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2021

## **2021 Faculty Summer Seminar - From Facts To Truth To Wisdom With Thomas Aquinas**

Center for Catholic Studies, Seton Hall University

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**2021 FACULTY SUMMER SEMINAR**

**FROM FACTS TO TRUTH TO WISDOM WITH  
THOMAS AQUINAS**



**Co-sponsored by the  
CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES and the  
CENTER FOR VOCATION & SERVANT LEADERSHIP**

**With support from the  
TOTH-LONERGAN ENDOWED CHAIR  
IN INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES**



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

# 2021 FACULTY SUMMER SEMINAR

CO-SPONSORED BY THE CENTER FOR VOCATION AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

**JUNE 14, 15, 16 (MONDAY-WEDNESDAY) • 9:30 AM-12:30 PM**

**MICROSOFT TEAMS WITH LIMITED IN-PERSON AVAILABILITY**



## ABOUT THE FACILITATOR

**Jeremy Wilkins** is Associate Professor of Systematic Theology at Boston College. His book, *Before Truth: Lonergan, Aquinas, and the Problem of Wisdom* (CUA, 2019) explores the factors of permanence and change in a religious tradition that knows it has developed and is developing still. He is also co-editor of two volumes in the Collected Works of noted Canadian Jesuit thinker Bernard Lonergan, and author of numerous articles on theological and philosophical topics.

## From Facts to Truth to Wisdom with Thomas Aquinas

It has been suggested in recent years that we live in a Post-Truth society. Such a suggestion bears directly upon the idea of a university, especially a Catholic University. Simultaneously, we are surrounded by a ubiquitous appeal to "facts" that are often interpreted in contradictory ways and enlisted in the service of questionable and opposed agendas. How might we as inquirers, citizens, and teachers respond to these contemporary issues? What role should a university play in such a cultural moment? and what resources might our tradition harbor for thinking about the relationship between facts and truth and wisdom?

This summer faculty seminar will explore the thought of Thomas Aquinas in light of these contemporary concerns. Readings will include the sections of both the *Summa Contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae* covered in Core II. It will be a great opportunity for ongoing faculty development as well as a careful consideration of our role and responsibility as a university community in the present age.



Since 1998, the Center for Catholic Studies has provided the opportunity for faculty to reflect in depth on topics central to the Catholic intellectual tradition. This seminar is open to all administrators and faculty. Faculty participants who write a short response-essay by August 1st, will receive a stipend of \$300. These essays will be collected and made available online at <http://scholarship.shu.edu/catholic-studies/>.

**APPLY BY INDICATING YOUR INTEREST TO FRANCIA PETERSON  
AT FRANCIA.PETERSON@SHU.EDU BY JUNE 1, 2021**

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES AT SETON HALL UNIVERSITY  
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## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR VOCATION AND SERVANT LEADERSHIP

The Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership promotes openness to God's call in both the academic life and common life of Seton Hall University to support the overall mission of forming students as servant leaders for today's world. The Center began in 2003 supported by a generous grant from Lilly Endowment to further their goal of preparing the next generation of Church leadership. The Center for Vocation and Servant Leadership does its work in cooperation with other campus organizations and by sponsoring several different programs including faculty development, scholarships, and retreats for faculty and administrators. The mission of Seton Hall University reflects a faith in God who knows us individually and has a personal plan for our life. The call to our vocation is not a demand but an invitation to join God in something meant for our doing. A generous response to our vocation – like the choice at a fork in the road – can make all the difference. For more information visit: <https://www.shu.edu/vocation-servant-leadership/>

## ABOUT THE CENTER FOR CATHOLIC STUDIES

Founded at Seton Hall University in 1997, **the Center for Catholic Studies** is dedicated to fostering an ongoing dialogue between the Catholic intellectual tradition and all areas of study and contemporary culture. In the spirit of the Catholic Church's legacy of bringing forth things "new and old," the Center's scholarly research, publications, and programming serve to generate new initiatives and facilitate conversation and collaboration among faculty, administrators, students, and the general public. The primary function of the Center for Catholic Studies (CCS) is to foster the Catholic mission of Seton Hall in creative ways. It endeavors to be an incubator for innovative initiatives in promoting Catholic identity across the university. It fulfills this role for diverse demographics within the university in five principal areas: Faculty Development, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, Intellectual Life, Student Engagement, and Ongoing Innovation.

The Center developed the undergraduate program in Catholic Studies Program which offers a major, minor and certificate ([www.shu.edu/go/dcs](http://www.shu.edu/go/dcs)) and continues to support the Program's students with scholarship aid as well as ongoing co-curricular activities. Focusing on the central role of the faculty, the Center also sponsors regular Faculty Development programs, including lectures, seminars and retreats. In addition, the Center administers two national faculty programs: Collegium: A Colloquy on Faith and Intellectual Life, and The Lilly Fellows Program. The Center maintains a global focus in international scholarship and is the home of the G.K. Chesterton Institute for Faith & Culture, as well as the Bernard J. Lonergan Institute. The Institutes offer opportunities for study and research, as well as ongoing programs related to faith and culture. In addition, the Micah Institute for Business and Economics concentrates on communicating Catholic Social Teaching and ethics to business education at Seton Hall and the wider business community. The Center also publishes the prestigious Chesterton Review and The Lonergan Review. For more information, visit [www.shu.edu/go/ccs](http://www.shu.edu/go/ccs)

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Dr. Gregory P. Floyd

*Director, Center for Catholic Studies*

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**2021 FACULTY SUMMER SEMINAR**

**FROM FACTS TO TRUTH WITH THOMAS AQUINAS**

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2021

## From Aquinas to Lonergan and Finnis: The Study and Teaching of Natural Law

Michael Ambrosio

### Introduction

The seminar from “From Facts to Truth to Wisdom” provided a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas, the complementarity of faith and reason and the continuing vitality of the concept of natural law. Reflecting on Professor Jeremy Wilkins’s interesting and informative lectures, I thought about the impact of my first exposure to Aquinas and natural law philosophy in Father David Grainfield’s Jurisprudence class at Catholic University Law School. That exposure to Aquinas’s conception of natural law was the impetus to my deep and abiding interest in and commitment to the study and teaching of natural law.

The seminar was timely. The assault on truth and the irrationality reflected in our political discourse poses a serious threat to social progress. There is an urgent need to renew the public consensus regarding respect for facts, the concern for truth and the need for practical wisdom in the search for appropriate responses to social problems.

The promotion of lies by politicians and lawyers in pursuit of power, complacency in the face of the climate crisis and wealth and income inequality, the irrational response of so many to the current pandemic, the notion of alternative facts, the growing embrace of conspiracy theories and mistrust of the government and the media, and the efforts to undermine the democratic process are some of the signs of what could be the beginnings of a decline of American society and culture. The tradition of natural law, sometimes referred to as the tradition of reason, provides a set of values and principles to morally critique the conduct of those in government and in the private sector and direction for those seeking responsible solutions to social problems.

### The Revival of Interest in Natural Law

The story of the development of natural law philosophy begins with the Greek Stoics and the classical philosophers, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. For the Stoics natural law simply meant the workings of the cosmos. The natural law, which dictated actions that accorded with virtue, was how a rational being lived in accordance with the rational order of the universe. The epistemic starting point and premise of the classical philosophers is that through the ability to think or reason, human beings have the capacity to acquire knowledge of good and evil, and right and wrong.

Socrates’s critical reflection on the self and the world led him to ask the fundamental questions of ethics—What is the good life? How ought we live? What should I do? Plato, in his *Laws*, makes the connection between reason and law by defining law as “reasoned thought (*logismo*) embedded in the decrees of the state.” In the *Republic*, he considers the possibility of



a completely rational state. Aristotle, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, asserts that human beings are by nature rational and social beings with the capacity for morals and it is that capacity for morals that makes law necessary. For Aristotle, the purpose of law is not only to make men obedient but to teach virtue so as to make men wise. He saw justice as the chief virtue and recognized the existence of a natural or absolute justice, superior to conventional or legal justice. The idea of a higher law as a source of morality is reflected in the Roman Cicero's assertion centuries later that "law is the highest reason, implanted in nature, which commands what is right and ought to be done and forbids the opposite." <sup>1</sup>

In the medieval era Aquinas reconciled Aristotle's ideas with Christian theology. His *Summa Theologica* and other writings profoundly influenced later philosophy and philosophers. For Aquinas, natural law is a participation in God's eternal law and "is promulgated by the very fact that God instilled it into man's mind so as to be known to him naturally." <sup>2</sup> Widely different theories of natural law often obscure the central thread that there are universal objective values and moral norms that should guide individual and collective actions. The concept of natural law has had a remarkable resilience since the ancient Greeks first coined the term more than two thousand five hundred years ago. It has had periods of decline and revival.

The latest revival of interest in natural law began in the wake of the horrors of Nazi Germany. In a series of talks in 1951 and 1952, the Jesuit theologian and foremost American proponent of natural law, John Courtney Murray, observed that the "learned and the wise" in American society rejected the tradition of natural law in favor of technological secularism, practical materialism, and philosophical pluralism. He argued that the University had failed miserably to help society face the momentous moral choices produced by the age of "modernity." He sought to stimulate debate about the social functions of the university and the social consequences of its decision to ignore religious viewpoints and to adopt the dogma of philosophical pluralism.

Murray believed that the legal community bears a special responsibility to elaborate and periodically renew the public philosophy or moral consensus. He envisioned a public philosophy based on the tenets of the ancient principles of truth and justice, of freedom and order, of human rights and human responsibility. He looked to the legal community to renew the public consensus by injecting the principles of natural law not only in the legal system narrowly defined, but into the broad public philosophy. In his discussions of the role of moral discernment *vis-à-vis* the natural law, Murray stressed the complexity of formulating ethical rules and the need to ground moral discernment in human experience. At the same time, he argued, the ability of people to come to some clear understanding of their ethical obligations must not be underestimated.

Murray thought that the greatest power in the community is not in the role of the government but in the conscience of the community, which had the obligation to criticize both the business system and the actions of government. He thought the conscience of the community, founded on principles derived from experience and the intelligent reflection on that experience, was the binding force as well as the coercive force in society. Murray emphasized that having come from ancient Greek philosophers long before the founding of the Church, natural law is not a Catholic or religious doctrine. To underscore its universal appeal, he referred

to it as “the tradition of reason” and “as the acquisition of the human mind and spirit reflecting on the meaning of human life as it has historically developed.”<sup>3</sup> In 1958, Harvard Law Professor Lon Fuller, had a now famous debate in the pages of the *Harvard Law Review* with the leading Legal Positivist of the twentieth century, H.L.A. Hart over the relationship of law and morals.<sup>4</sup> Hart presented the narrow Legal Positivist conception of law as an aggregate of rules for the violation of which a sanction is imposed. He argued that the realm of law is an autonomous discipline concerned with the expressions of legislative will and enactments of power entirely separate and distinct from the realm of morals. Fuller’s response emphasized that law and morals are interconnected and that what the law ought to be will inevitably affect what the law is. Although Fuller invoked the tradition of natural law in arguing that the purpose of law is to secure justice and the common good, he presented a limited procedural conception of natural law that is essentially descriptive rather than normative and, as such, bears little resemblance to other robust accounts of natural law. However, Fuller, nevertheless, generated a lot of interest in natural law.

The writings of John Rawls, Bernard Lonergan, and John Finnis substantially contributed to the current interest in natural law. Bernard Lonergan’s *Insight* was published in 1957. His *Method in Theology* was published in 1972. In 1976, John Rawls published his very influential *A Theory of Justice: Justice as Fairness*. John Finnis’s *Natural Law and Natural Rights (NLNR)* was published in 1980. I remember pouring over Lonergan’s complex thought and having an occasional epiphany of understanding. I had little difficulty understanding Rawls or Finnis’s *NLNR*. Of course, like Aquinas, as a theologian Lonergan dealt with the meaning of everything. Rawls and Finnis had a narrower focus on legal, political, and moral theory. Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice* is a political theory. In *NLNR* Finnis blurs the lines between legal, political, and ethical theory. He traces the history of natural law theorizing and different images of and objections to natural law before he sets forth a restatement of the classical Aristotelian-Thomistic conception of natural law.

The current interest in natural law, in large part, is a result of the wide influence of John Rawls’s *A Theory of Justice: Justice as Fairness*. Rawls’s natural law theory is based on the heuristic device of a hypothetical social contract and principles of justice that free and rational individuals in the “Original Position” would choose under a veil of ignorance of their position in the state to be formed. It is considered Kantian because his principles of justice are essentially categorical imperatives. It has been called the last gasp of political liberalism because of its emphasis on individual freedom and equality. Although Rawls’s principles of justice emphasize individual freedom as the paramount value, his focus is on distributive justice by political institutions. His principles of justice are easily stated but difficult to apply. He calls them the liberty principle, the principle of equality of fair opportunity and the difference principle. These are as follows:

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty of all.

Offices and positions are open to all under conditions of equality of fair opportunity—persons with similar abilities and skills are to have equal access to offices and positions.

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both to the greatest benefit to the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principles and attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equal opportunity.<sup>5</sup>

Rawls puts the right, i.e., principles of justice, prior to the good and posits a “thin theory of the good” consisting of four primary or instrumental goods including self-respect, income and wealth, liberty, and opportunity. This notion of the good is in stark contrast to definitions of the good by Lonergan and Finnis who, like Aquinas, both hold that the good is prior to the right. Finnis is critical of Rawls’s thin theory of the good as arbitrary. Although Rawls recognized the existence of universal values, he maintained that the state in seeking a moral consensus must remain neutral about the good out of respect for individual autonomy. Finnis is critical of Rawls for placing the right prior to the good and for failing to recognize that the state’s obligation of distributive justice is only secondary to the primary obligation of distributive justice of every individual. Finnis, however, agrees with Rawls’ conclusion that consequentialism, act and rule utilitarianism, is senseless and irrational.

### **Open-Ended Thomism and Claims of Self-Evident Values and Practical Principles**

For Aquinas, Lonergan and Finnis, self-reflection on experience is a path to objective truth. Aristotle and Aquinas recognized the importance of self-evidence as a starting point for thought. Aquinas asserts that some things are self-evident in themselves, i.e., *per se nota*, and other things are self-evident only to the wise. In his *Treatise on Law*, he noted that both speculative reason and practical reason are based on self-evident principles, albeit different self-evident principles. The speculative reason begins with the self-evident principle of identity or non-contradiction—something cannot be what it is not. Aquinas identified other self-evident principles on which speculative reason is based, such as, “Every whole is greater than its part” and, “Things equal to one and the same are equal to one another.” Regarding practical reason, Aquinas asserted that the self-evident first principle from which all other principles are derived is “the good is to be done and promoted and its contrary, evil, is to be avoided.”

Aquinas affirms Aristotle’s distinction between speculative and practical reason. Speculative reason, akin to the scientific method, is the means to discover apodictic or necessary truth. The practical reason is the means to discover moral truth, how to act, how to live. In other words, speculative reason enables us to know only what is (facts) but practical reason enables us to know the good (values) and what choices to make, how to live, what ought and ought not be done (wisdom). Understanding this distinction between speculative and practical reason, between instrumental and value rationality, is fundamental to an understanding of natural law.

Lonergan emphasized the central importance of appropriating one’s self-consciousness, to understand one’s understanding, to affirm one’s capacity as a knower. He recognized that the process of self-appropriation is slow and immensely difficult. He wrote *Insight* to facilitate that

process. In a memorable phrase, he posited that “genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.” For Lonergan authenticity is self-transcendence, which comes from the pure desire to know. Lonergan’s open-ended Thomism is reflected in his explanation of the relationship between intellectual, moral, and religious conversion, which Father Richard Liddy discusses in his book, entitled *Transforming Light: Intellectual Conversion in the Early Lonergan*. Father Liddy writes:

Lonergan explains the relation between intellectual, moral and religious conversions in terms of Karl Rahner’s notion of ‘sublation’ in the sense that ‘what sublates goes beyond what is sublated, introduces something new and distinct, puts everything on a different basis, yet so far from interfering with the sublated or destroying it, on the contrary needs it, includes it, preserves all of its proper features and properties and carries them forward to a fuller realization.’ In other words, moral conversion goes beyond intellectual conversion by going beyond the value of truth to values generally. It sets the human subject on a new, existential level of consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

John Finnis, like Lonergan, is an open-ended Thomist., He sublated Aquinas’s notions of the good by introducing something new and distinct regarding fundamental values in his conception of natural law. Finnis posits that there are seven self-evident universal or fundamental goods—life, knowledge, friendship, play, aesthetic experience, religion, and practical reason-- that are grasped by rational reflection on experience. He cites Aquinas for the proposition that the pursuit of inclinations leads to values. For example, the inclination to be curious leads to knowledge. Aquinas identified five fundamental values and said that there are others. Finnis includes in his theory of the good, four of Aquinas’s fundamental values—life, knowledge, friendship, and religion—to which he adds play, aesthetic experience, and practical reason. Finnis also posits nine self-evident principles of practical reason that he refers to as the methodological requirements of practical reasonableness and the deep structure of moral thought.

Finnis writes extensively about self-evidence. He devotes an entire Chapter in *NLNR* to an explanation of the self-evident good of knowledge. He identifies thirteen non-demonstrable principles of theoretical rationality and states there are others. He writes:

Nowadays, any claim that something is self-evident is commonly misunderstood by philosophers. They think that any such claim either asserts or presupposes that the criterion of the truth of the allegedly self-evident principle, proposition, or fact is one’s feeling of certitude about it. This is indeed a misunderstanding. Self-evident principles.... are not validated by feelings. On the contrary, they are themselves the criteria whereby we discriminate between feelings, and discount some of our feelings (including feelings of certitude), however intense, as irrational or unwarranted, misleading or delusive.<sup>7</sup>

Finnis attaches little importance to the role of feelings in the pursuit of the basic goods. He states that “a participation in basic goods which is emotionally dry, subjectively unsatisfying, nevertheless, is good and meaningful as far as it goes.” Lonergan, however, attaches far more importance to feelings than Finnis. He considers feelings an intentional response to values and an integral aspect of the dynamic structure of human knowing.

Lonergan and Finnis present conceptions of natural law that, despite their differences, are essentially compatible. They both affirm the capacity to know of the existence of God through reason. They both rely on self-evidence. They both recognize the intelligibility of universal goods or human values, that the good is prior to the right, the complimentary of will and reason, the distinction between speculative reason and practical reason, and the importance of the common good. Lonergan accepts Aquinas’s three-fold order of the good—the good of order, particular goods, and final values. Finnis rejects Aquinas’s hierarchical three-fold order of the good and contends that all the self-evident universal goods are valuable for their own sake, non-commensurable, equally important, and equally fundamental. Although they identify different fundamental goods or values and disagree about whether there is a hierarchy of the goods, both Lonergan and Finnis agree with Aquinas on the more fundamental point—the existence of intelligible self-evident fundamental goods or values that are the basis for human flourishing and the moral obligation to be reasonable and responsible in one’s actions.

### **Studying and Teaching About Natural Law and Lonergan and Finnis**

I joined the Seton Hall Law School faculty in 1970, after three years as a poverty lawyer. Early on and throughout more than fifty years as a law professor, I sought to introduce legal theory and the concept of natural law in courses I taught. In courses on Introduction to Law, Equity, Contracts and Professional Ethics, which I taught for many years, I introduced legal theory and the concept of natural law, with varying degrees of success. I was reluctant to teach Jurisprudence until I read widely enough about legal, moral, and political theory. In 1978, I began reading Bernard Lonergan’s *Insight*. After struggling to understand Lonergan’s complex thought, I turned to his *Method in Theology*, which was more accessible. I came away from reading Lonergan with a better understanding of myself. I concluded that I experienced the religious, intellectual, and moral conversions that Lonergan writes about. I found Lonergan’s ideas very challenging and convincing, particularly his Generalized Empirical Method (GEM) which consists of what Lonergan calls four levels of conscious intentionality. Lonergan scholar Mark Miller writes:

The four levels are empirical, intelligence, rational and responsible. Each level is designated by one main operation: experience, understanding, judgement and decision, respectively. So experience is the operation for the empirical level. This first level is sometimes called ‘experience.’ Understanding is the operation for the intelligence level, and this second level is sometimes called ‘understanding.’ Judgment is the operation for the rational level, and this third level is sometimes

referred to as “Judgment.” Decision is the operation for the level of responsibility, also called “decision” .... Lonergan uses the term ‘levels’ because a person’s movement from one operation to another raises or expands that person’s consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

Although I never arrived at a point when I thought I had sufficient knowledge and understanding to undertake the task of teaching his complex thought, my encounter with Lonergan expanded my self-consciousness and my horizons.

Finnis describes the first non-moral principles of natural law based on the pursuit of the basic goods as laying down the outlines of “everything anyone could reasonably want to do, to have or to be” and he refers to the nine requirements of practical reasonableness “as modes of responsibility” and “the deep structure of moral thought.” Like Rawls principles of justice, Finnis’s principles of practical reasonableness are easily stated but difficult to instantiate or apply to concrete situations. The following are the nine principles of practical reasonableness that Finnis considers intermediate principles of natural law:

1. Act according to a rational life plan.
2. No arbitrary preference amongst values
3. No arbitrary preference amongst persons
4. Commitment—to avoid apathy
5. Detachment—to avoid fanaticism
6. The limited relevance of consequences; efficiency within reason
7. Respect for every basic value in every act
8. Foster and favor justice and the common good of communities one is a part of
9. Follow one’s conscience<sup>9</sup>

Finnis asserts that the above self-evident principles of practical reasonableness are moral principles. They are interrelated and aspects of each other. In his *Treatise on Law*, Aquinas identified natural law as one of four kinds of law, along with eternal law, divine law and human law, that all fit within his definition of law as “an ordinance of reason, for the common good, made by him who has care of the community, and promulgated,” Finnis, however, holds that natural law is only law in a metaphorical sense, in the same way that physical, chemical, biological and psychological laws are metaphorically laws. For Finnis natural law is a set of moral standards consisting of the principles of practical reason for ordering human life and human community. He equates natural law with natural rights, intrinsic morality, natural reason, or right reason. He expands the vocabulary of natural law by reconciling natural law with the tradition of natural rights. He stresses that the natural law tradition is concerned with more than merely affirming the historical fact that morality affects law but instead is primarily concerned with determining what the principles of practical reason really are, to afford a rational basis for the activities of legislators, judges, and citizens.

In 1983, I came across Oxford Professor John Finnis’s *NLNR* at Blackstone’s bookstore while at a conference at Oxford University. A year later I met Finnis at a conference on teaching

Jurisprudence. I invited him to speak at the University Convocation and at the Law School. I gave a copy of *NLNR* and excerpts from it to every member of the law school faculty, hoping they might find it as compelling as I did. Finnis's talk about the Morality of Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament, unfortunately, did not generate much interest. Moreover, my efforts to promote interest among the law faculty in natural law and Finnis's *NLNR* had little impact. I had more success with students in my Jurisprudence classes that I began teaching in 1985 and have continued to teach up to now. I was so enamored of Finnis's *NLNR* that I was disappointed that only a few of my colleagues saw fit to read it. Skeptics find it difficult to accept Finnis's assertion that the seven basic goods that make up his exhaustive theory of the good, and his nine requirements of practical reasonableness are self-evident. However, I find Finnis's *NLNR* very convincing.

In the 1990s I began team-teaching a Law and Morality Seminar with Theology Professor William Toth: we taught the seminar for several years with students from the Law School, the Seminary, and the Business School. With the establishment of the Toth-Lonergan Chair in 2015, I resumed team-teaching my Law and Morality course. I taught with Professor Mark Miller, the first chairholder, using Finnis's *NLNR* and Professor Miller's book on Lonergan, entitled, *The Quest for God and the Good Life*. I will be teaching the seminar for a third time with Professor Michael Stebbins, the current chairholder. As Lonergan scholars, Professors Miller and Stebbins present Lonergan's complex thought with precision and clarity.

To foster the Catholic identity of Seton Hall University it is essential that its faculty are committed to promoting respect for facts, the search for intelligible truth and the wisdom imbedded in the Catholic faith and the secular tradition of natural law. I am encouraged by the broad participation of Seton Hall University faculty in the Praxis Program, which focuses upon Lonergan's Generalized Empirical Method (GEM) and the willingness of so many members of the faculty to explore Lonergan's complex thought. It is my fervent hope that more university professors, at Seton Hall and elsewhere, will recognize the value of a sound theory of natural law to render a moral appraisal of individual human actions and every kind of social phenomena. I am confident that those who experience the profound insights of Lonergan and Finnis and internalize Lonergan's General Empirical Method and Finnis's methodological requirements of practical reasonableness will want to introduce them to their students.

## **Conclusion**

A Catholic university and a Catholic Law School should have a prominent place for teaching about the rich heritage of the Catholic intellectual tradition. The study of religion and natural law, properly perceived as a set of objective moral standards discoverable through reason, is an anti-dote to the skepticism, materialism, philosophical pluralism, and moral relativism in the post-modern world. Lonergan and Finnis provide broad framework principles that enable students to understand what it means to be a person of moral discernment, who acts in reliance on and in accord with sound moral principles rather than from impulse, ignorance, and bias of one form or another.

It seems obvious to me that the tradition of natural law philosophy that Aquinas and later Thomists advanced, which the Catholic Church has embraced for centuries, should inform the teaching and scholarship at Seton Hall and other Catholic universities. It also seems obvious to me that a Catholic law school should (a) affirm the value of reason and religion as sources of wisdom; (b) have a curriculum that addresses the moral dimension of law and lawyering; (c) explore the Catholic view of law and justice; and (d) have a critical mass of faculty with a deep understanding of the relationship between law and morality and the tradition of natural law reflected in the writings of the most important philosophers including the classical Greek philosophers, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and, among others, St. Thomas Aquinas, Lon Fuller, John Courtney Murray, John Rawls, Bernard Lonergan and John Finnis.

The Seminar “From Facts to Truth to Wisdom” is exactly the kind of program that promotes the development of faculty capable of achieving the lofty educational goals befitting a Catholic university and a Catholic law school. At the same time, this kind of seminar also affirms what Seton Hall aspires to be—a place for the mind, the heart, and the spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Cicero, *DeLegibus*, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1928), I, vi. 18-19

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Questions 90-97, art. IV, obj. iii, reprinted in Thomas Aquinas, “Treatise on Law,” in *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A.C. Pegis, Vol. II; (New York: Random House and London: Burns and Oates, 1945), 10-11

<sup>3</sup> From, John Courtney Murray, *Natural Law and the Public Consensus* quoted in Robert W. McElroy, *The Search for an American Theology: The Contribution of John Courtney Murray*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989) , 55

<sup>4</sup> H.L.A. Hart, “Positivism and the Separation of Law and Morals,” in *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 71, (1958), 593; Lon L. Fuller, *Positivism and Fidelity to Law—A Reply to Professor Hart*, *Harv. L.R.*, vol. 71, (1958) 630

<sup>5</sup> For a concise description and criticism of Rawls’ theory of justice see Ronald I. Cohen, *Justice*, (NY: Springer, 1986), 26-34

<sup>6</sup>Richard M. Liddy, *Transforming Light, Intellectual Conversion in the Early Lonergan*, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1963), 199

<sup>7</sup> John M. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011), 69

<sup>8</sup> Mark T. Miller, *The Quest for God and the Good Life: Lonergan’s Theological Anthropology*, (DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2013) 46-47

<sup>9</sup> Finnis, *Natural Law*, Ch. 5, 100-127 passim



## **Understanding Fact, Truth and Wisdom during COVID-19 Pandemic through Lonergan and Aquinas Teachings**

**Xue-Ming Bao**

The concern about fact, truth and wisdom during the COVID-19 pandemic is evidenced by the sheer number of publications on the subject during 2020 and 2021. A search in the Discovery Platform of the University Libraries found 4000 articles with “fact” and “COVID-19” in the titles, 1400 articles with “truth” and “COVID-19” in the titles, and 270 articles with “wisdom” and “COVID-19” in the titles.<sup>1</sup> This essay attempts to analyze my consciousness of understanding about the COVID-19 pandemic through Bernard Lonergan and Thomas Aquinas teachings of “fact, truth, and wisdom.” The thesis is threefold: (1) The fact that COVID-19 pandemic has happened is real, (2) the truth for avoiding COVID-19, is to wear mask, keep social distance, frequent hand washing, and getting fully vaccinated, and (3) the wisdom is to follow the CDC guidelines.

### **The Fact of COVID-19 Pandemic**

The Fact that COVID-19 Pandemic has happened is real. Lonergan’s many teachings about fact help me to better understand this fact. He states

‘...fact is concrete as is sense or consciousness....fact is intelligible...’  
‘Fact, then, combines the concreteness of experience, the determinateness of accurate intelligence, and the absoluteness of rational judgment. It is the natural objective of human cognitional process.’<sup>2</sup>

It was on March 11, 2020, that the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) a pandemic, “which means an epidemic of an infectious disease that has spread across multiple continents or worldwide.”<sup>3</sup> I had no idea of the seriousness of the pandemic, and thought it was just something that happened far away—in China. I went on with my life as usual, without wearing my mask and eating at restaurants until, at the end of March 2020, I tested positive for COVID-19. Fortunately, I was cured by self-quarantining at home for three weeks. During the rest of 2020, we faced a barrage of horrific statistics of deaths and hospitalizations from major news media. It was through the combination of the concreteness of my personal experience as a COVID-19 patient, and the accurate intelligence like daily statistical reports on the COVID-19 related deaths and hospitalizations that I was able to make rational judgement that the fact that COVID-19 pandemic had happened was real.

The following is a selected scientific description about the fact of COVID-19 from a peer-reviewed journal article, and it is clearly intelligible to me:

The city of Wuhan in China, faced an outbreak of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) since December 2019, with extreme acute respiratory coronavirus

syndrome 2 (SARS-CoV-2) being the causative agent...the risk factors for mortality and a clear course of the disease clinically, including viral shedding, have not been identified.... The name "coronavirus" was developed in 1968, which stemmed from the morphology similar to "corona" or crown-like.... In dealing with COVID-19 challenge, most countries are practicing a mix of inclusion and stopping crowds hoping to delay an increased number of affected individuals and minimizing the need for hospital facilities, as well as securing those at higher risk from being infected, especially old age population and people with long-standing illness.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Truth of Avoiding COVID-19**

Loneragan states: "...truth is to be learned."<sup>5</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)<sup>6</sup> has issued many guidelines to help American people cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. The major ones are to wear mask, keep social distance, and wash hands frequently. These guidelines correspond to Lonergan's teaching: "The proximate criterion of truth is reflective grasp of the virtually unconditioned."<sup>7</sup> Lonergan states: "To appropriate a truth is to make it one's own. The essential appropriation of truth is cognitional."<sup>8</sup> I have learned the truth of avoiding COVID-19 through CDC guidelines. It would take my contemplation, affectivity, and the good to make the truth become a way of my life. Torrell and Blankenhorn wrote: "Thomas speaks more precisely: '...contemplation is nothing else than truth; but when contemplation becomes a way of life it also takes account of affectivity and the good.'"<sup>9</sup> However, in their research on "truth distortion" on COVID 19, Chaxel and Laporte found that most people tend to maintain their early preference and increasingly distort their evaluation of truth to make it fit the narrative of the source. They conclude: "...uncertainty in information is a major source of societal polarization on a major public health issue, such as COVID-19, with possible consequences on an individual's willingness to comply with preventive measures."<sup>10</sup>

### **Wisdom about COVID-19**

McGinn wrote: "According to Thomas, wisdom is to be numbered among the 'intellectual virtues,' or operative habits of the mind," and "...wisdom is the judge of all the other intellectual virtues...."<sup>11</sup> I recall that on November 15, 2019, at his investiture as President of Seton Hall University, Dr. Joseph Nyre, mentioned his mentor when he said: "Wisdom is knowing what to do, and virtue is doing it." Therefore, the CDC guidelines provide us—laymen—with the wisdom of what to do about COVID-19; and I just need to follow these guidelines by wearing mask, keeping social distance, washing hands frequently, and getting myself fully vaccinated. Torrell and Blankenhorn wrote: "...in discussing the gift of wisdom he [Thomas] recognizes immediately that if one can only judge well that which one knows, it is no less true that this capacity for judgment is actualized in a different way in each person....in this case, wisdom is an intellectual virtue."<sup>12</sup> Thomas's teaching perfectly validates President Nyre's remark.

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<sup>1</sup> Here is the url to the Discovery Platform of Seton Hall University Libraries

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&setup=1&authtype=sso&custid=s8475574&groupid=main&profile=eds>

<sup>2</sup> Lonergan, Bernard. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5<sup>th</sup>, vol. 3, University of Toronto Press, 1957, p. 331

<sup>3</sup> Neuwirth, Rostam J. "The Global Regulation of 'Fake News' in the Time of Oxymora: Facts and Fictions about the COVID-19 Pandemic as Coincidences or Predictive Programming?" *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law = Revue Internationale de Semiotique Juridique*, Springer Netherlands, Apr. 2021, pp. 1–27

<sup>4</sup> Mohammed Abdalqader, et al. "The Facts About Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19): The Current Scenario and Important Lessons." *Global Journal of Public Health Medicine*, Research and publication, June 2020, p. 168

<sup>5</sup> Lonergan, Bernard. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5<sup>th</sup>, vol. 3, University of Toronto Press, 1957, p. 296

<sup>6</sup> CDC url <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> Lonergan, Bernard. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5<sup>th</sup>, vol. 3, University of Toronto Press, 1957, p. 549

<sup>8</sup> Lonergan, Bernard. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan: Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. Edited by Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran, 5<sup>th</sup>, vol. 3, University of Toronto Press, 1957, p. 558

<sup>9</sup> Torrell, Jean-Pierre, and Bernhard Blankenhorn. *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*. Catholic University of America Press, 2011, p. 12

<sup>10</sup> Chaxel, Anne-Sophie, and Sandra Laporte. "Truth Distortion: A Process to Explain Polarization over Unsubstantiated Claims Related to COVID-19." *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2021, pp. 196-203

<sup>11</sup> McGinn, Bernard. "INTRODUCTION." Thomas Aquinas's "*Summa Theologiae*," Princeton University Press, 2014, p. 3

<sup>12</sup> Torrell, Jean-Pierre, and Bernhard Blankenhorn. *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*. Catholic University of America Press, 2011, p. 16

## From Facts to Truth to Wisdom with St. Thomas Aquinas

**Andrea Bartoli**

As mentioned during the last session of this rich and very engaging Faculty Summer Seminar, I developed over the years a devotion to the only person who we know is in Paradise today with Jesus. Commonly referred to as the “good thief,” this friend in Jesus’s last moments only comes to us through the Gospel of Luke. In chapter 24: 39-43, we read:

39 One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, ‘Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!’ 40 But the other rebuked him, saying, ‘Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.’ 42 Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ 43 He replied, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.’<sup>1</sup>

To me, the very possibility that someone who is suffering, dying, and yet remains aware enough to accept punishment for deeds actually performed and move so quickly, eloquently, and effectively from facts to truth to wisdom is of great consolation. The law of the Spirit that St. Thomas writes so convincingly is beautifully exemplified by this encounter that has the potential to move many in the rediscovery (or the first discovery) of Jesus’ centrality.

During the first session Professor Wilkins remarked how the times of Augustine and Thomas were radically different: the former was a time of dissolution when the old order of the Roman Empire and classical culture was dissolved (at least in the West) with Rome moving from being a city of more than a million people during the pontificate of Leo (440-461) to a few thousands during the pontificate of Gregory (590-604). On the contrary, the time of St. Thomas was marked by a coming together, a revival of urban life, the establishment of universities and the rediscovery of ancient wisdom that led to progress in many areas. This prompted some of us to ponder our current time and our shifting from dissolution to reordering.

For me, one of the exercises that the seminar encouraged is to take seriously what John Paul II questioned in one of his last messages for the celebration of World Day of Peace (2003) when he wrote: “Is this not the time for all to work together for a new constitutional organization of the human family, truly capable of ensuring peace and harmony between peoples, as well as their integral development?”<sup>2</sup> Who is going to determine if this is the time? Who is going to answer? How could the process to identify a reasonable answer that is truly open to the good of all be produced?

I shared this question with colleagues at Boston College at the Lonergan Workshop more than ten years ago. The readings, the enlightening lectures of Prof. Wilkins, and the conversations with colleagues renewed my enthusiasm to explore further the possibility of truly answering John Paul II’s question. Indeed, with Thomas and all the saints, we are called to open ourselves to the One who “makes all things new.” (Revelation 21:5)

This commitment will proceed in light of “Fratelli Tutti,” the encyclical letter of the Holy Father Francis on fraternity and social friendship promulgated on October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. Could it be that this is both the proper time and our responsibility to articulate the emerging horizon of humanity as a whole, or to use St. Thomas’ expression, as a “perfect community”? Could it be that universities have a role to play in this articulation? Could it be that the Spirit is trying to speak through us as it was able to speak to all through the presence and words of the good thief?

As President of the Sant’Egidio Foundation for Peace and Dialogue, I see the urgency of a gathering—tentatively planned for January 2023—to address John Paul II’s question in light of “Fratelli Tutti.” It is my hope that further conversations with Professor Wilkins and the participants of the 2021 Faculty Summer Seminar called “From Facts to Truth to Wisdom with St. Thomas Aquinas” will illuminate the challenging procedural path of finding ways to address the question in inclusive and respectful ways. Who is going to be invited to the conversation? Why? How?

Charles Taylor, Patrizia Nanz, and Madeleine Beaubien Taylor recently published a book, *Reconstructing Democracy: How Citizens Are Building from the Ground Up*,<sup>3</sup> that presents interesting participatory processes in different contexts. It is my hope that the gathering in January 2023 will be inspired by—if not directly following—the procedural awareness suggested by an approach that values representativeness, randomness, and citizens’ participation and responsibility. In appreciation for the movement from facts to truth to wisdom, I would like to share the prayer that Pope Francis gave us at the end of “Fratelli Tutti” which I find very beautifully consistent with St. Thomas’s teaching and the inviting quality of these days:

O God, Trinity of love,  
from the profound communion of your divine life,  
pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.  
Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus,  
in his family of Nazareth,  
and in the early Christian community.

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,  
discovering Christ in each human being,  
recognizing him crucified  
in the sufferings of the abandoned  
and forgotten of our world,  
and risen in each brother or sister  
who makes a new start.

Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,  
reflected in all the peoples of the earth,  
so that we may discover anew  
that all are important and all are necessary,  
different faces of the one humanity  
that God so loves. Amen.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Holy Bible, NRSV, 1989, p. 2673

<sup>2</sup> His Holiness John Paul II, Message for the Celebration of the XXXVI World Day of Peace, *Pacem in Terris: A Permanent Commitment*, January 1, 2003 (Libreria Editrice Vaticana)

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, C., Patricia Nanz, Madelaine Beaubien, *Reconstructing Democracy*, Harvard University Press, 2020

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Letter Encyclical “Fratelli Tutti” (Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Vatican City 2020)

## A Monk and His Cat

Beth Bloom

As I listened to Dr. Wilkins's lectures on Saint Thomas and his life of study in his contemplation of how to appropriate prayer and wisdom in understanding the existence of God, I wondered about his ability to center himself in his theological perusals. How restless was his mind, how did he find peace, and how did he accomplish the task of providing a logical explanation of God's love through his own capacity for love?

A mantra kept playing in my mind: the text and music from one of a series of art songs, "The Monk and His Cat" (Op. 29, no. 8) from "Hermit Songs," by Samuel Barber.

Pangur, white Pangur, How happy we are  
Alone together, scholar and cat  
Each has his own work to do daily;  
For you it is hunting, for me study.  
Your shining eye watches the wall;  
My feeble eye is fixed on a book.  
You rejoice, when your claws entrap a mouse;  
I rejoice when my mind fathoms a problem.  
Pleased with his own art, neither hinders the other;  
Thus we live ever without tedium and envy.

W. H. Auden composed this interpretation of a circa ninth century anonymous Irish poem "Pangur Ban," about a monk and his cat thought, however, to have been written by Sedulius Scottus,<sup>1</sup> a monk who lived in Reichenau Abbey. The English translation is by [Whitley Stokes](#) and [John Strachan](#) (1903).<sup>2</sup>

In my perception of St. Thomas's intellectual process, I envision that the connection between a cat and this laborious scholar is a metaphor for the relationship between a natural hunter for mice and monk entrusted, albeit by himself, with the arduous task of hunting for a way to rationalize "a system of the ways of appropriating Christian faith in an organized academic setting."<sup>3</sup>

A monk leads a simple life of study and reflection. He and his cat may be "alone together" but clearly not alone, as each seeks solutions to their daily tasks...together...yet apart, not in competition with each other, but with mutual joy in their solutions. Yet their aloneness flourishes as each succeeds. Both astute in their own way, the cat rejoices in entrapping its prey using its cunning and sharp eyes, while the monk may have weakened his eyes during the course of his years of study, but who solves his quandaries also with the gift of his intellect.

Aquinas supports Aristotle's belief that the purpose of life is to live with a capacity for reason, define its purpose, to believe in science for its own sake, and to live in support of those truths. However, for Aquinas a life well-lived is more than that. He contemplates how values such as love, evil, truth, integrity, and wisdom can become principles by which we can understand and live a virtuous life. This comes naturally if one includes love of God in the mix. The Christian god may reveal Himself through contemplation and by listening to Jesus. Aquinas' metaphysics, unlike Aristotle's, is accessed through faith, through the wisdom whose origin is love.

So how does Pangur fit into this? Pangur is the monk's teacher. His manner is a gift from God. He provides companionship and comfort for a scholar whose mind is often restless, searching for understanding of the order of the universe and the part that God plays in our world. Pangur waits until his objective presents itself. He pounces with delight, catches the mouse, and then rejoices that his daily work is done as he retreats to his roost. The monk, once he begins to better understand his relationship with God, also may rejoice.

According to Jean-Pierre Torrell, "Contemplation is an arduous experience that embraces the totality of the person who desires to follow his intention through to the end."<sup>4</sup> More specifically, St. Thomas believes that contemplation exists for two reasons. One is the human desire to question—to know—to study. But for Aquinas, "contemplation is the highest act of a mode of life...and it is such a difficult task that it cannot be constantly sustained."<sup>5</sup> This is humanly achievable, the other reason, however, is a gift from God, which is attainable only through asceticism and prayer rather than science or intelligence."<sup>6</sup> This, according to St. Thomas, translated into two forms of wisdom, one theological, or studied and the other "wisdom of the holy spirit" or infused wisdom.<sup>7</sup> "...A wisdom that is found in God and communicated to humans through revelation. The cultivation of this higher form of wisdom rooted in revealed truth is what the Summa is all about."<sup>8</sup> Pangur, without envy, allows the monk to study and contemplate. Indeed, "When we are in our house, we two alone, we have something to which to apply our acuteness."<sup>9</sup>

Pangur's is a natural wisdom, also bestowed by God. Perhaps not spiritual, but he is the master of his work, "pleased with his own art" and rests in comfort and self-satisfaction. Indeed, the ultimate wisdom is living by moderation and love, but also knowing when to take action. This beautiful friendship between man and beast fosters a love of the divine in humanity and in nature.

"I get wisdom day and night, turning darkness into light."<sup>10</sup>



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<sup>1</sup> The poem is preserved in the *Reichenau Primer* (Stift St. Paul Cod. 86b/1 fol 1v) and now kept in [St. Paul's Abbey in the Lavanttal](#). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pangur\\_B%C3%A1n](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pangur_B%C3%A1n) accessed July 27, 2021

<sup>2</sup> English translation by [Whitley Stokes](#) and [John Strachan](#) (1903):

*I and Pangur Bán, each of us two at his special art:  
his mind at hunting (mice), my own mind is in my special craft.  
I love to rest—better than any fame—at my booklet with diligent science:  
not envious of me is Pangur Bán: he himself loves his childish art.  
When we are—tale without tedium—in our house, we two alone,  
we have—unlimited (is) feat-sport—something to which to apply our acuteness.  
It is customary at times by feat of valour, that a mouse sticks in his net,  
and for me there falls into my net a difficult dictum with hard meaning.  
His eye, this glancing full one, he points against the wall-fence:  
I myself against the keenness of science point my clear eye, though it is very feeble.  
He is joyous with speedy going where a mouse sticks in his sharp-claw:  
I too am joyous, where I understand a difficult dear question.  
Though we are thus always, neither hinders the other:  
each of us two likes his art, amuses himself alone.  
He himself is the master of the work which he does every day:  
while I am at my own work, (which is) to bring difficulty to clearness.*

<sup>3</sup> McGinn, Bernard, “The World That Made Thomas Aquinas,” in: *Thomas Aquinas's Summa theologiae*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2014), p. 11

<sup>4</sup> Torrell, Jean-Pierre, “St. Thomas Aquinas, Theologian and Mystic,” in: *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Catholic University of America Press: Washington D.C., 2011), p. 13

<sup>5</sup> Torrell, Jean-Pierre, “St. Thomas Aquinas, Theologian and Mystic,” in: *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Catholic University of America Press: Washington D.C., 2011), p. 14

<sup>6</sup> Torrell, Jean-Pierre, “St. Thomas Aquinas, Theologian and Mystic,” in: *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Catholic University of America Press: Washington D.C., 2011), p. 14

<sup>7</sup> Torrell, Jean-Pierre, “St. Thomas Aquinas, theologian and Mystic,” in: *Christ and Spirituality in St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Catholic University of America Press: Washington D.C., 2011), p. 15

<sup>8</sup> McGinn, Bernard, “Introduction,” in: *St. Thomas Aquinas's Summa theologiae*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2014), p. 4

<sup>9</sup> See endnote 2

<sup>10</sup> Written by a student of the monastery of Corinthia on a copy of St. Paul's Epistles—eight century—translated by Robin Flower. <https://voetica.com/voetica.php?collection=4&poet=743&poem=5407> accessed July 31, 2021.

## Reflections on *From Facts to Truth to Wisdom with St. Thomas Aquinas* and Counseling Psychology

Peggy Brady-Amoon

What are facts? What is truth? Wisdom? In an age of “alternative facts” and proliferation of misinformation, it is clear these are timely questions. It is also clear that these are not new questions. In fact, as we learned in this illuminating seminar, St. Thomas Aquinas considered and addressed these and other fundamental questions in ways that remain relevant today.

### Context

Dr. Wilkins opened the seminar with a description of context in which St. Thomas Aquinas lived, worked, and wrote. We discussed the similarities and differences between that time and our own—and what we can learn from St. Thomas’s life, including his decision to follow St. Dominic and join the Dominican order.

For some of my own context, I approached this seminar with an appreciation for St. Thomas’s life and work having worked at St. Thomas Aquinas College for twenty-six years, which was founded by the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill, the same congregation that staffed my elementary and high schools. To this day, I am inspired by the commitment of the Sisters to Truth, the dignity of all people, and community. As some further context, I am approaching this reflection from the perspective of my primary discipline, counseling psychology. Counseling psychology is a small yet vibrant specialty area within the larger discipline of psychology that focuses on human strengths and potential, including educational and career development, and seeks to understand and promote normal as well as optimal development across the lifespan.<sup>1</sup>

### Facts

St. Thomas Aquinas argued that facts are discerned empirically using science and reason. As such, he valued study and, therefore, the role of the scholar and university. Consistent with his time and context, he also valued history and tradition as guides to the truth.

Psychology, including counseling psychology, is founded on observed, empirically supported facts as well theory, based both on facts and reason, that are informed, challenged, and developed through the incremental generation of knowledge. Psychology employs a range of methods ranging from observation to experimental designs to generate and validate facts and other knowledge.

One of the reasons I pursued a faculty position is that in most academic contexts (at least from the faculty member’s perspective), studying and learning as well as the role of the scholar, scholarship, and the university are also valued.

## Truth

As I was reminded, Dominicans seek and are guided by Truth with a capital T, often using the Latin term “Veritas” (which is the motto of St. Thomas Aquinas College). This Truth, as articulated by St. Thomas Aquinas recognizes God as the source of Truth.

In counseling psychology, I was taught (and as a teacher, teach myself) there is often a distinction between Truth with a capital T, which in psychology is truth that is based on empirically supported Facts and how each person sees or experiences their own truth/life. In this way, your truth may differ (and likely does) than mine—yet the objective truth or commonly agreed upon truth (something verifiable) may or may not be something we need to (or can) seek in our work with individuals, groups, families, communities, or systems at large.

## Wisdom

St. Thomas Aquinas reframed Aristotle’s philosophy, putting it into greater context by integrating Aristotle’s philosophy and Christianity. For St. Thomas, reason is equivalent to wisdom, the synthesis of values, altruism, and overall being virtuous. Furthermore, according to St. Thomas Aquinas, wisdom starts with learning from the past and by studying the integration of all the sciences, which parallels counseling psychology as an integrated discipline. However, for St. Thomas Aquinas, faith takes this to the next level. He further argued that the highest form of wisdom in this life is love, the only virtue that cannot be overdone and, I will note that God is love (1: John 4:16). This directly connects with respect for all persons, which once again is consistent with the principles of counseling psychology. At the same time, I continue to find St. Thomas Aquinas’ conceptualization of the *common good*, that is what is good for individual persons *and* the whole, not simply the majority or most, particularly intriguing and relevant today<sup>2</sup>. It is an important reminder that institutions exist for the good of the individual person *and* the common good, not the other way around, and institutions do not exist for their own sake.

St. Thomas also argued that it is a mistake to think that scientific thinking/knowledge is the only form of thinking/knowing. Similarly, counseling psychology, like psychology as a whole, recognizes that thinking/knowing is gained through scientific thinking as well as through intuition,<sup>3,4</sup> eureka moments,<sup>5</sup> and other different ways of knowing,<sup>6,7</sup> all of which recognize the possibility of (and for some, the importance of) faith and God.

Furthermore, Aquinas argued our basic capacity to self-transcendence comes from consciously relating oneself to a good larger than oneself, which Dr. Wilkins linked with Lonergan’s work, and I connect, from a counseling perspective, with Abraham Maslow’s foundational work<sup>8</sup> that considers self-actualization in the form of self-transcendence as optimal human capacity.

St. Thomas Aquinas argued that wisdom encompasses an openness to the prompting of God, which although not explicitly endorsed, is compatible with counseling psychology (and other

disciplines). He also posited that contemplation infused with intellectualism promotes wisdom. Contemplation is therefore, the center of gravity for a wise person that promotes positive personal relationships with God and other people. Furthermore, according to St. Thomas, in the University, we (can) live the contemplative life, reading, thinking, and teaching. I intentionally wrote “can” because this is inspirational, particularly today, when, as it often seems, service and “productivity” are valued more than contemplation and slow scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

In counseling psychology—and education in general—we often refer to reflection and reflective practice, which requires setting aside regular reflective quiet time to connect with our inner wisdom to be able to give our clients, students, and others our best selves. Moreover, counseling psychology is focused, like St. Thomas Aquinas, on the balance between the contemplative and active lives. We are called to reflect on ourselves and our relationships with others, to promote the dignity of each person and the common good. May we all strive to do better.

<sup>1</sup>Brady-Amoon, P., & Keefe-Cooperman, K. Psychology, counseling psychology, and professional counseling: Shared roots, challenges, and opportunities. (*European Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 6(1), 2017), pp. 41-62 <https://www.doi.org/10.5964/ejcop.v5i2.105>

<sup>2</sup>Maritain, J. *The person and the common good*. University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN, 1946)

<sup>3</sup>Kahneman, D. *Thinking, fast and slow*. (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, NY, 2011)

<sup>4</sup>Myers, K. B., *Introduction to type* (7th ed.). (CPP/The Meyers Briggs Co., Sunnyvale, CA, 2015)

<sup>5</sup>Kounios, J., & Beeman, M. *The eureka factor: Aha moments, creative insight, and the brain*. Random House, New York, NY, 2015)

<sup>6</sup>Belenky, M. F., Clinchy, B., Goldberger, N. R., & Tarule, J. M. *Women’s ways of knowing: The development of self, voice, and mind*. Basic Books, New York, NY, 1986)

<sup>7</sup>Gilligan, C. *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women’s development*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1982)

<sup>8</sup>Maslow, A. H. A theory of human motivation. (*Psychological Review*, 50(4), 1943), pp. 370–396 <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346>

<sup>9</sup>Mountz, A., Bonds, A., Mansfield, B., Loyd, J., Hyndman, J., Walton-Roberts, M., Basu, R., Whitson, R., Hawkins, R., Hamilton, T., & Curran, W. For slow scholarship: A feminist politics of resistance through collective action in the neoliberal university. (*ACME: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies*, 14(4), 2015), pp. 1235–1259

## Evidence Based Practice in Nursing

Josephine M. DeVito

Nurses make clinical decisions based on Knowledge from many sources, including course work, textbooks, and clinical experiences. Clinical experience is a functional source of knowledge and plays an important role in Evidence-Based Practice (EBP). Evidence is constantly changing and learning about the best practice in nursing persists throughout the professional nursing career. Decisions are sometimes based on custom or tradition. Trial and error involve trying alternatives successively until a solution to a problem is found. Certain 'truths' are accepted as given and this knowledge is so much a part of a common heritage that few seek validation. We have seen in this traditional position, that some nursing interventions are based on custom rather than on sound evidence.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Thomas Aquinas's view of human understanding is not perfect in comparison with the understanding of God, who is the divine perfection. Human beings make mistakes, have different levels of understanding, and are not able to understand what is invisible. They depend on material objects to understand what is infinite.<sup>2</sup> For Thomas Aquinas, all truth has a single source, God who is a true philosophy and theology that will never contradict each other. Therefore, the combination of faith and reason constitutes the highest life and God is existence without any limitation.<sup>3</sup>

In nursing research, a paradigm is a world view, a general perspective on the complexities of the world. Paradigms for human inquiry are often characterized in terms of the ways in which they respond in basic philosophical questions, such as, "What is the nature of reality" and "What is the relationship between the inquiry and those being studied?"<sup>4</sup> Questions about the best approaches to patient outcomes involves teaching students how to critically think. There are numerous research studies on the approach to teaching and the importance of critical thinking for students across various disciplines.<sup>5</sup> Paul and Elder<sup>6</sup> characterized a critical thinker as the following:

1. Raises vital questions and/or problems clearly and precisely
2. Gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively
3. Develop well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them with relevant criteria and standards
4. Being able to think open-minded within alternative systems of thought, recognizing and assessing, as need be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences
5. Communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems

Thomas Aquinas also used questioning to discover the meaning of understanding. He is recognized for his writing the *Summa Theologica* representing his articulation of Christian beliefs and/or practices and the *Summa contra Gentiles*, the knowledge of God. He wants us to understand in the following:

1. A question is posed
2. Objections to the question
3. An authority quoted to the contrary
4. Determination of the question
5. Replies to the question

Nursing uses questions in Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) which is continuously evolving and is defined as the conscientious use of current best evidence to make decisions about patient care.<sup>7</sup> EBP also includes a lifelong problem-solving approach to how healthcare is delivered that integrates the best evidence from high quality studies with a clinician's expertise and patient preferences and values.<sup>8</sup> There are seven steps in Evidence-Based Practice, which begins with cultivating a spirit of Inquiry:

1. Asking the Clinical Question in the PICOT format: P= patient population, I= intervention, C= comparison intervention or group, O= outcome, T=Time (if relevant). For example, P= in depressed adolescents, I= how does treatment with Prozac, C= affect depressive symptoms compared to depressed adolescents not taking Prozac, O= less depressive symptoms when treatment with Prozac, T= 3 months after starting treatment with Prozac.
2. Searching for and collect the most relevant best evidence. After the clinical question is developed in the PICOT format, each keyword is searched. For example, searching the databases (Cochrane, MEDLINE, CINAHL, database of systematic reviews) for systematic reviews and randomized controlled trials given that they are the strongest levels of evidence to guide practice decisions.
3. Critically appraise the evidence. As the abstracts and studies are reviewed this process includes asking the following questions, a) Are the results of the study valid? Did the researcher use the best methods to conduct the study's validity, were the methods used to conduct the study rigorous; b) What are the results? Do the results matter and can I get similar results in practice, which refers to the study's reliability, and c) Will the results help me in caring for patients? Is the treatment feasible to use with patients? The study's applicability.
4. Integrate the best evidence in clinical expertise including patient preferences and values in making a practice decision or change.
5. Evaluate outcomes of practice decisions or change based on evidence.
6. Disseminate the outcomes of the EBP decision or change

The methods of arriving at the truth or the best outcome, by developing questions, is very different for Thomas Aquinas and Evidence-Based Practice in the profession of nursing. Both seek a better understanding and knowledge for outcomes. Nursing research studies continue to improve and implement future research to provide evidence-based practice in the everchanging environment of health care practices. New methods to deliver patient care continue to be implemented, including an Interprofessional approach to health care, which includes nursing, medicine, occupational, physical therapies, rehabilitation, pharmaceutical therapies, and spiritual care. Healthcare for patients and families who required these services should always be provided.

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<sup>1</sup> Polit, D. & Tatano-Beck, C., *Nursing Research: Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice 11<sup>th</sup> ed.*, (Wolters Kluwer: New York, 2021), p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Inglis, J., *Wadsworth Philosophers Series on Aquinas*, (Wadsworth / Thomson Learning: California, 2002), p. 67

<sup>3</sup> Dalcourt, G., *Bright Notes: The Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas*, (Influence Publishers: Tennessee, 2020), p. 11

<sup>4</sup> Polit, D. & Tatano-Beck, C., *Nursing Research: Generating and Assessing Evidence for Nursing Practice 11<sup>th</sup> ed.*, (Wolters Kluwer: New York, 2021), pp. 7-8

<sup>5</sup> Bean, J., *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*, (Jossey-Bass: California, 2011), p. 20

<sup>6</sup> Paul, R. & Elder, L., *Miniature Guide to Critical Thinking Concepts and Tools*, (Foundation of Critical Thinking Press: California, 2009), p. 2

<sup>7</sup> Sackett, D., Straus, S., Richardson, W., Rosenberg, & Haynes, R., *Evidence-Based Medicine: How to Practice and Teach*, (London: Churchill Livingstone, 2000)

<sup>8</sup> Melnyk, B. & Fineout-Overholt, E., *Evidence-Based Practice in Nursing & Healthcare: A Guide to the Best Practice*, (PA: Wolters Kluwer, 2015)

## Can Aquinas Speak to Human Scientists Today?

Anthony L. Haynor

As a human scientist with a strong Catholic identity, I have always found Aquinas to be a central figure, albeit intimidating. The excellent seminar offered by Dr. Jeremy Wilkins prompted me to focus on themes in Aquinas's thought that resonated with me as a human scientist operating now in the twenty-first century. I will argue that Aquinas's metaphysics can inform the work of scholars working in the disciplines of sociology, anthropology, economics, psychology, political science, biology, and neuroscience—particularly those interested in the integration of the human sciences.

The very first point to make is that Aquinas affirms the capacity of human beings to attain knowledge of nature (in its various forms) by dint of their capacity to reason (that is, to theorize about facts and verify those theories through systematic investigation). It is true (as Professor Wilkins emphasized) that for Aquinas human reason cannot achieve a complete understanding of our place in the universe—it needs to be supplemented with the wisdom that is revealed by God through revelation. My focus here is with the status of metaphysics in Aquinas's thought. It was seen by him as a philosophical exercise in which reason plays a major role. As I understand it, metaphysics provides a framework for understanding the various kinds of "Being" and how they interrelate. Such an understanding for Aquinas can be grasped through the exercise of human reason—up to a point. For Aquinas a fully adequate metaphysical understanding needs to be grounded in a natural theology that sees God as ultimate "Being," one that is infinite, and beyond time and space. Metaphysical wisdom for Aquinas is incomplete without a fully developed natural theology that is revealed to us through scripture. Metaphysics can be thought of as a "subalternated" science (mentioned by Professor Wilkins) in that the understanding of finite Being that we can achieve through the exercise of reason is subordinated to the science of theology, which draws on revealed wisdom. Metaphysics however "subalternated" is recognized by Aquinas as having a legitimate and significant intellectual status.

While the relationship of metaphysics to natural theology needs to be clarified, so is also the case when it comes to the relationship between the empirical human sciences, on the one hand, and metaphysics, on the other. It needs to be emphasized at this point that the human sciences as we know them in our age did not exist in Aquinas's time. Thinking about "nature" (in all its forms) fell under the category of "natural philosophy," making it more a philosophical than an "empirical" enterprise. For Aquinas, "natural philosophy" has a "subalternated" status vis-à-vis metaphysics. But over time "natural philosophy" was differentiated into the empirical human sciences. It is clear, however, that Aquinas understood what the empirical realm entailed, given the emphasis he placed on the senses in human life. While it is problematic to speculate on how



Aquinas would regard the empirical human sciences today, I am confident that he would be more than open to them.

If “natural philosophy” (as it attempted to comprehend the human condition) evolved into the empirical human sciences, we are left with three levels of science: (1) empirical human science, (2) metaphysics, and (3) natural theology. (The concept of a “hierarchy” of the sciences was brought up by Professor Wilkins.) This hierarchical division would be consistent with Aquinas’s thinking on the matter.<sup>1</sup> God as revealed in nature is the focus of the metaphysical concern with “Being.” The most compelling effort to map out the landscape of “Being” is Talcott Parsons’ “Paradigm of the Human Condition.”<sup>2</sup> Four subsystems are put forward (and logically deduced) in terms of “adaptation,” “goal-attainment,” “integrative,” and “pattern-maintenance” functions. The “physico-chemical” subsystem occupies the adaptation space within the human condition. Think of this in terms of the necessity for human survival of adapting to climate and securing natural resources (e.g., water) that sustain life. Second, the “organic” subsystem addresses the needs of living things—human and non-human. The goal-attainment function involves our survival and health needs as organisms, which includes co-existence with non-human organisms. Third, there is the human action system, which is divided into four functional subsystems—the behavioral subsystem (involving our capacities for perception and goal-striving), the personality subsystem (involving our need-dispositions), the social subsystem (involving norms and the institutional ordering of society), and the cultural subsystem (involving symbolic ordering). Fourth, there is the “telic system,” which provides a transcendent ground for human action, life processes, and the material world. (Here Parsons ventures into what we would call “natural theology.”) Parson would have cringed if his theoretical system were referred to as “metaphysics.” He defined his project as strictly “scientific.” But it is interesting to note that many of Parsons’ critics did characterize his framework as more “metaphysical” than “scientific.” From a Thomistic perspective, Parsons’ “Paradigm of the Human Condition” represents a significant metaphysical contribution to human studies. It lays out the “substances” (physico-chemical, organic, behavioral, personality, social, cultural, transcendent) that comprise the human condition, each with its own identity, unity, and, yes, “essence.” It also addresses in considerable detail the fact that these substances interact and intersect. Parsons’ metaphysical scheme (if we can call it that) is not restricted to the static—on the contrary it accentuates the developmental aspect of the human condition (e.g., the idea of societal evolution is central). There is dynamism in each of the “substance” domains as they adjust to each other in fulfilling basic functional demands. The pattern that emerges (in Thomistic parlance this is what comes to “exist”) is capable of being explained in term of forces acting on the various “substances.” The particular “forms” that emerge are not inevitable—in a definite sense they are “accidental.” For Parsons (and this way of looking at the human condition is consistent with Aquinas’s metaphysics) substances (the material world, the organic world, the behavioral apparatus, personality, the social, the cultural, and the telic) intersect in complex ways to meet the functional requirements of human beings. In short, Parsons’ “Paradigm of the Human Condition” can be accommodated to the Thomistic dichotomies of “essence/existence,” “substance/accident,” “potentiality/act,” and “matter/form.”

Let me conclude with a brief discussion of human studies as “empirical sciences.” For Parsons (and this would apply to Aquinas as well), it becomes the responsibility of the respective human scientific disciplines to understand the “substance” that it is assigned to investigate employing methodologies appropriate to it. A metaphysical framework like the one developed by Parsons can guide this work in very productive directions. One line of inquiry that Parsons’s paradigm would foster is the integration of the human sciences. That is an empirical project to which Aquinas would give hearty assent. A main takeaway from the faculty seminar facilitated by Professor Wilkins is that empirical human science needs to be subalternated to a metaphysical framework that lays out the key problems revolving around substance and form in human studies. Parsons’ “Paradigm of the Human Condition” is offered as a metaphysical scheme that can fruitfully inform empirical work in the human sciences.

<sup>1</sup> For a monumental effort to move from the empirical to the metaphysical to the religious levels, see Lonergan, B., *Insight* (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1992)

<sup>2</sup> Parsons, T., “Paradigm of the Human Condition,” in *Action Theory and the Human Condition* (Free Press: New York, 1978)

**From Facts to Truth to Wisdom**  
**—To Potentially Business Ethics at Seton Hall University**

**James Marner**

To write a four-page document on the 2021 Faculty Summer Seminar: “From Facts to Truth to Wisdom with Thomas Aquinas” is a daunting task given the fact that I have twenty pages of notes from the three-day seminar alone. There is simply too much to say given the impressive and thought-provoking talk given by Jeremy Wilkins, particularly when one needs to speak to it from one’s own perspective and discipline. However, I will venture to do so with the hope that I can do so briefly without being too long-winded and still be able to get at least some points across that struck me and that I hope to take with me into the classroom, the business school, and my life.

When talking about my perspective, I hope that it starts from my Catholic Faith and my belief in God, the Holy Spirit, and Christ. Yet Faith is a challenge to all of us humans and often needs to be emboldened and often times one needs to be reminded of its place in one’s life and circumstance. In my view, Faith in Christ needs to be primary and above all else in one’s life and one’s discipline needs to be secondary because frankly all else is secondary if one is able to truly consider and reflect on one’s Faith in one’s life, study, work and place. In the end it is not a matter of fitting in one’s Faith’s Wisdom into one’s discipline. Rather, it is more a matter of recognizing how one’s Faith’s Wisdom’s ought to permeate one’s discipline as God intended it too and how at times human reason and human wisdom as well as human sin taints one’s discipline.

The Faculty Summer Seminar provided an excellent reminder and education of such and positions one to be able to re-examine how such Faith truths are being applied to one’s teaching, research and work in one’s discipline and if not, how it can be moving forward. In this paper, I would like to call out some of the Faith Truths that were discussed in the seminar and then discuss how they fit and can be applied in one’s life as well as a business school setting since that is where I teach. Jeremy Wilkins started the seminar of with a quote from Saint Paul that basically grounds a Catholic in what it is they ought to be living based on what they were taught by the life of Christ. It states in Corinthians 1:18-25:<sup>1</sup>

18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

19 For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

20 Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

21 For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

22 For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,

23 but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

24 but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

So, from the get-go we are reminded by Jeremy that there is something much greater than us and our disciplines that we must reflect on it and defer to in our lives and our work. That something is embodied by Christ and His life and teachings. Yet that something and certainly Christ may not be widely accepted or appreciated by others, and we need to be prepared to understand the struggles and hardships that may present themselves as we go forth with such preaching and beliefs in the cross of Christ. Yet given the facts, truths and wisdom of the Faith, Christ, and God we really have no choice but to stick with it regardless of such potential suffering.

Jeremy went on to teach us that this tip of the iceberg thinking of Faith in our lives and discipline is rooted in Saint Thomas Aquinas's dealings with Aristotelian thought that re-emerged and permeated throughout the Middle Ages. It was Aquinas who accepted much of what Aristotle taught and it was Aquinas who placed Aristotle's thought below the thoughts and teachings of God. Much like the above scripture quote described God's thoughts and ways as being far greater than man's thoughts and ways, so too did Aquinas do the same with Aristotle's philosophical and scientific teachings. So, while man's and Aristotle's thinking, research and work can go very far and much can be learned and appreciated by such efforts, it is and will always be limited while God's capabilities remain unlimited. Further while Aristotle was able to make people think about and contemplate Science and to examine one's opinions while contemplating, understanding, and appreciating the truths of pure science for its own sake, Aquinas reintegrated Aristotle's intellectual center of gravity and subordinated the human intellectual life to that of Christian prayer, worship and service since God is the most worthy object of our contemplation. So, listening to Jesus, following his work, praying, and worshipping Christ was the Aquinas version of the contemplative life and considered by Aquinas to be one's true center of gravity. Finally, Aquinas personalized God and pointed out that if one did not do the above and if one sinned, they were not simply destroying themselves in the process, but they were also offending God, your maker, personally. So, wisdom was ultimately tied to a personal relationship with God and that right judgment and good order in one's life starts with this relationship with God above all else and is demonstrated and revealed to us all as a gift primarily via the life, teachings, suffering and resurrection of Christ.

In Aquinas's teachings he focused us on understanding and grasping the right principles that wisdom is to know so that we can know the best order of things and reality. He spoke of wisdom being a habit and a science through which people come to know a body of knowledge. He saw Metaphysics as a kind of wisdom that one can acquire by study on one's own and come to understand and appreciate much like Aristotle taught. However, he also stressed that there is a higher science, namely Theology, that one cannot study but that one can only own by Faith. It is a science that one just cannot work out like one does with knowledge of all the other sciences. So, while one can work and study hard to understand how things fit together and wise people can connect the dots of the sciences and integrate them together, people can only do so to a point because there are things that we only know by believing in God and through such belief, learning this higher kind of wisdom based on what God gives / reveals to us. These are things that we could never discover, and this higher knowledge draws up the lower knowledge and enables us to understand more deeply God and God's intent for us, our communities, and our world. Since this higher Wisdom is based on what God gives to us, this best wisdom's habit, practice, and learning is grounded in docility and the prompting of the Holy Spirit. It is a highly and entirely personal type of work that one does not learn from books. It is sitting in quiet and learning divine things and

coming to understand the wisdom behind the suffering of divine things and of being in and acting in love. Through such practice and habits one can begin to intrinsically grasp how things fit together in more meaningful ways as well as how things flow from love and not just learning as well as how things are ultimately tied back to God and God's intention for oneself, their communities, and the world as well as beyond.

So, Aquinas view was that the world is an open system tied back to God, who is a God that tugs at our hearts and minds. God does so to every person not the select few so God's love for us is truly democratized and is open to anyone who is open to becoming a listener to the Spirit and willing to be docile to and to defer to the Spirit. This being in love with God is the first principle of wisdom according to Aquinas and love is the preeminent gift of the Holy Spirit. From love flows the best and highest wisdom and people can never have enough love and can never have too much love.

Given that Christianity admits that book learning is not the most important thing and what is most important is not learned from books. Rather the entire intellectual enterprise is best used in service to this personalized higher wisdom that is from God and of God's intent that we must contemplate first and often so that we can best understand how to love God and serve God in a very personalized way. However, this higher wisdom is not just speculative and about only prayer and worship. It also has a very practical side that is focused on "feeding the lambs" and helping ourselves, our communities, our world and even our enemy since this highest wisdom is based on loving and loving God, ourselves and everyone who belongs to God, which is everyone who chooses not to reject God, as well as loving the world and universe itself. This is because through Wisdom we have come to learn and understand that we are made to come to know God face to face and to know that we ourselves are loved by God and that we are to love as we have been loved. So, in the end we are living in a very personalized world with a God who loves us and this we must contemplate often, ideally daily. We must also come to understand that we live in a world where we must collaborate with others and with our God. We need to learn from those who came before us, we need to learn from science, and we need to learn from God and God's word as well as God's church. We cannot simply rely on science and ourselves. Our learning must include others and God. We have to depend on one another and on God to explain things that are simply beyond us and our understanding. We cannot know everything ourselves since our evidence runs out and we can't figure out everything ourselves. There are questions that are outside of the sciences and disciplines that we teach. However, God can reveal to us the complete explanation and through the Grace of God and God's Spirit we can be given the understanding that we need to live and serve God as God intended us to. Finally, when we do not do as much and when we sin or are less than intended by God, through God's grace we can still receive the gifts of God's love and forgiveness. However, we need to be willing to receive God's love and forgiveness and grace helps us to do as much.

Ultimately, there is a consequence for what we do in life and how we think about things. We need the wisdom of God first and foremost as well as human wisdom and reason for us to understand life, the world, our role in it and our relationship to God, others, and the world as well as to enable us to avoid sin and trespassing against a God, who loves us first, as well as against others and ourselves. With such forms of Wisdom, we can be better equipped to order and judge things, figure out the right questions to ask, realize when we are asking the wrong questions,

recognize sin that is not natural and not what flows from what it means to be human and to know how to appeal to what is right particularly in God's eyes. Given that, how does one do as much in the world of business and at a business school, particularly a Catholic one that is rooted in such teaching and traditions of Thomas Aquinas as I have attempted to briefly describe? That is what I would like to turn my attention to at this point.

The best place to start in the business world is Business Ethics and to think about how ethics are integrated and taught within the business school. Is it an optional subject that is bolted on to a program that a student can choose to take or not? Or is it a program that is thought of first and built into each of the majors and each of the classes and into the training and development of the faculty on an ongoing basis? In other words, does Business Ethics become a habit / way of life for the administration, faculty, staff and ultimately students? If so, where do the ethics emanate from and how are they thought of on an ongoing basis and how is Business Ethics taught and ultimately exercised and lived by the school, its faculty and ultimately its students?

Based on my understanding of the Catholic Faith and my learnings from the Faculty Seminar, Business Ethics needs to stem from God primarily and as demonstrated by the life of Christ as well as by both the contemplation of and the docility towards the listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit by the administration, faculty, and students in a way as described by Jeremy Wilkens as I have tried to explain above based on his lectures at the Faculty Seminar. Further, it just so happens that I am in the midst of trying to initiate such a way or program at the SHU Stillman Business School with the assistance of our Toth-Lonergan Visiting Professor J. Michael Stebbins, Ph.D. In the past semester, I would sit in department meetings and hear how Business Ethics was being reconsidered in the school and that the school was struggling to get a vision or plan on how it would like to revamp its approach to Business Ethics. Knowing Professor Stebbins work and after having him lecture on Business Ethics in my class, I thought it would be best if the Stillman School would meet with him and ascertain if his approach to Business Ethics is something that they ought to consider. After saying as much a number of times, I was finally able to forge a meeting of key players at Stillman and Professor Stebbins regarding his vision, ideas and approach and they are in the process of being considered at this time by the school.

Professor Stebbins approach is rooted in Christ first and foremost as well as Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas and Lonergan and much of what I stated earlier applies to it. At this time, I would like to share some of his thinking as a way of showing how what was taught in the Faculty Seminar applies to my discipline in the Business School and particularly to Business Ethics. Most of my thoughts come from Professor Stebbins lecture on: "A Different Way of Thinking about Ethics in Business" that he gave on March 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021 to my Money & Banking class at the SHU Stillman School and it dovetails with some things stated later in the Faculty Seminar we have been discussing. The lecture started by asking the question: "What is ethics for?"<sup>2</sup> Personally, I would answer that by saying that ethics is first and foremost for insuring that the Wisdom of God that we have been speaking about in this paper is integrated into and at the forefront of anything we do particularly in the business world since that is our context. If so, it would involve constant contemplation of God, his revelations, his teachings, the life of Christ and the promptings of the Holy Spirit to any and all business situations and opportunities in addition to a study and understanding of past business, newer capabilities, performance, money making opportunities, efficiencies, decision making, etc.

If one is going to do the above, Professor Stebbins explains and spells out how we need to think of ethics differently in the business world. We need to move from an “Ethics of Compliance” (“Ethics for Bad People”)<sup>3</sup> and an “Ethics of Surplus”<sup>4</sup> to an “Ethics of Achievement” (“Ethics for Good People”).<sup>5</sup> Where Ethics of Achievement sublates both Ethics of Surplus and Compliance much like Aquinas’s Theology and God’s Wisdom sublates Aristotle’s Metaphysics (Science) and Human Reason and Wisdom. So while Ethics of Compliance focuses on “obeying laws, rules and relations”<sup>6</sup> out of “fear of punishment or desire for a reward”<sup>7</sup> and Ethics of Surplus focuses on “giving away a few of your extra resources when you can afford to”<sup>8</sup> out of a desire to show “occasional and limited generosity and a desire not to be greedy,”<sup>9</sup> Ethics of Achievement focuses on “striving to be a source of value in all situations and relationships out of a “deep-seated desire for the good of all.”<sup>10</sup> So instead of having a “primary negative”<sup>11</sup> tone focused on “follow the rules –or else!”<sup>12</sup> that Compliance has or a tone of “from time to time, give to those who have less”<sup>13</sup> that Surplus has, a person in a business setting would have a tone of “mostly positive—“Have courage, be creative, find a better way.”<sup>14</sup> In order to do the latter, one certainly would need to incorporate the Wisdom of God and the life of Christ and the understanding of suffering and challenge in business contexts since “the ethics of achievement aims at: progress over time, not perfection; getting to the root of problems; recognizing and correcting mistakes; calling out the best in people.”<sup>15</sup> Surely, not an easy task and surely one that is challenging and hard to do.

But why would someone or a business or a business school want to do as much as Ethics of Achievement? That begs the question of “What is business for?”<sup>16</sup> that Professor Stebbins asks in his lecture. Is it just as *The Economist* magazine quotes: “It is not natural for businesses to do good. The only thing businesses do naturally is to maximize profits and minimize costs”?<sup>17</sup> Professor Stebbins argues that the businesses purposes are tied to the purposes of the overall economy. He states that “the fundamental purpose of the economy: to provide a just, humane, and sustainable standard of living for all.”<sup>18</sup> He further states that therefore “the fundamental purpose of business is: to contribute to a just, humane, and sustainable standard of living for all.”<sup>19</sup> He finally states that “the motive of the owner does not equal the purpose of the business.”<sup>20</sup> Given that purpose for business in my view one needs to clearly understand the Wisdom of God first in order to get a grasp of what is just, humane and a sustainable standard of living for all from God’s perspective. To me that is something that needs to be contemplated and understood from God’s eyes and God’s ongoing assistance, direction and help will be necessary to execute as much given the complexities of the world we live in and the sheer numbers of people and problems that we face locally and globally on a daily basis.

Beyond that Professor Stebbins points out that “cooperation is a fact”<sup>21</sup> which picks up on what was discussed later at the Faculty Seminar. He states that “we accomplish practically nothing on our own.”<sup>22</sup> “In almost every case, we satisfy needs and wants not on our own but through some kind of cooperative effort.”<sup>23</sup> From a business perspective, “this cooperation becomes organized or made routine for the sake of efficiency and we tend to act so that multiple needs and wants can be met on an ongoing basis.”<sup>24</sup> Such cooperation is from which business opportunities emerge and are to be performed in service of others in order to contribute to a just, humane, and sustainable standard of living for all. So, in my view businesses emerge from what Professor Stebbins calls “Patterns of Cooperation”<sup>25</sup> that are based on Bernard Lonergan’s thinking and writings. Patterns

of co-operation are: “interdependent systems and / or routines by which people’s needs and wants are met on a regular basis”<sup>26</sup> which is precisely what good business is all about. Business Ethics asks the question: “In what ways does your organization directly or indirectly help satisfy legitimate human needs and wants?”<sup>27</sup> “In general, ‘being ethical’ in any area of life means participating effectively and responsibly in patterns of cooperation that meets legitimate needs and wants.”<sup>28</sup> Business Ethics focuses in on how one is being ethical and from a Catholic perspective mirroring the life of Christ in a business context and within the patterns of cooperation that the business is servicing for the common good.

So, similar to Jeremy Wilkins’ explaining that law needs to be for the common good and that authorities are entrusted as care givers and need to make sure wisdom is enacted with care, business ethics are about ensuring the common good and the good of order as Lonergan describes in business settings. Further, businesspeople are entrusted as care givers and need to make sure wisdom, particularly God’s wisdom is kept at the forefront of business activity for the sake of the common good and the good of order. Particularly in business, activity is very dynamic not static. It is constantly changing and progressing, and it is businesspeople who need to be aware of and charged with ensuring the social justice of what happens because of business activity and ensuring the common good is considered and taken care of throughout the business cycle. In order to do as much, businesspeople need to understand that the source of their power legitimacy is authenticity towards the common good and the source of that power is cooperation. It is through patterns of cooperation that business can be virtuous, reasonable, wise, and caring for the common good and maintaining the good of order in business.

But how does one accomplish such a daunting task, what does business ethics teach as a building block to such an approach? Professor Stebbins states that this is done first and foremost by the role of habits in our lives. “A habit is a developed, relatively stable tendency to think, feel, choose, or act in a particular way.”<sup>29</sup> “A habit gives you the ability to perform an activity – with excellence; with ease; and with enjoyment.”<sup>30</sup> By developing good habits one develops virtue and that “makes it easier to do the right thing.”<sup>31</sup> As opposed to a bad habit or vice that “makes it harder to do the right thing.”<sup>32</sup> Business ethics is about teaching people that “every time you make a decision, the decision also makes you.”<sup>33</sup> By teaching business people how to develop good habits and how to be virtuous towards the common good and the good of order business activity can become aligned to God’s vision and intention for those God loves, which is every one of us. By making it a habit to cooperate in a consistent and efficient pattern in order to contribute to a just, humane, and sustainable standard of living for all will in the end be beneficial to all and will ultimately be God’s work through us as God intended. By contemplating God and being docile towards listening to God’s Spirit is a great place and the right place of us all to start. Cooperating with each other for the sake of the common good is a great second step. Is that why all my mother ever wanted for Christmas is cooperation? I am beginning to think so.

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<sup>1</sup> ESV (English Standard Version) Bible

<sup>2</sup> Stebbins, J, *A Different Way of Thinking about Ethics in Business*, (Unpublished, Book Pending), Lecture Presentation Deck, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Stebbins, J, *A Different Way of Thinking about Ethics in Business*, (Unpublished, Book Pending), Lecture Presentation Deck, p. 3





## The Importance of Ethical Principles in King and Aquinas

Brian Pilkington

In his lectures at Seton Hall University during the summer of 2021, Professor Jeremy Wilkins of Boston College took seminar participants through the thought of Thomas Aquinas moving from facts, to truth, to wisdom. This short essay takes up one topic of the many discussed over three days of instructive conversation and aims to reinforce the benefit of placing theorists from divergent backgrounds in conversation with each other. In particular, I consider—only in brief—similarities between the thought of Thomas Aquinas (with Jeremy Wilkins) and Martin Luther King, Jr. on the importance of foundational principles. The concept of human dignity serves as an illustrative example.

The aim of the seminar was to think through epistemological, metaphysical, and—at least in some small part—ethical issues with the aid of St. Thomas. The seminar concluded with a brief discussion of King’s *Letter from a Birmingham jail*, excerpts of which were read by participants in preparation for discussion. Wilkins (with Aquinas) highlighted the importance of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. If knowledge is the grasping of the implications of the principles and understanding is the grasping of the principles, wisdom requires getting the right principles in the first place. Arguing from a faulty start will get one nowhere on a good day and lead one to wrong conclusions on a bad one. However, these claims would not be accepted by all interlocutors; there are approaches to ethics (both philosophical and healthcare-focused) which eschew foundational principles, focusing instead, for example, on rooting ethical analysis only in particular situations. (Consider, for example Joseph Fletcher’s work on situationism.) Foundational principles are important for Aquinas and, or so I attempt to illustrate here, important for King.

The seminar closed with a discussion of King’s famous *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*; a fitting piece to close a day of conversation about the role of law and the common good, as well as a helpful way to prompt reflection on situations in which (it might be the case that) we ought to break laws and even what (might) not properly be considered a law at all. What should have been obvious to all participants is the importance of principles and of consistency in their application for Aquinas, thanks to the careful attention of the lecturer. What may not have been gleaned by seminar participants previously less familiar with King’s work is that “getting the principles right” is an aim shared both by Aquinas (or Wilkins with Aquinas) *and* King.

The lecturer helpfully drew participant’s attention to a deep kind of expertise rooted in experience through the example of an aging woman in the back of the Church. The not uncommon image of sage wisdom suggests a potentially deeper sense of knowing than over-theorized attempts to explain basic phenomena and respond to other philosopher’s challenging, but potentially nitpicky, objections. King relies on the former kind of example when he describes the real heroes of the South as including:

... old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman of Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride

the segregated buses, and responded to one who inquired about her tiredness with ungrammatical profundity, “My feets is tired, but my soul is at rest.”<sup>1</sup>

To illustrate the importance of foundational principles for King, consider his description of the woman as having risen up with a sense of dignity. The importance of foundational principles may have been lost on participants of the seminar as the assigned version of King’s piece omits some passages. (Truncation is sensible given the weightiness both in amount and in substance of any set of readings engaging Aquinas and King for a short seminar, though something is always lost with a “surgical” approach.) The assigned version references dignity once, in this passage. However, the full text of King’s letter references the notion three times. First, King distinguishes two kinds of peace—one better, one worse—with the superior peace highlighting the respect of all persons for the dignity of all persons. King writes:

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality.<sup>2</sup>

With this context described, King moves to the foundational principle:

Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

Only then, having described the context and the appropriate relation between persons, and grounded this behavior in a foundational principle, do we receive the image of the hero as dignified. It is also worth noting that image of the principle itself connotes its foundational nature. The ethically required interactions between persons is built up the “solid rock” of human dignity.

This short piece does not offer an argument in favor of foundational principles, nor does it offer a defense or critique of the role of the concept (or a principle) of dignity within the thought of Aquinas or of King. Rather, in it I attempt to illustrate that in King, like in Aquinas, there is an important place for foundational principles. Theorists and practitioners who seek to employ the work of King in their own thinking and practice within ethics (or in healthcare ethics) should recognize this fact, on the way to truth and wisdom within their own professional practices.

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<sup>1</sup> King, M. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, (April 16, 1963), accessed 6.25.21: [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

## Information Literacy: from Facts to Truth to Wisdom

Lisa Rose-Wiles

Guiding students to move “from facts to truth to wisdom” lies at the heart of information literacy, which is central to the mission of academic librarians. The first steps are to find information and judge whether it is factual, and here we face a major contrast between today’s information-rich society and the medieval world of Saint Thomas. In his time, information was not only less abundant, but access was limited to those privileged by literacy, education and time who could then filter and disseminate the information deemed suitable for their citizens. Libraries were not available to the general populace but based in monasteries, where books were collected, copied, and read as required activities on the path to prayer and holiness.<sup>1</sup> Today, not only are libraries widely available, but we are bombarded with information from a wide variety of sources, especially through the largely unfiltered internet and social media. The major challenge is not how to get information, but to determine what information is true. What or whom do we believe?

Wilkins makes a distinction between questions of belief, which rest on the concept of assent to authority, and questions of understanding. Belief is an assent to trust the word of others in matters that one cannot properly understand for oneself (who among us has the time and expertise to derive  $E = mc^2$ ?) and involves asking “whether someone can and ought to be trusted.”<sup>2</sup> Understanding is clearly required for the “critical thinking” that has become wildly popular in higher education. Critical thinking has been defined in many ways, but it clearly involves judgment,<sup>3</sup> and good judgment requires understanding. I suggest that in today’s information inundated world, belief in authority also requires a measure of understanding and judgment.

This question of authority is addressed in the Association of College and Research Libraries Framework for Information Literacy (“the Framework”) which is the current gold standard for information literacy. The frame, “Authority Is Constructed and Contextual” states that

Information resources reflect their creators’ expertise and credibility and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required.<sup>4</sup>

The reasoning for and aims of this frame seems multi-faceted. It strongly endorses libraries’ commitment to social justice by recognizing that the traditional model of scholarly publishing often ignores or marginalizes minority voices. Critical pedagogy views this as a power differential that reinforces the traditional establishment and fosters oppression; from this perspective, authority is essentially a weapon of power and only those in power wield it.<sup>5</sup> The frame also

acknowledges that students can be creators of and contributors to information rather than simply consumers of it, rejecting the “banking model of education” in favor of a more active and participatory model supporting critical pedagogy.<sup>6</sup> Further influences, although not made explicit, likely include growing awareness of issues with the peer-review system on which academic publishing relies as a quality check, and frustration with exclusionary paywalls that require readers (or their academic libraries) to pay expensive subscriptions to access content from academic journals. The frame stresses different modes of publication, including digital formats, and holds that authoritative content may be found outside of the scholarly literature.

Rinne<sup>7</sup> contends that the frame “authority is constructed and contextual” ignores the premise that research is not only a quest for knowledge but a quest for the truth, and that truth and authority are inextricably connected. If all opinions are considered valid and anyone can be an “authority,” we face the danger of descending into post-modernist relativism; an information world of “small t” truths depending on one’s perspective. Post-modernism has made important contributions to scholarship in terms of recognizing bias and power differentials and emphasizing that personal narratives can convey important information and give different perspectives. However, when everything is treated as subjective there can be neither consensus nor truth.<sup>8</sup> Sanders provides a useful illustration. He describes being presented with a variety of windows of different shape and size that provide views on the same exterior landscape, leading to the recognition that the windows filter, restrict or actively distort one’s view.<sup>9</sup> This is a lovely metaphor for bias and—to use Bernard Lonergan’s term—limited horizons.<sup>10</sup> What Sanders apparently overlooks is that while the view from each of these windows (perspectives) appears equally valid to the viewer (each is a “small t” truth), there is a (large T) Truth that is unrestricted by bias or limited horizons (those distorting “windows”). In other words, the Truth—the whole picture—exists, and the key to apprehending it is to broaden one’s horizons and achieve a higher viewpoint. However, this is a challenge for most of us, and especially for our students, especially given the academic tendency to specialize in ever shrinking areas of expertise.<sup>11</sup>

The second major criticism of the frame concerns this concept of expertise, which is central to the “construction” of authority. While it is laudable to give a space for all voices and opinions, especially the oppressed or marginalized, some opinions are necessarily more valid than others. I may freely post my opinions about brain surgery on the internet or social media, but any competent brain surgeon would quickly recognize that I have no expertise in the matter and that any claim I make to being an authority is fraudulent. Unfortunately, this type of “information” is readily available with the click of a computer mouse. To quote William Badke “The most pressing enemy at the gates today is conjecture and speculation masquerading as authority.”<sup>12</sup>

So how do we help our students determine who is an “authority” and who has expertise, and to get to the higher viewpoint that leads to truth, and hopefully to wisdom? As the Framework notes, the specific approach will depend on the information need, and the recognition that research methods and publication patterns differ among disciplines. However, the expertise that comes with deep training and experience (and typically in the academic world, formal credentials such as a doctorate) are key elements of authority. Recognizing the

shortcomings of these markers of authority does not mean that we should dispense with them or abandon traditional methods for determining authority, but it is important for librarians to clearly explain the different source types that are appropriate for a discipline and a research question, the peer review process, and what clicking on the peer-reviewed or scholarly article limit means.

Another common information literacy approach, also included in the Framework, is to seek and integrate diverse perspectives on a question. The analogy here is to “look through many windows” in the hope of gaining a more complete view, but again determining the perspective and possible bias of information can be a challenging hurdle for naïve researchers. Still, it is essential that we encourage students to develop the habit of questioning and examining both the content of information and the author’s motivation for presenting it, especially the unfiltered information found on the internet. The latter is critical because most students habitually use the internet rather than their library databases unless specifically required to do so (and often not even then), and many will not have access to those curated resources after graduation. Lonergan’s Generalized Empirical Method<sup>13</sup> (based on the recursive steps of experience, understanding, judgment and responsibility) and its accompanying transcendental precepts (be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable and be responsible) provide a useful approach to the research process and the assessment of authority. As Badke notes, “the very essence of scholarship is the set of careful methodologies that we have developed to help us determine who we should believe.”<sup>14</sup>

Clearly there must be a balance between conceding every opinion and resorting to the Cartesian position of doubting everything and everyone. The Framework advises that (students) learn to “respect the expertise that authority represents while remaining skeptical of the systems that have elevated that authority and the information created by it”<sup>15</sup>—excellent advice but difficult to practice, especially when faced with an unfamiliar subject. The essential balance lies in the intersection between Wilkins’s belief in a trustworthy authority and the “immanently generated knowledge” reached through one’s own understanding and true judgment.<sup>16</sup> Trust in authority represents the vector that Lonergan describes as “from above downward,” while experience and learning represent the vector “from below upwards.”<sup>17</sup> Liddy notes the importance of trusting others, including “teachers, professors, mentors” to the development of one’s own intelligence as one “comes to see what others have seen, to hear what they have heard, [an] to understand what they have understood and learned.”<sup>18</sup> The two vectors act like scissors, and both are essential to education. The challenge for librarians is to guide and foster students’ understanding of information in its various forms and content, and to integrate the vectors of belief in previously established knowledge (authority) that is the foundation of academia with their own experiential learning and growing capacity for judgments of truth so that they may achieve wisdom. Despite the differences in place and time and the complexity of our information landscape, we are following the footsteps of St. Thomas in this endeavor.

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- <sup>3</sup> Grallo, R. Thinking carefully about critical thinking. *Loneragan Review* Vol. 4 (2013), pp. 154-180
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- <sup>10</sup> Lonergan, B.J.F. *Method in theology*, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 1971)
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- <sup>17</sup> Lonergan, B. J. F. *A Third Collection*, R. M. Doran, J. D. Dadosky, & F. E. Crowe, eds. (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2017), p. 174
- <sup>18</sup> Liddy, R. Lonergan on the Catholic University. *Dept. Religion Publications*. 181 (1989), p. 2 <https://scholarship.shu.edu/religion-publications/181>

## Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* and Medieval Church Music

### Gloria Thurmond

“During the early thirteenth century medieval church music reached its climax, marking the highest degree of union between aesthetic goal and artistic fulfillment. Until that era, the history of music had been the steady expansion of technique and artistic achievement toward the creation of a repertoire that would satisfy both the demand of the creators themselves for musical interest and that of theologians who had defined the purposes for which music was to be used.”<sup>1</sup>

The sacred musical compositions of the Gothic era reflect this unity, as can be observed in the work of the *Notre Dame School* composers Leonin and Perotin. Their compositions clearly demonstrate the urge to serve the aesthetic goal set forth by the Church and its thinkers. Their compositions were reflections in sound of the philosophical developments brought to peak during the same period of time by Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventura.<sup>2</sup> Just as these philosophers were endeavoring to explore the nature of God and Creation by reason, so were musicians during that time attempting to mirror the glory of Creation and the reasonableness of its multiform manifestations in sound.<sup>3</sup> As the Notre Dame Cathedral was an architectural replica of the orderliness of God’s work in stone, so were the works of its musicians a reflection of that universe in music.

Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae* was intricately constructed as a Gothic cathedral and embraced the totality of a subject, systematically divided into propositions and sub-propositions, with inclusions deduced from major and minor premises. The *Summa*, as does the Gothic cathedral, soars heavenward. “From this highly rationalistic viewpoint followed the scholastic definition of beauty, which, according to Aquinas, rested on the criteria of completeness, proportion, harmony, and clarity—because, as he said, the mind needed order and demanded unity above all other considerations.”<sup>4</sup>

For composers of church music, the favorite “Gothic musical form was the three-part motet, and the prevailing rhythmic pattern was the ternary, which was called *tempus perfectum* because of its Trinitarian symbolism.”<sup>5</sup> In the cathedral schools and later in the universities, music was studied primarily as a branch of mathematics. The Bishop of Chartres Cathedral thought songs worthless if the singers were not trained in music theory.

Latin and vernacular texts were reconciled in the polytextual motet. Consequently, a Gothic sacred composition represented a synthesis of theory and practice functioning together as equals, and therefore, a unity. Gothic unity has been found mainly in such methods and procedures as its dialectic in philosophy, structural principles in architecture, and techniques of



writing in literature and music.<sup>6</sup> As an orderly philosophical exercise to be practiced in one's life-long pursuit of Truth, Aquinas' *Summa Theologiae* was never completed. Nor were any of the great medieval cathedrals completed during Aquinas's lifetime.

The philosophical approach constructed in the *Summa Theologiae* found ways to "reconcile the seemingly irreconcilable, to arrive at the irrational by ingenious rational arguments, and to achieve the utmost in immateriality through material manifestations. The object of Gothic thought was, therefore, to work out a method for comprehending the incomprehensible, for pondering on the imponderables, and for dividing the indivisible."<sup>7</sup> Gothic art was, overall, designed to bridge the impossible gap between matter and spirit, mass and void, natural and supernatural, inspiration and aspiration, the finite and the infinite.<sup>8</sup>

For Aquinas, the qualities of beauty flow from that which is reasonable: Namely, the qualities are clarity, proportion, and splendor. Accordingly, the beautiful life is the contemplative life because, in contemplation, reason is used at its highest level. Contemplation, for Aquinas, is "a simple gaze upon a truth." He positions his view on Richard of St. Victor's notion that "contemplation is the soul's penetrating and easy gaze on things perceived."<sup>9</sup>

This definition is easily transferable to music. To listen to music is to contemplate something beautiful and, therefore, something eminently true since it mirrors the infinite beauty of God. "Listening to the inner relationships of an inspired and well-composed composition might well exercise and strengthen the intellect to more easily contemplate the divine, or perhaps contribute to one's ultimate happiness."<sup>10</sup>

Happiness, according to Aquinas, consists first in that contemplation which is infused by the Holy Spirit, and then in that which is acquired, but never to the detriment of moral virtue. To the extent that music brings one to the experience and joy of contemplative activity and life, it leads one to the purpose of the virtuous life, because moral virtue anticipates and disposes one to the contemplative life.

The nineteenth century English Anglican priest hymnist and translator John Mason Neale wrote, "Aquinas' hymn *Pange lingua gloriosi* far surpasses most medieval Latin poetry in its subtle and charged language."<sup>11</sup> Pope Urban IV desired three new hymns in Latin for the recently promulgated feast of Corpus Christi, and he subsequently decided that Thomas Aquinas was best qualified to write them. Although Aquinas' authorship of *Pange lingua gloriosi* is not totally conclusive, the richly allusive Eucharistic hymn bears the imprint of his breadth of knowledge by uniting history, theology, and liturgy.

Since, as according to Aquinas, "beauty is the experience of that which delights," it might be that the constant pursuit of activities that will lead to an experience of delight is a worthy exercise. To experience delight as a constant disposition in life, one must discipline oneself to recognize beauty everywhere and in all instances. These would include a deep appreciation and gratitude for the gift of life itself, for nature, the fine arts, the performing arts, good literature, theater, and the good company of family and friends.

The moral and philosophical attunement of Aquinas's intellectual framework for intellectual argument is transferable to the pursuit of the experience of constant delight. Listening to contemporaneous medieval sacred music demands a sustained attention and a resolve that will facilitate the discovery of new areas of order and rightness in the journey towards truth and transcendent beauty.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Seay, A., *Music in the Medieval World*, (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1965), p. 122

<sup>2</sup> Seay, A., *Music in the Medieval World*, (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1965), p. 122

<sup>3</sup> Seay, A., *Music in the Medieval World*, (Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs, 1965), p. 122

<sup>4</sup> Fleming, W., *Art, Music & Ideas*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc: New York, 1970), p. 140

<sup>5</sup> Fleming, W., *Art, Music & Ideas*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc: New York, 1970), p. 140

<sup>6</sup> Fleming, W., *Art, Music & Ideas*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc: New York, 1970), p. 143

<sup>7</sup> Fleming, W., *Art, Music & Ideas*, (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc: New York, 1970), p. 143

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<sup>9</sup> Cole, B., *Music and Morals*, (Alba House: New York, 1998), p. 74

<sup>10</sup> Cole, B., *Music and Morals*, (Alba House: New York, 1998), p. 74

<sup>11</sup> Cole, B., *Music and Morals*, (Alba House: New York, 1998), p. 74

<sup>12</sup> Miravalle, J., *Beauty*, (Sophia Institute Press: New Hampshire, 2019), p. 148

# The Truth about the Normative Force of Just and Unjust Laws

Travis Timmerman

## Introduction

This short paper focuses on, what appears to be, an overlooked segment of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." More precisely, it will focus on King's (and Aquinas's) distinction between just and unjust laws and how this distinction bears on our moral and rational obligations to follow such laws. In doing so, I will discuss a tension between what King states in his letter and the lesson that is typically drawn from his letter. This paper proceeds as follows. In the next section, I review King's position, noting Aquinas's influence on his thought. After that, I review the tension in question and offer a way to resolve the tension. I conclude by suggesting an explanation for why this tension exists in the text, arguing that there may even be good practical reason to deliberately place it there.

## King and Aquinas on the Normative Force of the Law

Early on in "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," King references Aquinas's discussion of the four types of law, writing that "in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law."<sup>1</sup> Aquinas held that human laws were, of course, fallible and so lacked normative force whenever they conflicted with natural law, which themselves lacked normative force whenever they conflicted with God's law, which are necessarily never wrong. To this point, in *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas wrote that if human law were to ever deflect from the law of nature, it is no longer a law but a perversion of law."<sup>2</sup> He adds that "Laws can be unjust" whenever they contradict "the divine good" and morally impermissible to act in accordance with such unjust laws.<sup>3</sup>

Drawing from this, King makes a distinction between just and unjust laws, arguing that the latter lack normative force. It would be morally wrong to follow unjust laws and so the mere fact that the direct-action King and fellow protesters took was illegal was insufficient grounds for criticizing their actions. It's worth considering King's argument in his own words. Here is the relevant passage.

I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that 'an unjust law is no law at all.'

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas

Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust...

I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. 'In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.'<sup>4</sup> [emphasis mine]

### **Why Accept the Punishment Attached to Laws that Lack Normative Force?**

Though anecdotal, in nearly every popular discussion of King's letter I've seen, people focus on the emphasized portion of the quote. They claim, via a fallacious appeal to authority, that it would be impermissible to break unjust laws *unless* one was also willing to accept the penalty for this violation, whatever it turned out to be. Sometimes Socrates will be referenced as another appeal to authority in support of this rule, something King did himself.<sup>5</sup>

Now, the problem with this claim is twofold. First, it's unclear why one is necessarily morally obligated to accept the punishment for violating unjust laws, especially if the punishment is something as severe as death (or worse). No coherent set of deontic concepts entails that one necessarily has a moral obligation to be punished for doing something morally permissible or obligatory. On the contrary, people are generally praiseworthy for doing what they ought to do when doing so is challenging. Second, there's a worry this prescription is self-defeating. Punishing someone for doing their moral duty and violating an unjust law is *itself* unjust. So if one ought to violate unjust laws, then they ought to violate the unjust law concerning their punishment for their initial violation of an unjust law.

### **Two Potential Resolutions**

There seem to be two consistent salient ways to charitably read King's prescription here. First, one might read him as saying, contrary to Socrates (Plato, really), that people ought to be willing to accept the punishment for violating unjust laws *when they're caught and only then for broadly consequentialist reasons*. But this still allows that if they violate an unjust law and get away with it, it's morally permissible for them to evade punishment. This prescription is then read as a highly contingent generic, not universal, claim. Second, King wrote this letter as part of his anti-racist activism. He was a thoughtful and effective activist who was no doubt well aware of the optics of his prescriptions. Claiming that people ought to accept the punishment for violating unjust laws may have been the most effective means of creating change (e.g. by preemptively warding off ad hominem attacks).

## Conclusion

The focus on King's letter (and Aquinas's discussion of just and unjust laws) should be on the permissibility of violating unjust laws, not on likely false claim that one morally ought to accept the (unjust) punishment for violating unjust laws.

<sup>1</sup> King, M. L., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, 196.

<sup>2</sup> Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologiae* I-II, 1485.

<sup>3</sup> Aquinas, T., *Summa Theologiae* I-II, 1485

<sup>4</sup> King, M. L., *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*, 1963

<sup>5</sup> Socrates was sentenced to death for supposedly corrupting the youth and worshipping false gods in Athens. The historical Socrates seemed to believe that these laws were unjust, but that he was obligated to accept the penalty because of a (rudimentary) social contract argument

## Saint Thomas Aquinas & Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail": The Law, Justice, & the "State of Wisdom"

John P. Wargacki

Over the last twenty-five years or so, Dr. Martin Luther King's historic "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" has evolved from one of his lesser known texts—typically overshadowed by the iconic "I Have a Dream" speech at the Washington Mall—to one of his oft-cited treatises regarding *when*, *how*, and *why* an earnest conscience should proactively pursue justice by breaking unjust laws, and be prepared to suffer the consequences, no matter how harsh. That King's letter, among so many other critical moral sources, relies on St. Thomas Aquinas's grappling with similar moral questions nearly seven-hundred years later speaks to the vitality of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition toward informing the pursuit of justice in modern contexts.

While hardly surprised by his arrest and swift imprisonment after his arrival in Birmingham, Alabama, in August of 1963, King had not planned on writing a letter prior to his detention, a decision prompted, as he says, because "there was injustice."<sup>1</sup> The fifteen-page, handwritten text relies heavily on theological, historical, and philosophical documentation, all drawn from memory without the benefit of library, let alone the internet. This fact, however obvious, demands to be underscored precisely because it illuminates just how deeply he absorbed the long history of moral discourse, from the Bible to Thoreau, and apply these lessons to the tumultuous period of racial conflict in America of the 1960s, specifically. When teaching this text, I stress something often overlooked: Dr. King's letter is a *rebuttal*, not a plaintive argument, in terms of its rhetoric. He is not "explaining" why he choose to go to Birmingham, rather he's responding to his "Fellow Clergymen" who criticized his decision as "unwise and untimely"<sup>2</sup>. King is compelled to justify his actions to those one assumes to be supporters—hence, he is indeed preaching to the proverbial "choir."

I MUST make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizens Councilor or the Ku Klux Klanner but the white moderate who is more devoted to order than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice;...Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.<sup>3</sup>

King echoes here Revelations 3:15-16, which says of the "lukewarm" believer: "because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth"<sup>4</sup>. As one who chose

a life of constant danger, King calls out those “safely positioned” critics content to live with a “negative peace,” further foreshadowing Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium*, which makes clear: “Nor is peace simply the absence of warfare, based on a precarious balance of power.”<sup>5</sup>

Tyler Lynch, in his essay entitled, “St. Thomas in Birmingham Jail: Aquinas’s Natural Law and the Ethics of M.L.K.,” further claims: “In response to the charge that he and his cohorts showed a ‘willingness to break laws,’ King marshalled the philosophy of classic Christian thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas in rebuttal.”<sup>6</sup> King foregrounds the “legitimate concern” that the Civil Rights movement advocates adhering to some laws and breaking others by emphasizing that “there are two types of laws: just and unjust”;<sup>7</sup> hence, formulating his argument in Thomistic terms before Aquinas is even mentioned in the next sentence since Aquinas deals with the notion of “laws framed by man” in the *Treatise on Law*, Q.96, Art.4, c.o.. He makes another fundamentally Thomistic argument: “one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”<sup>8</sup> Once more concurring with Aquinas by arguing that unjust laws are “not binding in conscience,”<sup>9</sup> King has extended this concept from the realm of moral philosophizing into the practical sphere.

Enter Henry David Thoreau, rebel protégé of the father of American Transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson. Thoreau’s “Civil Disobedience,” 1849, provided a pragmatic roadmap for what Mahatma Gandhi would later describe, not as “passive resistance,” but rather “no-violent, non-cooperation.” Largely predicted upon Christ’s words from Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount”: “Love thy enemies,”<sup>10</sup> Gandhi famously called his strategy *Satyagraha*, literally translated as “holding on to the truth.” In recognizing the dangers of mob mentality, Thoreau was compelled, in Thomistic fashion, to anticipate the question of when breaking the law becomes a moral imperative.

Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them...If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go; perchance it will wear smooth—certainly the machine will wear out. If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.<sup>11</sup>

Thoreau’s notion of “agency” in committing injustice creates the introspective space between being just another “rebel”, one bound to make the injustice worse, and those who chose to be a “counter friction”: Christ, Francis, Gandhi, Dr. King, Nelson Mandela, even Lech Wałęsa. Thoreau, mindful of the inherent danger in breaking unjust laws for any reason, underscores the integral component of “non-violence” in any form of “civil disobedience”: “What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.”<sup>12</sup> King’s letter along with its multitude of morally persuasive sources as evidence embodies the Thomistic definition of the

moral state as one that creates a condition of “wisdom”—a point well-illuminated by Jeremy Wilkins throughout the Annual Faculty Summer Seminar.

<sup>1</sup> King, Martin Luther. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” *The Atlantic Monthly*; August 1963; vol. 212, No. 2; p. 78

<sup>2</sup> King, Martin Luther. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” *The Atlantic Monthly*; August 1963; vol. 212, No. 2; p. 81

<sup>3</sup> King, Martin Luther. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” *The Atlantic Monthly*; August 1963; vol. 212, No. 2; p. 84

<sup>4</sup> Revelations 3:15-16 (christiantoday.com)

<sup>5</sup> Francis. “Evangelii Gaudium.” *The Holy See*, 24 November 2013. Vatican.va. 219

<sup>6</sup> Lynch, Tyler. “St. Thomas in Birmingham Jail: Aquinas’ Natural Law and the Ethics of M.L.K.”

<https://wordpress.viu.ca/compassrose>, p. 4

<sup>7</sup> King, Martin Luther. “Letter from Birmingham Jail” *The Atlantic Monthly*; August 1963; vol. 212, No. 2; p. 82

<sup>8</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Treatise on Law*, Q.96, Art.4, c.o., p 79

<sup>9</sup> Aquinas, Thomas. *Treatise on Law*, Q.96, Art.4, c.o., p 79

<sup>10</sup> Holy Bible. King James Version (KJV), Reference ed., Matt 5:44

<sup>11</sup> Thoreau, Henry David. “Essay on Civil Disobedience” <https://users.manchester.edu>, p. 3

<sup>12</sup> Thoreau, Henry David. “Essay on Civil Disobedience” <https://users.manchester.edu>, p. 3



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