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Rescuing Finality:
the role of finality in unifying moral action
and the cost of its eclipse

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Introduction

Man discovers in his inner desire for God the finality of his being. This paper seeks to give an account on the essential role of the principle of finality in the clarification and construction of the moral specification of the human act. At the same time it seeks to draw attention to the consequences of the denial of this principle. To accomplish this task I shall first briefly review the notion of finality according to Aristotle and its application to ethics. Secondly, I shall review the inclusion of the principle of finality, as spelled out in Aristotle's thought, in the theological synthesis constructed by St. Thomas Aquinas. Thirdly, I shall present an account of how this principle was eclipsed in the work of Thomas's successors. Finally I shall illustrate with a current example the consequences of not taking the principle of finality into account in formulating moral theology.

Abbreviations

a.	article
aa.	articles
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church
Cf.	Confront (compare)
DV	<i>Dei Verbum</i>
e.g.	exempli gratia (for example, such as)
etc.	<i>etcetera</i>
Ez.	Ezekiel
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
i.e.	<i>id est</i> (that is)
Jn.	John
Jr.	Jeremiah
Lk.	Luke
Mt.	Matthew
NA	<i>Nostra Aetate</i>
OT	<i>Optatam Totius</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Greca</i>
Phil.	Philipians
Ps.	Psalm
q.	question
qq.	questions
Rev.	Revelation
Rm.	Romans
SCG	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
ST	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>
Suppl.	Supplement
viz.	<i>videlicet</i> (that is to say, namely)
vol.	volume
VS	<i>Veritatis Splendor</i>
Ws.	Wisdom
1 Cor.	1 Corinthians

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I. The Thought of Aristotle

1. Notion of the principle of finality

Aristotle uses the notion of essence as the building block of his philosophical thought. He considers that philosophy is the science of the universal essence of that which is actual; hence philosophy is to be concerned with the universal. He finds the universal in particular things and calls it the essence of things, as opposed to Plato who would find the universal apart from particular things. The procedure runs this way, it begins with the analysis of particular phenomena of the real world around us, and then by abstraction from these sensible things it reasons to the knowledge of essences and laws. It is important to realize that the mind has an active role to play in this process of knowledge¹ and also that the potential objects of knowledge must already exist in reality. Only then they can be known by the human mind discerning the intelligibility of things.

For Aristotle, philosophy goes hand in hand with science (or reasoning). He understands science in three senses, namely, 1) practical science (ethics and politics); 2) poetical science (poetry, fine arts); 3) theoretical science (physics, mathematics, and metaphysics). For Aristotle, metaphysics is philosophy in the stricter sense; he defines it as “the knowledge of immaterial being,” and calls it “first philosophy” since it is fundamental for the construction of any other science. Logic is thought of as a preliminary stage to philosophy. The order of his philosophy would be: 1) Logic; 2) Theoretical Philosophy, including Metaphysics, Physics, Mathematics, 3) Practical Philosophy; and 4) Poetical Philosophy.

For Aristotle, metaphysics is also the most important science,² and as science it seeks knowledge of things in their causes. He maintains that while other sciences cut off pieces of beings and study those fractions, metaphysics is peculiar because its aim is to reach the knowledge “of being as being”. Hence its scope encompasses the whole of reality; everything

¹ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima*, III, 5, 430a 14-20, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, New York 1991, Random House, p. 592.

² The Greek term τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά is of uncertain origin, but it seems certain that it was coined by one of Aristotle’s commentators to serve as a title to the works of Aristotle which he had placed “after the physics” since they were part of an independent science. Others prefer to interpret it as “beyond the physics.” Aristotle just called it “first philosophy”, “theology”, or “wisdom.”

falls under the range of metaphysical analysis.³ While every other science seeks to find out the causes and principles of things, metaphysics inquires into the first principles and highest causes, not only in the order of existence, but also in the order of thought (i.e., possible being).⁴

Many philosophers before Aristotle tried to find the first factor or ἀρχή⁵ that would explain reality (i.e., the order of existence) but their results were somewhat confusing and seemed incomplete. Aristotle resolved the confusion by first introducing the concepts of potency (δύναμις – *dynamis*) and act (ἐνέργεια – *energeia*), which appear as form and matter. Act means full and perfect existence, as if the most perfect action of a thing is just to be what it is. Potency means what a thing can be, but is not yet in actuality. The real things of nature are composed of these two factors. They are in act, because they really exist. But their existence is incomplete, because they are subject to change, and so they have a potency to certain kinds of changes. Now, Aristotle considered matter (ὕλη – *hyle*) as pure potency, which by itself is nothing. Matter is always tied to some particular form (μορφή *morphe*) of existence. Hence matter always exists under some form; it is always part of *something*. However forms normally do not exist except in a composition with matter. This is the basis for Aristotle's theory of form and matter (*hylomorphism*) that respects the reality of the material world, but also recognizes an intelligible order within the world.

Aristotle answered the question of “why things are as they are” by using four basic kinds of causes, namely, 1) *material cause*, that out of which something is made or that in which a change is wrought; 2) *efficient cause* (*causa quod*), the thing or person that acts to make something happen or that by which something is produced or some change is wrought; 3) *formal cause*, the form of a thing as the source of its activity, or the idea in someone’s mind that guides his activity or that in which something is changed or that which gives being to something; 4) *final cause*, the end of an action, or purpose for which a change is produced or for which something exists, since no action ever happens unless it is “going somewhere”.⁶ These causes can be exemplified as follows: a statue is produced by a sculptor (its efficient cause) by his imposing changes upon a piece of marble (its material cause) for the purpose of possessing a

³ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, VI, 1026a 1-33, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, pp. 778-779.

⁴ Cf. *Ib.*, IV, 1003a, 26, pp. 731-732.

⁵ The Greek term ἀρχή was later rendered in Latin as *principium*, and then came into English as *principle*.

⁶ Cf. R. TAYLOR, “Causation”, in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York 1967, II, McMillan Publishing Co. & The Free Press, p. 56.

beautiful object (its final cause), the marble thereby acquiring the form, or distinctive properties, of a statue (its formal cause).⁷

In regard to the order of thought, Aristotle provided also some first principles, namely, the *principle of noncontradiction*, the same thing cannot both be and not be at the same time and in the same respect; the same proposition cannot be both true and false; *the principle of the excluded middle*, either a thing is or it is not, there is no third possibility; *the principle of the reason of being* (intelligibility), being is intelligible to the human intellect and as an object of intellection it can be explained ontically only through being, and so it cannot be identified with non-being. Every being has a reason of its existence either in itself or in something else; *the principle of identity*; every being is that which it is; each being is separated in its existence from other beings; *the principle of causality*; every effect has a cause; and *the principle of finality*; every agent acts for an end. These principles are considered first principles since they are self-evident and primary truths, immediately perceived by the intellect, i.e. without demonstration.

The principle of finality –which most interests us for this paper–, is the reason why an action takes place; the end or τέλος⁸ is a definite perfection of the action by which the acting agent seeks his own good, and for the sake of which he acts.

Aristotle considered the final cause to be the most important one. All the other causes are subordinated to it. However, all of them are necessary in order to explain the universe. Everything that exists has a purpose.⁹ “It must first be said,” says G. B. Kerferd, “that Aristotle’s teleology is not a doctrine of any over-all pattern of purpose in the universe, nor is it intended to show how natural objects may serve purposes outside themselves. It is, rather, a doctrine of internal finality, that is, a doctrine that the end of each object is to be itself. Second, his teleology is rooted in his equation of final cause with formal cause. The study of the end or purpose of a thing is the study of its form.”¹⁰

⁷ *Ib.*, p. 56.

⁸ The Greek word τέλος is used to describe the end or goal toward which a movement is being directed as well as to describe the final goal toward which men and things strive. It also denotes the termination or conclusion of a process and it is in contrast to ἀρχή.

⁹ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *De Caelo* I, 5, 271a 33, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 404.

¹⁰ G. B. KERFERD, “Aristotle”, in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, New York 1967, I, McMillan Publishing Co. & The Free Press, p. 158.

In the *Physics*, which deals with the natural body in general, Aristotle affirms that nature acts for the sake of an end, and it is itself an end (ἡ δε φύσις τέλος και ου ενεκα).¹¹ He also affirms that not every thing can claim to be an end, but only that which is best (τα δῶς το τέλος και ταγαθον των αλλων το γαρ ου ενεκα βέλτιστον και τέλος των αλλων ἐθέλει ειναι).¹² Here Aristotle wished to indicate that natural living things display a finality in their process of growth. When Aristotle says that everything in nature happens for some end or purpose, he includes also things that are the acts of “deliberate reason”, that is, acts of men.¹³ Even chance events involve reason in some sense because chance implies purpose and not just mere chaos.¹⁴ In conclusion, Aristotle wanted to show that nature belongs to the kind of cause which acts for the sake of something; and that nature reveals a directing intelligence since it displays order and order implies a relationship to an extrinsic cause.¹⁵

Artifacts are for an end and in a similar but more perfect way nature is for an end. Art imitates nature, in the sense that, art tries to understand the order of nature so as to reproduce artistically its own creations, just as nature produces its own objects. Nature produces all things for an end; we can see this more clearly if we look at animals rather than men, because animals make things neither by art nor after deliberation;¹⁶ even plants and spiders, ants or the like show that something is produced for an end, e.g. leaves grow to provide shade for the fruit.¹⁷ Therefore, says Aristotle, nature produces all things for an end and this shows that there is an order and finality in the process of all natural things.¹⁸

The finality of things in nature is necessary because through it things come to be what they are. For example, the reason why a house is built is not the existence of stones and walls; rather the house is produced for the sake of sheltering and guarding certain things.¹⁹ The bricks

¹¹ ARISTOTLE, *Physica* II, 2, 194a 28, as quoted by C. J. DE VOGEL, *Greek Philosophy, a collection of texts with notes and explanations*, Leiden, Netherlands 1967, E. J. Brill, II p. 87.

¹² *Ib.*, p. 87.

¹³ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica*, II, 5, 196b 10-20, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 244.

¹⁴ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica*, II, 5, 197a 7, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 245.

¹⁵ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica*, II, 6, 198a 9-12, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 247; Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica*, XII, 10, 1075a 12-23, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, R. MCKEON (ed.), pp. 885-886.

¹⁶ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica*, II, 8, 199a 20-22, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 250.

¹⁷ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica*, II, 8, 199a 23-26, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 250.

¹⁸ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica* II, 8, 199a 7-8. 30-33; 199b 33, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, pp. 249-251.

¹⁹ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica* II, 9, 200a 5-10, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 251.

and stones are necessary for the house to be, but the house, the end, is only present because someone chose it and knows what a house is.²⁰

In the *Metaphysics*, dealing with causes, Aristotle asserts that some causes are as the *substratum* (e.g. the parts), and others are as the *essence* (the whole, the synthesis, and the form). For instance, the seed, the physician, the adviser, and in general the agent, are all sources of *change* or of rest; the remainder are causes as the *end* and the *good* of the other things; for that for the sake of which other things are, tends to be the best and the end of the other things.²¹ Aristotle considered that in the universe there is nothing separate and by itself, rather everything is connected, and they are connected because they are ordered to one end, which is the extrinsic common good or end.²²

This *τέλος* may be another substance for whose sake any corruptible substance has been produced (its extrinsic final cause), e.g. wheat is grown for man's nourishment. The *τέλος* may also be the full development of the substance itself (its intrinsic cause) e.g. the maturity of the wheat plant.²³ In consequence, the final cause does not need to pre-exist the process of which it is the cause, but may actually be the effect of the process. In other words, it is first in the intention of the agent but last to be realized. Aristotle affirms in the *De Anima*, that both the intellectual faculty [mind] and the appetite are capable of originating movement. The mind originates movement because it calculates the means to the end, while appetite is in every way relative to the end; for that which is the object of appetite is the stimulant of the mind, and that which is last in the process of thinking is the reason for undertaking the action.²⁴

Aristotle considered final cause as the “cause of causes” that must be known in order to give complete explanation to any natural process. Matter cannot exist without form, and some extrinsic agent or effective cause produces form in matter, however, before the effective cause begins to act it must be predetermined in a specific way to produce a definitive effect. This

²⁰ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica* II, 9, 200a 15-16, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 252.

²¹ ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica* V, 2, 1013b 20-27, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 753.

²² Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysica* XII, 10, 1075a 12-23, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, pp. 885-886.

²³ B. M. ASHLEY, “Final Causality” in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, 1967, V, McGraw-Hill Company, pp. 915-916.

²⁴ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima* III, 10, 433a 14-16, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 598.

predetermination or specific tendency toward a goal is final causality. This came to be known as teleology.

Teleology can be thought of as a backward analysis by which, the steps that were necessary to its achievement are discovered from the observation of a goal already achieved.

Aristotle deciphers the entire universe by means of finality. He affirms that individual substances have this innate tendency towards an end. In the same way this tendency is observed in the cosmos since it is made up by these individual substances.²⁵

2. Application of the principle of finality to ethics

Aristotelian ethics builds on the consideration of the end and of values; it seeks to balance the two by means of applying the teleological principle to the vast realm of ethics. His concern is mainly with action, not as being right in itself irrespective of every other consideration, but as conducive to man's good. That which conduces to the attainment of his good or end will be a "right" action on man's part; the action that is opposed to the attainment of his true good will be a "wrong" action.²⁶

In his work *Nicomachean Ethics* (Ἠθικά Νικομάχεια) he states that, "every craft and every line of inquiry, and likewise every action and decision, seems to seek some *good*; that is why some people were right to describe the good as what everything seeks."²⁷ Hence everything seeks an end, a good. Here Aristotle qualifies all human action as being aimed at an end or purpose, and he defines the final purpose as well-being (εὐδαιμονία), which consists of an activity of the soul in accordance with reason, i.e. in agreement with virtue.²⁸

Aristotle, in his work *Eudemian Ethics* (Ἠθικά Εὐδήμεια) asserted that the supreme good of man is happiness. It is a matter of living in a blissful and beautiful manner.²⁹ Jacques Maritain

²⁵ Cf. B. M. ASHLEY, "Final Causality" in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, pp. 915-916.

²⁶ Cf. F. COPLESTON, *A History of Philosophy, Greece & Rome*, Garden City, New York 1962, I, Image Books, p. 74.

²⁷ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 1, 1094a 1, T. IRVIN (ed.), Indianapolis 1999, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., p. 1.

²⁸ Cf. C. J. DE VOGEL, *Greek Philosophy, a collection of texts with notes and explanations*, Leiden, Netherlands 1967, II, E. J. Brill, p. 135.

²⁹ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 1, 1214 a 31, as quoted by J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, New York 1964, Charles Scribner's Sons, p. 31.

observes that in Aristotle's ethics "happiness (ευδαιμονία) consists in the perfect fulfillment of the human nature [...] it is the state of a man in whom human nature and its essential aspirations have attained their complete fulfillment, and attained it in conformity with the true hierarchy of ends proper to that nature."³⁰ Indeed, Aristotle remarks that "not to have organized one's life with a view to some end is mark of much folly."³¹ In order to determine what happiness is, it is necessary to find out what the end of our nature is, and to discover what kind of good above all others man is made for, the good which is uniquely appropriate to a rational being and through which he achieves the fulfillment of his nature.³²

Aristotle does not say that we *ought* to tend towards happiness since it *is* a fact of nature, it *exists* in man necessarily. Since seeking happiness is something that man cannot avoid, Aristotle tries to determine in what does happiness towards which we necessarily aspire really consists.³³ According to Maritain, Aristotle connects happiness with Man's final good.

Since all things are, as it were, suspended from their final cause, Aristotle sees "the primary aspect of the Good is its aspect as End."³⁴ Since the Good is of central importance to Aristotle, he identifies the Good with Happiness whose principal component is wisdom followed by virtue and lastly pleasure.³⁵ Aristotle affirms that the end which we pursue for its own sake and is the cause of our seeking all other ends must be the absolute or supreme good.³⁶

Aristotle considers the question of the ultimate End, the primacy of the Supreme Good, or the happy life the dominant issue in ethics, and what determines the identity of the virtues. Now the virtues is both orientated toward what is good in itself (*bonum honestum*) and are the *means* of arriving at Happiness.³⁷ A man performs a morally good act when he prepares and forms his action by reason, but more precisely when the action has been judged by reason in regard to its

³⁰ J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, p. 31.

³¹ ARISTOTLE, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 1, 1214 b 10. as quoted by J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, p. 31.

³² Cf. J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, p. 31.

³³ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 31.

³⁴ *Ib.*, p. 32.

³⁵ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 1, 1214a 8-9, as quoted by J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, p. 33.

³⁶ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 2, 1094a 20, T. IRWIN (ed.), p. 1.

³⁷ Cf. J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, p. 35.

capacity to attain the ultimate end of human existence i.e. Happiness.³⁸ Aristotle identifies happiness with “the good and beautiful life [...] the blissful life”.³⁹ Reason regulates human acts on the basis of their tending directly towards true happiness. The end (τέλος) is thus the device supplying an approach to understand the ethical action. In the Aristotelian system then, the τέλος identifies the “why” of things. In this sense, cutting steak is the end of a steak knife, pumping blood is the end of a mammal’s heart, and winning the game is the end of playing chess.⁴⁰

Expounding the issue of the good that we all are seeking, Aristotle questions, “What, then, is the good of each action or craft?” He answers that the good “is that for the sake of which the other things are done; in medicine this is health, in generalship victory, in house-building a house, in another case something else, but in every action and decision it is the end, since it is for the sake of the end that everyone does the other actions.” Then he concludes, “and so, if there is some end of everything achievable in action, the good achievable in action will be this end; if there are more ends than one, [the good achievable in action] will be these ends.”⁴¹ It is clear then that Aristotle emphasizes that everything has a tendency towards an end which he identifies with the good. In the field of ethics the application of finality to the qualification of the moral problems conceives the end as a principle and cause to the potentialities of man. The good that man pursues is happiness which is reachable by means of man’s actions.

II. Inclusion of the principle of finality in St. Thomas’s theological synthesis

Aristotle provided great elements for the development of the philosophical world, nevertheless his enormous contribution to philosophy, and especially in the field of metaphysics, was abandoned for centuries. Instead, a new approach to Platonism took over the scene and somehow became the basis for Christian metaphysics within the Scholastic synthesis. In the meantime, the Arabs rediscovered Aristotle and it was through their endeavors that the Aristotelian works began to be translated into Latin in the twelfth century and introduced in the Scholastic theology.

³⁸ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 36.

³⁹ ARISTOTLE, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 3, 1215a 11-12. as quoted by J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ Cf. T. IRVIN, “end, goal”, in ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Indianapolis 1999, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., p. 325.

⁴¹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 7, 1097a 19-24, T. IRWIN (ed.), p. 7.

The inclusion of the works of Aristotle in the university curriculum caused a good deal of turmoil; nevertheless, they fascinated St. Thomas. He realized that the Aristotelian metaphysics were far superior in comparison to that of the Platonic or the Neo-Platonic systems. St. Thomas decided to construct his fundamental apparatus on Aristotle's system. There is no doubt about the influence of Aristotle on St. Thomas's theological synthesis. St. Thomas retained and modified many elements of the work of the *philosophus*, as he calls Aristotle in the *Summa*. These elements were taken from different fields, namely logic, ethics, and most especially metaphysics. The principle of finality was among those elements, and it is of pivotal importance in the whole development of St. Thomas's system especially in the part dealing with morality.

Though St. Thomas adopted –with some reservations– Aristotelian philosophy, he also drew from other authors such as St. Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Moses Maimonides (a Jewish philosopher and rabbi) and Arabian philosophers. Despite his debt to Aristotle, St. Thomas had to rethink certain issues in Christian terms in order to articulate the articles of faith which are totally alien to the Hellenistic mentality.⁴² For this reason, St. Thomas refused to adopt the division made by Aristotle in philosophy between metaphysics and ethics. Thomas believed that the light of faith possessed a greater power for unification than did human reason.⁴³

In his metaphysical elaboration, St. Thomas –following Aristotle– establishes the causes which give intelligibility to being. Two causes relate to the intrinsic structure of the being, and the other two causes to its origin and end. The first is the material cause out of which something is made; the second is the formal cause which tells us what the thing is; the third is the efficient cause which is that by which something is produced; and lastly the final cause which describes that for the sake of which something takes place.⁴⁴ Though this last one is given the prime place among the others, the others are not separated but rather intertwined and work together.⁴⁵

The principles of possible being also operate together. For instance, the principle of finality *omne agens agit propter finem* (every agent acts for an end) cannot be separated from the

⁴² E. J. GRATSCH, *Aquinas' Summa, An Introduction and Interpretation*, New York 1985, Alba House, pp. xvi-xvii.

⁴³ S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, Washington, D.C. 1995, Catholic University of America Press, p. 221.

⁴⁴ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, V, lesson 2, 763-776; lesson 3, 777-794 in H. REITH, *The Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Milwaukee 1989³, The Bruce Publishing Company, pp. 364-374.

⁴⁵ Cf. J. A. MERINO, *Historia de la Filosofía Medieval*, Madrid 2001, Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, pp. 198-199.

principle of efficient causality because this principle which gives the form to a being, also tends to the good that befits the being. Since efficient causes act only to attain a good, there cannot be a tendency without some good, either real, possible, or apparent, that is the end of the activity.⁴⁶ The principle is self-evident, which means that it is understood immediately when the terms are analyzed. St. Thomas makes this principle clearer in the *Summa Contra Gentiles* when he affirms that every agent acts for an end since without an end to aim at the agent would never begin to act.⁴⁷

St. Thomas considered that every action is ordered toward being either as substance or as the accidental perfections that accompany the substance or which it acquires later. Now, by the very fact that something exists at all, it is good; it would not have come into being were it not the fulfillment of some potency. Hence the end of activity is a good. Now this principle of activity is an appetite that is either natural or elicited (extracted), that is, dependent on knowledge either sensory or intellectual.⁴⁸ A particular good, towards which an action tends, presupposes the efficient, formal, and material cause; however in the transcendental order the good is prior to the cause of the particular action, therefore we can say that the end (the good) is first in the order of intention (becoming) and last in the order of execution (being).

St. Thomas's application of the principle of finality can be seen very clearly in his most prominent, important and influential work, the *Summa Theologiae*. Here St. Thomas makes the principle of finality have a fundamental role. In his consideration of the ontology of the human person, St. Thomas not only gives an account on the whole structure of Man's inner cosmos, but also examines Man and his spiritual acts. St. Thomas maintains that teleology is the all-embracing principle of nature; therefore it includes Man as composed by body and soul. In giving an account on the body of man, St. Thomas asserts that the body has a purpose, he affirms that the divine artificer has given to every being the best equipment, not indeed the best absolutely, but the best for its particular purpose. The proximate purpose of the human body is

⁴⁶ H. REITH, *The Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 164.

⁴⁷ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 2, in A. C. PEGIS, *Basic Writings of Thomas Aquinas*, New York 1945, Random House, volume II, pp. 5-7.

⁴⁸ H. REITH, *The Metaphysics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 165.

the rational soul and its activities. The kind of soul that a being has determines the corporeal equipment, since body and soul are fitted to each other.⁴⁹

Later we will look into the different parts of the *Summa* to see how St. Thomas uses the principle. For now and in order to have a general idea we should mention that St. Thomas begins his moral theory in the *prima secundae* with an account about the end of Man, thus making the principle of finality the basis for the following articles. The account on the end is considered together with the consideration of Man's quest for happiness, which he acquires from his actions. St. Thomas considered that God presents himself as the first principle and the last end of man, who is to recognize his origin and end so as to draw closer to it through his free acts.⁵⁰ Subsequently the human act is described and identified with the moral act.

The moral synthesis of St. Thomas is described as one of purpose and end, as can be seen in the way he begins with the idea of purpose and end, referring to the fact that all human acts are placed for some end. However, since the series of ends cannot be allowed to extend to infinity, he requires a last and highest end which is desired because of itself alone; all other things are desired, consciously or unconsciously, because of this last end.⁵¹

St. Thomas was convinced that in order to spell out the end of human existence it was necessary to analyze the final end as the constitutive element of the human action. Although the principle of finality (every agent acts for an end) seems to be evident, St. Thomas wanted to make sure that it was clear, given that many other philosophers had denied its importance or tergiversated it.⁵²

Servais Pinckaers observes that "for St. Thomas, in the mainstream tradition of Aristotle and the Fathers of the Church, the question of happiness is incontestably the first consideration in Christian moral theory. It is natural to everyone. It points to the question of our last end, which presupposes a certain amount of reflection, as can be seen from the more abstract way in which it is formulated. The question of happiness is essential to St. Thomas's definition of Christian

⁴⁹ Cf. H. MEYER, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, St. Louis 1945, B. Herder Book Co., p. 182; THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 91, a. 3.

⁵⁰ Cf. J. A. MERINO, *Historia de la Filosofía Medieval*, p. 210.

⁵¹ Cf. H. MEYER, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 369.

⁵² M. A. FUENTES, *Conseguir la Vida Eterna, Los Principios Fundamentales de la Teología Moral Católica*, San Rafael 2005⁷, Ediciones del Verbo Encarnado, p. 45.

ethics. It expresses the fundamental human thrust toward the true and the good. This in turn is strengthened by the exercise of virtue and the resulting experience gained in all areas of human activity.”⁵³

St. Thomas asserted that Man is rational, which is proved by the fact that man arrives (reaches an end) at the knowledge of intelligible truth by advancing from one thing to another – which is what reasoning is.⁵⁴ Hence, when Man acts he does so for the sake of an end. If Man would not act for the sake of an end he would be irrational and would not be the master of his actions and hence his actions would not be human.⁵⁵ From this St. Thomas understood, as did Aristotle, that the human act is pertaining to choices, because Man is rational and therefore acts for the sake of an end. Man chooses in order to achieve something. The act of choice, for St. Thomas, was the act that best distinguished Man. Man, through his choices, has the ability to define who he is.⁵⁶ Consequently, for St. Thomas, the moral act was the same thing as the human act.

The finality of the moral act, according to St. Thomas, is both the end and the object of the moral act. Pinckaers affirms that “for St. Thomas [the principle of finality] had been the basic element of voluntary action, which he defined as the properly human power to act in view of an end. This is why the study of moral theology in the *Summa* began with a treatise on our last end, presented as the principle of the unity of all our actions. This was extended potentially to all persons and even to all creatures.”⁵⁷

St. Thomas, as aforementioned, utilizes the principle of finality and makes it a fundamental part of his theological synthesis. The formula “*omne agens agit propter finem*” can be found, for instance, in various places in the *Summa Theologiae* as a systematizing principle

⁵³ S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 6.

⁵⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 76, a. 1; q. 79, a. 8; Cf. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima* III, 5, 430a 14-20, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, R. MCKEON (ed.), p. 592.

⁵⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 1, a. 1.

⁵⁶ Cf. VS 71 “[Human acts] do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man but, to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his profound spiritual traits. This was perceptively noted by Saint Gregory of Nyssa: ‘All things subject to change and to becoming never remain constant, but continually pass from one state to another, for better or worse... Now, human life is always subject to change; it needs to be born ever anew... But here birth does not come about by a foreign intervention, as is the case with bodily beings...; it is the result of a free choice. Thus we are in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions’ (*De Vita Moysis*, II, 2-3: PG 44, 327-328.)”.

⁵⁷ SERVAIS PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 243.

together with Divine Revelation through the Biblical sources and the Fathers of the Church. In the first part St. Thomas begins by showing that Man needs revelation and theology and not simply philosophy (q.1). Then St. Thomas considers the existence of God and everything related to divine essence (qq. 2-26). Within this part we find the famous five ways to prove God's existence, in which the principle of finality is relevant.⁵⁸ Then he reflects on the Blessed Trinity (qq. 27-43). Finally he closes the first part by giving an account about God as creator and of his creatures (qq. 44-119). On this point it is fitting to mention that the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum* asserted that God is the beginning and end of all things, and can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason (Cf. Rm. 1:20; DV 6).

Now, at this point St. Thomas gives an account of the act of creation and of how God is the final cause of everything, hence the principle of finality provides a foundation to the whole argument. He states that "every agent acts for an end: otherwise one thing would not follow more than another from the action of the agent, unless it were by chance. Now the end of the agent and of the patient considered as such is the same, but in a different way respectively. For the impression which the agent intends to produce, and which the patient intends to receive, are one and the same. Some things, however, are both agent and patient at the same time: these are imperfect agents, and to these it belongs to intend, the acquisition of something even while acting. But it does not belong to the First Agent, to act for the acquisition of some end. He is an agent only, and intends only to communicate His perfection, which is His goodness; while every creature intends to acquire its own perfection, which is the likeness of the divine perfection and goodness. Therefore the divine goodness is the end of all things."⁵⁹

The second part deals with the concern about the advance of the rational creature towards God. Man is a free moral agent who has the power, by his actions, to tend towards God as his ultimate end. Conversely, by his actions too, he can turn away from Him. It consists of two subparts. The *Prima Secundae* gives an account on God as the ultimate end of human activity (qq. 1-5) and, in a general way, it gives an explanation of human acts as tending towards or deviating from this ultimate end (qq. 6-48). We should be aware of the fact that when we speak

⁵⁸ St. Thomas proposed different ways to prove the existence of God, and in them he implied the principle of finality in varied modes, depending on the determined way, namely that of 1) motion, 2) causation of existence, 3) contingent and necessary objects, 4) degrees and perfection, 5) intelligent design.

⁵⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 44, a. 4.

about tending towards an end, or its opposite, namely deviating from an end, we are dealing with categories of finality. Then an analysis of the principles of human acts follows, including habits, law and grace (qq. 49-114). This part deals with the last end in general, in fact, in the first question St. Thomas states that it belongs to man to act for an end since in his human actions man's reason and will take part, and given that the object of the will is the end and the good therefore all human actions must be for an end.⁶⁰

In the second article of the same question the principle of finality appears again when St. Thomas observes that "necessarily every agent acts for an end". This is because if the first cause of other causes is taken away, then necessarily all are removed. Now the first of all causes is the final cause. The reason for this is that matter does not receive form, unless moved by an agent; since nothing reduces itself from potentiality to act. But an agent does not move except out of intention for an end. For if the agent were not determined to some particular effect, it would not do one thing rather than another: consequently in order that it may produce a determinate effect, it must, of necessity, be determined to some certain effect, which has the nature of an end. And just as this determination is done, in the rational nature, by the "rational appetite," which is called the will; so, in other things, it is caused by their natural inclination, which is called the "natural appetite". Here St. Thomas also differentiates two ways in which a given thing tends to an end, namely, by moving itself as in the case of man, or by being moved by another as in the case of an arrow shot towards the bull's eye. Therefore, says St. Thomas, the creatures that possessed reason move themselves to an end because of the dominion they have over their actions through their free-will. Those that lack reason tend to an end, by natural inclination, as being moved by another and not by themselves; since they do not know the nature of an end as such, and consequently cannot ordain anything to an end, but can be ordained to an end only by another. Consequently it is proper to the rational nature to tend to an end, as directing and leading itself to the end: whereas it is proper to the irrational nature to tend to an end, as directed or led by another, whether it apprehend the end, as do irrational animals, or do not apprehend it, as is the case of those things which are altogether void of knowledge".⁶¹

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ib.*, I-II, q. 1, a. 1.

⁶¹ Cf. *Ib.*, I-II, q. 1, a. 2.

In dealing with the question about voluntary acts, St. Thomas agrees with St. John Damascene in saying that a voluntary act consists of a rational operation, therefore human acts are voluntary. St. Thomas explains it deeper by saying that every agent or thing moved, acts or is moved for an end. However the principle for its moving or being moved changes if there is knowledge of the end. Those things which have knowledge of the end are said to move themselves because there is in them a principle by which they not only act but also act for an end. Since they act and act for an end, the movements of such things are said to be voluntary: for the word “voluntary” implies that their movements and acts are from their own inclination. Therefore, since man especially knows the end of his work, and moves himself, in his acts especially is the voluntary to be found.⁶² A human act is properly human because it is voluntary.

St. Thomas explains how the intellect moves the will; he does so based on some elements of Aristotle’s thought namely that the intellect (or calculative faculty or mind) and the appetite are both capable of originating movement. The intellect calculates the means to the end, while appetite tends to the end; for that which is the object of appetite is the stimulant of the intellect, and that which is last in the process of thinking is the beginning of action.⁶³

This can be clearly seen in the way St. Thomas explains the human act, which can be represented as a dialogue between the intellect and the will.⁶⁴ St. Thomas affirms that intellect and will produce the human act, which consists of an interior act and an exterior act. The interior act has two parts: 1) the deliberation about the end and 2) the deliberation about the means to achieve the end.

⁶² Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 6, a. 1.

⁶³ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *De Anima* III, 10, 433a 14-16, in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 598.

⁶⁴ Cf. AQUINAS, THOMAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, T. GILBY (ed.), New York 1970, XVII, McGraw Hill Book Company, p. 211; W. FARREL, *A Companion to the Summa*, New York 1959, II, Sheed & Ward, p. 59.

Human Act

Intellect

Will

Intention (The Interior Act)

About *Ends*

1. Perception (by speculative intellect)

2. Wish (by will)

The wish of the will is distinguished from the perception of the intention; to have one is not necessarily to have the other.

3. Judgment (by practical intellect) (that the end is achievable)

4. Intention (by will)

About *Means*

5. Deliberation (by speculative intellect) (on possible means)

6. Consent (by will)

7. Judgment/Decision (by practical intellect) (on the best means)

8. Choice (by will)

The exterior act is the act commanded by the will whereby the physical faculties of Man join in the accomplishment of the act. St. Thomas begins his account of the execution of the human act by attributing to the intellect the act of command.

Execution (The Exterior Act)

9. Command (*Imperium*)

10. Application

11. Performance

12. Completion

St. Thomas remarks that since things are in potentiality to several things they need to be reduced to actuality, and that is to move. Then he continues by saying that “a power of the soul is in potentiality in two ways, namely, first, with regard to acting and not acting; secondly, with

regard to this or that action. Thus for instance the sight sometimes sees actually, and sometimes sees not: and sometimes it sees white, and sometimes black. It needs therefore a mover in two respects, viz. as to the exercise or use of the act, and as to the determination of the act. The first of these is on the part of the subject, which is sometimes acting, sometimes not acting: while the other is on the part of the object, by reason of which the act is specified.”⁶⁵ Then asserting that the subject’s motion is caused by some agent, St. Thomas lays down again the principle of finality to make clear his conclusion. “Since every agent acts for an end, the principle of this motion lies in the end. And hence it is that the art which is concerned with the end, by its command moves the art which is concerned with the means; just as the ‘art of sailing commands the art of shipbuilding.”⁶⁶ Here St. Thomas is posing an example following Aristotle’s articulation in the *Physica*, in which Aristotle said that in the products of art we make the material with a view to the function.⁶⁷ St. Thomas continues, “now good in general, which has the nature of an end, is the object of the will. Consequently, in this respect, the will moves the other powers of the soul to their acts, for we make use of the other powers when we will. For the end and perfection of every other power, is included under the object of the will as some particular good: and always the art or power to which the universal end belongs, moves to their acts the arts or powers to which belong the particular ends included in the universal end. Thus the leader of an army, who intends the common good –i.e. the order of the whole army– by his command moves one of the captains, who intends the order of one company. On the other hand, the object moves, by determining the act, after the manner of a formal principle, whereby in natural things actions are specified, as heating by heat. Now the first formal principle is universal ‘being’ and ‘truth’, which is the object of the intellect. And therefore by this kind of motion the intellect moves the will, as presenting its object to it.”⁶⁸

St. Thomas again applies the teleological argument in answering to the question of whether intention is an act of the intellect or of the will. He begins by pointing out to the etymological sense of the word “intention” which itself denotes or signifies “to tend to something”. Then he elaborates by saying that “both the action of the mover and the movement of thing moved, tend to something. But that the movement of the thing moved tends to anything

⁶⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

⁶⁶ *Ib.*, I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

⁶⁷ Cf. ARISTOTLE, *Physica* II, 2, 194b 6 in R. MCKEON (ed.), *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, p. 240.

⁶⁸ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 9, a. 1.

is due to the action of the mover. Consequently intention belongs first and principally to that which moves to the end: hence we say that an architect or anyone who is in authority, by his command moves others to that which he intends. Now the will moves all the other powers of the soul to the end. Therefore it is evident that intention, properly speaking, is an act of the will.”⁶⁹

So as seen in the different preceding points, St. Thomas considered finality as central in the whole of philosophy and theology. In his consideration of “becoming” and of “change” in the universe, his viewpoint is the same as Aristotle who observed nature simply and unassumingly making itself manifest to man, and at the same time offering its natural principles to help man to interpret it [nature]. St. Thomas accepts the conclusions of Aristotle’s study of the phenomena of nature. Among these conclusions is the certainty that in God there is neither change nor becoming; instead this is true of every creature. Becoming is the metaphysical presupposition of every creature, and this becoming implies potency and act, hence a tendency to an end, or in other words, a teleological tendency.⁷⁰ Now, the movement of natural things –which is implied in change or in becoming– is not an end in itself, rather it exists to serve being. All movement is directed to an end that should be realized.⁷¹

The *Secunda Secundae* deals with the morality of particular actions. It is largely a treatise on the virtues, which he reduced to seven, namely the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity (qq. 1-46), and the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, including also the moral virtues (qq. 47-170). If in the general consideration finality provides with the urge and reason for action, it could not be less true in dealing with particulars which are dependant on the general. Again here the principle of finality has an important role because we are dealing with particular actions, to be precise, with virtues. St. Thomas affirms that virtue is “*habitus operativus bonus*”, an operative habit essentially good, and is distinguished from vice which is “*habitus operativus malus*”, an operative habit essentially evil. Now in metaphysics (both Aristotelian and Thomistic) habit comes under the category called quality which implies adaptation and specification. In order to be the subject of habits a being must be *in potentia*, i.e. capable of determination and perfection; and this *potentia* must not be restricted to only one mode of activity or receptivity, because if there is absolute fixity, where one and the same line is

⁶⁹ *Ib.*, I-II q. 12, a. 1.

⁷⁰ Cf. H. MEYER, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, pp. 250-251.

⁷¹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 251.

invariably followed, there is no room for habit. Now as we aforementioned, potency tells us that there is tendency toward an end, there a pursue of a goal, since it is observed that by the very fact that something exists at all, it is good and it would not have come into being were it not the fulfillment of some potency. Hence the principle of finality is of chief importance when considering virtues.⁷² The second part of the second part finishes with an account on particular states and kinds of life, such as the active and contemplative lives, the episcopacy, and the religious state (qq. 171-189).

The *tertia pars* is devoted to Jesus Christ, the savior of all, including the sacraments which derive their efficacy from his passion, death and resurrection. This part starts off with a close view on the Incarnation (qq. 1-26) and then continues examining what Jesus did and suffered (qq. 27-59). Subsequently the sacraments are studied in general (qq. 60-65) and then in particular (qq. 66-90; Suppl. 1-68). The very last treatise of the Summa articulates a consideration on the resurrection and eternal life (Suppl. 69-101). Just as in the previous parts, in this last one the principle of finality is used in the explanations, for instance in the purpose for the Incarnation, the mode of union and the events of Jesus' life; as well as for the consideration on the sacraments as vehicles to ultimate end of our sanctification.

III. The *eclipse* of the principle of finality

St. Thomas, indeed, elaborated a synthesis that in many ways surpasses the works of authors previous to his day. Pinckaers affirms that the *Summa Theologiae* is the greatest masterpiece of the medieval Scholasticism, particularly in its moral section.⁷³ After St. Thomas's death, his thought system continued to be carried on especially by his disciples and brothers Dominicans. Unfortunately, St. Thomas's interpreters and commentators had an "optical illusion" and considered St. Thomas's work so perfect and complete that they did not bother to go back to the sources from which the *Doctor Angelicus* had drawn his knowledge.⁷⁴ This attitude proved to be disastrous because it generated an approach that, while remaining unperceived, misinterpreted the original work. "Unfortunately" Pinckaers observes, "the original

⁷² Cf. A. WALDRON, "Virtue" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York, 1912, XV, Robert Appleton Company, pp. 473-475; Cf. C. A. DUBRAY, "Habit" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York 1912, VII, Robert Appleton Company, pp. 101-102.

⁷³ S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 233.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Ib.*, pp. 234-235.

Thomistic structure of moral theology was misunderstood and abandoned in the following century [after his death], and replaced by a very different organization of moral material, one far less satisfactory in my opinion. But the change thus introduced into Catholic moral thought was concealed by its adherence to most of the treatises, ideas, and positions that form the façade of St. Thomas's moral theory"⁷⁵. One thing was St. Thomas's original synthesis and another totally different was its posterior interpretation, which later became to be known as the Thomistic School.

The interpreters and commentators of St. Thomas not only betrayed their *magister* and his work, they also eventually took over the field of interpretation of moral theology. Nowadays, when we approach any account on moral theology that claims to be according to the thought of St. Thomas, we should ask, is it really Thomas's thought? Is it accurate? Most likely, this question would have helped the rightful development of moral theology throughout the centuries, and would have avoided much confusion.⁷⁶

Thomistic thought was mainly attacked by the Franciscan school which guarded the Augustinian tradition. Franciscans regarded St. Thomas as being too innovative especially on account of his Aristotelianism. The Franciscans thought that such a tendency was exaggerated and very dangerous, even though they themselves made use of Aristotle to some extent.⁷⁷

The struggles between the two schools continued for centuries and the split went deep. Regarding the central point of Christian moral theory, the Dominicans, following St. Thomas, affirmed the supremacy of the *intellect*, defining the first and formal element of beatitude in terms of this faculty, as the vision of God; the Franciscans maintained the primacy of the *will* and made love the essential element of beatitude. However, the struggle was not limited to these two religious families. Many entered the fight. Sadly, the consequences, which have lasted to our day, were to the detriment of the whole Christian moral doctrine. An agent of such a fate was William of Ockham.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ *Ib.*, p. 220.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Ib.*, pp. 236-237.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 240.

⁷⁸ Cf. *Ib.*, pp. 240-241.

1. The position of William of Ockham (and Duns Scotus)

While St. Thomas was the theological Himalaya of the Dominicans and Thomists⁷⁹, John Duns Scotus, the *Subtle Doctor* was the champion of the Franciscan school.⁸⁰ The Augustinian tradition supplied Scotus with a foundation for his synthesis. Nonetheless Scotus included also some contributions from Aristotle -whom he respected- but gave them a different interpretation since they were fruit of a philosophy which was separated from theology.⁸¹ William of Ockham, the *Venerabilis Inceptor*,⁸² following the endeavor of John Duns Scotus to simplify the multiplicity of formalities of the intellectual world of his day, began a revolution in philosophy that directly attacked (and eventually altered) the philosophical foundation of St. Thomas's theological synthesis; for this reason some have called him "the first Protestant."⁸³ The attempt to simplify things and the subsequent revolution set in motion by Ockham has had consequences that even reach us today. However this did not happen at once, it has been a subtle process of laying coats and coats upon the original system of St. Thomas thus covering it up. We could say that confusion in moral theology has been a result of a chain reaction, which that one event triggers another reaction, in such a way that each event is the result of the preceding and the cause of the one following.

The starting point of the eclipse is in the realm of ontology. St. Thomas used a metaphysics of participation, which affirmed the *analogy* of being, to articulate his theology. This analogy of being referred to the fact that *being* cannot be predicated in a univocal way regardless of what is the subject of the sentence. St. Thomas maintained that when it is said that God "*is*" it can only be understood by analogy with the same sense it is said that a creature "*is*". The mode of being of the Creator is different from the mode of being of creatures, since the very essence of God *is* existence, while a creature *is* only to the extent that it receives the gift of being

⁷⁹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 235.

⁸⁰ Cf. C. MASCIA, *A History of Philosophy*, New Jersey 1964, St. Anthony Guild Press, p. 237.

⁸¹ Cf. J. A. MERINO, *Historia de la Filosofia Medieval*, p. 260; C. MASCIA, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 237.

⁸² William of Ockham (1285-1349) began the theology program at Oxford but he did not complete it, and never became a fully qualified "master" of theology, hence his nickname, the *Venerabilis Inceptor*, "Venerable Beginner".

⁸³ Cf. W. TURNER, "William of Ockham" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York 1912, XV, Robert Appleton Company, p. 636.

from the Creator or to the extent that the creature *participates* in the being of the Creator.⁸⁴ St. Thomas stated that the “proposition, ‘God exists’ of itself is self-evident, because the predicate is the same as the subject, because God is His own existence.”⁸⁵ According to St. Thomas, this cannot be affirmed of creatures; in fact, elsewhere St. Thomas clearly remarked that “every being in any way existing is from God. For whatever is found in anything by participation, must be caused in it by that to which it belongs essentially, as iron becomes ignited by fire. Now [...] when treating of the divine simplicity that God is the essentially self-subsisting Being; and [...] that subsisting being must be one; as, if whiteness were self-subsisting, it would be one, since whiteness is multiplied by its recipients. Therefore all beings apart from God are not their own being, but are beings by participation. Therefore it must be that all things which are diversified by the diverse participation of being, so as to be more or less perfect, are caused by one First Being, Who possesses being most perfectly.”⁸⁶

Scotus, however, affirmed that the concept of being is not analogical, but univocal.⁸⁷ For him “to be” is predicated univocally of substance and accident; that is, both the Creator and the creature exist in the same way or in the same sense. In this way “being” became a category that was not linked to participation in God and was a more neutral or abstract qualifier that was applied *to* God and creatures in the same way.⁸⁸ Scotus elevated being to a higher level over God, so that being could be distributed to both God and His creatures, and by maintaining “being” had only one univocal meaning, he said that the only two categories to think metaphysically were “being” and “non-being” in such a way that “being” had to be predicated univocally both of the Creator and his creation. The Creator *is* in the same way a creature *is*, and vice versa.⁸⁹ Thus, Scotus did away with this sense of participation of being and favored univocity in metaphysics.⁹⁰ For him, univocity should be the mental instrument that enables man

⁸⁴ Cf. K. A. J. SMITH, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy, Mapping a Post-secular Theology*, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2004, Baker Academic Publishing Group, pp. 96-97; THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Ente et Essentia*, III-V, in R. M. MCINERNEY, *Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings*, London 1998, Penguin Books, pp. 37-46.

⁸⁵ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 2, a. 1.

⁸⁶ *Ib.*, I, q. 44, a. 1.

⁸⁷ Cf. C. MASCIA, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 237.

⁸⁸ Cf. R. M. MCINERNEY, *A History of Western Philosophy, philosophy from St. Augustine to Ockham*, Notre Dame, 1970, University of Notre Dame Press, p. 358; Cf. K. A. JAMES SMITH, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy, Mapping a Post-secular Theology*, p. 97.

⁸⁹ Cf. K. A. J. SMITH, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy, Mapping a Post-secular Theology*, p. 97.

⁹⁰ Cf. C. MASCIA, *A History of Philosophy*, p. 237; K. A. J. SMITH, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy, Mapping a Post-secular Theology*, pp. 95-96.

to be open to all reality, finite and infinite, human and divine, contingent and necessary. Univocity designated, said Scotus, the unity of reason of that which is predicated; univocity was the identity of a concept and this identity goes beyond the real identity of the subjects of which it is predicated.⁹¹

By considering the act of being before the act of creation, Scotus endowed creation with a metaphysical self-sufficiency. Hence he understood the existence of creation apart from the Creator, i.e. without any need of participation in the being of God. This affirmation shifted the universe from the category of creation (implying a necessary relationship to a creator) to the category of nature (not implying a necessary relationship).⁹²

Ockham inherited this univocal approach to metaphysics and therefore denied to universals the same act of being as he attributed to particulars. For him, particulars did exist in the real world, universals did not. Ockham did not admit that in the real world there was anything that corresponded to the universality of a concept. He did not admit any universal *in re*, in common nature, etc. – anything which was not completely individual.⁹³ He asserted that a single distinct entity appearing in a multiplicity of individual things was a contradiction of terms. He argued that the universal was described in language proper to the individual; but if it was an individual it was incomprehensible to him how it could appear in a multitude of individuals. On the other hand, if it was present in a number of particulars it could not be a single entity. Therefore, particulars had “being” while universals have “non-being”.⁹⁴ According to Ockham the words that we use to designate things generically are just names. We give these names, said Ockham, to the products of our abstraction which cannot be said to have “being” in the same sense that concrete particulars have being. Universality, said Ockham, was simply a manner in which a sufficiently generalized abstractive cognition was predicable, and thus it existed wholly within the mind. In other words, universals had no being, they were just abstractions. It is the concrete particulars that had being.⁹⁵ This statement is the basis for the rise of nominalism.

⁹¹ Cf. J. A. MERINO, *Historia de la Filosofía Medieval*, p. 263.

⁹² Cf. F. M. WALSH, “The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology” in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 273.

⁹³ Cf. PH. BOEHNER, *Ockham Philosophical Writings a selection*, London, 1967, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., p. xxvii.

⁹⁴ Cf. M. H. CARRÉ, *Realists and Nominalists*, London 1967, Oxford University Press, pp. 108-109.

⁹⁵ Cf. PH. BOEHNER, *Ockham Philosophical Writings a selection*, p. xxviii.

In summary, based on univocal predication Ockham concluded that God had being in the same sense as creatures did. In addition, Ockham held that only particulars had reality; universals just had names. These two conclusions would turn out to be the greatest influences in shaping moral theology in the long run.

Once the only foundational valid categories to describe beings were reduced to “being” and “non-being”, the real existence of essences, which are the natures of realities arrived at through abstraction from their sensible phenomena, was also denied. Now if real essences do not exist, we cannot establish any difference between essence and existence. Either they are collapsed in each other or one (essence) must disappear.⁹⁶

Ockham stated that the term “being” by its very meaning necessarily had reference to actual existence, since it denoted everything that existed or could exist in the universe. To introduce a distinction between “being” and “existing”, “essence” and “existence”, in a real thing was as meaningless for Scotus (who called it a fiction) as it was for Ockham. Hence existence (*existentia*) was not different from essence (*entitas*). The terms “essence” and “existence” both signified exactly the same individuals and the same reality; there was only a grammatical difference (Ockham was very sensitive to any intrusion of grammar in metaphysics)⁹⁷ one signified in the manner of a noun and the other in the manner of a verb (*unum nominaliter et aliud verbaliter*).⁹⁸

Since Ockham denied any distinction between essence and existence, both turned out to be one and the same. For him, “to be” means “to exist.” He then tried to describe how did something exist and what was the essence of that which existed. If existence can be qualified neither as a substance nor as an accident, then *existence* simply *is* and cannot be defined by its essence. Existence and essence identified each other and there is neither a real nor a formal distinction between them.⁹⁹ If we were to predicate being of God in the same sense as we predicate it of creatures, we would be led to affirm that the essence of both God and creatures is

⁹⁶ Cf. F. M. WALSH, “The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology” in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 273.

⁹⁷ Cf. PH. BOEHNER, *Ockham Philosophical Writings a selection*, p. xlii.

⁹⁸ WILLIAM OF OCKHAM, *Summa Totius Logicae*, III, II, c. xxvii, in PH. BOEHNER, *Ockham Philosophical Writings a selection*, p. 93

⁹⁹ Cf. J. A. MERINO, *Historia de la Filosofia Medieval*, pp. 297-298.

to exist, because the only real beings are those that exist. Since the only categories to describe existence are “being” and “non-being,” the only real thing that exists is actual being. This affirmation was contrary to St. Thomas’s notion of God’s essence as being identical with his existence.¹⁰⁰ However, the way Ockham clears up this issue is by eliminating essence altogether.

Once the distinction between essence and existence disappeared, species could not appear anymore since there were no natures to bind creatures together. Only individuals without any internal connection with one another could appear. Without any description of the nature of the human species, there could not be any basis for determining what contributed to the flourishing of human nature, because we have just individuals (Peter, John, James) not Man in the universal sense. At one stroke, the basis for any type of perfective ethics disappeared,¹⁰¹ which is very serious because the system of perfective ethics focuses on what is “good” for the person to do as a result such activity perfects his being.

2. A coat on potency and act as principles of being

The drifting away of Scotus and subsequently of Ockham from St. Thomas also caused the theory of potency and act to be disregarded as principles of being. For St. Thomas the nature of material things contained a twofold composition of form and matter, whereby the nature was constituted;¹⁰² and in intellectual substances there was a composition of actuality and

¹⁰⁰ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 3, a. 4 “God is not only His own essence [...] but also His own existence. This may be shown in several ways. First, whatever a thing has besides its essence must be caused either by the constituent principles of that essence (like a property that necessarily accompanies the species--as the faculty of laughing is proper to a man--and is caused by the constituent principles of the species), or by some exterior agent--as heat is caused in water by fire. Therefore, if the existence of a thing differs from its essence, this existence must be caused either by some exterior agent or by its essential principles. Now it is impossible for a thing's existence to be caused by its essential constituent principles, for nothing can be the sufficient cause of its own existence, if its existence is caused. Therefore that thing, whose existence differs from its essence, must have its existence caused by another. But this cannot be true of God; because we call God the first efficient cause. Therefore it is impossible that in God His existence should differ from His essence. Secondly, existence is that which makes every form or nature actual; for goodness and humanity are spoken of as actual, only because they are spoken of as existing. Therefore existence must be compared to essence, if the latter is a distinct reality, as actuality to potentiality. Therefore, since in God there is no potentiality [...] it follows that in Him essence does not differ from existence. Therefore His essence is His existence. Thirdly, because, just as that which has fire, but is not itself fire, is on fire by participation; so that which has existence but is not existence, is a being by participation. But God is His own essence [...] if, therefore, He is not His own existence He will be not essential, but participated being. He will not therefore be the first being--which is absurd. Therefore God is His own existence, and not merely His own essence.”

¹⁰¹ Cf. F. M. WALSH, “The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology” in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 273.

¹⁰² Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 50, a. 2, ad. 3.

potentiality, not, indeed, of matter and form, but of form and participated existence.¹⁰³ He also maintained that every created essence was in potency to its existence.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, for Ockham, potency was absolutely a “non-being”. His deductive syllogism ran like this: what is non-being is nothing; potency or potential being, is non-being; hence potency is nothing. The only real thing that exists is actual being. Therefore potency could not be a principle of being.

This conclusion had serious consequences in the morality, because when acting, a person passes from potency to act, there is a change that takes place in the acting person. Without the concept of potency and act there cannot be a way to articulate the transitive and the intransitive effects of the human actions.¹⁰⁵ The transitive effect is the change in the external surroundings that Man brings about by his actions, the way in which he shapes his world through his actions. The intransitive effect is the change that Man brings about in himself because of his choices, the change that occurs in himself due to his actions. Without potency and act, the consequences of human choices do not touch the inner person, just the external.

3. Self-determination

Once human acts were not seen in the context of passing from potency to act, they were no longer acts of self-determination; they lost their ability to shape the person.¹⁰⁶ In addition, since human acts had only consequences that affect Man’s surroundings and did not change him interiorly, then the moral task was reduced to conforming Man’s action to the demands of an external norm. Reward is given to the one who conforms to the norm; punishment is inflicted on to the one who does not comply. Once the goal of the moral life was seen in terms of reward or punishment, “extrinsicism” had entered into moral theology. Virtue was not its own reward. The reward was for being virtuous. At this point in which the moral task was to conform to a norm, the issue was regarding the conditions that Man should observe in order to get a reward

¹⁰³ Cf. *Ib.*, I, q. 75, a. 5, ad. 4.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. *Ib.*, *De Ente et Essentia*, V, in R.MCINERNEY, *Thomas Aquinas Selected Writings*, pp. 44-46.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. F. M. WALSH, “The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology” in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 273.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. VS 71 “[Human acts] do not produce a change merely in the state of affairs outside of man but, to the extent that they are deliberate choices, they give moral definition to the very person who performs them, determining his profound spiritual traits. This was perceptively noted by Saint Gregory of Nyssa: ‘All things subject to change and to becoming never remain constant, but continually pass from one state to another, for better or worse... Now, human life is always subject to change; it needs to be born ever anew... But here birth does not come about by a foreign intervention, as is the case with bodily beings...; it is the result of a free choice. Thus we are in a certain way our own parents, creating ourselves as we will, by our decisions’ (De Vita Moysis, II, 2-3: PG 44, 327-328.)”.

and avoid punishment. This is the root of legalism. Ockham maintained that the conditions were set by Man's responsibility for his actions, given that if man is not responsible for his actions then he would be neither qualified for reward nor for punishment.

4. *Freedom of indifference*

In order for Man to be responsible for his actions he has to be free. However, what does it mean to be free?¹⁰⁷ The nature of Man's freedom was one of the controversies at the University of Paris in the time of St. Thomas, who considered that to be free meant to be virtuous since freedom is the result of the joint work of intellect and will.¹⁰⁸ St. Thomas placed freedom after the intellect and will, the latter having as its chief object the good seen as end. Freedom was placed at the conjunction of the intellect, which judged, and the will, which willed, loved, and desired.¹⁰⁹ The Franciscans, on the other hand, led by Duns Scotus held that freedom resided simply in the will, since it was the only rational faculty that was free.¹¹⁰ Ockham proved to be a good heir of Scotus on this point as well. Scotus affirmed that the intellect was not free because of its being ordered to the truth; consequently he proposed a notion of freedom that required a radical autonomy of the will from all outside influences.¹¹¹ Ockham maintained that "freedom is the power I have to produce various effects, indifferently and in a contingent manner, in such a way that I can either cause an effect or not cause it without any change being produced outside of this power."¹¹² In other words, freedom meant the capacity of Man to do or not to do an action without depending on outside influence and without any restraints. This being free from outside

¹⁰⁷ Cf. F. M. WALSH, "The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology" in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 274.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. M. A. FUENTES, *Conseguir la Vida Eterna, Los Principios Fundamentales de la Teología Moral Católica*, p. 6 "true freedom comes about through virtue, because to act freely is the connatural combined act of our intellect and our will. This true act of freedom originates in our faculties without any coercion, and seeks a good, because freedom is a perfection and not a detriment. If it is coerced and does not seek a good, there is no freedom. St. Thomas explains (*SCG IV*, 22) how the children of God are moved by the Holy Spirit not as servants, but as free. For, as the man is free who exists for his own sake and not for another's, we do freely what we do for our own sake and reason. And this is what we do voluntarily; that which we do against our will we do not do it freely but forcibly (as a slave) [...] But the Holy Spirit impels us to act in such a way that we act voluntarily, in as much as he constitute us to love God (*amatores Dei constituit*). The children of God are moved freely by the Holy Spirit, through love, not through fear like servants.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 381.

¹¹⁰ Cf. W.A. FRANK – A. B. WOLTER, *Duns Scotus, Metaphysician*, West Lafayette, IN 1995, Purdue University Press, pp. 200-204.

¹¹¹ Cf. L. FREPPERT, *The Basis of Morality According to William Ockham*, Chicago 1988, Franciscan Herald Press, p. 33.

¹¹² WILLIAM OF OCKHAM, *Quodlibeta I*, q. 16, as quoted by S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 242

influences encompassed having no tendencies or inclinations towards anything, thus contradicting what St. Thomas stated about Man's intellect being inclined towards truth, happiness, good. So if Man had no prior determinations then he would be fully responsible for his choices. As a result of this way of conceiving freedom a new kind of freedom emerged, namely, the freedom of indifference, which enables Man to choose between contraries.¹¹³ This conception of freedom minimizes the role of the natural inclinations, which were basic in St. Thomas's synthesis. Among these inclinations the most important is the inclination for happiness. Pinckaers comments that, "[i]ndubitably, the inclination to happiness exists within us, but according to Ockham we remain entirely free to choose it or not, even as we are free in regard to our ultimate end or to our existence itself."¹¹⁴

Consequently, having in mind that the will was free from influences but the intellect restrained by them, human acts were divided into two kinds: namely, those human acts in which the intellect had a role and those in which only the will had a part.¹¹⁵ Since for Ockham the intellect (reason) was a hindrance for Man to act freely –because it tends to truth– the only way for Man to act freely was by subjected the intellect to the strict control of the will solely. In other words, the will must first consent to have the intellect act. This contradicted St. Thomas's notion of teleology according to which "every agent acts for an end [a reason]."¹¹⁶ This notion echoes Aristotle observation that "not to have organized one's life with a view to some end is mark of much folly."¹¹⁷

5. *Finality's eclipse*

Up until now we have seen how the chain reaction caused by Ockham's theological elaboration, affected several aspects of St. Thomas's synthesis, namely, the notion of essence and existence, the notion of potency and act, and the notion of freedom. These undermined aspects were to trigger the next reaction, namely, the eclipse of the principle of finality. Since

¹¹³ Cf. S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 268.

¹¹⁴ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 244.

¹¹⁵ Cf. F. M. WALSH, "The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology" in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 274.

¹¹⁶ St. Thomas uses the formula "omne agens agit propter finem" in several places of the ST I, q. 44, a. 4; I II, q. 1, a. 2; I II, q. 6, a. 1; I II, q. 9, a. 1; I II, q. 12, a. 1.

¹¹⁷ ARISTOTLE, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 1, 1214 b 10. as quoted by J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, p. 31.

there was no longer a distinction between essence and existence; human actions did not determine Man since potency and act did not apply to human action anymore; and freedom demands total independence from the intellect. Hence the principle of finality loses its importance to the whole moral synthesis. This is so because St. Thomas affirmed that Man is rational creature,¹¹⁸ which means that he has the faculty of reason and therefore in his actions he pursues a reason or end¹¹⁹ or else he would not take action. St. Thomas had considered the finality of the moral act to be the basic element of voluntary action.¹²⁰

Ockham critiqued St. Thomas's account of freedom and the role that St. Thomas had given to natural inclinations.¹²¹ Moreover, Ockham did not agree with the universal application of the principle of finality which was the way the Thomas provided unity to moral action. For Ockham, separation was more important than unity.¹²² Pinckaers observes that "Ockham did attach real importance to the end, which he called the principal object of the free act. But [Ockham] considered that the end existed within the individual act and could not therefore establish essential bonds with other acts. In the case of a person willing a thing in view of a further end willed for its own sake, [Ockham] saw two perfectly distinguishable actions. The act directed to one thing would have as its end a 'partial object' and would be distinct from the act that directly sought the end and grasped it as a 'total object.'"¹²³ Finality was viewed extrinsically and related in a more or less contingent way to the object of the individual act, and not intrinsically bonding together the multiple acts.¹²⁴

Consequently human action became a succession of individual actions, drawn as it were with perforated lines, the dots being the intrinsically unrelated moral atoms. Any connection between them would remain outside the sphere of freedom and dependent upon the decision of the will.¹²⁵ Each of our actions became fixed in the instant of choice and separated from all the actions preceding or following it. Ockham held that in order to avoid losing our freedom of

¹¹⁸ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 79, a. 8 "man arrives at the knowledge of intelligible truth by advancing from one thing to another; and therefore he is called rational."

¹¹⁹ *Ib.*, I, q. 44, a. 4; I-II, q. 1, a. 2; I-II, q. 6, a. 1; I-II, q. 9, a. 1; I-II, q. 12, a. 1.

¹²⁰ S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 243; THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 6, a. 1.

¹²¹ S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 244.

¹²² *Ib.*, p. 244.

¹²³ *Ib.*, p. 244.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 271.

¹²⁵ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 243.

indifference, past actions could not determine an action of the present moment, nor could the latter have any bearing upon what we might do in the future.¹²⁶ Since acts became independent from one another, only having a superficial connection, each act became a kind of absolute, like a small island. This concept of freedom and of the human act prepared the ground for what later would be casuistry.¹²⁷ Once finality was thus reduced and obscured, the inner connection between the interior and exterior act of the will also were obscured. Without the principle of finality to link one voluntary act and another, each act was viewed as an isolated event, free of any determination supplied by previous intentions or actions. This disconnection was necessary in order to protect the freedom of indifference.¹²⁸ In this way Ockham protected his notion of freedom.

6. *Happiness*

The eclipse of the principle of finality triggers a new reaction, namely, that happiness gets eclipsed as well. Indeed, by rejecting natural inclinations from the schema of the free act, Ockham rejected as well the very inclination to happiness which had pivotal importance in St. Thomas's moral theory and in fact was the initial moral question.¹²⁹

For St. Thomas, Man seeks certain goods since they are the means to certain ends that he desires so that he can be happy.¹³⁰ Now, what ultimately gives happiness to Man is to be like God since it was in His image that Man was created. Man pursues perfection, he is ordered towards an ultimate end which is God himself, the supreme good in whom man finds his full and perfect happiness (VS 72). In St. Thomas's treatise on sin this point is also clear because for him sin is anything that hinders Man from reaching his ultimate end, namely communion with God which constitutes His plan for our happiness.¹³¹ St. Thomas held that the pursuit for happiness allows Man to see the choices he needs to make in order to achieve his ultimate end. In other words, this pursuit makes visible the end (finality) towards which Man is headed, hence his

¹²⁶ *Ib.*, p. 337.

¹²⁷ *Ib.*, p. 244.

¹²⁸ F. M. WALSH, "The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology" in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 274.

¹²⁹ S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 244.

¹³⁰ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 3, aa. 1. 5.

¹³¹ Cf. *Ib.*, I-II qq. 71- 89; THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Malo* I, 3; II, 2 "*peccatum est actus inordinatus*", as quoted by H. MEYER, *The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, p. 382.

choices (actions) can be in accordance to his end. Finality helps Man to identify the choices to make in order to go towards his end. To the young man in the gospel who asked “what must I do, to [be happy]?” (Cf. Mt. 19, 16) St. Thomas points to the Beatitudes. But once the metaphysical principle of finality was eclipsed, the Beatitudes lost their place in moral theology.

On this regard, Pinckaers observes that by the beginning of the seventeenth century moral teaching did not pay attention to the treatise on happiness, so that in the earliest moral manuals it disappeared completely. The ethicists thought of it as being too speculative and preferred to replace it with the treatise on obligation and law. Even those who wanted to keep the treatise out of obedience to the Thomistic tradition failed to give it the decisive and crucial role it had in the *Summa*. They preferred to stress the study of our ultimate end, as though fearing to speak of happiness. They seemed to be getting allergic to the question of happiness.¹³²

Another consequence of the eclipse of the principle of finality was that moral theology no longer considered important the distinction between the interior act of the will and the exterior act commanded by the will. St. Thomas considered the interior act of the will as the principal cause for morality, since it shapes and causes the exterior act.¹³³ By throwing the metaphysical principle of finality away from the understanding of the human act, moral theory was unable to connect the will’s choice of the end and the choice of the means to the end. They became just consecutive acts which no longer had any internal connection. Eventually this failure in seeing the connection between interior and exterior acts caused the ethicists to lost sight completely of interiority and to study only the exterior aspect of the human acts as found in legal ordinances. Interiority was considered subjective, connected to spirituality, instead law was objective.¹³⁴ This was particularly debilitating for moral theology since, as Pinckaers says, interiority is “the radical ability to receive and experience within ourselves in a vital manner all truth and goodness, which render us fruitful and enable us to bring forth, in all the power of our free will, actions and works capable of transforming both ourselves and the world.”¹³⁵

¹³² Cf. S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 230.

¹³³ Cf. *Ib.*, pp. 58-59.

¹³⁴ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 271.

¹³⁵ *Ib.*, pp. 78-79.

7. *Shift to the third person's stand point*

The chain reaction continues. Once the interiority of the human act was eclipsed the moral act was viewed differently; actions instead of being viewed as issuing from within –as performed by agent– were studied from observation, as exterior to the person, and so merely phenomena of the outer world in which they take place.¹³⁶ Moral acts ceased to be viewed from the standpoint of the first person i.e. the agent performing the action, and began to be viewed from outside, the standpoint of the third person, like taking a picture. The consequence of conceiving moral acts from the observer's perspective and from there describing the object of the act, was that ethicists lost sight of the intentionality that is integral to moral acts. Pope John Paul II himself rejected this approach when he affirmed that “in order to be able to grasp the object of an act which specifies that act morally, it is therefore necessary to place oneself in the perspective of the acting person.” (VS 78) Since the interior act and the exterior act could not be connected for lack of a connecting bond, each act was given its own end. The interior act continued to be viewed from the stand point of the first person, the acting person (agent's intention), hence its end was called *finis operantis*; the exterior act was now viewed from the stand point of the third person, the observer who “objectively” sees the external change produced by the action, hence it was called *finis operis*. In the end, the treatment of the moral object itself was eclipsed by the concept of “objective” morality.¹³⁷

8. *The confusion of the object*

The result of implementing the third person's observation of the moral act was the misunderstanding of the moral object. It was confused with the physical or material object because the agent's intention was not able to describe the object. The intention of the acting person was only able to provide a circumstance to the moral act. Ethicists lost sight of the interior dimension and focused to study only the exterior aspect of the human act as found in legal ordinances; hence the object began to be defined by the external laws, which were considered objective. Interiority was considered subjective, connected to spirituality.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 60.

¹³⁷ Cf. F. M. WALSH, “The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology” in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 275.

¹³⁸ Cf. S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 271.

Once moral theory was confused with regard to what the object of the moral act was, the moral order was also confused with the physical or natural order of things. This occurred when the object was considered as a fact under observation from the standpoint of the third person, as in positivist sciences. By being juxtaposed to the subject (the acting person), it was identified with the material act.¹³⁹ The term subject came to signify the person, changeable in will and feelings to the point of caprice, whereas the object came to signify the external material world, an impersonal reality with its firm, hard, opaque quality.¹⁴⁰

Another consequence of the loss of the principle of finality was that law became to be understood from the point of view of freedom of indifference. Law was considered as something coming from somewhere outside of us that had the power to impose itself on us with the force of obligation. Law was no longer the result of the legislator's reason but issued directly from his will and authority. Accordingly, law varied according to the legislators, God, the Church, society.¹⁴¹ For St. Thomas the "law is a rule and measure of acts, whereby man is induced to act or is restrained from acting: for "*lex*" [law] is derived from "*ligare*" [to bind], because it binds one to act."¹⁴² Hence it is observed that it obeys the principle of finality since reason directs the rational agent to act for an end¹⁴³ Law is nothing else but a dictate of practical reason emanating from the ruler who governs;¹⁴⁴ however, this consideration became superfluous in the context of indifference. Moral theology became just an instrument to identify what was allowed and what was forbidden, what was obligatory and what was free.¹⁴⁵ Pinckaers says that law became the origin of morality. "A human act became moral through its relationship to the law. [The human act] would be good or evil in the measure in which it conformed to the law or obligation or opposed it; apart from this, a human act could be regarded as indifferent."¹⁴⁶ All this menaced moral theology with becoming a pure legalism.

Accordingly, having this notion of law as an act of the will of the legislator, the understanding of the natural law changed too. For St. Thomas, natural law was the product of

¹³⁹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 67.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 350.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 270.

¹⁴² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 90 a. 1.

¹⁴³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 90 a. 1; ARISTOTLE, *Physics* II.

¹⁴⁴ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 91 a. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 270.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 270.

practical reason which pointed out to Man what was to be pursued and what was to be avoided in order to be happy. In the *Summa* St. Thomas stated that “*being* is the first thing that falls under the apprehension simply, and *good* is the first thing that falls under the apprehension of the practical reason, which itself is directed toward action: since every agent acts for an end under the aspect of good. Consequently the first principle of practical reason is one founded on the notion of *good*, viz. that “good is that which all things seek after.” Hence this is the first precept of law, that “good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided.” All other precepts of the natural law are based upon this: so that whatever the practical reason naturally apprehends as man's good (or evil) belongs to the precepts of the natural law as something to be done or avoided.”¹⁴⁷ At this point in moral theology, morality was considered in terms of laws and obligation that threaten and limit freedom. Although the subject matter of moral theology is supposed to be the human action, in reality only those actions falling under law and obligation were considered the proper purview of moral theology; actions pertaining to freedom were outside the scope of moral theology.¹⁴⁸ This also caused that among the human acts the most studied were sins and consequently the treatise on sin replaced that of happiness and virtues. Ockham reinterpreted St. Thomas's moral theory and based it on obligation which became the center of morality.¹⁴⁹

Clearly we see that the enterprise of St. Thomas's interpreters and commentators transformed (or deformed) moral theology; it passed from a morality of virtues, whose task was to educate to the practice of virtue, to a morality of cases of conscience, scrutinized in their relation to legal obligations.¹⁵⁰

IV. Consequences of the eclipse of finality in moral theology – An example

Up to this point we have considered the chain reaction which affected ethics and moral theology especially regarding the criteria to qualify morally the human act. A defective moral theory remained discretely concealed for many centuries even as the Second Vatican Council called for its renewal (Cf. OT 16). Nevertheless, the attempts for renewal still run the risk of misdiagnosing the underlying malaise. The moral theology that was passed on by the post-

¹⁴⁷ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 94 a. 2.

¹⁴⁸ Cf. S. PINCKAERS, *The Sources of Christian Ethics*, p. 271.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. *Ib.*, pp. 250-251.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 233.

Tridentine manual tradition sought to ground morality in the physical or material object of the human action. Hence the moral qualification of goodness or badness of the human act was given based on the external physical aspect of the act (physicalism). This view came about when human acts were no longer described from the standpoint of the first person (the agent performing the action), and began to be described from the standpoint of the third person (outside observer). The manualists lost sight of the intentionality of the agent and adopted the exterior physical aspect as the criterion to qualify the act. This is why – to the detriment of the focus on virtue – legal obligations (external norms) became paramount.¹⁵¹ Post-Tridentine moral theory thought that the right way to give an account on morality was to rely on the physical or material object.¹⁵²

The main issue of the present crisis in moral theology has to do with this same issue. Contemporary moral theologians began to realize that indeed it was inaccurate to give any moral qualification to a physical (material) object, as well as to specify morally human acts on the basis of a physical element. Consequently, a new approach to morality arose, namely, proportionalism. This approach seeks to emphasize the role of intention in qualifying moral actions. Proportionalism considers that every human act produces both good and bad effects; hence Man is never exempt from causing evil regardless of what he does. For example, when one chooses to do something good, like to follow the religious vocation, one sacrifices other good things, such as having a family. This bad (or evil) effects present in human acts are called (by the proportionalists) “ontic” or “pre-moral” bad or good acts.¹⁵³ The proportional theory then says that, an act is rendered good when, in the balance between ‘goods’ and ‘evils’ (which occur inevitably when one chooses to act), the “goods” outnumber the “evils” (thus forming the proportionate reason); in this case the “ontic evil” is justifiable. This is the rationale that many people today use to justify birth control, abortion, euthanasia.¹⁵⁴ Proportionalism denies the existence of intrinsically evil acts; hence it enables Man to perform any act on the basis of his

¹⁵¹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 233.

¹⁵² Cf. *Ib.*, p. 271.

¹⁵³ Cf. J. FUCHS, *Christian Ethics in a Secular Arena*, Washington, D.C. 1984, Georgetown University Press, pp. 80-84.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. VS 75 Proportionalism by weighing the various values and goods being sought, focuses rather on the proportion acknowledged between the good and bad effects of that choice, with a view to the “greater good” or “lesser evil” actually possible in a particular situation.

intention and the proportionate reason.¹⁵⁵ John Paul II in his encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor* rules out proportionalism as a valid way to do moral theology.¹⁵⁶

Steven A. Long, in view of this crisis of moral theology, proposes to renew moral theology by going back to the Thomistic account of the moral object. Since he wants to oppose the proportionalistic approach, Long rejects describing the object of the moral act only on the basis of the agent's intention. For Long the object is to be described on the basis of 1) the agent's intention (end) and of 2) the natural teleology, (Long's way of speaking of the physical act). If natural teleology is ignored, then the object is collapsed into the end, says Long. This confusion in describing the object, says Long, has its roots in Cajetan's definition of the object of the moral act,¹⁵⁷ i.e. *solely* in terms of 'that which makes the act choiceworthy to the agent' and forgetting the act itself and its integral nature (i.e. natural teleology).¹⁵⁸ Long asserts that if we define the object only in terms of 'that which makes the act choiceworthy to the agent' then the agent's intention becomes the controlling factor in the definition of the moral object. Giving priority to intention obscures and eventually displaces the *natural teleology* of the physical act. Long (in his account of the decline of moral theology, identifies the error of collapsing the object of the act into the end in the New Natural Law theory proposed by Grisez and his associates. Nevertheless, Long, in trying to fix the error, falls back into the post-Tridentine approach which emphasizes the physical element. He provides us with a primer to reread the doctrine of St. Thomas regarding the intention, choice, object, end, and the species of the moral act.¹⁵⁹ Thus he seeks to give a speculative account of the nature and implications of these crucial principles of St. Thomas.¹⁶⁰ He reaffirms that his book "in particular, seeks to vindicate the speculative intelligibility and coherence of St. Thomas's account of the teleological grammar governing the constitution of the object and species of the moral act."¹⁶¹ With this aim in mind, Long begins with St. Thomas's well-known distinction between human acts (that flow from intellect and will)

¹⁵⁵ Cf. M. A. FUENTES, *Conseguir la Vida Eterna, Los Principios Fundamentales de la Teología Moral Católica*, p. 179

¹⁵⁶ Cf. VS 76 "Such [proportionalist] theories are not faithful to the Church's teaching [...] these theories cannot claim to be grounded in the Catholic moral tradition."

¹⁵⁷ S. A. LONG, "A Brief Disquisition Regarding the Nature of the Object of the Moral Act according to St. Thomas Aquinas", in *The Thomist* 67 (2003), pp. 45-71.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. S. A. LONG, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, Naples, FL 2007, Sapientia Press of Ave Maria University, pp.11-12.

¹⁵⁹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. xi.

¹⁶⁰ Cf. *Ib.*, p. xiii.

¹⁶¹ *Ib.*, p. xvii.

and “acts of man” (not from intellect and will).¹⁶² Next he illustrates choice and intention as characteristics of the human act where the notion of finality underscores the whole reasoning just like in St. Thomas’s account. Intention is an act of the will presupposing knowledge and is chiefly of the end, while choice is not of the end, but of the variable means to the end sought. Long uses the example of penicillin. Nobody wants penicillin until he wants to cure some disease. The penicillin is only the chosen means to the end of being healthy. Those who invented penicillin did not create an end but a means to the end which is to be healthy.¹⁶³

Aristotle and St. Thomas located happiness is the ultimate end of the good life. Long says that “happiness” is a misunderstood term nowadays. Happiness is not merely subjective fulfillment, but the achievement of the good.¹⁶⁴ “Without a natural end,” states Long, “either we could never begin to act –because there would, naturally speaking, be nothing to desire, and nothing to fear [...] – or if, *per miraculum*, we could begin to act, we could never end –because our acts would lack any natural point of termination– [...]; an action without a natural end would be impossible.”¹⁶⁵ This natural teleology is essential to Man and is the very foundation of ethics, because “human action is naturally ordered towards an end, which is pursued by a means. And the end is chiefly a function of *intention*, whereas choice is chiefly *of the means*.”¹⁶⁶ So far, Long’s account seems in line with that of St. Thomas.

St. Thomas, says Long, did not use the term “intention” to cover both end and means; for St. Thomas the object included the natural teleology of the physical[-external] act [and the intention of the agent]. Long affirms that to abstract from the natural teleology of the physical act [i.e. the physical element] opens the door to proportionalism¹⁶⁷ and hence it jeopardizes the correct understanding of what is the moral object. So, Long states that the natural teleology of the [physical] external act is to be included in the description [i.e., understanding] of the moral object, because the natural teleology of the physical[-external] act enables us to see if the moral object is *per se* ordered to the intended end. Long says that “*a speculative insight into natural teleology is essential if: (1) we are to understand the distinction between simple and complex*

¹⁶² Cf. *Ib.*, p. 1.

¹⁶³ Cf. *Ib.*, pp. 1-2.

¹⁶⁴ Cf., *Ib.*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *Ib.*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 33.

acts; (2) we are to understand whether there is one or more than one moral species; and, (3) we are to know what the species of an act is. In short, far from constituting an embarrassing 'physicalist' distraction, insight into natural teleology is simply required if one is to make sense of human action at all."¹⁶⁸

Long cites Thomas's example of the man who steals in order to commit adultery.¹⁶⁹ In this case, says Long, "there are two acts and two moral species – because there is nothing about theft as such that makes it to be of its nature ordered to adultery. An act that of its nature tends toward an end is *per se* ordered toward it. But one may steal the live-long day and never commit adultery, because these two are only accidentally related. We cannot distinguish between complex and simple acts unless we answer the question: Is this act essentially ordered to the end sought by the agent, or not? If not, then we have two acts, and two moral species, and of course one is through the choice of the agent accidentally further ordered to the other, as the thief may order his stealing to the remote end of adultery."¹⁷⁰

Even though Long admits that "the physical species or type of the act is not simply equivalent with its moral species or type," [in other words, one cannot judge moral goodness or badness based on the physical], nevertheless, he insists that "the physical character of the act is one of the causal elements that enters into the constitution of the object and species of the act. The object includes not only the act itself and its integral nature, but, as proceeding from a rational agent, includes also the relation of the act to reason: a relation which is actually a relation to the end in light of which the act appears appetible or choiceworthy to the agent."¹⁷¹ "There is much talk today of the error of 'physicalism' – and of course, the exclusion from the object of the moral act's relation to reason would be an error. Nonetheless, the far more preponderant error today is that of 'angelism' or the reduction of the object of the act merely to the relation to reason or to that which makes the act attractive to the agent."¹⁷²

To give a right description of the moral object of the human act Long insists on the importance of the fact that a human act is properly human because it is voluntary, just like St.

¹⁶⁸ S. A. LONG, "Veritatis Splendor §78 and the Moral Act", *Nova et Vetera*, 6 (2008) p. 146.

¹⁶⁹ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 18, a. 6.

¹⁷⁰ S. A. LONG, "Veritatis Splendor §78 and the Moral Act", p. 146.

¹⁷¹ Cf. S. A. LONG, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁷² S. A. LONG, "Veritatis Splendor §78 and the Moral Act", p. 156.

Thomas said.¹⁷³ In order to be voluntary, a human act involves an internal act of the will. St. Thomas understood the human act to concern choices, namely, the choice of an end and the choice of a means to the end.

We saw in part II, St. Thomas's analysis of the human act as a dialogue between the intellect and the will.¹⁷⁴ Due to this dialogue, the end and the means to the end have a relationship with one another. This happens when the intellect sees that there is a relationship of suitability between the two that enables the proximate object to be a means fitted to obtain the remote object intended by the will. Since it is only as a suitable means to the end that the will would be moved to choose an object as a means, the intellect presents to the will the object as a means to the end. When in the first part of the dialogue between intellect and will the will is focused on the end, the object of the will's motion is called intention (*intentio*). But when the motion of the will is focused on a fitting means to the desired end, the object of the will's motion is called a choice (election). When seen from the viewpoint of the acting person, however, the end and the means constitute a *single object* of the *motion* of the will. This single object, is not something that exists in the physical order. That which exists in the physical order has been perceived by the intellect under the aspect of this suitability and has entered into the sphere of morality as a product of a judgment of the practical reason. This object, according to St. Thomas, gives the moral act its primary moral specification, contrary to Long's explanation.¹⁷⁵

That the object is not in the physical order is made clear when St. Thomas distinguishes between *materia ex qua* and *materia circa quam*. In addressing the issue about whether the good or evil of a man's action is derived from action's object, St. Thomas places a second objection which reads:

“Praeterea, objectum comparatur ad actionem ut materia. Bonitas autem rei non est ex materia, sed magis ex forma, quae est actus.” – Further, the object is compared to the action as its matter. But the goodness of a thing is not from its matter, but rather from the form, which is an act. –

¹⁷³ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q.1, a.1.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, in G. THOMAS (ed.), p. 211; W. FARREL, *A Companion to the Summa*, p. 59.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. F. M. WALSH, “The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology” in *The Heythrop Journal*, 51 (2010), pp. 278 – 279.

“*Ergo bonum et malum non est in actibus ex objecto.*”¹⁷⁶ –
Therefore good and evil in actions is not derived from their object. –

Then St. Thomas answers to this objection by making the following distinction:

“*Ad secundum dicendum quod objectum non est materia ex qua, sed materia circa quam; et habet quodammodo rationem formae, in quantum dat speciem.*”¹⁷⁷ – The object is not the matter “of which” (a thing is made), but the matter “about which” (something is done); and [the object] stands in relation to the act as its form, as it were, through giving it its species. –

Here it seems to Long that St. Thomas is distinguishing the material object from the formal object. However, according to others, what St. Thomas is really doing is distinguishing between the *materia ex qua* and *materia circa quam* in order to answer the second objection. Long views St. Thomas’s statement using his fractioned view of two elements that together comprise: “what the act is about relative to reason” and not only one: for “what the act is about relative to reason” always materially includes the act itself and its integral nature.¹⁷⁸

In order to understand what St. Thomas said, first we need to clarify that the moral act is not like a thing in nature, a thing which receives its form from nature, and through its form its species. Rather, the human act proceeds from human intelligence, hence it receives its form from human reason, and through its form it receives its species.¹⁷⁹ Thus Thomas in distinguishing the *materia ex qua* (material object), refers to physical acts, viewed as types of behavior; Human acts belong to the moral order, hence human acts have their formal objects (ends) distinct from the objects of the external physical acts involved in the means. Reason apprehends an external act as a fit means to achieve a given end; in so doing reason shapes the external physical act into the moral object of the moral act (means to the end), hence the formal object is constructed. This formal object is the physical act perceived by the practical intellect as a fitting instrument to achieve the end (step 8 *electio*); The consequence of the physical act in the physical order may or may not coincide with the end the agent has intended in the moral order; If the external physical

¹⁷⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 18, a. 2.

¹⁷⁷ *Ib.*, I-II, q. 18, a. 2, ad 2.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. S. A. LONG, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. W. MAY, “Aquinas and Janssens on the Moral Meaning of Human Acts”, *The Thomist* 48 (1984) p. 581 as quoted by Cf. F. M. WALSH, “The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology” in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 279 – 280.

act (means – proximate act) does not coincide with the agent’s end, it is because the agent has judged that other means are more useful to his purposes, in other words, the agent has judged and chosen another means to be better to achieve the end (remote act). On the contrary, if the external physical act (means – proximate act) coincides with the agent’s end, it is because the agent has judged and chosen the physical act (means) as the best means to achieve the end (remote act); St. Thomas refers to these chosen means as the *materia circa quam* (the formal object).

Long misses this distinction. Instead, he joins the two elements. He thinks that the material *circa quam* is what the act is relative to reason, whereas the *materia ex qua is the natural teleology of the act*.¹⁸⁰ Long does not make any mention of practical reason’s judgment about the means, instead Long’s description of both the material and formal objects depends on a judgment by the speculative intellect rather than a choice by the will based on a judgment of the practical intellect of what is the most suitable means to achieve the desired end.

In his effort to reread St. Thomas’s moral theory, Long gives primacy to speculative reason over the practical reason. He correctly says that the teleology of human nature provides *reasons for action*. Before acting, one must know the end which subsequently is desired. The knowledge which precedes desire as the condition of desire is called *speculative*. The thing that is known accidentally sparks desire, but it is not accidental that the agent be ordered to certain things as ends. So *speculative* knowledge becomes objectively *practical* knowledge when, sparking desire, the agent is ordered to the end (known speculatively) as something to be achieved by transitive *activity* (as opposed to intransitive or contemplative activity).¹⁸¹ Long backs up this statement with St. Thomas’s statement about art: “the knowledge that an artist has about something that can be made is of two kinds: speculative and practical. He has speculative or theoretical knowledge when he knows the intimate nature of a work but does not have the intention of applying the principles to the production of the work. His knowledge is practical, properly speaking, when by his intention he ordains the principles of the work to operation as an end. [...] It is clear that the practical knowledge of an artist follows his speculative knowledge, since it is made practical by applying the speculative to a work. But when the practical is absent,

¹⁸⁰ Cf. S. A. LONG, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, p. 11.

¹⁸¹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 7.

the speculative remains.”¹⁸² Based on this statement, Long affirms “that for St. Thomas practical knowledge always presupposes this underlying speculative element.”¹⁸³ Thus, given that speculative reason supplies certain knowledge upon which desire and practical knowledge are built, Long gives it the predominant place over the practical reason.¹⁸⁴

However, Long seems to forget that for St. Thomas the human act was concerned about choices, both a choice of the end and a choice for the means.¹⁸⁵ Long disregards some fundamental parts of the dialogue between the intellect and the will in producing the human act. Specifically, he ignores an important task of practical reason which is to provide the judgment about the means (step 7). For him, the judgment done by the speculative reason provides both the material and formal objects. He says that the choice made by the will (step 8) based on a judgment of the practical reason about the most suitable means to achieve the desired end (step 7) provides neither the material nor the formal end.¹⁸⁶ Instead, argues Long, St. Thomas included the material object with the formal object in order to arrive at the total concept of the moral object.¹⁸⁷ In order to understand properly the object, Long proposes to represent the moral object after the manner of a fraction.¹⁸⁸

relation to reason, which is to say that which makes an act choiceworthy to the agent
the act itself and its integral nature [and its proximate teleology]

Long asserts that neither the relatively more formal nor the relatively material aspects can be excluded from the object of the moral act. If this is done, then absurd conclusions would follow, he says.¹⁸⁹ If we were to abstract the relation of the object to reason, we would have a problem, he says. He illustrates the nature of the problem with an example: a man who pushes an old lady *out of the way* of an oncoming bus and a man who pushes on an old lady *into the way* of an oncoming bus, both are men *who push old ladies around*. Both are acts of pushing, but they

¹⁸² Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *De Veritate* q. 2 a. 8 as quoted by S. A. LONG, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, p. 8, footnote 4.

¹⁸³ Cf. S. A. LONG, A. *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, p. 8, footnote 4.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II q. 12 a. 2; q. 13 a. 1.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. F. M. WALSH, “The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology” in *The Heythrop Journal* (51 (2010), pp. 279.

¹⁸⁷ S. A. LONG, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, pp. 7-10.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 12.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 14.

seem to be chosen for different reasons. Now, if one omits relation to reason from the consideration of the object of the moral act, then we lose the very *ratio* under which the act enters into the action of the agent (*that for the sake of which it occurs, that which makes the act choiceworthy to the agent*).¹⁹⁰

Long continues, however, by saying that if on the other hand we were to exclude from the object of the moral act the matter constituted by the very act itself and its integral nature, then we have another kind of problem, namely we would reduce the morality of the action to the end sought by the agent regardless of the fact that everything naturally moves towards its end by reason of its form. Then the object of the act can be altered merely by redescribing the act performed. He illustrates this with an example: “I’m not really strangling a child to death, I’m preventing dynastic civil war.”¹⁹¹

So in order to solve the problem Long insists on the inclusion of the material object in the definition the moral object. He states, “[T]he material aspect of the object – the act itself and its integral nature – is also necessary to the object, and this, again, for the very good reason that what the act is about relative to reason by its very nature can exclude neither the act itself, nor the integral nature of the act itself, both of which are materially included. The act itself and its integral nature are always materially included in the object.”¹⁹²

Long does not seek to collapse the object into the end, i.e. “that which makes the act choiceworthy to the agent” (trying to avoid angelism), however he collapses the two orders of human activity, the physical and the moral.¹⁹³ For example, one gives alms to a beggar. The physical order of human activity is the act of giving alms, that which is seen from the third person’s viewpoint; the moral order of human activity is the intention of the agent in giving alms, that which is seen from the first person’s viewpoint.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. *Ib.*, p. 15.

¹⁹¹ Cf. *Ib.*

¹⁹² Cf. *Ib.*, p. 12.

¹⁹³ S. A. LONG, “A Brief Disquisition Regarding the Nature of the Object of the Moral Act according to St. Thomas Aquinas”, p. 50. “The moral object of an act is the act itself--inclusive of its essential matter or integral nature--under the *ratio* of its order to the end sought: it is not solely and simply that *ratio* apart from the essential matter or integral nature of the act.”

In addition, in order to describe the object on the basis of 1) the agent's intention (end) and of 2) the natural teleology of the [physical] act, Long is forced to adopt the viewpoint of the third person to discover the natural teleology of the act (physical order) and the viewpoint of the first person to discover the aspect of the material object which makes the material object "choiceworthy to [the agent] in relation to the ends he seeks."¹⁹⁴ Let us think about a bank robbery. In this approach either there are two objects: 1) object of the first person, i.e. to rob the bank to give the money to the poor (social justice); 2) object of the third person, i.e. individual subsequent actions: bind the tellers, open the safe, put money in pockets etc. Or the fractioned object belongs to both orders simultaneously, which cannot be because the third person does not see what the first person sees; like in the case of mathematics, one is not allowed to put together in the same formula data with different measuring units.

Another objection to Long's view is that one cannot judge the goodness or badness from the exterior action, for this can be said mainly of the will of the agent not of the exterior action.¹⁹⁵ It seems then that if the object is described by the intention of the acting agent, then one falls in proportionalism. Long balances the inaccuracy by putting the physical order below the line of the fraction, in order to indicate that the action itself has natural teleology. But in fact Long is making a confusion between the first person and the third person.

In Long's approach, the formal object (the *materia circa quam*) will always run the risk of being collapsed into the intention of the agent while the material object (the physical act itself and its integral nature – the *materia ex qua*) will function as the object. Long fails to see that the end and the means to the end are related to one another. The intellect sees that there is a relationship of suitability between the end and the means to the end (that is that a certain means is chosen since it is the best to achieve the chosen end). This relationship enables one object to be a means fitted to obtain another object (end intended). The intellect presents an object as a means to the end and then the will only chooses the most suitable means to achieve the end.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. S. A. LONG, *The Teleological Grammar of the Moral Act*, p. 14.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I-II, q. 20, a. 1.

Following this it is hard to distinguish Long's approach from that of pre-counciliar scholastic manuals of theologians.¹⁹⁶

Moreover, Long restricts the principle of finality to the interior act (agent's intention without which the act would never occur; above the line of the fraction). Finality has no role to play in the shaping of the exterior act (physical aspect). The Natural teleology of the physical act shaped the exterior act, and those acts that are not *per se* ordered to the end of the interior are understood as a series of separate acts.¹⁹⁷

Once the principle of finality does not influence the exterior act, morality cannot give an account of how the external action transforms the subject interiorly, that is, it cannot explain the intransitive effects of morality. In this case we will have an exterior action which has an innocuous effect on the agent and would be only right or wrong according to an exterior moral norm, thus we arrive again to the "manualist" problem of morality.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. F. M. WALSH, "The Villain Responsible for Confusing Moral Theology" in *The Heythrop Journal* 51 (2010), pp. 283.

¹⁹⁷ S. A. LONG, "Veritatis Splendor §78 and the Moral Act", p. 145.

Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation has been to show the pivotal importance of the principle of finality in morality; to illustrate the consequences of its being “exiled” from moral qualification; and to awaken awareness of the need of rescuing finality and of bringing it back into moral theology in order to restore it as the central element in unifying moral action. Briefly we considered Aristotle’s notion and application of finality; then St. Thomas’s inclusion of finality as a foundational element of his moral theory. Next, we described the progressive distortion of moral qualification due to the eclipse of the principle of finality; and lastly we saw a concrete example of this current tendency to reduce the role of finality. If after reading this thesis, the reader is able to recognize finality’s essential role in human life and that to deny or to water down its importance inevitably leads into serious misconceptions in moral theology, then the thesis would have accomplished its purpose.

Man’s life is essentially ordered to an end, he orders intentionally his acts in pursuit of an ultimate end. The way he sees the end determines the way he proceeds to achieve the desired end. The ultimate end is God himself, the supreme good¹⁹⁸ in whom Man finds his full and perfect happiness (VS 72). Man longs to be happy, the engine impelling his actions is the desire for happiness. Nothing can be a greater source of happiness than our final end which is not something imposed from without. The rich young man’s question to Jesus illustrates this longing (Mt. 19: 16). The psalm cries out, “who will give us sight of happiness?” (Ps. 4: 6) St. Augustine exclaims “our heart is restless until it rests in You”¹⁹⁹ Man, created in God’s image and likeness,

¹⁹⁸ VS 12 “Only God can answer the question about the good, because he is the Good. But God has already given an answer to this question: he did so by creating man and ordering him with wisdom and love to his *final end*, through the law which is inscribed in his heart (Cf. Rm. 2:15), the ‘natural law’. The latter ‘is nothing other than the light of understanding infused in us by God, whereby we understand what must be done and what must be avoided. God gave this light and this law to man at creation’. He also did so in the history of Israel, particularly in the ‘ten words’, the commandments of Sinai, whereby he brought into existence the people of the Covenant (Cf. Ex. 24) and called them to be his ‘own possession among all peoples’, ‘a holy nation’ (Ex 19:5-6), which would radiate his holiness to all peoples (Cf. Ws. 18:4; Ez. 20:41). The gift of the Decalogue was a promise and sign of the New Covenant, in which the law would be written in a new and definitive way upon the human heart (Cf. Jr. 31:31-34), replacing the law of sin which had disfigured that heart (Cf. Jr. 17:1). In those days, ‘a new heart’ would be given, for in it would dwell ‘a new spirit’, the Spirit of God (cf. Ez. 36:24-28).”

¹⁹⁹ ST. AUGUSTINE, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, I, 1, J. K. RYAN (ed.), Garden City 1960, Image Books, p. 43.

never stops searching for happiness which can only be found in God.²⁰⁰ To find happiness is to find life's meaning, life in the fullness of truth.²⁰¹

Ethical theories in the ancient world were directed toward happiness. The Epicureans saw happiness in pleasure;²⁰² the Stoics, in virtue.²⁰³ Aristotle located the end of human life in contemplation, through which Man would be more like the most perfect beings (gods), consequently his proposal for action was the strive for acquiring the virtues that would enable Man to reach a state of contemplation.²⁰⁴ St. Augustine affirms that "Man has no other reason to philosophize than his desire to be happy."²⁰⁵ St. Thomas repeatedly maintained that "man cannot willingly be turned away from beatitude (happiness), since naturally and necessarily he desires it, and shuns unhappiness."²⁰⁶ St. Thomas sees that it is appropriate for man to act in pursuit of an end, and that acting out of a deliberate choice is typical for Man as a rational being.²⁰⁷ Hence, in working toward an end we reflect the image of God.²⁰⁸ We have many proximate ends, but all are ordered to the ultimate end. We tie together our actions in view of the ultimate end. It is not possible to have more than one ultimate end. If it is ultimate, it is last. St. Thomas concludes metaphysically that the entire creation is moved toward the Creator; the various creatures express this finality in different ways, according to their different natures. The stone expresses its finality by just being. A bird expresses its finality by not just being, but by acting according to its nature. A rational animal aspires to his end by directing himself to his end. We make our choices and through them aspire to reach our ultimate end.²⁰⁹

Christ begins the Sermon on the Mount with his perspective of happiness, (Cf. Mt. 5: 3-12; Lk. 6: 20-26) and later on he proposes himself as the way to reach it (Jn. 14: 6). The reason behind all of the works of Christ is that of happiness. The Christian is one who desires happiness,

²⁰⁰ CCC 27.

²⁰¹ Cf. GS, 19; CCC 28, 31.

²⁰² Cf. B. RUSSELL, *A History of Western Philosophy*, New York 1972, Simon & Schuster, Inc., pp. 243-244.

²⁰³ Cf. *Ib.*, pp. 254-255.

²⁰⁴ Cf. J. MARITAIN, *Moral Philosophy, a historical and critical survey of the great systems*, pp. 35-39; B. RUSSELL, *A History of Western Philosophy*, pp. 172-173.

²⁰⁵ ST. AUGUSTINE, *The City of God*, XIX, 1, V. J. BOURKE (ed.), New York 1958, Image Books Doubleday, p. 428.

²⁰⁶ THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 94, q. 1.

²⁰⁷ Cf. *Ib.*, I-II q. 1 aa. 1-2.

²⁰⁸ Cf. *Ib.*, I q. 93; I-II introduction "man is said to be made to God's image, in so far as the image implies an intelligent being endowed with free-will and self-movement: now that we have treated of the exemplar, i.e., God, and of those things which came forth from the power of God in accordance with His will; it remains for us to treat of His image, i.e., man, inasmuch as he too is the principle of his actions, as having free-will and control of his actions."

²⁰⁹ Cf. *Ib.*, I-II q. 1, a. 1.

and who by living a life of grace is able to foretaste true happiness. Life consists of more than suffering now in order to be happy later. Man desires to experience happiness now on this earth and to reach its plenitude in heaven.²¹⁰ The principle of finality enlightens our understanding of the eschatological dimension of our life. St. Paul attests to this and is certain that to be gone and be with Christ is very much the better (Phil. 1: 23). The Church expresses this desire when she cries, *Maranatha!* (1 Cor. 16: 22; Rev. 22: 20).

John Paul II in his *Veritatis Splendor* referring to happiness speaks of the “obscure riddles of the human condition which today also, as in the past, profoundly disturb the human heart. What is man? What is the meaning and purpose of our life? What is good and what is sin? What origin and purpose do sufferings have? What is the way to attaining true happiness? What are death, judgment and retribution after death? Lastly, what is that final, unutterable mystery which embraces our lives and from which we take our origin and towards which we tend?” (VS 30; Cf. NA 1; GS 11) All these riddles can be spelled in the context of finality. Man attains perfection as Man through his own actions; he finds true happiness in the things he does (Cf. VS 71). Only in freedom can Man direct himself toward goodness; Man achieves his dignity when he pursues his goal in a spontaneous choice of what is good, and procures for himself through effective and skilful action, apt helps to that end.²¹¹

In our society today, we have lost sight of our true final end. Yet the intransitive effect of moral action still shapes us. We think that what we do is one thing, and that what we are is another. And yet this is not true. The loss of the awareness of our true finality engenders a culture of death with all its great evils (contraception, euthanasia, assisted suicide, abortion, sterilization, etc.). To correct this disorder, the synthesis of moral theology has to be reevaluated in order to restore the principle of finality to its proper and central role in providing unity to moral action so as to make clear that the foundation of morality is the intentional ordering of human acts to God, as Man’s supreme good and ultimate end. Consequently a rightful description of the moral object may be established. This reevaluation will make clear the fact that the moral life is essentially teleological (VS 73).

²¹⁰ Cf. CCC 1718-1719.

²¹¹ Cf. GS 17; 2 Cor. 5: 10 “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.”

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