PHILOSOPHY 151: Moral Philosophy

AQUINAS: The Will and Its Acts

Summary

1. Will lies at the heart of Aquinas’s ethics
   1. Moral acts are willed acts
      1. They are identical with human acts
      2. No will means no moral quality
      3. Morally good action arises from a good will
   2. This centrality is evident in his description of moral philosophy
   3. Will appears prominently in all other major aspects of his moral theory
   4. Accurate grasp of the will is necessary to understand Thomas’ ethics
2. The Nature of the Will
   1. Will is power of the soul
      1. By which a human agent is in control of his actions
      2. To have control means a person can choose to act or not
      3. Will is distinguished from nature
   2. Will is the source of the voluntariness of all voluntary actions
      1. There are acts of powers other than the will
         1. Acts of the body – when a person walks or eats
         2. Acts of the intellect – when a person thinks, remembers, or imagines
      2. These powers appeal to the one that accounts for control
         1. Will *chooses* either to imagine or not to imagine, to walk or not to walk
         2. To so understand the will is to take it as *free-will*
   3. Will is a *rational appetite*
      1. Every being has a determinate appetite corresponding to the kind of being that it is
      2. Things have internal source of motion toward some definite place
      3. Thomas understands this internal tending as appetite
      4. Three levels of appetite:
         1. Natural inclination or natural appetite
            1. Operates without cognition on the part of the being
            2. Direction of the being is determined by its natural form
         2. Sensitive appetite
            1. Found in beings with sense cognition
            2. Beings respond appetitively to stimuli received through the senses
            3. Response depends on natural instincts or “natural judgment” of the “estimative power”
         3. Rational Appetite
            1. Found in beings endowed with reason
            2. The agent can tend towards the good by means of an appetite (at the level of intellect) distinct from sensitive appetite
      5. These appetites are appetites of the whole and not simply of one part
      6. Rational and sensitive appetite are different in the types of apprehension
   4. The universal aspect of the will’s object enables the will to be the appetite of the whole person – what can be called “personal appetite”
      1. Whatever the will wills, it wills as being somehow good
      2. Any and all goods of the person become objects of the will
         1. All the goods that are objects of the other powers need to contribute to the overall good of the person
         2. The will carries this integration by commanding the acts of the other powers
         3. This power of the will is not absolute
         4. Thus, it can be said that a person as a whole can be good or evil on the basis of the will
   5. One’s good is not limited to one’s individual good
      1. Each thing seeks its own individual perfection
      2. But, it seeks even more the good of its species and yet more the good of the whole universe
3. Nature and Freedom in the Will’s Acts
   1. Existence of the free will cannot be denied
      1. Humans engage in actions they could do otherwise not at all
      2. To deny free action is to deny morality
      3. Thomas’s usual concern, then, is not whether or not free actions exists but how they exist
   2. Act of Choice
      1. Choice is the principle among the free acts of will
      2. It is by choice that a person actually commits himself to one action or another

iii. For Aquinas, choice has a determinate structure

* + - 1. He holds choice is always means to an end
      2. Hence, choice has three elements:
         1. A given end to be achieved
         2. At least two possible means to achieve it
    1. Every act of choice presupposes an act of intention
    2. Natural appetite precedes and underlies all choices
       1. The object of the natural appetite is not some specific good but a general formality
       2. The will cannot have any natural motion, as nature is determined to one while the will is open to opposites
       3. The will is free for even after tending to a general good, it remains free with respect to any specific good
  1. The only object the will intends is beatitude in general
     1. This is true only in the present life
     2. The will moves naturally toward God
        1. Under the influence of grace, perfect good is presented with the vision of God’s presence
        2. The perfect good contains all possibilities of goodness
        3. Being universal good is the object of the will, the will moves toward it naturally
  2. “Exercise” and “specification” of the act
     1. Exercise refers to the fact that a power is actually eliciting an act
        1. Source is the agent
        2. Will has the capacity to exercise or not exercise the act
     2. Specification refers to the act’s being directed to one object or another
        1. Source is the object
        2. Object is supplied to the will by reason
     3. They are two aspects of a single act
  3. Intellect moves the will
     1. The will’s act is specified by the intellect
     2. “Movement” occurs in the order of formal causality
        1. On the other hand, under efficient causality, will moves itself
        2. It provides the basis for a person’s capacity to refuse the good
     3. There is an interrelationship between the intellect and the will
  4. There is no act that the will must necessarily exercise
     1. It is possible to will to cease thinking about the object and so to obviate all acts in its regard
     2. This can occur even if the object is beatitude itself
  5. There is no necessity present in the way in which the will’s act is specified
     1. The same object can be willed in various ways
     2. If there were objects good in all possible way, then it is not possible to will that object but only to love, desire, or rejoice in it
     3. Thomas points to two such objects:
        1. Beatitude considered in general
           1. Because it is to possess all the good of which one is capable while lacking no good
           2. It is not possible to think of beatitude and not desire it
        2. God seen in the divine essence
           1. All good is found perfectly in God
           2. All possible goodness is also found in God
  6. A person naturally wills whatever is suitable to human nature

1. The Acts of the Will
   1. Achieving beatitude
      1. For a person, it requires many acts of the will together with the external acts arising from them
      2. For God, beatitude is identical with essence, and no further actualization of potency
      3. For the angels, only one act is needed
   2. Choice (*Electio*)
      1. Object of choice is always a possible action
         1. No one chooses what one knows to be impossible
         2. Whenever one chooses something other than an action, one is in fact choosing to have or to use that thing by means of an action
      2. Chosen action is a means to an end
      3. Choice occurs anytime the means to achieve an end are not yet fixed
      4. With each choice, the person becomes committed to some good
   3. Intention (*Intentio*)
      1. Directed to ends rather than means
         1. However, it is intimately linked to choice
         2. This is because, in any choice, there is a concomitant willing of the end
      2. It is the act of the will directed to an end taken as the terminus of the means ordered to it
      3. Acts of intention are the result of choice
      4. Intention can be of various durations, which are:
         1. Actually willing an end
         2. Intending the end habitually
   4. Simple Willing (*Simplex voluntas*)
      1. A second act of the will that is directed to the end
      2. *Voluntas* refers to both the power of the will and to a specific act of the will
      3. This act is different from intention
         1. Intention is not “simple”
            1. It is not just directed to an end
            2. It is directed to the end as that which will be achieved by means
         2. Simple willing, on the other hand, is simply the willing of some good without any reference to intention of acquirement
         3. Simple willing includes the spontaneous, natural willings
      4. “Velleity (*velleitas*)” is unintended simple willing
      5. It is what one wills by an act of *free-will*
         1. Simple willing does not involve the degree of self-determination found in choice and intention
         2. To have it, is not to commit oneself to action
   5. Consent (*Consensus*)
      1. Consent names the “application of the appetitive motion to something preexisting in the power of the one applying it”
      2. Choice always imply consent, but consent need not imply choice
   6. Use (*Usus*)
      1. Use is the connection between the act and choice and the execution of the chosen action
      2. It is where the will “uses” the other powers in order to carry out the action
      3. As an act of the will, use necessarily follows upon an act of reason
         1. Thomas calls this special act of reason as “command”
         2. Command and use are a pair
            1. Command names the rational component
            2. Use names the volitional component
   7. Enjoyment (*Fruitio*)
      1. Enjoyment is the act of the will which a person has upon possessing or acquiring a desired end
      2. It is the joy produced in the will
      3. Two ways in which enjoyment can be imperfect:
         1. When the good is not possessed in reality but only in intention
         2. Good desired is not the final end, but only some good that is a means to an end
      4. Perfect enjoyment occurs when the final end is really possessed
2. Love as the First Affection of the Will
   1. Love is the primary affection of the appetitive powers
      1. Love denotes an appetites most basic relationship to the good
      2. Thomas refers to love as the proportion (*proportio*) that exists between a being and its good
   2. On the basis of such a proportion, there arise two other affections:
      1. Desire (*desiderium*), when the loved good is not yet possessed
      2. Delight or joy (*delectation/gaudium*), if the good is possessed
   3. All motions of the appetitive powers are based on the first and most basic affection of love
   4. Thomas distinguishes love at the rational level by referring to it as “dilection” (*dilectio*)
      1. This structure is expressed by the distinction between love of concupiscence and love of friendship
      2. At the rational level, love is in the form of wanting a good for someone
      3. Dilection has two objects:
         1. The person who is loved
         2. The good which is wanted for that person
   5. Love of friendship is more basic than love of concupiscence
      1. The affection of the will is precisely *love for persons*
      2. In all acts of the will, what is chosen is some good for some person(s)
      3. Helps in understanding why Thomas’ teaching on the will’s natural inclination to beatitude is not an egotistical one