

THOMAS AQUINAS, PROEMIUM TO PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

(BEGINNING OF HIS LAYING OUT OF THE 1ST BK OF NICOMACHAEAN ETHICS)

As the Philosopher says in the beginning of the *Metaphysics*, it belongs to the wise to order. The reason for this is that wisdom is the greatest perfection of reason whose property it is to know order. For, although the sense powers know some things absolutely, to know the order of one thing to another belongs only to understanding or reason.

But a twofold order is found in things. One is of the parts of some whole or some multitude to each other, as the parts of a house are ordered to each other. The other is the order of things to their end. And this order is more the chief one than the first. For, as the Philosopher says in the XII book of the *Metaphysics*, the order of the parts of an army to each other is because of the order of the whole army to its leader.

Order however is compared to reason in four ways:

There is an order which reason does not make, but only considers, as is the order of natural things.

There is also an order which reason by considering makes in its own act, as when it orders its thoughts to each other, and the signs of thoughts which are signifying vocal sounds.

There is moreover a third order which reason by considering makes in the acts of the will.

And there is a fourth order which reason by considering makes in exterior things of which it is the cause, such as a box or a house.

And because the consideration of reason is perfected by the firm disposition of knowledge, there are diverse forms of knowledge according to the diverse orders which reason properly considers.

For the consideration of the order of things which human reason considers but does not make belongs to natural philosophy; thus that with natural philosophy, we also include metaphysics.

The order however which reason by considering makes in its own acts belongs to rational philosophy which considers the order of the parts of a speech to each other and the order of beginnings to conclusions.

But the order of voluntary acts belongs to the consideration of moral philosophy

And the order which reason by considering makes in exterior things constructed by human reason belongs to the mechanical arts.

Thus therefore it belongs to moral philosophy, about which turns the present intention, to consider human acts as they are ordered to each other and to the end. I call acts *human* which proceed from the will of man according to the order of reason. For if there are some acts in man which are not subject to the will and reason, they are not properly called human, but natural, just as is clear about the acts of the plant soul which in no way come under the consideration of moral philosophy. Therefore just as the subject of natural philosophy is motion or a movable thing, so also the subject of moral philosophy is human act ordered to an end, or also man insofar as he is voluntarily acting for an end.

It should be known however that, because man is naturally a social animal, since he needs many things for his life which he cannot himself alone prepare for himself, it follows that man is naturally a part of some multitude through which he is given help to live well. This help he needs for two things.

First for those things necessary for life without which the present life is not able to be gone through. And the domestic household, of which he is a part, aids man in this. For every man has from his parents generation and nourishment and discipline and likewise also the individuals who are parts of the domestic family aid each other in the necessities of life.

In another way man is aided by the multitude of which he is a part for a complete sufficiency of life, so that man not only lives, but lives well, having all the things which suffice for his life. And thus the civil multitude, of which he is a part, helps him not only as far as bodily things (as regards many artificial things for which one household is not sufficient), but also as regards

moral things insofar as insolent youth, whom paternal admonition is not able to correct, are forced through public power by the threat of punishment.

It should be known however that this whole which is a multitude of citizens or the domestic family has only a unity of order by which something is not simply one. And therefore a part of this whole can have an act which is not an act of the whole, as the soldier in the army has an act which is not that of the whole army.

Nevertheless the whole itself has some act which is not private to some part, but of the whole, as the striking together of the whole army. And the drawing of the ship is an act of the multitude drawing the ship. There is however another whole which has a unity not only in order, but in composition or binding together, or even in continuity by which unity something is one simply; and therefore there is no act of the part which is not of the whole. For there is the same motion of the whole and the part in continuous things. And likewise in things composed or bound together, the act of the part is chiefly of the whole. And therefore it is necessary that the consideration of such a whole and its part belong to the same knowledge. However it does not belong to the same knowledge to consider the whole which has only a unity of order and its parts. And hence it is that moral philosophy is divided into three parts.

The first of these considers the acts of one man ordered to an end and is called *monastic*. [from one: we call it *ethics*]

The second however considers the acts of the domestic multitude and is called *domestics*.

But the third considers the acts of the civil multitude and is called *politics*.