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THE JUSTIFICATION OF MORALS IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF THOMAS AQUINAS

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Thomas Aquinas is considered by some as a "rational" theologian *par excellence*. However, the term "rational" applied to Aquinas is misleading. More accurately, he rationalized and tried to give systematic explanations for the traditional religious assumptions of Christianity and of the institution - the Catholic Church. He tried to organize them in a legalistic system as a basis for an all-encompassing canon law. He was primarily a compiler and classifier of religious speculations, ideas, papal and ecclesiastical decrees. Thomas imitated the Greek philosopher Aristotle by interpreting him in light of the Neo-Platonic philosophy adopted by Christians. His system of philosophizing always takes as a point of departure the assumption of religious absolutes and then fits all aspects of human life and action into the mythological religious scheme common to many religions (the age of innocence, original sin, revelation, redemption, grace, second coming, salvation) by means of speculation. These religious absolutes, dogmas, are determined and imposed by the religious organization - the Catholic Church. Moreover, this organization claims a supernatural origin and its leader demands absolute obedience in all matters, including the intellectual processes of reasoning and inquiry, as a visible substitute for God on earth.

METAPHYSICS AND HUMANIST PHILOSOPHY

Aquinas represents a wide conception of the scope of philosophy. Philosophical reflection derives from a spontaneous tendency of the human mind to understand the data given by experience, to explain ourselves and the world in which we live, in the most complete possible way. Thus such an attempt leads to the exercise of the human mind we traditionally call philosophy and metaphysics. This desire requires an attempt to reach a unifying interpretation of reality as known to us, and to obtain a clarity about the general situation which makes all particular situations possible. This represents an imperative tendency of the human mind to reduce multiplicity to unity. It operates in all intellectual endeavors. Aquinas as a metaphysician was concerned with the understanding of finite things and relating them to the metaphysical ultimate reality in which he believed. His finite view of nature itself was derived from the anthropocentric and analogous orientation. He, together with other medieval metaphysicians, believed that he was able to construct empirical hypotheses and attain final knowledge by means of metaphysical reflection.

The development of a particular science, however, has wrested from philosophy the field it regarded as its own. Cosmology is today part of physics, the philosophy of life is now scientific biology, and speculative psychology became scientific psychology. The sciences do not treat theological problems, or "ultimate" metaphysical questions, which are nothing but analogous anthropomorphic projections. Metaphysicians did not show that they have a method whereby these questions can be answered. They attempted to explain the world, but they do not have any recognizable way of verifying or testing their speculations. We realize today that the only understanding of the world which we can attain is that provided by the sciences, interpreted in a very broad sense, as a factual, rational, and empirical approach to realities known to man. It does not mean that we should abandon an attempt at developing a unifying system of philosophy, a "new metaphysics". On the contrary, we observe in the modern world development of the Humanist philosophy, a new unifying system, a "new metaphysics" with wider generality than scientific constructs, which is, at least in some way, testable. Also, no appeal to the authority of the philosopher can be made. Thomas Aquinas himself considered such an argument the weakest.

THOMIST THEORY OF MORALS

Aquinas did not attempt to develop a moral philosophy without Christian doctrines, since he considered that the knowledge of the purpose of human life, of the human supreme good, cannot be fully understood without revelation. To his credit it should be emphasized that he believed that such a system can exist and he had a great respect for Aristotle who epitomized this line of thought. His starting point is the Aristotelian conception of happiness or moral wellbeing [*eudaimonia*] as the last end of human living. He supplements this concept by the assumption of the religious doctrine, common to all mythological religions, of beatification in heaven: "If we speak of the ultimate end with respect to the thing itself, then human and all other beings share it together, for God is the ultimate end for all things without exception"; "There can be no complete and final happiness [*beatitudo*] for us save in the vision of God"; "the human mind's final perfection is by coming to union with God". Obviously, Aquinas's artificial assumption, which he does not prove, poses a restriction on the value of his doctrine and leads to a peculiar speculation, namely, that the ultimate criterion for the moral value of human actions will be in relation to this hypothetical end. For Aquinas, reality is hierarchical, and human beings fit in above the physical objects because they have a double nature - spiritual and material. He shared with Aristotle the view that the possession of reason distinguishes man from the animals. Our actions as human actions are rational and voluntary, and depend on our choice.

Aquinas correctly states that only such free acts based on the will in view of an end and apprehended by reason can be classified as moral actions, good or bad ("acts are called human inasmuch as they proceed from deliberate will" and "moral acts and human acts are the same"). For a human act to be morally good, a number of factors have to be present. Absence of any one of them is sufficient to prevent calling it good. Moreover, an act is morally obligatory only when not to do it or to do something else would be morally bad. Aquinas differentiates between interior and exterior acts. But there cannot be an exterior act without an interior act of the will. He then develops a finalistic, teleological conception of the will striving to achieve an ultimate, presumed good of man. All particular ends or goods such as riches, honors, fame and glory, power, pleasure, or speculative knowledge are only a means to the attainment of this ultimate good. Since he believed in the creation by God of human nature with its innate tendencies, he presupposed a common

supreme good, that is union with God, for all people. This is the fundamental flaw in Thomas's system of ethics. Note that it is not the moral behavior of human beings in relation to each other in a society that is the basis of morality, but the unspecified glorification of God. Though Thomas did not neglect personal morals, they became dependent on our relation to the institution, and were not measured by our relation to other human beings. Morality and moral justifications became a legalistic system based on the acceptance or not of the Church orthodoxy, the theoretical, unverifiable Church speculations about the supernatural, and whatever the Church ordered mankind to believe. Morals are put on a secondary and tertiary plane in the system of Aquinas's ethics. The primary precepts dealt with are the recognition of the cult, speculations about religious supernatural reality (that is, religious dogmas), ritual veneration of the sacred, and the unquestioned, submissive, servile, total subordination to the institution, the "party." This institution usurped its supernatural origin, supernatural power in ordaining what is good, and what is bad, what is wrong and what is right.

The power of the Church was formally extended to the domination over the secular state by Pope Boniface VIII in his bull "Unam Sanctam" (1302). Using the then current metaphor the Pope declared that there are two "swords" (i.e., powers) under the control of the Church - the spiritual sword is wielded in the Church by the hand of the clergy, and the secular sword is employed for the Church by the hand of the civil authority, under the direction of the spiritual power. The Church has then the right to establish, to judge, and to dismiss the secular power. Whoever opposes its power, opposes the law of God. Moreover, every human being must be the subject of the authority of the Roman Pontiff: "Now, therefore, we declare, say, determine and pronounce that for every human creature it is necessary for salvation to be subject to the authority of the Roman Pontiff." The same was declared by the Fifth Council of Lateran in 1516 and this doctrine was eventually formulated by the theologians as the fundamental principle of Catholicism in a dogma "*Extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*."

Clearly, the Church usurps the totalitarian domination over the entire world, over the mind, feelings, and morals of every individual. It is, needless to say, that it is the "moral" obligation according to such a doctrine to spread the faith (however faith may be defined by the Church) by force or any other means. In modern times the doctrine was upheld by Popes Gregory XVI and Pius IX, by Leo XIII in his encyclical "*Immortale Dei*" (1885), and by Pius X in his "*Vehementer Nos*" (1906) in which he declared null and void the law of the French Republic separating Church and state. In 1911 the encyclical "*Jamdudum in Luisitania*" repeated the same stand for Portugal.

THOMIST JUSTIFICATION OF MORALS

Aquinas's entire theory of justification of morals is analogous, developed on the model of the positive human law and the legal system. It is basically a play on words in which morality is reduced to legality, but it was used since it fitted into the totalitarian doctrines of the Church. It is important to emphasize that, as in any legal system, one finds here also the legislator, the judge, and the executor, all embodied in the institution of the Church. The intellectual paradigm that Aquinas develops may be summarized as follows: Since in reality there is a hierarchy of beings, there must be a hierarchy of laws governing it. At the top is the ETERNAL LAW - the deity Himself, the supreme mind ("*suprema ratio in Deo existens*"), His mind and reason ("*ratio in mente divina existens*"). "Hence the Eternal Law is nothing else than the plan of the divine wisdom which is considered as directing all the acts and motions". This concept is very old, having its roots in the Stoic and Platonist idea of the immanent reason in things or universal logos absolutized in God's Wisdom and personified in the Christian religion as the second person of the Trinity. According to Aquinas, the Eternal Law is recognized by all ("*lex aeterna omnibus nota*"). It is the governing idea of the Supreme Sovereign from which all rules derive. Thomas used many anthropomorphic analogies in his explanations. Even failures in the natural causes fall under the rule of the Eternal Law. We do not have direct knowledge of this Eternal Law, but in some manner we have a notion of the Eternal Law, such as when we are prone to receive the virtues, or we have the fear of God.

In accordance with his religious belief in the sacred books, he then postulated, in a puerile and naïve way, the positive DIVINE LAW, which is two-fold: the Old Divine Law, imperfect, underdeveloped, of the Old Testament, and the New Divine Law, perfect, fully developed, of the New Testament. The common good was envisaged by the Old Law as material and earthly benefit (the promised land of Canaan). The spiritual and heavenly good is directed by the New Law in the promise of eternal life. The office of law is to lead men into keeping its commandments. The Old Law did it by fear and penalty, the New Law does it through love

and the grace of Christ. The Old Law was given to the people who were still backward, whereas the New Law could come only after Christ's redemption as a condition for salvation. Both laws are for the guidance of human conduct and are required for four reasons:

1. Humans are destined to ends beyond their natural abilities and this requires a law to direct men to the actions matching what they are made for, namely toward eternal happiness.

2. Human judgment is not trustworthy, and different people can come to different decisions. Men must have divinely given law to know what should or should not be done. Also they need grace in order to know truth and to do good.

3. Men cannot make law on inward motion, only on outward and observable behavior.

4. Human law cannot forbid or punish all wrongdoing; therefore there is a need for a law that leaves no evil unforbidden and unpunished. So the distinction between a crime and a sin is that a crime is a punishable offense against the public order, while a sin is an offense against the ultimate common good. The Last Judgement will be a summing up of Justice.

There are many problems with the acceptance of the positive Divine Law of the Old and the New Testaments, even giving Aquinas the benefit for not knowing about the scripture what we know today. The so-called Divine Law was never formulated to any extent, and the term has rather phraseological usage. Aquinas accepted all natural phenomena, all events - historical, political, social, and miracles described in the Testaments as unquestionably true and factual. He also accepted all explanations given by the scriptures as true and factual.

Moreover, speculations on the religious scheme developed and derived from these scriptures by the Church became the basic and obligatory tenets for everyone. These speculations are obviously arbitrary and tendentious. The scriptures are used to illustrate and justify certain positions, often to justify moral judgment by quoting convenient phrases. The Church owned the sacred scriptures and had the sole authority and right (as it believed) to develop these tenets.

The precepts we find in these scriptures are two-fold: related to the worship of God, and morals related to human behavior vis-à-vis other humans or God. Even Aquinas and the Church had tremendous problems in reconciling their presumed supernatural character and the reality of their contents. All religious ritual prescripts of worship found in the Old Testament were rejected. From the New Testament - some new rituals were speculatively derived and especially a theory of the supernatural origin of the Church institution, most fundamental for the Catholic faith, was invented. As to the moral precepts - these were formulated with various degrees of relevance, and regardless of whether we believe in their supernatural origin or not, they represent accumulated human experience not unique to the Greco-Judean tradition. However, even Aquinas had problems in accepting all the tenets except the very general moral imperatives. Simply, the moral sensitivities of his time were vastly different from those of people living in biblical times. For example, he goes to considerable pain to explain away adultery, so prominent in the Old Testament, as commanded by God! It did not matter to Aquinas that he contradicted the nature of God. Scriptures thus contain the sum total of the experience and information about the world and the history of a given group. As such they might contain certain elements of permanent value as the Greek scriptures ascribed to Homer or Hesiod. Aquinas needed them as a pretext and an element of his religious scheme for justification of the new religion and the religious institution.

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