is not suggesting a pure choice.

Such considerations as these are suggested by Thomas's underscoring at the outset of his discussion of the cardinal virtues, that it is the life of practical intellect that is more commensurate with our condition, the moral life, the practice of the virtues. This underscores the human primacy of the cardinal virtues.

<p>Considerandum est autem quod de ratione actus virtuosus quatuor existunt.</p> <p>Quorum <i>unum</i> est, ut substantia ipsius actus sit in se modificata; et ex hoc actus dicitur bonus, quasi circa debitam materiam existens, vel debitis circumstantiis vestitus.</p> <p><i>Secundum</i> autem est, ut actus sit debito modo se habens ad subiectum, ex quo firmiter subiecto inhaereat.</p> <p><i>Tertium</i> autem est, ut actus sit debito modo proportionatus ad aliquid extrinsecum sicut ad finem. [<i>Et haec quidem tria sint ex parte eius quod est per rationem dirigitur.</i>]</p> <p><i>Quartum</i> autem ex parte ipsius rationis dirigentis, scilicet cognitio.</p> <p>Et haec quattuor Philosophus tangit in II Ethic. Ubi dicit quod non sufficit ad virtutem quod aliqua sint iuste vel temperate comparata, quod pertinet ad modificationem actus.</p>	<p>Note that there are four things which pertain to the notion of a virtuous act.</p> <p><i>First</i>, is its very substance be modified, thanks to which the act is called good, as bearing on fitting matter or surrounded by fitting circumstances.</p> <p><i>Second</i>, that the act be related in a fitting manner to the subject, as firmly inhering in him.</p> <p><i>Third</i>, that the act be proportioned in a fitting way to something extrinsic as to its end.</p> <p>[These three all pertain to the fact that the act is directed by reason.]</p> <p><i>Fourth</i>, there is that which is on the side of directing reason, namely, knowledge.</p> <p>Aristotle touches on these four in the <i>Nicomachean Ethics</i> 2 when he says that it is not enough for virtue that things are justly or temperately done, which pertains to the modification of the act.</p>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The attentive reader will notice that the aspects of the human act which give rise to this discussion of the cardinal virtues seem somewhat more generic than that mentioned at the outset. And so, we shall see, it is.

For now, having noted that there are three aspects of the human act which are due it because it is directed by reason, he now turns to the knowledge reason must have in order to accomplish such directing.

<p>Sed alia tria requiruntur ex parte operantis.</p> <p><i>Primum</i> quidem ut sit sciens; quod pertinet ad cognitionem dirigentem. <i>Deinde</i>, quod sit eligens et reeligens propter hoc, idest propter debitum finem; quod pertinet ad rectitudinem actus in ordine ad aliquid extrinsecum. <i>Tertium</i> est, si firme et immobiliter adhaereat et operetur.</p> <p>Haec igitur quattuor scilicet cognitio dirigens, rectitudo, firmitas et moderatio, esti in omnibus virtuosis actibus requirantur; singula tamen horum principalitatem quamdam habent in specialibus quibusdam materiis et actibus.</p>	<p>But there other things are needed on the side of the agent.</p> <p>First, that he be knowing, which pertains to directive knowledge. Then that he be choosing and choosing again for the sake of a fitting end, which pertains to the act's rectitude with reference to something extrinsic. Third, that he firmly and changeless adhere to and act.</p> <p>These four then, namely directive knowledge, rectitude, firmness and moderation, although they are required for any virtuous act, each has a certain principal role in certain matters and acts.</p>
--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The four elements are in one sense common to all virtuous acts insofar as any virtuous act will exhibit or instantiate them. We have, accordingly, what we might call four cardinal features of the virtuous act. But over and above that understanding, Thomas continues, there are specific matters and acts which provide another understanding of cardinal virtues.

<p>Ex parte cognitionis practicae tria requiuntur. Quorum <i>primum</i> est consilium; <i>secundum</i> est iudicium de consiliatis; sicut etiam in ratione sepulativa invenitur inventio vel inquisitio, et iudicium. Sed quia intellectus practicus praecipit fugere vel prosequi, quod non facit speculativus intellectus, ut dicitur in De anima 3, ideo <i>tertio</i> ad rationem practicae pertinet praemediatri de agendis: et hoc est praecipuum ad quod alia duo ordinantur.</p> <p>Circa <i>primum</i> autem perficitur homo per virtutem <i>eubuliae</i>, quae est bene consiliativa. Circa <i>secundum</i> autem perficitur homo per <i>synesim</i> et <i>gnomen</i>, quibus homo fit bene iudicativus, ut dicitur in Ethic. 6. Sed per <i>prudentiam</i> fit ratio bene praeceptiva, ut ibidem dicitur. Unde manifestum est quod ad prudentiam pertinet id quod est praecipuum in cognitione dirigente; et ideo ex hac parte ponitur <i>prudentia</i> virtus cardinalis.</p>	<p>On the side of practical knowledge, three things are required, the <i>first</i> of which is deliberation; the <i>second</i> is judgment concerning things deliberated; so too in speculative reason there is found inquiry or discovery and judgment. But because practical reason commands flight or pursuit, which speculative intellect does not, as is said in On the Soul 3, therefore it pertains to practical reason to ponder things to be done, and it is to this that the other two are chiefly ordered.</p> <p>Man is perfected with regard to the <i>first</i> by the virtue of <i>eubulia</i>, which is to deliberate well. Man is perfected as to the <i>second</i> by <i>synesis</i> and <i>gnome</i>, whereby a man is made to judge well, as is said in Ethics 6. Through <i>prudence</i> is man is made to command well. Thus it is clear that to prudence pertains what is principal in directive knowledge, and for that reason <i>prudence</i> is said to be a cardinal virtue.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Similiter rectitudo actus per comparisonem ad aliquid extrinsecum, habet quidem rationem boni et laudabilis etiam in his quae pertinent ad unum secundum seipsum, sed maxime laudatur in his quae sunt ad alterum; quando scilicet homo actus suum rectificat non solum in his quae ad ipsum pertinent, sed etiam in his in quibus cum aliis communicat. Dicit enim Philosophus in Ethic. 5 quod multi in propriis quidem virtute uti possunt, in his autem quae sunt ad alterum, non possunt. Et ideo *iustitia* ex hac parte ponitur virtus principalis, per quam homo debito modo copatur et adequatur aliis, cum quibus communicare habet; unde et vulgariter dicuntur iusta illa quae sunt debito modo coaptata.

Moderatio autem, sive refrenatio, ibi praecipue laudem habet et rationem boni, ubi praecipue passio impellit, quam ratio refrenare debet, ut ad medium virtutis perveniat. Impellit autem passio maxima ad prosequendas delectationes maximas, quae sunt delectationes tactus; et ideo ex hac parte ponitur cardinalis virtus *temperantia*, quae reprimit concupiscentias delectabilium secundum tactum.

Firmitas autem praecipue laudem habet et rationem boni in illis in quibus passio maxime movet ad fugam: et hoc praecipue in maximis periculis, quae sint pericula mortis; et ideo ex hac parte *fortitudo* ponitur virtus cardinalis, per quam homo circa mortis pericula intrepide se habet.

Harum autem quattuor virtutum, *prudencia* quidem est in ratione, *iustitia* autem est in voluntate, *fortitudo* autem in irascibili, *temperantia* autem in concupiscibili; quae solae potentiae possunt esse principia actus humani, id est voluntarii.

Unde patet ratio virtutum cardinalium, tum ex parte modorum virtutis, tum etiam ex parte materiae, tum etiam ex parte subiecti

Similarly, the rectitude of the act with reference to something extrinsic has the note of the good and praiseworthy even in things confined to oneself, but one is particularly praised in things which involve others, namely when a man rectifies his action not only in what pertains to himself, but also in matter he has in common with others. For the Philosopher says in Ethics 5 that many can use virtue in their own affairs who are unable to when it comes to others. Therefore *justice* is called a principal virtue, thanks to which a man is adapted and made equal in a fitting manner to others with whom he must live. Which is why just things are commonly called what is adapted in a fitting manner.

Moderation or restraint, however, is chiefly praised and has the note of good where passion chiefly impels, which reason must restrain so that the virtuous mean can be achieved. But passion especially impels to the pursuit of the greatest pleasure, which are those of touch, and thus from this consideration *temperance* which refrains desires bearing on the pleasures of touch is called a cardinal virtue.

Firmness especially is praised and has the note of good in the things where passion moves to flight, and this is when we face the greatest dangers, which are the dangers of death. So it is that *fortitude* is called a cardinal virtue since thanks to it a man is related with intrepidity to the perils of death.

Of these four virtues, *prudence* is in reason; *justice* in the will, *fortitude* in the irascible appetite and *temperance* in concupiscible appetite. These are the only powers that can be principles of human acts, that is, of voluntary acts.

Clearly therefore the notion of the cardinal virtues can be derived from the modes of virtue, which are as it were its formal notes, as well as from different subject matters and also different subjects.

Thomas distinguishes the tradition which explains cardinal virtues in terms of the general modes of the virtues from the Aristotelian tradition which finds their distinction rather in their different subjects and different matters. It is quite typical of Thomas as a man who moves within a plurality of traditions to show, when this is possible, the rationale of each. So it is that, rather than dismiss talk of cardinal virtues that cannot be reconciled with Aristotle -- or vice versa -- he reflects on the two accounts and finds a way -- one might say an Aristotelian -- way to reconcile them. But if the resolution is broadly Aristotelean, the resulting common doctrine amounts to an advance on Aristotle.

Reading Assignment

Disputed Questions on Virtues, pp. 105-140.

Writing Assignment

Does a person who has one virtue have them all?

Lesson 10: The Structure of the Human Act

The discussion of the cardinal virtues, with its remarks about practical reason and its phases and moments, as well as about the areas in which practical reason deploys its directive capacity, leads us on to a discussion of the structure of the human act.

Knowledge + Will = Human Act

Earlier we said that the human act, as opposed to some activity which might truly be assigned to a human being, has the dual notes of knowledge and will. In order to want anything I must have some notion of it, but having a notion of something to be done is not sufficient to doing it. When we act, accordingly, there are these two components, the cognitive -- awareness of what we are doing -- and the appetitive -- setting ourselves to doing it. Whenever there is a defect in one of the other of these, the act ceases to be a human or voluntary act.

If for example you press a ballpoint into my hand, seize my hands and trace on a sheet of paper my signature and then claim that I have assigned to you all my worldly goods, quite apart from the fact that you would not be much better off than you now are, I would retort that I did no such thing. Did your hand grip the pen that traced that signature on the document? In a sense yes, in a sense no. I did not guide my hand. Thus, although I can be aware throughout this sordid scenario what is going on, I am not *doing* what is being done. My will is not engaged; indeed is actively though ineffectually bent in the opposite direction.

Where unforced willing is absent or diminished, the action either ceases entirely to be a human act or is one only in a diminished sense.

Likewise, when what I set out to do is not what I set out to do because of ignorance on my part, I can scarcely be said to do that of which I am unaware. That is, I would not be held accountable for it. If you hop from the train and dash to your waiting car, pull open the door and plant a wet kiss on the driver's mouth and are subsequently abashed to learn that behind the wheel is the unquitting and iniquitous Fifi LaRue and not your lawful wife, even though the resourceful Fifi has managed to have the scene recorded on film, even though she can call up a dozen witnesses to your osculatory performance, you will plausibly claim that you did not kiss Fifi LaRue. Of course in some sense you did. But that was your car, your wife is in the laudable habit of picking you up at the depot, it never enters your mind that Fifi has chloroformed your bride, having gained entrance to your mortgaged home in the guise of an Avon Lady, appropriated your vehicle, met the train with the results already sadly reported. You intended to kiss the lady at the wheel because you thought and had good reason to think that she was the wife of your bosom, the mother of your children, with a half interest in everything you possess. The lady at the wheel turned out to be Fifi, not Desdemona. If you had become aware an instant before crushing your lips to Fifi's who the recipient of your ardor would be, of course you would have checked yourself and drawn back in horror.

Here you are acting willingly enough, but your willing is guided by defective awareness and knowledge. Needless to say, if you simply pulled open at random the doors of waiting cars and planted a kiss on the driver, this would be a very different situation and invoking the case we have developed would not even fool your wife.

Once we see that mind and will are the essential components of the human act, we can go on to a finer-grained discussion of the two.

The Elements of the Complete Act

In the *Summa theologiae*, I-II, after he has discussed the matters touched on in our previous lesson, Thomas goes on to talk of the different will-acts that make up the complete human action. This teaching provides us with a theory of incomplete acts as well; indeed, as we shall see, it is because an act can be broken off at one point or another that we distinguish the different components of the complete act.

The end of understanding or knowing is the true, something attained in a judgment which matches the things judged. The end of will is the good, that which is completely fulfilling of the agent. But if the will bears principally on the end, it also bears on the means to achieving that end. The will is an appetite that follows on intellect. The mark of intellect is that it knows the natures of things in a universal way. The senses grasp the singular and the appetite that follows on sense perception bears on the singular as such -- this food, this drink. It is a mark of mind that the individual thing is sought as something, as an instance of a kind. The myriad of things that we can want are thus seen as desired under the most common feature that they either are constituents of our complete good.

Thus a human agent humanly desires food as an instance of nourishment and, furthermore, implicitly at least recognizes that nourishment which insures bodily well being is a *sine qua non* of complete fulfillment. The will is the particular willing it is because of its aim or object, and that aim or object is provided it by mind. This does not mean that the will wants whatever comes to mind. Most of the things we recognize as good are far from exhausting the formality of goodness under which they are seen as desirable. They are particular or partial goods; there are dark and shadowy sides to them as well as their attractive aspects. It is this that grounds the freedom of the will. The passage from seeing something as desirable under some formality or other and actually desiring it involves a number of steps.

In distinguishing these steps, Thomas divides them into those which bear on the end, and those which bear on means to the end.

a. Will Acts Bearing on the End

- i. *Voluntas* -- Will
- ii. *Fruitio* -- Enjoyment
- iii. *Intentio* -- Intention

b. Will Acts Bearing on Means

- i. *Consensus* -- assent
- ii. *Electio* -- choice
- iii. *Usus* -- Use

It is well to have the whole schema before us in this way. In the first place, we must always remember that acts of will follow on understanding, so that for each of these will acts there is a corresponding act of intellect. Secondly, we must remember that we would be able to give a streamlined account of action such as this: A person sees something he wants, sees further than it can be achieved in this way or that, selects this way and goes for it. The analysis of human action Thomas is giving is meant to cover career decisions, the selection of a shampoo, taking a right on the way to work and any of the other billions of things that count as human acts. But let us examine the schema.

Reading Assignment

Ethica thomistica, chapter 4

Selected Writings. Selection 23.

Writing Assignment

Trace a human action through the various phases Thomas distinguishes.

Lesson 11: Natural Law

A recurrent feature of magisterial documents of the Catholic Church, when they bear on moral matters, is to insist that there are guidelines for human action that are available to anyone, believer and non-believer alike. Not only does the Church proclaim the moral demands that Christian faith imposes on its adherents, she also proclaims and defends natural morality. It is little wonder that this has led some to think of natural law as a peculiarly Catholic tenet. The Church takes on the task of defending the natural without in any way smudging the difference between the natural and the supernatural.

Important as the doctrine of natural law is to the moral thought of St. Thomas, he does not treat it *ex professo* save on one occasion -- but this is true of any number of his key doctrines, e.g. analogy. The treatment of natural law occurs within the treatise on law in the First Part of the Second Part of the *Summa theologiae*. The treatise begins, appropriately enough, with a definition of law. Thomas asks if law is something of reason, whether it is ordered to the common good, whether it is formed by the one having charge of the community and whether promulgation is of its essence. The answers to these questions, when collected together, tell us what law is.

Et sic quatuor praedictis potest colligi definitio legis, quae nihil est aliud quam quaedam rationis ordinatio ad bonum commune, ab eo qui curam communitatis, promulgata.

—I-II-IIae.90.4. c.

The definition of law can be gathered from these four: law is nothing other than a promulgated rational ordering to the common good by the one who has charge of the community.

This is the first or ordinary sense of the term. If asked what a law is, we would mention some civil ordinance governing conduct with an eye to the common good. Not just any citizen can enact a law: status and authority is needed for that. A law can only bind if it is made known to the citizens, though ignorance of the law is no excuse if the citizen has not acquainted himself with the promulgated ordinance. With this definition fixed and clarified, Thomas then asks if there are different kinds of law.

If we were to answer that question by saying that there are federal, state and municipal ordinances, that there are laws governing the conduct of lawyers, of physicians, of motorists, etc. we would quickly come up with a great variety of laws, to each of which the definition applies straightforwardly. These, we might say, are all laws in a univocal sense of the term; that is, the same account of the term 'law' would be given when applied to each of them. This is not the kind of diversity Thomas is referring to.

The kinds of law he enumerates in Question 91 are these: eternal law; natural law; human law; divine law, and the law of lust. If we asked which of these kinds would save the definition of Question 90 without any need for adjustment we would of course say human law. Thus, the definition of law with which the Treatise on Law begins, applies

without argument to only one of the kinds of law Thomas goes on to enumerate. If the term and account of 'law' with which he begins are to apply to these other kinds, adjustments will have to be made. They will not all be called law in a univocal sense of the term, but rather analogically.

The primary analogate of law is the kind that pops immediately into mind and whose definition is established forthwith. The other kinds of law will be called law with reference to this controlling instance and will be more or less like it.

If this is so, why does Thomas mention the eternal law first when he enumerates the different kinds of law? A consideration of what he means by eternal law tells us why.

<p>Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, nihil aliud est lex quam quoddam dictamen practicae rationis in principe qui gubernat aliquam communitatem perfectam. Manifestum est autem, supposito quod mundus divina providentia regatur, ut in Primo (q. 22) habitum est, quod tota communitas universi gubernatur ratione divina. Et ideo ipsa ratio gubernationis rerum in Deo sicut in principe universitatis existens, legis habet rationem. Et quia divina ratio nihil concipit ex tempore, sed habet aeternal conceptum, ut dicitur Proverbs 8, 23, inde est quod huiusmodi legem oportet dicere aeternam.</p> <p>— lallae.91.1.c</p>	<p>I reply that we must say that, following what was just established, law is nothing other than a dictate of practical reason on the part of the prince who governs a perfect community. But it is clear that, given that the world is ruled by divine providence, as was shown above, the whole community of the universe is governed by the divine reason. Therefore that very notion of the governance of things existing in God as the prince of the universe, has the note of law. And, because the divine reason conceives nothing temporally, but has an eternal concept, as is said by Proverbs 8, 23, this law must be called eternal.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The divine causality from which the universe flows is a knowing act on God's part. What is created is both established and governed by this causality and because of the latter we speak of God's providing for his creation. When we think of this on an analogy with an earthly prince fashioning rules of conduct for those in his realm, we speak of the divine providence as a law, indeed an eternal law since the divine thinking is not a temporal process but from all eternity. [The reference to a 'perfect' community is meant to distinguish the state or city from the family or lesser groupings which are not sufficient unto themselves. A parent's orders are not law in a full sense of the term.]

If divine providence is a law because we can liken it to law in the primary sense, it is in itself prior to human laws. Nothing is prior to God, all creatures and creaturely activities are subsequent to and dependent upon him. Earthly princes making laws are able to do so only because the universe is what it is and is governed as it is. Divine providence, eternal law, is first of all laws. But this does not mean that it is the first thing we mean by 'law.' We have here a situation which is repeated in every case where a name is analogically common to God and creature. Creatures are more easily known by us than God, of course, and our talk reflects this. We speak first of the things we know first. But sometimes terms fashioned to signify creatures come to be used of their first cause as

well. Words which first mean created perfections, subsequently and derivatively signify the divine. But God is prior to all creatures: without his causality, they would simply not be. This is why we distinguish the order of the name from the order of the things named. In the order of the name or word 'law', human law is first, and eternal law second. In the order of the things named, eternal law is first and human law derives from it.

Natural law is mentioned second because, ontologically, it falls between eternal law and human law. This is abundantly clear from the account Thomas gives of 'natural law' in article 3 of Question 91.

The eternal law, divine providence, can be said to be 'in' something in several ways, in the way that any rule or measure can be said to be in the measurer or ruler and in the measured and ruled. Thus, while eternal law is in the divine mind in the first sense, it is in the things subject to God's governance in the second sense. A sign of this is the more or less predictable behavior of things given the nature given it by God. Eternal law is in everything measured or ruled by it. It is the special way in which the human agent is measured by eternal law that leads to talk of a distinct law, natural law.

<p>...omnia participant aliquo modo legem aeternam, in quantum scilicet ex impressione eius habent inclinationes in proprios actus et fines. Inter cetera autem rationalis creatura excellentiori quodam modo divinae providentiae subiacet, in quantum et ipsa fit providentiae particeps, sibi ipsi et aliis providens. Unde et in ipsa participatur ratio aeterna, per quam habet naturalem inclinationem ad debitum actum et finem. Et talis participatio legis aeternae in rationali creatura lex naturalis dicitur.</p> <p>— I-IIae.91.2.c</p>	<p>...all things participate in some way in eternal law insofar as from its impression they have inclinations to their proper acts and ends. But among them the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a more excellent way, insofar as he becomes a participant in providence, providing for himself and others. Hence in it too eternal reason is participated in, thanks to which it has a natural inclination to its fitting end and act. This kind of participation in eternal law on the part of the rational creature is called natural law.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Natural law is a special case of the creaturely participation in eternal law -- by being governed by it. To be governed by eternal law does not involve awareness or knowledge, by and large, but in the case of the human agent, there is not only governance by the divine reason, but self-governance as well. The human agent thus imitates the divine agent and his sharing in eternal law is thus appropriately recognized as a special kind of law. Law, we remember, is something of reason.

Thomas goes on to speak of human law and makes it clear how it depends on the natural law whereby the human agent governs himself as a measured measure. If law is a dictate of practical reason, we should remember that practical reason describes a certain trajectory or process in its operation. The same is true of theoretical reason. Our thinking begins with sweeping generalities whose truth no one would doubt and proceeds to more specific knowledge where of course complete certainty is harder to come by. The starting points of reasoning, its principles, are called self-evident because

knowledge of their truth is not dependent on knowledge of the truth of something else. As reason moves off from such principles, it formulates judgments which depend upon the starting points either because they specify them in some way or because they derive from specifications of them. The ease with which we know starting points is the basis for saying that we know them naturally, as opposed to the effort and inquiry more specific truths cost. In the case of practical reasoning, the particular ordinances are called human law -- provided that all the notes of the definition of law first given obtain. Obviously, not every use of practical reason issues in laws even though it is undertaken to govern my conduct here and now. My ultimate judgment of what I must do does not acquire the status of law. But what is called law in the proper sense is a specification by the practical reason of the legislator.

Once we see how natural law is located between eternal law and human law, we are ready to understand its more frequent description. We find this in Question 94 which is dedicated to the discussion of natural law.

The precepts of natural law are the things we naturally grasp as to how we ought to act. The grasp or hold of such guidelines is a kind of habit of the mind, but natural law is what is grasped or held by that quasi-habit. [Article 1] The second article asks how many precepts of natural law there are. In pursuing an answer to it, Thomas spells out the analogy between theoretical and practical reason he has already invoked. Natural law is a special case of the creaturely participation in eternal law -- by being governed by it. To be governed by eternal law does not involve awareness or knowledge, by and large, but in the case of the human agent, there is not only governance by the divine reason, but self-governance as well. The human agent thus imitates the divine agent and his sharing in eternal law is thus appropriately recognized as a special kind of law. Law, we remember, is something of reason.

Thomas goes on to speak of human law and makes it clear how it depends on the natural law whereby the human agent governs himself as a measured measure. If law is a dictate of practical reason, we should remember that practical reason describes a certain trajectory or process in its operation. The same is true of theoretical reason. Our thinking begins with sweeping generalities whose truth no one would doubt and proceeds to more specific knowledge where of course complete certainty is harder to come by. The starting points of reasoning, its principles, are called self-evident because knowledge of their truth is not dependent on knowledge of the truth of something else. As reason moves off from such principles, it formulates judgments which depend upon the starting points either because they specify them in some way or because they derive from specifications of them. The ease with which we know starting points is the basis for saying that we know them naturally, as opposed to the effort and inquiry more specific truths cost. In the case of practical reasoning, the particular ordinances are called human law -- provided that all the notes of the definition of law first given obtain. Obviously, not every use of practical reason issues in laws even though it is undertaken to govern my conduct here and now. My ultimate judgment of what I must do does not acquire the status of law. But what is called law in the proper sense is a specification by the practical reason of the legislator.

Once we see how natural law is located between eternal law and human law, we are ready to understand its more frequent description. We find this in Question 94 which is dedicated to the discussion of natural law.

The precepts of natural law are the things we naturally grasp as to how we ought to act. The grasp or hold of such guidelines is a kind of habit of the mind, but natural law is what is grasped or held by that quasi-habit. [Article 1] The second article asks how many precepts of natural law there are. In pursuing an answer to it, Thomas spells out the analogy between theoretical and practical reason he has already invoked.

Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est, praecepta legis naturae hoc modo se habent ad rationem practicam, sicut principia prima demonstrationum se habent ad rationem speculativam: utraque enim sunt quaedam principia per se nota. Dicitur autem aliquid per se notum dupliciter: uno modo, secundum se; alio modo, quoad nos. Secundum se quidem quaelibet propositio dicitur per se nota, cuius praedicatum est de ratione subiecti: contingit tamen quod ignorantia definitionem subiecti, talis propositio non erit per se nota. Sicut ista propositio, *Homo est rationale*, est per se nota secundum sui naturam, quia qui dicit hominem dicit rationale: et tamen ignorantia quid sit homo, haec propositio non est per se nota. Et inde quod sicut dicit Boetius, in libro *De hebdomadibus*, quaedam sunt dignitates vel propositiones per se notae communiter omnibus: et huiusmodi sint illae propositiones quarum termini sunt omnibus noti, ut *Omne totum est maius sua parte* et *Quae uni et eidem sunt aequalia, sibi invicem sunt aequalia*. Quaedam vero propositiones sunt per se notae solis sapientibus, qui terminos propositionum intelligunt quid significant: sicut intelligenti quod angelus non est corpus, per se notum est quod non est circumscriptive in loco, quod non est manifestum rudibus, qui hoc non capiunt.

-- lallae.94.2.c

I reply that we must say that, as was stated in q. 91, a. 3, the precepts of the law of nature are to practical reason as the first principles of demonstrations are to speculative reason, for both are self-evident principles. But something is said to be self-evident either as such or with respect to us. A proposition is called self-evident as such when its predicate enters into the account of its subject, though it can happen that for one who does not know the definition of the subject the proposition will not be self-evident. The proposition 'Man is rational' is as such self-evident, since whoever says man says rational, but for one who ignorant of what a man is the proposition would not be self-evident. That is why Boethius says in the *De hebdomadibus* that there are axioms or self-evident propositions known to all and these are propositions whose terms are known to everybody. E.g. 'Every whole is greater than its part,' or 'Things equal to some third thing are equal to one another.' Other propositions are self-evident only to the wise who know what their terms mean. E.g. to someone who knows that an angel is not a body it is self-evident that an angel is not circumscriptively in place, something not manifest to the uninstructed who don't know this.

The notion of a self-evident proposition, one knows in itself as opposed to being derived from other propositions, has its natural habitat in theoretical or speculative reason. In this passage Thomas proposes to extend the notion of self-evident proposition from the theoretical to the practical order, thus providing himself with the means to give a second description of natural law, viz. Natural law means the self-evidently true precepts that

govern human action. It is imperative to grasp the notion of the self-evident in its native habitat before seeing how it can be extended to the practical order.

A proposition is self-evident as such when its predicate enters into the definition of its subject. If the definition of man is rational animal, then the proposition "Man is rational" is self-evident. Such a proposition is recognized as self-evident by one who understands the meaning of the constituent terms. The examples given are:

[1] The whole is greater than its part.

[2] Two things equal to a third are equal to one another.

It is difficult to imagine someone who doesn't realize that he who gets the whole pie gets more than if he is given only a slice of it. So too if your foot is as large as Emil's and my foot is as large as Emil's, my foot is as large as yours, neither of us being Emil. But there are those who are baffled by

[3] Angels are nowhere.

This was the point of pointing out that there is no limit to the number of angels who could be on the head of a pin. It is not that things would get crowded but that angels being what angels are don't take up space, they are not in place the way pins and bowling balls and the like are. Asking how many angels can be on the head of a pin calls attention to a category mistake. If someone said

[4] I have the number 7 in my pocket

we would assume he was telling a joke. The number 7 just isn't located the way keys and coins and handkerchiefs are. But [3] and [4] are self-evidently true and false, respectively, once we know the nature of what is being talked about.

What is important for our purposes is that Thomas means to extend talk of self-evident propositions to the practical order. A sign that something is a self-evident proposition is that it makes no sense to deny it. Theoretical self-evident propositions are defined as those whose predicates enter into the definitions of their subjects. [This is the first kind of *perseity* that Aristotle lists and a thorough discussion of the topic would require asking whether the other modes of *perseity* or self-evident can travel from the theoretical to the practical order.] Some such propositions are not known to be such by those who do not understand their terms. So too we can imagine a practical precept in the area of medical ethics the meaning of whose terms are known only to the instructed. For most of us, the precept would baffle; for the instructed it might be utterly nongainsayable -- to deny it would be nonsense.

In his autem quae in apprehensione omnium cadunt, quidam ordo invenitur. Nam illud quod primo cadit in apprehensione, est ens, cuius intellectus includitur in omnibus quaecumque quis apprehendit. Et ideo primum principium indemonstrabile est quod *non est simul affirmare et negare*, quod fundatur supra rationem entis et non entis: et super hoc principio omnia alia fundatur, ut dicitur in *IV Metaphs*. Sicut autem ens est primum quod cadit in apprehensione simpliciter, ita bonum est primum quod cadit in apprehensione practicae rationis, quae ordinatur ad opus: omne enim agens agit propter finem, qui habet rationem boni. Et ideo primum principium in ratione practica est quod fundatur supra rationem boni, quae est *Bonum est quod omnia appetunt*. Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum et malum vitandum. Et super hoc fundatur omnia alia praecepta legis naturae: ut scilicet omnia illa facienda vel vitanda pertineant ad praecepta legis naturae, quae ratio practica naturaliter apprehendit esse bona humana.

— lallae.94.2.c

There is an order among the things that everyone grasps. For that which first is apprehended is being, the understanding of which is included in whatever else one apprehends. Therefore the first indemonstrable principle is *Not to affirm and deny simultaneously*, which is based on the notions of being and non-being. On this principle all others are based, as is said in *Metaphysics* 4. Now just as being is the first thing apprehended simply speaking, so the good is what practical reason, which is ordered to some deed, first grasps: every agent acts for the sake of an end, which has the note of the good. Therefore the first principle in practical reason is that which is based on the notion of the good, that is, *on The good is that which all things seek*. The first precept of the law, accordingly, is that good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided. On this all other precepts of the law of nature are based, such that whatever is to be done or avoided will constitute precepts of the law of nature if practical reason naturally apprehends them to be human goods.

The parallel or analogy between speculative and practical reason is crucial to understanding what is meant by saying that the precepts of natural law are self-evident truths about what we should do, pursue or avoid. Practical reason is not a different faculty than speculative reason, but the extension of reason into the realm of doing or making. This extension entails that what pertains to reasoning as such applies to practical reasoning as well. Thus, to deny or gainsay a precept of natural law is to violate a law of reasoning as such. Thus, one who sought to deny that the good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided would imply that something other than good is to be done, that is, that something other than the good is the good. But this is to affirm and deny at the same time.

Similarly, the first thing grasped by reason, *being, what is*, is presupposed by the first grasp of practical reason, *what is desirable, the good*. That which is good is a being, but a being seen in relation to a desirer whose perfection it is. As we have seen above, the theoretical and practical uses of intellect differ, but they are not separate. "It is by extension," Thomas quote approvingly, "that theoretical reason becomes practical." Knowledge of the way things are, knowledge of what we are, provides the theoretical bases for practical reason.

This is clear from the conclusion of the article we have been examining. Our last quotation ended with the observation that precepts of natural law stating what is to be done or avoided are formed from practical reason's recognition of human goods. This recognition is based on our inclinations of which we become aware. Prior to any decision, we like everything else are inclined to preserve ourselves in existence. This inclination is manifest in the desire for food and drink. We don't decide such things are good for us, and then pursue them. We become aware that to be what we are is already to be inclined to them as goods. Like other animals we are attracted by the opposite sex and thus inclined to mate and have children. There are specifically human goods that are made manifest by our natural inclinations to live with others of our kind and to seek knowledge and avoid ignorance.

The goods revealed by such natural inclinations do not as such yield natural law precepts, as if "Eat, drink and be merry" were a precept of natural law. Rather, the natural inclinations reveal to us the constituents of our complete good and practical reason must then fashion guidelines for action which will become every more specific as the various goods made manifest by natural inclinations are pursued in more definite forms and in more particularized circumstances.

In its first description, natural law was said to be the peculiarly human participation in eternal law. We are not only governed by divine providence, we are so fashioned that we must govern ourselves. We do this by judging the fitting way to pursue the goods revealed by the natural inclinations. Knowledge is a good. Practical reason will see that the pell-mell pursuit of knowledge is destructive of the integral good of the person. So too the mindless pursuit of the pleasures of food and drink. Clearly, *Do good and avoid evil* is addressed by a rational agent to himself, and for him to do good is to do it in a reasonable way. The human good is a rational good, one judged to be worthy of pursuit. The recognition that we are naturally inclined to certain good is not the judgment that they are worthy of pursuit in just any old way. Each of these goods is comprehended by the integral good that is grasped in the very first principle, *The good is to be done and pursued and evil avoided*. The good of this natural inclination or that are specifications of, or constituents of, that comprehensive good. Pursuit of them will be judged fitting only if it does not jeopardize the comprehensive good.

The passage we have been analyzing is, by common consent, the single most important article Thomas devoted to the subject of natural law. It is paradoxically true that this discussion of that which is self-evidently true is very difficult to understand and quite different interpretations of it are offered by careful students of St. Thomas. This indicates that we should be careful not to equate the *theory or discussion of natural law* with *the precepts of natural law*. While everyone can be counted on to know the latter, the former is complicated and anything but self-evident. But what theorists seek to describe and explain is the fact that there are certain judgments as to what human beings ought to do or ought not do which only a fool could deny. Everyone knows that dealing unfairly with others is wrong -- at least when he himself is the victim.

Reading Assignment

Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings, selection 24.

Writing Assignment

How does the analogy between practical and speculative intellect enable Thomas to lay out the first precepts of natural law?

Lesson 12: Weakness of Will

Moral philosophy begins with a discussion of man's ultimate end because it is a characteristic of human action that it is for the sake of an end. The delineation of the comprehensive end of human activity provides the context within which lesser ends can be located. Some lesser ends can be considered as constituents of the ultimate end, others as means to its acquisition. Thus, one model of moral reasoning consists in the search for appropriate means to accomplishing or achieving a given end.

<p>...actus dicuntur humani, inquantum procedunt a voluntate deliberata. Objectum autem voluntatis est bonum et finis. Et ideo manifestum est quod principium humanorum actuum, inquantum sunt humani, est finis. Et similiter est terminus eorundem: nam id ad quod terminatur actus humanus, est id quod voluntas intendit tanquam finem... actus morales proprie speciem sortiuntur ex fine: nam idem sunt actus morales et actus humani.</p> <p>— ST, 1a2ae, q. 1, a. 3, c.</p>	<p>...acts are said to be human insofar as they proceed from deliberate will, but the object of the will is the good and end. It is clear therefore that the principle of human acts, insofar as they are human, is the end. It is also their term, for the human act terminates in that which the will intends as end... moral acts are properly specified by the end, for moral acts and human acts are the same.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Deliberation, as we have seen, is a search for means to the end. Once this search is completed, the process of execution begins with the last the chain of means deliberation has turned up. The kind of example that suggests itself is of something like the objective of education, e.g. the desire to be a doctor. In order to be a doctor one must have gone through medical school; in order to be admitted to medical school, one must, *inter alia*, have amassed a good academic record in pre-medical studies. Pre-medical studies can be pursued in a number of institutions, of which say five are within one's reach. Which of the five should be chosen? For the nonce, it seems well to apply to three of them. For this application forms are needed. Addresses of the registrars of these institutions may be found by consulting the public library. This could be done in person or by phone.

Better phone. The act of picking up the telephone on this occasion, then, fits into a complicated network of acts so related that, carried through to successful completion, I will soon be scrubbing up for my first whack at brain surgery.

On the other hand, when we think of Thomas's account of the first principles of practical reasoning in his Treatise on Law in the *Summa theologiae*, specifically the discussion of natural law, the model of moral reasoning set forth is one of applying general principles to particular circumstances and drawing the appropriate conclusion.

Not surprisingly, then, it is often maintained that Thomas, and Aristotle before him, operated with two quite different conceptions of practical or moral reasoning, on the one hand, and end/means analysis, and, on the other, a principle/application model.

<p>Sed sciendum est quod a lege naturali dupliciter potest aliquid derivari: uno modo, sicut conclusiones ex principiis; alio modo, sicut determinationes quaedam aliquorum communium. Primus quidem modus est similis ei quo in scientiis ex principiis conclusiones demonstrativae producuntur. Secundo vero modo simile est quod in artibus formae communes determinantur ad aliquod speciale: sicut artifex formam communem domus necesse est quod determinet ad hanc vel illam domus figuram</p> <p>-- ST 1a2ae, q. 95, a. 2, c.</p>	<p>Notice that something can be derived from natural law in two ways: first, as conclusions from principles; second, as certain determinations of the common. The first way is similar to that by which in the demonstrative sciences conclusions are derived from principles. The second is similar to the way in which in the arts common forms are determined to something special: as the artisan must tailor the common form of house to the construction of this house or that.</p>
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Action is the application of general judgments as to what ought to be done to the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves. Thomas makes use of the term *synderesis* to name the habitual knowledge of the precepts of natural law. These precepts, we have seen, are universal: the first -- *Do good and avoid evil* -- ranges over the whole domain of human action. Less universal principles specify the first to a given range of action. Until and unless universal precepts are tailored to this action here and now they cannot be effective. Thus application is accomplished by the virtue of prudence or practical wisdom. Imagine that an action is described discursively in this way:

- *I ought not take possession of what is not mine.*
 - *This Father Dowling novel is not mine.*

The conclusion would seem to be the judgment: *Therefore I should not take possession of this Father Dowling novel.*

Or consider this:

- *It is only just that I should pay my debts.*
 - *I owe you five dollars.*

The conclusion would seem to be: *Therefore I ought to pay you five dollars.* Of course you would not be satisfied with my just *saying* that or just *thinking* that. You want me to hand over five dollars. The conclusion of such a practical syllogism must be embedded in an action in order for us to say that the discourse has achieved its goal.

It is possible to be uninformed or confused about general precepts of action, although Thomas considers that total ignorance of the precepts of natural law is impossible. No matter how perverse our upbringing, no matter how decadent the society into which we are born, our practical judgments will incorporate the truth that we ought to do and pursue the good and avoid evil. We also have the capacity to discern that we have been misled by our moral education into thinking that something that is not truly our good is our good. In principle, at least, it would seem to be a feature of being a human agent, that we retain the ability to assess and appraise the moral ideals that have been inculcated in us. If this is difficult, sometimes seemingly to the point of practical impossibility, it is because we are not talking about disengaged knowledge, but of judgments which are embedded in our choices and actions.

But even short of such an extreme situation, one in which the human agent is raised in a wholly defective moral environment, nothing is more common than for a human agent to commence the process of applying a true precept, one that embodies an end that truly is fulfilling of a human agent, and failing to reach the goal. I know that I should be temperate. Temperance, the moderate consumption of food, say, is the pursuit of the undeniable good of nourishment and the accompanying pleasure in such a way that my integral good governs such conduct. Let us say that I have written a treatise on temperance; I am regularly invited to conferences where temperance is discussed. My analysis is considered the best since Aristotle. After the last session, I am at table in the hotel dining room. Succulent smells drift from the kitchen. There is the clink of tableware, the sparkle of glass and goblet, a dish of complimentary hors d'oeuvre placed at my elbow. A Manhattan seems just the thing. As I sip it, my eye travels over the menu. From a recessed alcove, music to eat by is played. The waiter hovers, ready to take my order.

Four hours later I attempt to rise from the table. With assistance I manage to get up. I am helped across the room and on to the elevator. In my room, I fall fully clothed across my bed and am immediately out like a light. Portrait of an intemperate man.

What went wrong? I know what I ought to do, at least on a level of generality. That knowledge was available to me as I sat down in the restaurant. Perhaps I reminded myself of the good of temperance and of various precepts which embody the ideal. As I become aware of the setting, surely I see the applicability of the precepts of temperance to those particular circumstances. But, in the event, I act intemperately. What went wrong?

The general practical knowledge I have bears on certain specific goods of action. My knowledge of those goods is true. But something that is good relates not just to my mind, but also to my will. My concrete action suggests that the good I know, the good of which I have true knowledge, is not my good; that is, it is not what I truly desire. What I truly desire is manifested in what I do. The good that I know, I do not and the evil that I would not, that I do.

Is this just a matter of the will freaking out, performing an action on its own that is unrelated to knowledge. In the example, what I will is certainly unrelated to the true knowledge I have concerning temperance. Can the will just act, independently of knowledge?

If will is a rational appetite, this is not possible. A particular will act is the will act it is because it is informed by a mental judgment. In the example, my action, what I will to do, is not specified or informed by my knowledge of temperance. What then? Thomas and Aristotle suggest that such occurrences reveal that there is some other knowledge or judgment that is actually informing the will. It is tacit, implicit, and if expressed would be the opposite of the true knowledge I have of temperance. It might be something as vulgar as *Eat all you can when on the road* or *When on an expense account, order everything on the menu*. Some version of *Pursue pleasure heedlessly* would seem to express what is actually my good or end. What I do reveals where my heart, and eventually my heartburn, is. A moral philosopher travels on his stomach.

The discursive process of one who does not have the virtue of temperance although he possesses true knowledge of temperance and its general precepts is aborted as it moves toward the singular action. As I try to apply the knowledge, my actual disposition, what I really relate to as good, makes itself felt. The act that I perform is the application of the judgment implicit in my actual disposition.

In order for practical reason to reach its goal I need true knowledge of the good and I have to be appetitively related to the true good -- it has to be *my* good. This is what Thomas means by practical truth.

Ad tertium dicendum quod verum intellectus practici aliter accipitur quam verum intellectus speculativi, ut dicitur in *VI Ethic*. Nam verum intellectus speculativi accipitur per conformitatem intellectus ad rem. Et quia intellectus non potest infallibiliter conformari rebus in contingentibus, sed solum in necessariis; ideo nullus habitus speculativus contingentium est intellectualis virtus, sed solum est circa necessaria. -- Verum autem intellectus practici accipitur per conformitatem ad appetitum rectum.

— Iallae.57.5 ad 3

To the third objection it should be said that the true is had in the practical intellect differently than in the speculative intellect, as is said in *Ethics 6*. For the true is had in speculative intellect by way of the conformity of mind to reality. And, because intellect cannot be infallibly conformed to contingent things, but only to necessary things, there is no speculative habit of contingent things that is an intellectual virtue, but only of necessary things. -- But the true is had in practical intellect through conformity with rectified appetite.

Only the man who loves the good expressed in true practical precepts will be able to apply them effectively in particular circumstances and act in conformity with them. If one has true knowledge but not correct appetite, his appetite will skew his reasoning and bring his action under the unstated precept which incorporates the end which truly captures his heart. The remedy is not more knowledge, since *ex hypothesis* this agent already has the relevant true practical knowledge. What is needed is prayer and fasting. Training the will toward the true good in situations less charged than the hotel dining room. Curbing one's appetite when this costs less schools the will so that, with difficulty at first, actions are brought under the true precept. With repetition comes ease and ease is a sign of virtue.

Reading Assignment

Ethica thomistica, chapter 6 and 7.

Writing Assignment

Compare theoretical and practical truth.

Lesson 13: Conscience

The virtue of practical intellect which in conjunction with rectified appetite, that is, the moral virtues, effectively applies the known good in particular instances is called prudence, *phronesis*, practical wisdom. But isn't conscience the term we would employ in talking of bringing particular possible actions under the rule of reason? Are prudence and conscience different terms for the same thing? If they differ, in what does their difference consist?

You will find in *Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings* at p. 217 a translation of a famous early treatment of conscience by Thomas Aquinas, taken from the *Disputed Question on Truth*. That reference is made to an early work of Thomas when the question of conscience arises is thought to be significant by some. Conscience is not a prominent feature of later moral discussions and it is sometimes suggested that this indicates that Thomas fused what he had said of conscience with discussions that employ another terminology. This is the basis of the suggestion that there is no need to distinguish between prudence and conscience. Each term refers to the discursive process whereby general precepts are applied to concrete circumstances.

What we have discussed in the previous lesson enables us to see why this is not so. I refer you to a text on p. 223, the answer to the fourth object. In case you do not have the Penguin volume in hand, I reproduce it here.

Ad 4. It should be said that the judgments of conscience and of free will in some ways differ and in some ways are similar. They are similar in that both bear on the particular act -- it belongs to the judgment of conscience as examining -- and in this the judgments of both differ from that of synderesis. But the judgment of conscience differs from that of free will because the judgment of conscience consists of pure knowledge, but the judgment of free will lies in the application of knowledge to the affections, which indeed is the judgment of choice. That is why it sometimes happens that the judgment of free will is perverted and not that of conscience. As when someone examines something imminently to be done and judges as if still speculating through principles that this is evil, for example, to fornicate with this woman. But when he begins to apply it to action, many circumstances of that act occur, for example the pleasure of fornication, from desire of which reason is bound and its dictate is not carried out in choice. In this way one errs in choosing and not in conscience; rather he acts against conscience and is said to do this with a bad conscience only insofar as what is done is not in accord with the judgment of knowledge. Evidently then conscience should not be said to be the same as free will.

Thomas likens conscience and the judgment of free will in their difference from synderesis. Synderesis, we have seen, is the name of the quasi-habit whereby one knows the precepts of natural law. The precepts of natural law are general and of sweeping application. The judgments of conscience and free will, on the other hand, are particular: they bear on the here and now. This is what ought to be done. How does he say they differ?

When we consider what he says of the judgment of free will, it is clear that what he is talking of is the conclusion of the practical syllogism as reached by the virtue of prudence. The judgment which has practical truth because it is in conformity with rectified appetite. It is just that that provides the contrast with the judgment of conscience. Conscience is said to consist of pure knowledge -- that is, knowledge unaffected by the condition of the knower's appetite. The judgment of conscience cannot be rerouted because of my lack of virtue; it does not yet engage my appetite.

This way of drawing the contrast is important. In the case of the virtuous man, action would move with such ease from general precepts to singular choice that there would be little need to distinguish between a purely cognitive judgment of conscience and the judgment of free choice. But when the latter swerves off from known and relevant moral knowledge because of the condition of appetite, the contrast with the judgment of conscience stands out. One knew he should not do this. He nonetheless did do this.

The judgment of conscience about a particular act precedes the act and follows it as well. As antecedent to action, it is admonitory, a warning; as subsequent it is productive or remorse. We recognize that what we did was wrong. In both cases, that of antecedent and subsequent conscience, conscience is the application of the general to the particular. But neither of these seems to accommodate much of our familiar talk about conscience.

We speak, for example, of forming a conscience. We speak of an erroneous conscience. And, as I point out in *Ethica Thomistica*, conscience is often invoked to justify very general judgments about what persons may or may not do.

Although Thomas's preferred meaning for 'conscience' is the here and now judgment of the morality of a singular act, he also uses it of the retrospective judgment of an act performed, something usually associated with an act which failed to embody the morally relevant knowledge. Thus remorse of conscience, *agenbite of inwit* in the phrase beloved of James Joyce, results. But conscience is also used to refer to the general moral knowledge that the agent holds in readiness to apply as circumstances require. It is this that seemed to be referred to when someone says, for example, "My conscience tells me that extramarital sex is all right." Such a remark might be the response to a concerned parent's inquiry as to what junior has been up to. As phrased, the remark is designed to stave off further criticism, implicit or explicit. By taking refuge in conscience one occupies a citadel to which he alone has access and which no one else can enter. What he says goes on in there is the final word.

Why is this nonsense? Every action implies a general judgment that is embedded and particularized in it. To remove a slice of french toast from your plate when you are engaged in conversation with the person to your left is a singular act. It is deliberately and voluntarily performed. Within moments, all evidence of what has happened is gone. So to act is to imply that it is all right so to act. When opportunity affords, french toast may be purloined from distracted diners. Such a general judgment is either defensible or not. There are several possibilities. Imagine that the syrupy felon was raised in a boarding house run by his widowed mother. At meals, it was every man for himself and food remained spearable until it had actually been eaten. Thus for food to be on one's plate represented only a prima facie claim to ownership. It was still fair game for the long arm of the voracious boarder. Our agent has carried this sad baggage into the wider world. His moral training has been such that his taking your slice of french toast is not only permissible, but even a laudable act, however prudent it might be to keep the triumph to himself. Is it to do violence to his conscience to suggest that his habits at table must be discussed with an eye to altering his way of looking at the food on other people's plates?

The discussion concerns the implicit general judgment about eating what is on the plates of others. You will doubtless first ask him what it would be like if everyone acted as he did. His response is that they do, or at least would if they had the chance. You shift your ground from the sociological to the moral. It is not what men do but the good or evil attached to it you want to discuss. Eschewing for the nonce the altruistic, you will ask what his judgment is when he looks down at his place and finds that it has been emptied by someone else. What does he think, and do, when he looks down to see a morsel departing from his plate on the fork of another? If disapproval or resistance comes into the picture, you will want to analyze the reasons why. And so on. With your legendary patience and dialectical skill you soon bring your interlocutor to the point of seeing that his mode of action violates justice. He already has some conception of justice, as his negative response to being the victim of the practice suggests. So

convinced does he become that he eventually publishes a two volume work, *The Torts of Orts*, which becomes required reading in the better law schools of the nation.

Before this salutary exchange, while he is still in the grips of the moral education he learned at the boardinghouse table, the single deed of taking his neighbor's french toast seems covered by the knowledge he had at the time. Holding that knowledge to be true, his act would seem justified, even perhaps mandated and obligatory. It is simple logic to hold that a person is bound to do what he thinks he is bound to do. What else could he do?

Let us look at some texts of Thomas which are celebrated for the clarity they bring to this matter.

Respondeo dicendum quod, cum conscientia sit quodammodo dictamen rationis (est enim quaedam applicatio scientiae ad actus, ut in Primo dictum est), idem est quaerere utrum voluntas discordans a ratione errante sit mala, quod quaerere utrum conscientia errans obliget. Circa quod aliqui distinxerunt tria genera actuum: quidam enim sunt boni ex genere, quidam sunt indifferentes; quidam sunt mali ex genere. Dicunt ergo quod, si ratio vel conscientia dicat aliquid esse faciendum quod sit bonum ex suo genere, non est ibi error. Similiter, si dicat aliquid non esse faciendum quod sit malum ex suo genere: eadem enim ratione praecipuntur bona, quae prohibentur mala. Sed si ratio vel conscientia dicat alicui quod illa quae sunt secundum se mala, homo teneatur facere ex praecepto; vel quod illa quae sunt secundum se bona, sunt prohibita; erit ratio vel conscientia errans. Et similiter si ratio vel conscientia dicat alicui quod id quod est secundum se indifferens, ut levare festucam de terra, sit prohibitum vel praeceptum, erit ratio vel conscientia errans. Ducunt ergo quod ratio errans circa indifferentia, sive praecipiendo sive prohibendo, obligat: ita quod voluntas discordans a tali ratione errante, erit mala et peccatum. Sed ratio vel conscientia errans praecipiendo ea quae sunt per se mala, vel prohibendo ea quae sunt per se bona et necessaria ad salutem, non obligat: unde in talibus voluntas discordans a ratione vel conscientiae errante, non est mala.

— *lallae.19.5.c*

I reply that it should be said that since conscience is in its way a dictate or reason (it is the application of knowledge to an act, as was said in Ia, 79.13) to ask if a will out of harmony with erring reason is evil is the same as asking whether an erroneous conscience binds. Some have dealt with this question by distinguishing three types of act: some are good because of the kind they are; some are indifferent, others are evil because of the kind they are. Then they say that, if reason or conscience dictates that something is to be done that is in its very kind good, there is no error. Similarly, if it dictates that something is not to be done which is evil because of its kind: the reason for prescribing good is the same as that for prohibiting evils. But if reason or conscience should dictate that a man is held to do by precept what is of itself evil, or that things of themselves good are forbidden, it will be an erroneous reason or conscience. So too if reason or conscience commands that something indifferent, like picking a stick from the ground, is forbidden or commanded, it will be erroneous. So they conclude that an erroneous conscience in indifferent matter, whether commanding or forbidding, obliges, such that a will out of harmony with such an erroneous reason is evil and sinful. But an erroneous reason or conscience commanding intrinsic evils or forbidding things good in themselves and necessary for salvation does not oblige, so that in those cases a will out of harmony with an erroneous conscience is not evil.

Thomas gives a lot of space to this position which links the question as to whether or not conscience binds to the kind of act at issue. If conscience forbids something as such good or enjoins something intrinsically evil, it is not binding. But in indifferent matters, whether it forbids or enjoins it binds, just as it does when enjoining the intrinsically good or forbidding the intrinsically evil. But this is nonsense.

<p>Sed hoc irrationabiliter dicitur. In indifferentibus enim voluntas discordans a ratione vel conscientia errante, est mala aliquo modo propter obiectum a quo bonitas vel malitia voluntatis dependet: non autem propter obiectum secundum sui naturam, sed secundum quod per accidens a ratione apprehenditur ut malum ad faciendum vel ad vitandum. Et quia obiectum voluntatis est id quod proponitur a rationem ut dictum est, ex quod aliquid proponitur a ratione ut malum, voluntas, dum in illud fertur, accipit rationem mali. Hoc autem contingit non solum in indifferentibus, sed etiam in per se bonis vel malis. Non solum enim id quod est indifferens potest accipere rationem boni vel mali per accidens, sed etiam id quod est bonum potest accipere rationem mali, vel id quod est malum rationem boni propter apprehensionem rationis.</p>	<p>But this is a silly judgment. For in indifferent matter a will out of harmony with an erroneous reason or conscience is evil because of its object on which the goodness or evil of will depends -- not on the very nature of the object but insofar as it is accidentally grasped by reason as an evil to be done or avoided. The object of will is what is proposed to it by reason, as has been said, so that when reason judges something to be evil, a will bearing on it is evil. This is the case not only in matters of indifference, but also when it is a question of things intrinsically good or evil. It is not only the indifferent that can take on the note of good or evil incidentally, but also that which is good can take on the note of evil and that which is evil the note of good because of the way reason apprehends them.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The will is guided by the judgment of reason and what is decisive for this matter is not simply the distinction between acts intrinsically good or evil, or indifferent, but what the mind grasps. The intrinsically good can be judged to be evil and the intrinsically evil to be good and the will is bound to conform itself to those judgments. An erroneous conscience binds. Thomas continues.

<p>Putat, abstinere a fornicatione bonum quoddam est, tamen in hoc bonum non fertur voluntas nisi secundum quod a ratione proponitur. Si ergo proponatur ut malum a ratione errante, feretur in hoc sub ratione mali. Unde voluntas erit mala quia vult malum, non quidem id quod est malum per se, sed id quod est malum per accidens, propter apprehensionem rationis.</p>	<p>For example, to abstain from fornication is a kind of good, but the will can only choose it insofar as it is proposed to it by reason. There if it should be presented as an evil but erring reason, it would choose it as evil. Hence the will will be evil because it chooses evil, not that which is in itself evil, but what is evil incidentally, because of the way reason judges it.</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

The argumentation Thomas dismisses fails to take into account that the objective distinction into kinds of act has to be mediated to will by reason. That is, one has to know that an act is of a certain kind. If he is mistaken, his will can only follow his judgment. In every case of it, Thomas argues, an erroneous conscience binds.

His position here, and the gusto with which he rejects the alternative to which he devotes so much time, can surprise. Thomas's moral thought has been firmly anchored in objective reality. His teaching is a welcome alternative to the various kinds of moral relativism abroad. That adultery is wrong is not just an opinion, a judgment dictated by one's feelings but which another's feelings might dictate is permitted. But now, in the crunch, as it were, Thomas seems to relativize action. His opponents do not what an erroneous conscience to bind when it tells us good is forbidden or evil commanded. Nonsense, Thomas replies. Conscience binds. Correct and erroneous conscience binds. Every kind of erroneous conscience binds. But if one must do what he thinks he should do and people think differently about the same matter, moral relativism seems triumphant.

Or is it? Is the action obligated by an erroneous conscience good?

Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut praemissa quaestio eadem est cum quaestione qua quaeritur utrum conscientia erronea liget, ita ista quaestio eadem est cum illa qua quaeritur utrum conscientia erronea excuset. Haec autem quaestio dependet ab eo quod supra de ignorantia dictum est. Dictum est enim supra quod ignorantia quandoque causat involuntarium, quandoque autem non. Et quia bonum et malum morale consistit in actu in quantum est voluntarius, ut ex praemissis patet, manifestum est quod illa ignorantia quae causat involuntarium tollit rationem boni et mali moralis; non autem illa quae involuntarium non causat. Dictum est etiam supra quod ignorantia quae est aliquo modo voluta, sive directe sive indirecte non causat involuntarium. Et dico ignorantiam directe voluntariam, in quam actus voluntatis fertur: indirecte autem propter negligentiam, ex eo quod aliquis non vult illud scire quod scire tenetur, ut supra dictum est.

— Iallae.19.6.c

I answer that just as the prior question is the same as the question whether an erroneous conscience binds, so this question should be seen as the same as that which asks whether an erroneous conscience excuses. But this question depends on what was said earlier (q. 6, a. 8) about ignorance. There it was pointed out that ignorance sometimes causes the involuntary but sometimes does not. And, since moral good and evil belong to the act insofar as it is voluntary, as what has gone before makes clear, it is obvious that the ignorance that causes the involuntary removes the note of moral good or evil but not the ignorance which does not cause the involuntary. It was pointed out earlier that an ignorance that is in some way willed, whether directly or indirectly, does not cause the involuntary. I call ignorance directly voluntary which is chosen by the will, but indirectly so insofar as one does not wish to know what he is held to know, as was said above.

Having established that the erroneous conscience binds, Thomas approaches the question whether it excuses by way of what he had earlier said of ignorance. An erroneous conscience is one that does not know, that is, ignores what is truly good, evil and indifferent. Since you can only do what you know you ought to do, it would seem that an erroneous conscience excuses as well as binds, all the more so you cannot be held responsible for an act you don't know you're committing. Yes, but there is ignorance and ignorance and not every kind of it renders an act involuntary. It is possible for one to be responsible for his ignorance, either because he directly chooses it or because he has been negligent about what he is held to know. Ignorance is an

excuse only where it is innocent. What Thomas is saying is that one may be responsible for having an erroneous conscience and that obviously affects whether we can say that the erroneous conscience both excuses and binds.

<p>Si igitur ratio vel conscientia erret errore voluntario, vel directe vel propter negligentiam quia est error circa id quod quis scire tenetur; tunc talis error rationis vel conscientiae non excusat quin voluntas concordans rationi vel conscientiae sic erranti sit mala. Si autem sit error qui causat involuntarium, proveniens ex ignorantia alicuius circumstantiae, absque omni negligentia; tunc talis error rationis vel conscientiae excusat, ut voluntas concordans rationis erranti non sit mala. Puta, si ratio errans dicat quod homo teneatur ad uxorem alterius accedere, voluntas concordans huic rationi erranti est mala, eo quod error iste provenit ex ignorantia legis Dei, quam scire tenetur. Si autem ratio erret in hoc, quod credat aliquam mulierem submissam esse suam uxorem, et, ea petente debitum, velit eam cognoscere, excusatur voluntas eius, ut non sit mala, quia error iste ex ignorantia circumstantiae provenit, quae excusat et involuntarium causat.</p> <p>— lallae.19.6.c</p>	<p>Therefore if reason or conscience should err by a voluntary error, either directly or on account of negligence because it is an error concerning something one is held to know, then such an error of reason or conscience does not excuse and the will in harmony with reason or conscience thus erring is evil. But if the error which causes the involuntary arises out of ignorance of some circumstance without any negligence, such error excuses and the will in harmony with erring reason is not evil. For example, if erring reason dictates that a man is held to lie with another's wife, the will in harmony with erring reason is evil, because this error arises from ignorance of God's law which one is held to know. But if reason errs in this that one believes that the woman yielding to him is his wife and at her request he wills to know her, his will is excused and is not evil because this error arises from ignorance of the circumstances.</p>
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

Thomas's example of the ignorance that excuses may seem to betray his celibate status, but doubtless he was thinking of biblical examples. The two articles, five and six, of Question 19 of the *Primae Secundae* are a good example of the precision with which Thomas handles vexing issues in moral theory. Conscience rightly holds a place of honor in the moral life. For Cardinal Newman it was a favorite basis for proving the existence of God. At any given moment, what I judge to be what I should do is indeed what I should do. I am obliged to follow my conscience. However, what I judge that I should do might be a mistake. Then I do not know, am in ignorance of, what I really should do. It is because my error may deal with something about which I should know better, that my ignorance does not excuse me. But non-negligent ignorance of the circumstances in which I act -- I didn't know the gun was loaded, the coke bottle contained poison, the head on my shoulder is not my wife's -- excuses and although I do the objectively wrong thing my act is not culpable.

In order to make a point about this matter, Aristotle tells a joke of the man who has an erroneous conscience but, because he is weak-willed, fails to do what he think he should and ends by doing the objectively right thing. Huck Finn believes he should return Jim the runaway slave to his owner but decides he won't do it, even if it means going to hell. The reader is meant to applaud his failure to follow his convictions.

Perhaps Twain meant that Huck had the moral good sense to override the evil mores of the culture in which he had been raised and thus acted on a principle he knew was just. Let us hope so. Otherwise Huck might have ended up where he said he was willing to.

Reading Assignment

Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings, selection 10.

Writing Assignment

Conscience always binds even when it is erroneous but an erroneous conscience does not necessarily excuse.

Lesson 14: Veritatis Splendor

In the preceding lessons we have sought to attain clarity about some fundamentals of the moral teaching of St. Thomas. Thinking about human action is not the same as human action, of course, and its ends may seem remote from the concrete area in which we choose and decide and direct ourselves with imperfect knowledge through the difficulties of life. In the first chapter of *Ethica Thomistica* I suggest that we do well to remember that a human life is something larger than the moral life even though it is our moral actions that define the persons we are. Things befall and happen to us even as we are deliberately directing ourselves toward ends. The best-laid plans *gang aglay* and we must adjust and rearrange our plans. No wonder the overall pattern of our lives in the wide sense elude us. *Incertae sunt providentiae nostrae...*

In 1993 and 1995, Pope John Paul II issued two encyclicals which have a special relevance for our subject. *Veritatis Splendor, The Splendor of Truth*, was signed by the Holy Father on August 6, 1993. Two years later, on March 25, he released *Evangelium Vitae, The Gospel of Life*. Once encyclicals were pamphlets; with the present pope they have become small books. We cannot of course do justice to these two remarkable works. In this lesson and the next we will draw attention to some features of each of them that bear in a peculiar way on the matter of this course.

One of the desires of Vatican II was that theology be done with more explicit relation to Holy Scripture. The Magisterium of John Paul II may be said to exemplify what was meant. *Veritatis Splendor* begins with a lengthy meditation on the passage of St. Matthew in which the rich young man comes to Jesus and asks what he must do to be saved. "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt. 19, 16)

In the young man whom Matthew's Gospel does not name, we can recognize every person who, consciously or not, *approaches Christ the Redeemer of man and questions*

him about morality. For the young man, the *question* is not so much about rules to be followed, but *about the full meaning of life.* This is in fact the aspiration at the heart of every human decision and action, the quiet searching and interior prompting which sets freedom in motion. [n. 7]

The end is the beginning of moral action and the Holy Father wants to stress the "lofty vocation which the faithful have received in Christ." It is well to reflect on, to be stirred up about, the purpose of human life, the reason we are here, the end for which we are destined. The young man receives an immediate sense of all this when he faces Jesus and out of that he asks his question. Jesus first establishes the basis on which he will answer. "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good." Jesus will answer the question with divine authority. What is the answer? "If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." If one would be saved there are things he must do and things he must not do. The Decalogue lays out the basic roadmap toward happiness.

Rules, commandments, precepts bind because they incorporate the end. They express ways in which the end is always thwarted when they prohibit. They express ways without which the end cannot be attained when they enjoin. Why is the Pope writing such an encyclical?

It is the mission of the Church to guide and direct human beings to their end. She has been doing this from the beginning. In recent years, the Magisterium has addressed itself piecemeal to a number of moral questions, giving guidance as the problems arose.

Today, however, it seems *necessary to reflect on the whole of the Church's moral teaching*, with the precise goal of recalling certain fundamental truths of Catholic doctrine which, in the present circumstances, risk being distorted or denied. In fact, a new situation has come about *within the Christian community itself*, which has experienced the spread of numerous doubts and objections of a human and psychological, social and cultural, religious and even properly theological nature, with regard to the Church's Moral teaching. It is no longer a matter of limited and occasional dissent, but of an overall and systematic calling into question of traditional ethical presuppositions. At the root of these presuppositions is the more or less obvious influence of currents of thought which end by detaching human freedom from its essential and constitutive relationship to truth. Thus the traditional doctrine regarding the natural law, and the universality and permanent validity of its precepts, is rejected; certain of the Church's moral teachings are found simply unacceptable; and the Magisterium itself is considered capable of intervening in matters of morality only in order to 'exhort consciences' and to 'propose values,' in the light of which each individual will independently make his or her decisions and life choices. [n.4]

Perhaps not since Pope St. Pius X's *Pascendi* has there been such an appraisal of the opposition to Church teaching within the Church. It is to appraise and reject some of the main currents in post-conciliar moral theology that the Holy Father has written *Veritatis Splendor*. The rejected positions are revealed in all their poverty when compared with the richness of the moral tradition that the Pope invokes.

For our purposes, it is Chapter Two of the encyclical which is of major importance. We have seen that there are three sources of the moral appraisal of a given act: its object, its end and its circumstances. For the act to be good, it must be good in all these; for it to be bad is for it to fail in any one of them.

Perhaps the most fundamental principle of moral appraisal is that evil cannot be done in order that good might result. An action might be good with respect to what the agent proposes to do, the object of his act, and the circumstances in which he proposes to act might also be good. But if the end is not good, the act is vitiated. It is a bad act. Thomas exemplifies this by a man who gives alms -- a good thing to do - - and he proposes to do it in appropriate circumstances: e.g. when there is a needy person in the vicinity, when the money involved is his, etc. -- but his motivation is vainglory. He helps the poor in order to gain the applause of his fellow men, This defective purpose makes the act bad and it doesn't matter that some needy person is helped. It matters to the needy person, of course, and the help is undeniably a good for him. But in this case the agent voids his act of moral goodness because of his aim.

Over the last thirty years or so, Catholic moral theologians have been particularly eager to alter the sexual morality of the Church. Under the pressures of the age, under the assault on all moral standards, they have sought to ease the burden on Catholics in the realm of sexual behavior. The original aim was to alter the teaching on contraception. Deliberately to thwart the sexual act even as one engaged in it had always been recognized as immoral. When the widespread hope that the prohibition on contraception would be lifted was dashed in 1968 with the appearance of Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae*, the dissent that John Paul II refers to in the paragraph quoted above became rampant. Moral theologians, priests and subsequently many lay people, misled by the dissenters, rejected the clear teaching of the Church on the matter. Over the years, the dissent broadened to include Church teaching on extramarital sex, adultery, abortion and homosexuality. Moral theologians bent their best efforts to show that it was possible for a person to engage in extramarital sex, commit adultery, have an abortion or engage in homosexual activity with impunity. Tortured reasoning was engaged in in an effort to portray this dissent as Catholic teaching that the faithful might follow and remain good Catholics. Repeated rejections of this on the part of the Magisterium were treated as the expression of an alternative view that carried no more weight than the dissenting view. I have traced all this in *What Went Wrong With Vatican II* (Sophia Institute Press, 1998).

Finally, in *Veritatis Splendor*, the Pope examined in detail and rejected the reasoning behind the various dissenting opinions. This is the burden of Chapter Two of *Veritatis Splendor*. In a nutshell, the Pope shows that dissenters are promoting a version of the view that the end justifies the means and that evil can be done in order that evil might result.

With the subtlety that has characterized their efforts to portray a denial of Catholic doctrine as Catholic doctrine, the dissenters do not dismiss the three traditional fonts of morality. They do not say that the end for the sake of which you do something can trump the objective wrongness of what you do. Rather, they redefine what they mean by the

object of the act. They make the end part of the object so that the object becomes good because of the presumed primacy of the end as constituent of that object. They further argue that any effort to talk about what is done independently of the end for the sake of which it is done is an abstraction which cannot fit the actual acts being appraised.

What this comes down to is this. Adulterous acts can be defined on a pre-moral level; as a certain kind of biological encounter. But no human agent simply performs a biological act. For it to be human is for it to be taken up into the realm of intentionality, of conscious behavior. It is here that it acquires a moral quality. As it is actually engaged in, what would otherwise be an adulterous act can become morally okay. One might go to bed with someone out of compassion, as an act of consolation or kindness. Readers of Graham Greene's *The Heart of the Matter* will think of Major Scobie's affair with the young war widow. With the great difference of course that Scobie had no doubt that he was damning himself.... A dissenting moral theologian would have tried to put his mind at ease. The purpose with which he betrays his wife is part of what he does and, being *ex hypothesis* laudable, redeems his act and makes it good.

What I set out to do, the object of my act, is what I set out to do and in that sense the end for which I act. Thomas Aquinas called it the proximate end. The end that is distinguished from the object of the act is the remote or further end for the sake of which I act, what I hope will come about as a result of doing what I do. Dissenting theologians play on this possible ambiguity and seek to make the remote end a constituent of the proximate end or object of the act. It is easy to see that any number of acts which have traditionally been judged to be immoral just because of the kinds of act they are, because of their objects, would become good acts on the basis of dissenting moral theology. The result is to work havoc with both Christian morality and the natural law.

The dissenting theologian is wrong on both bases. His arguments are bad and fly in the face of the criteria of natural morality. There is no doubt that what they advocate is incompatible with Christian morality. No Catholic can possibly have any doubt on the matter.

For our purposes, it is instructive that the Holy Father bases his presentation on the structure of the moral act and the sources of its moral appraisal that we have found laid out in Thomas Aquinas. Of course the teaching is not peculiar to him, only the clarity and precision with which he states it.

Reading Assignment

The Splendor of Truth, chapter 2.

Writing Assignment

What is the significance of the insistence on the connection between freedom and truth?

Lesson 15: *Evangelium Vitae*

In what is known as the Casey Decision, Justice Anthony Kennedy, a Catholic, wrote an opinion that continues to make heads spin. In justifying the legalization of abortion, Justice Kennedy adopted the all too familiar view that to outlaw the slaying of the innocent is to impose one moral opinion on those who do not hold it. Not only does Justice Kennedy not think that there are moral truths which are incumbent on people even if for the nonce they do not hold them -- could a judge seriously hold that a thief who airily dismissed the notion of private property would thereby gain his immediate exoneration? -- went on to make one of the most absurd statements in modern jurisprudence. Every human person, he opined, has a natural right to define life and the universe as he wishes. You and I, each of us, has the right to define what human life is. You and I, each of us, has the right to define the whole universe any way we like. This mad generalization was launched to protect the equally silly notion that the prohibition of abortion is simply to give one arbitrary and baseless position precedence and primacy over other arbitrary and baseless positions.

The simplest thing that can be said about Justice Kennedy is that if he is right he is wrong. If he is right I have the right to define my own universe in which there is no supreme court and ridiculous rulings. Or, less sweepingly, to define my universe as one in which Justice Kennedy's ruling is false. But even if it is true, what right does he have, on his own view, to impose it on me?

But enough. One turns from such pretentious nonsense to Pope John Paul II's encyclical called *The Gospel of Life* with eager enthusiasm. It has become so rare to hear simple truths on the matter of abortion and the other assaults on human life that the Holy Father's voice lifts like one in the wilderness. Opposed to the Culture of Death in which minds like Justice Kennedy's prevail, there is the Gospel of Life received from the Lord.

The Church knows that this *Gospel of Life*, which she has received from her Lord, has a profound and persuasive echo in the heart of every person -- believer and non-believer alike -- because it marvelously fulfills all the heart's expectations while infinitely surpassing them. Even in the midst of difficulties and uncertainties, every person sincerely open to truth and goodness can, by the light of reason and the hidden action of grace, come to recognize in the natural law written in the heart (cf. Rom. 2:14-15) the sacred value of human life from its very beginning until its end, and can affirm the right of every human being to have this primary good respected to the highest degree. Upon the recognition of this right, every human community and the political community itself are founded. [n. 2]

It is just the obvious truth that the political community reposes on the right to life of each of its citizens that is denied by those who make it all right from some citizens to take the lives of other citizens. It will not do to say, as the Nazi doctors did, that there is human

life and human life, some valuable and some worthless. The rejection of the humanity of the unborn human has opened the door to questioning the right to life of the terminally ill, the old, the handicapped. The primary function of the state is to secure the safety of its citizens. To license out to citizens a right to deprive others of that right is to call the very legitimacy of a state into question.

I urge you to read and ponder this beautiful encyclical. It is bracingly counter-cultural although it simply recalls the principles on which our country was founded. The intrinsic dignity of the human person has never had a more eloquent expression than one finds in *The Gospel of Life*. For our purposes, I will concentrate on only one feature of the encyclical and one which may at first seem tangential. I have in mind the two references to capital punishment.

These passages are important because they seem to signal a profound change in the Church's attitude toward the death penalty. Traditionally, the Church has always recognized the right of society to exact the ultimate penalty from malefactors whose deeds can receive no other adequate penalty. In the encyclical, and in the revisions of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which were prompted by the encyclical, there seems to be a perceptible shift of doctrine. Is there?

A recent issue of *Catholic Dossier* (Vol. 4, no. 5, Sept.- Oct, 1998) is devoted to the death penalty and one will find there articles which consider the matter from a variety of angles. Cardinal Christoph Schoenborn, who was the editor of the *Catechism*, writes on the revisions of it prompted by *The Gospel of Life*. Professor Charles Rice, taking his cue from the encyclical and *Catechism*, argues that the death penalty is on its death bed. Others take a more reserved position, but Cardinal Schoenborn seems clearly among those who anticipate that the Church will withdraw her support of capital punishment. I am not in that number and what I now go on to say has two stages.

First, I will make clear that neither the encyclical nor the *Catechism* teach that capital punishment is as such immoral. Neither withdraws or withholds support of the practice. This is something on which all agree.

Second, I will argue that those who have trouble justifying the death penalty will have equal trouble justifying life imprisonment. From this fact, if it is a fact, I will say why I think the traditional acceptance of capital punishments stands and is unlikely to be withdrawn.

Chapter III of *The Gospel of Life* discusses the commandment, You shall not kill. Life is a gift and God remains the master of it. "With regard to things, but even more with regard to life, man is not the absolute master and final judge, but rather -- and this is where his incomparable greatness lies -- he is the 'minister' of God's plan." [n. 52] The life of a human person is sacred. "Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves 'the creative action of God', and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning to its end; no one can, in any circumstance, claim for himself the right to destroy directly an innocent human life." [n. 53] The prohibition is absolute, because of the kind of act it is,

its object. One can see how crucial the Holy Father's defense of the traditional sense of the object of the act against the revisionist sense proposed by dissenting theologians is. Ethics' books are filled with examples of supposedly justified killing if, for example, killing one innocent person would save a dozen. There is no trade-off possible in the case of human life. One fears that the dissenting theologian would support the Utilitarian calculus here and build the intention into the "object" of the act, attempting to turn an act of murder into one of mercy.

God's creative action is involved in every created thing or process but is involved in a special way in the case of the coming into being of a human person. Unless lesser souls, those of animals and plants, the human soul is not the actuation of a potentiality of matter. Thinking and willing are not possibilities of matter. The power that precedes them is the power of God. Human life thus is holy in a way that makes it far more deserving of reverence than are created things in general.

The Pope, having shown that the prohibition of murder is as old as the Church, indeed far older, draws attention to the way in which the *Didache*, "the most ancient of non-biblical Christian writing" illustrates the "way of death" by those who "kill their children and by abortion cause God's creatures to perish." Killing the unborn is the most vivid instance of killing an innocent, vulnerable person.

If God alone is the master of life, there "are in fact situations in which values proposed by God's Law seem to involve a genuine paradox. This happens in the case of legitimate defense, in which the right to protect one's own life and the duty not to harm someone else's life are difficult to reconcile in practice." [n. 55] It is just the sacredness of one's life that creates a duty to defend it. But if self-defense is a right and duty, defending life for which one is responsible is more so. "...legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for someone responsible for another's life, the common good of the family or of the State." [n. 55; citing the *Catechism*, n. 2265] This consideration brings the Holy Father to the death penalty.

This is the context in which to place the problem of the *death penalty*. On this matter, there is a growing tendency, both in the Church and in civil society, to demand that it be applied in a very limited way or even that it be abolished completely. The problem must be viewed in the context of a system of penal justice ever more in line with human dignity and thus, in the end, with God's plan for man and society. The primary purpose of the punishments which society inflicts is "to redress the disorder caused by the offense." (CCC n. 2265) Public authority must redress the violation of personal and social rights by imposing on the offender an adequate punishment for the crime, as a condition for the offender to exercise his freedom. In this way, authority also fulfills the purpose of defending the public order and ensuring safety, while at the same time offering the offender an incentive to help change his life and be rehabilitated. [n. 56]

Since the encyclical served as a basis for the revision of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, it is important to see that the encyclical here relies on the *Catechism*. The points of the passage just cited are several.

1. Both within and without the Church there is a tendency not to use the death penalty, perhaps even to abolish it.
2. Penal justice must be in line with human dignity and God's plan for man and society.
3. There are three purposes of punishment:
 - a. Primarily, to redress the disorder caused by the offense.
 - b. Defending public order and safety.
 - c. Providing the offender a chance for changing his life and rehabilitation.

The paragraph continues:

It is clear that, for these purposes to be achieved, *the nature and extent of the punishment* must be carefully evaluated and decided upon, and ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity: in other words, when it would not be possible otherwise to defend society. Today, however, as a result of steady improvements in the organization of the penal system, such cases are very rare, if not practically non-existent.

Here the Holy Father makes the use of the death penalty depend upon whether or not the penal system is sufficiently well-organized so that society can be protected against the criminal without executing him. He imagines conditions to be generally such, or soon to be such, that capital punishment will become rare to non-existent. He ends this extremely important paragraph 56 with a long quote from the *Catechism*.

In any event, the principle set forth in the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* remains valid: "If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and safety of persons, public authority must limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity with the dignity of the human person." [n. 2267]

While *The Gospel of Life* thus relies on the *Catechism* on the matter of capital punishment, changes were made in the latter in the light of the former. You will find this documented in the issue of *Catholic Dossier* already alluded to on pp. 37-42.

The original *Catechism* discussed legitimate defense in n. 2263, noting that it is not an exception to the prohibition of the intentional killing of the innocent that constitutes murder. The act of self-defense has a double effect: saving one's own life, which is intended, and killing the aggressor, which is not. But, as n. 2264 explains, one is justified only in using such force as is necessary to repel the aggressor. But it can happen that killing the aggressor is involved. Thomas Aquinas is cited for the truth that

one has a greater duty to take care of his own life than that of another. [ST, I-II.64.7.c]

There are revised versions of paragraphs 2265, 2266 and 2267 of the *Catechism*.

2265. Legitimate defense can be not only a right but a grave duty for one who is responsible for the lives of others. The defense of the common good requires that an unjust aggressor be rendered unable to cause harm. For this reason, those who legitimately hold authority also have the right to use arms to repel aggressors against the civil community entrusted to their responsibility.

2266. The efforts of the state to curb the spread of behavior harmful to people's rights and to the basic rules of civil society correspond to the requirement of safeguarding the common good. Legitimate public authority has the right and duty to inflict punishment proportionate to the gravity of the offense. Punishment has the primary aim of redressing the disorder introduced by the offense. When it is willingly accepted by the guilty party, it assumes the value of expiation. Punishment then, in addition to defending the public order and protecting people's safety, has a medicinal purpose: as far as possible, it must contribute to the correction of the guilty party.

2267. Assuming that the guilty party's identity and responsibility have been fully determined, the traditional teaching of the church does not exclude recourse to the death penalty, if this is the only possible way of effectively defending human lives against the unjust aggressor.

If, however, nonlethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people's safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person.

Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm -- without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself -- the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not practically nonexistent.

The encyclical and the revisions have already generated a great deal of discussion and are likely to generate a good deal more. It is clear that the overall attitude toward the death penalty is in the direction of rendering it practically unnecessary while retaining the traditional doctrine that it can be legitimate. Clearly, where there is a dubious process of establishing guilt, where capital punishment extends to less serious and even trivial offense, and when those executed are predominantly of one race, it is not the legitimacy of the death penalty itself that is called into question. In most concrete circumstances, having recourse to the death penalty should be rare.

What some have found difficult in the encyclical and the *Catechism* is the way "redressing the disorder" of the crime, which both give as the primary aim of punishment, seems to be eclipsed by considerations of defending society against the criminal and the rehabilitation of the offender. These are secondary effects of punishment, neither one of which can substitute for its primary purpose. Imprisonment to protect society against the criminal refers to further future and only possible offenses, not to that and those of which he has been found guilty. So do the opportunity the offender has to square his accounts with God is arguably the same whether or not the punishment is execution. It could be argued that there are more conversions among those on death row than among lifers. In any case, regarding prison as a school of virtue seems without basis and this is independent of the advances in the modern penal system.

What seems needed is an argument that life imprisonment fulfills all three aims of punishment. Prison redresses the imbalance established by the crime committed, protects society against more of the same and, perhaps, gives the offender a long time in which to put his house in order. Thus, attention turns to the justification of life imprisonment. It would seem to be appropriate only when the offender has committed a crime that is so horrendous that no amount of time would suffice to return him to the society he has offended. That is, there must be an abuse of freedom so serious that it justifies removing the offender for life from the society of free agents. [This is not to say that he loses his status as a moral agent; only that the arena in which he will be permitted to exercise it will be permanently limited to prison.]

Some fear that a case will be made against life imprisonment similar to that raised against capital punishment. Is being locked up for life compatible with the dignity of the human person? Is this really the best situation in which for him to rehabilitate himself? Already, as for example in Italy, there are campaigns to outlaw life imprisonment.

There are those -- I am one of them -- who do not regard it as Pickwickian to say that exacting the death penalty for particular horrendous crimes may be the most dramatic way of recognizing the dignity of the person of the offender. He is being treated as a responsible agent. He is being held to the consequences of doing what he did. To waive the death penalty in capital cases may involve an attitude the Church would not care to support.

The rising tide of opposition to the death penalty in modern society is seldom tied to any recognizable grasp of the dignity of the human person. As often as not, it is based on a theory of action which regards accountability as an arbitrary and tyrannical demand imposed on the offender by those with different views. Responsibility, not just the punishment that presupposes it, is the target of abolitionists.

Any adequate discussion of the death penalty and its use must involve a prolonged look at contemporary society, the society the Pope has characterized as a Culture of Death. This is a culture which rejects natural law as well as the tenets of Christian morality. In such a society, one might oppose prison sentences if only because of the "rehabilitation"

efforts to which they subject prisoners. But it seems unwise to find in secular agitation against the death penalty anything from which to take moral or religious comfort.

For other and often quite different views on these matters, I refer you once more to the issue of *Catholic Dossier* devoted to the death penalty.

Reading Assignment

The Gospel of Life.

Writing Assignment

Compare the culture of life and the culture of death.

Lesson 16: Concluding

Your culminating assignment for this course is a term paper of at least ten pages in length, typed, double space. In this brief concluding lesson, I will provide guidance in the selection of a topic and the development of it.

Philosophy is, methodologically speaking, the discussion of questions which are important but whose answers are not evident. That is, *prima facie*, there seem to be several possible and incompatible answers to a given question. If you consider Thomas Aquinas's procedure in the *Summa theologiae*, you will find a vivid illustration of the dialectic of philosophical discourse.

Each article in the *Summa* addresses a specific question. For example, Does happiness consist of riches? Many people would answer in the affirmative, but there is also a kind of folk wisdom to the effect that you cannot buy happiness. No doubt you have an initial hunch as to how the question should be resolved. Let us say that you doubt that happiness consist of riches. Very well, then the first thing you must do is formulate the best arguments you can on behalf of the opposite answer. This will enable you to see the difficulty of an easy answer, the attractiveness of arguments you may not find decisive but which nonetheless acquaint you with obstacles you will have to overcome in establishing your answer.

Having seen the attraction of the alternative answer, you then set about formulating as clear and strong an answer as you can for your own solution. A sign that it is a good one will be that you can, after having established it, indicate why arguments on behalf of the opposite view, whatever their attractions, and you will generously acknowledge them, cannot convincingly establish the alternative.

So much for the general technique for developing a philosophical essay. Now for the kind of problem you might select. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of problem, one more historical, the other more theoretical. An example of a historical or textual problem would be: A pagan answer and a Christian answer to the question as to the meaning of human life must necessarily be opposed.

In order to state the alternative, you must refer to determinate historical examples of the two views. In the course of these lessons, we found it necessary to ask whether Aristotle's conception of ultimate end is compatible with that of St. Thomas. The fact that the former was a pagan and the latter a Christian, makes it *prima facie* unlikely that they would give the same answer. Furthermore, it seems likely that their answers will not only differ but be opposed to one another such that if one is true, the other is false. In a historical or textual paper, the emphasis is on as accurate a statement as possible of the views you wish to discuss. The resolution is more than historical, although the emphasis is only indirectly on the truth of the matter.

A paper on a theoretical matter might be: The death penalty is indefensible. Of course, it is unlikely that you would discuss a theoretical problem independently of referring to what others have had to say about it, just as it is unlikely that you would write the first kind of paper solely to establish what others have said.

Given the structure of the paper, the kind of preparatory work you must do is clear. You must test a proposed topic to see if it is indeed controversial and thus in need of a resolution. The best way of testing this is to think of some good arguments on either side.

Given the length of the paper, you will want to divide the parts accordingly, allotting a fitting proportion of your space to each phase of the paper.

The papers you have been writing on assignment as you went through these lessons are invaluable experience for the longer undertaking you must now begin.