

# **Kant and Aquinas: Ethical Theory**

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[Reprinted from **THE THOMIST**, XXI, 1, January, 1958.]

## KANT AND AQUINAS : ETHICAL THEORY

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**W**ORKS purporting to report carefully and fairly the content of the ethical teachings of St. Thomas Aquinas often display serious deficiencies: want of precision in the grasp of meanings, want of correctness in the interpretation of statements, want of wit in the tracing of arguments, and want of comprehension and sympathy in the judgment of the system. These deficiencies astonish the careful student of St. Thomas and disturb those who have found his teaching helpful in the pursuit of the special end of practical knowledge. But the students of other attempts in this field and the disciples of other men working in this field have equally often had just cause for astonishment and dismay.

Too often the interests of polemic have been given a higher place than the interests of reason in finding truth and rectifying action. The careful examination of issues is often unimpressive. The methodical working out of positions is often unexciting. The impartial weighing of evidence is often inconclusive. Yet lazy devices of logic and commonplaces of dialectic and rhetoric, even when joined with stylistic brilliance and poetic luxuriance, are not suitable replacements for them.

To what must we look for the answering of philosophic questions and the resolution of dialectical oppositions? If we can be satisfied with a philosophic structure based on arbitrary inclination or pre-existing contingent interest, then we may look to lazy devices of logic, commonplaces of dialectic and rhetoric, stylistic brilliance and poetic luxuriance. But if our philosophic structure is to be based on the rational but objective necessity of the thing itself, then we must examine issues carefully, work out the positions ploddingly and weigh the evidence impartially.

On this basis we can see the reason for the use of historical analysis in the field of philosophy. It is true that we can learn

from our predecessors in what they have said well and benefit from their guidance where they proceeded rightly. We can also learn from them in what they spoke badly and benefit from them by learning not to follow their erring path, for in them we can see the end to which their path will lead. But these values can be gained only by assuming the point of view of a neutral observer whose judgment waits on the evidence, and these values will certainly be lost if we immediately assume the attitude of a party to the dispute to be judged. Comparison of the results of philosophic work must therefore be done in as impartial a manner as evidence ought to be weighed in a court of law. Neither the conditions of the inquiry nor the predispositions of the judge should determine right independently of the prior determination by the evidence presented.

Our work in this article is limited in scope. We wish to examine the issues between the ethical theories of Kant and Aquinas and to work out their positions. But the work is limited by the shortness of this article and by the limitation of our own investigation. We offer here a group of notes suggestive of a study to be made rather than the finished work itself.

## I

There have been three perennial philosophic reductions. One of them reduces the problem of the organization of action and inclination according to what ought to be, and the problem of the organization of operations and materials according to what is to be through them, to the unique problem of the organization of facts according to formal relationships. A second perennial philosophic reduction reduces the enterprise of ordering materials through systematic procedures to predetermined results, and the enterprise of ordering investigation according to clues found in the thing itself to unexpected discoveries, to the unique enterprise of ordering actions and men to the relief of tensions endlessly created by endless attempts to relieve tensions. A third perennial philosophic reduction reduces the

elaboration of scientific structure out of data collected, and the elaboration of human life in society out of human capacity and human need to the unique elaboration of the real from the self. If we want labels we might call these three reductions the Positivist, the Pragmatist and the Romanticist, respectively. But the labels so used would not quite mean the same as they have meant in any of their many historic applications. In any case and whatever we call them, the three reductions have been with us always and no doubt will continue to be with us for a long time. For they represent three basic ways in which man can over-simplify the complexity which his thought requires but with which it can never be content.

Briefly, however, the perennial reductions have been interrupted from time to time, by occasional theories maintaining the theoretic, the practical and the productive as distinct radically and irreducible, on the basis that although the three areas may include one another reciprocally still there remains an opposition of relationships between them. Such theories allow distinct knowledges of what ought to be done and what is to be produced as well as of what is. They allow distinct practices of producing and investigating as well as of what needs doing. And they allow distinct elaborations of knowledge and of society as well as of the reality potentially present in human power.

Kant is perfectly clear about the distinction of knowledge into theoretic and practical, although his position in respect to technical knowledge is considerably more subtle. However, it is only the former distinction which need concern us in this article. He says, for example:

But when we consider these actions (human acts) in their relation to reason—I do not mean speculative reason, by which we endeavor to *explain* their coming into being, but reason insofar as it is itself the cause *producing* them—if, that is to say, we compare them with [the standards of] reason in its *practical* bearing, we find a rule and order altogether different from the order of nature.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: The Humanities Press, 1950), p. 474. Cited as: "Pure" The words in square brackets appear marked in the same way in Smith. The words in parentheses we added.

Strictly, the distinction is of reason in its practical as compared with its speculative employment, rather than of knowledge into theoretic and practical. For

. . . practical reason is concerned with objects not in order to know them but with its own capacity to make them real (according to knowledge of them), i. e., it has to do with a will which is a causality so far as reason contains its determining ground.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the word "knowledge" is reserved for knowledge most strictly so-called, theoretic knowledge. Thus it is that Kant can say on the one hand: "*Knowledge*, which as such is speculative, . . ." <sup>3</sup> has a certain character, but then on the other hand:

But if we regard also the content of the knowledge which we can have of and through a pure practical reason, as the *Analytic* presents this content, there is to be found, besides a remarkable analogy between it and the content of the theoretical knowledge, no less remarkable differences.<sup>4</sup>

There is no contradiction in this, that is, there is no gap in the system showing in this merely verbal opposition. But we must understand Kant in and through his own technical language, keeping in mind at the same time the fluidity which he allowed himself even in his most technical uses of language, or we will find in him nothing but a fabric of obvious contradictions. We might say the same of almost any philosopher.

The distinction which Kant so carefully draws between the theoretic and the practical employments of reason is most basic in his ethical theory. At the very beginning of the *Critique of Practical Reason* he lays it down again, no doubt supposing for its justification the argument of the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

The theoretical use of reason is concerned with objects of the merely cognitive faculty. . . . It is quite different with the practical use of

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<sup>2</sup> *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings*, tr. and ed. Lewis White Beck (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, c. 1949), p. 195. Cited as: "Practical."

<sup>3</sup> *Pure*, p. 427.

<sup>4</sup> *Practical*, p. 197.

reason. In the latter, reason deals with the grounds determining the will. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Thus the beginning of the introduction of Kant's second *Critique*.

Kant generally says that truth consists in a conformity of knowledge with its object.<sup>6</sup> But in a few passages, he seems willing to broaden this manner of speaking somewhat as reason is considered as functioning in different offices. When reason is used in a hypothetical way, for example, in order to give the greatest possible system to the knowledge of the understanding, it is this systematic unity itself which is the criterion of the truth of the rules which reason lays down.<sup>7</sup> Reason, then, as giving rules, has a different criterion of truth from that which it has as simply knowing theoretically.

Following Kant's example in this matter, it is interesting to ask ourselves what the truth of the practical employment of reason would be. I do not know that Kant has anywhere taken up this problem in exactly these terms. However, in discussion of the distinction of the problems of the first and the second *Critiques*, he says:

There are, therefore, two very different problems. The first is: How can pure reason know objects a priori? The second is: How can pure reason be a directly determining ground of the will . . . ?<sup>8</sup>

The word "therefore" at the beginning of this passage relates to the paragraph immediately preceding, in which he has distinguished the laws of a system to which the will is subject from the laws of a system subject to the will; in the one the object causes a concept which determines the will, while in the other the will causes the object.<sup>9</sup> In elucidating the second of the two problems which he has distinguished, he says:

It requires no explanation of how objects of the faculty of desire are possible, for that, as a task of the theoretic knowledge of nature,

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> *Pure*, pp. 97, 220, 532.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 535.

<sup>8</sup> *Practical*, p. 155.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

is left to the critique of speculative reason. It asks only how reason can determine the maxim of the will. . . .<sup>10</sup>

From this it would seem that there is justification for supposing that Kant might well have given a definition of practical truth somewhat like the following: It is a conformity of the maxim of the will with reason. He notes the difference in the relation of determination and the realization of object which would lead to such a definition, and probably the only reason why he did not give such a definition explicitly is hesitation at transferring the notion of truth out of the speculative order, a hesitation which we noted above in respect to the notion of knowledge but which in that case, perhaps on the basis of common usage, he overcame. At any rate, the notion of a practical truth, although not in his verbal usage, is of first importance in Kant, and we might even say that the entire task of the *Critique of Practical Reason* is to explicate and justify this notion.

Having now noted Kant's distinction of the theoretic and the practical and constructed a plausible meaning, for him, of practical truth, we may make some brief comments concerning a few other leading ideas in the Kantian ethical theory.

First, there is a point at the beginning of the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*. As an opening to the first section of that work, Kant considers a list of things which, taken in relation to moral personality, might be considered as good. He shows that none of them is good in an unqualified sense, but, as his famous sentence goes: "Nothing in the world, indeed nothing even beyond the world, can possibly be conceived which could be called good without qualification except a *good will*."<sup>11</sup>

Second, there is a point concerning happiness in the section on principles in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. "To be happy," Kant says, "is necessarily the desire of every rational

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 55, in the Beek volume. Cited as: "Foundations."

but finite being, and thus it is an unavoidable determinant of its faculty of desire." But he goes on to explain this desire as necessary by man's lack of self-sufficiency and, in accord with the definition of happiness as the gratification of all desires, he rejects it as a principle for the determination of the will, saying:

. . . it determines nothing specific concerning what is to be done in a given practical problem, but in a practical problem this is what is alone important, for without some specific determination the problem cannot be solved.<sup>12</sup>

We have here, then, a necessary object of desire which is not a moral determinant.

Third, Kant recognizes a double sense of "freedom." In all of his works in the field of practical philosophy, Kant continually makes use of a fundamental concept of freedom, the positive content of which is made known to us through the moral law, and which is the basis of that law *in esse*.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, freedom is autonomy, self-determination in action. To the merely negative conception of freedom which can be thought theoretically, is added in the practical order a positive content, not only thought of as possible but known as actual for practice, that of a reason by the law of which the will is determined directly.<sup>14</sup> But there is a second sense of "freedom," that of free choice. In the *Introduction to the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant distinguishes between rational and elective will, that is, will and choice.<sup>15</sup> Rational will cannot properly be called "free" or "not-free," it is not directed to actions but to the law; it is, in fact, practical reason itself. Elective will, on the other hand, is free in man. This is a freedom of indetermination with respect to opposites, but it is not to be defined by the

<sup>12</sup> *Practical*, p. 136.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, *passim*, e. g., p. 119.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158.

<sup>15</sup> *Introduction to the Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Critique of Practical Reason and Other Works on the Theory of Ethics*, tr. Thomas Kingsmill Abbott, 5th ed. (London, N. Y., and Bombay: Longmans Green, 1898), p. 268. Cited as: "Metaphysics."

possibility of choice with or against the law, although there are plentiful examples of such indifference in experience.<sup>16</sup>

St. Thomas is quite clear about the distinction of knowledge into the theoretic, the practical and the productive, but the question of the place of logic in his system is somewhat more subtle. However, it is only with the distinction of the theoretic and the practical that we are concerned here. St. Thomas says, for example:

Now speculative and practical reason differ in this that speculative reason is merely apprehensive of things, while practical reason is not only apprehensive, but also causative.<sup>17</sup>

It may be noticed that this distinction is formally of reason into its theoretic and practical employments. But St. Thomas does make a corresponding distinction of knowledge, both in its broader sense and in its narrower sense of science, into speculative and practical.<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting to notice that there is a much narrower sense in which "science" is sometimes employed by Aquinas. In this narrower sense, it might be said that science as such is speculative, for it is distinguished against prudence with the comment: ". . . the subject of science, which is the right order of things which can be speculated about, is the speculative intellect. . . ." <sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the most interesting text from St. Thomas on the distinction of the theoretic and the practical is that found in the introduction to the commentary on Aristotle's *Ethics*:

Now order is compared to reason in four ways. For there is a certain order which reason does not make but only considers, for example, the order of things in nature. There is another order which reason makes in its own act, that is, when it orders concepts to each other and signs of concepts, for they are significant vocalizations.

<sup>16</sup> *Metaphysics*, p. 282.

<sup>17</sup> *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 83, a. 2.

<sup>18</sup> For the distinction of *cognitio* see: *Summa Theol.*, II-II, q. 8, a. 8, ad 3; I, q. 14, a. 16; for the distinction of *scientia* see: I, q. 14, a. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 56, a. 3.

Now third, there is an order which reason by its consideration makes in the acts of the will. And fourth, there is an order which reason makes in exterior things of which it is itself the cause, for example, in a ship or a house. . . . Now the order of voluntary actions pertains to moral philosophy. . . . So, therefore, moral philosophy, with which we are presently concerned, has as its property to consider human operations according as they are ordered to each other and to the end.<sup>20</sup>

The chief point of this passage is that ethics has a proper order, an order which can be distinguished in terms of a unique relation of reason to its object, an order in which reason is determinative of acts of the will. This distinction must be of fundamental importance to the study of ethics in Aquinas' mind, for he inserts this passage as an introduction to his comment on Aristotle's *Ethics*, although Aristotle himself does not have an explicit consideration of such a distinction at the outset of his ethical inquiry.

"Truth," according to St. Thomas, is used primarily and most properly to signify the adequation of the intellect to its object. As such it is in the intellect, strictly speaking, although we can speak of "true things" inasmuch as they are compared to an intellect on which they are dependent.<sup>21</sup> But there is another meaning of "truth" which is of considerable import for our purposes. In the *Summa Theologiae*, in showing that prudence is a virtue necessary to man, he answers an objection to the effect that prudence cannot be a virtue of the intellect:

. . . truth is ascribed to the practical intellect in a different way than it is to the speculative intellect, as is said in the sixth book of the *Ethics*. For truth is ascribed to the speculative intellect through its conformity to its object. . . . But truth is ascribed to the practical intellect through its conformity to right appetite. And this conformity has no place with respect to necessary things, such as do not come to be by human will, but only in contingent things which can be brought to be by us, which are either things which can be done within or things which can be made without.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *I Ethic.*, lect. 1.

<sup>21</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 1, a. 1; q. 1, a. 2.

<sup>22</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 57, a. 5, ad 3. Cf. *VI Ethic.*, lect. 2.

The speculative intellect has as its function to know, and so its truth is in conformity to the thing known. But the practical intellect has as its function to direct or to rule, and so its truth is in conformity with the principle according to which it rules, namely, right appetite.

Having now noted St. Thomas' distinction of the theoretic and the practical and his notion of practical truth, we may make a few brief comments concerning some other important matters in ethical theory.

First:

. . . whatever has a will is called good inasmuch as it has a good will, since through will we use everything in us. So we do not call the man good who has a good mind, but who has a good will.<sup>23</sup>

Even the intellect itself can be called good only insofar as it is subject to a will which adheres to God.<sup>24</sup>

Second, happiness is a universally necessary object of will and yet it is not sufficient to determine choice in particular:

. . . happiness can be considered in two ways. In one way, according to its common notion. And in this way it is necessary that every man will happiness. For the common notion of happiness is "perfect good," as has been said. But since good is the object of the will, perfect good of anyone is what totally satisfies his will. And so to desire happiness is nothing else that to desire that the will be satisfied. Everyone wills this. In another way, we can speak of happiness according to the specific notion as to that in which it consists. In this way not all know happiness, since they do not know that to which the common notion of happiness applies. And consequently, as to this, not all will it.<sup>25</sup>

Happiness, then, is a necessary object of will in its general notion, but through this necessity it cannot be a sufficient determining ground of will, for there can be ignorance of the relation of this to the particular.

Third, there is a double sense of "freedom" used by St.

<sup>23</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 3.

<sup>24</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 14, a. 3, ad 8.

<sup>25</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 5, a. 8.

Thomas. There is one sense in which it is said, for example, that “. . . the contemplative life consists in a certain liberty of soul . . .”<sup>26</sup>; or when true liberty and false liberty are distinguished as liberty from sin and liberty from justice.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, liberty is a kind of self-mastery or self-directedness independent of both extrinsic conditions and one’s own inclinations or dispositions. But there is a second sense of “freedom,” freedom of choice. In this sense, liberty is divided in a three-fold division, as it relates the indeterminacy of the will to its object, to its own act and to the order to the end. In this sense, it should be noted, “. . . to will evil is neither liberty or part of liberty, although it is a certain sign of liberty.”<sup>28</sup>

## II

Up to this point our study has been, no doubt, quite unrealistic. It begins to seem as though Kant and St. Thomas can be drawn close together, although it is perfectly clear to any beginning student of their texts that their doctrines are irreconcilably opposed.

What very well might be said of our study to this point is that it has been a kind of systematic misinterpretation of both philosophers. A certain appearance of community in doctrine has been attained, it might be thought, where there is not any real unity underlying that appearance; texts have been considered out of the context in which they normally would gain determination in meaning.

Let us, therefore, begin again, considering rather more the broader bases of ethical principles together with the arguments leading to them, than such particular points as we have so far considered in isolation from their appropriate arguments.

Kant’s *Critique of Practical Reason* is divided into two parts: the doctrine of elements of pure practical reason and the doc-

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, II-II, q. 182, a. 1, ad. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 183, a. 4. Cf. *de Verit.*, q. 24, a. 10, ad 7.

<sup>28</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 22, a. 7. Cf. *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 82, a. 2.

trine of method of pure practical reason.<sup>29</sup> In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant makes use of an analogy to architecture to explain the distinction of these two parts as they appear in that work. He says that considering the whole of all theoretic knowledge as a building which we are to construct according to an idea which we have in ourselves, the doctrine of elements gives an estimate of the materials and shows the kind and size of the building which can be made with them. The doctrine of method, on the other hand, is concerned to give the plan of the building which can be constructed with such material.<sup>30</sup> But the *Critique of Practical Reason* is not concerned with the construction of an edifice of knowledge, but rather with the determination of will through reason. "Its task is merely to show that there is a pure practical reason, and, in order to do this, it critically examines reason's entire practical faculty."<sup>31</sup> The doctrine of elements in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is concerned to show that practical reason, that is, reason as it determines action, can be pure, that is, free from influence in its determination from anything received by experience, and the suppositions and implications of this.<sup>32</sup> And the doctrine of method in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is concerned with the way

. . . in which we can secure to the laws of pure practical reason access to the human mind and an influence on its maxims. That is to say, it is the way we can make the objectively practical reason also subjectively practical.<sup>33</sup>

The doctrine of elements has two books, the first is the analytic of pure practical reason and the second is the dialectic of pure practical reason. The former is required as the rule of truth, in the practical sense, while the latter is required to display and resolve the illusion which may occur in the judg-

<sup>29</sup> *Practical*, p. 129.

<sup>30</sup> *Pure*, p. 573.

<sup>31</sup> *Practical*, p. 118.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

ments of practical reason.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the book of analytic shows the conditions of the proper employment of practical reason according to which it is pure, while the book of dialectic shows the false problem which arises from an improper employment of practical reason and the way in which this problem can be resolved.

The analytic, with which we shall be exclusively concerned in the remainder of this part of our study, contains three chapters. The first deals with the principles, the second with the concepts and the third with the motives of practical reason. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the order was the reverse of this.

... the reason for this lies in the fact that here we have to deal with a will and to consider reason not in relation to objects but in relation to this will and its causality. The principles of the unconditioned causality must come first, and afterward the attempt can be made to establish our concepts on the ground of determination of such a will, their application to objects, and finally their application to the subject and its sensuous faculty. The law of causality from freedom, i. e., any pure practical principle, is the unavoidable beginning and determines the objects to which it alone can be applied.<sup>35</sup>

The argument of the analytic of principles, reduced to its basis in outline form, is quite simple and direct. If desire for an object determines a practical rule to be an operating principle, the principle cannot be pure but must be only empirical. For in this case what determines choice is a conception of an object and its relation to the subject, by which the faculty of desire is determined to seek the realization of the object. Such a relation is called pleasure in the object, and so if desire for an object is to determine the operating principle, this relation of pleasure must be a condition of the determination of choice. Since pleasure or displeasure attached to an object can be known only by experience, such a principle would be merely

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

empirical and not pure. Since it depends on the susceptibility of the subject, it cannot be a necessary principle and so it can furnish no law. Since it is only determinative to the extent that we choose what we expect to make us happy, that is, what we expect to give an agreeable feeling as an accompaniment to life, it is based on the general principle of one's own happiness or self-love.<sup>36</sup>

Now if there are any practical laws, that is, practical principles which are universal and necessary as determining grounds of action, they can be considered on two sides. On one hand, they contain reference to the object whose realization is determined through will. Now we have seen that practical laws cannot be determined by the relation of the object of the will to it. Therefore, they must determine this relation, and so it is not by their material aspect that they get the form and the force of law. The other aspect is that of their constitution as universal laws, i. e., their form considered in abstraction from the matter to which they refer. Since to be practical laws they must determine the will, and since they cannot do this by their matter, they must do it by their form alone.<sup>37</sup>

Of what sort would a will be which could be determined not by any material condition but by the pure form of law? Such a will would be wholly independent of the natural law of appearances, the physical law of nature. For the determining ground of any actualization in nature must be found in sensible appearance. Independence of this natural law is freedom. Therefore, such a will would be free. Again, of what sort would a law be which could serve as the determining ground of a free will? It clearly must be a law which determines by its mere form, for if it were by any reference to the object which it has that it determined, there would be a causality exercised by the empirical conditions and such a causality is always necessary. "Thus freedom and unconditioned practical law reciprocally imply each other."<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-138.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 130-132, 138-139.

Which of these two, the moral law or freedom, first presents itself to us? Not freedom, since our concept of that is only negative at first and it cannot be deduced from any possible experience, since in nature all that we can find is determination through causes. Rather, it is the moral law of which we are first aware, and we become conscious of it as soon as we begin to construct maxims for the will.

But how is the consciousness of that moral law possible? We can come to know pure practical laws in the same way we know pure theoretic principles, by attending to the necessity with which reason prescribes them to us and to the elimination from them of all empirical conditions, which reason directs. The concept of the pure will arises from the former, as the consciousness of the pure understanding from the latter.<sup>39</sup>

We are directly aware that we are obligated. This is not a feeling, nor is it theoretic knowledge, nor is it reducible to either of these. It is simply practical awareness. We know immediately in setting up practical rules for ourselves that we must not make ourselves an exceptional case; we ought to do just what anyone else in our place should have had to do. Our susceptibility to inclinations of feeling and our delight in having our own way cannot obliterate the obligation which we find ourselves under always to act in such a way that the rule according to which we are acting could hold just as well as an absolutely universal rule for anyone who acts according to reason: "So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as the principle of a universal legislation."<sup>40</sup>

From this it follows that pure reason, just of itself, is practical, that is, it determines the will apart from any condition. It gives a universal law which we call the "moral law." On the other hand, freedom of the will is the condition of this moral law, a condition we know through the moral law of which we are immediately aware. The will, therefore, is autonomous, and dependence on something extrinsic to itself as

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 141.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 141-144.

a ground of determination does not obligate it and, in fact, is directly opposed to duty and morality. An obligating principle, a true law in the practical order, contains a reference to an object, most certainly, and it is through the law that this material is put into relation to the will. But it is not the material which determines the relation but the form of universality which determines the matter to be so related.<sup>41</sup>

The doctrine of the second chapter of the analytic in the *Critique of Practical Reason* follows directly from that of the analytic of principles. Kant understands by the concept of an object of pure practical reason the idea of an object as an effect possible through freedom. To be an object of practical knowledge signifies merely the relation of the will to the action by which the object would be realized. Insofar as the object is an object of pure practical reason, not of an empirically conditioned practical judgment, the question of its physical or empirical possibility is quite irrelevant, the only important question is whether we should will an action directed to the existence of that object. If an object is necessary in relation to a will determined solely through pure reason, it is a good; if it is a necessary object of the aversion of such a will, it is an evil. The concept of good, therefore, is not a derivative of anything other than the practical law. Otherwise, it means not the morally good, but that which is conditional with respect to mere well-being which is determined empirically and which by this very fact can be no ground of morality. It is not the case that

... the concept of the good as an object of the moral law determines the latter and makes it possible, but rather the reverse, i. e., that the moral law is that which first defines the concept of the good—so far as it absolutely deserves this name—and makes it possible.<sup>42</sup>

The concepts of good and evil refer to the intention of the will. They suppose an object as given and determine the intention immediately with respect to that object. The categories of

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-165.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 166-172.

pure practical reason, that is, the predicamental relations of the practical characterization of an object by the concepts of good and evil, are rules of a sort. But they do not give us the slightest theoretic knowledge of objects, that is, they do not bring any unity to the multiplicity of experience, as science does; rather they contribute to the "a priori subjection of the manifold of desires to the unity of consciousness of a practical reason commanding in the moral law, i. e., of a pure will."<sup>43</sup>

But the notion of these concepts as determinative and at the same time as determined which we have been sketching out, brings up a serious problem. That is the problem of how we decide whether an action possible for us in the sensible world is or is not a case falling under the rule. To make a decision of this sort requires practical judgment, but how is it possible? In the first place, the question does not concern the problem of the determination of the practicability of an action, that is, whether it can be carried out in the sensible world. Practical judgment is concerned only to apply the rule. The solution to the question, then, consists in the possibility of using natural law, whose relation to the sensuous can be determinate a priori, as a type according to which the practical judgment is to be made. If the agent were a member of the natural order, and if the proposed application were to be a case in that order falling under a universal natural law, would it be possible to will the case or not? Using this principle, two opposite errors are well avoided. First, this is not to call on empirical consequences to determine the will, so the empiricism of practical reason is avoided. Second, this principle avoids the mysticism of practical reason, according to which an attempt is made to discover a non-empirical type such as the kingdom of God, a thing which could not solve the problem because it is quite irrelevant to the empirical. Natural law serves, as it were, as a bridge, for it has in common with moral law the form of universal legislation, but it also has the required relevance to the sensuous.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 176-179.

The third chapter of the analytic again is a direct consequence of the previous two. Incentive which finds its basis in inclination is not moral; the only true moral incentive is the law itself. This law, on the other hand, inasmuch as it determines the intention of the will with regard to all objects of inclination merely by itself and, to be exact, by its form, has an effect in inclination, curbing it and thus causing the moral feeling of respect. This feeling is not moral through leading to action in accord with the law, since action merely in accord with the law which is not done for the right motive as well, that is, action not done for the sake of the law, is not morally good. Rather, respect for the law is a moral feeling because it is determined by the law.

Since the law itself must be the incentive in a morally good will, the moral interest must be a pure nonsensuous interest of the practical reason alone. Now on the concept of an interest rests that of a maxim. The latter is thus morally genuine only when it rests on the mere interest that one takes in obedience to the law.<sup>45</sup>

But the moral law is not our very nature. It commands because there is that in us which is not of itself in accord with the moral determination. We are not, in other words, pure independent rational beings. A pure will which could only act morally would not receive moral law as a command but would be itself identical with the law.

The moral law is, in fact, for the will of any perfect being a law of holiness. For the will of any finite rational being, however, it is a law of duty, of moral constraint, and of determination of his actions through respect for the law and reverence for its duty. . . . We are indeed members of a legislative realm which is possible through freedom and which is presented to us as an object of respect by practical reason; yet we are at the same time subjects to it, not sovereigns, and to mistake our inferior position as creatures and to deny, from self-conceit, respect to the holy law is, in spirit, a defection from it even if its letter be fulfilled.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 180-187.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 187-189.

As a corollary to this explanation of moral incentives we may reflect on the command to love God above all things and neighbor as self. This is not a command given to inclination, for inclination cannot be elicited on order. Rather, it is a purely practical love which is commanded, that we should like to do the commandments of God and like to perform all of our duties to our neighbor. As this is a disposition, the command is not absolute but means to strive toward this condition; in other words, we should make constant efforts to attain a perfect moral disposition through acting always for the sake of the law and thus continuously curbing inclination. Perfect fulfillment of a precept of this sort is impossible for a finite will, for every finite will must always be under the constraint of the law; it is impossible that man rise to so high a point that he become identified with the law, so that he would act morally not by constraint but by his own inclination. Kant cautions that this reflection is not introduced so much to give clarity to the evangelical command by exact conceptions so as to avoid religious fanaticism in respect to the love of God, as it is to avoid a narrow moral fanaticism, the idea of acting for the worthiness of it rather than out of duty to do so. Such a motive is reducible to self-love. And the principle of self-love would just reverse the evangelical command, so that the first precept would be to love oneself above all for one's own sake and God and one's neighbor for the love of self.<sup>47</sup>

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Turning now to the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, we shall first examine the initial chapters of the third book of his *Summa contra Gentiles*, for in this place he establishes certain principles which are of the greatest significance for understanding his ethical theory. In the first book of this work St. Thomas considered the perfection of divine nature, in the second book the perfection of divine power according to which God is the author and lord of all things, and in the third book

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 189-192.

he considers the perfection of divine authority and dignity according to which God is the director and end of all. The first three chapters are concerned with questions of finality and governance in general, its universality with respect to all agents and its universality with respect to its termination in good.<sup>48</sup>

There is one first of all beings, possessing the full perfection of all to-be, whom we call God. We have already shown this. From the abundance of His perfection He bestows to-be on all which are, so He proves to be not only first among beings but also the principle of all to-be. Now, not by necessity of His nature does He lend to-be to others, but according to a choice of His will. The result is that of the things He has made He is lord, as we have the dominion over things subject to our wills. But He has perfect dominion over the things produced by Him in that for their production He is in need neither of the support of some other agent nor the basis of matter, for He is the universal effector of all to-be.

Every voluntary agent acts for an end, ordering the things that are produced through his will to their goal. The thing reaches that goal by its own actuality, which must therefore be given direction by the originator of the principle according to which it has actuality. Thus, because God is the author of all, He rules all as well. Considering, however, the results of this regulation of all things by God, we see that the result differs according to differences in the natures of the things. Some creatures are like an arrow shot at a target. They reach the goal wholly through the direction of their author, just as the arrow reaches the mark wholly by the archer's direction. But there are others which have reason, and these reach their right end not only as directed by another but also as self-directing. By their own actions they lead themselves to their goal. If they follow the divine direction in their self-direction, then they reach their goal; they do not reach their goal if they ignore the divine regulation and go off in another direction of their own choice.<sup>49</sup>

Every agent acts for an end, for every agent acts in a definite way when it does act, while if there were no end all ways of

<sup>48</sup> *III Cont. Gent.*, cc. 1-3.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 1.

acting, as well as not acting at all, would be quite indifferent. And every agent acts for an ultimate end, an end which is not itself for an end. Otherwise there would be an infinite regress, and this is clearly impossible for each thing is dependent on the next for direction. And this applies both for intelligent agents and other things as well, the latter act for their end just by their own built-in structure, while the former act by a cognitive pre-conception of their goal.<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, every agent acts for a good. For in acting for an end it acts for something determinate. This determinate object must be proportionate to it. And what is proportionate to the agent is good. So every agent acts for a good. The order of concepts which develops is: action, end, appetite, good. Good is the object of appetite, appetite is intrinsic tendency to end, end is the goal of action. The will is rational appetite.<sup>51</sup>

We turn now to an examination of some of the articles of question twenty-two in the *De Veritate*. This question is concerned with appetite for good and specifically with will.

Similar to the question we have just considered is that of the first article: Do all things have an appetite for the good? Yes. Every agent acts for an end. Things are ordered and directed to an end in two ways, by themselves and by another. Things knowing the end can be directed to it by themselves, but things which do not know the end can be directed to it only by some other. The latter occurs in two ways. Either they are inclined to that end by some intrinsic principle given to them by that other or they are merely moved to that end by that extrinsic principle. In the former way all natural things tend to their proper end, but in the latter way things which are moved violently move to the end. The latter would include all works of art and the violent in general, and the end here would not be the good of the thing moved but rather that of the mover. Now since all nature is directed by God to its end by its own inclination, it is necessary that that to which everything

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, c. 3.

is inclined is what is willed by God. Since God has no further end of His willing than Himself, and since He is goodness itself, it follows that all things are inclined by nature to good. So all things have an appetite for the good, for to have an appetite is nothing else than to seek to tend to something as ordered to it.

Therefore, since all are ordered and directed to good by God, and in such a way that there is in each thing a principle through which it tends to the good, as if seeking its own good, it needs be said that all things naturally have an appetite for the good.

For if things were directed to a good without having in themselves a natural principle of inclination, they could be said to have direction to the good but not to have an appetite for it, but by reason of their natural inclination all are said to have an appetite for the good, as if tending to it spontaneously. On account of this it is said in the book of Wisdom 8: 1, that divine wisdom disposes all things sweetly, since everything by its own motion tends to that to which it is divinely ordered.<sup>52</sup>

Do all things have an appetite for God Himself? All things do have an appetite for God Himself in an implicit way; not all have an appetite for Him in an explicit way. Nothing draws appetite except by being an end, and just as the action of God is in every action, so the divine goodness is in every appetible, since it alone is the ultimate appetible. But this is only an implicit appetite for God. A rational creature, however, can reduce the secondary ends to the first, just as he can reduce conclusions to principles. Such a reduction of all appetibles to God is to have an explicit appetite for God.

And just as in demonstration one has not rightly grasped the conclusion until he has reduced it to first principles, so also the appetite of a rational creature is not rectified except through an actual or habitual explicit appetite for God.<sup>53</sup>

In reply to the objection that no one desires what he flees but that some hate God inasmuch as they flee Him, St. Thomas explains that God can be looked at in two ways, in Himself

<sup>52</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 22, a. 1.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 2.

and in His effects. In Himself He cannot but be loved since He is goodness itself. So those who see His essence, that is, the blessed in heaven, love Him as much as they know Him. In His effects, on the other hand, He can be hated, for those effects may seem contrary to the will. For example, punishment and hard precepts may be contrary to the good intended by a particular will. But even so, God is still loved implicitly in some other of His effects, for everything has an appetite for its own to-be and this also is an effect of God.<sup>54</sup>

It might seem that God cannot be loved in Himself as an ultimate good, since one loves all things as proportionate to oneself, as good for the one loving. Now, it is true that everything mainly wills the good which is most suitable to it, and this is its good. When the good of the thing loved, however, is or is thought to be greater than the one loving, then the lover wills that good to be rather in the thing loved. For the good of the lover himself is found rather where it is more perfectly realized. The good of a part is found more in the good of the whole than in the part itself, and so every partial good tends more to complete good than it does to itself. Since our good is perfect in God, therefore even by nature it is more loved in Him than in us.<sup>55</sup>

But can God be loved above all things with an eye to a reward? We can consider the act of love in two ways, in itself and in respect to its object. In respect to its object, it is clear that an act of love of God above all things with an eye to a reward or anything ulterior is impossible. On the other hand, goodness accrues to man as a result of his love of God, and this goodness can be said to be a reward. From the point of view of the act of love, which can itself be loved since it is a good in that by it we are inclined to God, something can be loved beyond that act as a reward of it. But if the right order is to be preserved, this reward must not be made the ultimate object of our love. Considered as a lovable object, our love

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 3.

<sup>55</sup> *III Sent.*, d. 29, a. 3.

itself may be loved because it is good for us. But again, considered as a lovable object, our proper good must not be loved more than God.<sup>56</sup>

There are different sorts of appetite. Everything has an inclination to the good by its very structure itself and this is called "natural appetite." But some things are capable of having not only their own structure but the structure of others as well, and this without conflict, since they have the structure of the other as of the other, they do not assume it as their own. This is knowledge. Where there is knowledge, there must be appetite leading to the perfection of the knower not only as he is naturally structured in himself but as he is a knower as well. Such appetite is of various kinds depending on the various kinds of knowledge which it follows. Human will is appetite consequent on intellectual knowledge, and so it is called "rational appetite." Man also has a sensitive appetite, which he shares with other animals, for everything that senses has this sort of inclination. And, of course, man also has natural appetite in common with all things in nature. Indeed, sense and will can themselves be considered as having natural appetite, inasmuch as by their structure they are inclined to the good.<sup>57</sup>

Does the will then will something of necessity? The question as it is stated is ambiguous: Does the will will something by being forced, and again, does the will will something through its natural inclination? The first is clearly impossible. But in the second sense it is true that the will does will something of necessity. We have just seen that the will, too, is a certain nature. As such, by its natural inclination it is inclined to its due end. On the other hand, considered just as will it has appetite for something according to its own determination, not inasmuch as it is naturally inclined.<sup>58</sup>

But natural inclination does not necessitate the will in all of its acts, because precisely as will, the will is indeterminate with

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 4.

<sup>57</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 22, a. 3; q. 22, a. 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 5.

respect to many. For the will does not follow perception immediately by natural inclination, as sense appetites do in brutes, but follows a judgment of reason. The freedom of the will is rooted in the indeterminacy of this judgment with respect to particular goods.<sup>59</sup>

There is indetermination of the will with respect to its object, that is, with respect to what is willed. For while it tends to its ultimate end of necessity, still there is variety in what is to the end. There is also indetermination of the will with respect to its act, for its act is in its own power, so that given any particular good as a possible object it can act or not act. For it naturally wills the good, but it is not determined by its nature to will this or that good. There is also an indetermination of the will with respect to the order to the end. This indetermination can arise either from the indetermination with respect to the object in the case of those things which are to the end, or also from some failure in the apprehending of the end and the means.<sup>60</sup>

In a sense the will is able to move itself. For from its determinate motion to the end, it is able to move itself with respect to those things which are to the end, just as by its own power the intellect can reason from given principles to conclusions.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, God moves the will as an efficient cause just as He moves every natural thing. For He causes the will and its natural inclination and He moves it into the act in which it moves itself, that is to say, here as in everything God causes all actuality including the actuality of the free act of a free will.<sup>62</sup> But what of the indetermination of the will as to this or that object? Granted that the will moves itself to act or not to act and moves all the other powers of the soul in this fashion, it must be said that so far as the specification of the will is concerned, it is the intellect which moves it, for it is

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 24, a. 1; *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 83, a. 1; I-II, q. 13, a. 6.

<sup>60</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 22, a. 6.

<sup>61</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 9, a. 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 6.

the will's nature to be intellectual appetite, and thus it is the intellect which presents the will with its proper object.<sup>63</sup>

Considering human acts, that is, acts which man freely performs, it is seen that it is the object which gives them their character, just as it is the structure of a natural thing which gives that thing its character. So the first goodness of a human act depends upon that act having a proportionate object. Sometimes this object is the natural effect of the action, and then the proportion of action to effect is the basis of its goodness. But although an action is called good from this, that it can induce a good effect, still the goodness of what is effected does not cause the goodness of the action.<sup>64</sup>

But what is this suitability of the object which is at the basis of the goodness of the act? It is a suitability of the object to man, a suitability which man measures by reason. The norm or rule of morality, therefore, is reason. If we will what is good, our willing is good; if we will what is reasonable, what we will is good.<sup>65</sup>

But this reasonableness is not itself an unmeasured measure. For it is itself measured by the eternal law which is the divine reason or plan. Our light of reason shows us the good and leads us to it only insofar as it is a reflection of the divine wisdom.<sup>66</sup>

There seems to be a difficulty, however. In the first part we showed that, according to St. Thomas, truth of the practical intellect is in the accordance of judgment with right appetite. Now, however, we have said that reason is a moral standard, and so it would appear that right appetite is right insofar as it is in accord with reason. Which of these is true? St. Thomas, in commenting on Aristotle's *Ethics*, raises this question and replies to it as follows:

Now there seems to be a certain question here. For if truth of the practical intellect is determined in comparison to right appetite,

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 63.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 18, a. 2; q. 19, a. 2.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 18, a. 5; q. 19, a. 2.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 19, a. 4.

and rectitude of appetite is determined through the fact that it is concordant with true reason, it follows that there is a kind of circularity in the stated determinations. Therefore, it ought to be made clear that appetite is of the end and of those things which are to the end, and the end is determined for man by nature, as has been explained in the third book. Those things which are to the end are not determined for us by nature but by the investigation of reason. Therefore, it is obvious that rectitude of appetite with respect to the end is the measure of truth in practical reason. And as to this, the truth of reason is determined by its consonance to right appetite. But the truth of practical reason itself is the rule of the rectitude of appetite as to those things which are to the end. And so as to this, appetite is said to be right as it follows out what true reason judges.<sup>67</sup>

We can begin at this point to discern the order of determination: divine reason, nature, appetite for the end, human reason, object, appetite of things to the end.

There is one more problem which we may consider briefly, namely, the judgment in which the object is presented to the will. We must first distinguish between the judgment of conscience, that is, the particular judgment of goodness or evil, and the judgment of choice, that is, the particular judgment of what is to be done. The judgment of choice may be contrary to the judgment of conscience; one may judge to do that which he knows with the same particularity he ought not to do. In this respect, the judgment of conscience may be said to be pure cognition, not in the sense that it is theoretic rather than practical knowledge, but rather in the sense that it is pure practical knowledge rather than an application of such knowledge in the actual determination of appetite.<sup>68</sup>

Conscience binds men, not by forcing choice, which would remove freedom, but in a conditional way through knowledge. What is the condition? Very simply, it is that if a certain good is to be sought or a certain evil is to be avoided, then it is required to choose in this fashion. The condition, in other words, is the good, and in the last analysis the condition is the

<sup>67</sup> *VI Ethic.*, lect. 2.

<sup>68</sup> *De Verit.*, q. 17, a. 1. Notice the replies, especially ad 4.

ultimate good, not, of course, in general but in particular determination.<sup>69</sup> And it cannot be thought that conscience does not bind as a law inasmuch as it is man's own act. For it certainly is true that man does not make a law for himself, but through an act of his knowledge, by which a law made by another comes to be known to him, he is bound to the fulfillment of the law.<sup>70</sup>

The judgment of conscience is not self-evidently true but is the term of a reasoning process. Reason is concerned primarily with the universal; the judgment of conscience is always particular. There is a special sort of practical syllogism by which the required illation is accomplished and which St. Thomas has discussed and analyzed in considerable detail.<sup>71</sup> We cannot consider that entire analysis here, significant as it is, but some remarks about the first principles of that reasoning process are in order.

Just as in the theoretic order there must be certain first principles which are self-evident or immediate, so also in the practical order. These first practical principles constitute what St. Thomas calls "natural law." The habit of these first principles is innate just as is the habit of first principles in the speculative sphere. But again, just as in the case of the first theoretic principles, the actual knowledge of these principles depends upon experience and intuition, the act of intellect abstracting from the particularity of experience.<sup>72</sup>

The habit of first practical principles is called "synderesis." Yet we must know that the practical syllogism is not a syllogism in all the strictness of the scientific syllogism. St. Thomas calls the practical syllogism a "quasi-syllogism." The practical conclusion could not wholly be resolved to the first principles of the natural law, since synderesis supplies only what corresponds to the major premise of a scientific syllogism. One cannot proceed from the universal first principles of right, that is,

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 4, ad 1.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, qq. 15-17; *II Sent.*, d. 24, q. 2; *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 79.

<sup>72</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 79, a. 12; *II Sent.*, d. 24, q. 2, a. 4.

from the natural law, to the judgment of conscience without the introduction of other premises which are not contained in the natural law.<sup>73</sup>

In respect to this natural law, the following points should be noticed. Like all law, it is an ordering by reason, since it is a kind of measure and ordination of what is to be done and this is an act of reason rather than of will.<sup>74</sup> Again, like all law, it is an ordination to the common good, since its force is reduced to the ultimate end and this is the common good.<sup>75</sup> Now we can speak of the eternal law, and this is nothing but the plan of governance of things in God as in the chief of the whole universe.<sup>76</sup> We may, on the other hand, speak of natural law. All things have a share in eternal law inasmuch as they are under rule by it. But different things share in the eternal law in different ways. Some are ruled by the eternal law without sharing in it in such a way that they can rule themselves by it; others, of course, rational creatures, are ruled by it by having a principle derived from it by which they rule themselves.<sup>77</sup> Such a principle is the natural law.

Natural law, then, is a body of first practical principles. It is not made by reason but discovered by it. It is formed by the mind by the mind's having a natural habit which is brought to act through abstraction from experience. This experience includes not only things that are, but also the natural inclinations of man. Not inclinations in the sense of sensual appetites, but in the sense of the general orientation to good and to particular goods which is structured into man. There are several principles of this law, the first of which is based on the most general inclination to good: "Good ought to be done, evil ought to be avoided." The consequent principles are based on this and on certain more specific inclinations to particular goods, as to self-conservation, generation and education of children,

<sup>73</sup> *II Sent.*, d. 24, q. 2, a. 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I-II, q. 90, a. 1.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 2.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 91, a. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, a. 2.

the use of intelligence and social life.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, as we noted above, it is of the greatest importance to notice that the judgment of conscience cannot be simply deduced from these principles.

### III

We have attempted to give a summary account of a few of the leading principles of ethical theory in Kant and Aquinas. And we have made an effort to do equal justice to both. In neither of the theories is our account a summary of the complete ethics nor even of the principles of ethics. A good deal more could be said in both cases to supply the ultimate bases for the conclusions and to explain the doctrines of virtue, the determination of principles to particular cases, and even the points with which we have been especially concerned. These two ethical theories certainly could not be judged rightly either absolutely or even in comparison to one another merely on the basis of this summary.

But our purpose in this article is not judgment but examination and comparison. We have made an examination, limited, to be sure. But our examination should be sufficient for a similarly limited comparison. We proceed, then, with our limits in mind.

Let us first point out some of the oppositions which can be seen from our exposition.

For Kant, reason is a moral standard of itself alone, and it can be a moral standard only inasmuch as it is a standard of itself alone. Freedom, in the sense of autonomy, is first absolutely in the order of moral determination. For Aquinas, on the other hand, reason is a moral standard but not of itself alone; it can be a moral standard only inasmuch as it is consonant with the prior moral standard of right appetite, and in the final analysis with the final moral standard of the eternal law. There is no such thing as freedom in the sense of autonomy and freedom of choice is precisely what is in need of moral

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, q. 94, a. 2.

determination. True liberty, that is, liberty from sin in which self-mastery consists, is not a peculiar moral principle; it is rather the attainment of a certain degree of moral perfection.

For Kant, inclination furnishes maxims which must be considered merely by reason according to its own principle, that is, merely as to whether they can have the force of universal law, and law has its character as law merely from its form. For Aquinas, reason cannot form law merely from itself. Inclination of nature, inclination in a very different sense from that which Kant had in mind, is a supposition of the law. What is even more basic, in Kant law derives its force from itself and not from any order or necessity besides itself; in Aquinas law derives its force from the end and from necessity of order to the end. In Kant the law is not discovered elsewhere than in reason; it is a fact of reason; in Aquinas law is found by our reason in nature. Kant explains the law by autonomy and that is an ultimate inexplicable principle; Aquinas explains the law by nature and ultimately by the divine nature.

For Kant, the will is the only absolute good because it is the ultimate source of goodness; for Aquinas, man is good fully by his will alone but this is because it is by the order of the will that all other human powers are moved to their ends and by it that man is moved ultimately to his ultimate end.

For Kant, the goodness of the object and of the end is a derived good, it depends on the will. For Aquinas, the goodness of the will in any particular act depends directly on the object and ultimately on the last end. For Kant, the law itself is the unique moral motive; for Aquinas, natural law and ultimate end are sharply distinct. For Kant, if our analysis is correct, it is possible that there is a practical truth but it is wholly dependent on reason as a law-giving faculty; for Aquinas, practical truth is reduced to a higher norm in the orientation of the will with respect to the ultimate end.

For Kant, the precept to love God above all things is to be reduced to the moral law; for Aquinas, the precept of love is at

the very foundation of the law, since it regards the relation of appetite to ultimate end and the law depends on this.

Superficial similarities do not stand up against such stark systematic oppositions. Nor are these mere superficial differences. Our first examination brought out some apparent resemblances but we have seen them dissolve before an examination of arguments. These differences are real and they are differences of the greatest importance. For they are no mere theoretic differences. Aquinas: until appetite is reduced to explicit intention of the ultimate end there is no moral goodness. Kant: if the will does not rest in the law, if it intends any end other than as a consequent of the law, then there is no moral goodness. Human goodness is at stake here; following one theory one would fail as a man if the other is correct. This point, we think, cannot be urged too strongly.

On the other hand, taking into account this opposition, the undeniable differences of the two ethical theories, one can see ways in which there is a similarity in the function of certain principles within one theory to the function of certain radically different principles within the other.

In Kant there are primary moral principles, the moral law is not manufactured by imagination or fixed on by feeling or taste but it is a fact of reason. Similarly in Aquinas there are certain fundamental moral principles which reason must see, principles which need no demonstration, principles which are objective and necessary. Just as we find first practical principles in Kant in the same way as we do first theoretic principles, by attending to the necessity with which reason prescribes them and clearing them of all empirical accretions; so we find first practical principles in Aquinas in the same way as we do first theoretic principles, by an intellectual intuition having a basis in a natural habit of the intellect and in common experience.

In Kant there is a requirement that moral interest be first in obedience to the law itself, other interests are moral only insofar as they are subordinated to duty. Similarly in Aquinas, there is a requirement that moral interest be first in the ulti-

mate good itself as it is in itself. Just as we are morally good in Kant by a subordination of every subjective interest to the universal moral law, so we are morally good in Aquinas by a subordination of every proper good to the common good. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice and all the rest shall be added to you," can have a proportionately similar sense in both theories; to place the reward above the law in the one case, and above the ultimate common good in itself in the other, is a complete perversion of moral rectitude. Universality of legal form is to Kantian ethics what the common good is to the Thomist ethics.

In Kant there is a necessity of reason being practical of itself alone if it is to be truly practical at all. Similarly in Aquinas there is a necessity of appetite being for a good if there is to be any appetite at all. Just as we do not truly act practically in Kant except through the domination of reason over all else, so we cannot have any action in Aquinas except through the ultimate end: as Kant began with a problem of how reason can be practical, so Aquinas might have begun with a problem of how action as human is possible at all.

Such comparison of two radically different theories by a consideration of similarities between what is intrinsic to each as it is found related within it could be carried on indefinitely. Nor is it determinate in the sense that one comparison excludes another: Kant's law is like Aquinas' end and also like *synderesis*.

Returning now to the point from which we began, the distinction between theoretic and practical is both greater and less in Kant than it is in Aquinas. If we may use terms not precisely adapted to either of our philosophers, hoping that a careful examination of the discussion which follows will assist in the clarification of our meaning, we might say that Kant puts a unity between the two as to form and ultimate principle, a unity which is quite alien to the philosophy of Aquinas; but Aquinas, on the other hand, claims a unity or continuity with respect to object or matter, a unity again altogether alien to the system of Kant.

Kant, in the introduction to the *Critique of Practical Reason*, explains that the organization of the first *Critique* and that of the second must conform in general outline “. . . because it is still pure reason, the knowledge of which here underlies its practical use.”<sup>79</sup> He explains this statement further in a section on the critical examination of the analytic at the end of that book.

Whoever has been able to convince himself of the truth of the propositions in the Analytic will get a certain enjoyment out of such comparisons, for they correctly occasion the expectation of bringing some day into one view the unity of the entire pure rational faculty (both theoretic and practical) and of being able to derive everything from one principle. The latter is an unavoidable need of human reason, as it finds complete satisfaction only in a perfectly systematic unity of its cognitions.<sup>80</sup>

The chapter in the methodology of the first *Critique* which is concerned with the architecture of pure reason is of some aid in explaining Kant's position on this point, for there he says that our many modes of knowledge must form a system in accord with reason's legislative prescriptions. Only so can these all play their roles in furthering the essential ends of reason.<sup>81</sup>

In St. Thomas, no such unity as this can be found in any purely human science. Sacred doctrine, it is true, is both speculative and practical, but it unites both in a single principle only because it goes beyond all merely human knowledge, so that considering diverse things under the divine light of revelation, it unites those considerations which in philosophy must be distinct.<sup>82</sup> We have already seen how there are first practical principles just as there are first theoretic principles. Both are acquired in a similar way but there is a basic difference in what is taken into account in the two cases, for the practical have a basis in the natural inclinations of man in a way in which the theoretic do not. And a reading of St. Thomas' commentary

<sup>79</sup> *Practical*, p. 129.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 195-197.

<sup>81</sup> *Pure*, p. 653; pp. 653-665.

<sup>82</sup> *Summa Theol.*, I, q. 1, a. 4.

on Aristotle's *Ethics* will indicate how appropriate to the peculiarities of practical subject-matter he thought the structure of the argument in general and in detail must be. Not only the truths of the science but the form must be appropriate; in analyzing the book Aquinas derives the form from the peculiarities of the subject-matter.

On the other hand, Kant divides the theoretic and the practical as nature and freedom. In nature all is determined but man as a moral agent is free. For nature is not thing-in-itself but appearance, while man as a moral agent is in a world not of things as they seem but of things as they are.

According to St. Thomas, man as a moral agent fits into the world of nature. In fact, it is the will as a certain nature that is determined, and to this determination must be reduced the indetermination of will as will. Nature is a principle of morality in Aquinas, so that man as a moral agent abstracted from nature is impossible. For Kant, moral agency must be abstracted from nature, morality in nature is impossible.

"Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily they are reflected on: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me."<sup>83</sup>

"There is one first of all beings, possessing the full perfection of all to-be, whom we call God."<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> *Practical*, p. 258.

<sup>84</sup> *III Cont. Gent.*, c. 1.