

The Seeds of Virtue:
Law and Virtue Ethical Conceptions in Aquinas's Ethics

by

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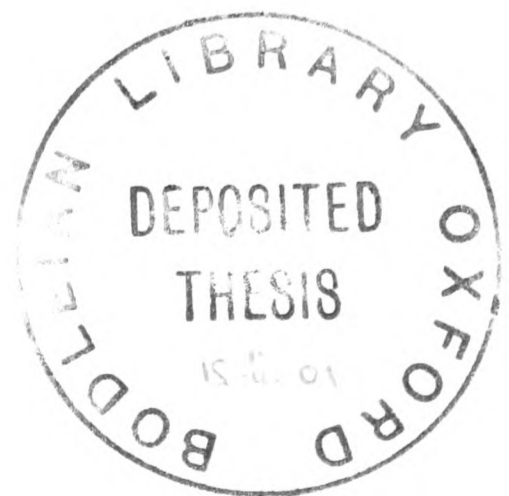
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Abstract

There is a *prima facie* incompatibility between a law conception of ethics, in which law concepts (e.g. ought, rule, action) are basic, and a virtue conception of ethics, in which virtue concepts (e.g. character trait, ideal, agent) are basic. However, both conceptions contain elements that are needed for an adequate ethical account.

Aquinas's conception of ethics is of interest, because it combines virtue and law components within a broadly Aristotelian account. I argue that Aquinas's virtue-and-law ethical conception is not *ad hoc*, but emerges from, expresses, and is grounded normatively, rationally, and motivationally in his general conception of practical thought. My first objective in the thesis is to explicate and defend an interpretation of Aquinas's understanding of practical thought as the rational determination of general good into particular action. I argue, first, that this interpretation expresses Aquinas's conception of the *nature* of practical thought, as reflected in Aquinas's central practical concepts of order, nature, good, and reason. Second, I argue that this interpretation is expressed in Aquinas's conception of the *structure* of practical thought, as reflected in general, specific, and particular conceptual levels of practical thinking, reasons, and forms of reasoning. My second objective in the thesis is to show that Aquinas's virtue-and-law account presupposes and develops this conception of practical thought, and briefly to indicate how insights from Aquinas's account elucidate relationships between virtue and law ethical conceptions.

To Debbie

Inter virum autem et uxorem maxima amicitia esse videtur.

Preface

I am delighted to be able to express my gratitude to several individuals and groups without whom this project would never have reached completion. First, my wife, Debbie, who knows the experience of giving physical birth, has encouraged and supported me in this experience of 'labour' in ways far too many to enumerate. Without her this would never have been possible, and to her I dedicate this work, with love. My daughters, Stephanie and Jessica, have displayed virtues of generosity, patience, and charity beyond their years. They have brought light into blurry eyes and life into weary bones throughout this process. I love them and I am proud to be their dad.

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All translations of Aquinas are my own, and are from the *Summa Theologiae* (ST), unless otherwise noted.

Utroque autem modo virtus est homini naturalis secundum quandam inchoationem. Secundum quidem naturam speciei, inquantum in ratione homini insunt naturaliter quaedam principia naturaliter cognita tam scibilium quam agendorum, quae sunt quaedam seminalia intellectualium virtutum et moralium. ST IaIIae.63.1

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Abbreviations

Aquinas

In BDT	<i>Expositio super librum Boethi De trinitate</i>
In DA	<i>Sententia super De anima</i>
In Met	<i>Sententia super Metaphysicam</i>
In NE	<i>Sententia libri Ethicorum</i>
In PA	<i>Sententia super Posteriora analytica</i>
In Sent	<i>Scriptum super libros Sententiarum</i>
QDA	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de anima</i>
QDM	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de malo</i>
QDP	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de potentia</i>
QDV	<i>Quaestiones disputatae de veritate</i>
QDW(1)	<i>Quaestio disputata de virtutibus in communi</i>
QDW(2)	<i>Quaestio disputata de virtutibus cardinalibus</i>
SCG	<i>Summa Contra Gentiles</i>
ST	<i>Summa Theologiae</i>

Aristotle

DA	<i>De Anima</i>
EE	<i>Eudemian Ethics</i>
MA	<i>De Motu Animalium</i>
Met	<i>Metaphysics</i>
NE	<i>Nicomachean Ethics</i>
Rhet	<i>Rhetoric</i>
Top	<i>Topics</i>

Pseudo-Dionysius

De Div Nom	<i>De Divinis Nominibus</i>
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I

Introduction:

The Compatibility of Virtue and Law in Practical Thought

One of the most fascinating and urgent jobs in ethics today seems to me to be to articulate the dialogue between rule and perception in an Aristotelian morality.¹

[Aquinas] is one of the very few to synthesize a fully developed account of the virtues with an equally extensive account of the moral law, without collapsing either kind of consideration into the other.²

1 The Return to Virtue

It is no longer the case, as G. Von Wright suggested in his 1962 Gifford Lectures, that virtue 'is a neglected topic in modern ethics'.³ Influential calls by Von Wright and others to return to more serious reflection about character and its place within ethics have found a striking response among many moral philosophers in recent decades.

Theorists of 'virtue ethics' have produced a theoretic rival to the dominant schools of 'modern moral philosophy' such as Kantianism, utilitarianism, and contractualism.⁴

Virtue ethics represents a return to older ethical views, particularly those of Aristotle.

¹ (Nussbaum 1983), 207.

² (Porter 1995), 126.

³ (Von Wright 1963/1993), 136.

⁴ Following (Anscombe 1958/1997), 'modern moral philosophy' has become a term of art among virtue theorists to denote dominant non-virtue theories. Advocates of a return to an ethics of virtue include, besides those already mentioned, (Alderman 1982); (Becker 1974-75); (Blum 1980); (Dent 1984); (Foot 1978); (Hauerwas 1981); (Hauerwas and Pinches 1997); (Hunt 1978); (MacIntyre 1984); Slote (Slote 1983); (Slote 1992); (Stocker 1976/1997); (Trianosky 1987); (Wallace 1978); (Williams

Both virtue theorists and their opponents recognise a fundamental distinction between virtue and non-virtue theories, and a *prima facie* incompatibility of some kind between them. What is the nature of the distinction? It does not correspond to the standard contrast between deontological and teleological theories, for what is importantly characteristic of virtue ethics is not captured by such a distinction. Aristotle's theory is missed entirely: like deontological theories, Aristotelian virtue ethics is nonconsequentialist; but, like consequentialism, it is teleological.⁵ Other suggested contrasts between non-virtue and virtue ethical accounts have more promise:⁶ ethics of requirement vs. ethics of aspiration;⁷ ethics of rules vs. ethics of character;⁸ deontic vs. aretaic ethics;⁹ 'imperative' vs. 'attractive' ethical notions;¹⁰ act-ethics vs. agent-ethics.¹¹ These contrasts, albeit with diverse *foci*, map roughly onto the same general distinction, which I now seek to explicate.

2 Law and Virtue

I adopt a time-honoured approach and identify the distinction between virtue and non-virtue ethical approaches as between 'virtue' and 'law'. Such a distinction was made by Kant and his early modern successors,¹² and is made as well by some recent

1985). Critiques of virtue ethics include (Louden 1984/1997); (Louden 1990); (Terzis 1994); (Hurka 1998); (Montague 1992). For surveys of recent virtue ethics see (Pence 1984); (Trianosky 1990); (Spohn 1992); (Yearley 1990). For collections of essays see (Kruschwitz and Roberts 1987); (French, Uehling et al. 1988); *Philosophia* 20 (1990); (Crisp 1996); (Crisp and Slote 1997). Several seminal articles, e.g. Anscombe's, have been reprinted in (Crisp and Slote 1997), and will be cited here from that collection (dates given as, e.g., 1958/1997).

⁵ (Watson 1990), 450.

⁶ Right-hand terms of these contrasts are virtue concepts.

⁷ (Taylor 1988); (Solomon 1988).

⁸ (Solomon 1988).

⁹ (Slote 1992).

¹⁰ (Sidgwick 1907), 106. See also (Bradley 1962), Essay VI.

¹¹ (Laird 1946).

¹² See (Schneewind 1990/1997).

advocates of virtue ethics.¹³ Moreover, it is a distinction recognised and utilised by Aquinas, who gives significant accounts of both virtue and law. Thus I contrast virtue ethics with ‘law ethics’.

As a working definition, a *virtue* is ‘a disposition to act, desire, and feel that involves the exercise of judgement and leads to a recognisable human excellence, an instance of flourishing’.¹⁴ Those concepts or notions which comprise the basic vocabulary for considerations of character are *virtue concepts*. These include (roughly and non-exhaustively): virtue (the concept of a virtue as well as concepts of particular virtues, e.g. generosity); disposition; trait of character; motivation (virtue is concerned with sustained and dispositional as well as occurrent and particular motivation); ideal; aspiration; and emotion. Considerations of character are typically concerned with patterns of attitudinal, emotional, cognitive, conative – as well as actional – response of an agent. An ethical conception in which virtue concepts are basic is a *virtue conception of ethics*.

A *law conception of ethics*,¹⁵ by contrast, is one in which *law concepts* are basic. What are law concepts? Law is fundamentally characterised by obligations, duties, rights, and rules.¹⁶ To these notions may be added related law concepts concerned with acts and act-evaluation and guidance, e.g.: action, right action, principle, precept, prescription, (particular) motivation, (particular) intention,¹⁷

¹³ E.g. (Anscombe 1958/1997); (Stocker 1976/1997); (Pincoffs 1971); (Crisp 1996). Stocker speaks of a ‘legislative’ model of ethics (p. 77), Pincoffs of the ‘analogy with law’ (p. 558), and Crisp of morality seen as a ‘lawlike set of principles which binds us to perform or not to perform certain actions,’ a ‘legalistic turn’ in ethics (p. 1).

¹⁴ (Yearley 1990), 2. Moravcsik defines virtues as ‘Complexes involving inner states, representations, feelings, as well as dispositions to act, express feelings, and the exercise of these’ ((Moravcsik 1990), 35). Roberts: ‘Virtues are not just dispositions to actions. They are determinations of our emotions, passions, desires, and concerns. They are patterns of saliency, attention, perception, and judgement’ ((Roberts 1991), 329).

¹⁵ See (Anscombe 1958/1997), 31. Cf. (Donagan 1977), 3.

¹⁶ See (Hart 1961).

¹⁷ The distinction between virtue and non-virtue ethical views is sometimes set up as a contrast between bare, discrete act-descriptions on the one (non-virtue ethics) hand, and *all* consideration of

prohibition, permission, supererogation, sense of duty, requirement, universalisability, ought, should, right, wrong, rectitude.¹⁸

The distinction between virtue and law conceptions of ethics, as I have explicated it, concerns the kinds of moral concepts which play a basic role in the conception. I distinguish, further, between *strong* and *weak* versions of each ethical conception.¹⁹ A strong virtue conception of ethics is one in which virtue concepts are basic, and all other moral concepts (e.g. ‘right act’) are derivative from – e.g. explained or justified entirely on the basis of, reducible to, or eliminable in preference to – virtue concepts.²⁰ A weak virtue conception of ethics is one in which virtue concepts are at least as basic as other moral concepts, such that a complete account of morality cannot be given apart from essential reference to virtue concepts. Aristotle has been variously identified, in these terms, as a strong virtue ethicist²¹ and as (possibly) only a weak virtue ethicist.²² What has come to be known as a *virtuous person definition* of right action, according to which a ‘right action’ is *defined* as ‘what a virtuous person would do in the circumstances’, expresses a strong virtue conception of ethics, at least with respect to ‘right action’.²³ A *virtuous person criterion* with respect to right action, on the other hand, is an epistemic thesis, according to which the *criterion* for determining a particular right action is ‘what a virtuous person would do in the circumstances’. This is compatible with a weak virtue

motives and intentions on the (virtue ethics) other. Accounts with these tendencies include (Garcia 1990); (Clowney 1990); (Trianosky 1990). However, it need be no part of an act- or law-theory to abstract from *all* intentions or motivations, and it would render it implausible to do so. Indeed, Kant, certainly a law theorist, made the *motive* of duty a necessary condition for the performance of a good act. The distinction (cf. my listing of virtue concepts above) is rather between motives and intentions that are restricted to the description of the particular acts in question (law conception of ethics), in contrast to long-term motivational patterns and intentions (virtue conception of ethics).

¹⁸ For my purposes here I do not distinguish in a technical sense between ‘rules’ and ‘principles’.

¹⁹ See (Zagzebski 1996), 16; 77ff.

²⁰ (Watson 1990), 451-452. He calls this the ‘claim of explanatory primacy’. See also (Crisp 1996), 7. For eliminativist proposals, see (Anscombe 1958/1997); (Slote 1992); (Williams 1985).

²¹ (Crisp 1996), 7.

²² (Watson 1990), 468 n.24.

conception of ethics, since it is left open whether some kinds of right actions may be ethically specifiable independently of virtuous persons.

Similarly, a strong law conception of ethics is one in which law concepts are most basic, and all other moral concepts, e.g. 'virtuous person', are derivative in some way from law concepts. A weak law conception of ethics holds only that law concepts are at least as basic as other moral concepts. A strong version of either virtue or law ethics is incompatible with both its strong and weak counterpart. Rawls, for example, may be seen as a strong law ethicist. He includes virtues within his account, but they have only derivative status, explained and morally justified merely as dispositions to follow moral rules.²⁴ On his conception a complete account of morality may be given without essential reference to virtue concepts. Weak versions of each conception are compatible with each other. That an ethical conception is a weak virtue conception or a weak law conception is, for our purpose here, sufficient to constitute it respectively as a virtue or a law conception of ethics. As Crisp writes regarding virtue ethics, 'A virtue ethicist, then, can be characterised as someone who allows the virtues to ground at least some reasons, perhaps alongside other moral reasons or non-moral reasons grounded in the good of the agent.'²⁵ Weak virtue and law ethical conceptions are compatible in principle. Still, it remains to see *how* they are compatible, given the fundamental contrasts between them.

²³ See (Zagzebski 1996), 79-80; (Hursthouse 1991/1997), 219.

²⁴ (Rawls 1971), 192, 437.

²⁵ (Crisp 1996), 7.

3 Central Contrasts Between Virtue and Law Ethical Conceptions

Here I isolate four central, related conceptual contrasts between these ethical views, which importantly elucidate their differences in key areas of ethical conception.

3.1 Agent vs. Act: the object of ethical evaluation

The contrast between agent and act is often taken to be the central contrast between virtue and non-virtue views, as expressed in the title of an early article advocating a return to a broader notion of ethics, ‘Act-Ethics and Agent-Ethics’. There Laird distinguishes the contrast as follows: ‘By the morality of the act I mean the morality of specific willed actions. By the morality of the agent I mean a morality whose central conception is a man’s moral character.’²⁶ Following Zagzebski I take the focus of this contrast to concern the object of ethical evaluation, and it fits well the virtue/law distinction. Law ethics is concerned with *kinds of acts* (lying, truth-telling) and their moral evaluation (right/wrong, good/bad, permitted/prohibited/obligated) *as* kinds of acts, abstracted from the personal particularities of the agent, S, performing them.²⁷ Virtue ethics, on the other hand, is concerned with ethical evaluation that is wider in scope, including not only S’s actions, but also S’s attitudes, emotions, long-term motivations, and character traits. Strengths and weaknesses of each approach may be seen in this light.

The virtue ethicist notes, first, that the concern of moral evaluation is properly wider than simply action. We typically do evaluate individuals morally with regard to

²⁶ (Laird 1946), 113.

²⁷ ‘In both the moral and the legal case what counts is the rule and its exceptions (or, understood differently, the rule and other rules with which it can conflict). What counts as relevant is differences

their attitudes, character traits, and motivations, whether these actually involve action or not. Sue's hatred towards Sally and desire for her death because Sally has a better car than Sue is ethically reprehensible. Bill's standing intention to murder Ted is bad, even if he never finds opportunity to accomplish it. We care about what people like, not just what they do.²⁸

Second, some morally important character traits, such as gratitude²⁹ and compassion, are matters more of attitude, feeling, and motivation than of characteristic kinds of action. The right response to a situation calling for compassion, for example, is essentially emotional or desiderative; it will often involve some action as well (e.g. putting one's arm around the grieving widow's shoulders), but there is no characteristic kind of action appropriate to all situations calling for compassion. Unlike the strategy of Job's friends, the appropriate 'action' may be simply to be still. What is *necessary*, however, is to feel empathy and desire the best for the person.

Third, even character traits which are usually expressed in characteristic acts typically involve more that is ethically evaluable than simply the acts. For example truthfulness or honesty involves more than simply acts of telling the truth: it involves loving the truth; desiring it to be known; grieving when it is assaulted; expressing sensitivity and wise judgement in determining what, when, and how to tell what is true; and a stable disposition to tell the truth. A truthful person is one who can be counted on to tell the truth – one who often lies, but happens to tell the truth in a particular instance, is not a truthful person.

Fourth, even character traits that essentially involve rule-following, such as conscientiousness, cannot be fully characterised in terms of rule-following alone, for

in the situation; what does not count as relevant is differences in the personal descriptions of the persons involved.' (Pincoffs 1971), 558.

²⁸ (Irwin 1996), 47. '[M]uch that *is* moral, including most of the Christian virtues set forth in the Beatitudes, *is* moral without being a willed act' ((Laird 1946), 115, emphasis his).

non-rule-determined judgement is always required in order to determine which rule applies to a given situation, and to apply it properly. A fortiori, the features of the moral field mentioned in earlier points cannot be reduced to considerations of kinds of actions or of rules guiding actions. For this reason it may be impossible to specify the proper response to a given situation apart from appeal to the particular perception or refined judgement of a suitably virtuous agent. Hence virtue ethicists emphasise the virtuous person definition or virtuous person criterion of what is the right thing to do in a particular situation. There is no independent set of rules or procedures, e.g., which could be applied by everyone to determine the quality of a bottle of wine. Rather, a good wine is determined to be so by connoisseurs, wine tasters who, through practice and interest, have developed refined judgement.³⁰ Similarly, ‘there can be no complete set of rules sufficient for giving a determinate answer to the question of what an agent should do in every situation of moral choice.’³¹ To know what is right, in at least some situations, we must look to the moral ‘connoisseur’, the virtuous person, for direction by example.

Fifth, what we have seen suggests that the aim of moral education should be to develop virtuous *persons*, with virtuous attitudes, character traits, and trained emotions. Emphasis, then, should be placed on moral exemplars and ideals – persons (mythical or real, historical or contemporary) to emulate, those who incarnate and exemplify the attitudes and traits we hope to instil. Thus virtue ethicists emphasise in moral education the role of literature, narratives, songs and other media which provide

²⁹ See (Schaller 1990), 200-202.

³⁰ See (Wallace 1991), 489. On a more mundane level, consider the ‘reasonable person’ criterion in law. Cf. (Becker 1974-75), 114-115; (Lucas 1963).

³¹ (Zagzebski 1996), 18.

more specific, articulated examples of character to learn from and emulate, rather than lists of rules and principles to follow.³²

Law ethicists, on the other hand, consider a strictly agent-centred perspective to be inadequate. First, a time-honoured desideratum of a moral theory is that it help an agent or collection of agents (e.g. a hospital ethics committee) to determine what/what not to do – it needs to be *action-guiding*. Since what is in view is an action, what seems to be required is the ability to specify act-kinds and evaluate them. An agent-centred prescription to ‘do what a virtuous person would do in the circumstances’ seems less than helpful, apart from independent act-specification.³³ To be action-guiding this prescription requires of one the ability to *identify* a virtuous person to emulate, and (if one is not able to ask the person what he or she would do) to possess sufficient *content* in one’s conception of that person’s character to have some idea what he or she *would* do. I discuss the content aspect below. Regarding identifying a virtuous person to emulate, however, seems to require a prior ability to identify the kinds of acts such a person would or wouldn’t do. Much of what the virtue ethicist affirms as morally important (attitudes, motivations, desires) in the virtuous person is epistemically unavailable to others, apart from its expression in kinds of action.

Indeed, the identification of act-kinds is typically epistemically more immediate than the identification of character traits. ‘Lying’, e.g., is specifiable independently of the character trait, ‘honesty’. Moreover, honesty is more abstract, for as we have seen it extends far beyond mere not-lying. ‘Integrity’, a related trait, is still more abstract still. This is not to say that act-description and -identification do not require judgement: the distinction between, e.g., ‘hitting’ (e.g. striking cattle repeatedly in

³² See (Nussbaum 1990).

³³ See (Louden 1984/1997), 210-213.

order to drive them to feed hungry people) and ‘beating’ (e.g. striking a cat repeatedly, for pleasure) is a moral one, going beyond mere physical description of the action. The latter action exemplifies cruelty, a character trait. However, cruelty may take many, sometimes subtle forms. Cruelty is a more abstract concept; beating as an act-kind is more obvious, and, as it were, stands on its own, morally. Acts such as beating function as kinds of easily grasped gatekeepers to virtue-ascriptions: one who beats is *not* a virtuous person, and almost anyone can grasp this.³⁴

Second, this point about the epistemic immediacy of act-identification has a bearing upon moral education and upon social structures in which the character of some of its members is less than virtuous. In early moral education of individuals, identifying particular act-kinds (‘don’t take the cookies’) rather than pointing to moral exemplars (‘what would Martin Luther King do?’) is obviously most appropriate. The act-kind identified is both epistemically more immediate to the child than is an ideal or even a character trait (‘don’t be selfish’), which are more abstract, and it standardly identifies a kind of act that is *basic*, in the sense that it delimits the boundaries of acceptable and safe behaviour (‘don’t play with matches’) – which can later be developed into a more articulated concern with traits and attitudes (‘don’t be reckless’). These ethically basic act-kinds are both easiest and most important to learn, and are typically what is expressed in identified moral rules. The same point can be expanded to the societal level: even in societies which are uniform in their values and ideals there are those who are not virtuous, and there is a need to identify – both for general moral education as well as for minimal social ordering – certain kinds of

³⁴ Note that act-kinds that *disqualify* one from being considered a virtuous person provide the clearest case. One who tortures is *necessarily not* a virtuous person, simply on that ground. One who gives money to the hospital, on the other hand, is *not necessarily* a virtuous person, since it may be done in order to gain control of the hospital, or for any number of ulterior motives. This difference is related to a distinction I shall make between negative and positive reasons for action.

actions that are morally out of bounds, that threaten the very possibility of social life, and these need to be identified in rules for appropriate behaviour.

Third, the need for such basic act-kind identification is expanded in modern western cultures, which are *not* uniform – where there is significant moral disagreement and plurality of values and ideals. An appeal to a virtuous ideal can reasonably guide the behaviour of a community of shared values, beliefs, and ideals, in which there is ‘a recognised class of superior citizens, whose judgement on moral issues would be accepted without question,’³⁵ but this condition manifestly does not hold of modern western cultures today as a whole – although it may be true in varying degrees in sub-communities within larger cultures, such as some religious communities.³⁶ The possibility of finding moral common ground between divergent moral communities, whether on the inter-cultural level or among intra-cultural sub-communities, where areas of peaceful agreement may in principle be reached within contexts of disagreement, would seem to require appealing to kinds of action which may minimally delineate the moral boundaries and most basic goods defining their common life.³⁷

Put differently, virtue ethics pulls towards relativism. As noted above, appealing to virtuous ideals is action-guiding only for those who know what such persons would be likely to do in such situations, and knowing this typically requires a shared and sufficiently articulated and specified conception of the ethical life. To provide such is the point of using literature and stories of moral exemplars in moral education. However, stories and ideals vary between cultures and moral communities,

³⁵ (Schneewind 1990/1997), 200.

³⁶ The novels of Chaim Potok describe the highly unified Hasidic communities in New York City. However, the novels also reveal the manifold tensions between these communities and the broader American culture with which they are often sharply at odds.

³⁷ According to (Schneewind 1990/1997), virtue ethics historically fell of its own weight in western culture because of its inability to deal with the pluralism and disagreement that defines modernity.

as virtue ethicists often emphasise. While virtue ethics pulls towards relativism a law conception of ethics seeks a means for finding common ground between moral communities, and to the extent that this is a desideratum for a moral theory, it constitutes a point in favour of law ethics.

Fourth, related to the first point, some kinds of acts simply do seem to be morally specifiable, independently of the evaluation of persons or character traits. While ‘honesty’ is broader than truth-telling, truth-telling is itself a morally good *kind* of act.³⁸ It is right for one to tell the truth – it is a good thing – even if one is *not* an honest person: even if one decides only ‘just this once’ to tell the truth. Likewise, an act of ‘punishing the innocent in order to benefit the guilty’, is a bad act – independently of the character of the one who does it, or, arguably, of his motivation for doing so. True, it is the kind of act a vicious person would do, but that is surely not its most basic construal – one would most naturally specify vicious persons in terms of this kind of act, rather than specify this act in terms of a vicious person. Almost all agree that Hitler was a vicious person; I suspect, however, that if asked why they think so, most would appeal first, not to character traits such as cruelty, but rather to certain of his acts: e.g. his committing genocide – his unjust killing of millions of innocent people. In any case, whatever people commonly think, *that kind* of act surely is morally evaluable – independently of Hitler’s emotions, desires, attitudes, or stable dispositions, as reprehensible as they were. Tying this together with previous points, kinds of acts such as this, those which delimit the boundaries of the possibility of social life, are not only more epistemically immediate than related agent-centred features, and morally specifiable independently of agent-evaluation, but they also *need* to be

³⁸ Obviously this is understood to be *ceteris paribus* throughout – bracketing borderline cases (lying to Nazis about Jews in one’s house) and making true, but insensitive statements (‘You’re ugly!’). Distinguishing between cases, of course, requires judgement.

specified – and promulgated – as being kinds of acts *not to be done*, regardless of an agent's character. That is, they need to be *prohibited*.³⁹

The picture that emerges from this discussion of the agent vs. act contrast in moral evaluation is that moral evaluation of *both* acts and agents seems to be necessary to an adequate moral view. The question then emerges as to whether and/or how they can be combined.

3.2 Thick vs. Thin: the specificity of ethical concepts

A second contrast concerns the specificity of ethical concepts. Anscombe distinguishes between virtue and law conceptions of ethics in terms of their core concepts. The concept 'morally ought', has little or no descriptive content to enable ordinary language users to pick out typical instances in everyday life. However, if one points to an action and asks whether it was 'unjust', 'the answer would sometimes be clear at once'.⁴⁰ The concept 'unjust' is conceptually richer. Williams makes a similar distinction, between 'thick' and 'thin' concepts.⁴¹ Thin concepts, for Williams, are ethical concepts which have very general evaluative application, such as 'good', 'right', 'ought', and 'wrong', with little connection to specific descriptive contents. They appear as all-purpose moral predicates, logically applicable to a great range of objects, persons, acts, or states of affairs. Thick concepts, on the other hand – ethical descriptions such as 'bully', 'discreet', 'chaste', 'gratitude', and 'liar' are logically tied to more descriptively specific ranges of application.

The application to the virtue/law distinction is obvious: law concepts are paradigmatic thin concepts and virtue concepts are paradigmatic thick concepts. The

³⁹ See (Louden 1984/1997), 207-208; (Clowney 1990), 65.

⁴⁰ (Anscombe 1958/1997), 34. See (Zagzebski 1996), 17-18.

advantage of virtue concepts as basic in one's ethical conception is also obvious. On Williams's view, thin concepts are of little value, being unconnected to meaningful truth-conditions; the interesting ethical work is done at the descriptively richer, thick level, where ethical concepts have substantive content. Ironically, as a counter to the law conception argument in 3.1, this suggests that a virtue conception of ethics is *more* action-guiding than a law conception.

This specific action-guidance carries a price-tag, once again: the pull towards relativism. For Williams, not only are thin concepts of little value, but they also constitute on his view the only fully universal, 'objective' ethical concepts available. Since thick concepts find their signification entirely within particular, e.g. cultural perspectives where their evaluative and descriptive elements are grasped in a shared, non-reflective context, they are specific to shared frameworks, and thus not universal or fully objective. Other virtue ethicists admit, or even emphasise the relativity of virtue conceptions to particular moral communities, which are unified by common narratives, ideals, and values. MacIntyre asserts that, 'The moralities of different societies may agree in having a precept enjoining that a child should honour his or her parents, but what it is to honour . . . will vary greatly between different social orders.'⁴² While many, such as MacIntyre, admit the possibility of a generic virtue-structure that may be transcultural or universal, virtue ethicists typically affirm that what is significant in ethics occurs solely at the thick, community-specific level. It is what is *different* between, say, 'courage' as conceived in heroic societies and as conceived in medieval monastic cultures, that is most salient and important. Thus, Hauerwas concludes,

there is no virtue theory in general. Rather the characterisations of the virtues, their content, how they interrelate, will differ from one community and tradition to

⁴¹ (Williams 1985), 129ff.

⁴² Cited in (Blum 1996), 233.

another. This diversity is often obscured by the fact that the virtues have the same name and may in fact seem structurally similar.⁴³

Similarly, Roberts argues that ‘The idea of generic virtues, virtues which have only features that are non-specific to particular traditions, is a fiction.’⁴⁴

Not only are specific virtue conceptions different, but in some cases fundamentally incompatible. Roberts asserts, for example, that the ‘Christian’ virtue of ‘Gratitude is not, and cannot be, in Aristotle’s list of virtues. For it is incompatible with the central Aristotelian virtue of magnanimity (“pride”).’⁴⁵ Magnanimity is typically considered to provide the clearest case of incompatibility between an Aristotelian, ‘pagan’ ethic and a Christian ethic whose central virtue is ‘humility’.⁴⁶

As we have already seen, a law conception of ethics aims at avoiding the moral tribalism that such relativism, at its logical extension, seems to lead to. Only non-relative, non-community-specific moral concepts – thin, law concepts – can play the role of forming the boundaries of the common life of and establishing some common ground between diverse moral communities. The question arises whether there is a way to understand ethics in which thick and thin ethical concepts may both play important roles.

⁴³ (Hauerwas 1993), 260. See also (MacIntyre 1983); (MacIntyre 1984); (MacIntyre 1988); (MacIntyre 1990). For criticism of MacIntyre see (Schneewind 1982); (Irwin 1989).

⁴⁴ (Roberts 1992), 37. He goes on to say that ‘the thesis that there are no generic virtues does not, however, imply that virtues have no generic features.’

⁴⁵ (Roberts 1991), 336.

⁴⁶ (Casey 1990), 200; (Kenny 1988), 115; (Nussbaum 1988), 38.

3.3 Maximal vs. Minimal: the orientation of ethical conceptions

An important feature of an ethical conception is its orientation or aim. A law conception of ethics is traditionally seen as oriented towards marking out the minimal boundaries of the moral life, those kinds of actions that may be permitted, prohibited, or obligated, for example. Further moral evaluation of what fits within the boundaries of permission, according to a law conception of ethics, lies beyond its conceptual resources. One common law concept, for example, is ‘duty’; much of the moral life, as described by virtue ethics, however, lies beyond what is reasonably characterised in terms of ‘duty’ – such as what one should pursue as a career, whether one should get married, how one should spend one’s time on the weekend (within permissible limits), etc. A law conception of ethics seems to have no resources to provide moral evaluation or guidance in these matters – yet they seem to be morally significant.⁴⁷

A virtue conception of ethics, on the other hand sets the bar much higher – ‘virtue’, after all, means ‘excellence’ (*aretê*, *virtus*). Whereas a law ethic is an ethic of ‘requirement’, a virtue ethic is an ethic of ‘aspiration’; a law ethic is concerned with obtaining a ‘pass’, while a virtue ethic with obtaining an ‘honours’ degree.⁴⁸ Modern moral philosophy, according to Norton, is minimalist:

The effect of modern moral minimalism is to afford to moral life little space for aspiration; it is a small room with a low ceiling and not much of a view. In particular, it calls for little in the way of developed moral character . . . I believe an important consequence of this has been to redirect human aspirations away from the confines of morality and toward the apparently limitless horizons afforded by the laboratory and the market . . . By contrast to modern ethics, classical ethics

⁴⁷ A very different version of law ethics, in this respect, is expressed by utilitarianism in its strong versions, e.g. Singer’s, which is not minimalist but, as thought by many, excessively demanding. On this view one might indeed have a duty to take a certain job, not get married, etc. Whereas the minimalist view has a large range of the ‘permissible’, this view tends to evacuate the permissible, and exclude the supererogatory (Urmson 1969). It also seems to remove the concept of moral excellence, aspiration, and development (Norton 1988). Because of space I limit my consideration of law ethics to the traditional, minimalist form.

⁴⁸ See (Kenny 1991), 77.

gives a central place to ideals, and it is characteristic of ideals that they are capable of enlisting the full measure of human aspiration.⁴⁹

VE thus provides a richer and more realistic view of the moral life. The point in one's playing football, by way of analogy, is certainly more than to avoid transgressing its rules, or to follow its basic standards of dribbling and passing. Rather it is to become an excellent player, one who has mastered the skills, can be innovative, can make 'big plays' when needed. The goal is excellence, not non-transgression or compliance.

On the other hand, again, there is need for constitutive rules in football, and there is need, as we have seen, for constitutive moral rules, that mark the boundaries of the moral life. Moral education may aim at excellence, but it begins with the minimal conditions of the good life, the identification of basic act-kinds in moral rules, as expressed in a law conception of ethics. The question, then, is whether and/or how an ethical conception may embrace both maximal and minimal orientations.

3.4 General vs. Particular: the kinds of reasons and reasoning in practical thought

This fourth contrast is broader than the virtue/non-virtue ethics issue; it is a distinction related to practical reasoning⁵⁰ more generally, concerning kinds of reasons and reasoning. However, it is relevant to our issue, and it is most typically addressed in current discussion in relation to virtue ethics. It is obviously related to much of what we have already spelled out as contrastive between virtue and law ethical conceptions.

A signal emphasis in much current discussion of Aristotelian virtue ethics, is the central role of non-rule-governed ethical perception in the practical reasoning of the

⁴⁹ (Norton 1988), 184-185.

⁵⁰ In Aquinas *ratio practica* may refer either to 'practical reason' or 'practical reasoning', and I will render it by both. The ambiguity should be recalled.

virtuous agent: 'the discernment of perception'.⁵¹ According to Nussbaum, on this view, *normative priority* in practical choice should be accorded not to principle, but to perception.⁵² This, apparently, is the claim that what makes a situation, and the appropriate response to it, possess the salient moral character that it does depends in the first place, not upon any *general* characterisation of the features exemplified in the situation (e.g. the kinds of act involved, e.g. truth-telling), but rather first upon the particular perceptual judgement of the agent. General principles may emerge as incomplete summaries of the previous judgements of virtuous persons, but their normativity is posterior and their importance is secondary only. According to Nussbaum there is no general procedure for deciding what to do in every case, such as subsuming a case under antecedently fixed rules, for it cannot be so codified. Rules may be helpful in moral education, for those who have not yet become practically wise (virtuous), but rule-following actually represents, as against the emphasis of modern moral philosophy, a falling-off of practical rationality, rather than its flourishing.⁵³ Virtuous practical insight, on the other hand, is a noninferential, nondeductive, non-rule-governed ability to recognise the salient features of a complex situation,⁵⁴ an epistemically privileged capacity available only to the virtuous.

This 'perceptual capacity', once acquired, according to McDowell, 'can be exercised in complex novel circumstances, not necessarily capable of being foreseen and legislated for by a codifier of the conduct required by virtue, however wise and thoughtful he might be.'⁵⁵ It is indeed a kind of 'situational appreciation' or perception (Aristotle's *aisthêsis*).⁵⁶

⁵¹ Nussbaum's rendering of Aristotle in NE 1109b23. (Nussbaum 1990), 69.

⁵² Ibid., 68.

⁵³ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 74.

⁵⁵ (McDowell 1978), 21.

⁵⁶ (Wiggins 1991), 231.

Central to this approach is a denial that the moral life is codifiable or reducible to a list of rules or exact and detailed guides for action. The denial of codifiability is not necessary to a virtue conception of ethics, but it is not accidentally related to interest in it, since Aristotelian virtue ethics emphasises particular judgement and ‘promises a nonskeptical response to the failure of codification’.⁵⁷ Some proponents of this view put it more strongly, holding that there are *no* true ethical generalisations. ‘There *are* no general principles or rules anyway – except in so far as these are condensations of the judgement of aisthesis.’⁵⁸ Indeed, according to Dancy, there is *no* generally morally relevant property or feature – thus, the property of being a ‘human’ or being ‘rational’ can play no general role of moral relevance in discussions of animal rights, racism, or feminism. All morally relevant features are particular rather than general or universal.⁵⁹ Along with a rejection of codifiability and a suspicion of the general, on this view, is a rejection of the rationality of subsumptive, deductive, or ‘mechanical’ forms of practical reasoning; the subsumptive conception of rationality is ‘at best optional, and its rigidity makes it implausible’.⁶⁰ The priority is on particular, non-rule-governed moral perception.

Thus Dancy summarises:

The virtuous person is not conceived of as someone equipped with a full list of moral principles and an ability correctly to subsume each new case under the right one. There is *nothing* that one brings to the new situation other than a *contentless ability* to discern what matters where it matters, an ability whose presence in us is explained by our having undergone a successful moral education.⁶¹

This is a radical denial of *generalism*. Generalism is, minimally, the view that there can be true generalisations in ethics, and that at least in some cases, general properties may be normatively prior to particulars (e.g. that a particular act of killing is

⁵⁷ (Watson 1990), 454.

⁵⁸ (Wiggins 1991), 229, his emphasis. See (McDowell 1979/1997), 156; (Crisp and Slote 1997), 14.

⁵⁹ (Dancy 1993), 89-90.

⁶⁰ (Dancy 1993), 82.

bad *because* it is an instance of murder). *Strong particularism* denies generalism outright. *Weak particularism* denies that the moral life may be fully characterised in terms of general rules or principles, and sees a necessary role for non-general-rule-determined moral judgement or insight. However, it may be compatible with modest forms of generalism, ones that do not conceive of practical reason on a strictly deductivist model. A law conception of ethics is clearly generalist in approach: it seeks to articulate normative general reasons for action. Particularism, then, constitutes a serious challenge to such an approach. Other than making concessions to moral education, particularists generally deprecate the use of principles or rules in practical reasoning, and typically exclude it in the reasoning of a virtuous person.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that principles, rules, and general reasons form a significant part of actual human practical reasoning.⁶² Indeed Nussbaum, who has stressed as much as anyone a conception of practical rationality as comprising fine-grained moral attention, sensitivity, and moral imagination, also acknowledges the centrality of what she terms the 'dialogue between rules and perception' in Aristotelian morality,⁶³ the 'interaction of rules and perceptions in moral judging and learning'.⁶⁴ Nussbaum's own conception of the relationship between rules and perception is not clear. On the one hand, perception is normatively prior to rules; rules are best characterised as 'rules of thumb' or summaries of past perceptions, and are not normative for perception.⁶⁵ On the other hand, rules seem to be normative at times: 'Indeed, such rules [general principles] frequently provide an invaluable sort of steering, without which perception would be dangerously free-floating.'⁶⁶ In any case

⁶¹ (Dancy 1993), 50, my emphasis. Dancy attributes this view to Aristotle, *ibid.*

⁶² (Annas 1993), 94, n. 155.

⁶³ (Nussbaum 1990), 100.

⁶⁴ (Nussbaum 1990), 149.

⁶⁵ (Nussbaum 1990), 68.

⁶⁶ (Nussbaum 1990), 165.

Nussbaum acknowledges that an analysis of the relationship between general and particular in practical reasoning is in order. She concludes, 'One of the most fascinating and urgent jobs in ethics today seems to me to be to articulate the dialogue between rule and perception in an Aristotelian morality.'⁶⁷

3.5 Conclusion

What is evident from this discussion is that the contrasts between virtue and law conceptions of ethics are deep, and provide prima facie objections to their compatibility. However, both seem necessary to an adequate conception of ethics. We seem to need a mixed virtue and law conception, which can 'coordinate irreducible or strong notions of virtue along with irreducible or strong conceptions of the various act notions into our conceptual scheme of morality.'⁶⁸ *That* they may be compatible is a desideratum; *how* they may be compatible remains to be seen. The overall objective of this thesis is Aristotelian – to seek to 'save the *phainomena*' of both virtue and law in ethics, by examining one example of how they are combined: in the ethics of Thomas Aquinas.

⁶⁷ (Nussbaum 1983), 207.

⁶⁸ (Louden 1984/1997), 216.

4 Aquinas

The moral philosophy of Thomas Aquinas (1224/5-1274), a thirteenth-century Dominican friar, theologian, and philosopher, is of particular interest in light of the questions I have raised here.⁶⁹ First, although Aquinas drew upon a number of sources – Stoic, Roman, biblical, patristic – his approach was largely Aristotelian in its contours. Much of the writing of Aquinas upon which I will depend here consists of commentaries on Aristotle's works, and in his more strictly original work (the primary one upon which I will draw here is *Summa Theologiae* – ST) he appeals regularly to Aristotle and Aristotelian notions. It is beyond my scope here to defend the claim the claim that Aquinas's approach is fully Aristotelian, or to defend or even evaluate Aquinas's interpretations of Aristotle *as* interpretations.⁷⁰ However, it seems safe to affirm at least – and I will assume – that Aquinas saw himself as engaged in a broadly Aristotelian project. Examining his thought in these matters, then, suggests the possibility of application to the Aristotelian issues we have raised.⁷¹

Second, as will be evident from this thesis, Aquinas held a law conception of ethics. This is not in dispute; his account of natural law is widely considered to be one of the premier accounts ever established. In fact, as a perusal of most ethics anthologies published in recent decades will attest, Aquinas has traditionally been viewed solely as a law ethicist; or, put more strongly, he has been held to *be* solely a

⁶⁹ On Aquinas's ethics see (McInerny 1982); (McInerny 1993).

⁷⁰ According to (MacIntyre 1984), 178, Aquinas's commentary on Aristotle's NE has never been bettered. Cf. (Jaffa 1952). I elsewhere defend Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle where their divergence has seemed to many to be most extreme, concerning the virtue of magnanimity. See (Horner 1998).

⁷¹ 'The study of Aristotle's *Ethics* continues with unabated enthusiasm in a now largely Greekless philosophical environment; there is no reason why the Second Part [of ST], which is one of the most fascinating commentaries ever written on that work, should not be studied beside it with equal seriousness' ((Kenny 1980), 30).

law ethicist (i.e. as holding a strong law conception of ethics),⁷² as well as a rigid deductivist in practical reasoning.⁷³

Third, however, as will also be evident from this thesis, Aquinas also held a virtue conception of ethics: he provides an extensive account of virtue, along broadly Aristotelian lines. More recent treatments of Aquinas's ethics have defended this claim. Indeed, Foot, one of the strongest advocates of virtue ethics, speaking of Aquinas's account of the virtues, asserts that

there are different emphases and new elements in Aquinas's ethics: often he works things out in far more detail than Aristotle did, and it is possible to learn a great deal from Aquinas that one could not have got from Aristotle. It is my opinion that the *Summa Theologica* is one of the best sources we have for moral philosophy, and moreover that St Thomas's ethical writings are as useful to the atheist as to the Catholic or other Christian believer.⁷⁴

Aquinas has a combined virtue-and-law conception of ethics. Examining his ethical conception will be instructive as to *how*, along broadly Aristotelian lines, a virtue conception of ethics and a law conception of ethics may be combined.

⁷² (Donagan 1985), 17: 'early and late, St. Thomas thought of morality as a matter of law.'

⁷³ Nussbaum (1978) reads Aquinas (in his interpretation of Aristotelian ethics) as seeking to erect a science of human nature which provides a hierarchy of rules of practice, from which an agent, in any deliberative context, may deduce an exact directive of what to do (pp. 166-167). There are two separable objections here: *theoreticalism* (the reduction of practical reason to theoretical reasoning about human nature, i.e. to metaphysics), and *deductivism* (the reduction of practical reasoning to subsumptive, deductive, or rule-case reasoning, whereby an agent is fully able to determine what to do by subsuming a particular situation under a more general rule. Some neo-Thomistic interpretations of Aquinas have been theoreticalist and deductivist, but recent analyses of Aquinas's ethics from within the Aquinian camp have criticised these positions, e.g. (Geraghty 1982), (Pinckaers 1995), (Westberg 1994). Because of space limits here I am not able to sketch full responses to these objections, but my account of Aquinas's practical thought (especially in chapters III and V, with regard to theoreticalism and deductivism, respectively) provides some initial responses, and the material for more specific development. A current influential and distinctive approach to Aquinas on practical reason which is critical of theoreticalism, but friendly to the role of deduction in practical reasoning, is the 'Finnis-Grisez' position. See (Finnis 1980); (Finnis 1983); (Finnis 1998); (Finnis 1991); (George 1992), especially (George 1992); (Hittinger 1987); (Lisska 1996). My account of Aquinas – in some respects in agreement, in some respects in disagreement with this position – provides material for a more developed analysis of and response to it, but this development is beyond my scope here.

⁷⁴ (Foot 1978/1997), 164.

5 Thesis

Several recent works have significantly explicated and defended aspects of Aquinas's combined view.⁷⁵ Rather than providing extensive accounts of either virtue or law, my approach in this thesis is distinctive in explicating the relation between virtue and law by virtue of their relationship to Aquinas's conception of practical thought more generally.⁷⁶

My thesis is that *Aquinas's conception of practical thought is of the rational determination of general good into particular action. Aquinas's combined virtue and law conception of ethics is not ad hoc, but emerges from, expresses, and is grounded normatively, rationally, and motivationally in this conception of practical thought.*

To defend this thesis I seek to accomplish two objectives, in descending order of centrality and emphasis. My first objective is to explicate and defend an account of Aquinas's conception of practical thought as the rational determination of general good into particular action. In II I give a general account of the *nature* of practical thought in Aquinas by way of analysis of four central, interrelated notions in Aquinas's conception: order, nature, good, and reason. In III–V I examine the *structure* of practical thinking in Aquinas, arguing that it involves the interaction of three conceptual levels of thought: general, specific, and particular.

My second objective, pursued more briefly in VI, is to consider the nature and relationship of virtue and law in Aquinas as they are situated within Aquinas's general conception of practical thought, presupposing and developing it. I also briefly return to the *prima facie* incompatibilities between virtue and law raised in I.3, and indicate

⁷⁵ See (Porter 1990); (Porter 1995); (Porter 1989); (Westberg 1994). Also (Nelson 1992). Cf. (Brown 1981).

how insights from Aquinas's account elucidate relationships between virtue and law ethical conceptions.⁷⁷

A methodological point: because my objective is to understand virtue and law in Aquinas in terms of his overall account of practical thought, in II-V I prescind as much as possible from what in Aquinas's writing is specifically dependent conceptually upon his accounts of virtue and law – so as not to beg questions as to the emergence of virtue and law from practical reason, rather than reverse. In several cases, in analysing his notion of practical thought I will need to consult pieces of Aquinas's writing which are situated in contexts where he discusses virtue and law, where I can find the clearest exposition of the point I am analysing. But I shall only use distinctions and conceptions from these contexts which are not themselves necessarily already dependent upon his notions of virtue or law in particular. Typically in these contexts Aquinas is himself engaged in drawing out implications of practical thinking and *applying* them to virtue or law.

A caveat: Aquinas does not pretend to reflect upon human action and ethics in abstraction from his theological views, or from the extensive theological discussions which often provide the general and specific context for his moral theorising. To characterise Aquinas's ethical views here simply as 'moral philosophy' and not also as 'moral theology' would be a distortion. On the other hand, there is extensive reflection within the sources we shall examine of a specifically philosophical nature. The latter – without artificially abstracting from Aquinas's broader views – will be my focus in this thesis.

⁷⁶ On early approaches to practical thought and action theory that are sympathetic to virtue theory and Aristotelian and Aquinian approaches, see (Anscombe 1957); (Kenny 1963); (Kenny 1975); (Kenny 1979).

⁷⁷ Due to space limitations here, these indications are brief and programmatic. The focus of the thesis is to provide the general account of Aquinas's practical thought from which further elucidation and implications of the relationships between virtue and law in his terms may be developed.

II

The Nature of Practical Thought

1 The Central Concepts of Practical Thought

In a passage which will serve as paradigmatic for this chapter, IaIIae.71.2, Aquinas provides a summary of the nature of practical thought which makes evident the centrality and interrelatedness of several core notions in his conception. According to Aquinas,

the nature of X is chiefly the form according to which X is assigned its species. Now the human being is placed in its species through its rational soul. Thus, what is contrary to the ordering activity of reason (*ordo rationis*) is, properly speaking, contrary to the nature of the human being, as human being, while that which is according to reason is in accordance with the nature of the human being, as human being. For ‘the good of the human being is to be in accordance with reason’, and ‘its evil is to be against (*praeter*) reason’, as (Pseudo-) Dionysius states.¹ Therefore, human virtue, which ‘makes a human being good, and its work good’,² is in accordance with human nature inasmuch as it harmonises with (*convenit*) reason, while vice is contrary to human nature inasmuch as it is contrary to the ordering activity of reason.³

Each of four core metaphysical, psychological, and epistemological concepts used here – order, nature, good, and reason – plays a central role in Aquinas’s thought in general, and in his practical thought in particular. And, as this passage illustrates, all are fundamentally interrelated. In my view an adequate understanding of the nature of practical reasoning in Aquinas is impossible apart from an understanding of these concepts and their relationships to each other. My objective in this chapter is to

¹ De Div Nom 4.

² Aristotle, NE 2.6.

³ IaIIae.71.2.

sketch a general account of the nature of practical thought in Aquinas, by way of an initial analysis of these concepts and their interrelationships.

2 Order

2.1 ‘Order’ in Aquinas’s thought

Order (*ordo*) is a central concept in Aquinas’s thought generally.⁴ The relation between order and reason is fundamental. To order (*ordinare*) is proper to reason;⁵ it is the task of a wise person to set in order, since wisdom is the highest perfection of reason, and the proper characteristic (*proprium*) of reason is to cognise the order of one thing to another.⁶ Only a being endowed with intellect may grasp the ordered relation and proportion of things to each other, as well as the ordered relation of those things to an end.⁷ Order, for Aquinas, ‘is the basic feature of thought’.⁸

2.2 Teleological Order

Aquinas repeatedly notes that there is a twofold order in things: (a) order of part to part – the co-ordination and interrelationship between things, e.g. as members of a group – ; and (b) order of parts to an end (*finis*) – e.g. between interrelated members of a group and the point or purpose which unites them.⁹ With this distinction, in In

⁴ See (Meyer 1944), 298; (Woznicki 1990). On hierarchical cosmological order in Aquinas, following especially Dionysius, see (Gilson 1956/1994), 190ff. On *ordo* in Augustine, see (Mahoney 1987), 72-77.

⁵ In NE 2.3.274.

⁶ In NE 1.1.1; cf. In Met 1.2.41-42; SCG 1.1, 3.77.

⁷ SCG 2.24.4.

⁸ (Aertson 1999), 235.

⁹ In NE 1.1.1; SCG 2.24.4.

NE, going beyond Aristotle's account, Aquinas introduces the study of ethics as a part of political science, and applies it to the social nature of human beings, i.e. as members of groups which exemplify both kinds of order.¹⁰

Although commenting upon Aristotle, Aquinas illustrates (a), the ordering of part to part, in a picture evocative of Augustine.¹¹ Aquinas draws parallels between order or harmony and peace and health: peace is to the state as health is to the human body – as health consists in the harmony of humours, so peace consists in the harmony of wills.¹² He applies this analogy to human action: as the harmony of health involves right proportion, so goodness in action requires a right ordering with respect to the particularising circumstances of action; like sickness, sin is a *disordered* condition – although not of body, but of soul.¹³

For Aquinas, (b), the ordering of things to their end, is prior.¹⁴ The end constitutes the organising principle that gives point to the ordering of part-to-part. Aquinas's notion of order, i.e., is fundamentally *teleological*. He understands God's providential ordering of the universe, e.g., as God's creative ordering of natures to an ultimate end,¹⁵ so that the good of the order of the universe constitutes the end to which the good of every particular part of the universe is ordered.¹⁶ As this description of cosmic ordering suggests more generally, 'good', 'order', and 'end', for Aquinas, are conceptually related.

¹⁰ (Finnis 1998), 23ff.

¹¹ Augustine defines peace in general as *tranquilitas ordinatis*, and peace among humans as ordered *concordia*, analogous to the 'peace' or health of a human body, which comprises the ordered proportion of its parts (*De Civitate Dei* 19.13).

¹² In NE 3.8.474. 'Harmony among parts' expresses (a), but the analogy expresses (b) as well, as Aquinas states that peace and health are the ends of political statecraft and medicine. Cf. SCG 3.6.3; 3.94.11

¹³ In NE 2.7.320; 3.15.546; 4.15.842.

¹⁴ IaIIae.5.6.

¹⁵ SCG 3.97; IaIIae.71.6 ad 3.

¹⁶ SCG 3.64.10; 3.90.4.

2.3 Order and Rule

Teleological ordering also conceptually underlies the notions of ‘rule’ (*regula*) and ‘measure’ (*mensura*), which feature importantly in Aquinas’s ethics, as well as his thought more generally.¹⁷ Although ‘rule’ in recent moral philosophy typically denotes an action-guiding linguistic formula (e.g. ‘Always tell the truth’), for Aquinas *regula* (typically synonymous with *mensura* in a kind of parallel formula, *regula vel mensura*),¹⁸ is conceptually broader. I identify in Aquinas three distinguishable, analogically-related significations of rule in relation to action.

First, RM1, rule may refer to an *end* itself, which serves as the standard by which to evaluate what is ordered to the end.¹⁹ Second, and more properly for Aquinas,²⁰ RM2, rule may signify a *right ordering* or *ordered relation* of what is directed to an end. What is ordered to an end is evaluated in terms of its ‘fit’ (*convenientia*) in relation to the end;²¹ what is ‘good’ is determined in relation to its ordering to its end.²² In this sense, rule is a kind of standard for evaluating or measuring the correctness of something with regard to its directedness to its end.²³ In the case of human action, such a standard may serve rational agents as a standard for direction (a ‘direction’ or ‘directive’), i.e. as action-guiding. This can, but need not, be expressed in an action-guiding linguistic formula,²⁴ for, according to Aquinas, e.g., the virtuous person herself constitutes a rule of human acts.²⁵

¹⁷ SCG 3.97.10.

¹⁸ I will typically use ‘rule’ to stand for ‘rule’, ‘measure’, or their combination.

¹⁹ IaIIae.Prol; 1.5; 19.9.

²⁰ QDM 2.1.

²¹ IaIIae.7.2.

²² In NE 1.1.14; QDW (1) 1, 13; IaIIae.64.2.

²³ IaIIae.76.1; IIaIIae.51.4.

²⁴ IIaIIae.57.1 ad 2.

²⁵ Ia.1.6 ad 3; In NE 3.10.494; 10.9.2075.

Aquinas understands his important notions of ‘right’ (*rectum*) and ‘ought’ or ‘due’ (*debitum*) within this teleological context, as being ‘measured by some rule’.²⁶ The normative notion, *debitum*, is broader than moral; it is grounded in Aquinas’s metaphysical teleology. *Debitum* refers to ‘a particular kind of relation which by nature ought to obtain, but which can be and often is broken.’²⁷ The relation which ‘ought to obtain’ with respect to *any* X is understood by Aquinas teleologically, in terms of order to X’s end or full actualisation.²⁸ Rule, however, more properly and narrowly applies to activities or operations, whether natural or rational – i.e. as identifying the ordered relation which ‘ought to obtain’ between activities and with respect to their end.²⁹ Moral evaluation, evaluation of specifically rational action according to the ‘rule of reason’ (*regula rationis*), is a subset of this application.³⁰

Third, RM3, in the case of end-directed activity, rule may refer to the *power* that orders to the end and its *activity* in doing so, e.g. ‘ruling’ or ‘regulating’. The instinctive, natural inclination (*appetitus*) of non-rational animals towards their end, following from their nature, is the rule of their proper operation directed towards their end.³¹ In rational action, however, the rule is *reason*, expressed normatively in Aquinas’s important ethical concept, *regula rationis*. What does this mean?

Aquinas explicates the activity of rational agents by appeal to the analogy of reasoning in medical art.³² As the standard of a non-rational animal’s action follows from its form, the standard of rightness of medical treatment is intrinsic to the end-

²⁶ IaIIae.21.1; 55.4 ad 4.

²⁷ (Gallagher 1994), 49. Fullness of being is of the very essence of good; for any X, there is a fullness of being due to it by virtue of its kind: IaIIae.18.1.

²⁸ Ia.4.1.

²⁹ Due order to end in action is measured by a rule: IaIIae.21.1.

³⁰ IaIIae.71.6; SCG 3.10.11. Most generally, privation of due order in subject or act is evil (*malum*); more specifically, defect of order to its end in activity in general is fault (*peccatum*); most specifically, privation of the ‘due rule of reason’ in deliberate action is sin (*culpa*): QDM 2.2; SCG 3.6.3, 7. Sin is always due to a departure from rational order to the general end of human life: IaIIae.21.2 ad 2.

³¹ QDM 2.1.

³² Ibid.

directed practice itself, following from its end. The end at which medicine aims is health: a normative concept which entails objective constituents or conditions for its fulfilment. ‘Health’ is the ‘form’ from which follows the rational ordering of what aims at it.³³ Right medical practice, then, conforms to what is rightly ordered to health – viz. to the rule of medical art. Aquinas argues that, in the case where a doctor deviates from the ‘rule of art’ and the patient happens to regain health, although the end is attained the doctor’s activity is still at fault because it deviates from the rule, the activity’s rationally ordered relation to the end.³⁴ Construed according to this analogy, *regula rationis* would seem best understood along the lines of RM2.

However, according to Aquinas, the standard of rightness in activity ordered to the end must itself be *determined rationally*, i.e. by correct reasoning.³⁵ Such a standard – as with medicine – is often flexible and qualified, and its determination requires careful thought, experience, and skill. Here Aquinas’s rational analogue to ‘natural inclination’ becomes evident. While the natural *appetitus* of a non-rational animal aims in a fixed, instinctive way at its end, the specific *appetitus* of a rational agent, S – ‘rational appetite’ – is expressed in S’s *participating* in teleologically ordering activity, rationally determining its end and ordering what it does towards it.³⁶ On Aquinas’s view, while there are independently specifiable, ordered relations between kinds of actions and ends at a general level, constituting objective, rational standards for evaluation and direction, they are themselves determined³⁷ by correct end-directed reasoning, which itself constitutes a standard of human action (i.e.

³³ In Met 7.6.1404-1410; SCG 3.97.12.

³⁴ QDM 2.1.

³⁵ QDV 1.2; Ia.79.9 ad 4; IIaIIae.57.1 ad 2.

³⁶ IaIIae.1.2; SCG 3.114.2.

³⁷ ‘Determined’ is ambiguous between ‘establishing’ and ‘identifying’. I explore and defend the use of this term below.

RM3). Aquinas holds that the latter is ineliminable, since at the particular level of practical determination, no more general, independently specifiable standard is sufficient to identify the correct action.³⁸ Personal, non-general-rule-determined judgement is required; right reasoning itself is the rule.

Aquinas speaks of reason as a rule of human action, in that it is its first principle³⁹ or primary starting point.⁴⁰ He accepts Aristotle's general teleological claim that the end at which X aims is the first principle of X's action, and he holds that the first principle in any genus is the rule for that genus. It follows that the *end* aimed at in human action is the first principle in the genus of human action, and thus its rule. This fits RM1. How, then, is *reason* said to be the first principle of human action? Is it its *end*? Yes, for Aquinas specifies the actualisation or end of human nature as 'acting according to reason'. In this important sense, reason *is* the end of human action, and thus its rule. Aquinas's more common specification of reason as rule of human action, however – *regula rationis* –, is that 'it is reason's role to order to the end'.⁴¹ Reason's role in teleologically ordering action is itself a rule. Reasoning serves as a rule of human action by *ruling* (*regulare*) – regulating, moderating, bringing order and direction into – it (RM3). Moreover, the ordered relations between act and end which reason identifies and establishes in so directing human action also constitute reason's rule (RM2).⁴²

³⁸ In NE 3.10.493-494.

³⁹ It is easy to misconceive what is a 'principle' (*principium*) in Aquinas, especially in ethical matters, since principle has come to signify more strictly a proposition, as in a rule or general moral truth. In Aquinas, however, *principium* is a broader concept, usually best translated as a 'starting point' or 'origin', as I will often render it. See In Met 5.1.751-762.

⁴⁰ IaIIae.90.1. Also IaIIae.1.1 ad 3; QDW(1) 13.

⁴¹ IaIIae.90.1.

⁴² QDW (1) 9; IaIIae.39.2 ad 1; 74.7; 75.2; SCG 3.1; 3.9.1; 3.139.3. Cf. the related distinction in English between a 12-inch 'rule' (RM2) and the 'rule' of a prince (i.e. his activity of ruling, RM3).

When Aquinas speaks of *regula rationis*, then, he typically signifies either RM2 and RM3, or perhaps both.⁴³ The distinction between them is not linguistic, so the ambiguity of reference in various contexts should be noted. While the significations are analogically related, the more fundamental signification of rule with respect to reason in human action is RM3:⁴⁴ it is reason's ordering power to the end that determines its rationally ordered relations. Rule as rational standard presupposes reason's standardising activity.

In summary, Aquinas's notion of rule is of a kind of standard of evaluation, regulation, or direction, which is expressed in a variety of ways, and which is grounded in his conception of teleological order. Indeed, when Aquinas speaks of rule in relation to human action, it is understood according to his notion of *ordo rationis*, to which I turn.⁴⁵

2.4 *Ordo Rationis*

Aquinas's most important notion of 'order' in practical matters, cited twice in IaIIae.71.2, is *ordo rationis*. Both *ordo* and *ratio* are multiply ambiguous. *Ordo* may refer to the act/activity of setting in order, establishing order, giving an order, etc., as well as to the ordered condition that results from such activity, e.g. to an 'ordered set'. Similarly *ratio* may refer to the power to engage in discursive thought (being able to reason), or to its exercise (reasoning to a conclusion).⁴⁶ Thus, *ordo rationis* may

⁴³ QDW (2) 2; IaIIae.21.1.

⁴⁴ QDW (1) 1, 13.

⁴⁵ SCG 3.10.17.

⁴⁶ Other terms are less ambiguous: *ratiocinatio* refers to an act of reasoning, and *ratiocinari* to the exercise of the reasoning power. Aquinas's emphasis on reason as a discursive process suggests that the exercise of the power is usually what he has in mind when he uses '*ratio*'.

signify OR1: the ordering activity of reason or reasoning – the establishing of order by rational means – or OR2: the rational order so established.

As with rule, the distinction between OR1 and OR2 is not linguistic, and the ambiguity of reference of ‘*ordo rationis*’ in many contexts should be noted. (I render *ordo rationis* variously as ‘ordering activity of reason’, ‘rational ordering’, ‘rational order’, or typically, for economy and deliberately retained ambiguity, ‘*ordo rationis*’.) The significations are analogically related; the more fundamental, core signification is OR1, the ordering activity of reason. What is rationally ordered presupposes and expresses ordering rationality.

2.5 Four orders of rational activity

In Aquinas’s general introduction to the nature of moral philosophy in In NE 1.1.1-3 he spells out four relationships between order and reason, which in turn differentiate four different kinds of sciences.

- (1) Order-1⁴⁷: the order reason considers (*considerat*) but does not establish (*facit*) in things – e.g. the natural order of things (*ordo rerum naturalium*). Order-1 rational activity is expressed in natural philosophy and metaphysics.
- (2) Order-2: the order reason establishes in its proper act (i.e. in reasoning itself) – e.g. the order of concepts among themselves, or the order of premises to conclusions. Order-2 rational activity is expressed in logic.
- (3) Order-3: the order reason establishes in the operations or activities of the will – e.g. voluntary acts. Order-3 rational activity is expressed in moral philosophy.

⁴⁷ ‘Order-1’, ‘order-2’, etc., is my terminology.

(4) Order-4: the order reason establishes in external matter – e.g. by making things.

Order-4 rational activity is expressed in art or technology.

The natural, logical, practical,⁴⁸ and technical orders are thus distinct modes of rational activity, for Aquinas. I am not concerned here with order-2 thought, and I consider order-1 and order-4 modes later. It is order-3 rational activity that expresses properly practical thought: the rational establishing of order in human action.

Practical thought, i.e., expresses *ordo rationis*, specifically OR1. Aquinas spells this out further in the immediate context.

What is proper to practical philosophy, according to Aquinas, is to examine human operations, in so far as they are ordered to one another and to an end⁴⁹ – i.e. those actions which proceed from a human's will according to *ordo rationis*.⁵⁰ The kind of human actions in view, then, are, first, *ordered by reason's activity*: they involve reason's bringing order into human activity – directing the relationships between the elements of human action, and doing so most fundamentally by directing them towards an end. Second, then, morally significant human action is, paradigmatically, *end-directed*, i.e. teleologically ordered. Third, this rational ordering concerns action which 'proceeds from a human's will'. We return to Aquinas's notion of will more fully below. Here he indicates both the voluntary character of this kind of human action, and the necessary relation between voluntariness and the end-directedness and rational ordering of action. Human action, properly speaking, is *self-determining*: human action is not fixedly determined to

⁴⁸ Aquinas's specific designation of *philosophia moralis* in the immediate context, where he is differentiating between different sciences, drops out later in favour of referring to the same matter in terms of practical reason more generally. For simplicity I will now construe it in the more general terms, i.e. 'practical thought' or 'practical philosophy'. There is a further distinction to be made within 'practical' (3.3.2).

⁴⁹ In NE 1.1.2.

⁵⁰ In NE 1.1.3.

particular ends, e.g. by natural instinct. Rather, it is *chosen* – i.e. ordered or determined rationally to an end by the human agent itself.⁵¹

Elsewhere Aquinas fills out this initial sketch. Acts of this kind Aquinas specifies as *properly human actions* – actions aimed at an end, which proceed from a deliberate will – as opposed to merely ‘acts of a human’.⁵² An example of the latter is blinking; an example of the former is winking – blinking ‘for the sake of’ sending a message constitutes an action ordered to an end.⁵³ Such actions are morally evaluable, thus *moral actions*: actions that fall into the order of things pertaining to moral philosophy.⁵⁴ By being rationally ordered to ends, actions enter the ‘moral order’.⁵⁵ Properly human, morally evaluable actions, then, are *rational actions*: for to act rationally, for Aquinas, is to act for an end: to act for the sake of that which one grasps as a good to pursue.⁵⁶

In sum, practical thought, on Aquinas’s conception, expresses order-3 rational activity: the rational establishing of order in self-determining, end-directed, rational – and therefore, moral and properly human – action.

2.6 Natural order and rational order

Order-1 and order-3 rational activities are distinct. Order-1 thinking, e.g. concerning metaphysics, involves examining but not establishing the natural order, while order-3 thinking involves bringing rational order into human action. Put differently, order-1 thinking is theoretical, and order-3 thinking is practical. If there are relationships

⁵¹ See IaIIae.1.2; 6.1. The human is naturally the principle of its own actions by virtue of its intellect and will: IaIIae.5.5sc.

⁵² IaIIae.1.1; SCG 3.2.

⁵³ (Gallagher 1994), 47.

⁵⁴ IaIIae.1.3. ‘Moral’ here is to be contrasted to ‘non-moral’, rather than ‘immoral’.

⁵⁵ IaIIae.2.5; 1.3 ad 3; 18.8; 18.10; 34.2 ad 1.

between theoretical reason and practical reason, metaphysics and ethics, or the natural and rational orders, Aquinas does not tell us in his schema of In NE 1.1.1-3.

Elsewhere in Aquinas, however, various significant relationships between them emerge. Here I consider more generally what he indicates concerning the relation between the order of natural things or natural order, and rational order or *ordo rationis*.

Three aspects distinguishing natural order and rational order are of particular interest to us here.⁵⁷ First, nature, for Aquinas, is not only ordered (as the product of God's *ordo rationis* in creating), but nature also may be said itself to 'order', in so far as it comprises the principles of the ordering of natural substances to their ends.⁵⁸ A nature is an origin of actuality or action, and thus implies an ordering to the action that expresses it.⁵⁹ Rational beings, such as humans, possess rational natures, and thus, for humans reason or rationality may be said to be a first principle of human action: human rationality is itself, as an expression of natural order, a fundamental starting point for, an ordering towards, human – i.e. rational – action. *Ordo rationis*, by contrast, typically denotes the rational directing or bringing of order into the realisation of human action, rather than expressing its origin. The relation of natural order to rational order, with respect to end-directed human action, is one of *principle to realisation* – of potentiality to actuality, of origin to execution, of 'root' to 'fruit'.⁶⁰

Second, relatedly, Aquinas explicates the distinction between natural order and rational order in terms of what is *determinate* and *determining*. Non-rational animals are inclined by nature to desire or pursue determinate kinds of objects, or to seek to realise determinate kinds of ends – i.e. to desire and seek what they do in a

⁵⁶ IaIIae.1.2; 19.3.

⁵⁷ For more on natural order, see (Woznicki 1990), 26ff.

⁵⁸ IaIIae.2.4; IaIIae.85.1.

⁵⁹ IaIIae.49.3 ad 3; SCG 3.7.7.

relatively stable, species-consistent way, with little variation.⁶¹ They possess a sensory appetite inclining them towards particular goods, i.e. objects they naturally apprehend to be good by virtue of their sensory powers. S, however, possessing intellect, is able to grasp universal natures of things, and hence to grasp particular objects and ends as falling under a *general* conception of good, in light of which S is able rationally to evaluate particular goods *as* particular instantiations or expressions of goodness.⁶² This inclination to goodness itself,⁶³ i.e. to goods considered as intelligible, and thus as instances of a general form of good, beyond an inclination simply to particular determinate goods, is what Aquinas calls *will*, or rational appetite.⁶⁴ It is ‘an appetitive response to features discerned by reason’:⁶⁵ the capacity to desire things for reasons, and thus to have *rational desires* as well as *natural desires*.⁶⁶ Rational appetite grounds S’s ability to compare putative goods or ends of action, and on that basis to ‘choose’ (*eligere*) – to determine for itself rationally – what to do.

The difference between the sensory appetite and the will is that . . . the sensory appetite is determinate to one particular thing, according to natural order; whereas the will, although determinate to one thing in general, according to natural order – sc. the good – , is indeterminate with respect to particular goods.⁶⁷

S’s *determination* of what is good to realise *in particular* belongs, then, not to natural order, but to rational order. S needs to determine its object – to seek its proper good – by reasoning.⁶⁸ In order to be able to act, Aquinas says, X must have a determinate particular end for the sake of which to act.⁶⁹ Whereas non-rational animals are

⁶⁰ IaIIae.85.2.

⁶¹ QDW (1) 6; Ia.18.3; IaIIae.13.2; SCG 3.85.5.

⁶² IaIIae.1.2 ad 3; SCG 3.113.4.

⁶³ . . . *inclinata in ipsum universale bonum . . . ipsam universalem rationem boni*: Ia.59.1.

⁶⁴ Ia.82.5.

⁶⁵ (Jordan 1991), 136.

⁶⁶ IaIIae.8.2 ad 3; 13.2; 30.3, ad 2.

⁶⁷ IaIIae.13.2.

⁶⁸ QDW (1) 6; 9.

⁶⁹ Ia18.3; IaIIae.1.2; 9.6 ad 3; SCG 3.2.8.

inclined to determinate particular ends of action by natural instinct, S must itself, by reasoning, determine the ends of its actions.⁷⁰ This provides us further initial insight into the relationship between *reason* and *end*. *Ordo rationis*'s role is not only to *direct* human action to an end, but also to *determine* the end to be pursued: ordering reason in Aquinas bridges the gap between reason's 'rule' as end and as ordering to end.

But is it not the case, as with non-rational natures, that the ends of human action are *given in nature*? Yes; according to Aquinas, it is given in the nature of S to be ordered to aim at good, generally conceived. We see in III that Aquinas also holds that there are general *kinds of goods* which are also given in nature, that substantively fill out the 'good in general' with respect to human beings – goods that are known and desired naturally by humans, by virtue of their human nature. As with other expressions of nature, these goods and the reasons for action which express them are also called 'first principles' by Aquinas – they constitute primary starting points ordering certain kinds of action for humans.

The relation between human ends as *given in nature* and as *determined by reason* is central to Aquinas's conception of practical thought. Since the nature of the human is itself rational, it embodies and expresses the very core relations between natural order and rational order in its action. By its nature S not only aims at good in general, but also must determine what is good to aim at in particular, by further reasoning. The kinds of substantive goods and reasons for action given in nature are *general*: they are determinate, but general, *kinds of goods and action*, and need to be further determined into realisation in *particular* actions by the determining reasoning of *ordo rationis*. The ends of human action, then, are both given in nature *and*

⁷⁰ Ia.18.3; IaIIae.1.2, ad 3; 19.3; SCG 3.3.7.

established by reasoning. Natural order comprises the starting points and potentialities for human action; the end to which natural order directs is determinate in general but indeterminate in its particular expressions. The particular determination of goods and ends and their ordered realisation in human action is the work of rational order. ‘The principles of reason are those which are according to nature. For reason, presupposing these things which are determined by nature, goes on to determine other things, according to what is suitable.’⁷¹

Third, relatedly, the relationship between natural order and rational order is expressed in Aquinas’s identifying the ‘moral order’ of morally evaluable action with rational order, as distinct from natural order. According to Aquinas, the manifold particularising features (*circumstantiae*) of any practical situation are specifically relevant to the rational determining of what is morally salient in the situation – i.e. the determining of what kind of situation it is, morally speaking, and of what particular action or response is called for. The open-ended ability of *ordo rationis* to conceive the situation in various ways, recognising and evaluating the various particularising circumstances and construing the situation in their light, reflects the determinate/determining relation between natural order and rational ordering we have examined.

As the species of natural things are constituted by their natural forms, so the species of moral actions are constituted by forms which are conceived by reason . . . Since nature is determinate to one thing . . . that which in natural things is accidental to something, cannot be taken as the difference constituting the species. But the process of reason is not determined to a single thing, but at any given point it is able to proceed further. And thus that which, in one action, is taken as a circumstance added to the object that determines the species of the action, may be taken again by *ordo rationis* as the principal condition of the object determining the species of the action.⁷²

⁷¹ IIaIIae.154.12.

⁷² IaIIae.18.10.

It is ordering rationality, for Aquinas, that determines the moral character of human action.

An unclarity has surfaced: does *ordo rationis* determine the moral status of action by *identifying* its moral status or by *establishing* it? The ambiguity in ‘rule’ and ‘*ordo rationis*’ are related to this question, as both may refer to the recognition of ordered relationships (RM2, OR2) or to the rational establishing of ordered relationships (RM3, OR1). The term ‘determination’ is compatible with both notions: it may ‘fix’ S’s identification of X, or it may ‘fix’ X into a determinate character, bringing into determinate reality or expression what did not previously exist. I use ‘determination’, in part, for that reason: it not only accurately expresses what I take to be Aquinas’s general conception of reasoning, i.e. the rational process of moving from general to particular – indeed Aquinas often uses *determinatio* in this way – , but it also retains the ambiguity or flexibility of reference just noted, which I believe also characterises Aquinas’s conception of practical thought.

This distinction is related to a divide between two conceptions of practical reason, as specified by Cullity and Gaut.⁷³ On a *recognitional* model of practical reason, the goodness of S’s object of choice, X, is constituted independently of S’s choosing X. The role of S’s practical reasoning is to recognise that X is good and to bring it about that S realises X in action. On a *constructivist* model of practical reason, X’s goodness depends upon S’s rational choice of X: ‘the good simply is constituted as the object of rational choice – what *makes* something good is that it is the object of rational choice.’⁷⁴ On a Kantian version of constructivism, the rationality of choosing X depends upon S’s choosing X by a process of universalising reasoning – i.e. reasoning of the right *form*. On a neo-Humean version, the rationality

⁷³ (Cullity and Gaut 1997), 4-6; also (Gaut 1997), 161-162.

of choosing X rests upon S's choosing X by a process of valid *instrumental reasoning* – concerning how to realise or obtain what S, independently of rational determination, desires.⁷⁵

Which model does Aquinas hold? The above citation (IaIIae.18.10), as well as Aquinas's specification of practical reason as order-3 rational activity, may suggest that he holds a constructivist view. On the other hand, Aquinas's emphasis upon basic human goods given in nature, and his recognition of moral acts specified *in kind* by their objects, suggests a recognitional view.

I understand Aquinas's conception of practical reason to include both models, with qualifications. With regard to what is *general*, Aquinas's account is clearly recognitional or 'identificational'. However he strongly emphasises – I avoid the term 'constructivist', as Aquinas would reject the view as characterised above – the ordering and regulating role of reason in *expressing* goodness in *particular* realisation in action, and so in bringing into actuality something 'new'. On Aquinas's view, the goodness of X for S is ultimately grounded in X's relation to S's specifically human nature, independently of S's particular rational determination to realise X in action, and independently of S's actual desire to realise X in a particular situation. The ultimate goodness of X, i.e., is grounded in its relation to the general substantive kinds of basic human goods which, along with the general reasons for action that express them, constitute normative givens for S, in virtue of S's nature. Since S's nature is rational, S both 'rationally determines' – rationally *identifies* – X's relation to human goodness, and 'rationally determines' – rationally establishes or *expresses* – the *particular realisation* of X in action. The particular determination of what S is to realise in action here and now is, to varying degrees underdetermined by the kinds of

⁷⁴ (Gaut 1997), 162.

goods given in nature, and its expression in action includes the rational ordering, not only of S's external acts, but also of S's passions and desires (II.3.3.3). Rational determination by *ordo rationis*, i.e., involves *both* S's identification of rationally ordered relationships between action, objects, and goods that are objective, holding independently of S's particular ordering activity itself, *and* S's particular ordering activity of bringing rational order into the realisation of human goodness in action.

A summary of the distinctions between natural order and rational order is given in Figure 1.

Relationships between the order of nature and the order of reason

Order of Nature	Order of Reason
Ordering to action	Ordering of action
Principle (starting point of action)	Realisation (end of action)
Potential	Actual
Determinate	Determining
General	Particular
Origin	Execution
Natural desires	Rational desires
Natural	Moral
'Root'	'Fruit'

Figure 1

⁷⁵ See (Cullity and Gaut 1997), 4-8.

3 Nature

Like ‘order’, ‘nature’ (*natura*) is central to Aquinas’s thought as a whole. Aquinas appeals frequently to considerations of nature in his practical philosophy; his law ethic, after all, is predominately a ‘natural law’ ethic. Here I explore more fully the role nature plays in Aquinas’s conception of practical thought, and how it relates to his other fundamental concepts.⁷⁶

3.1 Aquinas’s metaphysical teleology

According to Aquinas in IaIIae.71.2, ‘the nature of X is chiefly the form according to which X is assigned its species’. Aquinas is speaking here of X’s *substantial form*.⁷⁷

The substantial form of X (a natural substance) is its specific nature – its initial actuality (*actus*), that in virtue of which X is the kind of thing it is. X’s substantial form is the subject or ontological ground⁷⁸ of the set of essential properties or characteristics that constitute it in its species. These properties include the specifying powers and potentialities which constitute X’s abilities and capacities for performing the characteristic kind of activity essential to members of its species. In terms already introduced, the substantial form of X – X’s nature – is a first principle or starting point for the action of X.⁷⁹ X expresses its nature in its action – its nature is indicated by its characteristic operation.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ On ‘nature’ see (Lewis 1967), chpt. 2.

⁷⁷ Particularly helpful here are : (Irwin 1980); (Irwin 1980); (Irwin 1981); (MacDonald 1990); and (Stump and Kretzmann 1991).

⁷⁸ (MacDonald 1990), 329.

⁷⁹ SCG 3.7.7; Ia.76.1.

⁸⁰ Ia.76.1.

As indicated, X's substantial form is its initial or 'first actuality' – i.e. X's existing as an instance of a kind of thing. By virtue of its nature, however, X is in potentiality to its full actualisation; it is ordered to its 'second' or 'final' actuality, which is its completion or perfection (*perfectio*), its fulfilment or end (*finis*): viz. the exercise of its specific powers and actualisation of its specific potentialities.⁸¹ The full actualisation of X's nature is X's ultimate good,⁸² for its good and well-being consist in the full realisation of its characteristic activity.⁸³

A further element of Aquinas's metaphysics of nature follows from this account. By virtue of having a nature, and thus possessing certain specifying potentialities towards a determinate kind of actualisation, X possesses a fundamental, natural *appetitus* – inclination, impulse, aptitude, or desire – towards that actualisation.⁸⁴ Hence, Aquinas claims, all natural substances seek their own perfection or completeness. Each form gives rise to some inclination or tendency (*inclinatio*) or appetite (*appetitus*) towards its own completeness or full actuality.⁸⁵ X's natural appetite, that is, is an expression of X's nature functioning as a principle ordering X to action – i.e. to X's actualisation. For X to seek its own completeness, then, is for X to act according to (its) *nature*; for X's nature is constituted by its substantial form, and it is realised in its characteristic actualisation.

Thus, on Aquinas's account of nature, there is a conceptual link between a substance's nature; its powers and potentialities; its characteristic activity and the actualisation of its nature; its fundamental inclinations; and what it means for it to act 'according to nature'. Aquinas's account of nature is both metaphysical and

⁸¹ Ia.77.1; IaIIae.3.2.

⁸² In NE 1.1.12.

⁸³ In NE 1.10.119.

⁸⁴ *Appetitus* in Aquinas, according to Jordan, is 'a capacity for being actualised in a certain way'. (Jordan 1991), 134.

⁸⁵ Ia.80.1.

teleological, and his general metaphysical teleology underlies his more specific picture of human nature and action.

3.2 Human nature

In IaIIae.71.2 Aquinas explicitly ties his metaphysical conception of nature to his understanding of human nature, human good, and what it means for a human to act according to nature.

Now the human being is placed in its species through its rational soul. Thus, what is contrary to *ordo rationis* is, properly speaking, contrary to the nature of the human being, as human being, while that which is according to reason is in accordance with the nature of the human being, as human being.

Soul (*anima*), according to Aquinas, is the first principle of life in all living things, the ultimate intrinsic source and explanation of all of an animate substance's vital activities and mode of existence.⁸⁶ For any living X, then, X's soul constitutes X's substantial form. The human soul is a rational soul; its substantial form is 'rational animal'. The 'root' of rational action is the 'rational nature',⁸⁷ and the 'fruit' is the full actualisation of human nature in activity ordered by reason.

The human rational nature is the ontological ground of its specifying powers and potentialities. In addition to powers shared with other kinds of natures which appear at lower levels on the natural hierarchy, rational beings are specifically distinguished by their cognitive power of intellect and intellectual appetitive power of will ('rational appetite').⁸⁸

Humans possess two cognitive, information-gathering powers: sensory cognition and intellectual cognition, distinguished by the respective objects of their

⁸⁶ Ia.75.1. (Kretzmann 1993), 129.

⁸⁷ IaIIae.85.2.

⁸⁸ Ia.78.1.

cognition. *Sensory cognition* comprises the apprehension of sensory information as the activity of bodily sense organs, and is a power shared with non-rational, sensing animals. Senses, for Aquinas, are capacities or passive powers to undergo intentional change through the stimulus of external sense objects, producing cognition of the particular sense objects in the sensing subject.⁸⁹ Human external sensory powers are abilities to take in the forms of objects sensed; internal senses are abilities to retain and manipulate them, in order to cognise them.⁹⁰

Intellectual cognition is uniquely characteristic of rational nature; it comprises the apprehension of universal natures and concepts. Only creatures possessing intellect (*intellectus*) – intellective beings – are able to think abstract thoughts, beyond the particular power of sensory cognition.⁹¹ The distinctive ability of rational nature to apprehend what is general and universal makes it possible for S to think abstract thoughts about things, analyse them, compare them, acquire scientific knowledge about them, and act on their basis.

Humans also possess two appetitive or desiderative – world-engaging – powers, also distinguished by their objects. *Sensory appetite*, which humans share with other sensing beings, comprises a cluster of inclinations for the acquisition of or 'union' with sense objects, the capacity to be affected by or respond in a certain way to what is grasped in sensory cognition.⁹² The sensory appetite humans share with animals involves an inclination towards what is apprehended by the senses as *good*, i.e. as constituting or contributing towards the sensor's completeness or full actuality, as appropriate to its nature.⁹³ Aquinas divides the sensory appetite into two distinguishable kinds of sensory sub-appetite, again on the basis of their objects.

⁸⁹ Ia.78.3.

⁹⁰ Ia.78.3, 4.

⁹¹ Ia.12.4.

⁹² Ia.81.1.

Affective (concupiscible) appetite constitutes an inclination towards what is apprehended by the senses as good or beneficial (attraction), and away from what is apprehended as evil or harmful (repulsion), simply speaking. *Aggressive* (irascible) appetite constitutes an inclination towards overcoming difficulty or hindrance in attaining what is apprehended as good/avoiding evil.⁹⁴ *Passions* are discrete affections, or acts of sensory appetite, characterised by bodily changes, arising in response to apprehended goods, evils, or difficulties. Aquinas distinguishes these passions, according to the corresponding appetites, as *affective passions* (e.g. love, hate, desire) and *aggressive passions* (e.g. fear, hope).⁹⁵

What is uniquely characteristic of rational nature with respect to appetite is *rational appetite* or *will*. It depends upon the power of intellectual cognition: by virtue of its ability to grasp universal natures, S is drawn not only to particular objects apprehended as good by the sensory powers, but also to whatever is judged by the intellect to instantiate goodness, in light of a general conception of good.⁹⁶ Will seeks ‘intelligible good’ (*bonum intellectum*) – good as grasped or conceived by the intellect.⁹⁷ Aquinas specifies these two related powers – intellect and will – as the two specific principles or starting points of human action, given in human nature.⁹⁸

According to Aquinas, then, what specifically distinguishes human beings is the interactive expression of their fundamental specifying powers of intellect and will – which results in their capacity for rational management or control of sensory appetite, their ability to evaluate and judge between different and competing particular

⁹³ Ia.80.1, ad 2.

⁹⁴ Ia.81.2.

⁹⁵ IaIIae.22.1-2.

⁹⁶ Ia.80.2 ad 2.

⁹⁷ IaIIae.19.3.

⁹⁸ IaIIae.58.3

(apparent) goods in light of their overall purposes,⁹⁹ and, thus, their ability to seek their completion or actualisation *rationally*, by living according to reason. Such a capacity can only be ascribed to rational animals, for it is a function of the interaction between intellect and will.¹⁰⁰ The actualisation of human nature in action – human good – is realised in the ordering activity of reason.

3.3 Human action

3.3.1 Actualisation

It is often noted by interpreters of Aquinas's ethics that his account is based upon his analysis of human action.¹⁰¹ This can be misleading if one does not understand Aquinas's notion of 'action' in light of the metaphysical teleology we are exploring; for *actus*, *actio*, and *operatio* are broader concepts than the English 'act' or 'action'.

The basic signification of *actus* is 'actuality' or 'actualisation'.¹⁰² Its proper contrast is to 'potentiality' – not merely 'possibility', as in standard contemporary usage. What I have termed 'powers' here, are *potentiae* – faculties, abilities, capacities, but also potencies or potentialities. The contrast to a potentiality, of course, is an actuality; powers in Aquinas's metaphysical teleology are abilities or capacities to be actualised or realised to their full potential. A substantial form is a 'first actuality' – 'for to exist (*esse*) is the actuality (*actualitas*) of every thing'.¹⁰³ However, the completeness or perfection that each substance seeks is its own actuality ('second' or 'final' actuality), for 'everything is complete in so far as it is actual (*in*

⁹⁹ IaIIae.15.2; 30.3.

¹⁰⁰ IaIIae.1.1.

¹⁰¹ E.g. (McInerny 1993), 196; (McInerny 1992).

¹⁰² (Kretzmann 1993), 149 n.6.

actu)'.¹⁰⁴ 'Human action' in the broadest sense, then, is the full, complete actualisation of the specifically human powers, the full realisation of human nature in the actualisation of the human's rational powers.

Within this broad sense Aquinas utilises several increasingly specific notions of 'action'. I distinguish these in 3.3.2 – 3.3.3.

3.3.2 Activity

Within the broad category of 'activity' (activity is often, but not exclusively, identified as '*operatio*' in Aquinas) is included not only the properly human acts we have identified – the subject matter of order-3 thought – but also rational activity expressed in order-4 technical thinking or art. Aquinas stresses both what these two forms of thought share and how they differ. Most fundamentally, both involve expressions of *ordo rationis*: bringing order into human activity – into human acts themselves (order-3) or into external things, by creating or building (order-4) – in contrast to theoretically considering order that already exists. There are important similarities in the kinds of reasoning they employ, and Aquinas appeals frequently to analogies between them. Systematic consideration or general knowledge with regard to both order-3 and order-4 thinking – 'moral philosophy' and 'art', respectively – fall under the general category of 'practical science', broadly understood.¹⁰⁵ Human action and human art both involve 'practical' intellect,¹⁰⁶ which is ordered, not simply to truth, but to operation – to what can be made or done by virtue of our activity;¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Ia.5.1.

¹⁰⁴ Ia.5.1.

¹⁰⁵ In BDT 5.4.1.2.

¹⁰⁶ In NE 1.1.8.

¹⁰⁷ In BDT 5.1; Ia.1.4sc.

both concern contingent and variable matters,¹⁰⁸ and both utilise flexible forms of rational determination in their reasoning.¹⁰⁹

The distinction between order-3 and order-4 rational activities is often put by Aquinas, following Aristotle, as a distinction between *actio* and *factio*: between *doing* and *making*, as often rendered. 'Making' is rational activity aimed at producing something external to the agent itself, while 'doing' properly remains internal to the agent. Although it may have external effects, 'doing' expresses ordering rationality in operations of the will through deliberation, intention, understanding, willing, and so on.¹¹⁰ In a broad sense of *practicus*, for Aquinas, *both* doing and making count as 'practical'. In a narrower and more proper sense, however, Aquinas speaks solely of order-3 thinking as specifically 'practical',¹¹¹ and therefore specifically morally evaluable.¹¹² I follow Aquinas in speaking primarily of 'practical' in reference to order-3-type action and rational activity.

As with Aquinas's narrower sense of 'practical', I am concerned here primarily with *actio* in contrast to *factio*. It might seem that we have now reached a sufficiently precise notion of 'action'; but this is not the case. Distinguishing between *actio* and *factio* as 'doing' and 'making', although helpful in some respects, is inadequate. Let us call the '*actio*' we have identified: '*actio* (a)'. Within *actio* (a) Aquinas makes a still further distinction, between two subsidiary kinds of actualisation. The first Aquinas calls '*actio*' as well – now his most specific use of the term. Let us distinguish this as '*actio* (b)'. This kind of actualisation I shall call

¹⁰⁸ In NE 6.3.1150-1152.

¹⁰⁹ In NE 1.2.24; 1.3.32; 1.3.35.

¹¹⁰ In NE 1.1.13; 1.12.144; 6.2.1135-1136; 6.3.1151; 6.4.1167; IaIIae.3.2 ad 3.

¹¹¹ Note that 'practice' and, derivatively, 'practical', in the Aristotelian tradition Aquinas inherits, is etymologically coextensive with 'action', as Aristotle's Greek term for action is *praxis*. Aristotle also has a range of uses of *praxis*, which are not always easy to distinguish. It refers to: (1) most broadly, all broadly intentional actions; (2) rational action based on choice; and (3) most narrowly, rational action which is its own end. See Irwin's discussion in (Aristotle 1985), 385.

¹¹² SCG 3.10.11.

direct or *active* action; it is indeed a kind of ‘doing’, affecting or effecting something. and it corresponds to the current notion of ‘intentional human action’. The second kind of actualisation distinguished under *actio* (a), however, Aquinas refers to, not as ‘*actio*’ at all, but rather as ‘*passio*’: passion. *Passio* also involves the actualisation of a human power, but of a ‘passive’ power, i.e. a power whose actualisation or ‘act’ is *to be affected* in a certain way. Thus I shall call this kind of action an *indirect* or *passive* action; not a kind of ‘doing’, but a kind of ‘being’ or of ‘being affected’ by something. Both direct and indirect actions constitute properly human *actions*, for Aquinas. It is in this sense that Aquinas, when being most specific, speaks of human action as comprising both ‘actions’ and ‘passions’.¹¹³

There are, then, four discernible levels of distinction between kinds of action in Aquinas, from least to most specific. (See figure 2.)

¹¹³ IaIIae.1.3; 51.2.

Kinds of Action in Aquinas

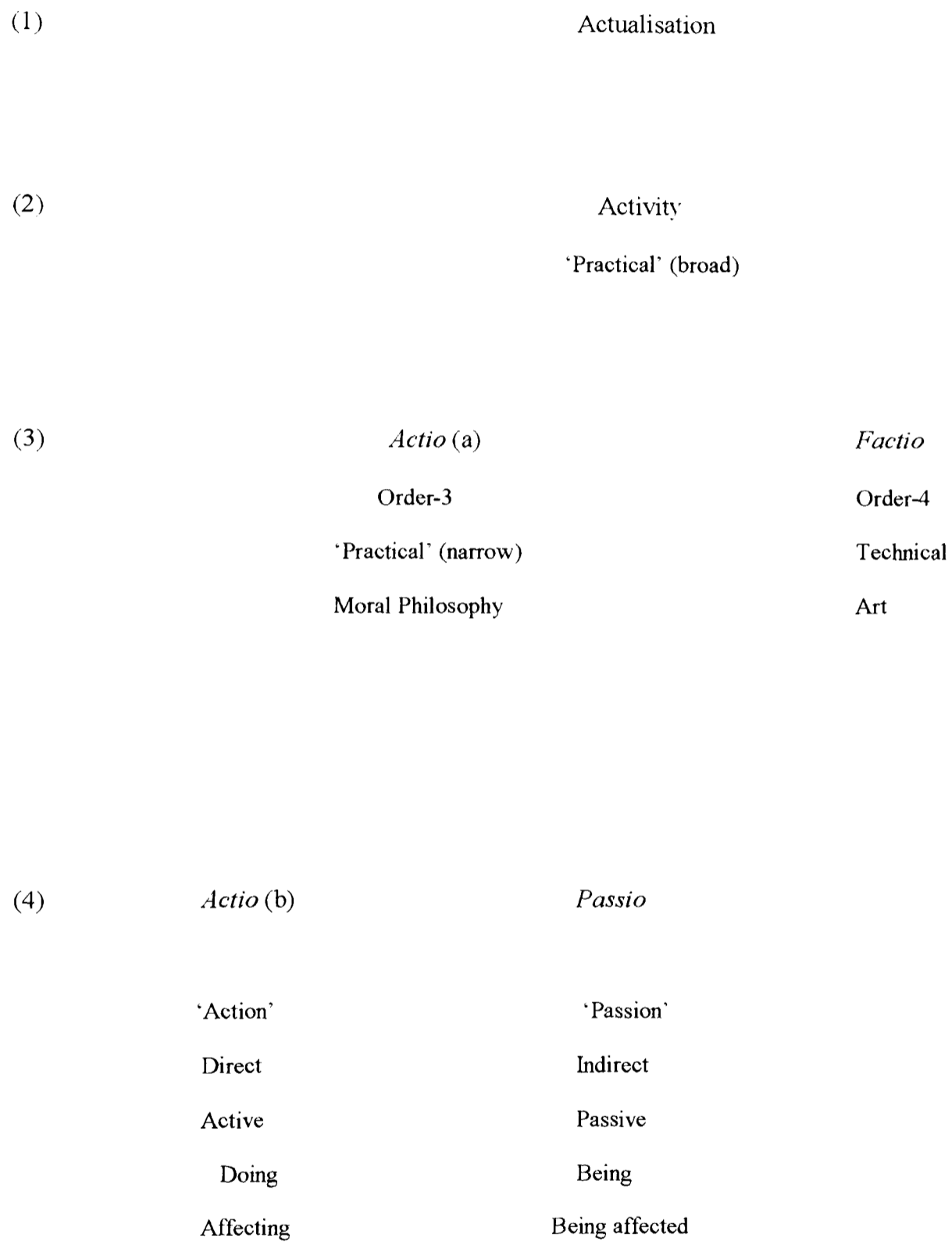


Figure 2

The most important distinction for our purposes here is the identification of *properly human action*. It is action corresponding to *actio* (a), the left disjunct of level (3), and what falls under it, including, more specifically, both action and passion, or direct and indirect action. Most typically when Aquinas speaks of human *actus* or *actio*, he has this inclusive notion in mind. When being more specific, he makes the further distinction between *actio* (b) and *passio* as two subordinate forms of properly human action. Adding to the confusion, Aquinas sometimes refers to human action solely in terms of ‘direct’ human action, and he may be easily taken to think that only direct human action counts as properly human action. The broader context of his account, however, makes it clear that indirect action is also included. This is consistent with Aquinas’s analogical methodology – he often treats core conceptions or central cases of concepts as paradigmatic, or as standing for the less central cases.¹¹⁴ Here, *direct human action* is the central case of human action, since reason’s role in ordering it is direct and immediate; *indirect human action*, where reason’s ordering role is indirect, is human action in a more extended sense.¹¹⁵

3.3.3 Direct and indirect action

Aquinas commences his ethical study in ST IIa with an analysis of end-directed, rational action – properly human acts –, and for the first 21 questions simply focuses on direct human action. Such action is ‘active’ – the actualisation or perfection of the human’s active powers, i.e. its ability to affect something, due to a principle internal to the agent.¹¹⁶ Indirect human action, however, is ‘passive’ – the actualisation of the

¹¹⁴ On analogy in Aquinas, see (McInerny 1961); (Klubertanz 1960).

¹¹⁵ Direct human action is proper to humans alone, while indirect human action is shared with non-rational animals. IaIIae.6.Prol.

¹¹⁶ IaIIae.6.1.

human's passive powers, i.e. its ability to be affected by something, due to a principle external to the agent.¹¹⁷

Direct human action is paradigmatic voluntary, rational action. A fully voluntary act, according to Aquinas, has three conditions: (i) its origin is internal to S; (ii) it is performed for the sake of an end (*propter finem*) that is grasped by S;¹¹⁸ and (iii) the end is grasped by S as an end (*sub cognosciter ratio finis*), and what is done for the sake of the end is grasped in terms of its ordered relationship to the end (*proportio actus ad finem*).¹¹⁹ The actions of non-rational animals may satisfy (i) and (ii), e.g. when Fido sees food in the corner of the kitchen and runs to get it. Such acts are 'incompletely' voluntary, according to Aquinas. Only agents who possess general concepts, who are able to see an aim as some sort of good, and who are able to see themselves as an agent engaged in action – i.e. only agents that are able to act for reasons and to have the thought that they are doing so – may express fully voluntary, self-determining action.¹²⁰ While all animals act for the sake of ends, only rational animals are able to *determine* their ends rationally, 'to move themselves in respect to an end which they determine or propose (*praestituunt*) to themselves'.¹²¹ Unlike Fido, Phil may not only see a piece of chocolate in the kitchen as a good and an end of action, but he may also evaluate his eating it in light of what he knows about chocolate's properties of keeping one awake (caffeine) or being fattening (calories), and in light of his desire to get a good night's sleep, or his objective to lose weight. A rational agent is able to formulate general conceptions of what is good, establish

¹¹⁷ IaIIae.22.1.

¹¹⁸ IaIIae.6.1.

¹¹⁹ IaIIae.6.2.

¹²⁰ (Kenny 1993), 81-83; (King 1999), 125 n.46.

¹²¹ Ia.18.3.

general plans and overall purposes, and understand and evaluate its actions in light of them.¹²²

Direct human action may be expressed in external acts or effects which require bodily movements such as speaking or walking (*actus imperati*), or in acts unmediated by external movement, such as choosing and deliberating (*actus elicit*).¹²³ Aquinas gives a highly articulated psychological account of the stages of human action in IaIIae.11-17, utilising the theoretical background not only of Aristotle's psychology but also of a rich history of psychological discussion in earlier Christian thinkers.¹²⁴ Properly human action, according to Aquinas, is a function of interaction between intellect or reason and will, and his psychological account of human action specifies progressive but interrelated stages, each involving a combined reason/will component, expressing both reason's ordering and directiveness and will's appetitive response to rational direction.¹²⁵

Direct human action fits what we have seen about 'properly human action', and is possible only for rational agents. *Indirect human action*, however, shares common ground with non-rational animals. Passions are actualisations of the passive power of sensory appetite, or the cluster of passive *potentiae* which constitute it.¹²⁶ Passions are discrete affections or episodes of the capacity to be affected or to respond affectively in certain ways to objects grasped in sensory cognition. Different kinds of response are specified by their objects, thus 'fear' constitutes a passional response to a fearful object, such as a monster. Passions are complex psycho-physiological states; fear of a monster is typically expressed in physiological states such as trembling and

¹²² Ia.83.1.

¹²³ IaIIae.11-17. (Kenny 1993), 83ff.

¹²⁴ (Westberg 1994), 126-129.

¹²⁵ (Westberg 1994), 130ff. For a different account, see (Donagan 1982).

¹²⁶ On passions in Aquinas see (Jordan 1986); (King 1999); (Roberts 1992).

‘contraction of heat and vital spirits’.¹²⁷ Like sensory perception, however, passions are ‘objectual’ – they are responses to perceived objects, which constitute the ‘principles’ of their actualisation – , and they are ‘intentional’ – they are states of the sensory appetite directed towards their object (e.g. fear *of* the monster), which, unlike perception, may be present or absent, real or imagined.¹²⁸ Thus, passions constitute ‘objectual intentional states’ of the sensory appetite:¹²⁹ affective psycho-physiological responses to the cognised environment, ways of ‘taking’ or perceiving the world.¹³⁰

Non-rational animals also naturally ‘take’ objects of sensory cognition as good or bad (*sub ratione boni vel mali*), i.e. as suitable or not (*convenientis vel nocivi*), and thus are motivated to pursuit or avoidance.¹³¹ How, then, can the actualisation of human passion be considered properly human action, which is rationally ordered, end-directed, and self-determining? How can human passion constitute morally evaluable, rational action?

Human passion, as distinct from related animal passion, is ‘cognitively penetrable’:¹³² it can be rationally ordered. In so far as passions are able to be shaped and directed by *ordo rationis*, they are voluntary and morally evaluable.¹³³ Just as some kinds of direct human actions are specified as *moral kinds of acts*, according to their rationally ordered relations to kinds of objects, so some kinds of passions constitute *moral kinds of passions*, expressing specific rationally ordered relations to kinds of objects. Shame, for example, is ‘base fear’; and envy is sorrow for another’s

¹²⁷ IaIIae.44.1.

¹²⁸ I follow (King 1999), 104-109 here.

¹²⁹ (King 1999), 105-106.

¹³⁰ (King 1999), 106: ‘the passions are a kind of “appetitive perception”.’

¹³¹ In II Sent. 24.2.1.2; Ia.78.4; 81.3.

¹³² (King 1999), 126ff.

¹³³ IaIIae.24.3.

good – both are morally bad kinds of affective response to morally significant kinds of situational object.¹³⁴

Passions may be ordered by reason in various ways: Bill may be affected by lust for a beautiful woman, but choose not to act upon it,¹³⁵ and Ann may shape her passionate response of fear of a monster by general considerations of reason, e.g. by thinking about the fact that there are no monsters except in fairy tales.¹³⁶ Moreover, passions may be teleologically ordered by reason: ‘Human acts, whether they be considered as actions or passions, receive their species from the end [to which they are directed]. For human actions can be considered in both ways, since the human moves itself and is moved by itself.’¹³⁷ Since passions as such obtain their species from their (external) object, Aquinas must refer in this statement to a *rational shaping of appetitive response that is end-directed* – i.e. that one can rationally choose to shape one’s passions according to reason. This rational action is indirect, however: whereas one can directly choose to speak, one cannot directly choose to be affected in a particular case, e.g. to feel joy over the promotion of one’s colleague. However, one can *indirectly* choose to be affected, by choosing to act (directly) in certain ways (e.g. to congratulate the colleague, speak well of him to others), so as to establish patterns of acting in a certain way, and thus to cultivate, by habituation, the appetitive, motivational conditions in one’s character which will be expressed in proper affective responses in the future.¹³⁸ The actions one chooses to do *now* are direct, end-directed actions – Aquinas’s paradigm – , which produce indirect action in future.

When speaking of reason’s ordering power with regard to passions, Aquinas emphasises Aristotle’s analogy of ‘political rule’. Reason ‘commands’ or ‘orders’ the

¹³⁴ IaIIae.24.4.

¹³⁵ IaIIae.17.7 ad 1; 10.3 ad 3; 15.2 ad 3.

¹³⁶ Ia.81.3.

¹³⁷ IaIIae.21.3.

sensory appetite, not as master to slave, but as political authority to free subject – i.e. by giving rational direction.¹³⁹ Here we see an important expression of RM3 – *regula rationis* as a kind of regulating power.

Passions constitute properly human actions, then, inasmuch as S's appetitive powers are rationally ordered, shaped by *regula rationis*, and thus express rationally ordered affective responses to the situations S encounters. Reason is the first principle of human acts, both action and passion,¹⁴⁰ and the complete actualisation of human nature – the human good – involves the rational ordering of both. 'Acting according to reason', according to Aquinas, is bringing *ordo rationis* into both action and passion.

If we simply name as 'passions' all of the movements of the sensory appetite, then it belongs to the completion of the human good that the human passions be moderated (*moderatae*) by reasoning. For since the good of the human consists in reason as its root, that good will be all the more complete, as it is able to extend to the range of things that are suitable to the human.¹⁴¹

On Aquinas's view, moreover, acting according to reason, for the human being, is acting according to *nature*.¹⁴² We are now able to understand this in terms of Aquinas's metaphysical-teleological account of human nature as rational.

As we have seen, Aquinas seldom makes the various distinctions between direct and indirect human action explicit. Properly human action includes both action and passion, but Aquinas often simply speaks of paradigmatic direct human action as representing the whole, as a kind of shorthand. However in his account of indirect human action Aquinas recognises that the right response to a practical situation may not be direct action, i.e. to do something, but rather to be affected in a certain way (to feel sympathy for a bereaved spouse, to desire to help a poor person). This insight –

¹³⁸ See (Kosman 1980).

¹³⁹ Ia.81.3 ad 2.

¹⁴⁰ IaIIae.58.2.

¹⁴¹ IaIIae.24.3

emphasised in a virtue conception of ethics – is embedded in Aquinas’s broader understanding of action. When I speak of ‘action’ in what follows, these distinctions should be recalled.

4 Good

4.1 ‘Good’ in Aquinas’s thought

Like order and nature, ‘good’ and ‘goodness’ (*bonum, bonitas*) are central concepts in Aquinas’s thought, not only in his ethics, but more generally.¹⁴³ We have already seen various important connections between good, order, and nature, and we have developed much of the conceptual context needed to understand Aquinas’s notion of good. In this section I briefly examine a few additional features of goodness in Aquinas in order to fill out the picture.

Like other medieval philosophers, including Augustine, Boethius, Albertus Magnus, and others,¹⁴⁴ Aquinas has an account of the metaphysics of goodness that underlies his account of good in ethics. According to MacDonald, any ‘metaphysics of goodness, for instance, at least suggests a metaphysical foundation for ethics, and in fact philosophers such as Aquinas present their moral philosophy as founded on their account of goodness in general.’¹⁴⁵ Such an interpretation raises the worry that Aquinas conflates metaphysics and ethics, not sufficiently distinguishing between his own categories of order-1 and order-3 rational activity. Still, the conclusion is inescapable that Aquinas’s understanding of goodness is an expression of his

¹⁴² IaIIae.18.5 ad 1; 21.1; 51.1 ad 1; 91.2 ad 3; SCG 3.139.3.

¹⁴³ On good in Aristotle see (Ackrill 1972); (MacDonald 1989); (White 1981). On good in Aquinas see (Staley 1995); (MacDonald 1992); (Kretzmann 1983);

¹⁴⁴ See (MacDonald 1991).

metaphysical teleology and cannot be understood apart from it.¹⁴⁶ Before turning in IIa to an account of the goodness of human action, Aquinas in ST Ia gives a metaphysical account of human nature and goodness, which is an expression of his general metaphysical teleology. Long before he explicates *human* goodness – indeed even before he gives a natural theological account of God’s goodness – Aquinas gives an account of the metaphysics of goodness (Ia.5). Aquinas’s account of human goodness in ST is based upon his account of the metaphysics of goodness, which is an aspect of his general metaphysical teleology. Further, Aquinas’s account of the goodness of human action in IIa appeals both to his metaphysical teleology of human nature and to his metaphysics of goodness in general.¹⁴⁷ This picture may seem theoreticalist, but Aquinas’s metaphysics of goodness can be seen to be compatible with a conception of practical thinking as order-3 rational activity, when we distinguish between general and particular conceptual levels in practical thought, understand Aquinas’s conception of practical reasoning as the rational determination of general good into particular expression in action.

4.2 The metaphysics of goodness

In ST Ia.5 Aquinas gives a general account of goodness, or *bonum in communi*.¹⁴⁸ By this he means to address goodness as a ‘transcendental’ property. The *transcendentia* are properties that belong to every being, transcending the ten Aristotelian categories of substance, relations, qualities, etc.¹⁴⁹ Transcendentals include good, being, one, and true: they are *communia* – they go through all the categories; they are universal

¹⁴⁵ (MacDonald 1991), 19.

¹⁴⁶ ‘[F]or Thomas, the good is above all a metaphysical notion.’ (Gallagher 1994), 37.

¹⁴⁷ IaIIae.18 and 19.

¹⁴⁸ Similar accounts in QDM 1.1; QDV 21.1, 2.

properties of being, rather than ideal subsisting realities.¹⁵⁰ Transcendentals are the proper consideration of metaphysics, which studies being as such.¹⁵¹

In Ia.5.1 Aquinas considers the question, inherited from Boethius and the tradition, whether being and good are convertible. His answer, to adopt Fregean terms, is that they are the same in reference (*secundum rem*), but differ in sense or concept (*secundum rationem*).¹⁵² Aquinas defends this claim in four steps. First, he considers the concept of good (*ratio boni*), an important term in Aquinas's thought, since he holds that whatever a human desires, it desires under the conception of it as good (*sub ratione boni*).¹⁵³ Aquinas says here that *ratio boni* consists in this, that good is something desirable (*appetibile*). He defends this by appeal to the aphorism, well-known to medievals,¹⁵⁴ but most familiar to us as what Aquinas considers to be Aristotle's definition of good in NE 1: *bonum est quod omnia appetunt* – good is 'that which all things desire (to which all things are inclined, what each thing seeks or tends towards)'.¹⁵⁵

Aquinas appeals to this definition frequently and it needs to be clarified. Does Aquinas mean to define good as: 'what all things desire' – so that we may identify what human good is empirically, by investigation of what in fact all or most humans desire? This is the view of many welfare economists, who identify good with what is desirable, and then identify what is *desirable* with what is actually *desired*.

This is not Aquinas's view, as he makes clear in In NE 1, where he specifically comments on Aristotle's definition. In this definition, according to

¹⁴⁹ See articles in (MacDonald 1991). On categories, see QDV 21.1.

¹⁵⁰ (Aertsen 1991), 57. I have been greatly helped in this section by (Aertsen 1991) and (Aertson 1999). See also (Gallagher 1994), (Jenkins 1994).

¹⁵¹ In *Met*, Prol.

¹⁵² (Stump and Kretzmann 1991), 99.

¹⁵³ IaIIae.1.6; cf. Ia.82.2 ad 1.

¹⁵⁴ See [MacDonald, 1991 #1118], 21 n.29.

¹⁵⁵ QDM 2.1; QDV 21.1; SCG 3.3.3.

Aquinas, Aristotle appeals to the ‘effect’ of good, speaking of good as a *primum* or first conception of human understanding (i.e. as a transcendental).¹⁵⁶ The *prima* cannot be understood by or reduced to anything prior or more general, but only defined *per posteriora*, by their proper effects. The nature of good is manifested through the *effect* of desirability. Thus X is not good, in Aquinas’s conception, because it is desired; rather it is desired because it is conceived of as good. Thus all practical reasoning presupposes good: ‘the mind must think the known under the intelligibility of the good, for it is only as an object of tendency and as a possible object of action that what is to be through practical reason has any reality at all.’¹⁵⁷ The concept of good, then, consists in something’s being desirable. Put differently, what is seen as good is seen as an *end* or aim,¹⁵⁸ i.e. as what is sought in activity,¹⁵⁹ as having the nature of a final cause,¹⁶⁰ or as being a terminus for appetite or desire.¹⁶¹

Second, in Ia.5.1, Aquinas identifies ‘desirable’ with ‘complete’ (*perfectum*): X is desirable in so far as it is complete, for everything seeks its own completion.¹⁶² This we have already seen, and so we may anticipate the third step of Aquinas’s argument: X is complete in so far as it is actual (*in actu*). Thus actuality and goodness are intrinsically connected: X is good in so far as it is a being (*ens*), for to be (*esse*) is the *actualitas* of everything. Thus, fourth, good and being are identical in reference, but differ in concept, as ‘good’ adds the *ratio* of ‘desirability’ that ‘being’ does not express.

Aquinas goes on to distinguish between ‘being *simpliciter*’ and ‘good *simpliciter*’. ‘Being’ *simpliciter*, unqualified being, signifies the substantial being of

¹⁵⁶ In NE 1.1.9. See QDP 9.7.6; (Aertsen 1991), 238.

¹⁵⁷ (Grisez 1969), 353.

¹⁵⁸ Ia.5.2 ad 1; 5.4 ad 1.

¹⁵⁹ In NE 1.9.105.

¹⁶⁰ In NE 1.2.30.

¹⁶¹ Ia.5.6; SCG 3.3.3.

X, contrasted to X's being potential. Actuality added to X's existence in the form of accidental properties qualifying X ('to be black') adds to X 'being in a certain respect' (*ens secundum quid*). Unqualified good, however, 'good' *simpliciter*, expresses completion or finality (*rationem ultimi*). X is good relatively – in a certain respect – by virtue of its substantial being, but X is good *simpliciter* when it is fully actualised.¹⁶³

This picture fills out what we have seen of Aquinas's metaphysical teleology. There are intrinsic connections between the good of X and the nature of X, *appetitus*, end, completion, and the actualisation of X's specifying capacities in action. X's ultimate good is X's second actuality or full completion.¹⁶⁴ What 'everything desires', then, is its full completion or full actualisation; it is the end at which it naturally aims.¹⁶⁵ Subsidiary ends at which X aims are seen by X as constituents of or means to X's full actualisation. Thus Aquinas summarises good as principally and in itself (*per se*) consisting in completion and actuality.¹⁶⁶

The conceptual backdrop of Aquinas's metaphysical teleology makes intelligible Aquinas's stress on the intrinsic connection between good and nature. The full actualisation of X's nature is X's ultimate good;¹⁶⁷ its good and well-being consists in the full realisation of its characteristic activity.¹⁶⁸ Thus understood, what is good is what is according to nature.¹⁶⁹ What is good for X is what is *conveniens* or suitable to X's nature.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, what X *apprehends* as good is some particular

¹⁶² SCG 3.16.1-3.

¹⁶³ Ia.5.1 ad 1; SCG 3.20.5, 7.

¹⁶⁴ Ia.5.1 ad 2.

¹⁶⁵ In NE 1.1.12; QDW (1) 21.2.

¹⁶⁶ Ia.48.5. Completeness belongs to the *ratio* of good: IaIIae.49.1.

¹⁶⁷ In NE 1.1.12.

¹⁶⁸ In NE 1.10.119; SCG 3.22.1.

¹⁶⁹ IaIIae.18.5 ad 1; 71.1.

¹⁷⁰ In II Sent. 39.2.1; SCG 3.7.5.

good that it apprehends *as* proportionate or suitably related to its nature,¹⁷¹ i.e. as what is deeply natural to it (*sibi connaturale*).¹⁷² What X apprehends as suitable to its nature, of course, may not be so actually: Aquinas recognises the distinction between real and apparent goods, and that X's natural desires may be distorted, e.g. by passion.¹⁷³ There are goods given in nature that are naturally desired as suitable to the nature of X – natural desires for natural goods –,¹⁷⁴ but desires for them may be distorted by disordered appetite (*cupiditas*) in the case of rational agents who, by virtue of their open-ended rational appetite, develop 'rational' desires (desires arising from reasoning, e.g. about what is good or attractive) which go beyond what is given in nature, and are incompatible with and distortive of the desires that are natural.¹⁷⁵ In this case, because of the disorder of one's nature, what one grasps as *conveniens* to one's nature is mistaken.¹⁷⁶

4.3 Human good

Aquinas's conception of human good, then, is a specific expression of his general picture. Human goodness is specified by the human substantial form of rationality. Human goodness – being in accord with nature – is being in accord with ordering rationality. What is in accord with human nature harmonises with (*convenit*) *ordo rationis*.¹⁷⁷ It is, in its full expression, the complete actualisation of human nature in

¹⁷¹ Ia.54.1; IaIIae.8.1; 9.3; 19.10; 51.1; SCG 3.3.2.

¹⁷² IaIIae.27.1. What one desires, one desires qua good or *conveniens*: Ia.80.1 ad 2.

¹⁷³ IaIIae.6.4 ad 3; 10.3.

¹⁷⁴ IaIIae.10.1, ad 3.

¹⁷⁵ IaIIae.30.3.

¹⁷⁶ QDM 16.2.

¹⁷⁷ IaIIae.71.2.

living rationally, expressing ordering rationality in action and passion.¹⁷⁸ *Ordo rationis*, indeed, is the human good.¹⁷⁹

Aquinas identifies the basic human good in some places as *bonum rationis*, or the good of ‘reasonableness’,¹⁸⁰ which identifies the natural inclination of human beings to ‘act according to reason’ or act rationally.¹⁸¹ *Bonum rationis* identifies that which is moderated or directed by reason, including the putting of order into action and passion.¹⁸² *Bonum rationis* is itself an end of action – it is ‘fine’ or honourable (*honestum*), and desired for its own sake.¹⁸³ Here we find insight into the relation between reason and end in human action: reason understood as *bonum rationis* is the end or aim of human action: living rationally, expressing reason in action and passion. Given Aquinas’s metaphysical teleology it is clear that living rationally in this way is not a formal matter of universalising reasoning, or simply respecting logical validity in one’s argument forms. Rather it is a substantive matter of achieving a rational balance of human goodness in appropriate particular actional and passionate expression.¹⁸⁴

4.4 Eudaimonism

The dominant conception of ethics in classical and medieval thought is eudaimonistic. Like Aristotle and Augustine, Aquinas conceives of ethics as most fundamentally a ‘morality of happiness’,¹⁸⁵ and he devotes the initial five questions of his account of

¹⁷⁸ IaIIae.58.2.

¹⁷⁹ SCG 3.9.1.

¹⁸⁰ Finnis’ term.

¹⁸¹ IaIIae.94.3. See In NE 2.3.272; 2.10.367; 3.18.587; IaIIae.61.3; 63.2; 65.2; 67.1; SCG 3.139.3.

¹⁸² IaIIae.59.4; 61.2.

¹⁸³ In NE 1.5.58.

¹⁸⁴ See (Finnis 1998), 83-84.

¹⁸⁵ (Annas 1993). (Davies 1992) aptly entitles his chapter on Aquinas’s ethics ‘How to be Happy’. On *eudaimonia* in Aristotle see (Roche 1992); (Devereux 1981); (Hardie 1965); (Hardie 1980); (Kenny

ethics in ST (IIa) to explicating and defending the claim that rational action is ultimately grounded in S's conception of 'happiness' (*beatitudo, felicitas*). Then, in the rest of IIa, he spells out substantively what 'happiness' consists in.

We are now able to see what this position amounts to for Aquinas. Aquinas identifies the *ultimate end* of human action as what we have already seen to be the naturally given aim of human action: the full actualisation of human goodness, the second actuality of human nature, or its final completion.¹⁸⁶ This, for Aquinas, is what 'happiness' signifies. In light of Aquinas's broader account, and given the thin connotation of 'happiness' in current usage, '*felicitas*' or '*beatitudo*' are better translated as 'well-being' or 'flourishing'. I shall use 'flourishing'.¹⁸⁷

5 Reason

Finally, I turn to reason (*ratio*) in Aquinas. We have already seen numerous interrelationships between reason, order, nature, and good in his thought; here I briefly locate the practical dimension of this central concept within its broader context.

1977); (Kenny 1991); (Irwin 1985); (Irwin 1986); (Irwin 1991); (Irwin 1994); (Heinaman 1988); (Heinaman 1993); [Kirwin, 1967 #1279]; (McDowell 1980); (Nagel 1972); (Williams 1962). On Aquinas and Aristotle see (Adams 1991).

¹⁸⁶ IaIIae.2.3; 3.2, ad 4; SCG 3.97.7.

¹⁸⁷ As commonly practiced by contemporary Aristotle scholars (see n.135). Aquinas distinguishes between complete and incomplete flourishing (IaIIae.3.5). There cannot be complete human fulfilment in this life; it can only be found in the vision of God, who is complete goodness (IaIIae.2.8; 3.8). Aquinas's conception of *incomplete flourishing*, the human good realisable in this life – while it sees theoretical contemplation as the primary parallel here to the vision of God – includes as constituents an indefinite number of intrinsic goods, including properly human actions themselves, which are ends rather than means to other aims. (IaIIae.2.2; 3.2 ad 2; 3.3, ad 2; 1.6 ad 1, 2; 10.1; 60.1 ad 3; 94.2; QDV 22.5; SCG 3.2.9; In NE 1.9.111.) 'Incomplete' flourishing is our concern.

5.1 *Intellectus and ratio*

Aquinas's paradigmatic conception of *ratio* is of a discursive process of moving correctly ('rationally') from something understood to something else understood, to a cognised intelligible truth.¹⁸⁸ According to Aquinas there is a single human cognitive faculty or power, which is both intuitive and discursive.¹⁸⁹ These two aspects are expressed in *intellectus* and *ratio*, respectively.

Intellect is the specifically human power to cognise universal natures by abstracting them from their particularly individuating matter (II.3.2). To 'understand' (*intelligere*) constitutes, in a minimal, initial sense of grasping a nature or possessing a concept, facility in making judgements using the term, applying it in reasonable ways, and understanding the consequences of its application within the context of non-specialised, ordinary language. In contrast to non-embodied, purely 'intellectual' beings, according to Aquinas, humans are 'rational' beings, who need to think discursively and engage in rational investigation and analysis in order to reach new knowledge and more complete understanding and conceptual refinement.¹⁹⁰

Reason is essentially discursive, and it is epistemically grounded in non-discursive, immediate understanding – i.e. what is known 'naturally'. Aquinas describes reasoning in general terms as involving 'a certain discursion and movement' from potential to actual intellectual cognition,¹⁹¹ from one thing cognised to another,¹⁹² from the better to the lesser known,¹⁹³ by way of a process of comparison

¹⁸⁸ Ia.79.8.

¹⁸⁹ Ia.79.8, 11.

¹⁹⁰ Ia.79.8; 85.5. See (Kretzmann 1993), 142-143.

¹⁹¹ Ia.79.4.

¹⁹² Ia.83.4.

¹⁹³ IaIIae.7.1.

or combination (*collatione*),¹⁹⁴ which results in a derived cognition of particular conclusions.¹⁹⁵

5.2 The analogy between theoretical and practical reason

5.2.1 Similarities and differences

Aquinas's most detailed accounts of reason and reasoning concern theoretical reason. His accounts of practical reason conceive it as analogous to theoretical reason:¹⁹⁶ it expresses a similar structure, follows similar argument patterns, and, like theoretical reason, is considered by Aquinas to be fully rational. However, there are important differences between the two. Here I briefly explore some of the salient similarities and contrasts between theoretical and practical reason.¹⁹⁷

Both theoretical and practical reason are rational processes, expressions of the same power. They are characterised by a similar procedure (*similis processus*), viz. they move rationally from general to particular. 'And so from the precepts of natural law [which Aquinas identifies as first principles of practical reason], as from certain general and indemonstrable principles, it is necessary that human reason proceed to more particular determinations of certain things.'¹⁹⁸ Both theoretical and practical

¹⁹⁴ Ia.83.4. 'Comparison' (or 'combination') – *collatio* – seems to me to be Aquinas's core notion of reasoning, although I am not able to defend this claim here. In any case it is central to reason in Aquinas. See In NE 3.13.519; In DA 3.15-16; QDW(1) 1.11; 11.1 ad 18; 15.1; 15.3; 16.1; 17.2; 22.15; ST Ia.82.2 ad 3; 117.1; IIaIIae.47.1.

¹⁹⁵ IIaIIae.17.9 ad 2.

¹⁹⁶ See IIaIIae.94.2, the entire structure of which expresses the analogy. See (Aertson 1999), 249; (Boyer 1998), 161.

¹⁹⁷ On practical reason and reasons see (Audi 1989); (Audi 1993); (Audi 1997); (Raz 1978); (Raz 1990); and essays in (Mele 1997) and (Raz 1978).

¹⁹⁸ IIaIIae.91.3.

reasoning begin with first principles of reason given in nature, i.e. grasped naturally.¹⁹⁹

The aims of theoretical and practical are different: truth for its own sake, and truth as ordered to action. The different objectives at which they aim cannot, of course, be absolutely distinct. One may decide, as the conclusion to a piece of practical reasoning, to engage in theoretical reasoning. In any given piece of practical reasoning there is likely to be significant theoretical reasoning: the solution to a practical problem of getting across a river will include reasoning about the construction of a raft or a bridge. And a theoretical problem is usually motivated by some kind of practical concern.²⁰⁰ Aquinas holds one can think about typically practical matters in a theoretical way, such as when a builder contemplates the properties of a building, as such.²⁰¹ Still, theoretical reason and practical reason are specified by their different aims, constituting answers to different kinds of questions.²⁰²

Theoretical reason and practical reason also differ, according to Aquinas, in their subject matter. Theoretical reason concerns theoretical matters that are nonmaterial, necessary, unchanging, and certain,²⁰³ but practical reason matters having to do with action (*de operabilibus*),²⁰⁴ i.e. particular human actions,²⁰⁵ which are contingent and variable.²⁰⁶ Thus, 'human knowledge often fails, especially in contingent particulars, such as are human acts,'²⁰⁷ resulting not in necessary

¹⁹⁹ Ia.79.12.

²⁰⁰ See (Audi 1989), 1.

²⁰¹ Ia.14.16.

²⁰² Ia.79.11.

²⁰³ In BDT 2.5.1.

²⁰⁴ Ia.79.12.

²⁰⁵ IaIIae.6.6; 39.1.

²⁰⁶ IaIIae.94.4.

²⁰⁷ IaIIae.2.3.

knowledge, but probable opinion.²⁰⁸ The orientation to contingent particulars in matters of action is crucially important to Aquinas, for it makes necessary the role of character-dependent perception in grasping them .

[H]uman actions and choices are concerned with (*circa*) particulars. It is from the very fact that the sensory appetite is a particular power, that it has great influence in disposing one so that something concerning singulars appears to one in such a way or another.²⁰⁹

5.2.2 Paradigmatic reasoning

Paradigmatic reasoning, for Aquinas, is expressed in rational discursion from general premises to particular conclusions: ‘Now the process of reasoning is from what is general to what is particular (*ex communibus ad propria*).’²¹⁰ I use the term ‘determination’ to express this basic model of general-to-particular reasoning.²¹¹ This picture of reasoning is expressed fully in inferential or syllogistic reasoning, which constitutes Aquinas’s rational paradigm.

If theoretical reasoning is Aquinas’s paradigmatic kind of reasoning, the theoretical syllogism or ‘scientific’²¹² demonstration concluding in unqualified *scientia* or scientific knowledge is Aquinas’s paradigmatic form of theoretical reasoning. The ideal of theoretical thought is the cognition of an ordered system of propositions that expresses, in a way that is structurally isomorphic with the metaphysical structure of reality, a theoretically deep explanation of things – based on what is metaphysically basic, i.e. fundamental natures and relationships. To have

²⁰⁸ In BDT 2.5.1.1 ad 4.

²⁰⁹ IaIIae.9.2 ad 2.

²¹⁰ IaIIae.94.4.

²¹¹ IaIIae.91.3.

²¹² ‘Scientific’ is the common English rendering of *scientia*, from *scire*, ‘to know’. It does not correspond to English ‘science’. I use *scientia* and ‘scientific knowledge’ here as synonymous, and according to Aquinas’s conception. (MacDonald 1993) has been particularly helpful in this discussion.

paradigmatic *scientia* with respect to proposition P is to hold P (a) on the basis of demonstrative reasoning whose ultimate premises are (b) propositional first principles.

Aquinas gives an account of demonstrative syllogism in In PA 1. It is comprised of two premises and a conclusion, where the premises' major and minor terms, or subject and predicate, are connected in the conclusion by way of a middle term.²¹³ Paradigmatic scientific demonstrations, according to Aquinas, are 'explanatory demonstrations' (*demonstrationes propter quid*), which reason from cause/explanation to effect, the premises providing the explanation of the conclusion. In order to be explanatory the premises must be better cognised or epistemically prior to the conclusion, and they 'cause' the conclusion in that the premises are 'self-evident' or known through themselves (*per se nota*), since what is by virtue of itself is always the cause of what is by virtue of something else (*per aliud*).²¹⁴

Demonstrative syllogisms are grounded in first principles, for all cognition is grounded in nature – it begins with the grasp of things known naturally, i.e. immediately, apart from investigation.²¹⁵ First principles include universal natures²¹⁶ – which are expressed in definitions (e.g. *rational animal*)²¹⁷ – and universal connections, or propositions that express immediate, necessary relations between universal natures ('A human being is a rational animal').²¹⁸ Both terms and propositions are first principles.²¹⁹

²¹³ (Schmidt 1966), 260.

²¹⁴ In PA 1.7.

²¹⁵ Ia.79.12; 117.1; IaIIae.5.1 ad 1.

²¹⁶ In PA 2.20.

²¹⁷ Definitions, for Aquinas, are not primarily linguistic entities, or propositional in structure. The definition of 'human being' is *rational animal*. (MacDonald 1993), 190 n.31.

²¹⁸ In PA 1.5. 'Universal connections' is a term from (McKirahan 1992).

²¹⁹ (MacDonald 1993), 183.

In demonstrative syllogistic, however, Aquinas is interested in propositional epistemic first principles. He calls these ‘immediate propositions’ (*immediata principia*). An immediate proposition is one in which the predicate is in or belongs to the account or definition (*ratio*) of the subject.²²⁰ Since *rational animal* is the definition of human being, the proposition ‘A human being is a rational animal’ is an immediate proposition.²²¹ Immediate propositions are *per se nota*, or self-evident. For Aquinas self-evidence is not primarily epistemic; the primary sense in which an immediate proposition is immediate is metaphysical: which propositions are immediate depends upon ‘what real natures there are and what relations hold among them, that is, on the basic structure of the world, and not on the psychology or belief-structure of any given epistemic subject.’²²² What is in fact self-evident – better known or prior ‘by nature’²²³ – may not be self-evident to some S, who may be a competent language user with respect to the proposition on a shallow level of ordinary usage, but does not know on a level of deeper analysis the real natures of the subject and predicate expressed by the terms. Thus Aquinas distinguishes between what is self-evident in itself (*secundum se*), and what is self-evident in relation to us (*quoad nos*). Both are metaphysically immediate, but only the latter may be epistemically self-evident to some S as well. Some propositions whose predicates really belong to their subject are *per se nota* only to the ‘wise’.²²⁴ In a demonstrative syllogism, immediate propositions are epistemically prior – but their epistemic priority is based upon their metaphysical priority.

To have paradigmatic *scientia* with respect to P, then, is to hold P on the basis of demonstrative reasoning whose ultimate premises are propositional first principles.

²²⁰ In PA 1.7.

²²¹ In PA 1.19. (MacDonald 1993), 169-170.

²²² (MacDonald 1993), 170.

²²³ In PA 1.4; 1.23; In BDT 2.6.3.

In sum, these propositions are: (1) *universal* – holding universally for all such natures;²²⁵ (2) *necessary* – as essential predications, they are necessarily true;²²⁶ (3) *immediate* – they express metaphysically immediate relationships or facts, and thus are cognised by virtue of or through themselves, rather than demonstrated or concluded from other propositions (thus, indemonstrable);²²⁷ and (4) *epistemically prior* to P because they express facts and relationships that are metaphysically basic and explanatory.

Thus is paradigmatic theoretical reasoning for Aquinas. I detail it here, not because we will pursue analysis of it, but because it constitutes the benchmark of ideal rationality for Aquinas. Against this background we will understand the analogous nature of practical reasoning, which diverges from it in various ways. In III we examine the first principles of practical reason, and in V we will examine the practical analogue of the demonstrative syllogism, Aquinas's 'practical syllogism'. Most significant to note here is that Aquinas's paradigmatic reasoning expresses the general-to-particular structure of rational determination that I have explicated.

5.2.3 Non-paradigmatic reasoning

It has been objected that Aquinas's picture of demonstration is overly narrow and restrictive.²²⁸ However, the demonstrative model does not reflect the whole of Aquinas's picture of significant knowledge, but only the ideal – what he describes as 'unqualified' *scientia (scire simpliciter)*: complete and certain cognition of

²²⁴ Ia.2.1; IaIIae.94.2.

²²⁵ IaIIae.62.3.

²²⁶ In PA 1.7.

²²⁷ IaIIae.58.4.

²²⁸ See, e.g. (Kenny 1993), 57.

something.²²⁹ Aquinas's fuller picture of knowledge and reasoning is broader and more flexible.

Aquinas holds that full *scientia* is possessed only in a priori disciplines such as logic or geometry. Only to a lesser extent, or less certainly, may we have *scientia* of objects for which being enmattered is a part of their definition, i.e. most of our knowledge, including our knowledge of natural science. Still Aquinas calls our cognition of these matters '*scientia*' (we may think of it as 'qualified' *scientia*).²³⁰ As Serene notes, 'while in principle Aquinas remains a strict adherent to "the Aristotelian ideal of demonstrative science", in practice he welcomes various sorts of scientific explanations which do not satisfy its requirements.'²³¹

Paradigmatic, *explanatory demonstration* is structurally isomorphic with the cause-to-effect metaphysical structure of the world, beginning with what is better known 'by nature' (universals), and progressing to what is better known to us (particulars).²³² However, our cognition of essentially enmattered objects begins with sense experience, which is of particulars. In non-a priori disciplines, then, demonstrations typically progress from effect to cause, from what is better known to us to what is better known by nature.²³³ Aquinas calls this kind of argument a *factual demonstration (demonstratio quia)*.²³⁴ Far from being exceptional, this kind of argument predominates in Aquinas's thought: it characterises the reasoning of natural science, and is the form of argument that Aquinas uses in natural theology to argue for the existence of God.²³⁵

²²⁹ In PA 1.4.

²³⁰ Ia.85.1 ad 2.

²³¹ (Serene 1982), 507.

²³² In PA 1.4.

²³³ Ia.85.8 ad 1.

²³⁴ In PA 1.23. I borrow 'explanatory' and 'factual' terminology from (MacDonald 1993).

²³⁵ Ia.2.1. Another form of non-paradigmatic reasoning in Aquinas is dialectical reasoning, which is beyond my scope to investigate here. See (MacDonald 1993), 179-180; (Finnis 1998), 100 n.v. On

We see that theoretical reasoning in Aquinas is broader and more flexible than the syllogistic model would suggest. We may expect analogues to this breadth and flexibility in practical reasoning – indeed, all the more, since practical matters are contingent and variable.

5.2.4 Synthesis and analysis

Within both theoretical and practical reasoning Aquinas makes a further, related distinction. We have seen Aquinas's distinction between explanatory demonstration, arguing from cause to effect, and factual demonstration, arguing from effect to cause. Reasoning in explanatory demonstration is *synthetic (compositiva)* in structure: moving from simple to complex.²³⁶ The methodology of non-a priori disciplines, however, begins with what is better known to us – complex and particular effects – and analyses or resolves it into its simpler, more general causes.²³⁷ Thus it is *analytic (resolutiva)* in structure, moving from particular and complex to simple and general. The synthetic method delivers conclusions, or judgements of what is the case, with absolute certainty – ‘unqualified *scientia*’. Thus Aquinas also describes this method as ‘*judicative*’.²³⁸ The analytic method, however, does not guarantee the truth of its conclusion, but seeks the truth in its principles – what we have called ‘qualified *scientia*’. Aquinas describes this method as ‘*investigative*’.²³⁹

dialectic in Aristotelian thought see Top 1.10-12; EE 1.7.1216b26-30; (Crisp 1991); (Evans 1977); (Irwin 1988), chpts. 1-3; (McKirahan 1992), XVIII; (Reeve 1995), 31-66.

²³⁶ IaIIae.14.5.

²³⁷ In PA 1.4; IaIIae.14.5; In BDT 2.6.1.3.

²³⁸ In PA, Prol.

²³⁹ In PA, Prol. Aquinas specifies here that ‘dialectic’ is a form of investigative reasoning.

The relationship between these two methodologies is not always clear in Aquinas,²⁴⁰ but the general pattern emerges in his account that in theoretical reasoning there are two general rational operations: (1) *investigation*, which seeks to discover what is the case, and (2) reasoning to a *judgement* as to the results of investigation.²⁴¹ Investigation typically involves seeking to discover the causes or explanations – the principles – of the effects, a process that is *analytic*.²⁴² Where principles are better known than the effects or implications, however, or when the process of investigation has reached its intended end, the process of reasoning or displaying the rational structure between principles and conclusion is *synthetic*, resulting in a judgement in light of the principles.²⁴³ In both cases, the relationship between principle and conclusion or cause/explanation and effect is crucial. Full knowledge of a particular conclusion involves *judging it as* exemplifying the general principle: we rationally judge conclusions of reasoning or investigation *through* principles,²⁴⁴ and we see such conclusions as *expressing* principles by, in effect, seeing them as ‘resolving’ into their principles.²⁴⁵ Thus, according to Aquinas, judgement is an operation of *intellectus* – i.e. intellect’s seeing the relationship of conclusion-to-principle – , which ties both beginning and terminus of the reasoning process to intellect.²⁴⁶ In V we will consider practical reasoning’s analogue to this picture.

²⁴⁰ E.g. in In PA, Prol. (cf. QDV 15.1 obj. 3) Aquinas breaks down the categories somewhat differently than I have stated them here, but I think my delineation expresses his general picture most accurately.

²⁴¹ In NE 6.9.1239.

²⁴² The picture is slightly messier than this. Not all investigative reasoning is analytic in a strict sense; rhetoric, poetry, and dialectic are investigative without being strictly analytic (In PA, Prol.).

²⁴³ Ia.79.8, .12; IaIIae.14.5.

²⁴⁴ Ia.79.12.

²⁴⁵ Ia.79.8.

²⁴⁶ IaIIae.53.4.

6 Conclusion

By analysis of Aquinas's interrelated concepts of order, nature, good, and reason in this chapter we have developed a general account of the nature of practical thought as the rational ordering or determination of general goodness – grounded in nature – into particular determinate expression in action and passion. In III-V we examine how this picture of practice in Aquinas is expressed in the structure of practical thought.

III

The General Level of Practical Thought

1 Three Levels of Practical Thought

In II we saw that, paradigmatically, reasoning for Aquinas moves from general to particular, and that reasoning as a whole is broader and more flexible than demonstrative reasoning. Aquinas also holds that there are *two directions* of practical thought: beginning from our grasp of a particular thing to be done our cognition proceeds by ascent to the grasp of universals, and then returns to the particular thing to be done by way of descent.¹ Corresponding to each direction Aquinas specifies a procedure: 'induction' and 'syllogism', respectively.² These are paradigmatic forms of reasoning, for Aquinas, but not exhaustive.

To the two directions of reasoning correspond two conceptual levels of practical thought: *general* and *particular*. Particularly important are the *reasons for action* which correspond to these levels. Aquinas paradigmatically identifies a piece of practical reasoning as a determining (by descent) of general reasons into particular action. Generalising reasoning (by ascent), on the other hand, moves from particular to general, establishing general reasons from which practical determination begins.

The two-direction/two-level picture, although accurately reflecting the general structure of Aquinas's practical thought, and his explicit terminology, contains a conceptual gap. I distinguish *three conceptual levels* of practical thought implicit in

¹ In NE 6.7.1198. 'Descent' is stated by Aquinas in the text, 'ascent' is implied.

² In NE 6.3.1148. Aquinas applies these terms in this context to both theoretical and practical reasoning.

his account, which map onto the two directions in such a way that a middle level, *specific*, is shared to some extent by both reasoning by ascent and reasoning by descent, and mediates between them in fruitful ways. I defend the existence of this level in IV. The kinds of reasons for action that emerge at the different conceptual levels are general, specific, and particular reasons. Also, I distinguish certain *forms of reasoning* which are characteristic of each level. I see these forms mapping onto the schema already sketched as follows. *Generalisation* paradigmatically signifies forms of reasoning by ascent which move from particular to general, to the grasping of general reasons for action. As stated, the middle, specific conceptual level is shared by the two directions of thought. Thus some *specification* will express reasoning by ascent, in so far as it involves conceptual refinement at the general level, on the basis of considerations emerging from the specific level. I will not analyse reasoning by ascent here, but rather focus on forms of practical determination.³ More centrally, specification in practical thought involves kinds of reasoning by descent which specifically determine general conceptions into more specific understandings of practice or visions of the ethical life. Although practical specification need not seek more particularity than this – it may be solely aimed at gaining a more specific understanding – a paradigmatic piece of practical reasoning in Aquinas involves the further, *particular determination* of a specific practical conception into particular action, by means of forms of reasoning characteristic of the particular level of practical thought. An overview of these levels (including, for completeness, forms of generalising reasoning), is given in figure 3.

³ The paradigmatic form of generalising reasoning, for Aquinas, is particular-to-general induction (In NE 6.3.1148; In PA 2.20; In Met 1). Paradigmatic generalising specification, in my view, is dialectical in form (In PA 1.1; In NE 1.4.51-54).

The Structure of Practical Thought

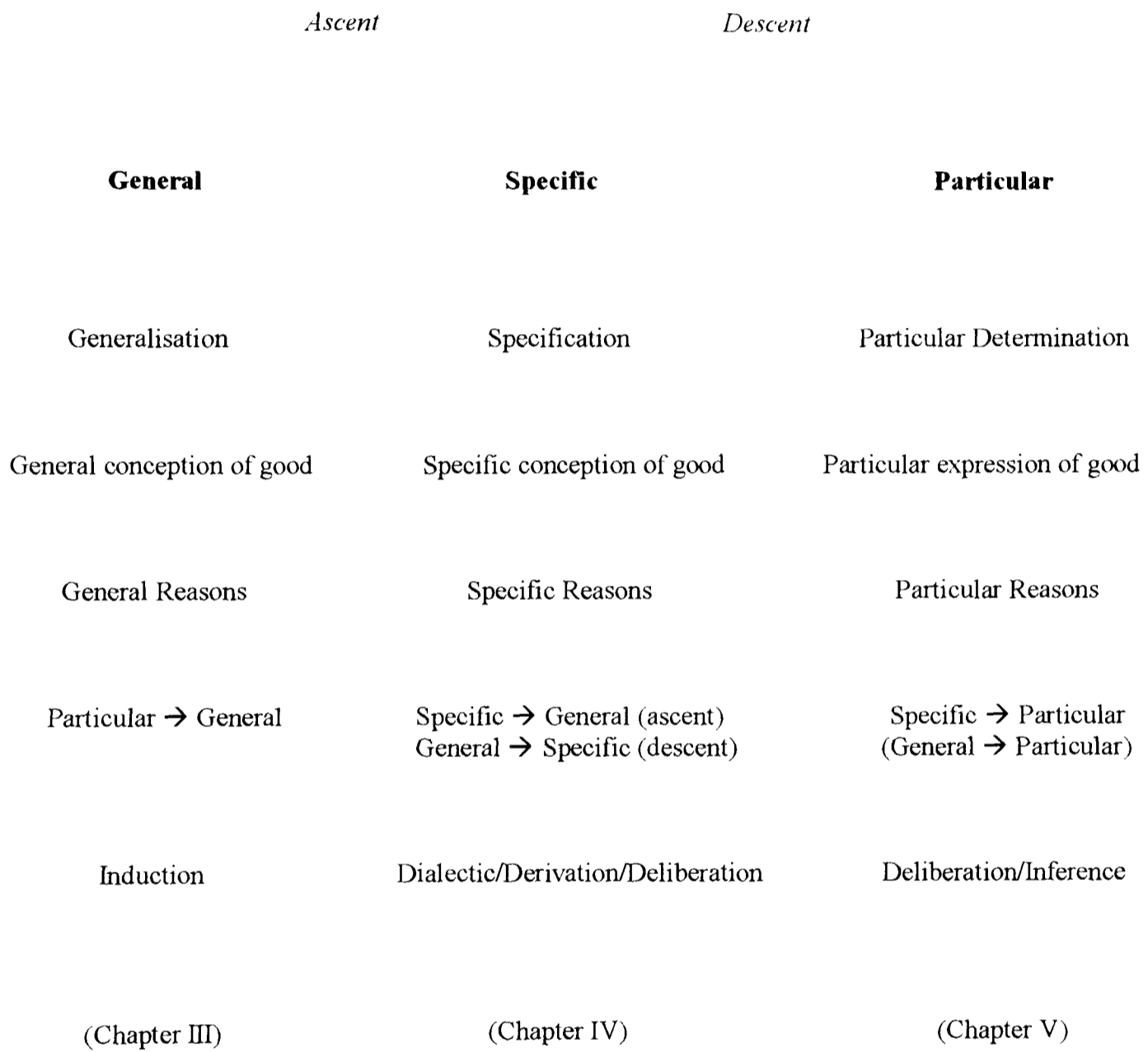


Figure 3

Although paradigmatically and generally progression in practical reasoning moves from left to right in this figure, there is no fixed, inalterable progression from level to level, as the products of thinking at each level may feed back to form inputs to consideration at other levels in different ways. Nor are there rigid boundaries between any of these; there is a constant dialogue between general and particular, and between both and specific. Moreover, where the lines are to be drawn, especially between general and specific levels, is somewhat arbitrary. Given the conceptual gap in Aquinas's account calling for a 'specific' level of reasons, and in light of Aquinas's concern that the general level of practical thought express ultimate normative and motivational grounds for action that are universal in scope, I draw the line between general and specific in such a way as to keep the general level quite 'general' – i.e. minimally specified with regard to practical content. On this conception it is at the general level where common ground between different ethical traditions may be sought, and where disagreement concerning the foundations of ethics may be debated and possibly resolved. But it is at the specific level of practical thought where more articulated practical reasons and rich ethical visions – the substantive content of ethical traditions and narratives – find their home. It is where most ethical teaching and practical guidance, including Aquinas's own, take place.

2 General Conception of Good⁴

We have seen the central role of ‘good’ in Aquinas’s thought. Practical thought at the general level involves a *general conception of good*.⁵ In fact a general conception or *ratio* of good – or a *ratio* of general, universal, or common good – has several distinguishable, but not always clearly distinguished, referents in Aquinas’s practical thought. I briefly set them out in order to focus our discussion.⁶

2.1 General Conceptions of Good

First, a general conception of good may refer to what operates in Aquinas as a *formal conception of good*. This notion corresponds to the characterisation of good as a universal concept which underwrites the formal link in Aquinas between the intellectual being S’s ability to grasp abstract universals and its ability to will, i.e. to

⁴ Some distinctions about terminology are in order. I am using ‘general’ in a ‘general’ way, i.e. which includes, more specifically, ‘universals’, as in natures, essences, concepts, etc., but is not limited to that specific sense. Aquinas’s typical term for ‘universal’ in the sense just mentioned is *universalis*. Aquinas speaks of the process of reason paradigmatically as progressing from the ‘general’ to the ‘particular’. Now the process of reason is from the general to the particular (*ex communibus ad propria*) (IaIIae.94.4). As in this example, in making the general/particular distinction Aquinas often refers to what is general by the term *communis* (IaIIae.94.4; Ia.5.1). However, he often uses *universalis* in this context as well, e.g. when speaking of ‘universal principles’ (Ia.59.1 ad 1; 82.5; IaIIae.1.2 ad 3). *Universalis* and *communis* are Aquinas’s primary terms for ‘general’, and while they may signify conceptions that are distinct from each other, they need not. Their significations are not exclusive, and Aquinas’s uses of them are not strict. Moreover Aquinas also uses the related term *generalis*, both in the technical, primary sense of ‘genus’ opposed to ‘species’ (IIaIIae.53.2; 58.5), and in the broader sense of ‘relating to all’ (IaIIae.46.1). The fact is that while each of these three terms carries a distinctive primary signification and paradigmatic contrast (general/special; universal/particular; common/proper) – according to (Deferrari 1986), the primary notion of *universalis* is that of belonging to all or the whole, and of *communis* (i.e. in common) is common, joint, combined – they can all be in various ways used synonymously, and are often opposed to the contrary of one or more of the others (see Deferrari; for example, as a secondary meaning of *communis*, he lists: general, usual; synonyms: *generalis*, *universalis*; opposites: *particularis*, *specialis*).

⁵ (MacDonald 1990) introduced me to this concept. Aquinas does not use exactly the terminology of ‘general conception of good’ (although it is close to his explicit terminology in some instances), but the notion – or as I suggest, the notions – are operative in his account in various ways.

⁶ (MacDonald 1990), 334, identifies three distinguishable roles. My distinctions differ slightly, and I add a fourth.

act for reasons, desiring objects *sub ratione boni*, as putative goods or intelligible ends to pursue.⁷

The second role of a general conception of good – which I shall consider the *general conception of good*, most properly speaking – refers to S's substantive, but still highly general, conception of good, which provides the general shape and normative/motivational basis for more specific conceptions of good and particular determinations into action. It is, for humans, a general conception of *human* good, and is constituted by S's understanding of basic human goods and their relationships to each other, minimally specified.

Although our interest is with these first two roles of general good, especially the second, I briefly identify two further notions of a general conception of good in Aquinas. The third we may call a *comprehensive conception of good*, that which grounds Aquinas's account of 'common good'. For Aquinas, the substantive general good that is desired by S can also be thought to be general in terms of being total or inclusive – rather than narrow or partial. 'The more comprehensive (*communior*) the good apprehended, the more comprehensive the good to which the will tends.' A judge, for example, has the common good (*bonum communi*) in view, while the family of a criminal being tried by the judge has a narrower good in view – its own – which may actually conflict with the common good.⁸ Finally, 'general good' in Aquinas, again a substantive notion, can refer to a *complete conception of good*; here the general good is finally exemplified by that which is the complete, substantive fulfilment of the notion of good: complete flourishing,⁹ and ultimately, God himself, who is the ultimate good by his essence.¹⁰

⁷ Cf. SCG 3.20.1.

⁸ IaIIae.19.10.

⁹ IaIIae.2.7.

¹⁰ IaIIae.2.8; Ia.60.5 ad 3, ad 5.

The first notion of a general conception of good operates clearly in Aquinas: the formal grasp of good not only characterises, but in fact underlies the possibility of willing and practical thought in S. The second notion is not explicitly distinguished from the first, formal signification in Aquinas. However, it follows naturally as a practical expression of the conception of intellectual beings as grasping particular goods under the *ratio* 'good', when that conception is applied to the actual practical thinking of human agents, as they compare (putative) goods under a developing, general understanding of what is good, and seek to determine what to do in particular situations in its light. S in fact develops a general understanding of what is good in a way that is a substantive counterpart to Aquinas's formal description of intellection, and, although – and indeed because – he never makes the distinction explicit, some of Aquinas's references to a general good seem best taken as combining both formal *and* substantive-but-general notions. My primary interest in spelling out a general conception of good is with the second notion. Since practical reason is concerned with determining general good into particular action, it is here, in S's general, minimally specified conception of good, that I locate the 'general' level of practical thought.

2.2 Theoretical Basis of a General Conception of Good

The notion of a general conception of good for S emerges, first, from Aquinas's metaphysical-teleological account of goodness, human nature, and human action. Since S possesses intellect S is able to have general conceptions of things, and thus is able to grasp particular objects or actions as putative goods, as falling under a general conception of good. Rational appetite (will) is the inclination to goodness itself, in

general – i.e. to desire what one desires under a general conception of it as good, *sub ratione boni*. This grounds self-determination and freedom of decision, for Aquinas. By virtue of its rational nature S is not determined to apprehend any particular X as good.¹¹ S necessarily is inclined to goodness itself, generally conceived,¹² and thus necessarily wills whatever X it wills *as* good – but S's will is indeterminate with respect to desiring any *particular* X, because each X can be considered from different perspectives, all in relation to S's general conception of good.¹³ 'A human is master of its actions, because it has the power of deliberating about its actions. Because its reason in deliberating is related to opposites its will is able to be inclined to any of them.'¹⁴

One's general conception of good, however, does not move one to act; what is general must be rationally determined into a particular end to be accomplished.¹⁵ 'An agent, through intellect, acts for the sake of an end, by determining the end for itself . . . under the conception of it as good.'¹⁶ Properly rational activity arises from the interaction of intellect and will: grasping putative actions or objects under a general conception of good, reasoning about them, and determining what to do in that light. Properly rational activity – to introduce new terminology – is *acting for reasons*. For Aquinas, to act rationally is to act for an intelligible end (*finis*),¹⁷ and to act for an intelligible end is to act for what one grasps as good (*bonum intellectum*),¹⁸ for good

¹¹ Unless it is the very essence of goodness itself, viz. the divine essence, which the blessed see in heaven. The will of one who sees God necessarily loves whatever one loves *sub ordine* to God. But the will of one who does not see God loves whatever one loves under the (substantive) general conception of good which one does know (*sub commune ratione boni quam novit*): IaIIae.4.4.

¹² Ia.59.1. The will regards good according to its general conception: Ia.82.5. Acts of willing are general, as are acts of understanding; just as intellectual beings understand universals, so they will what is general: SCG 3.95.16.

¹³ Ia.82.2 ad 1; IaIIae.1.2 ad 3; 1.3; 1.6; 9.1; 9.2; 10.1 ad 3; 13.6; 19.3; 50.5 ad 3; SCG 3.85.5; 3.97.11.

¹⁴ IaIIae.6.2 ad 2.

¹⁵ In DA 3.10.827; IaIIae.1.2 ad 3; 1.3.

¹⁶ SCG 3.3.7.

¹⁷ IaIIae.1.2.

¹⁸ IaIIae.19.3.

has the *ratio* or intelligible quality of 'end'.¹⁹ To see something as good is to see it as something intelligible to aim at, to pursue, to seek to realise – an end; in short, to see it as a reason for action. To act for an end, then, is to act for a reason. 'The reasons for actions-which-are-done-for-the-sake-of-an-end are drawn from the end.'²⁰

The open-ended apprehending of goods, comparing and evaluating them, and determining them into action, expresses the specific nature of rational beings.²¹ Rational comparison and evaluation requires a standard, as a formal, conceptual necessity – a *general* conception of good, however formal, implicit, and unreflective, against which to evaluate *particular* goods. By virtue of its nature as a rational animal, then, possessing intellect and will, a human necessarily possesses a general conception of good, under which it grasps particular objects and ends, according to which it is able to engage in rational comparison and judging of putative goods, and in light of which it is able to determine what to realise. To be a rational being is to have a general conception of good, in at least this formal sense.

2.3 Practical Experience of a General Conception of Good

Order-3, properly practical rational activity is *internal* to the practical standpoint, for Aquinas – it is not fundamentally reflection *about* practical reason or goodness, but engaging *in* practical reasoning, *expressing* goodness.²² From within the practical standpoint, as well, the notion of a general conception of good is central.

¹⁹ Ia.5.4 ad 1.

²⁰ IaIIae.14.2: *finis in operalibus habet rationem principii: eo quid rationes eorum quae sunt ad finem, ex fine sumuntur*. (Finnis 1998) is helpful on reasons for action: 'though Latin idiom did not encourage Aquinas to speak literally of "reasons for action", his constant talk of the ends of chosen action is most accurately understood in just those terms' (95 n. d).

²¹ Will and reason are each formed on condition that neither is determined to one thing without the possibility of being directed to something else: In II Sent. 39.2.1.

²² On internal perspective, see (Finnis 1998), esp. II.5.

Aquinas's most sustained exposition of how the practical stance operates is found in ST IaIIae.94.2. Here Aquinas spells out in detail the analogy between theoretical and practical reasoning at its most fundamental level – the absolute first principles in both theoretical and practical reason, which underlie in a formal way all that follows in each kind of thinking. The principle of non-contradiction (*one is not to affirm and deny the same thing at the same time and in the same respect*)²³ is the most basic first principle of theoretical reasoning, providing the theoretical framework for all of thought. So in the case of human action there is an equally fundamental starting point, as practically undeniable for one thinking about what to do as the principle of non-contradiction is theoretically undeniable for one thinking about what is the case, and which provides the practical, i.e. normative and motivational framework for all action: *good is to be done and pursued, and evil is to be avoided*.²⁴ Aquinas calls this the ‘first principle of practical reason’.

Both of these first principles are formal: that is to say, nothing is deducible from them directly, no specific content is asserted by them, they cannot themselves initiate any train of thought. Rather, they provide a framework of thought, defining how one in fact ‘takes’ everything else that one perceives or plans, conceives or commits. Both are inescapable: they do not express an ideal of rationality, but establish the very conditions for all possible thought and action. Aristotle defended the principle of non-contradiction by appealing to the self-defeating character of any attempt to refute it: to argue against this most basic principle of thought is to utilise thought that itself depends upon its validity. By parity of reasoning one may defend the first principle of practical reason in a parallel way: for the practical sceptic to set

²³ What appears in Aquinas's text is: *non est simul affirmare et negare*.

²⁴ *Hoc est ergo primum praeceptum legis, quod bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum*. Note the *prosequendum*: this cannot be reduced to ‘do good and avoid evil.’ See (Grisez 1969), 365; (Finnis 1998), 99 n. s.

out to refute the principle is for him to *act* for a reason, a reason he sees as worth pursuing – as evidenced simply by the fact that he seeks to do it. But this just is what it means to act according to the first principle of practical reason. In seeking to refute the practical first principle the practical sceptic expresses it, thereby confirming it by his attempted refutation.²⁵

The principle of non-contradiction and the first principle of practical reason express the most fundamental, necessary truths of theory and practice, which, as absolutely first principles, provide the overall framework for and necessary orientation to all that follows. Each principle, however, is itself based (*fundatur*) upon the most basic conception or intelligibility (*ratio*) pertaining to the arenas of thought and action. Respectively: *being*,²⁶ the conception under which one first grasps or conceptualises anything with regard to its truth (sc. that it either is or is not); and *good – ratio boni*, the conception under which one first grasps or conceptualises all that one grasps with respect to practical reason (sc. that it either is good/desirable/end/reason for action or is not).

As in Ia.5.1, Aquinas here identifies *ratio boni* by the definition of good as ‘that which all things desire’. This should be understood in light of the fuller metaphysical picture we examined in II.4.2: what ‘all things desire’ is their completion and actuality, according to their nature. For one to apprehend X under the *ratio* of good, then, is for one to grasp it as an end, as a reason for action – to be practically oriented to it, to ‘take’ it from within the practical stance, to ‘desire’ it and recognise its normative status; to see it as *conveniens* to one’s nature, as in some way expressive of or contributing to one’s completion or full actuality. On this picture, the practical stance is a comprehensive orientation that is *normative* and *motivational*

²⁵ See (Finnis 1998), 58-60.

from top to bottom, as it were. When S grasps X as a good to pursue or an action to realise, S necessarily sees it in light of S's general orientation to good, i.e. qua end or desirable. The normativity of the good and S's motivational stance towards it are not appendages or additions to S's rational determination, added, e.g. by an independently specifiable desire or act of will. They are intrinsic to S's recognition of the good itself. Practical reasoning moves *from* a practical stance, not *to* it.

The starting point of practical reason, then – the formal, underlying structure of all practical thinking – is a *practical orientation* towards the aim of realising what one takes to be good. For Aquinas, practical reasons that emerge from reasoning within the practical stance are motivating reasons, i.e. reasons for action which, recognised by S, motivate S to act. Practical reasoning does not move illicitly from 'fact' to 'value', for Aquinas, for from the practical standpoint, what S sees to *be* (factually) good, S sees *as good* – as desirable/end to pursue (valuable) – and is motivated to pursue it. Aquinas does not conflate the practical standpoint with the order-1, theoretical standpoint; however, he sees them as related. The *ratio boni*, on Aquinas's account, expresses their relatedness – both as presupposing his metaphysical teleology (natural order) and specifying his practical orientation (rational order).

This picture of a formal, underlying structure to all practical thinking – seeing all putative goods and actions in terms of a general practical orientation – is an expression, in different terms, of S's having a general conception of good. The first principle of practical reason expresses in gerundive form what a general conception of good expresses indicatively. Theoretical and practical considerations converge in the conclusion that rational agents necessarily grasp matters of action, formally speaking,

²⁶ Or being and not-being.

under some general conception of good. So far this picture is entirely formal. Simply to conclude that S acts according to a conception of what it thinks is good does not yet give one the resources to be able to distinguish normatively between the actions of, e.g. S1, who helps a little old lady across the street, and S2, who pushes her into the path of an oncoming lorry, each necessarily seeing its action under its general conception of good.

3 Normative Conditions for a General Conception of Good

3.1 Formal Conditions

Aquinas has more to say about normative constraints upon S's general conception of good. A first constraint is still formal, based upon the formally necessary conditions that emerge from within S's practical standpoint itself with regard to a fully rational general conception of good.²⁷

Aquinas reasons along these lines in the opening questions of IaIIae, where he turns to the subject of ethics. Aquinas begins his treatment, not with a theoretical analysis of human nature (although his already-specified metaphysical teleology in Ia informs every point), but with analysis – as he puts it – of humans inasmuch as they are principles of their own actions, as intellectual beings endowed with free will and self-movement:²⁸ i.e. rational agents. Thereupon Aquinas turns immediately to a formal analysis of the end-directed structure of rational action. Rational action is for the sake of (*propter*) and specified by its end (1.1-3). With multiple acts and ends, a

²⁷ Discussion in 3 is part of the 'minimal specification' I noted in III.1 as most appropriately concerned with the general level. I turn to more substantive specification in IV.

²⁸ IaIIae.Prol.

hierarchical structure of end-directed acts emerges, comprising 'end-trees'²⁹ made up of complexes of ends and relations of subordination and superordination between acts, ends, and complexes of acts and ends. Intrinsic to a teleological structure of this sort is a *formal ultimacy condition* for fully rational action. S cannot possess an infinite number of ends of rational action, where every act is done for the sake of another, but none is done for its own sake. S cannot aim for each member of an infinite series; S must fix its desire on some objective that is not desired for the sake of something else, or else S's desire would be empty and its action motivationally groundless (1.4). There must be an *ultimate end*, i.e. an end that is motivationally sufficient to ground S's chain of desire for action.³⁰

It seems that S's complex of rational action could be sufficiently motivationally grounded if it had several ultimate ends, each of which is desired for its own sake, each grounding its own motivational chains. However this will as a formal matter not be enough to ground the entire motivational structure, if these ends are not *ordered* to each other³¹ as constituents of an integrated, unified ultimate end; otherwise they would dis-integrate the motivational structure.³² In this case I distinguish (using MacDonald's apparatus) between a 'weak' ultimate end, which is sufficient to ground a particular motivational chain of ends, of which there can be multiple; and a 'strong' ultimate end, which is a single, integrated ultimate end, the kind required to ground one's motivational complex as a whole.³³ Drawing from Aquinas's account of order, to ground one's motivational complex as a whole, there must be a *teleological ordering* of the constituents of the strong ultimate end, towards

²⁹ (MacDonald 1991).

³⁰ IaIIae.1.5. It is only the ultimate end which one does not desire for the sake of something else: IaIIae.10.3sc. Cf. IaIIae.1.6; SCG 3.2.3; In NE 1.9.109.

³¹ IaIIae.1.5sc.

³² On order as integrity or integration, see SCG 3.94.11.

³³ In NE 1.9.107; (MacDonald 1991), 42-46.

a unified aim or point, beyond a mere coherence in the ordering of the constituents among themselves.³⁴ A kind of strong ultimate end that would satisfy this criterion would involve an *aggregate* conception of ultimate end, i.e. one that comprises a plurality of (weak) ultimate ends or intrinsic goods, teleologically ordered or integrated into a single, 'inclusive' end.³⁵ This indeed seems to be Aquinas's conception of the human ultimate end.³⁶

Aquinas's emphasis on the necessity of a strong ultimate end requires, then, that the ultimate end of a fully rational agent be *motivationally ultimate*. This psychological constraint presupposes a formal rational condition as well, that S's ultimate end must be *teleologically-ordered*; only in this way can it unify different motivationally (sub)ultimate ends, and thus constitute a truly motivationally ultimate end. The (strong) ultimate end of S's rational action, then, cannot be just *any* kind of thing. S's ultimate end must be motivationally ultimate and, if it comprises a plurality of constituents, teleologically-ordered.

The entirely formal conception of the ultimate end of rational action reached by this argument, Aquinas says, is what everyone agrees is '*flourishing*' – although there is great disagreement as to what flourishing amounts to as it is substantively spelled out by different people.³⁷ As simply a formal concept, 'flourishing' serves as a place-holder, standing for whatever the human ultimate end may be, yet-to-be-specified. Other terms Aquinas uses for the ultimate end include: 'human good', the 'good life', *bene vivere*, *summum bonum*, all treated by Aquinas as roughly equivalent terms.³⁸ Indeed, in its role in practical reason, 'flourishing' is referentially equivalent

³⁴ This reflects the priority of ordering of parts to end over part to part in In NE 1.1.1.

³⁵ The 'aggregate' conception is from (MacDonald 1991), 49. On inclusive ends see (Ackrill 1980); (Cooper 1975/1986); (Crisp 1994).

³⁶ IaIIae.1.3 ad 1; 3.2 ad 2; In NE 1.9.107; QDV 22.5.

³⁷ IaIIae.1.7; 5.8.

³⁸ IaIIae.57.5; IIaIIae.51.2 ad 2; In NE 1.4.45; 1.9.106.

to what we have been calling a 'general conception of good'.³⁹ 'Flourishing' refers to the general conception of ultimate end which gives point to all human good and action: 'flourishing is the principle of all human good because humans do all that they do for the sake of flourishing.'⁴⁰ The disparate strands we have examined of Aquinas's account of good and rational action cohere in a conception of flourishing, general and yet-to-be-specified substantively: as the strong ultimate end of human rational action, sc. the teleologically-ordered aggregation of particular human goods and ends. Aquinas's eudaimonism, then, as he initially moots it here from the practical standpoint, expresses the same picture of practical thought as that expressed by our account of a general conception of good. I shall consider the concepts of 'flourishing' and 'general conception of good,' with respect to their roles in human practical thought, as equivalent.

A fully rational general conception of good, then, will be motivationally ultimate and teleologically-ordered. These characteristics, based solely on a formal analysis of rational action, provide formal conditions for the distinguishing of an adequate general conception of good. The picture remains pretty thin, however. A standard objection to a purely coherentist epistemology is that it is unable to distinguish normatively (epistemologically) between an inmate in a mental institution

³⁹ Aquinas emphasises 'good in general' when analysing good; when he speaks of practical reason and will's aiming at the ultimate end, he emphasises 'flourishing', which he identifies as the human ultimate end. In both cases he speaks of will's intellective aspect of grasping particular goods qua good, analogous to intellect's grasping of particular items of knowledge qua being/truth. Moreover, Aquinas speaks of both good in general and flourishing in the same context and referring to the same thing. General conception of good, ultimate end, object of will, and flourishing are variously identified in reference, but not in sense (e.g.: the object of will is end and good in general: IaIIae.1.2 ad 3; good has the *ratio* of end, and the primary good is the ultimate end: IaIIae.1.4 ad 1; whatever humans desire, they desire for the ultimate end, evidenced by fact that they desire whatever they desire *sub ratione boni*: IaIIae.1.6; the ultimate end for humans is flourishing: IaIIae.1.7; the ultimate end is the complete, general good, which is flourishing: IaIIae.2.7; the ultimate end, the object of human will is general good, which is to be found ultimately in God, who constitutes the humans' flourishing: IaIIae.2.8; will is necessarily inclined to flourishing, which is the general and complete good (IaIIae.10.2), the ultimate end that moves the will necessarily (ad 3); the good in general, which has the *ratio* of end, is the object of will, and particular ends are included in the general end (IaIIae.9.1)).

⁴⁰ In NE 1.8.223.

who believes himself to be Napoleon and an Oxford don at high table, who believes himself to be an Oxford don at high table, provided the conceptual scheme of each is internally coherent. Formal constraints on rational believing, the objection goes, are necessary but not sufficient for judging beliefs to be reliable, for they do not have the means to rule out creative but insane persons who are willing and able to adjust their beliefs sufficiently to maintain internal doxastic equilibrium. The beliefs must additionally provide an evaluable connection with reality. Similarly, it would seem that purely formal normative constraints upon a general conception of good are necessary but insufficient for being able to rule out normatively (practically) clever scoundrels who are willing and able to adjust their ethical beliefs and values in order to maintain axiological equilibrium. More substantive constraints are needed to provide an evaluable connection with reality.

3.2 Substantive Conditions

A second kind of constraint Aquinas specifies for grounding a general conception of good's objective normativity addresses this need. Here normative conditions emerge from the nature of human rational agents qua specifically *human* – conditions that may not specifically obtain for other kinds of rational agents, if there are any.

Aquinas appeals here to *nature*. In II we explored some general relationships between the orders of nature and reason. Here, in considering Aquinas's basic reasons for action relating to human nature, we see a convergence of normative, objective conditions for rational action emerging from both orders.

'Good', like 'being', is a transcendental concept which applies to each of the ten categories. Since the various categories have no common nature, nothing is

predicated of all of them univocally. The good is predicated in one way of substance, in another way of quality, and so on.⁴¹ There are good kinds of things and kinds of good things, but good itself is not a kind of thing. Ultimately good's signification is substantive-hungry, i.e. it qualifies *kinds* of things, with different kinds of natures and completions, and thus good differs in *kind* between categories. Thus for Aquinas, the kind of good which informs actions and arises from particular perceptions of *human beings* is *human good*.

Human good (extensionally equivalent to human flourishing) is thus a substantive and not merely formal notion, although it may function in practical thought in both general and specific ways. Practically, a human's general conception of good is a general conception of *human good*, which is to be further specified in terms of good and goods that are intelligibly human. On the one hand humans constitute a kind of substance in the natural order, possessing specific natures, capacities, and characteristic activities, for whom there are objective conditions for flourishing as a kind of substance, which conditions may be *identified* by rational determination. On the other hand, the kind of substance humans are is essentially rational – which, in practical matters, amounts to the truth that human beings act essentially in terms of order-3 rational activity, *expressing* rational determination in action. On Aquinas's view there is a convergence of natural and rational orders at a general level that not only preserves the necessary normative/motivational framework embodied within the practical standpoint but also metaphysically anchors it within a universal, 'natural' objective harbour.

Let us see how Aquinas develops this. In IaIIae.10.1 Aquinas gives an analysis of 'nature' as it relates to human acts. 'Nature' can refer to a thing's matter or

⁴¹ In NE 1.6.81; QDV 1.1; 21.1.

form. But in another sense what is 'natural' to a thing is what is proper to it according to its substance, i.e. to its essential properties and capacities or acts. What is naturally willed by human beings – *as* rational agents – is natural in the second way. What is naturally willed?

Now [the naturally willed starting point of voluntary movements] is good in general (*bonum in communi*), to which the will is naturally inclined, just as any power inclines to its object; and also the ultimate end itself, which is related to desirables as first principles of demonstrations are related to intelligibles.

This states in slightly different terms what we have already seen IaIIae.94.2. But then Aquinas adds a statement of substantive significance: the naturally willed starting point of voluntary action comprises good in general, the ultimate end, and also

generally (*universaliter*) all those things which are suitable (*conveniunt*) according to the nature of the one who wills. For we do not seek through the will only those things which belong to the power of the will, but also those which pertain to [the] individual powers, and to the human as a whole. Thus a human naturally wills not only the object of its will [viz. the good in general, or general conception of good] but also other things which are suitable to other powers: such as the knowledge of truth, which is suitable to the intellect; and existence and living and other things of this kind which concern natural well-being or bodily integrity (*respiciunt consistentiam naturalem*),⁴² all of which are comprehended under the will's object, as some particular kinds of goods.⁴³

Aquinas stated earlier that 'the object of the will is good and end in general, and each power is ordered to some suitable good that is proper to it.'⁴⁴ Now we see that such goods to which one's powers are ordered are *naturally* willed as particular goods under a general conception of good, i.e. as constituents.⁴⁵ The order-3 practical stance according to which S wills all that S wills under a general conception of good converges in some yet-to-be-specified way with an order-1 perspective which

⁴² On *consistentia* see (Finnis 1998), 81 n.98.

⁴³ We have already seen that Aquinas sees a general conception of good and the ultimate end in S's practical reasoning as equivalent. Here Aquinas identifies general good, ultimate end, and naturally willed goods as together constituting the naturally willed (singular) principle of voluntary movements. This makes most sense if understood in terms of the conception articulated above, viz. of a strong ultimate end (flourishing, general good), which comprises a teleologically-ordered aggregate of particular, intrinsic goods and ends (the naturally willed goods). Cf. QDM 1.5.

⁴⁴ Ia.82.4.

identifies certain kinds of goods picked out as special by virtue of their being 'suited' to S according to S's nature. Note the kinds of goods Aquinas specifies: knowledge of truth, which is the *basic good* of intellect, i.e. without which it would not *be* intellect;⁴⁶ existence and life, which are the most fundamental goods of living entities, without which they would not *be* at all. The goods of intellect and life, moreover, are goods that are necessary to human well-being, without which there would be no intelligibly human life at all. They are necessary conditions of the 'natural *consistentia*' of human beings, and thus, a fortiori, necessary conditions of the full flourishing of human life – which is specified in S's general conception of good.⁴⁷ Thus we may consider the kinds of goods Aquinas specifies here to be *basic human goods*, in two respects: they are (1) basic, core goods with regard to (2) the basic, core or constitutive elements of human flourishing.⁴⁸

Aquinas develops this picture in more detail in IaIIae.94.2, where Aquinas identifies the first principle of practical reasoning. In this context Aquinas also proceeds directly from a formal description of the normative/motivational framework for action to the assertion that

Since good has the *ratio* of an end, and evil of a contrary, so all those things to which the human has a natural inclination reason naturally apprehends as good, and consequently as things to be actively pursued, and their contraries as bad and to be avoided.

Here, again, formal and substantive notions of good meet, where 'reason naturally apprehends' something as (intelligibly) good, viz. in those things to which a human being is naturally inclined. The constraints of both natural and rational orders are

⁴⁵ The ends and perfections of all other powers are comprehended under the will's object (general good) as particular goods: IaIIae.9.1.

⁴⁶ Truth is intellect's natural good: SCG 3.118.5.

⁴⁷ The ultimate end moves the will necessarily, because it is the complete good; and similarly for that which is ordered to this end, and without which it cannot be attained, such as existence and life, and other such things: IaIIae.10.2 ad 3.

⁴⁸ The notion of basic human goods is stressed by the 'Finnis-Grisez' position. See (Porter 1993).

evident here. S's rational determination of good is naturally guided and constrained by what it naturally grasps as good, i.e. those things to which S has a natural inclination, what is suitable to S's nature. In the context, as we shall see, Aquinas spells out the order of human natural inclinations by appeal to the 'nature' humans share with other forms of life, a metaphysical appeal. However human good itself is not reducible to theoretical generalisations about such inclinations, for S's nature is *rational*: S 'naturally wills' what S rationally *determines* to be intelligibly good (*bonum intellectum*), because S's 'natural inclination' is 'rational appetite', or responsiveness to reasons. In general, based upon Aquinas's metaphysical teleology, his notion of 'natural inclination', like 'good', is not only a descriptive, but also, and primarily, a normative, concept. One's natural inclinations are, properly speaking,⁴⁹ those which are *conveniens* to one's nature, i.e. ordered to one's fulfilment as the kind of thing one is by virtue of one's nature.⁵⁰ For rational beings, 'natural inclination' is doubly normative: not only constrained by the general objective conditions of flourishing given in nature, but also by the standard of right reasoning in S's rational identification and expression of intelligible good within nature's general contours, which rational activity ultimately expresses such flourishing.

Aquinas goes on in IaIIae.94.2 to specify an *order* of natural human inclinations, in terms of the natural goods human beings share with other forms of life, specified with reference to an ascending order of essential properties. With all living things, humans share life and thus an inclination to the good of life; with other

⁴⁹ Aquinas acknowledges that humans can experience 'natural inclinations' towards what suits (*conveniens*) bodily senses but is *against* reason (DM 16.2; (Finnis 1998), 93). This is enough to show that Aquinas realises that a descriptive reading off of 'natural inclinations' from actual human behaviour is insufficient to ground a normative view of natural inclinations. However, a descriptive account of human behaviour as it expresses human appetites and inclinations can play some epistemological role in our understanding of nature (SCG 3.7.3), an implication of Aquinas's view that the nature of good is *manifested* through the effect of desirability. See (Jenkins 1994), 62-75.

⁵⁰ Each thing is inclined naturally to an operation that is suitable to it according to its form (nature): IaIIae.94.3.

animals, humans share an inclination to the good of sexual union (*coniunctio*) and the raising of offspring; and with others of rational nature, humans share inclinations to the goods which are basic to rational agents: knowledge of truth (Aquinas specifies 'truth about God', perhaps emphasising that it is *important*, rather than trivial truth in view⁵¹), and sociality (*societas*), the good of being able to live together in community with other rational beings.⁵² Two goods listed in IaIIae.10.1 – the knowledge of truth and 'to exist and to live' – are repeated here. Aquinas is apparently not interested in providing an exhaustive or detailed list – in fact he adds a further good in the next article: the natural inclination to live according to reason – but rather in specifying the most basic kinds of goods with respect to human nature, necessary goods, without which human flourishing is impossible. Whichever goods actually fit this specification will constitute basic human goods. Roughly following Finnis,⁵³ we may summarise the examples Aquinas mentions in IaIIae.94.2, along with possible sub- or nested goods, as follows:

- (1) Good of human life (bodily integrity, health, maturity).
- (2) Good of sexual union (procreation and education of children, companionship, *fides*, marriage).⁵⁴
- (3) Good of knowledge (truth, understanding, investigation, discovery, explanation).
- (4) Good of sociality (community, fellowship, friendship, sharing of goods, justice).⁵⁵

⁵¹ As (Finnis 1998), 82-83, suggests.

⁵² Cf. SCG 3.85.11.

⁵³ (Finnis 1998), 79-86.

⁵⁴ (Finnis 1998), 97-98 n.p., argues that, for Aquinas, *coniunctio maris et feminae* fully specifies the good of marriage, not simply sexual union. However, in the context Aquinas identifies this good in relation to the nature humans share with other animals, who do not practice marriage. Marriage, rather, appears to be a specification of the combined basic human goods of *coniunctio* and *societas*. Aquinas speaks along these lines in SCG, where he *argues for*, rather than begins with, the view that marriage is

The picture emerges that for Aquinas, beyond purely formal conditions upon S's general conception of good, there are basic human goods to which S is naturally inclined, which constitute objective, fixed constraints upon what S can intelligibly conceive to be good. It is true that, for S, 'good is of many kinds (*multiplex*)' and the will is not necessarily determined to any one of them,⁵⁶ but it is also true that there are basic human goods, so 'close to the bone' of human nature, i.e. so constitutive of the possibilities of an intelligibly human life, that they are not normatively 'up for grabs' in human practical determination. They must be taken as normative, objective givens, as starting points in matters of action, as goods to which S is committed as soon as S begins to act within an intelligibly human context. The normative grasp of these givens is practical; it emerges from within the most basic of human reasoning towards action. The practical possibilities of human action are constrained by the goods S cannot help but seek to realise in its practical thinking, if it seeks to realise anything at all. This is true, however, because these are basic *human* goods, grasped as practically rational necessities because they are basic to human nature. In a foundational way, the order of nature converges with the order of reason, mutually constraining the objective, normative possibilities of rational human action.

Although in Aquinas natural and rational orders converge in grounding and explicating the ultimate norms of practice, theoretical insights from 'nature' do not determine what S is to do in particular.⁵⁷ The ends of human action given in nature are *general* – they specify *kinds* of goods that define the general shape of human possibilities, but underdetermine the particular shapes those possibilities may take in

'natural' and should be indivisible on the basis of various features of sexuality and raising offspring (3.122), and by appealing to friendship and partnership between husband and wife (3.123).

⁵⁵ The things, therefore, without which human society cannot be preserved are naturally suitable to the human. Things of this kind include: for each one to preserve that which is one's own and to refrain from harm. Therefore there are some things in human action that are naturally right: SCG 3.129.5.

⁵⁶ Ia.82.2 ad 1.

action. Basic human goods are multiply exemplifiable, able to be expressed in different ways by different people in different situations. These exemplifications are not simply relative or subjective, for they rationally emerge as particular options from within a general conception of good whose most basic constituents are given by reasoning grounded in nature. Natural and rational orders, and theoretical and practical reasoning find common ground at the general level of practical thought. 'The practical intellect has a certain starting point in a general consideration, and in this respect is the same in subject (*est idem subiecto*) with theoretical intellect, but the conclusion of its consideration is in a particular thing to be done.'⁵⁸

4 General Reasons

4.1 Reasons for Action

Here we look more specifically at how the general level of thought functions in giving the S reasons to act. I argue that S's general conception of good gives S *general reasons for action*, which give general shape to S's more specific reasons and particular determinations.

Reasons for action in Aquinas's conception are explicated in terms of ends. To act rationally is to act for the sake of an intelligible end, and to see an object as an intelligible end is to understand or grasp it as good. That S sees X as good gives S reason to respond by 'pursuit'⁵⁹ in the way appropriate to what X is. If S sees X as good or desirable S has reason to seek to realise X.

⁵⁷ This seems to be the target of (Grisez 1969), 340.

4.2 General and Particular Reasons

I call the kind of reasons for action which emerge at the general level of practical thought *general reasons*, those grounded in basic human goods and minimal (at least) reflection upon them. An important characteristic of these reasons is their generality. They are general, first, in terms of the universality of their range of application: that X is a basic human good, e.g., gives S, i.e. any human agent, a reason to realise X. They are also general, second, in terms of the level of their conceptual specificity: that X specifies a kind of basic human good gives *any* S reason to realise X-type goods, but it does not by itself give a *particular* S reason to realise a *particular* X-token in a *particular* way, in a *particular* situation. That is, general reasons delineate the general conditions of what S has reason to do, but they underdetermine what S has most reason to do in a particular situation. The good of truth gives S reason to realise or pursue truth, but there are many ways to express this, from writing a love letter to writing a thesis in philosophy. Sexual union, for Aquinas, is a basic human good, best expressed in marriage. On this view S has reason to realise the good of marriage, but of course any particular determination of this general reason is highly qualified. While the good of marriage is always normatively relevant to the practical deliberations of a human deliberator, it does not follow that *I* should marry *Sheila* here and now, for any number of reasons (she's already married; I have a celibate vocation; her father just died and she is in deep grief).

I designate as a *particular reason* a reason identifying an act A that a particular S has a determinate reason or most reason to realise in a particular situational context (place, time, circumstances), C. A general reason does not entail a

⁵⁸ In NE 6.2.1132.

particular reason. That S has a general reason to realise X acts opens up for S the specification of kinds of acts – X-type acts – that are always normatively relevant to S's practical thought in general – *kinds* of acts S should generally be open to opportunities to realise, and in situations where directly relevant, kinds of acts S should actively seek to realise. But S's general reason does not tell S what to do in a particular situation.

Reasons are expressible in propositions and as such may be used as premises in arguments, debated, and discussed. The proposition, 'Human life is a basic human good', expresses a reason for action for S, i.e. a reason for S to be interested in preserving or promoting human life. However, Aquinas typically states general reasons as *gerundives*. For example, the general reason Aquinas appeals to most is the 'no harm principle': *No one is to be harmed*.⁶⁰ This form expresses the reason as a practical reason, as an expression of what one has reason to do from within a normative/motivational framework. In this paradigmatic form, a general reason is not an imperative, although within appropriate contexts (e.g. moral instruction, the commands of an authority) general reasons may be expressed as imperatives.⁶¹ But it seems clear that for Aquinas general reasons are meant to have a truth-value, i.e. to be statements of fact (albeit not empirical fact) as well as statements that are directive. For Aquinas, 'No one is to be harmed' is true if and only if (it is a fact that) no one should be harmed, in light of the basic human good of human life. The expression is also directive, however: it shows S what S *should/not realise* in action. Thus a general reason is meant to have a truth-value, but expressed from within the practical context as directive.

⁵⁹ Cf. *prosequendum* in IaIIae.94.2.

⁶⁰ *Nulli esse nocendum* (and variations). IaIIae.100.5 ad 4; IIaIIae.49.2. Note that the first principle of practical reason is gerundive.

⁶¹ IaIIae.17.1.

4.3 Positive and Negative Reasons

Positive reasons ('Truth is to be sought') articulate what one is to seek to realise.

Negative reasons express what one is not to realise. The distinction between them is important. *Positive general reasons* we have considered. They articulate kinds of reasons relevant to any S, opening up the practical field to relevant, appropriate kinds of reasons to be considered and realised in action. It is these, positive general reasons, which underdetermine particular reasons, more specifically now, *positive particular reasons* – those which express what S has most reason to realise in particular.

Negative general reasons, however, operate differently: they exclude certain kinds of reasons from S's deliberative field of vision. Although, like positive general reasons, they underdetermine positive particular reasons, negative general reasons *do* determine *negative particular reasons* (which express what S has determinate reason *not* to realise in a particular situation). Thus they determinately rule out particular actions for particular agents, viz. actions which fall under the kind of act ruled out in general. Put differently, to the particular practical question: 'Should I realise X (a particular act)?' it is only an negative general reason that, qua general reason, can give a determinate answer: for if X is a token of an excluded act-type, then S is not to realise X, that particular act. Positive general reasons articulate the kinds of things open to S, but can point to no particular X as what is to be done to exemplify them.

Basic human goods imply both positive and negative general reasons. For example, the good of truth implies both the positive general reason to seek truth and the negative general reason not to lie. These negative general reasons are of special importance in that they specify the boundaries of the good, identifying acts that

violate the necessary conditions of the good. Indeed, they express a double necessity: they identify (1) the necessary conditions for the realisation of (2) those goods that are necessary for the realisation of human flourishing. Thus if a good is always relevant as an end for S to realise, it implies a positive general reason to realise it, but how to do so is left open. Any of several ways may be *sufficient*, as in the case of the variety of ways to seek truth. But a negative general reason specifies a kind of act that precludes the good, or removes a *necessary* condition for its realisation. Hence the negative general reason has a greater practical or normative stringency than any of the exemplifications of the positive general reason. Thus more stringent than any particular exemplification of the positive general reason to seek truth is the negative general reason not to lie.

4.4 *Bonum Rationis*

Our account of a general conception of good as expressing S's practical thought on the general level implies a further general reason to be mentioned here. We saw that a fully rational general conception of good is motivationally ultimate, teleologically ordered, and adequately grounded in relation to basic human goods. The second condition requires, first, that one's conception of basic human goods or general reasons be coherently ordered to each other. For basic human goods can conflict: Sam's pursuit of truth as a journalist can destroy his marriage if not properly balanced with it. The goods and reasons that express them need to be rationally ordered into a coherent perspective. Second, for Aquinas the ordering to the end is prior to the ordering among the parts, and gives the latter its point. Thus the goods and reasons comprising the general conception of good must be rightly related to the end that

unifies and integrates them (viz. the strong ultimate end of human flourishing). Thus we may say that by virtue of the formal constraints of a general conception of good S possesses a general, second-order reason rationally, teleologically to order S's first-order general reasons.

However, Aquinas specifies as well a *first-order* general reason to realise teleological ordering among one's general reasons, based upon a further basic human good: the good of reason or reasonableness, *bonum rationis* (see II.4.3), which corresponds to the 'natural inclination' of human beings to 'act according to reason'.⁶² *Bonum rationis* implies a positive general reason, viz. to 'act rationally', i.e. to seek to be reasonable and exemplify rational excellence in action. Aquinas often speaks of acting rationally as what it is always right for a human being to do,⁶³ as a kind of shorthand for 'human good' or the final actuality of human beings, and therefore as an initial specification of the human ultimate end. The *telos* or teleological-ordering principle within the ultimate end, for Aquinas, is the *basic good of acting rationally*: it is the aim presupposed in all rational action (from an internal perspective), and it expresses the final actuality of human nature as essentially rational (from an external, metaphysical perspective). Thus beyond the desideratum of coherence within one's general conception of good – informing it and giving it point – the basic human good of acting rationally expresses a practical *ideal* at which to aim in practice, a substantive, teleological organising objective to be expressed in all of one's action.

⁶² IaIIae.94.3.

⁶³ E.g. IaIIae.94.4.

5 First Principles of Practical Thought

5.1 First Principles

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance that *principles* play in Aquinas's thought, whether theoretical or practical. We saw that induction reaches some 'principle' and some 'universal', i.e. general principles from which syllogistic reasoning proceeds.⁶⁴ Aquinas's central discussion of practical thought in IaIIae.94.2 identifies the principle of non-contradiction and the first principle of practical reasoning as formal principles that govern all thinking in theory and practice. Aquinas also indicates there, however, that there is more than one first principle of practical reason: he identifies the practical first principles with the basic human goods and the general reasons that express them.⁶⁵

For Aquinas, principles include human beings themselves, as originators of their own acts;⁶⁶ the various powers of the soul as starting points of action – including sense operations, willing, deliberating, and choice;⁶⁷ general, indemonstrable truths that ground the certainty of theoretical reasoning⁶⁸ and the practical trustworthiness or correctness (*rectitudo*) of practical reasoning.⁶⁹ A father is a principle of his children,⁷⁰ and nature is an intrinsic principle of natural operations.⁷¹ Human acts are

⁶⁴ In NE 6.2.1132.

⁶⁵ In IaIIae.94.1 ad 2 Aquinas states that natural law precepts are first principles of human operations. In IaIIae.94.2 he argues that there are several natural law precepts, which stand to practical reasoning as first indemonstrable principles stand to theoretical reasoning. Cf. IaIIae.93.1; QDV 16.1. Elsewhere Aquinas speaks simply of first principles, apart from explicit reference to natural law precepts (but which turn out to be the same as or similar to his explicit natural law precepts): In DA 3.15.826; QDV 16.2; Ia.79.12. In the second half of IaIIae.94.2 Aquinas implicitly identifies basic human goods with the reasons expressed by natural law precepts. I address the 'law' aspect of this picture in VI.

⁶⁶ IaIIa.Prol; 6.1; In NE 1.18.3; 3.1.391.

⁶⁷ In NE 1.1.8; 2.5.290; 3.7.466; 3.11.502; QDW(1) 10c; IaIIae.6.2 ad 2.

⁶⁸ QDV 16.1, 16.2; Ia.79.8; IaIIae.14.5; 57.2, 4.

⁶⁹ QDV 16.2.

⁷⁰ In NE 3.11.501.

principles of the formation of habits,⁷² and habits are in turn principles of the expression of human acts.⁷³ Ends aimed at by an agent are principles of practical action and practical reason,⁷⁴ and the human ultimate end is the first principle in human action.⁷⁵

Although the distinction between principles and first principles in Aquinas is not always precise, he does state that not all principles are first principles; while all starting points or origins are principles, first principles are *more basic* starting points – e.g. what is first in a genus.⁷⁶ Both terms and propositions are first principles.

What is essentially distinctive of first principles – expressed in their attribution as 'first' – is their *priority*: first principles are prior to others. We examined this in II with respect to paradigmatic theoretical reasoning. Although Aquinas adverts often to practical first principles, he does not give a similarly systematic account of them. When he does, however, he typically appeals to the analogy between theoretical and practical reasoning.⁷⁷ Following Aquinas's lead, I offer some practical analogues to Aquinas's criteria for theoretical propositional first principles. Although the ideal of practical thought is not fundamentally explanatory but rather normative and motivational in character, Aquinas's discussion in In Met 1.1.20 suggests that the ultimate aim of generalising reasoning in practice is general knowledge, which provides its possessor with the why(s) that can guide experiential knowledge. Thus there *is* a kind of explanatory structure to general knowledge in the case of *practical science* as well, which guides practical application.

⁷¹ IaIIae.6.5; 10.1; 85.1.

⁷² IaIIae.51.2.

⁷³ IaIIae.49.Prol.; IaIIae.49.3.

⁷⁴ IaIIae.1.1; In NE 3.8.474; 6.4.1170, 1172; 7.8.1433; QDW(2) 2c.

⁷⁵ IaIIae.1.5; 72.5.

⁷⁶ IaIIae.6.1 ad 1.

⁷⁷ E.g. a significant portion of the crucial discussion of practical first principles in IaIIae.94.2 consists in spelling out the parallels between the two, and specifying practical first principles in light of theoretical ones.

In this way the 'practical intellect has a certain principle in a general consideration, and in this respect is the same in subject with theoretical intellect.'⁷⁸ Practical and theoretical intellect are not two separate kinds or branches of knowledge, or two distinct powers. They are the same power, directed at distinct ends.⁷⁹ We saw that theoretical and practical perspectives converge at the general level of practical thought, so it is not surprising to see hints of an ideal of practical science with regard to moral matters which would express a general knowledge of human goods and actions and could guide practical determination. Such general knowledge would begin with – and be normatively and motivationally grounded in and express – *practically basic* goods and reasons.

As theoretical first principles are propositions that explicate real natures and their relationships, practical first principles are propositions that explicate real goods and their relationships. As the structure of theoretical demonstration is isomorphic with the metaphysical structure of reality, the structure of practical determination is isomorphic with the normative structure of practice, the determining of general good into particular action.⁸⁰ Propositions expressing practical first principles, following the analogy to theoretical reasoning, would be reasons that are: (1) universal – applying to all human beings by virtue of their human, rational nature; (2) necessary – expressing practically necessary, essential goods and reasons; (3) immediate – expressing practically immediate reasons and goods, and thus epistemically immediate, known through themselves, by their very nature (thus, indemonstrable); and (4) epistemically prior to their practical determinations because they express reasons and relationships that are practically basic – normatively and psychologically

⁷⁸ In NE 6.2.1132.

⁷⁹ In BDT 5.1; Ia.79.11.

⁸⁰ Practical first principles are more than dispositions to know truth; they include, as well, the desire for good (Ia.79.2) – they are both naturally known and naturally desired (Ia.Iae.51.1).

prior and explanatory – , i.e. reasons that explicate the goodness of particular determinations of good. (See Figure 4.)

Theoretical First Principles	Practical First Principles
Universal: all such natures	Universal: all human beings
Necessary: propositions expressing essential predications	Necessary: reasons expressing essential goods
Immediate: express immediate metaphysical facts and relationships; <i>per se nota</i>	Immediate: express immediate practical reasons and goods; <i>per se nota</i>
Indemonstrable	Indemonstrable
Epistemically prior: express metaphysically basic and explanatory facts, more known by nature	Epistemically prior: express practically basic and explanatory reasons, more desired by nature
Absolute first principle: Principle of non-contradiction	Absolute first principle: First principle of practical reason
Based on <i>ratio</i> of 'being'	Based on <i>ratio</i> of 'good'

Figure 4

Thus Aquinas may say that first principles are 'simply intellectually cognised'.⁸¹ Humans do not have innate ideas, on his view – all human cognition is based upon the human intellectual ability to abstract universal natures from sensory contact with material particular instantiations. Human cognition requires experience. First principles, however, are *basic* – metaphysically and/or practically. Cognition of them is not reached on the basis of argument or reflection, for they constitute the very starting points for argument and reflection.

This picture of first principles in Aquinas converges with the picture we saw of basic human goods and general reasons. Basic human goods constitute starting points for human life and action. They constitute metaphysically basic facts about human nature and imply practically basic reasons for action: general reasons that express normative givens in all intelligibly human action. Basic goods and reasons expressing them are first principles of practical reason.

5.2 First Principles and Character-Dependent Perception

How does this picture square, however, with Aquinas's view that practical knowledge is character-dependent? Aquinas holds that reaching a general knowledge of things requires particular, sensory experience.⁸² Particulars are *epistemic principles* or starting points for general knowledge. Reaching general knowledge requires, however, more than simple sense perception, which is solely particular. One must apprehend the universal-in-the-particular, requiring a perceptual sense beyond (mere) external sense perception.⁸³ Aquinas refers to these capacities, variously, as internal sense, cogitative power – *vis cogitativa* – or 'particular reason'.⁸⁴ To be an intellectual agent, i.e., one needs an ability to perceive particulars *as* instances of kinds, which underlies the ability to have general conceptions of things. Indeed, since

⁸¹ Ia.79.8; 85.5.

⁸² In NE 6.3.1148. Aquinas's accounts of abstraction and induction spell out this process. Ia.85.5; 79.8. (Kretzmann 1993), 143; (Schmidt 1966), 271. For induction in Aristotle, see (Chappell 1995), 72, and (Kal 1988), 27. For the scope of induction in Aristotle, see (McKirahan 1992), 250-257.

⁸² Ia.79.8; 85.5.

⁸² Ia.79.8. Cf. IaIIae.74.10 ad 2.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸² Ia.85.5.

⁸² Ia.14.7c; 79.4. ad 3. 'Conceptualisation comes as the term and product of a process of reasoning' (Lonergan 1967), 37. See also 33, 39, 55-58.

⁸³ In PA 2.20.

⁸⁴ In NE 6.9.1249.

general knowledge is reached from particular perception, one must have the right kind of particular experiences in order to reach the right kind of general knowledge.

This is particularly important with regard to practical matters, where the challenge is not only to perceive contingent, variable particulars as instances of more general good, but to grasp them *as practical*, as linked to one's normative/motivational framework. For S to grasp X as good is for S to grasp X as an intelligible end or reason for action *for S*: to grasp it as logically and psychologically connected to S's normative/motivational framework, related to S's desires, appetites, and practical orientation.

This requires, first, a kind of *practical perception*, a seeing of things *as good/desirable/ends*. According to Aquinas higher animals possess *vis aestimativa*, a natural evaluative or perceptual power, by which they are able to perceive objects as either suitable or beneficial or harmful, as something to be pursued or avoided. Aquinas's favourite illustration of this kind of natural perception and judgement is of a sheep grasping the 'practical' difference between its mother and a wolf: it naturally perceives the wolf as an enemy, and flees; and it naturally perceives its mother as friendly, and follows.⁸⁵ This amounts to a kind of sensory imagination, which constitutes an indefinite, embryonic practical orientation.⁸⁶ The perception the animal has of an object will not motivate it to pursuit or avoidance unless it is apprehended under the aspect of good or bad (*sub ratione boni vel mali*), i.e. as suitable or not (*convenientis vel nocivi*).⁸⁷ The extra-sensate character of what is grasped is the object's *intention*⁸⁸ – which animals are able to grasp instinctively and embryonically.

⁸⁵ In II Sent. 24.2.1.2; Ia.78.4; Ia.81.3.

⁸⁶ In DA 3.16.839.

⁸⁷ In II Sent. 24.2.1.2; Ia.81.3; IaIIae.17.2.3.

⁸⁸ Ia.81.3. See (Brennan 1941), 134. In this context *intentio* has a technical signification. According to (Klubertanz 1952), 12, Aquinas does not state the meaning of '*intentio*', but only gives examples; the only detailed exposition is given by Avicenna. Cf. (Knudson 1982); (Mahoney 1982).

For Aquinas this proto-practical grasp by animals corresponds to his notion of the imperfect voluntariness of their acts: the animal imperfectly knows the end, merely apprehending it, without knowing it under the conception of it *as* an end, or by referring its mediating actions *to* the end.⁸⁹

Human beings possess, more properly, *vis cogitativa*, the ability to judge the extra-sensate character of things *rationaly*, under a general conception of good. This ability is a kind of fulfilment or transformation of the animal's capacity,⁹⁰ and it is properly expressed in the ability to have one's perception shaped by reasoning: comparing impressions, images, putative goods, possible ends – utilising one's imagination and memory – and then judging what one has most reason to do.⁹¹ How one thinks shapes what one desires and perceives.

It is also true, conversely, that what one *desires* shapes what one perceives and thinks: we pay attention to what we are interested in. The music lover hears what the tone-deaf and less musically interested do not, and the committed angler sees fish invisible to the less committed. This is due to the *attention* that these individuals pay to these matters over time, as a result of (and as a further contribution to) their love for the subject. 'For we see that those who delight in doing any work of reason are better able to judge particular matters, and accurately and diligently investigate those matters that occupy them with delight.'⁹² One's perception, then, is in great measure determined by one's desires, what one finds pleasure in; in short, by one's character – the disposition of one's appetites and thinking.

⁸⁹ IaIIae.6.2; In DA 3.16.839.

⁹⁰ In 81.3 Aquinas suggests that *vis cogitativa* in humans replaces the *vis aestimativa* in animals: 'In place of *vis aestimativa* in humans, is *vis cogitativa*, which is called by some "particular reason", because it compares particular intentions' (Ia.81.3; QDV 1.11). In Ia.78.4 the suggestion is that *vis cogitativa* is an additional power in humans, beyond their instinctive perception. The suggestions are compatible: the human substantial form shares some capacities with 'lower' animals, while being specifically differentiated from them by its possession of intellect.

⁹¹ Ia.79.4

⁹² In NE 10.8.2043.

For this reason, general practical knowledge also requires *character habituation*.⁹³ To have a correct general grasp of what is good, one must perceive particulars correctly. This depends crucially upon the disposition of one's appetites, and the disposition of one's appetites is shaped by habituation. Aristotle, in specifying the modes of induction, states that 'some first principles are studied by means of induction, some by means of perception, some by means of some sort of habituation, and others by other means.'⁹⁴ Aquinas adds to these a further example, from the practical arts: principles are reached through experience.⁹⁵ These modes have in common a progression from particular to general, on the basis of some sort of experience (in the broad sense of contact with particulars). Character habituation involves the general shaping of one's desires and appetites by way of *appetitive experience* so that one becomes pleased by the right things and pained by the wrong things, thus developing a perceptual sensitivity to and fine-grained discernment of what is truly good.

Character habituation occurs, ideally, in S's initial moral education by way of S's parents' appropriately applying pleasures and pains to S in ways that correspond to S's behaviour or to behaviour to be learned, in order to establish early correlations in S's character between certain act-kind identifications and appropriate appetitive response, so that S develops a 'taste' for the right things, actually coming to desire (or be repulsed by) them. On this picture, one's appetitive orientations become modes of perception, or at least necessary components of perception. According to Aquinas one cannot have a correct conception of good apart from the cultivation of one's character through habituation. 'That good is the most complete, which is desired as

⁹³ Cf. (Burnyeat 1980).

⁹⁴ NE 1.7, 1098b3-5.

⁹⁵ In NE 1.11.137.

an ultimate end by one with well-disposed affections.⁹⁶ What practical thought must grasp is what is 'practically true', involving both correct belief and correct desire. Desire is made correct by habituation of character.⁹⁷ Practical knowledge, then, understanding what is good, involves both thought and character. It is character-dependent knowledge.

If one's apprehension of what is good is dependent upon character, however, how is it that basic human goods can be said to be apprehended by all (rational) human beings as good? Indeed, Aquinas holds both that the grasp of what is good is irreducibly character-dependent, *and* that there are basic human goods naturally cognised by all human beings, by virtue of their nature as human beings and by virtue of the rational and psychological exigencies of rational action. How can both of these positions be maintained?

First, although Aquinas does hold that the grasp of the most fundamental first principles of practice is universal and unable to be effaced, he does not deny the effects of character and culture (and culture reflects a kind of corporate character – IaIIae.58.1; 97.3; In NE 2.1.247) at the general level of practice. The character of what is 'in principle' cognised by all humans must be qualified to some extent by the interpretative influences of culture and character.⁹⁸ Second, recall that even the 'self-evidence' of theoretical first principles does not guarantee that all human beings will actually know them. What is 'naturally known', according to Aquinas, is first a

⁹⁶ IaIIae.1.7.

⁹⁷ IaIIae.52, 55.

⁹⁸ In IaIIae.94.4 and 94.6 Aquinas states this regarding 'secondary principles' of natural law, not first principles. However, character and culture can affect one's cognition even of principles, in respects I shall suggest. Aquinas argues in some places that such first principles of action as 'It is wrong to do harm to anyone,' or 'Injustice is never right,' are principles of which one's understanding is never mistaken (In DA 3.15.826), and that the truth of general principles of reason, including practical reason, is equally known to everyone (IaIIae.94.4). However, he also acknowledges error about first principles (e.g. error about the first principle of the entire moral order, which is the ultimate end: IaIIae.72.5). I believe that my account, with its emphasis on *specification*, makes best sense of Aquinas's position.

metaphysical claim about what is intrinsically *cognisable*, and only secondarily an epistemological claim about what is *cognised* by human agents.⁹⁹

The distinction between the character-dependence of practical cognition and the immediacy of cognition of basic human goods is not absolute. Still, it is clear that, for Aquinas, within a range of how much one's cognition is influenced by character, the cognition of basic human goods and the general reasons they express lies on the end of least influence, thus grounding the possibility of agreement and common ground in general matters among diverse individuals and groups.

We saw above the reasons for this: basic human goods are grasped as good *immediately*, in the literal sense – they are not grasped *mediately*, i.e. on the basis of argument. Their value, their nature as intelligible ends of pursuit or realisation, is intrinsically obvious to agents, in that their *point* is basic to the attempt to engage in any intelligible human activity. Their point is grasped, that is, not as a *conclusion* of one's reasoning about good, but is grasped *in* one's reasoning about what to do. They are *practically basic*, in that they constitute core goods with regard to the necessary, constitutive elements of human life and well-being. They are *practically immediate*, in that they constitute not merely means to other ends, but as basic goods are intrinsically intelligible ends to be pursued for themselves. Because of this S's cognition of them is *epistemically immediate*, in a way practically analogous to metaphysically and epistemically immediate natures and connections in theoretical thought.

This is evident in how basic human goods actually function in reasoning about practice: not as items of debate, i.e. as practical conclusions, but as general starting points underlying and defining the terms of *all* debate (and action). Distortion arises

⁹⁹ (MacDonald 1993), 171-172.

typically with reference, not to the necessity or general nature of the basic human goods themselves, but to more *specific* conceptions of them, as they are spelled out in more detail, or to questions concerning how they are to be applied in particular cases. For example, truth, I would argue, is not in actual fact seriously questioned as a good – even sceptics and nihilists writing books against the possibility or value of truth articulate their perspectives (implicitly, at least) as being true (there is a point to their writing at all, and they give arguments to support their claim, in order that it be believed on that basis). They would be offended if their views were misrepresented by a reviewer or if they were cheated of their author's rights due to contractual misrepresentation by the publisher – both violations of truth. Whatever questions may be raised about objectivity or theories of truth, the basic point and desirability of truth is inescapable once one enters into the 'practice' of communication, and, more basically, of thought itself.¹⁰⁰ Genuine debate concerns not whether, e.g., lying is a good, but whether certain kinds of action constitute lying, or whether lying is justified in a particular case. Indeed *debate* about lying is not possible apart from an initial, shared presumption of the good of truth.

However, basic human goods are *general* and must be specified further in order to be action-guiding. It is at the level of *specification* that corruption typically occurs: *that* truth, life, sociality, etc. are goods is not – except in extreme cases – significantly shaped or distorted by culture and character. Their influence is seen, rather, in one's *specific* conception of these goods – their specific nature, value, relation to other goods, and role in the moral life. If as a child S lies and is positively reinforced, S's specific grasp of the nature of the good of truth will begin to be shaped in a distorted way. If S's character continues to develop in this direction, and S

¹⁰⁰ See (Finnis 1998), 58-60.

cultivates an understanding of truth as painful and to be avoided, or as expendable in light of other objectives, S may eventually care so little for knowing or speaking truth that, not only S's ability to act truthfully, but S's ability to grasp *what* is true, or, what in a particular situation truth calls for, becomes seriously distorted. At some point – certainly in the case of (if possible) *total* disregard for truth – we would cease to think of S as intelligibly rational. As argued, even sceptical arguments against truth are only intelligible as attempts to find or articulate a true position. One who literally cares *nothing* for truth – cares not at all whether even one's own (e.g. sceptical) views are true – no longer operates intelligibly. Such is the nature of a basic human good. Short of such extreme cases, however, cultivation of character – good or bad – shapes one's conception of good, but this influence occurs less in terms of one's cognition of basic human goods at the general level of thought, and more in terms of one's more specific conception of good, operating at the specific level.

Basic human goods and general reasons lie at the initial, immediate end of the inductive continuum expressing the acquisition of concepts – paradigms, in relation to contingent matters, of the most simple, most immediate apprehensions of natures available to embodied cognisers. Their specific conceptions lie closer to the more highly refined end, and reflect induction as a potentially lengthy and reflective process, including character habituation. Character (and culture) habituation only minimally effaces the grasp of basic goods.

5.3 General Conception of Good and First Principles of Practical Thought

Aquinas never supplies a list of practical first principles – a curious fact, if he intended to develop a complete, scientific structure of practical thought.¹⁰¹ Aquinas's evident concern is, rather, to establish the general-to-particular structure of paradigmatic practical thought, and ground it in universal, rational and normative foundations analogous to the foundations of theoretical thought, fitting his more general metaphysical, psychological, and epistemological perspective.

Aquinas gives occasional examples of naturally known practical principles, sometimes identified as first principles, sometimes not. Typically these are given in the context of providing an illustration in order to explicate the status of such first principles as certain or trustworthy,¹⁰² or to explicate their role as general reasons or premises in pieces of practical reasoning,¹⁰³ in contrast to more specific deductions or determinations of general reasons.¹⁰⁴ Aquinas's most often-used example of a general reason is the 'no harm principle':¹⁰⁵ a negative general reason expressing the necessary boundary conditions for the basic human goods of human life and *societas*.¹⁰⁶ Aquinas also occasionally appeals to certain, quite formal principles, such as, 'no one is to be wrongly injured',¹⁰⁷ 'evil is to be avoided',¹⁰⁸ 'every dishonourable thing is to be avoided',¹⁰⁹ and 'no sin is to be committed'.¹¹⁰ These principles constitute either substantive general reasons which directly express basic human goods, minimal specifications of them, or more formal restatements of them and/or

¹⁰¹ As theoreticalist and deductivist construals of Aquinas suggest.

¹⁰² In DA 3.15.826; QDV 16.2.

¹⁰³ In NE 7.3.1345.

¹⁰⁴ IaIIae.94.4; 95.2.

¹⁰⁵ In DA 3.15.826; In NE 6.11.1277; IaIIae.95.2; 100.3; 100.5 ad 4; IIaIIae.49.2.

¹⁰⁶ SCG 3.128.7.

¹⁰⁷ In NE 5.2.1018.

¹⁰⁸ In II Sent. 24.2.4; In NE 5.2.1018; QDV 17.2; IaIIae.100.3.

¹⁰⁹ In NE 7.3.1345.

their relationships to other basic human goods. For example, 'no sin is to be committed' is a minimal, formal specification of the first principle of practical reason.

Whereas the no harm principle is Aquinas's most often-mentioned, and most general and stringent, substantive negative general reason, his most often mentioned – and likewise, most general and stringent – positive general reason is the requirement, expressed variously, that human beings are to act rationally or according to reason.¹¹¹ This is not only a formal, but also a substantive general reason, since 'acting rationally', for Aquinas, is given substantive content in the context of his general metaphysical and psychological picture.

Aquinas's identification of practical first principles, then, is somewhat loose. What he does say about them, however, converges with what we have seen as the principles of practical thought in basic human goods and the reasons they express. The first principles Aquinas actually specifies correspond to our picture of general reasons that express basic human goods.

For Aquinas first principles include both terms and propositions. On the practical analogy, the natures of basic human goods themselves are practical first principles. However, in order to enter into a piece of practical reasoning, or to be used in moral education or specification of an ethical tradition, they must be expressed in propositions which, properly speaking, are characterised along lines explored in the last section. These gerundive, propositional first principles, are what I have called 'general reasons', and they correspond to the Aquinas's actual examples.

According to Aquinas general knowledge in matters of action, which expresses the 'whys' of practical experience and general truths of practice,¹¹² has value

¹¹⁰ DM 3.9 ad 7.

¹¹¹ IaIIae.94.4; 71.2; QDV 16.1 ad 9.

¹¹² In Met 1.1; In NE 1.4.54.

in ordering human action, although not apart from virtue.¹¹³ This relates importantly to practical first principles, and indicates a further first principle of practice.

According to Aquinas, the human *ultimate end* is the first principle in the genus of human action, the starting point of the entire moral order.¹¹⁴ One's conception of one's ultimate end functions as the *most* basic first principle in one's practical thought. Every S has some, at least formal, implicit, and often vague and inarticulate conception of its ultimate end, which S progressively specifies in more substantive and explicit ways, in order for it to be actually action-guiding in S's practical determination.¹¹⁵ This general conception of one's ultimate end or flourishing we saw to be equivalent, in Aquinas's account, to our notion of a general conception of good: an inclusive, aggregate conception of what is good – formal, but progressively specified in terms of a specific conception of good.¹¹⁶ It is this general conception of good or ultimate end that comprises S's 'general knowledge', the practical 'why' that governs practical action. Beyond its merely formal role it is constituted by the basic human goods and general reasons that express them and their relationships to each other. When adequately, teleologically ordered a general conception of good will express practical science, and guide action as a 'rule' or guiding, explanatory, normative, and motivational standard. S's general conception of good, then, is the first principle in S's rational action.¹¹⁷

This picture is expressed in Aquinas's analogy between the reasoning of art and action. According to Aquinas, the 'form' of *health* in the mind of a physician is a

¹¹³ In NE 1.11.138.

¹¹⁴ IaIIae.1.5; 72.5; In NE 1.2.139; SCG 3.97.12.

¹¹⁵ This expresses also what we have seen of the role of character in the process of cognition, and the convergence of nature and reason at the general level. Desire for the ultimate end in general is from nature, but the agent's actual perception of the end – its conception of the end – is not from nature, but is however it seems to the agent, depending upon the agent's character: In NE 3.13.524. Also 6.12.1273.

¹¹⁶ See In NE 6.12.1273.

principle of the physician's reasoning about how to effect health in a particular patient. Medical thinking begins with one's having a general conception of health (e.g. health as 'such and such') in mind, and then deliberatively reasoning about what conduces to or is necessary to produce the various constitutive conditions of health, until one reaches a final determination as to what one can and should do first in order to reach the end of producing health in the patient.¹¹⁸ The analogue to such a conception, in reasoning about action, is a general conception of good.

The aspiration to a teleologically-ordered general conception of good is basic to rational action: S cannot be sufficiently motivated or guided by a general conception of good that has no point, that does not integrate S's life or vision. Yet to be substantively action-guiding it must be specified. To this subject I now turn.

¹¹⁷ This may be seen as an expression of the first principle of practical reasoning, as it is actually worked out in S's rational action.

¹¹⁸ In Met 7.6.1404-1410.

IV

The Specific Level of Practical Thought

1 Specifying the Good

1.1 Introduction

The general level of practical thought is crucially important to Aquinas, for in its expression of general reasons for action it grounds the possibility – and explains the fact – of stable, common ground in ethics between diverse individuals and groups.¹ In this chapter I introduce the need for, and give an account of, a *specific* conceptual level of practical thought and examine forms of reasoning that characterise *specification*. My discussion moves beyond Aquinas's explicit account, filling a conceptual gap in his picture.

1.2 The General-to-Particular Structure of Practical Reasoning

The paradigmatic structure of practical reasoning in Aquinas is general-to-particular: S's rational particularisation of its general conception of good into expression in action. Aquinas's understanding of particularisation raises an initial worry. Aquinas follows Aristotle in asserting that inferences about action begin from the principle that

¹ See In NE 5.12.

‘such and such an end is good and best’ (however X is specified).² This appears to refer to S’s general conception of good. Aquinas seems to hold that S’s reasoning about action always starts with an explicit reference to S’s ultimate end or general conception of good. However, as a descriptive statement of how agents in fact reason about action, this is false; as a normative requirement as to how agents should always reason about action, it is unrealistic.³ Appropriating Broadie’s terminology, I call this the ‘grand end’ worry.⁴ Perhaps, it may be suggested, Aquinas means to refer here, not necessarily to S’s ultimate end, but merely to any proximate end that is held fixed and aimed at in a piece of practical reasoning.⁵ However, Aquinas’s requirement that rational action be ultimately rationally and psychologically grounded in S’s ultimate end – his eudaimonism – indicates that for Aquinas S *does*, in end-directed action, rationally act in light of S’s ultimate conception of flourishing, and that S *should* do so, most rationally. My account of practical determination in IV and V seeks to show the plausibility of Aquinas’s picture. On my interpretation, Aquinas holds both that the starting point of reasoning identifies (at least) a proximate end, and that S’s complete structure of practical determination is necessarily grounded in and presupposes S’s conception of its ultimate end – the latter constituting the ultimate reference for Aquinas’s point here. S’s conception of its ultimate end, however, need not be – indeed is very unlikely to be, explicitly – consciously considered or stated by S in a piece of particular determination.

In any case, a general-to-particular structure of practical reason is Aquinas’s paradigm. S grasps particular apparent goods in light of a general conception of good,

² [*Sullogismi*] *operabilium principium est, quod talis finis sit bonum et optimum . . .* In NE 6.10.1273.

³ See (Kenny 1977), 29.

⁴ (Broadie 1991), 198-202.

⁵ In Aristotle’s case, interpreters are divided. E.g. Irwin understands it to refer to the agent’s conception of what the highest good consists in: (Aristotle 1985), 348. Chappell argues that it need not: (Chappell 1995), 81.

but what is good in particular must be determined rationally by S. for S must have a determinate grasp of an object as intelligibly good in order to be moved to realise it. A very common interpretation of Aquinas's practical reason is that such a determination involves one's moving directly from the general level of reasons to the particular level, paradigmatically by way of employing a practical inference – to use the technical term Aquinas inherits from Aristotle, a 'practical syllogism'.⁶ I refer to this as the 'simple model' of practical determination. It is inadequate. The fact that S's positive general reasons underdetermine S's positive particular reasons as to what is to be done in particular, entails that, on a strictly deductive construal of syllogistic, Aquinas's paradigmatic practical reasoning is invalid. I consider this further in V. Even assuming the validity of positive practical inference, however, the conceptual distance in moving directly from general to particular levels is too great, either to be illuminative of practical determination, or adequately to characterise Aquinas's fuller picture.⁷

⁶ I henceforth use 'practical inference' and 'practical syllogism' synonymously.

⁷ My identification of a specific conceptual level elucidates and addresses a general ambiguity in interpreting both Aquinas and Aristotle. Aquinas's terminology for 'universal' and 'general' is flexible and overlapping. For both Aristotle and Aquinas it is not always clear whether in their terminology they intend to distinguish what is general/universal from what is specific ('genus/species' distinction) or from what is particular ('universal/particular' distinction). Thus Barnes (Aristotle 1994), 83: "The particular" (*to kath' hekaston*) is systematically ambiguous in Aristotle between "the individual" and "the specific" (in other words, Aristotle muffs the distinction between universal/singular and general/specific) . . . The context does not always resolve the ambiguity." Also (McKirahan 1992), 250: "Note that "particular cases" can include individuals, as opposed to universals, and specific, as opposed to general, terms. The "particular"/universal distinction also covers items that can appear as subjects and attributes in predications, and also connections of subjects and attributes that are expressed in subject-predicate propositions." Cf. (Devereux 1986).

1.3 Problems with the Simple General-to-Particular Structure of Practical Determination

First, Aquinas provides examples of practical reasoning that do not fit the simple model. In his account of practical syllogism, Aquinas specifies an explicit stereotyped structure of argument, which expresses the proper particularising of a general norm. On the model of a syllogism, Aquinas follows Aristotle in holding that a practical inference comprises three premises of this paradigmatic form:

PS:

Universal Premise (UP): X-kind humans should realise Y-type acts.

Particular Premise (PP): Act A is a (token of) Y-type act and I am (a token of) an X-kind human.

Conclusion (Concl): Therefore, I should realise act A.⁸

Some examples of inferential practical reasoning in Aquinas fit this model, but others do not, departing from it in instructive ways. For example, in IaIIae.94.4 Aquinas draws, as the ‘proper conclusion’ from the general reason

(R) It is right and true for all to act according to reason,

that:

(G) Goods entrusted to another should be restored to their owner.

This indeed involves an inference about practical matters, but it does not follow the paradigmatic pattern of PS. Rather than drawing a *particular* conclusion from a general premise, Aquinas concludes with another *general* premise – but one that is

⁸ This is a formalised and developed version of Aristotle’s example in DA 3.11.434a16-21. Aquinas accepts and develops this account in In DA 3.16.845. For both Aristotle and Aquinas this is the most detailed example of practical syllogistic, and is intended to be formal and paradigmatic. Both diverge from this paradigm in various ways, usually by abbreviation and ellipsis, as they give particular examples. E.g. Aquinas’s examples are typically negative formulations. (Note that even this formulation, to be complete, requires further specification of time and place.)

more specific than the original premise. This is an example of what I shall call ‘specific determination’, rather than ‘particular determination’, as in PS. Aquinas provides other examples of inferences that express or presuppose further specifying stages of reasoning, to be reached before the particular conclusion may be seen to follow from the general premise,⁹ or else which conclude with specific rather than particular propositions.¹⁰ Aquinas, like Aristotle, tends to conflate examples of specific and particular determination, but they can be seen to be distinct and, with regard to paradigmatic practical inference, must be kept distinct. Identifying specification as a *stage* in practical determination enables us to do so. Within a general-to-particular reasoning structure, there is a mediating level of general-to-specific reasoning.

Second, Aquinas not only provides examples of practical reasoning which do not fit PS, but also in the examples he does provide of practical inference, his typical universal premises, while more general than particular reasons, are not fully general reasons. They are what I call *specific reasons*, i.e. specifications of general reasons. In IaIIae.94.4 it is G, rather than R, that fits the model of Aquinas’s most typical universal premise. Indeed, note that the paradigmatic universal premise in PS does not explicitly express a general conception of good or necessarily a general reason for action; it more obviously expresses a specification of a general conception of good, or a specific reason for action. Although in practical determination for Aquinas there must ultimately be a subsumption of the particular good under a general conception of good, in his actual examples of practical syllogism, the particular is standardly drawn from a *more specific conception of good*.

⁹ QDV 17.2.

¹⁰ In II Sent. 2.4.

This is fortunate, because Aquinas's picture is thereby far more plausible than one that would require explicit actual inferences of particular conclusions from highly general goods or reasons. Presumably, for example, *all* inferences of Aquinian particular good actions could be described in terms of the following inference (not Aquinas's), using a version of R as universal premise:

PS (R):

UP: All human beings are to act rationally (realise rational acts).

PP: A is a rational act and I am a human being.

Concl: Therefore, I am to realise A.

Apart from further specification as to what counts as rational action, however – a more specific, substantive picture of the *kinds of action* that are rational – , R is entirely unhelpful, because too general. Presumably there are numerous acts that are rational under some description available to me. Why is it *A* that I am to realise? Whether in my seeking to determine what to do, or in attempts by others or myself to explain or justify my actions, more content as to what R actually involves, is required. Specific reasons – like G – fill in this conceptual gap.

A similar example, exemplifying the grand end worry, displays the practical futility of insisting, on the grounds of Aquinas's remark discussed in 1.2, that S's general conception of good must be expressed as a universal premise in S's practical inference. To do so would imply a practical syllogism, e.g. of this form:

PS (GCG)

UP: My end and best good is X.

PP: A expresses X.

Concl: Therefore, I am to realise A.¹¹

In most situations, more than one possible action expressive of S's general conception of good is available. More specific content is required concerning what X is and how it may be expressed, in order to be able to judge whether A is most appropriate.

Again, the conceptual distance between universal and particular premises is too great for this reasoning to be practical.

Third, the specific conceptual level in Aquinas's thought indicated by these considerations maps appropriately onto a middle, experiential level of knowledge of art and practice, between perceptions of particulars ('what' it is) and fully general knowledge ('why' it is so), which Aquinas explicates in *In Met* 1.1. Elsewhere Aquinas illustrates prudence's grasp of both general and particular by appealing to his standard health analogy and the physician's need for experience-based knowledge:

And thus it is that certain persons not possessing knowledge of universals are more effective concerning some particular matters than those who have universal knowledge, because they are experienced in other particular matters. Thus if some doctor (A) knows that light meats are easily digestible and healthful, but is ignorant concerning which meats are light, he is not able to effect health in people. But one (B) who knows that the flesh of fowls is light and healthful is better able to effect health.¹²

'Book' knowledge, i.e. general, explanatory knowledge of the 'whys' of medicine, without experience of particulars, is of less value to physicians than experience of

¹¹ When S's ultimate end is specified, as Aquinas often does, as 'acting rationally', this example is equivalent to PS (R).

¹² In NE 6.6.1194.

particulars only.¹³ The reasoning of the physician in the first case, A, has this general premise:

(1) All light meats are digestible and healthy.

Although A has this general knowledge, according to Aquinas, A does not know which meats are in fact light, and so is not of much help to people. B, on the other hand, knows that

(2) Chicken meat is digestible and healthy,

and thus is able to help people, by giving them chicken. Presumably (B) is able to reason as follows:

(2) Chicken meat is digestible and healthy.

(3) Here is chicken and here is a patient.

(4) Therefore, I will give the patient chicken.¹⁴

The knowledge possessed by B, expressed in 2, is experiential, middle-level knowledge, generalised from experience. What B lacks, however, is the general *why*, which enables B to explain *why* chicken is healthy. The *why* is what is expressed in 1, A's general premise.

Paradigmatic, full knowledge as expressed in art would include knowledge of 1. But as it stands, an inference of 1 – 3 – 4 would fail, because it does not *pass through* the experiential knowledge of how 1 is exemplified in the more specific conception of 'light meat', viz. 'chicken'. What is lacking in the reasoning of *both* A and B, in different ways, may be identified in the following inference, utilising a further premise, 5, which conceptually bridges the gap between A and B:

¹³ In Met 1.1.20. Still, those with only experience, who know *that* (*quia*) something is the case (e.g. X cures Y) but don't know *why* (*propter quid*), do not have the wisdom and insight of those with both general knowledge and particular experience, who grasp the cause and explanation of what is experienced: In Met 1.1.24.

¹⁴ Even here, of course, there are assumed premises, and the practical syllogism is not strictly valid.

(1) All light meats are digestible and healthy.

(5) Chicken is a light meat.

Therefore,

(2) Chicken meat is digestible and healthy.

A knows 1 but not 5, which is known by experience,¹⁵ and so fails to know 2, and thus 3 and 4. B knows 2 but does not know it as a *conclusion* from 1 and 5, and so does not possess general knowledge, or art, with respect to 2. The crucial inference 1 – 5 – 2 thus explicates the relation between general and experiential knowledge in this case. However, it is not a practical syllogism on Aquinas's paradigm. Rather, it represents a *specification* of the general premise 1, which may *then* be particularised further in an inference such as 2 – 3 – 4.¹⁶

The simple model of practical determination is inadequate, both as a model of practical reasoning in general, and as an interpretation of Aquinas's conception of practical reasoning in particular. There is a conceptual gap between general and particular levels, where more specific kinds of action need to be determined, so that S may be able to have a richer, more articulate picture of the appropriate practical possibilities, which may then be determined into particular action.

1.4 Specification

Thus I identify a specific conceptual level of practical thinking and reasons, and specifying forms of reasoning. *Specific determination* (descent), articulates, fills in, works out – i.e. specifies – the general conception of good into a specific conception

¹⁵ A could learn 5 theoretically from a book, but still not be able to recognise chicken and thus still fail to help people. So grasping 5 requires at least some experience.

of good. *Specific reasons* for action emerging from such reflection further open the range of reasons available to S for particular determination, which arrives at particular reasons for action.

I have noted that the line between general and specific levels is drawn somewhat arbitrarily. Still, I keep the levels distinct. Aquinas characterises the place of inter-traditional moral debate, and the ultimate normative, objective, and universal grounds of practical reasons, as obtaining at a general level. However, on his characterisation, moral education and the passing along of tradition, as well as intra-traditional debate and reflection, will occur primarily at a more specific level. The closer reasoning lies to the general level – e.g. ‘minimal’ specification – the more chance there is of agreement between different traditions, cultures, and moral perspectives. The more substantively specific the conceptions, on the other hand, the richer they are in providing tangible reasons for guiding practical thought and action, but also the more likely to diverge from other specific conceptions. Although everyone has some general conception of good, it is typically implicit and inarticulate. Most agents seldom consciously or explicitly reason from such a conception, other than when engaging in explicit ethical reflection concerning the grounds of their ethical perspective, e.g. while studying ethics or engaged in inter-traditional ethical dialogue. Despite Aquinas’s explicit emphasis upon the universal, objective grounds of ethics, he does not insist that that every S holds an explicit general conception of good. Nor does he think that the fact that S always acts rationally in light of its conception of its ultimate end implies that such a conception is (or should be) always entertained consciously. Just as one may walk towards an intended destination without thinking of the end at every step, he says, one need not be conscious of one’s

¹⁶ Irwin in (Aristotle 1985), 343, says that ‘particulars’ in Aristotle’s example, which Aquinas follows,

ultimate end in the consideration of every desire or action.¹⁷ Aquinas's own substantive ethical reflection, as reflected in *In NE* and in *ST IIa*, is best seen as taking place at the specific conceptual level. At this level one both clarifies and refines one's general conception of good, and from it reasons to particular determinations of good in action.

In sum: general reasons express one's ultimate normative/motivational grounds for action; specific reasons express a conceptually richer vision of this normative/motivational direction; and particular reasons represent the fruit of such thought in action. Figure 5, building upon the earlier distinctions of Figure 3, illustrates various further relationships obtaining between these levels, which I will explicate in the chapters which follow.

refer to 'more determinate types' (e.g. of meat) rather than 'particular instances'. This fits my interpretation of Aquinas.

¹⁷ *IaIIae*.1.6 ad 3.

Conceptual Levels of Practical Thought

General	Specific	Particular
Generalisation	Specification	Particular Determination
General conception of good	Specific conception of good	Particular expression of good
General Reasons	Specific Reasons	Particular Reasons
Particular → General	Specific → General (ascent) General → Specific (descent)	Specific → Particular (General → Particular)
Induction	Dialectic/Derivation/Deliberation	Deliberation/Inference
General shape of good	Specific shape of good	Particular shape of good
Thin conception	Thick conception	Determinate conception
Universal	Traditional	Personal
Moral grounds	Moral vision	Moral action
Justification, dialogue	Education, reflection	Action, expression

Figure 5

1.5 Thick and Thin Ethical Conceptions

This picture of conceptual levels in practical thought suggests a modification of Bernard Williams’s distinction between ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ ethical concepts. On Williams’s account, thin concepts (‘good’, ‘right’) are universal and objective, but of little value, being descriptively empty. Thick concepts (‘gratitude’, ‘compassionate’)

have substantive descriptive content, but their signification is relative to shared evaluative frameworks.

The thin/thick metaphor is instructive, but, especially with regard to Aquinas's conception of practical thought, it is more helpful if understood in terms of distinctions between conceptual levels rather than between kinds of concepts. On this construal, first, the distinction cuts across Williams's evaluative/descriptive distinction. Consider 'good', which, on Williams's account, is a paradigmatic thin concept. In ordinary language 'good' has, indeed, a wide range of application. We think of good teachers, good human beings, good watches, but also good thieves and even good lawyers. It may be thought that the evaluative flag signalling approval, as it were, can be logically planted on *any* ground that is claimed to be, at least to some S, 'good'.¹⁸ For Aquinas (as well as, arguably, for Aristotle and others), however, the wide applicability of 'good' is not due to its descriptive emptiness, for 'good' is substantively rich, tied into his broader metaphysical-teleological context. Rather, 'good' is substantive-hungry – since there is no single, univocal property of goodness that applies to all kinds of things, one needs to specify the kind of thing of which one is attributing goodness.¹⁹ When so specified, however, 'good' cannot be predicated willy-nilly; there are substantive criteria for identifying a good specimen, X, of its kind, which are logically tied to X's substantial form. The central ethical concept 'good', at least on Aquinas's account, has both wide application and substantive descriptive and evaluative content, thus cutting across the thick/thin distinction as Williams specifies it.

Second, understood as a distinction between conceptual levels, thick and thin conceptions are related. Even when specifically predicated of human beings, a

¹⁸ See (Williams 1985), e.g. 141. Cf. (Foot 1967).

relevant distinction remains between ‘good’, and a concept such as ‘compassion’. However it is not exclusive: ‘good’ and ‘compassionate’ may well be predicated of the same individual. The distinction is primarily in level of generality; the latter presupposes and specifies the former, indicating a general/specific relationship. The ‘thinness’ of ‘good’ (in ‘good human being’) is a function of its *generality*: it is a general characterisation of a human qua human, with respect to essential human characteristics; the ‘thickness’ or substantive richness of ‘compassion’ is a function of its *specificity*: it refers to a specific kind of human goodness, a good kind of character trait expressing human goodness. This reflects Aquinas’s metaphysical-teleological understanding of goodness. X is good in a certain respect, simply by virtue of its existing as a kind of thing, but it is unqualifiedly good only in so far as it is fully actualised with regard to its qualifying accidental properties, such as its virtues.²⁰ ‘Compassion’, a human virtue, is a perfection of human nature, a specific form of human goodness. It is thicker by being more specific. Williams’s construal of thick/thin leaves the relationships between concepts such as these obscure.

Third, important reasons for action, on Aquinas’s picture, do not exactly fit Williams’s description of thick and thin. Basic human goods such as truth and sociality are universal and objective goods which give rise to universal and objective reasons for action. They are also descriptively tied to the world, not descriptively empty. Still, they are general – they have wide application, and they underdetermine, as positive general reasons, their particular exemplifications in action. In other words, they are substantive and action-guiding, but only generally. They need to be specified into descriptively richer forms in order to be fully action-guiding. They are thin and need to be ‘thickened’, i.e. specified. These central reasons for action are missed by

¹⁹ A fuller analysis along somewhat similar lines, distinguishing between ‘good’ as a predicative vs.

Williams's thin/thick interpretation, but express the distinction, when understood as exemplifying a general/specific distinction. Ethical conceptions at the general level are thin conceptions in that they are general, applying in principle to all humans, and underdetermining their particular exemplifications. Ethical conceptions at the specific level are thicker, conceptually specific, expressing shared content that is, as Williams stresses, more tradition-specific.

On this interpretation, we not only account for relevant distinctions between thick and thin conceptions, but also understand how they are related: not as competing concepts or reasons, but as related general and specific *conceptions*, operating at different levels. On this construal we account both for moral common ground and objectivity *and* for richer moral language and conceptions that are needed to sustain ethical traditions. A thin conception of good grounds the possibility of moral agreement and dialogue, but man cannot live, as it were, on thin conceptions alone. Thicker conceptions are needed. But since basic human goods and positive general reasons are multiply exemplifiable, they may diverge.

By analogy, an Aquinian-type perspective would hold that humans by their nature need *family* – S needs to be nurtured, cared for, protected by, raised in, educated by a family. It's part of S's nature, qua human, qua social animal. Family is a fundamental expression of the combined basic human goods of sexual union and sociality. Given human nature, family is both possible and necessary; given human nature, it is possible to spell out certain general characteristics of what family is, what it does, necessary conditions for its flourishing, and so on. Given these assumptions, general characteristics of family may be appealed to in inter-traditional debates

attributive adjective, is given in (Geach 1967).

²⁰ Ia.5.1 ad 1, ad 3.

concerning more specific conceptions of family. General considerations provide normative grounds and standards for evaluating more specific conceptions.

However, while a general conception of family establishes a minimal, normative structure expressing the possibilities of the family-building project, it is too thin to guide the multiple elements involved in establishing an actual, particular family, e.g. the Smiths. Just as S cannot be raised by ‘family-in-general’, but only by a particular family, so the Smiths must be guided by more than general reasons expressing the nature of ‘family-in-general’. They need a *specific* vision of what good families look like, how they handle problems, how they distribute tasks, how they engage in moral education, etc., a vision expressed in stories, ideals, proverbial wisdom, and instruction concerning specific issues. Since there is a multiple realisability of specific conceptions of family that are consistent with the general contours, there will be a certain plurality among specific conceptions.

Similarly, it is at the thicker, specific level of practical thought where communities and agents find substantive, action-guiding moral direction, where cultures, traditions, and individuals as members of those cultures and traditions, work out a coherent vision of life.

2 Specific Reasons for Action

Positive general reasons express reasons for pursuit of goods that S has reason to realise, and naturally desires to realise, by virtue of S’s nature as a human. S’s positive general reasons open up for S the specification of kinds of acts always relevant to S’s practical thought in general, but do not give S positive particular reasons to realise particular acts in particular situational contexts. Reasons for action

corresponding to the mediating, specific conceptual level of practical thought are *specific reasons*.

Not only are positive particular reasons not entailed by positive general reasons, but we also saw that they are not guided by positive general reasons without further specification. This is true, to different extents, for both positive and negative general reasons. In III I emphasised the determinate character of negative general reasons. Here I qualify that picture importantly. Consider an inference utilising Aquinas's favourite general reason, the no harm principle:

PS (NHP):

UP: Harm is not to be done to anyone.

PP: A is an act of harm.

Concl: Therefore, I am not to realise A.

Unlike positive examples of practical syllogism, PS (NHP) is deductively valid. Moreover, as argued, there is an important difference between positive and negative examples: negative general reasons are 'determinate' – once S grasps that a putative action falls under the relevant description S knows determinately what not to realise, whereas positive general reasons underdetermine what S is to realise. Still, in both cases, S needs to *identify* the act in question – A – , and so needs to know *what kinds of act* fall under the general description given in the universal premise. In PS (NHP) the agent needs to know what constitutes harm, what kinds of acts fall relevantly under that description, in order to be guided by the universal premise. Thus Aquinas engages in specifying forms of harming, e.g. murder and parricide, and these specifications, as specific reasons, form universal premises in practical inferences.²¹

²¹ IaIIae.76.1; IaIIae.95.2.

Just as positive general reasons open up the practical field at the general level to kinds of reasons relevant to S's practical thought, and just as negative general reasons exclude or rule out kinds of reasons from S's practical determination, so *negative specific reasons* express further clarifications and specific determinations of the boundaries of reasons for action identified by negative general reasons, and *positive specific reasons* further open the field of practical possibilities shaped by positive general reasons – enriching the stock of moral concepts with more nuanced, fine-grained understanding of kinds of goods, and making salient the richer contours of the good life.

General reasons set the context for the moral life, but they are unable fully to determine particular action. Particular reasons are already rationally determined by S – they are, as it were, *conclusions* reached by practical reasoning, rather than starting points or guides for S' reasoning as to what to realise, and thus are not themselves, as such, action-guiding (I specify particular reasons as *reasons*, however, since they identify act-descriptions of what S has most reason to realise). If positive general and particular reasons were the only kinds of reasons available to S, S could never move from the former to the latter in a rational way; the conceptual shelves are too bare. Positive specific reasons, however, while also unable *fully* to determine positive particular reasons, bring considerable additional conceptual resources to help bridge the gap. Specific, like general, reasons identify *kinds* of acts, rather than particular acts, but in thicker ways, so that more possibilities for action are suggested.

Positive general reasons identify what any human being should pursue; positive specific reasons identify what X kind of person should do in Y kind of situation, where X and Y involve specifications of a general conception of good. We saw that Aquinas typically utilises specific reasons as universal premises in practical

sylogisms. This is true in PS, Aquinas's paradigmatic form of practical inference, following Aristotle. Aquinas additionally supplies an example to illustrate.

According to Aquinas,

the universal judgement is that which asserts that such and such should (*oportet*) be done, e.g. 'Children are to honour their parents.' But the particular judgement says, e.g. 'I am a son, and here is an honour that I ought (*debeo*) now to express to my parent.'²²

More formally,

PS (Children):

(UP): Children are to (ought to) honour their parents.

(PP): I am a child and A is an act expressing honour to my parents.

(Concl): Therefore I ought now to realise A.

The general context of Aristotle's account in DA on which Aquinas comments here concerns the nature of action, and its origins in appetite and thought. Appetite's originating movement depends upon its pursuit of real or apparent good, specifically practicable good (*praktôn agathôn*),²³ or good-determined-into-action. The specific context in which Aristotle introduces PS concerns S's attempt, as uniquely possessing deliberative imagination, to determine good into action. Aquinas's commentary emphasises the role of practical inference in making determinate which action is most worth doing, i.e. that which is greater in goodness and better to do than the alternatives available to one.²⁴ Such comparatives require some standard or rule (*mensura*) for comparing actions, according to which a deliberative agent may unify images of putative goods to be realised in action, and, by a process of reasoning (*sylogismo*), come to prefer one over others, producing an opinion or rational

²² In DA 3.16.845.

²³ 3.10, 433a28-30.

²⁴ . . . *quid sit magis agendum . . . magis in bonitate, et id quod est melius*. In DA 3.16.841.

judgement concerning what is best.²⁵ In this way S, unlike nonrational animals, is able to desire things for reasons and thus to act for a determinate reason or end.²⁶

What constitutes the standard used to evaluate possible actions in this process?

Aquinas specifies it as the middle term (*medium*) of a practical syllogism.²⁷ The middle term in PS, then, is: X-kind of human.

Thus, paradigmatically, it is *S's conception of a kind of person, and those kinds of acts that are normatively related to that kind of person*, that forms the standard by which S evaluates its possible actions. The *end* that is sought in S's particular action is expressed by this *conception* of agent and act.²⁸ This conception of agent and act, however, is itself part of S's understanding of what is good, i.e. it is a specification of S's general conception of good, which is what gives it point and context. To generalise: S's *specific* conception of good is characterised by conceptions of kinds of persons and actions that specifically spell out S's general conception of flourishing. These specific conceptions may be expressed as specific reasons for action, as in PS (Children).

Here are some examples of specific reasons in Aquinas:²⁹

Role-specific:	Children are to (ought to) honour their parents. ³⁰
Theologically specific:	Nothing prohibited by the law of God is to be done. ³¹ Adultery is evil (and thus is not to be done, is to be avoided) because it is prohibited by the law of God. ³²

²⁵ Ibid. 3.16.841-842.

²⁶ In DA 3.16.839.

²⁷ In DA 3.16.841.

²⁸ Thus RM1.

²⁹ Parricide and Adultery may also be considered as role-specific. However, they seem to be primarily derived by Aquinas from the no harm principle and considerations of justice, respectively.

³⁰ In DA 3.16.845.

³¹ QDV 17.2.

³² IaIIae.14.6; In II Sent. 2.4.

Specified by
ethical reflection:
unjust.³⁴

Adultery is unjust;³³ adultery is wrong because it is

No fornication is to be committed.³⁵

It is wrong to kill one's father.³⁶

These examples typically identify specific *act*-types to be/not realised. While Aquinas emphasises acts in his specification of reasons that are expressed in examples of practical arguments, for reasons I explore in V and VI, the bulk of his massive ST IIaIIae instead specifies the good life in terms of character traits, i.e. virtues, which descriptions also constitute specific reasons for action.

3 Forms of Specification

3.1 Synthesis and Analysis

How does one reach more specific conceptions of good, or specific reasons for action? Aquinas indicates no single, canonical method of specifying reasoning. In In NE 1.3.35 he makes a distinction concerning the forms of reasoning distinguishing practical from theoretical science.

For it is necessary in every practical science that one proceed in a synthetic manner. On the contrary in theoretical science it is necessary to proceed in an analytical manner by resolving the complex into its simple principles.³⁷

This fits part of what we have seen. In II we explored Aquinas's distinction in reasoning between synthesis— moving from simple and general to complex and

³³ IaIIae.14.6.

³⁴ In II Sent.2.4.

³⁵ DM 3.9; IaIIae.77.2.

³⁶ IaIIae.76.1

³⁷ In NE 1.3.35.

particular – and analysis – moving from particular and complex to simple and general. Aquinas appears here to map the distinction between theoretical and practical sciences onto the distinction between analysis and synthesis.³⁸

This is problematic. First, *paradigmatic* theoretical science, we saw, is actually *synthetic*: explanatory demonstration, reasoning from cause to effect. Second, deliberation, which is a central component of Aquinas's picture of practical determination, is explicitly *analytical* in structure:

For only an inquiry about things-to-be-done counts as deliberation. Since one who deliberates inquires in an analytic manner, it is necessary that one's inquiry lead one to that which is the principle in operation. For that which is last in analysis is first in production or activity.³⁹

These facts sit uncomfortably, at best, with the account stated above. Resolving this difficulty will help us broaden our understanding of practical reason in Aquinas, and clarify the distinctions between specific and particular practical determination.

We examined synthesis and analysis with regard to theoretical reasoning. Analytical reasoning is *investigative*, seeking to discover what is the case, while synthetic reasoning is *judicative*, reasoning to a judgement as to the results of investigation, and judging the particular conclusion *as* expressing its principles. It is by analogy to theoretical reasoning that we apply 'synthetic' and 'analytic' to practical reasoning. I noted Aquinas's description of deliberation as analytic, and we saw that he understands practical science as synthetic. How are these related in Aquinas's practical reason?

The picture gets more confusing before it gets clearer. Aquinas describes the methodology of teaching moral science in In NE as beginning with what S knows better, viz. the effects (particular actions and middle-level principles), and reasoning

³⁸ Cf. Ia.14.16.

³⁹ In NE 3.8.476.

from them to their explanations (general principles).⁴⁰ This picture is analytic. However, the account of practical science as synthetic cited above also appears in the context of Aquinas's account of the study and teaching of ethics. It indicates the opposite conclusion: there Aquinas advocates teaching ethics by beginning with general principles and then moving to particular conclusions – the method of synthesis!⁴¹ Now, what does teaching ethics have to do with practical reason? Aquinas elsewhere argues that teaching should parallel the thinking process of one in discovering knowledge for oneself. The teacher should begin with what S knows and then lead S to what S does not know.⁴² Applying this to the teaching of ethics, it would follow that the rational order of teaching ethics, in Aquinas's mind, reflects the rational order of S's reasoning about moral matters. Thus, if Aquinas characterises the teaching of ethics as either synthetic or analytic in structure, it would indicate as well his understanding of the rational structure of practical reason. Unfortunately, this does not get us far, since Aquinas apparently advocates both analytic and synthetic teaching of ethics. This comports with the evidence that practical reasoning is both analytic and synthetic, but it tells us nothing about whether or how they are related, and leaves it unclear whether in fact Aquinas thinks particular actions or general principles are better known to agents. (Not to mention leaving it quite unclear how to teach ethics.)

How then are we to understand practical synthesis and analysis? First, paradigmatic particular determination for Aquinas – like paradigmatic theoretical general-to-particular reasoning – is synthetic, the determining of general goodness into particular action. The goodness of a particular action depends upon its following rationally from a more general good; it must ultimately be resolvable into a general-

⁴⁰ In NE 1.4.51-54.

to-particular rational structure. This form of reasoning is *judicative*: its conclusion is a judgement as to what to do, which expresses its principles.⁴³ The paradigmatic pattern of particular determination is practical inference, which is synthetic – the practical analogue to theoretical explanatory demonstration.

Second, this paradigmatic pattern – like its theoretical counterpart – is *not investigative*. (Failure to draw this analogy is the source of much confusion about practical inference.) That is, practical syllogistic is not intended (except indirectly, I argue in V) as a means of S's figuring out what to do. *Deliberative* reasoning, on the other hand, *is* so intended, and, as Aquinas insists, is investigative and analytic in structure, corresponding analogically to theoretical analysis.⁴⁴ Deliberation, then, is a form of determining practical reason used by S in order to figure out what to do, while practical inference displays or *expresses* the relationship between what S has reason to do, e.g. has figured out to do, and the more general good justifying and motivating it. The two forms of reasoning play complementary, but different roles. This helps us respond to the grand end worry. An *ultimate* expression of practical synthesis would express S's seeing A as properly subsumed under S's general conception of good, as in PS (GCG). If PS (GCG) is seen as a rational expression of A's exemplification of S's general conception of good, rather than as a piece of reasoning intended to enable S to discover what to do, it becomes much more plausible.

A respect in which theoretical and reason differ with respect to synthesis and analysis is that deliberative reasoning, like practical inference, culminates in a judgement as to what to do.⁴⁵ My interpretation of Aquinas's view accounts for and motivates this. S's judgement of deliberation is also made, like its synthetic

⁴¹ In NE 1.3.35.

⁴² Ia.117.1; QDV 11.1.

⁴³ Ia.79.12; IaIIae.74.7.

⁴⁴ IaIIae.14.5; In NE 3.8.476.

counterpart, in virtue of S's *seeing* the particular action identified by deliberative reasoning *as* the proper particular expression of general good, which relationship is then expressible in a practical syllogism.⁴⁶ Deliberative and inferential practical reasoning, for Aquinas, reach the *same* conclusion, which Aquinas calls a particular practicable, or good-determined-into-action⁴⁷ – the former, ‘investigatively’, i.e. in discovering what to do, and the latter, ‘judicatively’, i.e. in seeing the conclusion *in* its normative/motivational/psychological/logical relation to the general good S seeks to exemplify in action. I pursue this picture further in V.

Third, the relation between practical synthesis and analysis is clarified by acknowledging a specific conceptual level of practical thought. We have seen that the paradigmatic expression of practical synthesis is practical inference, a form of particular determination, and that the structure of practical science is synthetic. What is the relationship between particular determination and practical science? Aquinas frequently draws upon the analogy between art and action, which are parallel in numerous respects. However, action's irreducible dependence upon character implies a fundamental distinction between the practical sciences as expressed in art and in action. The operation of art – the making – is the operation of the science itself, i.e. the expression of general knowledge applied to the particular situation. In the case of action, however, the correct 'doing' is not an operation of art or science, but, rather, an operation of virtue, the disposition of a rightly habituated character.⁴⁸ Because action depends irreducibly upon character, what is needed for right action is the kind of right general knowledge and reasoning as expressed in art (intellectual virtue), *as well as* good character (character virtue); these are uniquely combined in the virtue of

⁴⁵ Ia.83.3.

⁴⁶ See In NE 3.8.475; 3.9.484.

⁴⁷ In DA 3.15.827.

⁴⁸ In BDT 2.5.1 ad 3.

prudence.⁴⁹ Moral science, along with all practical sciences, is considered as pertaining exclusively to the reason, and not itself rightly disposing the appetitive faculty, whereas prudence expresses a right disposition of both in the determining of what to do.⁵⁰ (For this reason the activity of a moral philosopher is – notoriously? – not identical to the activity of a virtuous person. One may have a general knowledge of human affairs and human nature, or a philosopher's grasp of the metaphysics of goodness, and still fail to act well.)

Thus the actual drawing of a particular practical conclusion – and acting on it – is not an act of practical science, but of virtue. That is to say, practical science is not a form of particular determination at all; it is related to a more general level than the particular determination expressed in practical syllogistic. This makes sense when we broaden the structural pattern of Aquinas's practical thought to include a specific level. We saw that some of Aquinas's examples of inferences concerning practical matters are – unlike positive practical inference – deductively sound. They fit the general-to-particular *direction* of practical synthesis, but do not constitute practical syllogisms on Aquinas's paradigm. This is because they are not inferences that are general-to-particular, but rather general-to-specific: forms of specifying a general conception of good. These inferences fit the synthetic pattern of practical science Aquinas describes, while leaving room for a further distinction between practical science and S's fully practical determination, the latter culminating in the virtuous person's determination of general good into particular action. In other words, practical science concerns *specific determination*. *Particular determination*, on the other hand – paradigmatically, the specific-to-particular reasoning of practical

⁴⁹ In NE 6.4.1164-1167; 6.7.1200; IaIIae.57.4; IIaIIae.47.2 ad 3; 53.2; QDW(1) 6 ad 1.

⁵⁰ In NE 6.7.1200.

inference – goes beyond practical science, which remains at the specific level, and requires virtue.

Which, then, does Aquinas hold are better known to S: particular actions or general principles? And what teaching methodology does he advocate in ethics? We may answer this according to the analogy between theoretical and practical reasoning. The general-to-specific directional structure of practical science expresses the normative/motivational structure of practical thought grounded in practical first principles, just as general-to-particular theoretical science expresses the explanatory structure of theoretical reason, grounded in theoretical first principles. General reasons, in both cases, are better known ‘by nature’, and in some cases, because they are immediate and basic, also better known ‘by us’. Thus the teaching of ethics, for Aquinas, on the one hand, expresses the ultimate synthetic structure of normative/motivational practical reasoning in determining general goodness into action, inasmuch as S grasps the practical basicity of the general principles. Such teaching enables S to discover applications to practice S has not considered, from principles S knows.⁵¹ In so far as S does not fully apprehend the nature of general goodness, however, by analogy to natural science, the teacher begins with what S does know better – sc. particular actions expressing goodness (and, as I argue below, specific reasons or *endoxa*) – , and leads the student from those to a clearer conception of first principles. As with Aquinas’s view of theoretical reason, given the human epistemic situation, the latter scenario predominates.

Paradigmatic particular determination, we have seen, is synthetic (practical syllogism). The paradigmatic form of general-to-specific reasoning is also synthetic, as in paradigmatic practical science. Aquinas also uses other forms of specification.

⁵¹ QDV 11.1.

In 3.2 –3.3 I briefly delineate three forms of specification I identify in Aquinas. I do not give a complete account of any of them, but indicate how they express the picture I have adumbrated, and how they relate to the structure of practical thought in Aquinas more generally.⁵²

3.2 Derivation

Paradigmatic practical science, for Aquinas – general-to-specific reasoning – is deductive. A more flexible form of general-to-specific reasoning Aquinas also recognises and utilises, he calls *determinatio*.⁵³ Both are inferential, broadly speaking, and, following Aquinas, I consider both to express forms of ‘derivation’.⁵⁴

3.2.1 Deduction

Aquinas speaks of deduction in practical contexts,⁵⁵ and provides valid examples of deduction in reasoning about matters of practice. The clearest cases involve inferences from negative reasons. In IaIIae.95.2 Aquinas addresses the two ways to derive (*derivari*) conclusions from premises of natural law,⁵⁶ or general reasons for action. Our interest here is with the first: the derivation of X ‘as a conclusion from premises’, similar to conclusions drawn from premises in demonstration.

⁵² In addition to these, there is dialectical reasoning, which expresses generalising specification (ascent), which I do not treat of here.

⁵³ I retain the Latin here in order to distinguish Aquinas’s term from ‘determination’, which I use very broadly in this thesis. Aquinas’s term is also used broadly, and is close in signification to my use of ‘determination’ in most respects. However I preserve his use of *determinatio*, as a special case of my ‘determination’, in the contexts under review here, for the sake of (imposed) clarity.

⁵⁴ IaIIae.95.2.

⁵⁵ DM 3.9 ad 7; IaIIae.99.2 ad 2.

⁵⁶ The explicit discussion is one of natural law; however, nothing in the deduction/*determinatio* distinction is specific only to Aquinas’s natural law theory.

Aquinas's example of 'immediate derivation' is a clear case of deduction from the negative general reason, the no harm principle. From

(NHP) No one is to be harmed,

is concluded,

(M) No one is to be murdered.

This formulation is enthymematic; a second, minor premise is required:

(NHP) No one is to be harmed.

(1) All murder is harming someone.

Therefore,

(M) No one is to be murdered.

The deduction presupposes an embedded specification of the conceptions of 'harm', 'murder', and 'someone'.⁵⁷

The fact that this is an 'immediate derivation', for Aquinas, I suggest, rests upon the straightforward deduction available, as well as upon the obvious truth of 1, so that even when 1 is (typically) unexpressed, murder is seen by most or all to fall under 'harm'.⁵⁸ In obvious examples such as this, Aquinas engages in clear, valid, deductive subsumptive reasoning from *negative* reasons. Moreover, this deduction expresses *specification* – he does not identify a particular act to be done or avoided, but specifies a *kind* of act to be avoided.

What about specific deductions from positive general reasons? Aquinas holds that certain positive and negative norms – i.e. the Ten Commandments⁵⁹ – follow as close or proximate conclusions from general norms such as the no harm principle, although he does not explain in detail how this occurs.⁶⁰ Aquinas's emphasis in these

⁵⁷ See QDV 17.3; IaIIae.100.5 ad 4.

⁵⁸ Cf. IaIIae.77.2 obj.4, ad 4.

⁵⁹ Or at least some of them. See IaIIae.100.11.

⁶⁰ IaIIae.100.1; 100.3.

cases is on what is ‘obvious’ – those reasons which, as following immediately from general first principles one is able to cognise with a minimum of consideration,⁶¹ so that one immediately approves of them in light of their general principles, because they are so explicit. They are ‘derived in some way’ (*derivatur aliquo modo*) from natural reason, what the natural reason of every person immediately and of its own accord judges (*diudicat*) to be done or not.⁶² This sounds as if Aquinas is speaking of particular judgements of what to do, but what he actually specifies as reached in this derivation are the Ten Commandments, which are more general – i.e. specific reasons. Aquinas never details exactly how to deduce specific positive norms.⁶³ Moreover, he acknowledges that even in the Ten Commandments there are only two positive commands, and these only because of their special relation to particular forms of indebtedness (to God and to parents).⁶⁴ Paradigmatic general reasons for Aquinas, from which more specific ones are deduced, are negative reasons.

However, given Aquinas’s statement about the basis of the two positive commands, we may specify Aquinas’s derivation of the positive specific reason to honour one’s parents as follows:

(RP) One should do one thing in return for another if one is indebted to the other. Aquinas sees this – let us call it a ‘reciprocation principle’ – as an immediate dictate of natural reason, on the level of the no harm principle.⁶⁵ Just as M follows as a binding dictate of reason from NHP, so

(2) One should honour one’s parents

follows immediately from RP. Aquinas is clear that it is the ‘if one is indebted to the other’ that makes RP an immediate dictate of natural reason, and the fact of one’s

⁶¹ IaIIae.100.3

⁶² IaIIae.100.1.

⁶³ (Finnis 1998), 138.

⁶⁴ IaIIae.100.7 ad 1; cf. 100.5 ad 4, 100.6.

natural indebtedness to one's parents that underwrites the immediacy of the derivation. Of course RP – 2 is enthymematic: it requires or presupposes further content to the effect that children are indebted to parents, and that honour is a kind of expression appropriate to obligations of indebtedness between children and parents.

Given such content, the inference is immediate. Moreover, again given such content, it is a valid deduction. This is because it is a form of *specification* rather than particular determination: the conclusion identifies a kind of act, rather than a particular act. Thus the deduction of a positive specific reason does not differ from the deduction of a negative specific reason with respect to validity – both are valid deductions. The difference with respect to validity applies when the inference moves from this level to the level of particular determination. There, the negative inference remains deductively valid, while the positive does not.

Even at the specific level, moreover, negative and positive specific reasons possess a different character. Negative reasons need to be specified, as we saw in the case of M; however, the specification is minimal and obvious, for the very reasons that ground the basic negative general reasons upon which they are based – viz. negative specific reasons express the necessary conditions for some basic good, which is desired naturally. Specification of, e.g., murder, is limited – it is of a distinct act-type, even though it may be functionally specified or open-textured.⁶⁶ Murder can be committed in numerous ways, indeed in ways that may have not yet been observed. Still, the object of murder – the intentional taking of an innocent human life, let us assume – is quite determinate: if intent to kill, and death of an innocent human life are present, murder has taken place. The fulfilment conditions are relatively clear. Debate may rage on the borderlines over whether a particular act or kind of killing

⁶⁵ IaIIae.100.7 ad 1.

counts as murder (e.g. euthanasia), but at the core of the concept are clear cases, where there is general agreement.⁶⁷ Thus laws against murder are readily understood, and violations typically clear and able to be prosecuted.

Positive specific reasons, on the other hand, although also validly deduced as related subsumptively to positive general reasons, are of a different character. Beyond being open-textured concepts, positive reasons underdetermine the conditions for their fulfilment. Thus, the fulfilment of

(2) One should honour one's parents,

leaves open not only different *methods* of honouring, as 'murder' leaves open different methods of killing, but also the range of *kinds* of honouring. Whether some action or practice counts as honouring one's parents depends not only upon what kind of act it is more generically, depending upon its object (buying flowers, cooking a meal, smiling, paying for a trip to the Virgin Islands), but also upon other factors, including motivation (not just intent),⁶⁸ timing, attitude, and emotional response. The underdetermination of particular actions by the reason to honour parents is radical and irreducible. Thus, even at the specific level, where both negative and positive specific reasons share deductive validity, their characters differ fundamentally. Deduction of a negative specific reason from a negative general reason narrows the scope of reasons for action, while carrying with it the full normative weight of the general level, whereas deduction of a positive specific reason from a positive general reason further broadens the scope of practice, by opening up the possibilities of expressing the positive general reason.

⁶⁶ (Brennan 1977); (Kovesi 1967).

⁶⁷ Cf. (Porter 1995), 18-40

⁶⁸ Giving flowers to one's parents has the *obiectum* of their possessing the flowers. However, Howard may intend the giving of flowers to his parents in order that they feel honoured (his *finis*, which reflects his motive), while Richard may likewise intend that his parents have flowers, but in order that they not

Aquinas does not identify a specific methodology of deducing specific norms from general reasons, nor does he provide a clearly worked-out system of actual reasons or norms arranged in terms of immediacy. Indeed Aquinas asserts that one can proceed from principles to judgement of various matters in various ways.⁶⁹ Still, there is room for deductive reasoning, especially in spelling out more immediate relationships between general reasons and their implications. Finnis provides a clear exposition of deductive specifications of general reasons in Aquinas along these lines – working out significant, specific accounts of negative reasons, as well as more specific conceptions of kinds of acts which express the fulfilment or realisation of positive general reasons.⁷⁰

3.2.2 *Determinatio*

Aquinas distinguishes in IaIIae.95.2 between immediate derivation expressed in deduction and ‘a *determinatio* from certain general matters.’ Again, the general structure is general-to-specific, but here the connection between general and specific is looser. His favoured example is of a craftsman building a house.⁷¹ What makes that which is being built a house is the general form of ‘house’ – walls, roof, foundation, etc. – but the craftsman must determine the general form into some particular house, with particular walls, roof, and foundation. This is a positive process, the particularising of the general, and involves not only the faithful

cut him out of their inheritance. Howard acts ‘out of’ gratitude or love; Richard acts ‘out of’ greed. The ‘out-of’ locution identifies end and expresses motive. See (Kenny 1989), 61ff.

⁶⁹ IaIIae.100.1.

⁷⁰ Finnis gives extensive specifications of the goods of human life, marriage, and truth and knowledge: (Finnis 1998), 140-163. Note that if, as I have argued, deduction in Aquinas characterises specificatory reasoning, rather than particular determination, then even though Aquinas’s account makes significant room for deductive reasoning, it escapes the charge of deductivism.

⁷¹ In SCG 3.97.12 Aquinas uses this not to illustrate law, but practical reason generally.

expressing of general ‘house’ features, but also creativity and skill in working it out. Such determination extends all the way to *particular* determination, but it is expressed along the way in specification – working out the more specific forms of kinds of houses.⁷²

Aquinas emphasises the multiple exemplifiability of what is general. Each house, while sharing general features with all houses, is unique; there are many ways to be a house. Indeed in this context Aquinas appeals to the virtuous person criterion, the necessity for wise insight of skilled people in making particular judgements as to the right thing to do – as skilled builders make right judgements about building.⁷³

Just as particular determinations of goodness may be variable and diverse, arrived at by flexible ways of reasoning, so more specific visions of what is good are multiply exemplifiable and may express flexible forms of specifying reasoning. Moreover, just as particular determinations require judgement and character, so specific conceptions of good expressed in cultures and traditions – which express a kind of collective character – will express and be affected by the judgement, wisdom, and character of its citizens, its ethical vision being distorted or aided as a result.

3.3 Deliberation

Deliberation, we have seen, is *investigative* – one deliberates in order to discover what to do, *how* to determine good into action.⁷⁴ Deliberation is an important form of particular determination (V). Just as we saw judicative practical thought in the form

⁷² Aquinas’s example in IaIIae.95.2 concerns the specification of human laws rather than particular actions.

⁷³ IaIIae.95.2 ad 4; cf. In NE 2.7.323.

⁷⁴ DM 3.9 ad 7; IIaIIae.47.2 ad 3.

of specifying deduction, we see investigative, analytical deliberative reasoning expressed as specifying reasoning as well.

The general form of deliberative inquiry is expressed in numerous places by Aquinas: the end one wishes to reach constitutes the principle of the reasoning structure, the starting point of the deliberative process which seeks to identify those things that are for the end (*ea quae sunt ad finem*).⁷⁵ In a piece of deliberation, one lays down some end and then deliberates about what is for the end, until one reaches what is immediately to be done;⁷⁶ one takes some end for granted, and then engages in deliberative inquiry as to how to reach the end.⁷⁷ Reason proposes an end, and then proceeds to think ratiocinatively about it.⁷⁸ It is a process of analysis.⁷⁹

The analytical nature of practical reasoning is clear in Aquinas's medical analogy in *In Met*. The restoring of health in a patient by a physician (P) begins with the starting point or principle of health existing in P's mind, i.e. P's general conception of health. The structure of P's reasoning may be spelled out as follows:

(H1) Health is such and such (e.g. regularity, balance of heat, cold, moisture, dryness – x, y, z. I.e. health comprises conditions x, y, z).

(H2) If health is to exist (*si debet contingere*), it is necessary (*necesse est*) that x, y, z conditions obtain.

P then works out (*intelligit*), from what is subsequent to what is prior in the causal order, what is productive of, e.g. x, and what is productive of that, until P reaches

⁷⁵ Note that this is a broader relation than merely means-end, including, importantly, constitutive-of-end. 'Means' used as an abbreviation for this relation should be interpreted in this light. See (MacDonald 1991), 42ff. Cf. (Wiggins 1991), 219-220; (Ackrill 1980), 19; (McDowell 1980), 362. See also discussions in (Cooper 1975/1986); (Hardie 1980).

⁷⁶ In DA 3.15.821.

⁷⁷ In NE 3.8.475.

⁷⁸ In NE 6.2.1133.

⁷⁹ In NE 3.8.476.

(H3) A, some final thing (*aliquod ultimum*), which P himself is immediately capable of doing (e.g. the dispensing of some particular medicine).

and then,

(H4) beginning the process of acting that is ordered (*ordinata*) to the producing of the patient's health, beginning from A.⁸⁰

While P's aim is ultimately particular, the deliberative steps between (H1) and (H3) are characteristic of deliberative specification, as the conception of health becomes increasingly specific.

Application of a deliberative model to the aim of determining particular actions, e.g. the determination of what to do first in attaining modest practical ends (I want to get to London this afternoon. What's the best way to get there?), is obvious – such reasoning is plausible and commonsensical. Application of the deliberative model to broader practical reasoning, however, evokes the grand end picture, especially on analogy to reasoning from a general conception of health. Explicit deliberative reasoning along these lines may make sense as a form of life planning or general reflection in ethics, but it is unrealistic if meant to characterise all deliberative practical reasoning. Our appeal to *specifying* practical thought addresses this worry. Recall that Aquinas's concern that a particular action be determinable from a general conception of good is primarily a concern of synthetic reasoning. A particular action needs to be ultimately subsumable under general goodness. However, explicit deliberative specification of a general conception of good *is* legitimate as *specification* – developing a richer, specific conception of the moral life. Such specification is ultimately expressible within general-to-particular synthesis.

⁸⁰ In Met. 7.6.1406.

However, Aquinas nowhere argues that this need be explicit in each piece of particular determination.

Deliberative specification of the ultimate end or general conception of good along these lines is characteristic of specific-level ethical reflection, both of the practical reasoning of particular agents, e.g. in life planning, and of moral science. Aquinas's eudaimonism implies that S's general conception of good normatively and motivationally grounds S's practical reason; the ultimate end is the first principle in the genus of action, the starting point of the entire moral order.⁸¹ Unqualified prudence, according to Aquinas, is the disposition to deliberate well about the whole of human life;⁸² unqualified, paradigmatically good deliberation (*eubilia*) is deliberation about the end of human life.⁸³ This expresses deliberative specification, rather than deliberative particular determination, although it is intended to result in such. As a form of ethical reasoning more generally, moreover, deliberative reasoning along these lines is modelled in Aquinas's own account of ethics in In NE and ST. Following Aristotle's pattern, Aquinas begins by identifying a general, formal conception of flourishing, and then specifies the conception by reasoning out the 'means' to flourishing – its constituents, what conduces to it, what expresses it.⁸⁴ From specific reflection on the good life (*bene vivere totum*), for example, Aquinas draws a minimally specific conception of it as involving both character and action.⁸⁵ The bulk of Aquinas's moral philosophy as spelled out in *IIaIIae* may be seen as a kind of deliberative specification or filling out of his initial conception of flourishing.

⁸¹ *IaIIae*.1.5; 72.5; In NE 1.2.139; SCG 3.97.12.

⁸² *IaIIae*.57.4 ad 3.

⁸³ In NE 6.8.1233-1234.

⁸⁴ That the structure of NE reflects a kind of reflective analogue of S's deliberation is argued by (Irwin 1981), and (Sherman 1989), 8-9. Cf. (Anscombe 1977), 69.

⁸⁵ *IaIIae*.57.5.

3.4 Conclusion

Aquinas has no single canonical procedure of specifying reasoning. Indeed, it seems likely that he sees agents as engaging in combinations of some or all of them.

Consider Aquinas's stock example to illustrate exceptions to general reasons. We saw that in IaIIae.94.4 Aquinas draws, as the 'proper conclusion' from the general reason

(R) It is right and true for all to act according to reason,

that:

(G) Goods entrusted to another should be restored to their owner.

G is a specification of R, but it clearly is not arrived at by strict deduction. Aquinas points out that while everyone accepts R, and it is held as correct with certainty, G is not wholly certain and not always correct because, although it holds for the majority of cases there are exceptional cases where to return a good to its owner (e.g. to return a weapon to the Son of Sam) would *not* be to act according to reason.⁸⁶ Although Aquinas does not identify the reasoning used to reach a more specifically accurate understanding of G, we may reconstruct a possible progression of thought that would reach it, as follows: (i) It is always right to return a good to its owner. (ii) Returning a weapon to the Son of Sam is an instance of returning a good to its owner. (iii) Therefore, it is right to return the weapon to the Son of Sam. But (iii) is false; therefore it is not the case that (i), but rather that (i*) 'It is right in the majority of cases to return a good to its owner,' a refinement of the original specification of G. G is likely a 'probable' belief (Aristotle's *endoxon*),⁸⁷ part of the common stock of 'probable' beliefs of Aquinas's culture. i - iii involves considering one specific

⁸⁶IaIIae.94.4.

conception of G, deducing its implications, and then evaluating them against other general principles, probable beliefs, experience, etc., and then refining one's specific conception. The process exemplifies one way specification of general principles could work; there are others. Aquinas identifies no single method of specification.

4 Sources of Input in Practical Specification

If I am right about locating the bulk of moral education and passing along of ethical tradition at the specific level of practical thought in Aquinas, it should be borne out in his discussions of the sources of input in specifying practical thought. Moreover, if the specific level is where ethical vision becomes more localised and specific to communities, narratives, or world views, input from these sources should be evident there as well. This is what we see in Aquinas. In this section I briefly explicate different, related kinds of input in moral teaching and cultural transmission in Aquinas.

4.1 Teaching

Teaching is an obvious source of moral input. NE and ST are themselves vehicles of ethical teaching, and both, I have indicated, engage in specification of general good, both in structure and content. We saw Aquinas speak of natural reason's obvious and immediate conclusions from general reasons. Other conclusions, he says, are not obvious, and are known only to the wise. These must be taught (*disciplina*) by the

⁸⁷ In NE 1.4.51-54.

wise to the less wise.⁸⁸ Even those things that *are* obvious need to be taught, in order to make them clear to all. Thus, according to Aquinas, even though the Ten Commandments (or at least some of them) are naturally evident, they need to be promulgated.⁸⁹ When it comes to knowledge of human affairs, one may discover principles by oneself, seeing them as self-evident, or one may learn them from someone else.⁹⁰ Aquinas may refer here either to first principles that are self-evident by nature or self-evident to us – both are grasped on the basis of experience, the former solely on the basis of greater experience and reflection. Either, however, may be learned from others and then grasped as self-evident. Further, Aquinas says that there are not only first general principles that are naturally known, but there also are secondary general principles (*alia principia universalia posteriora*) that are not inherited from nature, but acquired through discovery or teaching.⁹¹ These ‘general principles’ include what we call specific reasons, and they may enter one’s conception through teaching.

In Ia.117.1 Aquinas addresses the pedagogical issue of whether one person can teach another. Learning involves a progression from what one already knows, to coming to know what one did not know before. Teaching follows the same pattern. Teachers lead students in this manner in two ways: first, by providing certain means of instruction that S’s intellect uses for the acquisition of knowledge. Aquinas specifies two such means:

(1) Certain less universal or general (*minus universales*) propositions, which S is able to judge from S’s previous knowledge. Here fit secondary general principles or specific reasons. I suggest that some other things, which I introduce below, also fit

⁸⁸ IaIIae.100.1.

⁸⁹ IaIIae.99.2, 100.2, 100.3.

⁹⁰ In NE 1.4.54.

⁹¹ IIaIIae.47.15.

here: maxims, proverbs, rules, probable beliefs, the store of ‘experiential knowledge’ found in art – in short, more specific generalisations.

(2) Some ‘sensible examples’ by way of likeness or opposition. Here Aquinas, who is short on examples in his writing, refers, apparently, to illustrations, analogies, or models. Here, again, I suggest, fit some other items, such as imaginative and rhetorical discourse, ideals, stories, and biographies.

The second way to help students learn, instead of aiding the intellect, is by strengthening it, by way of running through arguments with the student, showing how the conclusions follow from the principles. Aquinas says this is necessary because the student does not yet have sufficient comparing (*collatione*) power to draw conclusions from principles. Aquinas may be speaking here of deductive syllogisms, or referring to the broader range of argument forms we saw him endorse. Note that the second means appears to express synthetic teaching, while the first may correspond to the analytic method.

4.2 Tradition

A second source of input is tradition, or the collected wisdom of the moral tradition in which one is raised. Such is reflected in Aquinas’s conception of teaching, especially in the specific principles and the sensible examples. A maxim or probable belief Aquinas mentions – that ‘the generous person keeps the cheaper things for himself and gives the more expensive to others’⁹² – is likely a part of the collected store of proverbs, maxims, and wisdom making up the tradition in which Aquinas operates.

The understanding of principles of action follows from experience and age, and is perfected by prudence. Therefore, one should pay attention to the opinions and

⁹² In NE 1.3.38.

thoughts about practical matters made by those who are experienced, old, and prudent. Although these thoughts do not lead to demonstrations, they are not less than demonstrations themselves, but more. For people of this kind, because of their experienced sight, see the principles of practice, and therefore have right judgement of things to be done.⁹³

Character gives one the eye of wisdom. Aquinas follows Cicero in seeing culture as expressing a kind of collective character and its combined wisdom.⁹⁴ Culture becomes a kind of second nature,⁹⁵ and this seems true of both individuals and cultures. We learn from observations of custom, whether individual or corporate.⁹⁶ The storehouse of collected wisdom of tradition is a source of input to practical thought on the specific level.

4.3 Apprenticeship and Mentoring

Moral education, for Aquinas, is never merely a classroom exercise. On the analogy with art, moral education requires significant, particular-sensitive and particular-based experience.⁹⁷ Beyond art, it requires character habituation, for coming to perceive the good and loving it are inseparable.⁹⁸ Teaching general principles – the ‘why’ – in ethics comes only after S has already come to have a certain amount of knowledge of the ‘that’ – specific moral knowledge – combined with character habituation.

Moreover, along the lines of the art analogy, truly moral knowledge involves a kind of *skill*, a wisdom that discerns how to apply general good to particular action in various life situations. This kind of moral knowledge comes not only from the teaching of the collective wisdom of an ethical tradition, but also from entering into

⁹³ In NE 6.9.1254.

⁹⁴ IaIIae.91.3.

⁹⁵ IaIIae.58.1.

⁹⁶ In NE 1.11.137.

⁹⁷ In NE 1.3.38-41; 10.16.277.

⁹⁸ In NE 2.3.268.

the tradition as an apprentice. Aquinas is not explicit about this, but it is implied by his stress on the need to be raised properly, learning to know and love what is good. It is also presupposed, we may suppose, by the context that informs Aquinas's own discussion, which involves the entering of one into to a particular (e.g. the Dominican) community, defined by certain disciplines and practices.⁹⁹

Further, the apprentice/mentor model of moral education is suggested by Aquinas's stress on the analogy between art and action. As Aquinas acknowledges, apprenticeship is a mode of learning art:

What are taken in different ways as principles, either establish or destroy virtue. It is similar in any art. [Aristotle] shows this first in activities: since from playing the harp persons become either good or bad harpists, proportionately speaking. And the same applies to builders, or all those who make things. From repeatedly building well they become good builders, and from building badly they become bad builders. And if this were not the case, persons would not need to learn arts of this kind from some skilled instructor who directs their action.¹⁰⁰

4.4 Ideals

Related to the collected wisdom of the wise in the ethical tradition are examples of the wise themselves. This follows from Aquinas's emphasis on the virtuous person criterion. If discernment of the right thing to do cannot be determined apart from the perception of virtuous people, then it cannot be fully captured by the generalisations or collected judgements of the wise, either. These judgements serve as specific reasons, giving guidance, but specific reasons cannot be reduced to them. The wise themselves – as models, paradigms, exemplars – constitute specific reasons or paradigmatic specifications of good.

⁹⁹ See (Martin 1996).

¹⁰⁰ In NE 2.1.252. Cf. In NE 10.15.2163. The completion of virtue must be acquired by some kind of training: IaIIae.95.1.

Virtue conceptions of ethics have recently pointed to the power of models, exemplars, and ideals in moral development. Although Aquinas is chary to provide actual examples in his own thought, his notion of the virtuous person criterion implies – indeed requires – such a conception.¹⁰¹ He notes the power of example in human actions and passions, where experience is of great weight; indeed, example motivates more than words.¹⁰² In light of this, Aquinas’s category of ‘sensible examples’ in teaching is likely to include, and perhaps feature, examples of virtuous individuals.¹⁰³

4.5 Experience

Experience is another source of specific input to practical thought, as emphasised in art. Secondary general principles, we saw, are acquired by discovery through experience or by teaching.¹⁰⁴ This fits our picture of art as requiring experiential knowledge as well as training and study in general knowledge. The specific conceptual level of practical thought corresponds to art’s middle level of experiential knowledge. What one learns by experience in generalising from particular experiences can enter into one’s practical thinking as specific reasons, specifying one’s general conception of good in order to guide action. Experience also supplies material for teaching others.

Obviously experience needs to be reflective. Here the forms of specification we have examined – deduction, *determinatio*, deliberation – clearly fit. In reflecting on the nature of flourishing or on the significance of one’s experiences, one comes both to a more generalised grasp of particular experience and to a more specific

¹⁰¹ See In NE 6.9.1254; 6.10.1274; 7.5.1370; 7.5.1374; 7.11.1470; 10.4.2000; 10.8.2062.

¹⁰² IaIIae.34.1.

¹⁰³ Ia.117.1.

¹⁰⁴ IIaIIae.47.15.

conception of good. One skilled in human affairs either discovers working principles for oneself and sees them as self-evident, or learns them from others.¹⁰⁵

4.6 Practical Science

In QDW(1) 8 Aquinas suggests that principles in the practical order, such as the no harm principle, are knowable by nature, but may be acquired by study and exercise. Study in practical matters is practical science. Similarly, in IaIIae.58.5, Aquinas says that one can be rightly disposed to the general principles of action by the natural understanding of principles, whereby one grasps the no harm principle, ‘or else by some practical science’. Although he does not give an example of the latter, it is natural to take this as referring to the secondary general principles that are the focus of practical science – i.e. specific reasons. In IaIIae.14.6 Aquinas notes that ‘principles’ (besides the end aimed at) that enter into one’s practical deliberation may be deliverances of sense perception, or general statements cognised through theoretical (4.8) or practical science. We have seen that practical science involves general-to-specific reasoning; it supplies general and specific reasons to aid in the reasoning of the virtuous person, just as general and more specific conceptions of health aid the physician. Thus studying more general principles of practice is ‘helpful’ in S’s particular determination.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ In NE 1.4.54.

¹⁰⁶ In NE 1.11.138.

4.7 Theology and Special Revelation

Aquinas, following Augustine, distinguishes between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ reason.¹⁰⁷

Lower reason corresponds to reasoning about practice in light of a conception of the human ultimate end in an incomplete sense – apart from reference to God –, while higher reason involves specifying deliberation about practice in light of one’s complete conception of the ultimate end, i.e. including theological considerations.¹⁰⁸

These two kinds of considerations produce two kinds of reasons for acting, overlapping in their conclusions.¹⁰⁹ Lower reason seems to correspond to practical science, properly speaking.

A common example of a general reason for Aquinas is

(E) All evil is to be avoided.

Specific reasons following from E differ with respect to higher and lower reason, depending upon the kinds of reasons entering in at the specific level, or upon their grounds. From E, higher reason draws the conclusion,

(HE) Adultery is evil, because God forbids it.

Lower reason, however, draws the conclusion,

(LE) Adultery is evil, because it is unjust.¹¹⁰

The conclusion that follows from each, plus E, is that adultery is to be avoided. This conclusion is itself a specific reason, which may now serve as universal premise in a practical syllogism. On this view, theological input enters at the level of specification; the hidden, specific premises distinguishing higher and lower reason are

¹⁰⁷ See QDV 15.2; 15.3; 15.4; 16.1; 16.2; 17.1; In II Sent. 2.4; Ia.19.9; IaIIae.14.6.

¹⁰⁸ QDV 15.4 ad SC.

¹⁰⁹ QDV 15.3.

¹¹⁰ In II Sent. 2.4.

‘Adultery is forbidden by God’, and ‘Adultery is unjust,’ respectively. Neither functions at the level of fully general reasons.¹¹¹

Thus on Aquinas’s account, there is common ground between different world views, e.g. theistic and non-theistic, at the general level, whereas they may specify the content of general reasons in different ways, by reference to their different metaphysical assumptions. Since Aquinas rejects a Divine Command Theory of metaethics, he does not believe that adultery is wrong because God prohibits it, but rather that God prohibits it because it is wrong – it is fundamentally incompatible with the basic goods of marriage, truth, and sociality: i.e. it is unjust.¹¹² This fits Aquinas’s conception of the complete ultimate end, which does not replace the imperfect, ‘merely’ ultimate end, but presupposes it, as grace presupposes nature.¹¹³ Special revelation gives one additional – and more specific and clearer – reason to act/not to act, but not reason that is incompatible with a proper understanding of natural good. Ethical specification within a theologically-oriented community provides an example of the thicker reasoning of a more specific tradition or community of discourse. Its specification is different from, but not incompatible in principle with, a non-theological community of discourse rightly reasoning about ethics as practical science. For Aquinas, merely philosophical reflection, although able in principle to reach significant ethical truth, requires more time and intelligence than is available to most. Because of this, and because of the cognitive affects of sin, divine revelation is needed in practice to fill in these gaps.¹¹⁴ Moreover, in light of their complete

¹¹¹ However, there are relevant fully general reasons that, for Aquinas, underlie these: that God is to be obeyed is a first principle relating to higher reason, in a way parallel to R, for lower reason. QDV 16.1.

¹¹² Cf. QDV 17.2; (MacDonald 1990). However, see IaIIae.10.9; 94.5.

¹¹³ Ia.1.8.

¹¹⁴ See QDV 15.3. Thus Aquinas’s aim in identifying basic human goods and reasons at the general level is not to establish a world view-neutral, tradition-neutral ethic in practice, to serve as a sufficient moral decision-making structure, for the latter is far too thin. Rather it is to identify the ultimate norms for evaluating ethical traditions, and provide common ground for moral dialogue, debate, and rational persuasion in principle.

ultimate end, human beings need special revelation (divine law) in order to order their activity to that higher, complete end.¹¹⁵

4.8 Natural and Theoretical Science

We saw that there is a convergence of theoretical and practical considerations grounding normativity and objectivity at the general level. To arrive at a sufficiently thick ethical vision to guide behaviour, general knowledge of basic human goods requires further, including theoretical, information. However, theoretical considerations need to be seen by S as relevantly related to S's normative/motivational framework in order to become practical. Aquinas explicitly states that general data from practical science and theoretical science enter into practical deliberation, along with sense perceptions ('This is bread'; 'This is iron'), as principles, which are taken for granted in deliberation. Aquinas's example of such a principle from theoretical science is 'Human beings cannot live without suitable nourishment.'¹¹⁶ To be a principle, rather than a conclusion, it needs to be taken for granted – taken both as true and as compatible with S's practical standpoint. This principle fits at the specific level, where it is used in S's working out a more specific conception of flourishing. Theoretical reasoning, along with the whole range of knowledge, fits in to practical reasoning, not as supplying normativity as such, but as providing relevant information, filling out the picture of flourishing more specifically. Truths about nourishment are relevant, not to whether human life is a good, which is basic, but to understanding further how human life is preserved and promoted in actual existence.

¹¹⁵ IaIIae.91.4; 100.1.

4.9 Persuasive Discourse

Moral education in a community involves persuasive and imaginative discourse. Aquinas considers both to constitute kinds of investigative and probable reasoning.¹¹⁷ Persuasive discourse (rhetoric) concerns contingent, non-necessary matters,¹¹⁸ thus matters related to ethics.¹¹⁹ In such matters, unlike demonstrative science, which reaches conclusions with absolute certainty, rhetorical reasoning reaches conclusions of belief or opinion. It is a legitimate form of reasoning, but persuasive rather than conclusive.¹²⁰

According to Aquinas, rhetoric represents a kind of abridged syllogism or incomplete argument.¹²¹ His point seems to be that in persuasive discourse S1 gives reasons to S2 that are known less than certainly – perhaps specific reasons drawn from various sources which are not directly related to basic goods and obvious conclusions from them, or at least not yet demonstrated to S2 to follow directly from them – in order to persuade S2 to conclude to a more specific conception of good (specific determination) or to perform a particular act or engage in a particular practice (particular determination).¹²² Because the will can only be moved by an intelligible good, persuasion involves showing that something is a good thing to do.¹²³ Rhetoric apparently expresses a form of synthetic reasoning, persuading S to draw conclusions from more general premises, but apart from explicit demonstrations of the

¹¹⁶ IaIIae.14.6.

¹¹⁷ In PA, Prol.

¹¹⁸ Ia.83.1.

¹¹⁹ See IaIIae.7.2 ad 3.

¹²⁰ In PA, Prol.

¹²¹ In PA 1.1.

¹²² See IIaIIae.48.1.

¹²³ SCG 3.88.2.

argument involved, which demonstrations may be inappropriate, unneeded, or unavailable in the circumstances (e.g. because of time). Aquinas stresses that this reasoning can be legitimate because it involves comparison and the drawing of conclusions, distinguishing it from unwarranted persuasive reasoning, which is sophistical. Rhetoric is not epistemically inferior, except to Aquinas's paradigm of absolutely certain cognition of unqualified *scientia*, for the conclusions of legitimate persuasion are justified beliefs.¹²⁴ Clearly moral education and the extension of moral tradition may involve persuasive discourse, e.g. public oration, such as preaching.¹²⁵

4.10 Imaginative Discourse

Relatedly, imaginative discourse, or what Aquinas calls poetics, is a component of investigative and probable reasoning.¹²⁶ Aquinas describes this kind of reasoning as leading to S's holding a view, not on the grounds of a conclusive argument delivering a certain conclusion, but because S naturally or 'sensually' grasps X as being of a certain character, on account of S's image or representation of it.¹²⁷

Thus imaginative discourse involves using image and representation in order to establish or reinforce S's grasp of X as possessing a particular character, not merely as a cognitive matter, but sensually as well, as affecting S's desires and emotions. We saw that moral education involves character habituation, for Aquinas: the development of S's appetites and emotions so that S both grasps the good and loves it. Hence the use of 'vivid example' is particularly appropriate to moral education: 'the poet's task is to lead to something of virtue by means of some fitting example.' The

¹²⁴ Cf. QDV 15.2 ad 3.

¹²⁵ IaIIae.7.2 ad 3.

¹²⁶ In PA, Prol.

¹²⁷ In PA, Prol.

pervasive use of vivid example can modify S's apprehension of something, such as food, so that it is characterised by an affective response, e.g. of delight or disgust.¹²⁸

Whereas persuasive discourse is a kind of abridged syllogism, imaginary discourse is incomplete induction, according to Aquinas. Thus it is a kind of generalising reasoning, aimed not at persuading S to do something or to draw specific conclusions from general premises, but at shaping S's more general ethical perspective.¹²⁹ Again, Aquinas sees this as expressing legitimate reasoning in that it involves comparison, leading from one thing to another.¹³⁰ According to Aristotle, animals share 'sensitive imagination' with humans, but humans are able to compare and calculate by use of imagination, and so have 'deliberative imagination'.¹³¹ Aquinas develops this insight along the lines of *aestimatio* – whereas other higher animals have imagination of objects as harmful or not, their imagination and desire are indeterminate. Rational animals, however are able imaginatively to weigh alternatives, and thus to come to have rational desires.¹³²

By use of vivid example, one may imaginatively come to grasp the true nature of some object as good or bad, and thereby shorten the extensive inductive process of trying, comparing, and generalising. Obviously this plays a crucial role in moral education, and it fits Aquinas's picture at the specific level. By vivid example one acquires experiential knowledge and specific reasons apart from extensive experience – not merely as 'book' knowledge, but also as a kind of experiential cognition. We saw that Aquinas considers, as an appropriate part of teaching, helping to lead students to new cognition by 'sensible examples'.¹³³

¹²⁸ In PA 1.1.

¹²⁹ In PA 1.1.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ DA 3.11.

¹³² In DA 3.16.839-842.

¹³³ Ia.117.1.

The fact that use of such examples is meant to affect the learner in various ways implies that Aquinas does in fact endorse the use of stories, poems, songs, narratives, ideals, and exemplars in moral education.

5 Conclusion

Although Aquinas's own discussions of ethics tend to be stylised along the academic disputational model of his time, we see in his account a range of explicit and implicit sources of input into practical thought and into the teaching and transmission of moral education and cultural ethical vision. These sources of input fit primarily at the level of specification. This is not to say that the general level is unrelated to moral education, but that more vivid, substantive virtues and values taught to cultivate character involve considerations that are more specific to particular cultures and traditions.

In this chapter I have shown that there is in Aquinas's conception of practical thought a conceptual gap, most adequately filled by reference to a specific conceptual level, that is characterised by a range of forms of specifying reasoning, both generalising and determining. The specific level is where much of the practical work in moral education and intra-traditional moral discussion and debate occurs. Moral debate between traditions and substantive ethical visions must appeal to the thinner, general level of practical thought.

General reasons, which are grounded in basic goods, are closer to nature, for Aquinas; specific reasons are further from nature, more specific workings-out in divergent, creative ways, of what is ultimately normative. The closer one's practical

reasons for action are to 'nature', the less variable, for what is natural in us is unchanging,¹³⁴ while conclusions and determinations from it may vary.

¹³⁴ In NE 5.12.1029.

The Particular Level of Practical Thought

1 The Particular Level of Practical Thought

The aim of practical thinking, for Aquinas, is to determine general good into particular realisation in action. Goods or reasons must be properly particularised in order to be realised in action, and Aquinas's fullest explications of practical thinking are oriented to showing how this occurs in a piece of practical reasoning.¹ As an intellectual being, S is determined to good in general, but S must determine goodness into particular action, by way of reasoning about it.² Until general good, grasped by intellect, is properly particularised there is no rational action.³

According to Aquinas, there is a non-general-rule-determined flexibility and range of relativity or variability in how S may express the good life in particular. Expressing goodness in action, within the normative contours established by S's general and specific conceptions of good, is a kind of creative activity, which is unique and individual. In this chapter, based upon my previous account, I seek to spell out Aquinas's conception of particular determination.

¹ E.g. In Met 7.6; In DA 3.16.845.

² QDW(1) 6.

³ DM 3.9; In NE 6.2.1132; Ia.20.1 ad 1; Ia.80.2 ad 3; Ia.86.1 ad 2.

2 Forms of Particular Determination

2.1 Aristotelian Background

Aquinas consciously adopts a broadly Aristotelian terminology and conception of particular determination in his commentaries on Aristotle's works and in his own accounts of practical reason. In Aristotle scholarship there is debate over the relationship in Aristotle between deliberative and inferential models of particular determination. I briefly note two interpretations of this relationship in order to set a context for Aquinas's account. Aristotle's account of deliberation in NE book 3 seems quite different from his account of practical reasoning in books 6 and 7, where he introduces a new terminology, of inferences and premises.⁴ In the latter, according to Allan, Aristotle discarded the exclusively deliberative model of book 3 as being intellectual rather than practical,⁵ and broadened his view of 'the procedure of choice' to be expressed by the practical syllogism, which takes either deliberative ('means-end') or inferential ('rule-case') forms, depending upon whether what is expressed in the major premise is an end or a general rule.⁶ Deliberation's investigative role drops out of practical reasoning entirely: 'Practical reason, then, is for Aristotle not a reasoning process which precedes action, but rather thought expressed in action and controlling it.'⁷ I.e., practical reason expresses the strictly syllogistic or subsumptive relationship between end-and-means or rule-and-case.⁸ In this way Allan brings

⁴ Other examples of practical inference in Aristotle are found in DMA 6, 7 and DA 3.11.

⁵ (Allan 1955), 328.

⁶ (Allan 1955), 336, 338. Allan distinguishes two types of syllogism as beginning with 'premises of the possible' and 'premises of the good', respectively, based on Aristotle's distinction in these terms between two kinds of practical premises in MA 7, 701a24 (331, 336). However in the latter Aristotle's distinction is between the two premises within a practical syllogism, not between two kinds of syllogism. For critique of Allan, see (Kenny 1979), 117-124.

⁷ (Allan 1975), 78.

⁸ (Allan 1975), 75.

together ‘deliberation’ and inference, but by virtue of making all practical reason syllogistic and at the expense of giving practical reason any investigative role in S’s reasoning about what to do. Aristotle’s practical syllogism certainly seems ill-suited to discovering what to do. His detailed examples of practical inference are typically trivial at best: e.g. Everything sweet must be tasted by every human being, this X is sweet and I am a human being, therefore I should taste this sweet; Every man ought to walk, I am a man, therefore, walk; I want a drink, this is a drink, therefore I drink.⁹

Nussbaum, by contrast, emphasises deliberation’s investigative role in Aristotle. According to her, Aristotle’s practical syllogism is best understood as a schema for teleological explanation of activity,¹⁰ translating S’s deliberative practical reasoning

into a third-person teleological explanation of the agent’s action: ‘He did A because he wanted G and believed that it was necessary to do A in order to bring it about.’ This is a complete account of why he did it; and the conditions alleged are sufficient conditions for the action: if action does not follow, we will have to explain why it does not.¹¹

Following Von Wright, Nussbaum calls this pattern of practical thinking *anankastic* – ‘because of its inclusion of a premise descriptive of hypothetical necessity.’¹² There are at least two difficulties with this account. First, Aristotle’s discussion of deliberation (e.g. in NE 3.3) appears more flexible than this would suggest: the deliberator seeks the ‘ways and means’ that will reach the end, which possible means are typically multiple.¹³ Even if the end were more narrowly specified as, say: ‘To reach end X in the easiest and finest way,’ as Aristotle himself suggests, there will be many cases where there is no single ‘way’ that satisfies this description *tout court*,

⁹ NE 7.3, DMA 7. These are ‘completely crazy as examples of any reasonable agent’s conduct’: (Nussbaum 1978), 203.

¹⁰ (Nussbaum 1978), 174.

¹¹ (Nussbaum 1978), 176.

¹² (Nussbaum 1978), 176.

¹³ See NE 3.3.1112b16-26.

and thus no single act whose performance is *necessitated* by the end.¹⁴ Usually, there will be, on the deliberative model, several possible ‘means’ to any end, and they would likely be characterised conditionally: ‘If I do A and B, then C will (probably) obtain’; ‘If I do A and D, E and F will (probably) occur’; and so on. Second, if one attempts to translate deliberative reasoning of this sort into standard logical form, as Kenny points out, one commits a version of the fallacy of affirming the consequent: G is to be brought about. If I do A, then G. So I’ll do A (formally: $P \rightarrow Q$. Therefore, P). Deliberative reasoning is defeasible.¹⁵ Relatedly, a necessitarian construal of practical inference faces the objection that positive particular reasons are in fact underdetermined by positive general reasons, and thus are *not* necessitated by the form of practical syllogism.

Questions about the relationship between deliberation and inference, whether particular determination is investigative, the validity of practical syllogism, and the necessity or defeasibility of practical reasoning face Aquinas’s conception of particular determination as well. He accepts both deliberative and inferential models, and in his account they are closely related. Both models constitute forms of one’s determining general good into particular action, making determinate what one has reason to do. In what follows I seek to spell out Aquinas’s account of them in a way which explicates their interrelatedness, while not collapsing either into the other, and which elucidates the core elements of particular determination.

¹⁴ (MacDonald 1999) specifies different versions of the necessity claim in practical reasoning.

¹⁵ (Kenny 1989), 43-44.

2.2 Particular Deliberation in Aquinas

2.2.1 Introduction

It is ironic that Aquinas is often identified as a deductivist, as if he holds solely to an inferential model of practical reason. In fact Aquinas not only places great stress upon deliberation, discussing it throughout his writings, but he specifically identifies deliberation (*consilium*) as one of the five fundamental elements of the human psychological act to which he devotes specific questions in IaIIae.12-17. He discusses deliberation there at length, while only mentioning practical inference incidentally.¹⁶ We saw that some of Aquinas's discussions of deliberative reasoning are best taken as deliberative *specification*. However, deliberative reasoning is, in its fullest expression, also a central form of particular determination. We have seen repeatedly that, for Aquinas, human action is end-directed; while S determinately aims at its general conception of good, S must rationally determine particular ends for the sake of which to act.¹⁷ This rational determination is expressed in deliberation.

A human is master of its actions, because it has the power of deliberating about its actions. Because its reason in deliberating is related to opposites, its will is able to be inclined to any of them.¹⁸

The fully rational ability of S to grasp ends *as* intelligible ends – to compare them to other goods, and so to see its acts *as* being for the sake of reaching these ends – belongs to deliberation.¹⁹

¹⁶ In other summaries of the 'order of things to be done' and acts of reason regarding human action, Aquinas mentions deliberation, but not inference: IaIIae.15.3; 57.6; IIaIIae.47.8.

¹⁷ Ia.18.3; IaIIae.1.2 ad 3.

¹⁸ IaIIae.6.2 ad 2; QDM 6.1.

¹⁹ IaIIae.11.2.

2.2.2 Deliberation is analytic

Deliberative reasoning is analytic. Aquinas draws an analogy between deliberation and non-paradigmatic reasoning in theoretical thought – factual demonstration, in which S begins with complex effects and reasons back to simple principles that are causally and explanatory prior, ultimately 'resolving' the effects into the causes so that one may come to see the principles *in* the conclusions.²⁰ Analogously, in practical analysis, in the 'order of intention' S begins with the end sought and reasons back through what is causally prior, 'resolving' after a fashion, until S reaches a practical first principle, i.e. the first action to be done in order to reach the end. By realising the action identified, following in reverse order the reasoning just sketched (now, the 'order of execution'), S begins its practical journey to realise the end intended.²¹

On this model, S lays down some end that is first desired, and then deliberates about the things which are for the end, always proceeding from what comes later to what is prior, reaching the first thing immediately to do.²² In his commentary on NE 3.3 Aquinas spells out the process in more detail than does Aristotle. Taking the end for granted, Aquinas identifies three intentions (*intentiones*) underlying this process: first, to determine by what action or what means S can attain the end; second, to know by which of these S can more easily and better reach the goal, which involves judgement (*iudicium*) in finding ways to the end; and third, if the end can be reached by one means or motion, or optimally²³ by a particular means, to reach the end through this means. This process, Aquinas adds, requires perseverance and careful

²⁰ See In NE 1.3.35.

²¹ IaIIae.14.5.

²² In DA 3.15.821.

²³ The third, *per unum optime*, added by Aquinas.

attention (*solicitudo*). If the means is not at hand, S keeps inquiring as to how it can be reached, and so on.²⁴

This is one of Aquinas's fullest descriptions of the structure of deliberation. More typically he simply stresses that in deliberation one lays down some end,²⁵ or takes some end for granted,²⁶ or proposes some end,²⁷ and then deliberates about the things that are for the end.²⁸ '[H]aving apprehended the end, S can, from deliberating about the end and the things for the sake of it, be moved or not to gain that end.'²⁹

Another full description is found in *In Met* 7, which I examined in V, where Aquinas construes Aristotle's reasoning about health as an analytic process (H1-H4). I argued there that the deliberative steps between H1 and H3 express deliberative specification. However the deliberative process does not come to completion until a *particular* act is identified (H3), which the physician then expresses in action (H4).

Analytic reasoning in general is a kind of inquiry or investigation,³⁰ and Aquinas stresses that deliberation in particular is inquiry.³¹ It is a kind of rational investigation, a calculative, discursive rational inquiry,³² resulting in the identification of what one is able to do at once.³³ To deliberate is to seek (*quaerere*);³⁴ the aim of deliberation is the discovery of what is to be done.³⁵ Thus the point of deliberative reasoning is investigative: to determine what to do.

Aquinas's account of deliberation raises several questions, which I address in what follows. First, briefly, which ends are aimed at in deliberation? On the basis of

²⁴ *In NE* 3.8.475.

²⁵ *In DA* 3.15.821.

²⁶ *In NE* 3.8.475.

²⁷ *In NE* 6.2.1133.

²⁸ *In DA* 3.15.821.

²⁹ *IaIIae*.6.2.

³⁰ *In NE* 1.15.5; 3.9.484.

³¹ *DM* 3.9; *IaIIae*.14.1; 57.6.

³² *In NE* 6.8.1218; *IaIIae*.14.1 ad 2.

³³ *IaIIae*.14.6.

³⁴ *IaIIae*.47.8.

the health analogy, it would seem that deliberation must ultimately aim at the ultimate end of practice, i.e. flourishing. We saw in IV, however, that paradigmatically good deliberation, for Aquinas, concerns the ultimate end of human life, but that this is expressed primarily in specific deliberation, not particular deliberation. While deliberation, like practical synthesis, is directed to that end ultimately, it need not be explicitly so in the proximate task of discovering what to do in particular cases. A piece of deliberation as such simply takes an end for granted, as presupposed for its practical reasoning. This need not be the ultimate end; indeed the end may in turn be directed to a further end.³⁶

2.2.3 Deliberation is flexible

A second question about deliberation concerns the stringency of such reasoning. Aquinas's fuller description of deliberation (e.g. In Met 7), appears to require S to uncover what is *necessary* to the achieving of the end sought (H2): If health is to exist it is necessary (*necesse est*) that x, y, z conditions obtain – implying an overly rigid and unrealistic picture.

Several responses are appropriate. First, as I argued with regard to Nussbaum's construal of Aristotle, deliberative reasoning is defeasible. Typically there is more than one way to realise an end. Moreover, even when the 'best' way is sought, according to Aquinas, it requires judgement to discern.³⁷

Second, Aquinas stresses that deliberation is flexible. Indeed its indeterminate character distinguishes deliberative reasoning – it is an inquiry that is not yet

³⁵ IIaIIae.51.1 ad 1.

³⁶ IaIIae.14.2. Aquinas's terminology is flexible here; he speaks of 'ultimate ends' as termini of proximate chains of reasoning. E.g. IaIIae.12.3, where health serves both as ultimate end and as subordinate to the ultimate end.

concluded.³⁸ Deliberation is indeterminate with respect to its matter, its method, and the mind of the deliberator. Deliberation expresses the rationally calculating part of the soul, concerning contingent things; thus, in deliberating, the deliberator's *mind* is indeterminate.³⁹ Only one who has not yet reached an opinion or is not yet certain, deliberates.⁴⁰ The *matter* of deliberation – particular matters of human action – is contingent, variable, and uncertain,⁴¹ still a matter of doubt,⁴² since there are an indefinite number of particulars to take into account.⁴³ About such matters one can only say what is true 'for the most part', rather than what is true universally or necessarily.⁴⁴ Thus a practically wise person must be good at reasoning, able accurately to apply general reasons to particular, variable, indeterminate matters.⁴⁵ The *method* of deliberation, likewise, is indeterminate, for unlike the syllogistic reasoning of theoretical reason, it applies when there are not determinate ways to reach an end⁴⁶ – when S must fix for itself in advance how to proceed, since the procedures are not certain and determined in themselves,⁴⁷ and there are no fixed methods.⁴⁸ Indeed Aquinas locates human 'free decision' in deliberative activity: it is because deliberation is a non-demonstrative kind of inquiry that can go in different directions, that will is not necessitated.⁴⁹

How is it, then, that Aquinas appeals in some descriptions of deliberation to what is necessary? Clearly some things for the end are necessary conditions for

³⁷ In NE 3.8.475.

³⁸ In NE 6.1.1118.

³⁹ In NE 6.1.1118.

⁴⁰ In NE 6.8.1221.

⁴¹ IaIIae.14.1 ad 2.

⁴² IaIIae.14.2.

⁴³ IaIIae.14.3.

⁴⁴ IIaIIae.47.3 ad 2.

⁴⁵ IIaIIae.49.5 ad 2.

⁴⁶ IIaIIae.47.2 ad 2.

⁴⁷ In NE 3.7.467.

⁴⁸ In NE 3.7.468.

⁴⁹ QDM 6.1; IaIIae.6.2 ad 2; 17.1. (MacDonald 1999), 148.

reaching it. Aquinas's explication of the health analogy identifies certain fundamental constituents of the health-end (x, y, z), and so realising these will constitute necessary conditions of reaching it. Further, if there are necessary conditions for reaching x, y, z, then these must also be identified as necessary. However, not all things for an end are necessary conditions. In his house-building analogy to practical reasoning, Aquinas makes this clear. While the ultimate end of flourishing is necessarily willed by S, willing the building of a house as a way of expressing it is not. If S does will to build a house, however, there are both necessary and non-necessary conditions to be met. Aquinas says that it is necessary for one who wishes to build a house that one get some lumber, but whether to use fir as the lumber is not necessary.⁵⁰ This is obviously a poor example, since houses may be made of brick or other materials; he must mean to specify a 'frame house'. A better example would appeal to house as structurally specified:⁵¹ walls and a roof are necessary conditions of a house, but to build them of wood or brick, or in any particular style or configuration, is left open. The builder 'needs to determine the general form of a house to some particular shape'.⁵² Houses are multiply exemplifiable, and while there are necessary conditions which emerge in a builder's deliberations, there is significant room for creativity in determining what is best in the particular situation.

Aquinas draws an analogous conclusion regarding what is necessary to achieve the ultimate end of flourishing, and what conduces to it. The bindingness or necessity of the conclusions of practical reasoning (e.g. the bindingness of *conscientia*) is conditional upon the end to be attained.⁵³ To will the ultimate end is

⁵⁰ SCG 3.97.12.

⁵¹ See In DA 1.2.

⁵² IaIIae.95.2.

⁵³ QDV 17.3.

necessary,⁵⁴ but the only particular good that is willed necessarily by S is one that is ordered to the ultimate end as a necessary condition for it – and is seen as such by S.⁵⁵

As we saw regarding Aristotle, deliberation in general cannot be formulated in a deductively valid form, where the conclusion follows with necessity. Except in rare cases where there is only a single, necessary ‘means’ to the end available, S’s determination of the means to begin the ‘order of execution’ requires a ‘judgement of reason’ that is underdetermined by the general goal itself.⁵⁶

2.2.4 Deliberation is closely related to inferential practical determination

In Aquinas there is a close relationship between deliberative and inferential models of particular determination. He moves indifferently between deliberation and PS, illustrating one with elements from the other,⁵⁷ e.g. describing unqualified deliberation by reference to the middle term of the practical syllogism.⁵⁸

Both deliberative and inferential particular determination, on Aquinas’s view, share a three-part, general-to-particular structure. Paradigmatic practical inference, we have seen, has a pattern of a (1) universal or general (major) premise, (2) particular (minor) premise, and (3) general/particular conclusion. We also saw that Aquinas emphasises three intentions underlying S’s deliberation, roughly amounting to: (a) a general intention to reach the end, (b) an intention to find which ‘means’ best

⁵⁴ IaIIae.10.2.

⁵⁵ IaIIae.10.2 ad 3; IaIIae.13.6 ad 1; SCG 3.97.12.

⁵⁶ Although Aquinas sometimes refers to the conclusion of deliberative reasoning as a ‘choice’ (In NE 3.9.484; QDV 22.15 ad 2) or an ‘action’ (In NE 3.8.477; IaIIae.14.6), by far his predominant reference is to a ‘judgement of reason’ about what is to be done (In NE 3.9.484; 6.8.1230; Ia.83.3, ad 2; IaIIae.14.1; 17.3 ad 1; QDW(2) 1).

⁵⁷ See Aquinas’s commentaries on DA 3.10-11, and NE 6.12.

⁵⁸ In NE 6.8.1220-1231.

achieve the end, and (c) an intention to realise the end through the means arrived at by the deliberative process.

These two models share several features. First, the structure is general-to-particular, moving from what is general to a conclusion that particularly exemplifies the general: logically (inference) or causally (deliberation). They both express Aquinas's general conception of practical thought as the rational determination of general good into particular action. I argue below that what each form of reasoning reaches as a conclusion is the same. The conclusion of deliberative particular determination is *bonum applicatum ad operationem*.⁵⁹ a good-determined-into-action, a particularised general good – i.e. a particular do-able thing or 'particular practicable' (*particulare operabile*), the first step towards reaching the end.⁶⁰ It is not an action, simply speaking, but an action-to-be-done,⁶¹ the final acceptance of something-to-be-done.⁶² That is, S's particular deliberation aims at determining a *particular good* which expresses the *general end* that S seeks to realise; the identified particular good, when realised here and now, constitutes the starting point of the full realisation of the general end.

Steve, for example, seeks to realise the end of being a good father, and deliberatively reasons to the conclusion that, A, spending an hour of undistracted time with his daughter today is the appropriate particular expression of that end. Steve's realisation of A is both an *initial* realisation of the end – an actual *expression* of the general end in action – *and* a first step towards the *full* realisation of that end. The action identified in deliberation is an action under a description: a general good expressed *in* a particular, the expression of which in action constitutes both a

⁵⁹ In DA 3.15.827.

⁶⁰ IaIIae.14.6.

⁶¹ In NE 3.8.477.

⁶² QDV 22.15.

realisation of the end and the beginning of a causal or contributive chain towards the end's full realisation. What is reached in practical inference is the same in reference.

Second, both forms of reasoning involve *judgement*. Deliberation concludes in the identification of the particular practicable: the judgement of what is good, i.e. what is to be done, in light of the alternatives.⁶³ It is expressed in a judgement of reason,⁶⁴ but one that includes a desiderative element, S's appetitive acceptance of S's rational determination.⁶⁵ That is, it involves 'choice' (*electio*), which Aquinas says may be called a 'conclusion' by analogy to theoretical reasoning.⁶⁶ In Aquinas's detailed analysis of psychological action he puts these elements together more systematically: deliberation expresses a kind of inquiry concerning contingent matters of action, concluding in a judgement of reason about what is to be done, combined with a choice of will – reason's ordering what is for the end, and will's 'tending to' what is for the end.⁶⁷ The components of reason and will cannot be strictly separated – they combine rational order and motivation in a single, complex reason/will act.⁶⁸ The combination of rational and appetitive elements in judgement means that judgement involves character; perception of the particular practicable, unlike simple perception of sensory objects, requires the habituation of desire. Particular deliberation identifies the same kinds of particular instances of general good from which general practical knowledge arises, and it requires character habituation for the same reasons.

Thus Aquinas sees a close relationship between particular deliberative and inferential reasoning. Does Aquinas in fact conflate the two models? He does,

⁶³ Ia.83.3.

⁶⁴ Ia.83.3 ad 2; IaIIae.14.1; 17.3 ad 1; In NE 3.9.484.

⁶⁵ Ia.83.3 ad 2.

⁶⁶ QDV 22.15 ad 2.

⁶⁷ IaIIae.14.1.

⁶⁸ IaIIae.14.1 ad 1.

strikingly, suggest that, since deliberation is a kind of inquiry concerning what to do, in every act of virtue or sin there must be a quasi-syllogistic deduction (*sit quadam deductio quasi syllogistica*).⁶⁹ Here Aquinas seems to indicate that deliberative reasoning is syllogistic or deductive in structure. Similarly he introduces one of his clearest expositions of practical syllogism by saying that reason directs or orders human actions according to two-fold – general and particular – knowledge, so that in *deliberating* about what is to be done, it employs a kind of (*quodam*) syllogism. He then follows this introduction with a clearly inferential account of the reasoning involved.⁷⁰

What are we to make of this? First, neither Aquinas's nor Aristotle's notion of 'syllogism' should be conceived too strictly; it often simply stands for 'reasoning' or 'argument'.⁷¹ Aquinas evidently has a core conception of syllogism, and then more extended senses. Aquinas explicitly distinguishes deliberation from his core notion of syllogism, however, as being the appropriate way to reason when there are *not* determinate ways to reach an end, in contrast to syllogism, which does involve determinate ways to reach the end.⁷² Second, Aquinas himself indicates that he is using 'syllogism' in an extended sense here by qualifying his deliberative reasoning as a 'kind of' syllogism. Third, however, Aquinas does *not* wish to distinguish deliberation and inference strictly with respect to S's seeking to determine general good into particular action, for both forms of reasoning express this kind of determination. On the interpretation I press here deliberation and inference cover the

⁶⁹ DM 3.9 ad 7.

⁷⁰ IaIIae.76.1.

⁷¹ 'The English word "syllogism" is [the historical descendant of *sullogismos*] not just from the Greek but from Aristotle. However, this very history makes "syllogism" a bad translation of *sullogismos* in Aristotle. Logicians normally use "syllogism" to *mean* one of the specific forms of valid argument Aristotle discusses in *An. Pr* 1.1-6, but Aristotle's definition of *sullogismos* comprehends a much wider class: pretty much any valid argument, or at least any argument with a conclusion different from any of its premises.' (Smith 1995), 30.

same rational, psychological, and normative ground, but in different ways and featured in different stages, expressing the differences between investigative and judicative reasoning. Both express general-to-particular, principle-to-conclusion,⁷³ discursive rational processes of determining good into action. Thus Aquinas holds that they are closely related.

2.2.5 Deliberation takes time

Aquinas conceives of deliberation as a discursive process of reason, proceeding from one thing considered to another, which takes time to perform.⁷⁴ *Eubulia* or unqualifiedly good deliberation is distinct from *eustochia* or good conjecture: the former requires thorough investigation while the latter is a kind of correct perception or *aestimatio* of a situation that is prompt and exists without rational inquiry, a kind of innate knack possessed by some people.⁷⁵ Deliberation, however, is characteristic of particular determination. Does not Aquinas value the development of perceptual ability to ‘see’ situations properly, apart from extensive deliberation in every case? Where does situational perception fit into Aquinas’s account?⁷⁶

Aquinas clarifies that deliberation is not *necessary* to particular determination: when the judgement or decision is evident without inquiry, there is no need for the

⁷² IIaIIae.47.2 ad 2, 3. This distinguishes Aquinas’s account from both Allan’s and Nussbaum’s interpretations of Aristotle.

⁷³ Deliberation is principle-to-conclusion in structure, but in a way analogous to, but not identical to, practical inference: IaIIae.14.6.

⁷⁴ IaIIae.14.1; IIaIIae.49.5.

⁷⁵ In NE 6.8.1219.

⁷⁶ This seems to be a problem for Aristotle’s account. He distinguishes deliberation from quick thinking, insisting that it is a slow process (NE 6.9.1142b3-8). He also discusses situations that require a quick response, which is expressive of one’s character (3.8.1117a18-22). However he does not address the apparent incompatibility between character and reasoning this suggests: if deliberative reasoning is required for truly rational action, as he seems to suggest, then quick judgement on the basis of developed character is not fully rational. Aquinas’s more expansive account, as I interpret it here, accounts for immediate, character-shaped, but also rational response.

inquiry of deliberation.⁷⁷ One may be fully rational in judging at once, without deliberation, in matters that are evident.⁷⁸ Deliberation is required when matters are *not* evident or determinate. We shall see that Aquinas provides materials for giving an account of how situational perception may work within the general framework of practical thinking.

2.3 Inferential Particular Determination in Aquinas

2.3.1 Introduction

Whereas deliberative reasoning is analytic, inferential reasoning is synthetic.⁷⁹

Demonstrative, inferential reasoning for Aquinas expresses paradigmatic rationality; his practical analogue is inferential particular determination, practical inference.⁸⁰

Whereas deliberative reasoning seems particularly suited to flexibility and emphasises the role of character and non-general-rule-determined judgement in practical determination, practical inference raises the spectre of deductivism and rigid, narrow rule-following. Indeed 'rule-case' reasoning seems particularly suited to a law conception of ethics, which is thought to lie behind Aquinas's thought, in contrast to Aristotle's virtue approach.⁸¹

⁷⁷ IaIIae.14.4 ad 1.

⁷⁸ IaIIae.14.4 ad 2.

⁷⁹ IaIIae.14.5.

⁸⁰ See (Schmidt 1966), 259-260.

⁸¹ (Nussbaum 1978), 168.

2.3.2 The practical syllogism

Aristotle's inferential terminology has given rise to a term of art: 'practical syllogism'. It is suggested by Aristotle's account in 6.12, 1144a29-b1, referring to 'inferences or syllogisms (*sullogismoi*) about actions'. The derivation of 'practical syllogism' as a strict, narrowly technical term for practical inference from this passage alone has been discredited on grammatical grounds,⁸² and we have seen that 'syllogism' need not in any case be restricted to a strict sense in Aristotle.⁸³ Still, whether termed 'practical syllogism' or not, inference forms an important part of Aristotle's discussion of practical reasoning. He repeatedly characterises practical reasoning in a way that is syllogistic in at least a broad sense, paralleling theoretical syllogistic: two premises – one universal and one particular, followed by a conclusion.⁸⁴

Similarly, Aquinas's practical inference is subsumptive. Like its theoretical analogue, it comprises universal and particular premises, followed by a conclusion which expresses the appropriate application⁸⁵ of the universal to the particular.⁸⁶ One may play down the actual terminology of 'practical syllogism' in Aristotle's case, since he uses it so seldom, but it is impossible to do likewise for Aquinas. Aquinas often refers to a practical argument as a 'syllogism', or to practical reasoning as a kind

⁸² *Hoi gar sullogismoi tôn praktôn archên echontes eisin*. For discussion of its proper translation and the use of the term 'practical syllogism', see (Kenny 1979), 111-114; (Chappell 1995), 71-72. Cf. (Nussbaum 1978), 182-184.

⁸³ Moreover, according to Chappell, 75-76, in the NE Aristotle's preferred method of reference to reasoning about practice is by use of the term *logismos* (nine times) rather than by either the more general available term, *logos* (five), or the more restricted, *sulligismos* (two, including this passage). The latter is Aristotle's usual term for the most complete form of theoretical reasoning, comprising strictly two premises and a conclusion, in subject-predicate form, etc. The terminological moral, suggests Chappell, is that 'the reasoning of practical syllogisms is not so loose as to deserve no more than the prosaic name *logos*; but not so rigorous as to deserve the special name *sullogismos*. It is somewhere in between.' See also discussion in (Nussbaum 1978), 183-184. She concludes, however, that Aristotle is not using '*sullogismos*' carelessly in this passage (184).

⁸⁴ DA 3.11; MA 7; NE 7.3. See (Anscombe 1977).

⁸⁵ *Applicatio* is Aquinas's common term for what I call 'particularisation'. E.g. . . . *oportet . . . quod opinio universalis ad particularia applicetur*. In DA 3.16.846.

⁸⁶ In NE 6.9.1247; In NE 7.3.1339ff.; QDV 10.5; QDV 17.2; DM 3.9; ST IIaIIae.47.3 ad 1.

of 'syllogising'.⁸⁷ Even when giving an account of the intellectual virtue of prudence, Aquinas appeals frankly and repeatedly to syllogistic reasoning.

The reasoning of prudence terminates, as at a kind of conclusion, at a particular thing-to-be-done, to which it applies a universal cognition . . . For a conclusion is syllogised from a universal and a particular proposition. Thus it must be the case that the reasoning of prudence proceeds from a twofold understanding: one is cognisant of universals, and this pertains to the kind of understanding which is an intellectual virtue, since not only general theoretical principles are naturally cognised by us, but also general practical principles, such as 'no harm is to be done'. But there is another understanding, as mentioned in NE 6, that is cognisant of the ultimate, which is a first particular and contingent thing to be done, namely the minor proposition, which must be particular in a syllogism of prudence. This first particular is some particular end; thus the kind of understanding which is a part of prudence is a certain right grasp (*aestimatio*) of some particular end.⁸⁸

This rich passage raises several issues to which we shall return. Let's look more closely at the premises and structure of practical inference in Aquinas.

Aquinas accepts Aristotle's account of practical syllogism and extends it.

Recall PS as a paradigm of practical inference.

PS:

(UP): X-kind humans should realise Y-type acts.

(PP): Act A is a (token of) Y-type act and I am (a token of) an X-kind human.

(Concl): Therefore, I should realise act A.⁸⁹

In the universal premise the two crucial referents – to the agent and the act – are universalised, i.e. identified by type rather than token. That is, a universal premise in a practical syllogism identifies a *kind* of agent and a *type* of act, thus making it a general premise. The particular premise properly particularises each of these two universals: *this* A (particular act-token) is *of* the act-type specified in the universal premise and *I*, the (particular agent-token) am *of* the agent-kind specified in the

⁸⁷ In DA 3.16.841; QDW (1) 9.11; DM 3.9; In II Sent. 24.2.4; QDV 17.2; QDV 10.5; ST Ia.86.1 ad 2; IaIIae.13.1 ad 2.

⁸⁸ IIaIIae.49.2 ad 1.

⁸⁹ DA 3.11.434a16-21; In DA 3.6.845.

universal premise.⁹⁰ A particular premise is not properly particularised unless both universals are particularised. If I am not of the type of human indicated, or if the act in question is not of the type indicated, the subsumption does not go through and the conclusion does not follow.

The inference is first-personal. Aquinas states practical inferences first-personally, as expressions by S of S's rational determination of what to do. The conclusion of a practical syllogism expresses S's judgement about what S is to do and/or S's intention or desire to do it. Only in a derivative or extended application is the inferential pattern constructed from a third-person perspective, e.g. for T to explain why S did what S did. Nussbaum, we saw, construes Aristotelian practical inference primarily in terms of a third-personal, teleological explanation of S's action, although she acknowledges that reasoning in this way may be part of S's determining what to do.⁹¹ In the case of explaining incontinence, as we shall see, Aquinas does utilise practical inference third-personally, in explaining S's action. However, he paradigmatically specifies practical inference first-personally, which suggests that it expresses S's particular determination of action. As we saw in IV, Aquinas illustrates PS with

PS (Children):

(UP): Children are to (ought to) honour their parents.

(PP): I am a child and A is an act expressing honour to my parents.

(Concl): Therefore I ought now to realise A.⁹²

While not a trivial example, as many of Aristotle's, this is a *positive practical inference*, thus whose universal premise (a positive specific reason) underdetermines the conclusion. This confronts us again with the objection that positive practical

⁹⁰ See In NE 7.3.1340 re: universal as expressed in universal and particular premises.

inference is deductively invalid, and thus insufficient to determine S's action. We consider this issue in 2.3.4.

2.3.3 The conclusion of practical inference

Aquinas sometimes identifies the conclusion of a practical syllogism as an *action*, which must be performed immediately if nothing prevents it.⁹³ More typically he speaks of the conclusion as a *judgement*⁹⁴ or a *choice*,⁹⁵ expressible in a particular proposition (e.g. 'A (e.g. this act of adultery) is not to be done'⁹⁶ or 'I must abstain from A'⁹⁷). In one place Aquinas generously includes all three: a conclusion to a syllogism about action is 'a judgement, choice, or action'. However, he goes on to clarify that, since actions concern particulars, the conclusion of a practical syllogism is a particular *proposition*, concluded from a universal proposition through the medium of a particular proposition.⁹⁸ This proposition Aquinas construes as a *judgement* of reason, followed by will's response of choice.⁹⁹ Aquinas's considered view,¹⁰⁰ is that practical determination identifies a *particular practicable*, a first particular and contingent thing-to-be-done,¹⁰¹ i.e. an *action*, but an action identified in a particular proposition, i.e. in the particular premise and the conclusion.¹⁰²

This is intelligible if we understand the conclusion of practical inference as we did the conclusion of deliberation: as identifying a good-determined-into-action, a

⁹¹ (Nussbaum 1978), 196.

⁹² In DA 3.16.845.

⁹³ In NE 7.3.1346.

⁹⁴ Ia.79.12; 83.1; IaIIae.13.1 ad 2; 13.3; 13.6 ad 2; 74.7; IIaIIae.47.8; QDV 17.2.

⁹⁵ IaIIae.13.3; QDV 10.5.

⁹⁶ DM 3.9; In II Sent. 24.2.4.

⁹⁷ QDV 17.2.

⁹⁸ IaIIae.76.1.

⁹⁹ IaIIae.13.1 ad 2; 13.3; cf. QDV 22.15.

¹⁰⁰ IIaIIae.49.2 ad 1, cited above.

¹⁰¹ . . . *primi singularis et contingentis operabilis*.

universal-in-particular, i.e. an *action under a description*, which, expressed in a particular proposition, explicates the logical and psychological link between the act and the general or specific reason expressed by the universal premise. Indeed the conclusion of practical inference exemplifies or expresses Aquinas's general conception of practical reason itself: the determining of general good into particular action. It identifies not simply an action, but a universal-in-particular, a general good *as* expressed in this particular action – a particular practicable.

This picture enables us to understand a striking element of Aquinas's account. According to Aquinas, particulars identified in the particular and contingent – minor, ultimate – proposition in the practical syllogism are in fact *principles*:

The reason that understanding is said to be how we grasp an ultimate of this kind is clear from the fact that understanding is of principles. Now particulars (*singularia*) of this kind, which we say that understanding is about, are principles of that-which-is-for-the-sake-of [the end], i.e. they are principles after the manner of a final cause (*idest sunt principia ad modum causae finalis*).¹⁰³

How may particulars constitute principles? For practical induction the grasp of particulars as epistemic principles of general practical cognition involves S's seeing them, not merely in terms of sense data apprehended by cognition, but – by virtue of internal sense/*vis cogitativa*/particular reason – grasping their particular *intentions*, i.e. perceiving the particulars *as* instances of more general kinds, and by perceiving them *practically*, i.e. as good/desirable/ends, as exemplifications of goodness, which perception requires character habituation.

Perceiving a 'practical particular' A in this way, however, is just to perceive A as a 'particular practicable'. My account of practical inference, as did my account of deliberation, arrives at the same place as practical knowledge begins: character-dependent identification of general good as it is appropriately expressed by a

¹⁰² IIaIIae.49.2 ad 1.

particular action, A. A serves as an *epistemic principle*, since if one is to have a correct general grasp of what is good, one must perceive particular instantiations of goodness appropriately. We see now that A also serves as a *practical principle*, a starting point of action. How is this? Aquinas speaks of particulars as principles ‘after the manner of a final cause’ – principles of that-which-is-for-the-sake-of-the-end, i.e. the ‘means’. However the principle Aquinas specifies as serving as final cause for the means – that for the sake of which the means are realised – is the *end* itself.¹⁰⁴ The most obvious referent of this ‘end’ would seem to be the *general end* to be expressed in action, the overall aim of action, which – if expressed in a syllogism – would correspond to the universal premise.¹⁰⁵ But in this citation Aquinas identifies *particulars* specified in the *particular premise* (and conclusion) to constitute the ends for the sake of which the means are realised – principles ‘after the manner of a final cause’. This is not Aquinas’s only reference to this. In IIaIIae.49.2 ad 1 Aquinas identifies

the ultimate, which is a first particular and contingent thing to be done, namely the minor proposition, which must be particular in a syllogism of prudence. This first particular is some particular end; thus the kind of understanding which is a part of prudence is a certain right *aestimatio* of some particular end.

While the universal premise of a practical syllogism expresses a general end to be realised in action, the ‘first particular and contingent thing to be done’ identified in the particular premise and conclusion constitutes a *particular end* to be realised in action.

This is made intelligible by our understanding of the particular practicable.

The ‘particular end’ is the particular practicable, identified in the particular premise and conclusion. Thus *both* the universal and particular premises express the end of

¹⁰³ In NE 6.9.1247-1248.

¹⁰⁴ IaIIae.14.2.

¹⁰⁵ SCG 3.97.12; In NE 6.12; (Allan 1955), 336.

action to be expressed. The universal premise expresses a general/specific reason for action, hence a general end/good that is aimed at in action. The particular premise identifies the particular practicable, the particular action that appropriately expresses the general-end-*in-particular*. The particular act is itself an end, then, first, by virtue of its expressing the general end.

Second, it is an end in the sense that the aim of a piece of particular determination is to *determine* the particular practicable, the realisation of which constitutes the first step towards realising the general end. Thus determining the particular practicable is the ‘particular end’ of a piece of particular determination. Qua particular expression of *general* good, then, the particular practicable expresses the end for the sake of which the ‘means’ are realised (the end sought in the order of execution). Qua *particular* expression of general good, the particular practicable constitutes the end for the sake of which one engages in practical determination itself (the end sought in the order of intention).¹⁰⁶ According to *IIaIIae.49.2 ad 1*, grasping this end requires the practical perceptual capacity of prudence, which itself requires habituation of character.

This picture of particular determination is important, for it expresses a combination of both general-to-particular rational determination and character-dependent perception. It also emphasises that an important goal in particular determination is to *determine what to do* in particular. Although this fits the picture of my earlier remarks about Aquinas’s construal of practical syllogism as first-personal, it raises further questions, for it sounds as if practical inference is investigative, an attempt to discover what to do, and this obscures the distinction I have pressed between investigative and judicative reasoning, as expressed in

deliberation and inference. I return to the relation between deliberation and inference in 2.3.6. Further, the validity of reaching a determinate conclusion in practical inference remains a question. To this I now turn.

2.3.4 The validity of particular inference

2.3.4.1 Deductive validity

We now have an initial picture of Aquinas's conception of the nature and structure of practical inference. PS makes evident that the universal premise in Aquinas's practical syllogism identifies *types* of acts to be done by *kinds* of persons, i.e. it expresses reasons certain kinds of persons have to realise/not realise certain kinds of acts (respond in certain ways, pursue certain kinds of goods, etc.). In other words, universal premises express general reasons or, more typically, specific reasons for action. The underdetermination of positive particular reasons by positive general reasons or positive specific reasons means that Aquinas's positive practical inference is invalid according to the canons of deductive logic, where a syllogistic form is valid iff, when the premises are true, the truth of the conclusion necessarily follows.

This kind of validity does not hold of Aquinas's positive practical inference. It may be the case that all X-kind humans should realise Y-type acts, and that I am of the X-kind and I am able to realise a Y-type act-token, A, but it does not follow necessarily that I *should* realise A in particular circumstances, C. For C may not be the appropriate place/time to realise A or any Y-type act, even though I may be committed as a general rule, by accepting the universal premise, to realise Y-type acts

¹⁰⁶ 'Practical deliberation, then, is essentially a process by which we particularize our ends in order to

whenever appropriate. Alternatively, even if I am committed to do Y-type acts whenever appropriate (so that presumably *some* Y-type act would be appropriate for me to realise in *some* C) it may well be the case that *A* is never an appropriate Y-type act-token *for me* to realise, given the manifold contingent *circumstantiae* differentiating persons and situations. Y-type action is multiply realisable. *A* may be what I should realise in C, but that determination is not guaranteed by the form of the argument, which is what deductive validity requires.

2.3.4.2 Negative particular inference

We saw in IV that Aquinas utilises deduction in reasoning about practical matters, as a form of specification. In such cases, the inference is deductively valid, as it reaches a specific, rather than particular, conclusion. This seems to produce a dilemma: an inference about practical matters is either valid but not particular, so not fully practical (deductive specification), or is fully practical because particular, but is not valid (practical syllogism). The form of practical inference Aquinas uses most widely, however, is both deductively valid *and* particular: *negative practical inference*. There are many examples; one is Aquinas's identification of the temperate person's syllogism with regard to fornication:

PS (F):

(UP): No fornication is to be committed (by any human).¹⁰⁷

(PP): This act, A, is of fornication (and I am a human).

(Concl): Therefore A is not to be done (by me).¹⁰⁸

be able to act on them.' (MacDonald 1999), 153.

¹⁰⁷ Material in parentheses in all examples of practical inference supplied by me, for completeness.

¹⁰⁸ DM 3.9. This is a common example for Aquinas, used in his most detailed treatments of practical syllogism.

In this example the universal premise is properly universal, expressing in gerundive form a universal negative rather than a universal affirmative generalisation.¹⁰⁹ The particular premise is properly particularised, and the conclusion does follow.¹¹⁰ Why does the conclusion follow in this practical case? Because the universal premise expresses a negative specific reason, thus ruling out an act-type as inappropriate for an agent-kind to realise. Any proper particularisation of agent and act subsumed under such a universal premise will necessarily yield a negative conclusion, always ruling out that act for S. The form, then, is valid, and the conclusion is practical in an indirect way: the inference does not determine what S *should* do among alternatives (unless what S should do is *not* to do this act – e.g. if S were being pressured or bribed to do it), but it does *determinately* rule out certain acts which may be under consideration, or rule out certain acts from *being* under consideration at all.

Aquinas's point in emphasising negative reasons for action should now be evident. Negative reasons identify boundaries; negative reasons expressing basic human goods identify the boundary or necessary conditions of the good life, act-types which, if realised, are fundamentally incompatible with flourishing. Such reasons are fairly clearly identifiable and determinately applicable from general to particular levels, presupposing a minimum of moral education and perceptual development. Moreover, expressed in a negative practical inference, they fit a strict 'rule-case', subsumptive model: if S understands certain act-types as inappropriate, and has sufficient grasp of the act-tokens which express them, S knows what not to do. E.g., for Aquinas, 'committing adultery' is an act-type that is simply, normatively ruled out in S's rightly determining what to do in particular. In this sense, a negative practical

¹⁰⁹ In this case (assuming 'in any situation') it is an all-encompassing universal negative with respect to agent/act/situation-kinds, an unconditional prohibition. Of course a negative practical inference could be more specific if the conditions were qualified, or it addressed specific kinds of agent (e.g. children).

¹¹⁰ No need with an all-encompassing universal negative to index to time or place.

inference may indirectly play a role in S's determining what to do in C – i.e. as a kind of indirect investigative reasoning – by virtue of ruling out certain acts.

Distinguishing between negative and positive reasons elucidates a further distinction between deliberative and inferential reasoning. Deliberation seeks 'ways and means' to realise positive reasons, but not negative reasons. Given my positive reason to honour my parents I deliberate about how appropriately to honour them, e.g. given the features qualifying their present circumstances (they live in an assisted-living community, with little room for possessions; they are in poor health; they long for contact with their children and grandchildren) and mine (I live nearby; I am limited in time: I have a family, I am teaching and writing a doctoral dissertation). A positive reason sets an end, which, if there is more than a single, necessary way to realise it, appropriately leads to deliberative reasoning as to how best to do so.

A negative reason not to commit adultery, on the other hand, does not imply a deliberative response. Rather its role is to *exclude* reasoning about how to commit adultery from my deliberative consideration.¹¹¹ I may deliberate how best not to commit adultery *in general*, e.g. as a form of deliberative life planning in light of my general conception of good, especially if I believe that I lack self-control or tend to be attracted to someone else's wife. On this basis I may establish certain practices or disciplines which help me avoid situations of temptation, or help develop my character so that I will become less inclined to commit adultery. (In a particular context I may need to deliberate about how best to extricate myself from a particularly tempting situation, but this is deliberation about escape, not about non-adultery.) In so far as I deliberate about not committing adultery, I deliberate about how to avoid situations where I might deliberate *how* to commit adultery, or I deliberate about how

to realise the positive character traits of fidelity or integrity with which the act-type of adultery is incompatible. Such deliberation exemplifies both *specific deliberation*, aimed at the cultivation of character traits or habits that specifically express my general conception of good, and *particular deliberation*, when it results in identifying the first steps for me to take towards such cultivation. However, such deliberation is indirectly related to the negative reason not to commit adultery. Negative reasons paradigmatically enter practical reasoning in judicative, inferential reasoning, while positive reasons paradigmatically enter in investigative, deliberative reasoning.

A further feature of negative practical inference is that it is *immediate*, or can be, in contrast to deliberation, which takes time. In negative practical inference Aquinas makes evident room for immediate, situational perception. In so far as S sees situation C as exemplifying a negative reason, general or specific, S is able to see – in a deductively valid, immediate way (immediate *because* it is deductively valid) – what *not* to do. More accurately, given S's acceptance of the normative/motivational framework in which such negative reasons are expressed, S's perception of C determinately excludes certain features of C that may suggest reasons for action to some agents. The deductively valid subsumptive relationship between general and particular reasons in this case naturally expresses epistemic immediacy.¹¹² The immediate and exclusionary role of negative reasons and negative practical inference expresses, in a minimal respect, Aquinas's view, as we see in 2.3.5, that a fully virtuous person lacks the experience of normative dissonance that emerges from *seeing too much* as being normatively relevant in a practical situation.

Thus Aquinas's negative practical inference – which he emphasises strongly, in contrast, e.g. to Aristotle's approach – possesses important virtues with respect to

¹¹¹ In Raz's terminology, it is an 'exclusionary reason': a second-order reason not to consider certain

practical reasoning. Inferences about negative reasons are deductively valid, so such reasons are immediately or easily seen to apply to particular situations: as we have seen, negative reasons retain their peculiar determinate character from the general level to the particular; and negative reasons are particularly important and stringent because they identify fundamental, necessary conditions for general good. For these reasons negative reasons are both most easily understood by agents and most important to be understood. Hence they play a particularly important role in moral education and giving moral direction, and are naturally among the first things to be taught and most widely to be promulgated.

2.3.4.3 Positive particular inference

Positive practical inference, on the other hand, does not possess these virtues, for it leaves particular action deductively underdetermined. S's conclusion that A is to be realised is not formally necessitated by S's general conception of good. How, then, are we to understand this role of practical syllogism in Aquinas, if it is not deductively valid? And how are we to explain S's rational determination of what to do, if the practical syllogism's conclusion is logically underdetermined?

Recall that, while Aquinas's core conception of 'syllogism' expresses a strictly deductive argument, he also uses 'syllogism' in looser ways, to refer to reasoning more generally.¹¹³ Aquinas sometimes uses 'syllogism' with regard to practical matters in ways that refer to inference, but actually express practical specification, not determination.¹¹⁴ Indeed Aquinas often speaks of practical

first-order reasons. (Raz 1990).

¹¹² IaIIae.57.2 ad 2; 77.2.

¹¹³ IIaIIae.47.2 ad 2; cf. In DA 3.16.841.

¹¹⁴ QDV 17.2; In II Sent. 24.2 ad 4; IaIIae.14.6.

inference not as ‘practical syllogism’ *simpliciter*, but as ‘a kind of syllogism’. In some cases, we have seen, this in fact refers to *non-syllogistic*, analytic reasoning.¹¹⁵

This does not mean that practical syllogism has no content as a form of particular determination, for Aquinas specifically distinguishes between inferential and deliberative models of particular determination. But we need not require Aquinas to make the simple logical mistake of identifying practical syllogism with strictly deductive inference. Positive practical inference, I now argue, is subsumptive in a broad sense – it expresses the particularisation of a general reason – but it does not, by its form alone, fully determine the conclusion. Still Aquinas sees the conclusion as a *rational* determination of general good, explaining and justifying S’s determination of what to do. How this may be so depends crucially upon Aquinas’s account of practical perception, to which I turn.

2.3.5 The role of practical perception in inferential particular determination

Aquinas’s account of incontinence, in his commentary on NE as well as other places, provides his most detailed account of inferential practical reason. In his commentary on NE 7.3 Aquinas discusses the nature of universal and particular premises, and illustrates as follows:

¹¹⁵ DM 3.9 ad 7; QDV 10.5; 17.2; IaIIae.13.3; 76.1; 90.1 ad 2; IIaIIae. 49.2 ad 1.

PS (H):

(UP): Every dishonourable (*inhonestum*) act is to be avoided (*fugiendum*) (by any person).

(PP): This A is dishonourable (and I am a person).

(Concl): (Therefore this A is to be avoided (by me).)

I call this universal premise the ‘Inhonestum Principle’ (InhonP), as it will play a continued role in Aquinas’s explication of incontinence.

Two points from the context of this example are important. First, Aquinas emphasises the *ratio* or formal conception connecting the universal premise, particular premise, and conclusion, i.e. the subsumption of the particular case under the general normative reason.¹¹⁶ It is important to Aquinas that in a practical inference there be general-to-particular rational validity in some sense, whether the inference be negative or positive. Second, Aquinas is here concerned to explain incontinent behaviour: how do we explain this sort of reasoning by S, when S then goes on to perform A?

If Aquinas’s only conception of practical inference were negative practical inference, as in this example, it would be easier to see how the *ratio* is preserved in the inference; but he does not. Beyond Aristotle’s account, Aquinas goes on to specify competing practical syllogisms, which express the practical reasoning of four kinds of individuals: temperate, intemperate, continent, incontinent. For temperate and intemperate persons, the picture of practical inference is simple.¹¹⁷ The temperate person’s universal premise is (InhonP), a *specific reason* emerging from the temperate person’s general conception of good – one which values what is fine or honourable (*honestum*) as characterising the idea (positive reason) to be expressed in action.

¹¹⁶ In NE 7.3.1345.

(InhonP) identifies a negative action-type that is fundamentally incompatible with such a conception of good (probably specifically considered with regard to matters of appetite). However, (InhonP) is still insufficiently specified to underwrite a clear practical syllogism, for Aquinas specifies the particular premise in the reasoning of both temperate and intemperate persons as concerning ‘sweet’ things, rather than ‘honourable’ or ‘dishonourable’. Importantly, Aquinas does not conceive of the intemperate person as aiming to realise *dishonourable* actions, i.e. under the description of them as ‘dishonourable’, but rather under their description ‘sweet’ or ‘pleasant’.¹¹⁸ Hence, Aquinas supplies a further specification of the temperate universal premise, following as a specific reason from (InhonP): No sweet thing is to be tasted inappropriately¹¹⁹ (by any person, because it would be dishonourable).¹²⁰ Thus we may set forth the temperate practical inference, within its more general context, as:¹²¹

¹¹⁷ The temperate/intemperate picture becomes clearer when details from the subsequent account of continence/incontinence are added. Here I give a reconstruction of the former, informed by the latter.

¹¹⁸ While the virtuous person acts for the sake of the value of the action itself (fineness), the intemperate acts for the sake of the pleasure experienced in the act: IaIIae.15.3 ad 2.

¹¹⁹ I.e. at the inappropriate time: *nullum dulce est gustandum extra horam*: In NE 7.3.1347.

¹²⁰ In NE 7.3.1347. Aquinas gives no account of the specification of the temperate universal premise from (InhonP). It is not an immediate deduction, but would require thinking out what ‘honourable’ means, what temperance involves, and nature of sweet things, and human tendencies with regard to them.

¹²¹ Material in parenthesis drawn from Aquinas’s account but not stated by him in exactly this way.

PS (Temperate):

(General UP): Every dishonourable act is to be avoided (by any person).

(InhonP)

(Specific UP): No sweet thing is to be tasted inappropriately (by any person)

(because it would be dishonourable).

(PP): (This X is sweet but (tasting it in C would be) inappropriate, and I am a person.)¹²²

(Concl): (Therefore, this X is not to be tasted by me in C.)¹²³

The intemperate person's inference begins with a different universal premise, 'Every pleasure is to be pursued (*sumendum*) (by all persons).'¹²⁴ I call this the 'Pleasure Principle' (PleasP).¹²⁵ This general universal premise contrasts with (InhonP). The intemperate person, for Aquinas, possesses a different general conception of good – has a different ethical vision – than the temperate person. The intemperate person's universal premise is also specified further, viz. '(All sweet things are pleasant, and thus to be tasted by all persons)'.¹²⁶ Thus:

PS (Intemperate):

(General UP): Every pleasure is to be pursued (by all persons). (PleasP)

(Specific UP): (All sweet things are pleasant, and thus to be tasted by all persons.)

(PP): (This X is sweet (and tasting it in C would be pleasant), and I am a person.)

(Concl): (Therefore, this X is to be tasted by me in C.)

¹²² Seeing the particular act both with respect to sweetness and appropriateness is specified in In NE 7.3.1347.

¹²³ I omit reference to time in these examples, so as to avoid excessive detail.

¹²⁴ In NE 7.3.1346.

¹²⁵ Aquinas calls this *ratio* of concupiscence: 1346.

¹²⁶ In NE 7.3.1346.

The central difference between these two inferences, according to Aquinas, concerns which general *ratio* or formal conception the agent sees the action as falling under: ‘universal reason’, i.e. the general judgement of reason (which Aquinas identifies in the context with (InhonP)), or else ‘universal concupiscence’, i.e. the general orientation of desire which Aquinas identifies with (PleasP).¹²⁷ Each expresses an orientation to the agent’s general conception of good. See Figure 6.

¹²⁷ ‘Universal reason’ is likely equivalent to *bonum rationis*.

Temperate

Intemperate

General conception of good

General conception of good

(InhonP): Every dishonourable act is to be avoided (by any person). = *ratio* of reason

(PleasP): Every pleasure is to be pursued (by all persons). = *ratio* of desire

(1): No sweet thing is to be tasted inappropriately (by any person, because it would be dishonourable).

(2): All sweet things are pleasant, and thus to be tasted by all persons.

(3): This X is sweet but (tasting it in C would be) *inappropriate*, and I am a person.

(4): This X is sweet (and tasting it in C would be *pleasant*), and I am a person.

(5): Therefore, this X is not to be tasted by me in C.

(6): Therefore, this X is to be tasted by me in C.

Figure 6

According to Aquinas, then, the temperate and intemperate possess different general (and specific) conceptions of good, as well as different perceptions of *what kind of action* is in view – which properties are salient in specifying the act to be realised, thus identifying the general type of action it instantiates.¹²⁸ Temperate and intemperate agents perceive different particular practicables. They realise different actions based on their different perspectives of the situation.

These are clear cases of practical inference for Aquinas – competing visions of good, competing perceptions of the act in view – qua inappropriate/dishonourable, or qua sweet/pleasurable. Both temperate and intemperate agents have settled characters and thus value different things and see the world differently. The picture changes for Aquinas when one considers agents that are not settled in their character. His understanding of practical reasoning in this case emerges from the picture of the temperate and intemperate just constructed. See Figure 7.

¹²⁸ See In NE 7.3.1346.

Continent

(InhonP): Every dishonourable act is to be avoided (by any person). = *ratio* of reason

(PleasP): Every pleasure is to be pursued (by all persons). = *ratio* of desire

(1): No sweet thing is to be tasted inappropriately (by any person, because it would be dishonourable).

(2): All sweet things are pleasant, and thus to be tasted by all persons.

(3): This X is sweet but (tasting it in C would be) *inappropriate*, and I am a person.

(5): Therefore, this X is not to be tasted by me in C.

Incontinent

(InhonP): Every dishonourable act is to be avoided (by any person). = *ratio* of reason

(PleasP): Every pleasure is to be pursued (by all persons). = *ratio* of desire

(1): No sweet thing is to be tasted inappropriately (by any person, because it would be dishonourable).

(2): All sweet things are pleasant, and thus to be tasted by all persons.

(4): This X is sweet (and tasting it in C would be *pleasant*), and I am a person.

(6): Therefore, this X is to be tasted by me in C.

Figure 7

According to Aquinas, temperate and intemperate agents each have 3-proposition syllogisms: universal premise-particular premise-Conclusion (1-3-5, and 2-4-6, respectively). The continent and incontinent, however, have *four-proposition inferences*.¹²⁹ These agents do not have settled characters, so the differing universal premises of the temperate and intemperate agents are *each* possibilities for the continent and incontinent as general characterisations of C, and thus as specifications of a general conception of good. The continent person is pulled towards both, but the temperate characterisation of C wins. The incontinent is pulled towards both, but the intemperate characterisation of C wins. The incontinent's practical reasoning is not mysterious, for Aquinas. S may conclude according to the temperate pattern 1-3-5, i.e. consciously or verbally, yet act on 6. How? Because S also construes C in terms of a competing syllogism, also expressing a general-to-particular determination (and thus explicable in terms of practical reasoning), which follows the intemperate pattern 2-4-6. The latter inference in fact wins out over the former inference, for in the character of the incontinent person, passion overcomes ('binds') the person's rational control of its faculties, i.e. determines how the incontinent person 'takes' C.¹³⁰

What fundamentally distinguishes agents for Aquinas, then, is how they perceive the practical situation that confronts them. Temperate and intemperate agents perceive the situation – the kind of act to be realised – differently, as expressing very different conceptions of what is good, to which they are stably committed. Continent and incontinent agents battle between two different perceptions of the situation, each expressing different conceptions of what is good. How one sees C is a function of one's general conception of good *and* the state of one's character; for reasons we have seen, these are inseparable. Thus fully virtuous particular

¹²⁹ In NE 7.3.1347; IaIIae.77.2 ad 4.

determination requires the kind of understanding, which is a part of prudence, which ‘is a certain *aestimatio* of some particular end’.¹³¹ Individuals see the practical world differently, based upon their ethical commitments and character. The primary goal of moral education is that agents come to see situations properly, in a stable way – i.e. character habituation.

For Aquinas, then, practical inference expresses the rational/desiderative path of subsumption within S’s particular determination, between S’s general conception of good – in its varied levels of specificity – and S’s particular perception of the nature of what is salient in the practical situation. How does this picture relate to the question of the validity of positive practical inference? I suggest that (correct) positive practical inference expresses *practically valid* subsumption, not by virtue of its form, but in so far as it expresses S’s *seeing* the practical conclusion *as* a valid particularisation of S’s general normative picture. Positive practical inference is not deductively valid, so it rationally underdetermines the conclusion. What fills the gap in determination is *S’s perception of the situation* – seeing it *as* the appropriate exemplification of general good. This does not mean ‘anything goes’ normatively – practical inference is still formally, objectively truth-preserving in a *broad* sense: negative reasons rule out certain subsumptions, which offend necessary conditions of the good; and, positively, the more specific the vision of good, the more clear the kinds of subsumable, permissible positive goods to be exemplified. But within the permissible range of particularisations sufficient to express the general good, the particular answer is underdetermined. Irreducible, character-dependent personal judgement is required to determine the conclusion.

¹³⁰ In NE 7.3.1347.

¹³¹ IIaIIae.49.2 ad 1.

Thus a practical syllogism for Aquinas explains S's action by displaying the general-to-particular connection in S's perspective. A positive practical syllogism's *form* shows A to be *sufficient* for realising what is expressed in the universal premise, but not to be *necessary*. At this point formal explanation stops. Why does S choose A rather than B, C, etc., all of which would also be sufficient to realise what is expressed in the universal premise? In most cases it cannot be answered in terms of the necessity of A, and never in terms of the inference's form alone. What S judges to be the appropriate thing to do, is what, paradigmatically, S has *particular reason* to do, and this cannot be fully captured in a general description of S's general reasons and inferential reason-structure, without ineliminable reference to S's character-dependent perception of the situation. Given Aquinas's understanding of the practical standpoint, this is sufficient to provide an adequate reasons-explanation of S's action. That S sees X as relevantly related to S's normative/motivational framework, i.e. as an intelligible good, expressing S's general conception of good, is sufficient to explain why S chooses to realise X. S's belief that a certain act is as suitable way of attaining an end S sees as good, given Aquinas's understanding of will as oriented towards action, 'can by itself be rationally sufficient for action'.¹³²

Aquinas's account of practical syllogistic is very different from deductivist projects of identifying general reasons and simply applying the rule-case method to determine what to do. Aquinas's emphasis on the role of perception suggests that, for Aquinas, the point of practical inference is to express the rational structure of practical reason, rather than as a tool for discovering what to do. Except indirectly: negative practical inference rules out inappropriate act-types, and even positive practical inference may be indirectly used for practical guidance by the continent and

¹³² (MacDonald 1999), 156.

incontinent in syllogising heuristically, e.g. ‘trying out’ different universal premises and comparing ways to see a situation. But for Aquinas, the aim of practical syllogistic is not tortured decision-making but the *seeing as* of situations one confronts in light of a stable ethical vision informing all of life.

2.3.6 Inference and deliberation

The account of practical inference in 2.3.5 returns us to a non-investigative conception of practical inference, for according to it, S’s syllogistic reasoning does not by itself identify what S is to do. The key role in such identification is played, rather, by S’s character-dependent perception. S does not identify A *on the basis* of subsumptive reasoning from general good, except indirectly. Rather, S *sees* A – albeit as expressing S’s general conception of good. How, then, does this fit Aquinas’s general conception of practical reason as the rational determination – i.e. by reasoning – of general good into particular action? To answer this, I revisit the relationship between *both* forms of particular determination – deliberation and inference.

First, however, recall my discussion in II concerning the ambiguity of ‘determination’, and the related ambiguities of ‘rule’ and ‘*ordo rationis*’. Particular determination expresses the two senses of ‘determination’ identified there, exemplified in its two forms of reasoning: ‘determining’ the particular practicable by *identifying* it (deliberation), and ‘determining’ the particular practicable by *expressing* it in its rational general-to-particular structure (inference and action). This corresponds precisely, moreover, to Aquinas’s distinction between analytic/investigative and synthetic/judicative reasoning.

Particular deliberation and inference, on Aquinas's account, express these relationships. Aquinas explicitly states that deliberation is analytic and investigative: its aim is to discover or *identify* the 'principle' or first step towards the realisation of the end sought. Practical inference, by contrast, is investigative only indirectly. Positive practical inference is paradigmatically synthetic and judicative. Synthetic reasoning displays the rational structure between principles and conclusion, resulting in a 'judgement' of the conclusion in light of its principles: judging it 'through' its principles, or as expressing them. This we see in practical inference: its conclusion is a 'judgement of reason' concerning a particular action that appropriately expresses a general reason: a good-determined-into-action, a general-in-particular, i.e. a particular practicable. Practical inference displays the rational, structural relationship between general and particular; it 'determines' the conclusion by *expressing* it in its relationship to general good. Third-personally, S's judgement that 'A is to be done here and now' is rationally *explained* by S's *seeing A* as expressing S's general reason. From an internal, first-personal perspective – the practical standpoint – S's judgement that A is to be done is rationally *justified* by S's seeing A as expressing S's general reason, i.e. as being relevantly related to S's normative/motivational framework. We have seen that, with respect to practical inference, Aquinas emphasises, not subsumptive *reasoning*, as if S typically follows the practical syllogistic structure consciously, but rather subsumptive *seeing*, as it were: S's seeing *A as expressing* practical inference's normative structure.

Thus Aquinas's practical inference is not investigative, but judicative, and thus is similar to Allan's construal of Aristotle's practical reason as 'thought expressed in action'. Unlike Allan, however, Aquinas does not exclude investigative reasoning from particular determination as a whole, for deliberation plays an equally or more

important role in Aquinas's account. Deliberation's conclusion is the same in reference as that of practical inference.¹³³ Both conclude in a 'judgement of reason' concerning the particular practicable, and so both involve ineliminable, character-dependent practical perception. Deliberation 'determines' the particular practicable by identifying it; practical inference 'determines' the particular practicable by expressing it in its relation to general good. Each exemplifies, in different ways, the nature of particular determination. This interpretation accounts for Aquinas's conception of particular determination, including the distinctions between deliberation and inference, as well as their interrelationships. They are closely related and share common ground, both rationally relating general good to determinate action, yet they constitute distinct orientations as analytic/investigative and synthetic/judicative. They reach the same conclusion, but from different aspects and for different ends. And both are necessary for human practical determination; neither can be collapsed or reduced into the other.

If S were omniscient, and thus saw every possible particular exemplification of goodness in action, and if S were fully virtuous, so that S could see what is good, without distortion by vice and inordinate passions, S's particular determination could be expressed entirely in the form of practical inference. It would be immediate, purely a matter of virtuous perception – clear-eyed moral vision.¹³⁴ For less than fully knowledgeable and virtuous agents, some particular determinations may be almost as immediate. In other cases, however, the most appropriate particular practicable is not obvious, but needs to be thought out and investigated, involving deliberation. In the practical life more generally, ethical reflection will involve both deliberation and inference, at different stages, and in combination with – informing and being

¹³³ QDV 22.15; IaIIae.13.1 ad 2; 13.3; 76.1; DM 3.9.

informed by – forms of specifying reasoning (including data from ‘external’ sources). Deliberation and practical inference cover common rational, psychological, and motivational ground, but in different ways and featured in different stages.

Relationships between particular deliberative and inferential reasoning may be seen in their both expressing Aquinas’s basic notion of reasoning as ‘comparison’. According to Aquinas, by reasoning, S compares putative goods to each other, and against a general conception of good, in order to determine which particular good to pursue.¹³⁵ The process of comparison by reasoning involves the rational-perceptual capacities identified in III, grounding S’s ability to perceive the appropriate particular practicable. According to Aquinas,

Senses are required to apprehend ‘intentions’ that the other senses do not apprehend, such as the harmful, the useful, and other things of this kind. Now a human arrives at a cognition of these intentions by investigation and deliberation; but other animals possess that as a certain natural instinct, just as a sheep naturally flees a wolf as being harmful. Therefore in animals other than humans, the *vis aestimativa* is ordered towards this end, but in the human it is the *vis cogitativa* which compares these particular intentions; hence this power is said to be the particular reason.¹³⁶

By comparing different aspects of things, S is able to cognise their relative value. Note that Aquinas here identifies investigation and deliberation as expressions of rational comparison. In In DA, Aquinas argues that deliberative imagination, which is proper to rational animals, involves rationally weighing alternatives in order to determine what is most worth doing.¹³⁷ Aquinas describes this process as reason, in deliberating, forming several images into a unity: a good that is preferred (good 1), a good that it is preferred to (good 2), and a standard – a rule or end – against which both are measured. On this basis, says Aquinas, a rational animal is able to have

¹³⁴ As with God. See (Alston 1989). The need for deliberation is based upon epistemic limitations: IaIIae.14.3.

¹³⁵ Ia.82.2 ad 3.

¹³⁶ Disp DA 13. Aquinas regularly draws the analogy between grasping an object’s character ‘by instinct’ and grasping it by rational comparison (*per collationem*), e.g. Ia.78.4; 81.3.

rational desires, i.e. to desire things on the basis of a process of reasoning (*sylogismo*).¹³⁸

This account has several features. First, it portrays S as engaging imaginatively in considering various goods and how they relate to the agent's end, i.e. its general conception of good. This involves comparative evaluation between present goods and future goods, present and future pleasures.¹³⁹ The ability to engage in imaginative comparison and evaluation of goods across time and in light of an objective standard distinguishes the actions of rational from nonrational animals – only in this way are rational animals able to *determine* their desires and actions.¹⁴⁰

Second, Aquinas's use of *sylogismo* in this context evidences that here, as elsewhere, Aquinas interrelates deliberative and inferential aspects of practical thought. The general context concerns deliberation, but Aquinas then speaks of the standard against which one good is preferred to another as the 'middle term of a practical syllogism issuing in choice'.¹⁴¹ Aquinas goes on to specify the middle term in terms of a kind of person and those kinds of acts that are normatively related to that kind of person. This is the end deliberation seeks to identify, and inference seeks to express, in its particular exemplification.

Inference as well as deliberation expresses a kind of rational comparison.¹⁴² Deliberative and inferential modes of practical thought cooperate and interrelate as modes of comparison of particular goods in light of general good. In fact Aquinas identifies the perceptual power of *vis cogitativa* as essentially a power of

¹³⁷ In DA 3.16.840.

¹³⁸ In DA 3.16.841-842.

¹³⁹ In DA 3.15.829.

¹⁴⁰ See IaIIae.17.7; 30.3 ad 3.

¹⁴¹ In DA 3.16.841.

¹⁴² Ia.117.1; QDV 15.1 sc 6; QDV 17.2; QDV 11.1 ad 12. See (Schmidt 1966), 267.

comparison.¹⁴³ It is a way of seeing and judging – ‘taking’ – things, that is shaped by comparative reasoning, i.e. by forms of deliberation and/or inference.

Moreover, Aquinas speaks of a ‘kind of syllogism’ engaged in by the faculty of ‘particular reason’,¹⁴⁴ as it applies general knowledge to particulars through the mediation of *vis cogitativa*¹⁴⁵ or particular reason.¹⁴⁶ In the context of speaking of *vis aestimativa* and *vis cogitativa*, illustrated by the sheep-wolf example, Aquinas gives an extensive account of acting rationally as it involves applying general understandings of good, or general reasons, in order to bring rational order into the sensory faculties and passions. Aquinas says that

Thus in humans the sensory appetite is naturally moved by particular reason. But this same particular reason is naturally moved and directed (*dirigi*) according to universal reason. Thus in syllogistic matters one draws particular conclusions from universal propositions. Therefore it is clear that universal reason commands (*imperat*) the sensory appetite, which is divided into affective and aggressive parts, and this appetite obeys it. And since to deduce particular conclusions from universal principles is not a work of *intellectus* as such, but *ratio*, the aggressive and affective parts are said to obey reason rather than intellect. For one is able to experience this in oneself: by applying certain general considerations, anger or fear or some other thing of this sort may be mitigated or instigated.¹⁴⁷

Aquinas explicates here the ordering or directing of reason in ‘ruling’ or managing the passions and appetites on analogy to practical syllogism. Note that it involves general-to-particular rational influence, expressed in ‘command’. We will return to the latter. Concerning the former: by bringing general considerations of reason to bear on particular matters – especially imaginatively – one can rationally shape one’s passions and appetites.¹⁴⁸ Only rational animals are able to modify their emotional responses in some measure by reasons. Mary, unlike her little lamb, may

¹⁴³ Ia.81.2 ad 2; IaIIae.9.1 ad 2; IIaIIae.47.3 ad 3; 47.13 ad 2; 49.2 ad 1; 49.4; 51.3; QDW (2) 2; QDV 10.5; 17.2; In NE 6.4.1170; 6.7.1214-1215.

¹⁴⁴ QDV 10.5.

¹⁴⁵ QDV 10.5 ad 4.

¹⁴⁶ Ia.20.1 ad 1.

¹⁴⁷ Ia.81.3.

experience fear not only due to the presence of a threatening figure such as a wolf, but also in light of her thinking, e.g. about her not having a job, or growing older, or the fact that nursery rhymes about little girls and sheep are out of fashion. Only a rational being may have rational – and thus irrational – fears. On the other hand, Mary, again unlike her lamb, may also mitigate her present or future fears by rehearsing what she should do in a dangerous situation, reminding herself of past lessons learned in such circumstances, or by reflecting upon her general conception of the good life and the relation between that conception and her present circumstances. Only a rational being may have a rational (or irrational) reprieve from fear.

A fortiori rational beings may act rationally by applying general reasons and considerations of goodness to the evaluation of particular goods. The behaviour of a non-rational animal may be explained on the basis of its judging the object of its action as something good or pleasant. The rational animal's judgement of something as good, however, is distinctively mediated by reasons. Such a judgement is available only to a rational being, who can desire things in comparison to other things, for the sake of further ends, or as expressive of more general desires or desires of a higher order.¹⁴⁹ Taking a certain job, for example, may be good considered in terms of one's salary, but not good considered as providing a work environment and schedule that is conducive to the flourishing of one's family.¹⁵⁰

On Aquinas's view, both deliberation and practical inference express rational 'comparison', and both may be expressed in the rational ordering of one's acts and passions. Both deliberation and inference are involved in 'acting according to

¹⁴⁸ Ia.81.3 ad 2. For the role of imagination in rational control of passions, see (Kretzmann 1993), 146; (Klubertanz 1953), 142-143.

¹⁴⁹ Ia.82.2 ad 1; ad 3; 82.5; 83.1; IaIIae.1.6; 6.2 ad 2.

¹⁵⁰ Note that the results of such comparison may also feed back into the structure of practical thought at the specific and general levels, as character-dependent conclusions about what is best in particular situations may modify one's more general views of good.

reason'. 'There is natural judgement and natural inclination in non-rational animals, but they express a single kind of response. Human beings, however, have many possible responses – for rational judgement and inclination are indeterminate. Thus they need to seek their proper good through reasoning.'¹⁵¹ This rational determination of good in action and passion describes *bonum rationis*, Aquinas's unifying conception of human good: acting according to reason, living the paradigmatically rational life, a life of full expression of rational excellence.¹⁵²

3 Particular Reasons for Action

The conclusion of a piece of particular determination – whether deliberative or inferential – is S's judgement as to what S has particular or determinate reason to realise in action, i.e. S's particular reason to act. Let us consider this more fully.

Judgement, as I have specified, is a kind of determination. Indeed, according to Aquinas, the term 'judgement' originally signified a determination concerning 'justice' (*iusti*) or 'right' (*iuris*), i.e. by a judge,¹⁵³ but the extension has broadened to signify correct determination (*rectam determinationem*) in any area.¹⁵⁴ The judgement of a particular reason for action, for Aquinas, is first of all rational – he typically calls it a 'judgement of reason'.¹⁵⁵ Despite the other elements of particular determination and the flexibility we've seen in Aquinas's practical thought in general, Aquinas stresses that particular determination is a form of practical *reasoning*. Aquinas crucially distinguishes between rational and non-rational animals: only rational animals can be continent or incontinent, because only they can see the acts *as*

¹⁵¹ QDW (1) 6. Cf. IaIIae.94.; 99.3 ad 2.

¹⁵² SCG 3.139.3.

¹⁵³ IIaIIae.60.1.

¹⁵⁴ IIaIIae.60.1 ad 1. See QDV 1.11.

expressing general reasons, or act for reasons.¹⁵⁶ S's particular reason for action, e.g. the judgement that 'X is to be done here and now', is a particular judgement, but it always presupposes a *because*: it is a general good *in* particular, a particular action *in light of* or *because of* a general good.

The judgement of a particular reason is also *appetitive*. Intellect, in judging, has two acts: affirmation, by which it rationally assents to what is true, and negation, by which it rationally dissents from what is false. Appetite has two corresponding acts: pursuit and avoidance. In rational determination, intellectual and appetitive faculties may be brought into harmony so that what intellect declares good, the appetitive faculty pursues.¹⁵⁷ Outputs of practical determination express 'practical truth' distinctive of practical intellect: the 'conformable truth' of correspondence between right thinking and right desiring.¹⁵⁸ In the psychological act, the 'act of reason giving direction as to what is for the end, and the act of will tending to what is for the end according to reason's direction, are ordered to one another.'¹⁵⁹

All reasons for action, on my construal of Aquinas, have both rational and appetitive aspects. Thus S's grasp of them is affected by the condition of S's character. General reasons are least affected in this way, as they are closest to nature – to the basic human goods that delimit the necessary conditions for any intelligible conception of flourishing or a good life. Specific and particular reasons are progressively affected by character. S, by reasoning about action, progresses from natural desires for goods that are general and determinate by nature, but indeterminate in their particular exemplifications, to more specific and particular rational desires. These latter desires 'seem to be our very own because we are not inclined to them by

¹⁵⁵ E.g. IaIIae.13.1 ad 2; 51.3.

¹⁵⁶ In NE 7.3.1350.

¹⁵⁷ In NE 1128.

¹⁵⁸ In NE 6.2.1130.

nature but by our own devising'.¹⁶⁰ S's perception of more particular ends is crucially dependent upon the condition of S's character.¹⁶¹ The natural order provides the ground and conditions for S's action, but the nature of S's action is increasingly determined by rational ordering.¹⁶²

Given the multiply realisable character of the good life, positive particular reasons are person-relative in their details. They are objectively grounded in general reasons, but remain to be particularly determined by agents themselves. Particular reasons for action are the reasons most dependent upon S's character, for they express the particular practicable itself, the particular end which is an object of perception.

That which is apprehended as good and fitting (*conveniens*) moves the will by way of object. Now, that some X is seen to be good and fitting, happens from two causes: namely, from the condition, either of that which is proposed, or of the one to whom it is proposed. For appropriateness is predicated according to a relation, and thus it depends upon both extremes. And hence it is that taste, being disposed in different ways, does not in the same way take X as being fitting or unfitting. As Aristotle says, 'According as one is, so does one's end seem to be.' Now it is manifest that according to a passion of the sensory appetite one is changed to a certain disposition. Thus according to whether one is affected by some passion, X may seem to one to be fitting, which would not seem this way without the passion.¹⁶³

At the particular level of action there is an ineliminable element of character-dependent personal judgement. Just as only one with a healthy sense of taste can correctly judge flavours, so only one with good character can correctly make judgements about actions, pleasures, goods, or aesthetic matters.¹⁶⁴ Hence, while at the general level Aquinas appeals to general normative considerations about which there may be widespread agreement and common ground, at the particular level – both in generalising induction and in particularising determination – S's judgement is

¹⁵⁹ Ia.14.1 ad 1.

¹⁶⁰ In NE 3.20.621.

¹⁶¹ In NE 3.13.520, 524-525.

¹⁶² Ia.85.1; IaIIae.13.2; 17.9 ad 2.

¹⁶³ IaIIae.9.2.

¹⁶⁴ In NE 1.13.160. Cf. In NE 3.10.493; 3.12.516.

irreducibly particular, personal, perceptual, and character-dependent.¹⁶⁵ The epistemic priority of particular perception in induction implies that the most reliable specific reasons to appeal to for action-guidance are the probable beliefs of wise persons – those whose good characters and wide experience of particular situational contexts have given them the ‘eyes’ to see such situations accurately.¹⁶⁶

4 *Ordo Rationis* at the Particular Level of Practical Thought

I began my account of the nature and structure of practical thought with a discussion of ‘order’. I stated that *ordo rationis* is Aquinas’s most important notion of ‘order’ in practical matters. It should be obvious by now that this is no exaggeration. All that we have seen of practical thought in Aquinas in II – V has been an expression, at different levels and in different forms, of *ordo rationis*.

Aquinas identifies an important expression of rational ordering at the particular conceptual level: *imperium*, or command. It plays the chief role in his psychological analysis of human action, bridging the motivational gap between S’s judging that S is to be done, and S’s execution of X. The final act of practical reasoning is *imperium* or *praecipere* – command – , which is followed by will’s application (*usus*) of reason’s command to the various powers, to execute it.¹⁶⁷ Understanding the nature of *imperium* is crucial to understanding Aquinas’s conception of law (VI).¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ In NE 6.10.1274.

¹⁶⁶ In NE 6.9.1254.

¹⁶⁷ IaIIae.16.

¹⁶⁸ IaIIae.90.1.

Aquinas further describes S's practical judgement at the point of action as expressing a kind of certitude,¹⁶⁹ as implying a kind of *impulsio* to action.¹⁷⁰ This is not a 'theoreticalist' picture, where a theoretical description of appropriate action is transformed into practice by the addition of an extra psychological factor, as if will enters only at the point of decision. Rather, Aquinas conceives this impulse as a particular expression of S's entire practical standpoint: S's application of *ordo rationis* to execute action, whether direct or indirect. The *impetus* to action, for nonrational animals, arises from natural instinct. As soon as they apprehend X as *conveniens* or not, their appetite is moved to pursuit or avoidance.¹⁷¹ Rational animals, however, act from judgement, based upon comparative reasoning, which may take different directions.¹⁷² The distinctive impulse to action for rational animals is an expression of rational ordering: *imperium*.¹⁷³ It is the conclusive application of general reasons to particular action and passion.

Aquinas analyses *imperium* in IaIIae.17. His central analogy is an instance of his 'political rule' metaphor: a commander, A, ordering a subordinate, B, to action. Here the ambiguity of 'order' can mislead. In English, 'to order', understood in the context of commanding, is synonymous with 'to command', i.e. 'to give an order'. However, in Aquinas's example 'order' and 'command' are not synonymous: in commanding (*imperans*), A orders (*ordinat*) B to something to be done, by way of notifying or declaring (*intimando vel denuntiando*).¹⁷⁴ *Imperium* is not synonymous with order, but is a form of ordering, in this case to action. This expresses Aquinas's understanding of *ordo* as teleological. By commanding B, A teleologically orders B,

¹⁶⁹ IIaIIae.51.2 ad 2.

¹⁷⁰ IIaIIae.60.6 ad 1.

¹⁷¹ IaIIae.17.2 ad 3.

¹⁷² Ia.83.1; QDM 6.1.

¹⁷³ IaIIae.17.2 ad 3.

¹⁷⁴ IaIIae.17.1.

or sets B in right order to X, something to be done.¹⁷⁵ Moreover A does this by way of declaration, i.e. rational direction, giving reasons, rather than force or simple imposition of will. Commanding, without the implication of setting in order, as a kind of imposition of force, may apply to will but not to reason;¹⁷⁶ according to Aquinas, it is proper to *reason* that it order by way of declaration. *Imperium* is essentially an act of reason. However it presupposes an act of will.¹⁷⁷

Aquinas specifies how this operates in IaIIae.17.1. Reason may notify or declare as an expression of *ordo rationis*, in two ways. First (1), unqualifiedly or absolutely (*absolute*), when expressed indicatively, as a gerundive: This is what is to be done by you (*Hoc est tibi faciendum*). Second (2), in a way which Aquinas specifies as ‘moving’ (*movendo*) someone, when expressed imperatively, as a command: Do this (*Fac hoc*). Aquinas’s concern in *imperium* is 2, which is straightforwardly a command. By command, reason expresses ordering rationality in *particular* action, moving the sensory appetite and bodily powers to execute the action. This sense is secondary, however, to the absolute or fundamental declaration of rational ordering in 1. 1 expresses the reason-giving normative structure within the teleological ordering of *ordo rationis* more generally. It is exemplified in our account of general reasons as gerundive, expressing S’s general normative orientation to action. Both 1 and 2 presuppose will; rational determination is required to determine will’s inclination.¹⁷⁸ In concluding that X is to be done, reason does not introduce a new element of normativity; it presupposes and expresses it. In *applying* normativity to the particular execution of X, according to Aquinas, reason expresses it

¹⁷⁵ Cf. IIaIIae.47.8 ad 3.

¹⁷⁶ IIaIIae.47.8 ad 3.

¹⁷⁷ IaIIae.17.1.

¹⁷⁸ IaIIae.17.1 ad 2.

imperatively: do *this*, here and now. Command is the conclusive application of *ordo rationis* to action.

For Aquinas, fully practical reasoning concludes, not simply in S's judgement as to what would be good to do, but in S's action. Hence he identifies *imperium* as the primary expression of rational order in particular determination. The three acts of prudence, the virtue of practical reasoning, are deliberation, judgement, and command. Since what primarily distinguishes the virtuous, prudent person is that she acts on what she determines to be good or right, command is the more important.¹⁷⁹ It is the final or full expression of *ordo rationis* in action.

Aquinas's picture of reason's 'ruling' (RR, RM3) is to be understood in these terms. Aquinas argues that reason's command of sensory appetite in indirect human action is less direct than that of direct human acts, because sensory appetite involves bodily powers, and thus is dependent upon one's bodily condition or dispositions.¹⁸⁰ Rational control of sensory appetite is effected primarily through the medium of *imagination*: by bringing general considerations of reason imaginatively to bear upon one's conception of something, e.g. thinking of it either as pleasurable or painful, one may shape one's passional response to it.¹⁸¹ Imagination involves particular apprehension, which is 'regulated' by the universal apprehension of reason; in this way (general) reason is able to 'command' (particular) sensory appetite.¹⁸²

This fills out our account of the shaping of one's desires and passions by deliberative and inferential reasoning. Aquinas combines teleological ordering, the command-obedience metaphor, and general-to-particular reasoning, to argue that

¹⁷⁹ IaIIae.57.6; IIaIIae.47.8. This is a development of Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom as prescriptive: NE 6.10.1143a1-10.

¹⁸⁰ IaIIae.17.7.

¹⁸¹ QDV 25.4; Ia.81.3 ad 2, 3.

¹⁸² IaIIae.17.7.

Thus in humans the sensory appetite is naturally moved by particular reason. But this same particular reason is naturally moved and directed (*dirigi*) according to universal reason. Thus in syllogistic matters one draws particular conclusions from universal propositions. Therefore it is clear that universal reason commands (*imperat*) the sensory appetite, which is divided into affective and aggressive parts, and this appetite obeys it.¹⁸³

Reason's role as first principle in matters of action is to order towards an end.¹⁸⁴ Since the power of the mover is evident in what it moves, rational order is evident in what is aimed or directed towards an end.¹⁸⁵ Thus *ordo rationis* is expressed in what reason does in ordering, directing, or arranging (OR2), and in that which is ordered, directed, or arranged by reason (OR1). Rational action – whether direct or indirect – is action ordered by reason, and expresses *ordo rationis*.

Finally, this picture expresses Aquinas's conception of *bonum rationis*. According to Aquinas it belongs to *bonum rationis* to regulate (RM3) the sensory appetite, including its passions.¹⁸⁶ *Bonum rationis* is expressed in reason's activity itself (*prudentia*), and in the putting of order into actions and passions.¹⁸⁷ 'Moral virtue perfects the appetitive part of the soul by ordering [actions and passions] to *bonum rationis*. For *bonum rationis* is precisely that which is moderated or ordered according to reason.'¹⁸⁸ Thus *bonum rationis*, living according to reason, is expressed in *recta ratio*, the regulation, moderation, or teleological ordering of action, both direct and indirect. *Bonum rationis* is the ideal of *ordo rationis* in action.

¹⁸³ Ia.81.3.

¹⁸⁴ IaIIae.90.1; cf. IaIIae.58.2.

¹⁸⁵ IaIIae.13.2 ad 3.

¹⁸⁶ In NE 2.3.272.

¹⁸⁷ IaIIae.61.2.

¹⁸⁸ IaIIae.59.4.

VI

Virtue and Law in Practical Thought

1 Introduction

My first objective in this thesis has been to explicate and defend an account of Aquinas's conception of practical thought as the rational determination of general good into particular action. I turn now to my second objective, to argue that Aquinas's virtue-and-law ethical conception emerges from, expresses, and is grounded normatively, rationally, and motivationally in his conception of practical thought. I defend this contention by showing how Aquinas's virtue-and-law account presupposes and develops his conception of practical thought. Finally, I briefly indicate how insights from Aquinas's account elucidate relationships between virtue and law ethical conceptions. Space-limitations prevent a full account of these matters, but I explore several important aspects in some detail.

The *nature* of practical thought in Aquinas, I argued in II, is expressed in the human agents' rational determination of general goodness, rooted in the natural order, into particular goodness, expressing rational ordering. This picture is reflected in Aquinas's understanding of order, metaphysical teleology, and eudaimonism, and his understanding of will as rational appetite, which itself involves the rational determination of general into particular.

In III-V I examined the three-level conceptual *structure* of practical thought in Aquinas, reflected in the levels' distinctive forms of reasoning and kinds of reasons.

This structure maps roughly onto the general/particular distinctive nature of practical thought identified in II, while adding a 'specific' conceptual level. Conclusions from both sections converge within the overall conception of practical thought I have identified, as summarised in Figure 8.

Summary of Nature and Structure of Practical Thought

General	Specific	Particular
	<i>(Structure: III-V)</i>	
Generalisation	Specification	Particular Determination
General conception of good	Specific conception of good	Particular expression of good
General Reasons	Specific Reasons	Particular Reasons
Thin conception	Thick conception	Determinate conception
Universal	Traditional	Personal
Moral grounds	Moral vision	Moral action
Justification, dialogue	Education, reflection	Action, expression
	<i>(Nature: II)</i>	
General		Particular
Order of Nature		Order of Reason
Principle		Realisation
Potential		Actual
Determinate by nature		Determined by reasoning
Natural desires		Rational desires
‘Root’		‘Fruit’

Figure 8

This schema provides a summary of the main contours of my account of practical thought in Aquinas so far. Since I seek to show Aquinas's accounts of virtue and law as developments of his account of practical rationality, this schema indicates the kind of conceptual structure in which virtue and law will need to fit. Further, it makes evident areas of needed conceptual development within my account, especially in the specific category in its relation to the nature of practical thought. I show in this chapter that Aquinas's accounts of virtue and law do in fact fit this schema and fill it out in fruitful ways.

2 Virtue and Law in the Structure of ST

In this section, before turning to specific accounts of how Aquinas relates virtue and law within such a schema, I present an initial argument in support of my contention that Aquinas's accounts of virtue and law presuppose and develop his account of practical reason, by considering the structure of Aquinas's mature and systematic work, ST, and how he introduces virtue and law into it.

Aquinas introduces his account of ethics¹ in IIa as concerning the human, S, as rational agent: qua the principle of its own actions, by way of having free will and exercising control over its actions.² The account is explicitly eudaimonistic. Aquinas begins (IaIIae.1-5) with an analysis of end-directed, rational action, and its ultimate rational and motivational grounding in an ultimate end, i.e. *flourishing*. Aquinas initially identifies 'flourishing' as a formal ultimate end, and then gradually specifies it, appealing both to formal constraints on what human flourishing may consist in, and to fundamental substantive constraints emerging from his metaphysical teleology.

¹ Moral science: IaIIae.6.Prol.

Flourishing is the human final actuality, the actualisation of human nature in action.³

The remainder of IIa comprises a progressive specification of this general conception of flourishing.

Second, Aquinas turns to an analysis of *human action* (6-48), since 'it is necessary to reach flourishing through certain actions'. Here Aquinas distinguishes between two kinds of human action, direct and indirect human action (in my terms), considering each in turn.⁴ *Direct human actions* (6-21) are direct expressions of will or rational appetite. Thus Aquinas examines voluntariness and will (6-10), analyses in detail the rational/volitional psychological components of the human act (11-17), and then turns to the moral evaluation of direct human action (18-21), drawing upon his metaphysical teleology and analysis of rational action and will, and emphasising the role of *ordo rationis*. In 22-48 Aquinas analyses *indirect human action*, being rightly affected. Human passion enters the moral order in so far as it expresses *ordo rationis*, as being subject to the *imperium* of reason.⁵

Third, in questions 49-114 Aquinas turns to examine the *principles* of human action, both intrinsic and extrinsic. The intrinsic (*intrinsicis*) principles, Aquinas summarises, are power and habit. He analysed human potentialities in Ia, so he turns to habit in 49-89.⁶ Aquinas's account of *virtue* is set within this context. Further, extrinsic (*extrinsicis*) principles include the devil (inclining S to evil), and God (inclining S to good). God inclines to good in two ways: instructing S by way of law, and assisting S by way of grace.⁷ Aquinas's account of *law* (90-108) is set within this context.

² IaIIae.Prol.

³ IaIIae.3.2.

⁴ IaIIae.6.Prol.

⁵ IaIIae.4.1.

⁶ IaIIae.49.Prol.

⁷ IaIIae.90.Prol.

Note, first, that in the structure Aquinas's introduction of both virtue and law follow the extensive, earlier elements of his ethics noted, including his general eudaimonistic structure and analysis of human action, as well as the earlier accounts of metaphysical teleology and metaphysics of goodness which they presuppose. Second, by introducing virtue and law as *principles* of action, Aquinas directly ties them to the account he has constructed, including its metaphysical components. Aquinas does not indicate that he is now, by introducing virtue or law, finally turning to an account of ethics. Rather he is developing and extending the account he has begun and already significantly developed.⁸ Third, note that Aquinas at the outset specifies the nature of law as directive or informational. Law rationally orders agents to the human ultimate end, by directing action.⁹ Again, Aquinas's teleological ordering framework is presupposed.

It is worth noting, further, that this picture suggests the priority of virtue over law in Aquinas's account. As intrinsic principle of action, virtue expresses the very nature of the human, S, as S is inclined towards its actuality.¹⁰ The priority is also expressed in the structure of IIa. Aquinas's discussion of intrinsic principles comprises 40 questions, compared to 24, for extrinsic principles. The specific discussion of habit/virtue in this section, excluding Aquinas's account of sin, comprises 18 questions, the same as law. However, Aquinas's 189-question specification of the moral life in IIaIIae is structured as a virtue-account. After analysing three theological virtues (1-76) Aquinas treats of some 90 moral virtues in detail, all falling under the treatment of the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage, and temperance.

⁸ See (Hittinger 1991), 66 n.3.

⁹ IaIIae.90.1.

¹⁰ IaIIae.6.1, 6.4.

In any case, Aquinas's approach in ST indicates that his account of virtue and law constitutes a development and extension of his conception of practical thought. How do intrinsic and extrinsic principles fit the picture I have developed? Aquinas's most explicit description of the relationship between virtue and law appeals to an agricultural metaphor or analogy: laws function as 'seeds of virtue'. Let us examine this analogy in detail.

3 The Seeds of Virtue

3.1 The Seed Analogy

Aquinas's concern in drawing this analogy is to explicate the roles of nature and development with regard to virtue. He appeals to several kinds of seeds or starting points of virtue. In his most extensive discussion, in IaIIae.63.1,¹¹ Aquinas argues that virtue is not wholly of nature, as if its development were simply the unfolding, by removing hindrances, of what is fully pre-existent – a position he attributes to Platonists. Nor is it wholly instilled from without, apart from one's nature, a position (at least with respect to science or intellectual virtue) attributed to Avicenna. Rather, virtues are natural by way of a beginning (*secundum quandam inchoationem*), but must be developed in order to become complete (*perfecta*).

Virtues are natural in both senses in which X can be natural to Y: according to Y's specific nature, and according to Y's individual nature. S's *specific nature*, the form from which S receives its species (S's substantial form), is 'rational soul'. Thus what is natural to S are S's specific capacities and inclinations to S's full

actualisation, which is ‘acting rationally’. Aquinas distinguishes between the apprehensive and appetitive powers unique to the human soul, and notes the principles of action expressive of each. First, virtue is specifically natural to S inchoatively ‘in so far as in *reason* there are certain naturally cognised principles concerning things to be known and things to be done, which are certain seeds (*seminalia*) of intellectual and moral virtues.’ Second, virtue is natural to S ‘in so far as in *will* there is a certain natural *appetitus* towards good which is according to reason,’ i.e. *bonum rationis*.¹² Elsewhere Aquinas considers whether there may be such seeds in the sensory appetite itself. There are, but in a more extended sense: not as a kind of habit (Aquinas specifies that S’s knowledge of first principles is habitual), but simply by virtue of the powers themselves, and their characteristic inclinations to their proper objects.¹³ Virtues are also natural to S’s *individual nature*, in that certain bodily dispositions and conditions conduce or incline to certain virtues. E.g. more sensitive perceptual organs incline some to intellectual virtues, and a natural temperament inclines some to virtues such as chastity or temperance.¹⁴ These are ‘natural’ or incomplete virtues.¹⁵

These principles, especially the cognitive and motivational principles of reason and will, constitute for S a beginning of and orientation towards virtue. According to Aquinas, humans are thus naturally attracted to virtue, so that even the non-virtuous are naturally drawn to those who are virtuous, as conforming to the principles of their own natural reason.¹⁶ The seeds constitute a natural inclination to

¹¹ See also In NE 6.11.1276-77; QDW(1) 8, 10; QDV 11.1 ad 12; In I Sent 17.1.3; In II Sent 39.2.1; In III Sent. 33.1.2.1; Ia.79.12.

¹² Also IaIIae.63.2.

¹³ IaIIae.51.1.

¹⁴ IaIIae.51.1.

¹⁵ IaIIae.65.1.

¹⁶ IaIIae.27.3 ad 4.

the right ends of human life,¹⁷ indeed to the ‘good of virtue’ (*bonum virtutis*), which is the object aimed at in virtuous acts.¹⁸ Incomplete virtues are expressed in inclinations to do a good action, by nature or partial habituation.¹⁹ Apart from being fully developed, however, they can be harmful, for natural inclinations may conflict. Speed is an excellence or virtue of a horse; yet in a blind horse, it is more destructive than is slowness. S’s natural generosity, without the insight of prudence, may lead S to give away all of S’s resources, leaving S’s family destitute. Complete virtue, however, is virtue in its developed state, where the virtues are coherently ordered to each other by the direction of right reasoning (*recta ratio*),²⁰ or prudence. Complete virtue inclines S to do good action, but also to do it well, guided rationally.²¹ Developmentally, the seeds of virtue are inchoate, aimed at their ultimate fulfilment. Normatively, however, as first principles of action, they are more stable and certain than their particular exemplifications in action. The latter are multiply exemplified, varied, and contingent, deriving their normativity from their relation to the first principles.²²

How does this picture express the relation between virtue and law? Aquinas identifies the range of naturally-given principles of action as seeds of virtue. With regard to the central component of reason, however, he specifies as seeds the naturally known first principles I have identified as general reasons for action. Recall that, for Aquinas, first principles in theoretical reasoning comprise both natures and universal connections, especially as the latter are expressed in immediate propositions. In practical reasoning, these correspond to basic human goods and their propositional expression in general reasons. Now, whereas Aquinas often speaks of these general

¹⁷ IaIIae.62.3.

¹⁸ IaIIae.58.4 ad 3; 18.9 ad 3; 85.2.

¹⁹ IaIIae.65.1.

²⁰ IaIIae.58.4 ad 3; 17.9 ad 3.

²¹ IaIIae.65.1; 65.4.

²² IIaIIae.63.2 ad 3; QDV 16.1, 16.2.

reasons simply as practical first principles, he also often identifies them as *natural law principles*. Here Aquinas explicitly builds the bridge between practical reasoning and law, and between law and virtue.

In QDV 16.1,²³ Aquinas identifies practical first principles as natural law principles, and both as seeds of virtue:

Thus also in human nature . . . there must be cognition of truth without inquiry both in theoretical and practical matters, and this cognition must be the principle of all the following cognition . . . So in all things of nature the subsequent operations and effects pre-exist in certain natural seeds . . . For just as in the human soul there is a natural habit by which it cognises theoretical virtues of science, so in [the soul] there is a certain natural habit of first practical principles, which are natural principles of natural law. This habit pertains to *synderesis*, and is in the reason.

Here, as in other accounts of natural law principles, Aquinas specifies the form natural reason takes in its habitual knowledge of practical first principles as *synderesis*.²⁴ *Synderesis* constitutes a special case, in practical matters, of the habitual understanding of principles.²⁵

3.2 *Habitus* and Virtue

In order to understand law's relation to virtue in this picture, we need to unpack several aspects of Aquinas's account, beginning with his notion of *habitus*, or habit.²⁶

Aquinas's account of habit takes Aristotle's incidental remarks about *hexeis* appearing

²³ Less clearly also in IaIIae.51.1.

²⁴ IaIIae.94.1 ad 2; In II Sent 24.2.4.

²⁵ The Latin term for conscience, *conscientia*, is a translation of the Greek word for conscience, *suneidesis*; the latter was also transliterated, defectively, as *synderesis* ((Potts 1982), 687). A confusing passage in Jerome led medieval philosophers mistakenly to distinguish between *conscientia* and *synderesis*, and the two came to refer to distinct entities ((Potts 1982), 690). For Aquinas, *synderesis* is the disposition to know first principles of practical reason and be inclined to observe them (Ia.79.12, ad 3). *Conscientia*, which I do not treat of here, is not a disposition but an act, an application of what is known by *synderesis* to particular action (Ia.79.13). See (Potts 1980).

²⁶ As (Kenny 1989), 85, points out, *habitus* implies a firmer disposition than 'habit' in ordinary English language. In the latter sense, if one has a habit of doing X (smoking) then it is harder *not* to do X than

in several works and develops them into a theoretical account.²⁷ *Habitus* comes from *habere*, ‘to have’: it constitutes a kind of ‘having’ in relation to something, thus a quality. Health, e.g., is a bodily habit.²⁸ Aquinas’s interest here is in habits of the human soul. A *habitus* is a *dispositio* that has become firm or settled,²⁹ whereby one is consistently and reliably well- or ill-ordered to something, specifically to one’s nature or to one’s end or actualisation.³⁰ A moral virtue is an ‘operative habit’, an ordered disposition of soul,³¹ whereby one acts well, doing what is good and doing it well.³²

In his account of *habitus* Aquinas qualifies his initial metaphysical-teleological account of human nature, and establishes a middle stage between the seeds of virtue (first principles grounded in nature) and the fruit of virtue (full expression of virtue in action): the ‘plant’ of virtue, as it were (*habitus* or character disposition of virtue). In Ia Aquinas identified X’s substantial form as X’s first actuality, i.e. the existence of X, expressing X’s specifying capacities and inclinations to actualisation. X’s second or final actuality, Aquinas identified as the full realisation of X’s nature as expressed in action. The human substantial form is rational, so the final actualisation of human nature is ‘acting according to reason’, the full expression of *ordo rationis* in action and passion. In his later treatment Aquinas somewhat confusingly modifies this picture by identifying *habitus* also as constituting the first actuality of X’s nature.³³ On this expanded view, however, *habitus* is not the same as X’s substantial form, but a modification of it, a development or perfection of

if one has not, whereas to have a *habitus* to do Y (be generous) it is *easier* to do Y than if one has not. I shall use ‘habit’ to refer to *habitus* on Aquinas’s conception.

²⁷ (Kenny 1964): xix.

²⁸ IaIIae.49.1, 49.3 ad 3.

²⁹ IaIIae.49.2 ad 3.

³⁰ IaIIae.49.2, ad 1; 49.3.

³¹ IIaIIae.55.2.

³² IaIIae.56.3; 57.5, ad 2. I shall only address ‘good’ *habitus*, e.g. virtue, and not vice.

³³ IaIIae.49.3 ad 1.

X's substantial form, disposing it to its actualisation in a more determinate way.³⁴

Habitus is a kind of 'half-way house', as it were, between X's substantial form and X's final actuality.³⁵ Habit stands midway between power and act.³⁶

Habitus is not needed by every X. Aquinas specifies three conditions for X's needing to be so disposed to something. First, the subject of *habitus*, X, needs to be in potentiality to actualisation. This is true of all natural substantial forms (not true of God, who is fully actual). Second, X must be capable of being determined in several ways, to various things. We saw that Aquinas distinguishes rational appetite along these lines. No X can aim at an indeterminate good in action. The particular aims of non-rational beings are determined by virtue of their nature, but rational beings must rationally determine their own ends in action.³⁷ Third, it must be the case that in disposing X to that to which X is in potential, several things need to occur, which are capable of being coordinated in various ways, well or ill.³⁸ Again, the indeterminacy of S's action by reason, and the multiply exemplifiable possibilities of S's actualisation of goodness fit this description.

Every power that is able to be ordered to action in diverse ways, requires a habit which disposes it well to its own acts. Will, since it is a rational power, is able to be ordered diversely to action. And thus there needs to be established in the will some habit, by which it is well-disposed to its own acts³⁹ . . . Will by the very nature of its power is inclined to *bonum rationis*. But since this good is multiply diversified, will needs to be inclined to some determinate *bonum rationis* through some habit, so that action will follow more promptly.⁴⁰

There are a range of kinds of goods which express human actuality, and each is multiply realisable, expressible variously in different situations, by different agents.

The basic human good of truth may be expressed in various kinds of actions: research,

³⁴ IaIIae.54.1; In NE 2.5.298.

³⁵ Cf. QDM 2.4, 5, where Aquinas identifies first actuality as 'form or habit'.

³⁶ IaIIae.71.3.

³⁷ IaIIae.1.2.

³⁸ IaIIae.49.4 ad 3.

³⁹ IaIIae.50.5.

writing a letter, testifying in court, telling a story, making a promise, talking to a friend. Within these cases, how and when to tell the truth is all-important (e.g. in breaking the news of the death of a loved-one). Between the basic human good of truth (seed) and rightly and wisely telling the truth in a particular situation (fruit), for Aquinas, lies *habitus*.

Thus a *moral virtue* is a settled, habituated disposition of character that specifically determines S towards particular determination in excellent actualisation:⁴¹ the ‘plant’ whose excellent ‘fruit’ is expressed in action.⁴² Virtue is needed to determine S’s character (appetites, desires, passions) and reasoning towards right perception and expression in particular situations.⁴³ The inclination of S’s appetitive power to something determinate in this way is necessary for S to reach the end or aim of human life,⁴⁴ for the habit of moral virtue makes S ready to choose the rational mean in particular actions and passions, which mean is the aim of each virtue.⁴⁵ This choice is not unreflective, i.e. from impulse or passion, but expresses rational determination.⁴⁶ Moral virtue is a habit of rational choice.⁴⁷

A *habitus* is acquired by habituation, by repeated acts consistent with the disposition.⁴⁸ So virtue, e.g. temperance, is developed by S’s repeated temperate actions. These are initially directed in S’s moral education by S’s parents, where S is told ‘no’ when S inappropriately desires and takes, e.g. sweets; and later directed by S’s deliberate choosing of pleasurable things within appropriate limits, by rational

⁴⁰ IaIIae.50.5 ad 3; cf. QDW(1) 1, 9.

⁴¹ IaIIae.55.1.

⁴² In NE 6.2.1125.

⁴³ IaIIae.55.1; QDW(1) 9.

⁴⁴ IaIIae.50.5 ad 1.

⁴⁵ IaIIae.53.3; 59.1; In NE 7.9.1435.

⁴⁶ IaIIae.57.5.

⁴⁷ IaIIae.58.4; In NE 2.5.301.

⁴⁸ IaIIae.52.3; 51.2; In NE 2.1.250.

determination.⁴⁹ Temperance is a settled disposition of character, inclining one determinately to maintain a right, rational desiderative balance with respect to sensory pleasures.⁵⁰

Virtue, then, is both product and productive of *ordo rationis*, the ‘ruling’ (RM3) or ordering of S’s passions or sensory appetite by rational determination.⁵¹ ‘Moral virtue perfects the appetitive part of the soul by ordering it to *bonum rationis*. For *bonum rationis* just is that [i.e. action and passion] which is moderated or ordered by reason.’⁵² Virtue inclines the passions to follow the *imperium* of reason.⁵³ It orders its possessor to good or virtuous action.⁵⁴ Thus virtue is grounded in the ‘seeds’ of S’s rational nature (natural order), but is developed by rational ordering. This development expresses nature in a further respect, however. According to Aquinas a *habitus* is a kind of ‘second nature’;⁵⁵ habituation develops in S a natural, specifically determinate aptitude and inclination to S’s end, whereby it becomes natural and pleasing to S to act rightly.⁵⁶ Thus virtue is an *intrinsic principle*, an expression of S’s nature, which reliably determines S’s *appetitus* towards action. X’s action expresses X’s nature or character.⁵⁷ If S is temperate, S actually desires – sees as good, as constituting part of S’s specific conception of good, and is motivated to express – the right balance with respect to sensory pleasures. Thus S is not naturally sidetracked from reason’s command or rational determination by passion.⁵⁸ S’s virtuously moderated passions form a kind of appetitive perception, enabling S to

⁴⁹ In NE 2.2.264.

⁵⁰ IaIIae.63.4.

⁵¹ IaIIae.24.2 ad 3; 59.2; 60.2; 63.2; QDW(1) 4.

⁵² IaIIae.59.4.

⁵³ IaIIae.59.2 ad 3; 59.5; 74.6.

⁵⁴ In NE 2.3.277; 6.2.1125; QDW(1) 5; IaIIae.55.2.

⁵⁵ IaIIae.58.1, 3; 60.1 ad 2.

⁵⁶ IaIIae.60.1 ad 2; 34.4; 70.1; In NE 2.6.315.

⁵⁷ IaIIae.55.2 ad 1; 58.1 ad 3; 59.1.

⁵⁸ IaIIae.58.5; 59.2 ad 3; 77.1; 67.3.

judge what is good because S is rightly affected in the situation.⁵⁹ As the music connoisseur's perceptive insight into the nature and value of an orchestral work, being able to 'hear' what others do not, is a product of her love-shaped-by-training-and-experience orientation towards music, so the virtuous person's perception of the nature and moral saliences of a practical situation is a product of her desire-shaped-by-rational-habituation orientation to practice.

Thus Aquinas's ideal of the virtuous person, as we saw in V with respect to practical inference, is of one who naturally and immediately sees what is good and expresses it, in action and passion.⁶⁰ Aquinas answers the question of how S is able rationally to determine goodness into particular action, since such action is underdetermined by general reasons, by appeal to virtue. Hence the virtuous person criterion: while kinds of actions are specifiable independently of the virtuous person, i.e. in general reasons and in relation to basic human goods, and while certain kinds of actions and thus particular actions in particular situations are determinately ruled out by negative reasons, the *particular* act in its multiply-qualified particularity that is right to realise, is determined by the virtuous person.⁶¹

3.3 Law and the Seeds of Virtue

Law serves as 'seeds of virtue' within this picture in two ways, with regard to practical reasoning and to moral education.⁶² First, with regard to *practical reasoning*, law provides for Aquinas paradigmatic general reasons for action. This

⁵⁹ IaIIae.8.1; 9.2, ad 2; 10.3.

⁶⁰ Cf. IaIIae.89.4.

⁶¹ In NE 10.8.2062; QDW(2) 2.

⁶² Human law's role in defining and protecting the boundaries of the social order is a further way, which for Aquinas is an extension of the moral education function. I will not develop this here, except incidentally.

expresses law's central role of directing or ordering action to an end. Laws function as reasons for action.⁶³ Aquinas's primary ethical interest in law concerns natural law principles, which express the general reasons for action we have examined.⁶⁴ Hence I will discuss what I shall call *law reasons* for action. Law reasons operate primarily at the general conceptual level, for Aquinas, and secondarily at the specific level.⁶⁵

Law reasons are general.⁶⁶ Natural law precepts⁶⁷ are general and indemonstrable principles, which need to be determined into more specific and particular determinations.⁶⁸ Thus not all virtuous acts are related to natural law. The farther they lie from their normative grounds in the inclinations of nature, i.e. in so far as they are rationally worked-out determinations of what is best in particular, expressing natural law's multiply exemplifiable possibilities, the less they pertain to natural law.⁶⁹ Aquinas speaks unequivocally of natural law principles only at the general level.

Law reasons function as 'rules' of action, guiding the action of rational agents. Here Aquinas's use of rule overlaps current notions of rule as action-guiding linguistic formulae (RM2), but not entirely, as his notion presupposes his larger

⁶³ IaIIae.14.3 ad 2; 98.6.

⁶⁴ IaIIae.90.1 ad 2; QDV 16.1.

⁶⁵ Aquinas extensively discusses specification of natural law principles into various forms of more specific determinations, typically in human laws. My account in IV of derivative specification was drawn from Aquinas's description of law-specification. Unfortunately Aquinas provides no clear, consistent taxonomy of the results of such specification (see IaIIae.95.2, 4; 94.5, 6; 100.1, 3, 11). What is clear in Aquinas's account is that the most fundamental natural law principles are general reasons expressing the basic human goods, grounded in nature and the intelligible possibilities of human action, and that there is a progression of increased specificity and, in the case of positive reasons, decreased universality (normatively and epistemically) in reasoning from these to more specific determinations (IaIIae.94.4; 95.2, 4).

⁶⁶ IaIIae.96.1 ad 2; 98.6 ad 2; In NE 5.16.1083.

⁶⁷ Precepts (see below) are, strictly speaking, law reasons expressed as commands, a kind of specific expression of a reason for action that falls between the paradigmatic gerundive form of first principles, and the 'imperative' expressed in the psychological act of *imperium*. Precepts are applications of law to specific matters (IaIIae.90.2 ad 1). Aquinas sometimes speaks of natural law principles as natural law 'precepts', but the examples he gives of them are typically stated as gerundives. Thus Aquinas does not always use 'precept' in a strict way.

⁶⁸ IaIIae.91.3; 91.5; 94.6; 99.4.

⁶⁹ IaIIae.94.3, ad 3; 94.5 ad 3.

conception of teleological ordering and its expression in the analogous notions of rule. Law is an *extrinsic principle* of human action in that it provides guidance, a standard independent of what one's actual inclinations may be in a given situation, by which to evaluate and direct one's action. In this sense it is a rule.⁷⁰

Aquinas introduces his account of law (IaIIae.90.1) by stating that law is a kind of rule and measure of actions, according to which one is led (*inducitur*) to what is to be done, or restrained from acting. He appeals to several related features of his account of practical reason to spell this out. First, the rule and measure of human acts is reason, the first principle of human action, since it is reason's job to order to the end, which is the first principle in all matters of action. Thus at the outset Aquinas sets his understanding of law within the context of teleological order and rational, end-directed action, i.e. *ordo rationis*. Law is rational; it orders-by-directing agents to their end.⁷¹ Hence Aquinas defines law as an *ordinatio rationis*, a determinate expression of rational ordering.⁷² 'Law denotes a kind of reasoning directing actions towards an end.'⁷³ Second, Aquinas sets law within the context of eudaimonism. The general end to which law properly directs human action is the ultimate end of flourishing.⁷⁴ The end to which human law orders is the common good, the partial exemplification of flourishing at the social level.⁷⁵ Third, what distinguishes law reasons from other reasons is their close rational connection to first principles of practical reasoning, i.e. that they express *necessary conditions* for attaining the ultimate end.⁷⁶ Obligation or 'ought' in Aquinas is spelled out teleologically. It is a function, not of will, as in voluntaristic ethics, but of the necessary relation of an

⁷⁰ In NE 6.1.1110.

⁷¹ IaIIae.91.1 ad 3; 107.1.

⁷² IaIIae.90.4.

⁷³ IaIIae.93.3.

⁷⁴ IaIIae.90.2.

⁷⁵ IaIIae.90.2 ad 2, 3; 98.1.

action's order to the end.⁷⁷ Fourth, with regard to the specific form of law reasons as 'precepts', which command and prohibit, on the common analogy of human laws,⁷⁸ Aquinas re-emphasises that law is rational, for it is reason that orders to an end. Here Aquinas appeals to *imperium*, the core analogue of law: S's final psychological act, applying general good to the execution of particular action, as the product of S's rational determination. Law pertains to reason, according to Aquinas, just as *imperium* – which orders by way of commanding, like law – is an act of reason.⁷⁹

Laws function paradigmatically, then, as reasons for action. As paradigmatic general reasons, law reasons give general direction.⁸⁰ This relates to their function as rules, which are understood by Aquinas within the context of a general picture of ordering and ruling by reason (RM3, OR1), as becomes clear in his account of natural law. According to Aquinas, natural law is expressed in the *participation* of rational agents in eternal law, or the rational structure of God's creative and providential practical reasoning expressed in the existence and nature of the created order.⁸¹ What does this mean? Law as rule and measure may be expressed in something in two ways, says Aquinas. First, in the agent ordering, e.g. in the divine reason, law expresses the reasoning that orders. Thus Aquinas appeals to the 'rule' of divine reasoning (RM3), i.e. God's ruling and measuring/regulating by rationally ordering creation.⁸² Second, law as rule and measure is expressed in what is ordered, i.e. ruled and measured. This in turn takes two forms. First, law is expressed in non-rational creatures, by virtue of their law-like, end-directed activity as determined by their

⁷⁶ IaIIae.90.2 ad 3.

⁷⁷ IaIIae.99.1. (Grisez 1969), 360; (McInerny 1993), 210.

⁷⁸ (McInerny 1993), 216 n.27.

⁷⁹ IaIIae.90.1sc, ad 3.

⁸⁰ IaIIae.91.5 ad 3.

⁸¹ IaIIae.91.2. Eternal law-natural law-human law also represents a general-to-increasingly-specific structure.

⁸² IaIIae.71.6.

natures.⁸³ The standard or rule for evaluating their action (RM2) is determined by the nature implanted within them, by virtue of the relation of their act to their given end (RM1).⁸⁴ According to Aquinas, the behaviour of non-rational creatures expresses ‘law’ only in an extended or analogous sense.⁸⁵

Second, the primary sense of law is expressed by rational creatures, who participate in eternal law by engaging in teleological, rational ordering of their own activity in its light – by understanding it and expressing it in action.⁸⁶ This – not the construction of a deductive system of ethical decision-making – is Aquinas’s conception of natural law. It is evident that the ‘rule’ of law in this sense includes both RM2 and RM3.⁸⁷ RM2 identifies the general ordered relations given by God’s rational ordering in nature, e.g. the basic human goods and general reasons/natural law principles, which constitute natural normative givens for human action and possibilities. These are themselves expressions of RM3, God’s rational ordering activity of ruling and measuring.⁸⁸ It is this activity that is shared by S in S’s practical thinking, when S engages in the rational ordering of S’s own actions and passions.⁸⁹ This kind of rationally ordering activity involves *determination* in both senses I have specified: *identifying* ordered relations given in the general starting points of nature (RM2), and *expressing* ordered rationality in the particular possibilities of action and passion (RM3).

Aquinas states that humans know the features of eternal law only in general, in the general principles of practice.⁹⁰ Again, human understanding of the norms given

⁸³ IaIIae.93.5.

⁸⁴ IaIIae.49.2, 93.5 ad 1.

⁸⁵ IaIIae.91.2 ad 3.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ IaIIae.64.3.

⁸⁸ IaIIae.90.1 ad 1; 91.1.

⁸⁹ IaIIae.93.6; QDW(1) 13.

⁹⁰ IaIIae.91.3 ad 1, 2; 93.2.

in nature on Aquinas's view is solely *general*. The focus of human participation in eternal law, expressed in natural law, is the rational process of S's determining the general norms of practice into action, *expressing* general goodness in multiply exemplifiable, underdetermined-by-general-reasons, creative ways. The 'rule of reason', *regula rationis*, primarily refers to RM3, the ruling or regulating activity of practical reasoning. In this way primarily, and only secondarily in the modern sense, does Aquinas's conception of natural law involve rules or rule-following. Aquinas is not interested in an ethics of rules in the modern sense, although he uses them. The ultimate expression of rule in ethics for Aquinas is S's expressing regulating and moderating rationality in action and passion.⁹¹ Moreover, this is ultimately a function of *virtue*, not law. Indeed, at the point of particular virtuous action, the directional role of rules falls off, for what is appropriate in particular action is underdetermined by general reasons. Thus the 'rule' of particular virtuous act identification is the virtuous person (virtuous person criterion).⁹²

Paradigmatically, then, the rules or action-guiding directives of law are general reasons for action, expressing basic human goods and identifying necessary conditions for reaching the ultimate end of flourishing. As general and basic, setting the direction of the moral life (positive law reasons) and establishing its boundaries (negative law reasons), such law reasons are 'seeds' of virtue. They constitute starting points of action, and thus of virtuous action. The realisation of virtuous action, however, is the fruit of virtue.

Similar considerations show law reasons to play an initial, potential role in *moral education*. The purpose of law, by directing human acts, is to lead its subjects

⁹¹ IaIIae.94.2 ad 2; 94.4 ad 3; IIaIIae.47.12; SCG 3.139.3.

⁹² Ia.1.6 ad 3; In NE 10.9.2075.

to their proper virtue. The aim of law is to make humans good.⁹³ Here Aquinas's distinction between positive and negative reasons becomes central. Aquinas's general orientation to practice is positive: it is grounded in his metaphysical-teleological account of goodness, whose aim is the full actualisation of goodness, and in the eudaimonistic structure of end-directed action, whose aim is flourishing. Still, I have distinguished in Aquinas's conception between positive general reasons, which set the general direction towards the end, indicating what is to be done and pursued, and negative general reasons, which set boundaries for what may be done. Positive general reasons express basic human goods, the core goods with regard to the basic, constitutive elements of human flourishing. Entailed by the positive general reasons are related negative general reasons, which identify the necessary conditions of realising the basic human goods, and preclude actions that would directly violate such conditions.

Aquinas embraces and makes this distinction explicit with regard to law, distinguishing between 'negative precepts' (in my terminology, 'negative law reasons') and 'affirmative precepts' (my 'positive law reasons'), along these lines. The distinction is important in understanding his view of the role of law. While law's general orientation is to the good, directing persons to their good end, Aquinas's emphasis in law is clearly on negative law reasons. His examples of natural law reasons, except for, e.g. what I have called R – 'It is right and true for all to act according to reason',⁹⁴ which specifies a general ideal or aim⁹⁵ – are typically negative law reasons. He emphasises that, of the 10 Commandments, which follow closely from the natural law principles, only two are positive law reasons.⁹⁶ The

⁹³ IaIIae.92.1, ad 1; 95.1; In NE 2.1.251-2; 10.14.2138, 2150, 2153.

⁹⁴ IaIIae.94.4. See IV.1.3.

⁹⁵ IaIIae.91.6.

⁹⁶ IaIIae.100.7 ad 1.

reason for this priority, as Aquinas defends it, is the greater stringency of negative law reasons. According to Aquinas, the scope of negative law reasons extends to more persons than that of positive law reasons, and negative law reasons are more immediately obvious. ‘That one is not to harm another (no harm principle), which pertains to a negative precept, extends to more persons, according to a primary dictate of reason, than that someone ought to be given a service or benefit (*beneficium*).’⁹⁷ The latter case becomes obvious or a primary dictate of reason, only in the case of particular forms of indebtedness, e.g. when one is actually ‘owed’ such a service as a debt, which has not been repaid.⁹⁸ This is the only type of case in which a positive law reason carries the special aspect of ‘duty’ (*debitum*); the Commandments’ two affirmative precepts (honouring parents and honouring God) are of this type. Otherwise the only law reasons that bear that aspect are negative law reasons; which is to say that negative law reasons are standardly more stringent and determinate, and obviously so.⁹⁹

Aquinas thinks that the stringency, determinateness, and obviousness of negative law reasons are related. I argued similarly in previous chapters, and will not rehearse my account here. Aquinas provides a related, but somewhat different kind of argument, reaching a similar conclusion. He defends his claim that negative law reasons have broader extension than positive law reasons, with an intriguing analogy:

From the affirmation of X the negation of its opposite always follows, but from the negation of Y the affirmation of the other does not always follow. This follows: ‘If X is white, then it is not black’. But this does not follow: ‘If Y is not black, then it is white’. This is because negation extends further than affirmation.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid. See III.3.3.1.

⁹⁹ IaIIae.99.5; IIaIIae.58.3 ad 1.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

Consider the analogy in terms of sets. The set *white* excludes all members belonging to the set *black*. Thus to say that X belongs to *white* is to deny that X is a member of *black*. It determinately rules out X's being black. However to deny Y's membership in *black* does not, by itself, determinately specify that Y is white, or any other particular non-black colour. The application to law reasons is this. A positive law reason (1) to realise G identifies a set of actions that may realise G. It follows that all members of a set of actions, B, a set fundamentally incompatible with G, are determinately ruled out by (1). If X is a member of B, then it cannot constitute a fulfilment of (1). Thus S's acceptance of (1) entails that S has a determinate reason not to do X. The related negative law reason (2) not to realise B, however, works differently. From the fact that Y is *not* a member of B, it does not follow that Y is permissible, that it is an action that may realise G; only that it is not a member of B, the set of actions S has determinate reason not to do. Thus S's acceptance of (2) does not give S a determinate reason to do Y. The crucial practical question for S to ask, then, on Aquinas's analogy, is whether an action belongs to B. If it does, S knows what *not* to do, and this is determinate. However, if the action does *not* belong to B, the question as to what S is *to* do remains indeterminate. Determination of what to do requires at least further information, and perhaps experience and character-dependent perception. Thus it is not as immediately *obvious*.

This argument develops the same conception of the distinctive roles of positive and negative reasons I reached earlier, although Aquinas does not appeal here, as I did to the fact that negative law reasons specify the necessary conditions of basic human goods as grounding their stringency. In any case the stringency, determinacy, and immediacy of negative law reasons determine their priority of

emphasis on this conception.¹⁰¹ Negative law reasons are both most easily understood, and most important to be understood, and thus take priority in moral education.

According to Aquinas moral education progresses in two stages.¹⁰² The first is negative: that one avoid or stop doing what is wrong. It is easier to refrain from evil than to do what is good.¹⁰³ Moral progress cannot be made if one is travelling the wrong direction; one must first be reoriented towards the good. The second stage is positive, cultivating one's desire for goodness and increasing skill in discerning and applying it. The application to negative and positive reasons is obvious. Negative law reasons are more immediately grasped. Moreover, they identify actions that threaten the very possibility of good, and thus establish the boundaries of the moral life. Understanding and following such reasons makes the quest for goodness *possible*.¹⁰⁴ Understanding and following positive law reasons contributes to making it *actual*. These latter reasons, however, require further information, specification, and discernment. The negative-to-positive progression may be seen in actual practical education, as parents typically begin by training a child to understand its necessary boundaries ('Don't touch – hot!'), and only later seek to cultivate a more nuanced vision of distinctions within the normative sphere. Without a positive orientation to the good, negative reasons are meaningless; but without negative reasons defining and protecting the boundaries of the good, reaching it is impossible.

Thus law reasons function as 'seeds of virtue' in moral education for Aquinas, especially as negative reasons delineating the minimal boundaries of the moral life.

¹⁰¹ IaIIae.71.5 ad 3; 88.1 ad 2; 100.5 ad 4; IIaIIae79.2, 3; 122.6 ad 1.

¹⁰² IaIIae.72.5 ad 2; IIaIIae.24.9; 122.2 ad 1.

¹⁰³ IIaIIae.79.4sc.

¹⁰⁴ Aquinas makes parallel moves concerning human law's role in preserving the social order: they must be 'possible', defining and protecting the minimal boundaries of the common good, but aiming at producing citizens of virtue (IaIIae.96.2).

The second, positive stage of moral education is shared by virtue and law, but with increasing emphasis upon virtue. Law relates to the general, potential end of the schema of virtue's development, with particular action at the other. As the development progresses, considerations of law drop out and virtue comes to dominate. Aquinas speaks of virtue as the goal of practice; he never describes law as an end. The aim of moral education for Aquinas is not law-following or non-transgression, but virtue-in-action.

3.4 Virtue and the Seeds of Virtue

While law's role in practical reasoning predominates at the general level, virtue's role increases as practical reason moves towards specificity and particularity. Virtue predominates at the specific level, where Aquinas spells out the moral life in its richness, not in terms of law but of virtue, by developing a thick, specific account of virtue (IIaIIae).

However, Aquinas's *specific conception of virtue* does not emerge out of 'thin' air. Aquinas does have a formal and very *general conception of virtue* I have not yet identified: a formal conception of flourishing or 'acting virtuously', which functions at the general level, i.e. within the seeds of virtue. Aquinas does not emphasise it, as virtue's primary conceptual work enters at the specific level.

However it is important to identify this aspect of his thought, both for completeness, and because it, together with elements of his picture explicated in earlier chapters, enables us to untangle a puzzle within his conception of practical thought.

Although Aquinas's emphasis at the general level concerns the first principles of basic human goods and general reasons, he does indicate a role for virtue. In

IIaIIae.47.6 Aquinas appeals to a consideration of virtue that is similar to his ‘seeds’ discussions. He infers that since the end of moral virtues is human good, which is to act in accordance with reason, the ends of moral virtue must necessarily pre-exist in the reason.

Just as in theoretical reasoning, there are certain things naturally known, about which there is understanding, and certain things which come to be known through them, namely conclusions, about which there is *scientia*, so in practical reasoning, there pre-exist certain things as naturally known principles, and the ends of the moral virtues are of this kind, since the end is to practical matters as the principle is to theoretical matters . . . Certain things are in the practical reason as conclusions, and things for the end, which are drawn from the ends themselves, are of this kind. These are the concern of prudence, in applying universal principles to the particular conclusions of practical matters. Thus it is not prudence’s role to appoint (*praestituere*) the end to moral virtues, but only to determine the means.

That Aquinas means to locate these ‘ends’ of the virtues with the other first principles of practice, at the general level of practical thought, becomes clear in ad 3, where he states that the ends of moral virtues are appointed (*praestitutum*) by natural reason, or *synderesis*.

What are these ‘ends’ and how do they relate to what we have already seen?

The ends of the virtues constitute the objects, or what is aimed at by the virtues.

Virtues are directed towards virtuous actions.¹⁰⁵ In the next article Aquinas specifies:

The proper end of each moral virtue is that it be conformed to right reason (*recta ratio*). For temperance intends that one not stray from reason because of one’s desires; similarly, courage, that one not stray from a right judgement of reason because of fear or daring. This end is appointed to the human according to natural reason, for natural reason dictates to each one that one should act according to reason.¹⁰⁶

The ‘proper ends’ of the moral virtues indicated here are entirely formal or definitional, identifying the end of ‘virtue X’ with the proper balance or rational mean

¹⁰⁵ IaIIae.20.3 ad 2; 54.2 ad 3; 55.1 ad 2.

¹⁰⁶ IIaIIae.47.7.

with respect to the matter X moderates:¹⁰⁷ ‘the attainment of the mean is the end of a moral virtue’.¹⁰⁸ As Aquinas says elsewhere:

The object of every virtue is a good considered as in its proper matter: thus the object of temperance is a good concerning pleasures in relation to desires of touch. The formal aspect (*ratio*) of this object is from reason, which establishes (*instituit*) the mean in these desires: while the material aspect is that which is on the part of the desires.¹⁰⁹

According to Aquinas, more generally, the nature of X is determined by X’s end or object.¹¹⁰ Thus temperance, e.g., just is the *habitus* that inclines one stably to attain the rational mean or desiderative balance with respect to sensory pleasures.¹¹¹ This general kind of characterisation of a virtue I call a *general virtue concept*: it fixes the reference of what the virtue is generally or formally. The formal characterisation of its end I call a *general end*. The general end underdetermines what in a particular case the rational mean will in fact be. Moreover a general virtue concept does not provide specific, descriptive content as to what such a virtue looks like in practice. That awaits specification of the general virtue concept into a more *specific virtue concept*.

Aquinas sees these general virtue concepts as implications of natural reason’s ‘dictate’ that one should act according to reason, R. I.e., Aquinas sees general virtue concepts as constituents or minimal specifications of a general conception of acting according to reason, which is itself equivalent to his conception of the human good, *bonum rationis*, or flourishing. Now, Aquinas sees ‘acting rationally’ as equivalent to ‘acting virtuously’.¹¹² Hence, the conception of the human good of acting rationally

¹⁰⁷ IaIIae.63.4.

¹⁰⁸ IIaIIae.47.7.

¹⁰⁹ IaIIae.63.4.

¹¹⁰ QDA 13.

¹¹¹ In NE 7.8.1432.

¹¹² IaIIae.54.3; 73.3.

Aquinas appeals to here is a general conception of virtue, whose constituents are general virtue concepts.

How does this relate to the picture already developed? All of the elements Aquinas associates with the general, ‘seed’ level – basic human goods, general reasons/natural law principles, and now ends of virtues – are practical first principles, known naturally, the necessary preconditions of human action. Aquinas emphasises different aspects in different contexts. When treating of *initial* normative boundaries and basic preconditions for action, Aquinas speaks of natural law principles. When speaking of the *ultimate* aim of acting according to reason/virtue, Aquinas speaks of the ends of virtues. The linguistic difference is significant, I believe, because it signals a distinction of orientation, even at the general level: between principle-as-what-orders-to-the-end (natural order, law) and principle-as-end-or-aim (rational order, virtue).¹¹³

There is a direct link between the two. ‘Acting according to reason’ expresses *bonum rationis*, the basic human good that most specifically distinguishes human nature. *Bonum rationis* also constitutes the aim of human action, expressing complete ordering rationality in action and passion.¹¹⁴ Moreover, Aquinas identifies *bonum rationis* as the formal principle of each of the cardinal virtues.¹¹⁵ Defined by their relation to *bonum rationis* and the most general ordered relations between reason and action and passion, the cardinal virtues represent *general* virtues, under which each of the others falls as a kind of specification.¹¹⁶ This fits the picture of a general conception of virtue and its relation to *bonum rationis* I gave above. I argued in III that *bonum rationis* identifies a distinct basic human good, but also serves as a *telos* or

¹¹³ Cf. IaIIae.1.3.

¹¹⁴ IaIIae.20.3 ad 2.

¹¹⁵ IaIIae.61.2; 55.4 ad 2; 58.4.

¹¹⁶ IaIIae.61.3.

ordering principle for the other basic human goods, rationally ordering their (potentially mutually incompatible) pursuits teleologically, and as such, constituting an ideal at which to aim in practice. Now we see how Aquinas specifies *bonum rationis*-as-ordering-ideal, viz. in terms of *virtue*. Virtue essentially implies, for Aquinas, as in his doctrine of the connection of the virtues, a rational coherence between human goods.¹¹⁷ In the context of aim, *bonum rationis* is equivalent to *bonum virtutis*.¹¹⁸

This further fills out our understanding of Aquinas's eudaimonistic identification of the ultimate end as the primary first principle of the moral order.¹¹⁹ S's general conception of flourishing does not serve as a first principle in the sense of nature-as-principle, but in the sense of end-as-principle. Flourishing expresses the ultimate *end* of action, first arrived at in a general way (general conception), then needing to be specified deliberately in order to guide action.¹²⁰ Aquinas's conception of flourishing, the ultimate end of human nature is: *acting virtuously*.¹²¹

However, general virtue concepts need to be specified in order to guide action. *That* temperance seeks a right balance in matters of pleasure is a first principle; *what* such a balance is or looks like is a matter for specification. The multiple variety of particularising factors in each situation, underlying the need for judgement, implies that no set of rules is able to characterise the rational mean, although they may help in specifying it. Moreover, specification also includes examples of ideals and exemplars, stories, probable beliefs, vivid examples, and, as Aquinas's account exemplifies, conceptual analysis of temperance and its components, necessary conditions, kinds of expression, and strategies for development. The goal in

¹¹⁷ IaIIae.31.8 ad 1; 56.4; 65.1; 85.2.

¹¹⁸ IaIIae.31.8, 39.2; 60.2.

¹¹⁹ IaIIae.72.5.

¹²⁰ IaIIae.1.4; 1.7.

specification is a rich picture of how the virtues look in action, how they work, and so on, a specific conception of virtue. This is what Aquinas produces in IIaIIae.

At the *particular* level *prudence* emerges as central to Aquinas's conception of realising virtue in action, pulling together the various elements of the full expression of practical thought I have identified. Prudence expresses both intellectual virtue, which perfects reasoning, so that S is rightly able to reason between general and particular considerations, and moral virtue, which perfects S's appetitive responses to situations, thus motivating S to right kinds of acts and tuning S's 'appetitive perception' to be attentive to what is morally salient. Prudence, according to Aquinas, shapes the application or particularisation of general good into particular action, involving deliberation (when needed), as well as judgement, perception, and *imperium*.¹²²

Two components are required for prudence. First, right desires for the ends of action, which desires are the product of moral virtue. In order to be prudent one must want and value the right things, have right desires for what is to be done, i.e. have right *appetitus*. Second, right reasoning about the things that are for the ends. Aquinas specifically identifies prudence in terms of the latter, for it is an intellectual virtue, albeit one that presupposes the former, i.e. moral virtues. Aquinas stresses repeatedly, 'it is not prudence's role to appoint (*praestituere*) the end to moral virtues, but only to determine (*disponere*) the means.'¹²³

Irwin raises an objection against Aquinas's account at this point.¹²⁴ Aquinas's picture of prudence seems to restrict practical reason to means-end reasoning, reducing the ends or aims of good action simply to being matters of appetite, rather

¹²¹ IaIIae.3.2; 4.7.

¹²² IaIIae.57.6.

¹²³ IIaIIae.47.6. IaIIae.19.3 ad 2; 56.3; 57.4; 58.3; 65.1.

¹²⁴ (Irwin 1990). See also (Irwin 1997). For a different response see (MacIntyre 1992).

than reasoning – a non-cognitivist conception of virtue. There are three main types of reply open to Aquinas. Besides the ‘anti-rationalist’ option that denies that one’s ends are rationally evaluable, there are two ‘rationalist’ replies. The first acknowledges that deliberation is restricted to means-end reasoning, but argues that practical reason is broader than deliberation. One’s ends are rationally accessible, but by nondeliberative practical thought. This kind of move is expressed in Aquinas’s appeal to the ends of virtue as pre-existing in reason, appointed by the non-deliberative reasoning of *synderesis*. The second rationalist reply argues that the scope of deliberation is broader than means-end reasoning, e.g. including reasoning about constituents of the end. It is to note, as I have, that Aquinas’s notion of what is for the end includes constituents and specifications of the end, so that by deliberative practical reasoning concerning these one in fact does rationally determine one’s end.

Aquinas seems to accept both rationalist options, according to Irwin, and this leads to a conflict in his practical reason:

I want to claim that (a) sometimes Aquinas accepts the first rationalist solution and rejects the second, but (b) sometimes he commits himself to the second solution. Hence Aquinas’s views seem to contain some conflict, resulting from his failure to articulate a part of the Aristotelian position that he nonetheless must accept.¹²⁵

Irwin argues that these two rationalist solutions are incompatible. Further complicating matters, in one place Aquinas explicitly claims that prudence *does*, in fact, appoint the ends to moral virtues:

Prudence not only directs moral virtues in choosing things for the end, but also in appointing (*praestituendo*) the end. For the end of every moral virtue is to attain a mean in its proper matter, which mean is determined according to the right reasoning of prudence.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ (Irwin 1990), 22.

¹²⁶ IaIIae.66.3 ad 3.

My account of Aquinas's conception of practical thought resolves the puzzle. The formal concept of the end of a virtue, known naturally at the general level, is its *general end*, i.e. the attainment of the rational mean concerning its matter. This is determined or appointed by nature, *synderesis*. However, what the rational mean *is* in fact in a particular situation, constitutes the virtue's *particular end*, the end at which the virtue aims in a particular piece of rational determination. This is determined or appointed by prudence. On the account I have developed, the particular end is in fact a constituent or specification, or *particular exemplification*, of the general end. As such it constitutes part of what is 'for the end', and lies within the scope of what is determined or appointed by prudence (on the first rationalist solution)!

Moreover, we saw in V that the particular end of the virtue, the appropriate particular instantiation of the general end in action and passion – i.e. the particular practicable – is just what prudence determines. 'This first particular is some particular end; thus the kind of understanding which is a part of prudence is a certain right *aestimatio* of some particular end.'¹²⁷ Thus it is actually the *particular* – rather than the general – end to which virtue disposes one, according to Aquinas.

And thus, just as one is rightly disposed in relation to universal principles through natural understanding or the habit of science, so in order that one be rightly related to particular principles of things to be done, which are ends, one must be perfected by some habit according to which it becomes connatural to one rightly to judge concerning the end. And this occurs through moral virtue, for the virtuous person rightly judges the end of virtue.¹²⁸

Hence Aquinas holds, consistently, both that the ends of the virtues are appointed by non-deliberative reason (general end, *synderesis*), and that they are appointed or rationally determined by deliberative reasoning (particular end,

¹²⁷ IIaIIae.49.2 ad 1.

¹²⁸ IaIIae.58.5.

prudence).¹²⁹ This interpretation further indicates how deliberative reasoning may shape S's conception of the end. The general end is entirely general, and in order to be action-guiding must be specified. This occurs along the lines of specification I have suggested, but is also in turn shaped by the data of S's particular determinations of the end in practice, as S gains further experiential knowledge of the virtue by seeing it expressed in varied, particular situations. Aquinas's emphasis upon the need for experiential knowledge of particulars in practical reasoning indicates not only that one's more general knowledge shapes one's particular perception, but also that one's grasp of particulars shapes one's more general knowledge. This 'more general' knowledge of virtues is experiential knowledge at the specific level, where character and reflection especially converge.

3.5 Conclusion

In summary, law in Aquinas finds its primary home at the general level and virtue at the specific level, and virtue bears its fruit in action at the particular level. My schema of the nature and structure of practical thought in Aquinas may thus be further developed, as in Figure 9, where I have inserted virtue's and law's contributions to filling previous gaps, as well as added new distinctions my account of virtue and law have drawn.

¹²⁹ Cf. *IaIIae*.47.15, for how this fits the natural order/determinate → rational order/determining picture already developed.

Virtue and Law within the Nature and Structure of Practical Thought

General	Specific	Particular
Generalisation	Specification	Particular Determination
General conception of good	Specific conception of good	Particular expression of good
General Reasons	Specific Reasons	Particular Reasons
Thin conception	Thick conception	Determinate conception
Universal	Traditional	Personal
Moral grounds	Moral vision	Moral action
Justification, dialogue	Education, reflection	Action, expression
Natural order	Natural order (second nature)/ rational order	Rational order
Potential	Developmental	Actual
Determinate by nature	Determining nature by reasoning	Determined by reasoning
General ends of virtues	Virtues	Particular ends of virtues
General conception of virtue	Specific conception of virtue	Particular expression of virtue
Form	Habit	Act
Extrinsic principle	Intrinsic principle	Realisation
Reasons	Character	Action
Law	Virtue	Action
Seeds	Plant	Fruit

(Figure 9)

4 Application

In this final section I return to the contrasts between virtue and law conceptions of ethics identified in I, to indicate in an initial way how insights drawn from Aquinas's ethical account may elucidate relationships between virtue and law ethical conceptions. The application of these insights is necessarily brief and programmatic, but it suggests the potential fruitfulness of a virtue-and-law conception in accounting for and developing both important elements of practical thought.

4.1 Agent vs. Act: the object of ethical evaluation

Aquinas's account includes ethical evaluation of both agents (character traits, attitudes, emotions, motivations) and kinds of action, specifiable independently of agent-descriptions. Kinds of actions are specifiable in terms of their relation to basic human goods and general/specific reasons for action. Such identifications are basic to the normative starting points of action, which are expressible in law reasons. Reasons expressing particularly exigent kinds of action in this way, especially negative reasons, are important in delineating the boundaries of the moral life and social order, and in providing the beginnings of directive input to moral education. This applies primarily to the general level.

However, 'action' for Aquinas is broader than direct human action, and thus includes the expression of the elements of 'agent' evaluation. Thus, while Aquinas's ethics may be roughly characterised as 'act-based' at the general level, even this conception presupposes an element of agent-evaluation as well (as in a general conception of virtue). Moreover, act and agent-evaluation in Aquinas are both

grounded normatively in his metaphysical-teleological, eudaimonistic account, which is more basic still. Further, while Aquinas's emphasis developmentally begins with act-evaluation (in the modern sense), it is aimed ultimately at the act-evaluation (not in the modern sense), i.e. of both direct and indirect human action, which action is ineliminably an expression of virtue, a full-orbed expression of the agent's excellence.

For Aquinas, neither act nor agent-considerations are reducible to the other. Both are fundamental elements of practice, both play important roles in different ways, and both need to be accounted for in practical thought.

4.2 Thick vs. Thin: the specificity of ethical concepts

Aquinas is able to account for the distinction between thin and thick practical conceptions in his implicit distinction between general and specific levels of practical thought. The specific level is especially important with regard to virtue, which is consistent with a virtue conception of ethics' emphasis upon thicker, specific virtue concepts. It is also consistent with the observation of virtue ethicists that thicker virtue concepts are closely tied to particular moral communities, narratives, or traditions, and that the virtue-conceptions of such communities diverge from each other. More specific conceptions of courage, e.g., differ between different moral communities. At the specific level expressed in *IIaIIae*, Aquinas appeals much more to theological considerations and shared values of his own community.

However, Aquinas would disagree with the relativist cast of much of current virtue ethics, for specific virtue concepts, on his account, are grounded in universal human nature, in the 'seeds' of virtue. Nussbaum helpfully argues with regard to Aristotle that various, differing 'thick' virtue concepts are themselves expressions of

‘thin’ virtue concepts, the latter being universal, referentially fixed by universal ‘grounding experiences’ faced by humans by virtue of their nature. Thin virtue concepts identify nominally-defined kinds of virtue-responses to such experiences. While thick virtue concepts are culturally specific, there is common ground between them with respect to the thin virtue concepts at the general level.¹³⁰ This picture is similar to Aquinas’s general conception of virtue/specific conception of virtue picture.

It is true that virtue concepts require thick specification in order to be action-guiding, as opposed to law reasons, which are able in some cases to provide important action-guidance even at the general level (especially negative law reasons), and it is true that specific conceptions of virtue diverge. However, divergence at the specific level is often overstated by virtue ethicists. What courage looks like specifically may be conceived differently by different cultures and narratives, especially in their conception of the courageous ideal (e.g. warrior in ancient Greece, martyr in early Christianity), but each may be recognised by the other, and both by third parties (as in this discussion), as ‘courage’. How strictly divergent specific virtue conceptions are is a matter for particular cultural analysis. Yearly has examined and compared the conceptions of courage between the culturally distant traditions of Aquinas and Mencius, and discovered significant commonality, as well as difference.¹³¹

The standard example of putative radical virtue discontinuity between cultures – between Aristotle’s pagan virtue and Christian virtue – is also typically overdrawn. Roberts, I noted in I, claims that Aristotle’s chief virtue of magnanimity is incompatible with gratitude, a Christian, but not Aristotelian virtue. However, Aristotle – in *Rhet*, not *NE* – in fact commends gratitude.¹³² Magnanimity, ‘greatness of soul’, moreover, is typically thought to be *most* fundamentally incompatible with

¹³⁰ (Nussbaum 1988); (Nussbaum 1993).

the ‘chief’ Christian virtue of humility.¹³³ However, this claim typically turns on a distorted view of humility and its role within the Christian tradition. Humility is far from universally held by the tradition to be the chief virtue; in the New Testament, and in Aquinas, that honour is held, rather, by love.¹³⁴ Moreover, Christian humility need not be construed as ‘considering oneself *small*, not great’.¹³⁵ Aquinas explicitly finds common ground between magnanimity and humility, specifying them as complementary elements in one’s developing a proper sense of one’s strengths and weaknesses. I have argued elsewhere that Aquinas’s extensive account of the virtue of magnanimity, finding significant common ground between Aristotelian and Christian values, is informative and persuasive.¹³⁶

For Aquinas, I have argued, the general conceptual level provides the possibility of finding common ground between different specific conceptions of good, especially by appeal to basic human goods and their general reasons, which are normative givens presupposed by all specific conceptions. These may be appealed to, both in evaluating one’s own (or one’s community’s) conception, and in seeking common ground in dialogue, debate, or agreement between competing conceptions. By (implicitly) distinguishing between these conceptual levels Aquinas is able to escape the strictures of relativism, while acknowledging and accounting for the specificity and diversity of actual moral reflection and education.

¹³¹ (Yearley 1990).

¹³² 1374a25, 1374b16-17.

¹³³ (Casey 1990), 200; (Nussbaum 1988), 38.

¹³⁴ 1 Co 13; IIallae.23-27. See (Lewis 1996).

¹³⁵ (Nussbaum 1988), 38.

¹³⁶ (Horner 1998).

4.3 Maximal vs. Minimal: the orientation of ethical conceptions

Aquinas's virtue-and-law ethical conception exemplifies both minimal and maximal ethical orientations. He does not reduce ethics to law, but gives an important place to law reasons in setting the necessary and minimal boundaries to the moral life and social order, a task which a law conception of ethics promotes.

However, normativity for Aquinas extends beyond the 'seeds' of virtue, to the aim of virtue, which is full flowering in excellent action. Law's purpose is to lead to virtue; it may specify acts and intentions, but its aim is that S not only do good things, but do them well, from a stable disposition of character.¹³⁷ Aquinas most fundamentally specifies the moral life, not in terms of law concepts, but virtue concepts: flourishing, on Aquinas's understanding, is acting according to virtue. This aim is not a matter of 'duty', strictly speaking, but a matter of aspiration.¹³⁸ However it is not thereby morally neutral or irrelevant to the moral life. Indeed it is the end of the moral life, the goal of moral education. 'Acting virtuously' is grounded in human nature just as are the basic human goods, but as end, aspiration, and fulfilment.

For Aquinas, minimal and maximal orientations are compatible, and both are necessary, expressing both ends of the moral life. Together they express Aquinas's general conception of practice: general and particular, determinate and determining, natural and rational orders – joined together by virtue.

¹³⁷ IaIIae.96.3 ad 2; 100.9; In NE 2.4.283; 6.10.1271.

¹³⁸ In NE 4.1.661; IaIIae.56.1.

4.4 General vs. Particular: the kinds of reasons and reasoning in practical thought

Finally, Aquinas's conception of practical thought includes general and particular expressions, neither eliminable, and neither reducible to the other. Aquinas is not a theoreticalist or deductivist. Practical determination, for Aquinas, will seldom if ever be consciously deductive or syllogistic. The ideally virtuous person need not consciously or explicitly reason from general good to particular practicable, although such investigative reasoning will often characterise the practical reasoning of those possessing varying degrees of virtue.

However, the expression of normativity in action is always general-to-particular for Aquinas. In his view, this is an expression of rationality itself.¹³⁹ For Aquinas, only nonrational animals would fit Dancy's description of S's bringing nothing general to new situations. Dancy (hesitantly) attributes a non-general, 'contentless ability' doctrine to Aristotle,¹⁴⁰ but Aristotle in fact distinguishes between the actions of rational and nonrational animals on the basis of whether or not they possess the capacity for general conceptions,¹⁴¹ and he himself makes general ethical claims.¹⁴² As we have seen repeatedly, for Aquinas, the very nature of properly human action is that it is rationally determined, which depends crucially upon the nature of humans as intellectual beings, who are thus able to understand what is general, and thus able to act for reasons: choosing actions, not from determinate instinct, but by judgement, in light of a rational, general standard of goodness, a general conception of good.

¹³⁹ *IIaIIae*.47.3 ad 1.

¹⁴⁰ (Dancy 1993). 50.

¹⁴¹ See *NE* 1149b30-1150a9.

¹⁴² (Broadie 1991), 18.

Aquinas also, however, emphasises the ineliminable, non-general-rule-determined role of particular judgement in the ethical life. The particular practicable is a general-in-particular, but while its normativity is grounded in its relation to general goodness, its identification is rationally underdetermined by its (positive) general normative grounds. Positive general reasons run out in determinacy in the descent to particulars.

According to Aquinas, *pace* Nussbaum, general goods are normatively prior to their particular instances. In this sense, Aquinas is a generalist, albeit not a deductivist or strong generalist. He is also a particularist, however, as he sees a necessary, ineliminable role for virtuous, fine-grained particular perception in the determination of particular action. Aquinas, (apparently) like Nussbaum, is a weak particularist. Unlike Wiggins and Dancy, Aquinas does not deny the possibility of general principles of practice, while emphasising the value and necessity of non-generally-determined particular insight.

Aquinas's account combines general and particular elements, not in an ad hoc way, but as expressing the central constituents of the fuller picture of his general conception of practical thought, as the rational determination of general goodness into particular action. Indeed, the various distinctions we have seen within the general-specific-particular structure of Aquinas's account – e.g. his account of basic human goods and general reasons, natural and rational orders, the distinction between negative and positive reasons, the nature of the particular practicable, the general and particular ends of virtues, and the interrelationship as well as distinctiveness of investigative and judicative reasoning at general, specific, and particular levels – all

provide a unique and detailed picture of ‘the dialogue between rule and perception in an Aristotelian morality’.¹⁴³

5 Conclusion

Aquinas’s virtue-and-law conception of ethics brings central considerations of virtue and law together in illuminating and fruitful ways. It is not simply an ad hoc attempt to ‘save the *phainomena*’. It stands in its own right, as a highly articulated theoretical ethical account, which emerges from, and is grounded normatively, rationally, and motivationally within Aquinas’s rich, detailed, and broadly Aristotelian conception of practical thought: the rational determination of general good into particular action.

¹⁴³ (Nussbaum 1983), 207.

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