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“PRAEAMBULA FIDEI” E NUOVA APOLOGETICA

THE ‘PRAEAMBULA FIDEI’ AND THE NEW APOLOGETICS



Atti dell'VIII Sessione Plenaria • 20-22 giugno 2008

Proceedings of the VIII Plenary Session • 20-22 June 2008



VATICAN CITY
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REALISTIC PRACTICAL TRUTH

STEPHEN L. BROCK

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after receiving the Academy's invitation to give a talk on 'Truth and Practical Reason', and before I had decided on the specific topic, the philosophy department at my university held a conference on the moral philosophy of Elizabeth Anscombe. Some of the most animated discussion at the conference centered on her conception of *practical truth*. In the course of this it dawned on me that I was not entirely clear in my own mind about St Thomas's conception of it. This lecture seemed to offer a good chance to try to remedy that.

Now I understand better why the matter was not clear in my mind. It is *very* complicated, a good deal more so than I had anticipated. It is already complicated in Thomas himself. His writings on practical truth are many, and they are not always easy to combine into a coherent picture. Then the interpretations I have looked at add substantial complications of their own.

You may rest easy, I am not going to lay out all the texts or all the interpretations now. In fact I mainly want to look at the relation between just two passages. The first one, I would say, goes to the very heart of what practical truth is; but I must confess that it took me rather by surprise. The second one helps to explain why; and, as I discovered, it also serves as the point of departure for an influential line of interpretation of Thomas on practical truth, which I think very much worth presenting and evaluating. This is what I shall seek to do here, though only, I would stress, in a tentative way. At the end I shall say something very briefly in relation to the larger theme of the conference.

I. THE TWOFOLD MEAN OF PRACTICAL INTELLECT

Let me go straight to my first text. It is part of the corpus of *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 64, a. 3, which is on *whether intellectual virtue consists in a mean*. To set it in its context I shall present the whole corpus.¹ This I divide into five parts, with some remarks about each.

1) *I reply that the good of a thing consists in a mean, insofar as it is conformed to a rule or a measure that it might happen to exceed and fall short of, as has been said.*

‘As has been said’ is a reference to the first two articles of this question, where Thomas explains the familiar doctrine that *moral* virtue consists in a mean, one determined by reason. Let me briefly recall what he says. Some of it will be pertinent later on.

In general, the moral virtues perfect the appetitive powers in various fields. They bring about various types of good appetitive acts. The proper goodness of these, which is their moral goodness, consists in their conformity with the rule and measure of reason.

¹ Here is the corpus of *Summa theologiae* (STh) I-II, q. 64, a. 3, with my divisions:

1) Respondeo dicendum quod bonum alicuius rei consistit in medio, secundum quod conformatur regulae vel mensurae quam contingit transcendere et ab ea deficere, sicut dictum est.

2) Virtus autem intellectualis ordinatur ad bonum, sicut et moralis, ut supra dictum est. Unde secundum quod bonum virtutis intellectualis se habet ad mensuram, sic se habet ad rationem medii. Bonum autem virtutis intellectualis est verum, speculativae quidem virtutis, verum absolute, ut in VI *Ethic.* dicitur; practicae autem virtutis, verum secundum conformitatem ad appetitum rectum.

3) Verum autem intellectus nostri absolute consideratum, est sicut mensuratum a re, res enim est mensura intellectus nostri, ut dicitur in X *Metaphys.*; ex eo enim quod res est vel non est, veritas est in opinione et in oratione. Sic igitur bonum virtutis intellectualis speculativae consistit in quodam medio, per conformitatem ad ipsam rem, secundum quod dicit esse quod est, vel non esse quod non est; in quo ratio veri consistit. Excessus autem est secundum affirmationem falsam, per quam dicitur esse quod non est, defectus autem accipitur secundum negationem falsam, per quam dicitur non esse quod est.

4) Verum autem virtutis intellectualis practicae, comparatum quidem ad rem, habet rationem mensurati. Et sic eodem modo accipitur medium per conformitatem ad rem, in virtutibus intellectualibus practicis, sicut in speculativis. Sed respectu appetitus, habet rationem regulae et mensurae.

5) Unde idem medium, quod est virtutis moralis, etiam est ipsius prudentiae, scilicet rectitudo rationis, sed prudentiae quidem est istud medium ut regulantis et mensurantis; virtutis autem moralis, ut mensuratae et regulatae. Similiter excessus et defectus accipitur diversimode utrobique.

Now, the acts that make up the fields of certain specific virtues, for instance temperance or fortitude, are interior passions, evoked by apprehended goods. Such virtues serve simply to bring the appetite into line with reason's judgment. Moreover, since people's appetitive dispositions vary, the adjustments that reason's judgment calls for, and that the virtue effects, will likewise vary. Depending on the individual, the mean may lie more in the direction of one extreme or in the other. For instance, regarding the good of knowledge, if one is prone to curiosity, he must restrain his desire. If he is prone to neglect his studies, he must arouse it.²

The virtue of justice is a special case. For justice, the rule of reason is as it were two-pronged. The field of justice is the handling of *exterior things*, in relation to other persons. Here reason determines a mean both for the appetite and for the things themselves. Justice 'gives to each *what it owes*, and *neither more nor less*'.³ It gives the *just thing*, the *res iusta*.⁴ Hence the rule of reason regulates the giving not only as to how the giver's will is moved to perform it, but also in itself, as to its own object and circumstances. The just giving, in itself, is an adjustment made in function of the exterior situation, not of the subject's inner dispositions. To the question of what you should pay the plumber, how you are apt to feel about it is irrelevant. The answer would be the same for anyone. Thomas says that justice achieves what is right 'absolutely and in itself'. I shall return to this point toward the end.

2) *But intellectual virtue, like moral, is ordered to a good, as has been said. Hence the good of an intellectual virtue is related to a mean just as it is to a measure. Now, the good of intellectual virtue is the true: of speculative virtue, the true absolutely, as is said in Ethics VI; of practical virtue, the true in conformity with right appetite.*

The last phrase, 'the true in conformity with right appetite', is also directly from Book VI of Aristotle's *Ethics*.⁵ It is what Thomas constantly takes to be the formula for *practical truth*.

There are some characteristics which I am here simply going to take for granted that Thomas assigns to practical truth. They are five. a) Practical truth is truth that of itself tends to inform one's actual conduct. It is *per se*

² *STh* I-II, q. 64, a. 1.

³ *STh* I-II, q. 64, a. 2.

⁴ See *STh* II-II, q. 57, a. 1, ad 1.

⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.2, 1139a30.

apt to get put into *practice*. b) For this reason, it is properly truth about particular, contingent, operable things that are in one's power to do. Universals, by themselves, do not move action, and neither does the thought of particular things that are not in one's power. c) The same reason is also part of *why* practical truth is in conformity with right appetite. Thought does not move except together with appetite. d) Typically practical truth is reached through deliberation. e) The intellectual virtue whose business is to secure this truth is *prudence*. Prudence is the one intellectual virtue that is inseparable from moral virtue, which is what ensures the basic rectitude of the appetite.

We should notice the way in which the passage opposes speculative and practical truth. The speculative is truth 'absolutely'; the practical is also truth, but with a certain condition, the conformity to right appetite. How this condition affects it will be a main concern for me.

3) *Now the true of our intellect, absolutely considered, is as though measured by the res, since the res is the measure of our intellect, as it says in Metaphysics X: for according as the res is or is not, there is truth in opinion and speech. So in this way the good of speculative intellect consists in a certain mean, by conformity to the res itself, insofar as it declares to be what is, or not to be what is not; and it is in this that the nature of the true consists. Excess is in a false affirmation, by which it declares to be what is not; and defect is taken according to a false denial, by which it declares not to be what is.*⁶

It is the familiar doctrine of truth as the 'correspondence' of thought to its object. Notice how strongly he asserts it: it is in this that consists the *nature of the true*, the *ratio veri*.

I have left *res* untranslated. A natural translation would of course be *thing*. That is not wrong, but we should keep in mind how broadly it must be taken in this context. Truth and falsity are not confined to 'external givens', presently actual realities outside the mind. The meaning of *res* here is just that of Aristotle's *pragma*, the 'matter' that an affirmation or a denial is about. This covers anything that can be thought of. The point is important for us, because practical thinking is largely about what is at the moment only in potency, what one *might* do; for instance, as to whether it would prove *good*, or *right*, or perhaps *pleasant* to do.

⁶ The *Metaphysics* passage is X.1, 1053a33.

4) Now the true of practical intellectual virtue, compared with the res, has the character of something measured. And thus the mean is taken in the same way in practical intellectual virtues as in speculative, by conformity to the res. But with respect to appetite, it has the character of a rule and a measure.

This is the key passage, which I will be coming back to query. For the moment I will just observe that what Thomas is mainly driving at here is that in the case of practical intellectual virtue, the word 'mean' may refer to either of two things. As with speculative virtue, the 'mean' of practical intellectual virtue may refer to something *measured* – by the *res*. Or it may refer to a *rule and measure*, one that measures appetite. The latter is proper to practical intellectual virtue. The last lines connect this second sense with the mean of moral virtue:

5) Hence the same mean which is of moral virtue is also of prudence itself, namely the rectitude of reason; but this mean is of prudence as of what regulates and measures; it is of moral virtue as of what is measured and regulated. Likewise, excess and defect are taken in a different way for each.

The final sentence, I assume, means that prudence avoids excess and defect by being what *rules them out*. Moral virtue avoids them by being what they are ruled out of.

II. TWO KINDS OF TRUTH

Now to the other passage. It is from just a little earlier in the *Prima secundae*: q. 57, a. 5, ad 3. It seems to me that at least on first reading, it is not at all easy to square this with the passage from q. 64, a. 3; especially with the part that I put in boldface.

The article is about prudence, as to whether it is a virtue necessary to humans for 'living well' (*bene vivere*). Of course Thomas says that it is. Living well, he says in the corpus, means acting well, and this consists not merely in performing a good deed, but in doing it out of a right choice. A right choice is a choice of means suitably ordered to the due end. What disposes a man well about the end is moral virtue. But prudence is needed in order to dispose him well about the means, perfecting his reason in the deliberation that leads to his choice.

The article's third objection argues that as it is found in human beings, prudence should not be counted an intellectual virtue. An intellectual virtue 'always says the true and never the false. But this does not seem to happen

with human prudence, since it is just not human never to err in deliberating about what to do, on account of the contingency and variability of human doables. As it says in the book of *Wisdom* IX, “the thoughts of mortals are fearful, and our plans are uncertain”.⁷ Thomas replies as follows:

*The true of the practical intellect is taken in a different way from that of the speculative intellect, as it says in Ethics VI. **For the true of the speculative intellect is taken by conformity of the intellect to the res.** And because the intellect cannot be conformed infallibly to the res in contingent matters, but only in necessary ones, no speculative habit about contingent matters is an intellectual virtue, but only about necessities. **But the true of the practical intellect is taken by conformity with right appetite.** Which conformity has no place in necessary matters, which do not come about by the human will, but only in contingent matters that can come about by us... And so practical intellectual virtue is posited only about contingent matters...*⁸

I have put in boldface the places that struck me as hard to square with the 64,3 passage. In 64,3, *both* speculative and practical truth were said to consist in conformity with the *res*. Here it *sounds* as though conformity with the *res* is exclusively the nature of *speculative* truth. Thomas almost seems to be saying that practical truth is taken by conformity with right appetite *rather than* by conformity with the *res*. This is all the more surprising because in 64,3 appetite was only said to be *measured* by practical intellect, not to measure it.

⁷ Virtus intellectualis est secundum quam contingit semper dicere verum, et nunquam falsum. Sed hoc non videtur contingere secundum prudentiam, non enim est humanum quod in consiliando de agendis nunquam erretur; cum humana agibilia sint contingentia aliter se habere. Unde dicitur *Sap.* IX, cogitationes mortalium timidae, et incertae providentiae nostrae. Ergo videtur quod prudentia non debeat poni intellectualis virtus: *STh* I-II, q. 57, a. 5, obj. 3.

⁸ Verum intellectus practici aliter accipitur quam verum intellectus speculativi, ut dicitur in *VI Ethic.* Nam verum intellectus speculativi accipitur per conformitatem intellectus ad rem. Et quia intellectus non potest infallibiliter conformari rebus in contingentibus, sed solum in necessariis; ideo nullus habitus speculativus contingentium est intellectualis virtus, sed solum est circa necessaria. Verum autem intellectus practici accipitur per conformitatem ad appetitum rectum. Quae quidem conformitas in necessariis locum non habet, quae voluntate humana non fiunt, sed solum in contingentibus quae possunt a nobis fieri [sive sint agibilia interiora, sive factibilia exteriora]. Et ideo circa sola contingentia ponitur virtus intellectus practici, [circa factibilia quidem, ars; circa agibilia vero prudentia]: *STh* I-II, q. 57, a. 5, ad 3. In the text I have omitted the parts in brackets. Although they are important and raise some questions, they are not pertinent to the present issue.

Now, Thomas does not actually say here that there is no such thing as 'conformity with the *res*' in contingent or practical matters. What he says about such matters is only that intellect cannot conform to them *infallibly*. But does the text not read as though it is not this conformity that 'practical truth' consists in, but *rather* in conformity with right appetite?

Stumped by this problem, I began to cast about for help. Eventually I happened upon what is in fact a highly articulated line of thinking about practical truth in Thomas, that takes its original cue from this very passage. It is endorsed by some quite prominent figures. The one to take the cue, and to lay out the interpretation in full detail, was Cardinal Cajetan, in his commentary on the passage.⁹ Followers include John of St Thomas,¹⁰ Santiago Ramírez,¹¹ Thomas Deman¹² and Yves Simon.¹³ I suspect that the line has also influenced others, at least indirectly, but I have had little time to pursue this. Here I can only offer a brief sketch of it.

At the core of Cajetan's reading of 57,5 is a distinction between two *functions of intellect*. One, which is common to speculative and practical intellect, is what he calls 'cognition'. The other, which is proper to practical intellect, he calls 'direction'. To these correspond *two kinds of truth*, cognitive truth and directive truth. Cognitive truth is the familiar one: the goodness of the intellect in relation to the *res* that is cognized. Directive truth is the goodness of the intellect in its work of directing the appetite. That is, in the terms of 64,3, it is the goodness of the intellect as ruling, measuring, and determining the mean for the appetite.

Indeed, these two senses of truth in effect coincide with the two senses of 'mean' that we saw applied to practical intellect: the mean that it has as *measured* by the *res*, and the mean that it has as the rule and measure *measuring* the mean of the appetite. Cajetan is saying that even with respect to this second sense we can speak of truth or falsity, because even in this respect the intellect's work is also *measured* by something. What measures

⁹ Sancti Thomae Aquinatis, *Opera omnia*, Iussu impensaue Leonis XIII P.M. edita, vol. VI: *Prima secundae Summae theologiae*, a Q. I ad Q. LXX, cum commentariis Thomae de Vio Caietani, Roma: ex typographia polyglotta S.C. de Propaganda Fide 1891, pp. 369-370.

¹⁰ Johannes a Sancto Thoma, *Cursus theologicus in I^{am} II^{ae}*, disp. XVI, a. 1, n. 3; a. 4, nn. 1-9.

¹¹ Santiago M. Ramírez, *La prudencia*, Madrid: Ediciones Palabra 1979, pp. 75-6, 143-154.

¹² Saint Thomas d'Aquin, *Somme Théologique: La Prudence*. 2^a-2^{ae}, *Questions 47-56*, traduction, notes et appendices par T.-H. Deman, O.P., Paris: Desclée, 1949, pp. 460-477.

¹³ Yves R. Simon, *Nature and Functions of Authority*, Milwaukee: Marquette University Press 1948, pp. 21-28.

it in this respect is not the *res*, but the 'directive principle'. This is the appetite itself. The *right appetite* of the end measures the rule that prudence conceives and uses to measure the choice of means.

Having a distinct measure, this directive truth is something distinct from cognitive truth. It is distinct not only from the cognitive truth of the speculative intellect, but also from that of prudence itself. The distinction is seen in this, that prudence may *fail* to achieve cognitive truth and nevertheless succeed, at the very same time, in achieving directive truth. An example that I take from Yves Simon, with some modifications, illustrates this possibility.¹⁴

Imagine a pair of responsible parents, carefully deliberating about taking the family on vacation to a certain place. After giving all due consideration, they come to the conclusion that this would indeed be beneficial to the family and is a choiceworthy thing for them to do; and so they choose to do it and actually carry out this choice. Now, this judgment, that taking the vacation would be beneficial to the family and so is choiceworthy for them, can be considered as true or false in either of Cajetan's two ways. It has 'cognitive' truth if in fact taking the vacation really *would* be beneficial to the family and really *is* choiceworthy for them. It has directive truth if it leads the parents to choose and act in accordance with their upright desire, their desire for the family's welfare.

That this distinction is needed can be seen if we now suppose this. The vacation trip includes traveling by car to the destination. As it turns out, a bridge on the road has a hidden, serious defect, making it apt to collapse shortly. And in fact it does collapse, while they are crossing it, and some of them are injured. In this scenario, the parents' judgment about the vacation did not have 'cognitive' truth after all. They were wrong; taking the vacation would not be of benefit to the family – quite the contrary. But should we say that they were wrong to *choose* to take the vacation? It is assumed that the family's welfare is truly a due end, and that they deliberated very conscientiously about taking the vacation. In *theory* the collapse of the bridge was perhaps foreseeable, but they could hardly have been expected to look into that. They made the best choice possible, given what they then did and could know.

But if they made a good choice, then surely the judgment directing them to it, *as such*, was also good. It was good *even though*, with respect to the *res* or the matter judged – the *operabile*: taking the vacation – it was mis-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

taken. It had cognitive falsehood. Yet it was reasonable, conscientious, prudent; the parents cannot be *blamed*. The cognitive error was *involuntary*. The judgment offered good direction to the will, made for a good choice. It was in line with the desire for the due end. So it had directive truth. To be sure, as Deman and Simon insist, prudence does require serious effort to get at the 'cognitive' truth of the matter, to judge it to be as it really is. But even when such effort fails, as sometimes it inevitably does, the judgment's 'directive' truth may remain intact.

To conclude this sketch: for Cajetan it is only with this distinction between cognitive and directive truth that we can be satisfied with Thomas's reply in I-II, 57, 5, ad 3. Thomas would be saying that as regards the truth that practical and speculative intellect have in common, cognitive truth, prudence is not infallible. The matter is just too contingent. Judged on this basis, prudence could not be deemed an intellectual virtue. There is intellectual virtue for cognitive truth only regarding universal and necessary things. But as regards directive truth, prudence *is* infallible. It fully guarantees the rectitude of choice, fidelity to the right desire of the due end. The prudent man always makes the choice that is right for him to make, *given* what he can and should know. He may be 'objectively' or 'materially' in error, as to the *res*, but that is incidental to this sort of truth. And this is the proper business of prudence, as a habit of *practical* intellect: directive truth. So it can count as a genuine intellectual virtue.

III. ONE KIND OF TRUTH, TAKEN EITHER ABSOLUTELY OR WITH A CONDITION

As can be seen from the following that it has gathered, Cajetan's distinction is certainly an attractive one. Obviously one should be very cautious about criticizing it. I must admit, coming at it as I did, with the 64,3 passage in mind, I was rather quick to raise objections; but these may well have been too hasty. The only one of them that might be worth mentioning here would be simply that this 'directive truth' does not seem to be what Thomas considers to be truth in the unqualified or proper sense. In 64,3 we did read that conformity with the *res* is what the *nature of truth* consists in. 'Directive' truth seems to be at best only some qualified sense of truth. But perhaps Cajetan would grant this. He might even grant that prudence itself is an intellectual virtue only in a qualified sense – only a *practical* intellectual virtue. His chief concern would be only to show that in *some* sense, prudence is infallible.

However, further exploration has led me to have another doubt about his account, which I think may be more telling. It arises from a set of remarks by Thomas on the very *infallibility* of prudence, and this precisely *in its directive function*. Let me cite just two short texts.

The chief one is a passage about human law. There is an objection to the very existence of human law, based on the fact that law is a *measure* of human acts. It is considering law in its directive function. It runs: ‘A measure ought to be most certain, as it says in *Metaphysics* X. But the dictate of human reason is uncertain, as that passage of the book of *Wisdom* IX has it: “the thoughts of mortals are fearful, and our plans are uncertain”’.¹⁵ Thomas answers:

*Practical reason is about operables, which are singular and contingent, and not about necessary things as speculative reason is. So human laws cannot have that infallibility that the demonstrative conclusions of the sciences have. Nor must every measure be in every way infallible and certain, but only as far as is possible in its genus.*¹⁶

Lawmaking, for Thomas, is very definitely a work of prudence;¹⁷ and it is not absolutely infallible. It is not absolutely infallible in its function as a *measure*, its *directive* function.

I would relate this to what we saw early on about justice (Law is a *ratio iuris*).¹⁸ Justice involves rectitude not only within the will but also as to its use of exterior things. The will’s inner rectitude is simply its being moved in accord with the judgment of reason prudently deliberating in view of the due end. But its exterior act must also be rectified, *in itself*, as it bears on the things.¹⁹ Even prudent deliberation in view of the due end may not yield a true judgment of the act’s rectitude. When reason’s judgment is not true, its direction is not good.

¹⁵ *Mensura debet esse certissima, ut dicitur in X Metaphys.* Sed dictamen humanae rationis de rebus gerendis est incertum; secundum illud *Sap.* IX, cogitationes mortalium timidae, et incertae providentiae nostrae. Ergo ex ratione humana nulla lex procedere potest: *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 3, obj. 3. (The *Metaphysics* passage is X.1, 1052b35-1053a8.)

¹⁶ Ratio practica est circa operabilia, quae sunt singularia et contingentia, non autem circa necessaria, sicut ratio speculativa. Et ideo leges humanae non possunt illam infallibilitatem habere quam habent conclusiones demonstrativae scientiarum. Nec oportet quod omnis mensura sit omni modo infallibilis et certa, sed secundum quod est possibile in genere suo: *STh* I-II, q. 91, a. 3, ad. 3.

¹⁷ *STh* II-II, q. 50, a. 1, ad 3.

¹⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 57, a. 1, ad 2.

¹⁹ Very pertinent here is *STh* II-II, q. 59, a. 2, corp. & ad 3.

Indeed an upright will, a *just* will, is not satisfied with its own interior rectitude alone. It does want its own rectitude, of course. But its *end* is to *live* well, which means to *act* well. Acting well is a function not only of right appetite, but also of the action's own object or matter: the right exterior thing, the *res iusta*. Rectifying the action requires truth about its relation to its matter. That bridge was not the *right thing* to drive the family over. A prudent person will hit upon the right thing, the right action and the right choice, as far as is humanly possible; and when he fails, the failure will be blameless. The requirements of his will's *rectitude* will always be met. But the requirements of his will itself will not.

This is simply to say that the failure will be *involuntary*. This does imply that it is blameless. But what it means first of all is that it is *against his will*. It is itself *contrary to his right desire*. In following his inculpably erroneous judgment, his will remains good. But culpable or not, an erroneous practical judgment does not give good *direction* to the good will. What it directs the will to is, *in itself*, a *bad act*. If the error is blameless, then the act is *involuntarily* bad. So it is not *morally* bad.²⁰ But *on the whole* it is still bad, *undesirable*.²¹ Cognitive goodness and directive goodness in practical judgment stand or fall together.

At the same time, the passage on human law also introduces another notion: that of a *qualified* infallibility, the infallibility that the domain allows – the infallibility ‘possible in its genus’. There are several texts pertinent to this, but here I will cite just one. It is on whether *sollicitudo* is a feature of prudence. It seems not, says the objection, because prudence is an intellectual virtue. This seems to entail that prudence has the ‘certitude of truth’. Solicitude seems opposed to certitude; ‘hence it is related that Samuel said to Saul: “As for the asses that were lost three days ago, be not solicitous, because they are found”’. Thomas replies:

according to the Philosopher in Ethics I, certitude is not to be sought alike in all things, but in each matter according to its proper mode. And since the matters of prudence are contingent singulars, which

²⁰ See *ibid.*

²¹ Sicut Dionysius dicit in IV cap. *de Div. Nom.*, bonum causatur ex integra causa, malum autem ex singularibus defectibus. Et ideo ad hoc quod dicatur malum *id in quod fertur* voluntas, sufficit sive quod secundum suam naturam sit malum, sive quod apprehendatur ut malum. Sed ad hoc quod sit bonum, requiritur quod utroque modo sit bonum: *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 6, ad 1 (emphasis added).

*human actions are concerned with, the certitude of prudence cannot be such as to remove solicitude altogether.*²²

There is the 'certitude of prudence'. But it is only qualified certitude.

My doubt, then – by no means a certitude – is whether Cajetan has not taken a bit of a wrong turn in his reading of the 57,5 passage. As it looks to me, Thomas is not arguing that prudence '*always* says the true and never the false' – that it is *absolutely* infallible. It is not so even in its directive function, ordering to the end that is the object of right desire. Rather, I would suggest, he is saying that the very thing that makes prudence necessary for living well – its being the habit by which human action is brought into conformity with right desire – excludes absolute infallibility, even regarding that conformity. Seeking conformity with right desire extends or applies the mind to a field in which absolute infallibility is impossible.

But prudence carries the *qualified* sort of infallibility that humans can have in that field. It is 'practically' infallible. And it is so in both its directive and its cognitive functions – as measuring appetite, and as measured by the singular, contingent *res*.

This seems to remove the grounds and the motive for positing a kind of truth that consists in conformity with right appetite rather than with the *res*. We can follow the 64,3 passage and say that there is just one kind of truth. Speculative is this kind taken 'absolutely', simply according to its own nature; practical truth is the same kind, but with an additional condition attached, conformity to right appetite. Right appetite is not what makes practical truths true. It makes them *practical* truths, truths immediately about action, for action, leading to action.

I do not mean that it is entirely wrong to speak of right appetite as a measure of practical truth. Indeed Thomas says in his commentary on Book VI of the *Ethics* that 'the rectitude of the appetite about the end is a measure of truth in practical reason; and in this respect, the truth of practical reason is determined according to right appetite'.²³ But as Cajetan him-

²² Secundum Philosophum, in I *Ethic.*, certitudo non est similiter quaerenda in omnibus, sed in unaquaque materia secundum proprium modum. Quia vero materiae prudentiae sunt singularia contingentia, circa quae sunt operationes humanae, non potest certitudo prudentiae tanta esse quod omnino sollicitudo tollatur: *STh* II-II, q. 47, a. 9, ad 2. (Regarding the *Ethics* reference, see I.1, 1094b12, b25; I.7, 1098a26-28.) See also q. 47, a. 3, ad 2, and q. 49, a. 1; a. 5, ad 2; a. 8, ad 3.

²³ Rectitudo appetitus per respectum ad finem est mensura veritatis in ratione practica. Et secundum hoc determinatur veritas rationis practicae secundum concordiam ad appetitum rectum: *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, lib. VI, lect. 2, §8.

self observes in his commentary on the 64,3 passage, the expression ‘measure of truth’ has more than one sense. It may mean either what measures a truth *in itself*, or what measures it *quoad nos*.²⁴ What measures it in itself is what *makes* it true, what its truth *consists* in conformity with. What measures it *quoad nos* is some principle by which we know it or accept its truth. It seems clear that for Thomas, right appetite measures practical truth only in the latter sense.

It is just the idea expressed in the old dictum, *qualis unusquisque est, talis finis videtur ei*. Desire contributes to making some judgments *seem* true to us. But this is not to make them *be* true. What makes them be true is the *res* that they are about.²⁵ Elsewhere Thomas likens the role of right appetite in the work of prudence to that of the *agent intellect* in speculative thought.²⁶ He certainly does not mean that the agent intellect is the *res* that all speculative thought is about. It is only a principle by which we arrive at and discern truth about the *res*.

This I think explains the absence of any mention of appetite as measure of practical truth in the 64,3 passage. The question there is not the general one, ‘what is the measure of truth?’ To this question there would be many answers – especially if one is thinking of the measure *quoad nos* – both for practical *and* for speculative truth: the rules of logic, the agent intellect, God... And if we do bring in right appetite as a sort of measure of practical truth, we should also bring in the fact that ultimately the appetite of the end is itself measured by intellect.²⁷ But the question in 64,3 is simply whether intellectual virtue consists in a mean. Truth is a mean because what it *consists* in is conformity with a certain measure. This is always the *res*.

CONCLUSION: REALISTIC PRACTICAL TRUTH

I think I can sum things up in this way: in comparison with the Cajetan interpretation, I find Thomas’s conception of practical truth to be a little more ‘realistic’ – taking this in three senses. First, practical truth is meas-

²⁴ Cajetan, *op. cit.*, pp. 415-416. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In XII libros Metaphysicorum expositio*, lib. X, lect. 2, §1956-1959, ed. R.-M. Spiazzi, Taurini: Marietti 1964, pp. 562-563.

²⁵ Anscombe argues strongly that one’s desire is not what one’s practical reasoning is about: G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1957, §35, p. 66.

²⁶ *STh* I-II, q. 56, a. 3.

²⁷ See *STh* I-II, q. 19, a. 3, ad 2; II-II, q. 47, a. 6.

ured by the *res* (the practical *res*, the *operabile*). Second, it establishes rectitude not only within the appetite but also in exterior actions, as to their own matter; it determines the *res iusta*. Third, it is acknowledged to be something that human virtue cannot attain with absolute infallibility. That exceeds human nature's real limits.

I would not equate this last sort of 'realism' with 'pessimism'. On the contrary, I think Thomas's view should strike us as quite optimistic. For he is saying that it *is* possible for human nature to reach a condition in which, *habitually*, it *can* hit upon the right and good thing to do; and this not just 'given how things seem to us', but absolutely, in the real world, according to 'the things themselves'. The things have the proportionate stability that makes this possible. The practical domain is rather a mess, but for Thomas it is not as much of a mess as perhaps we tend to think.

This is not to say that we can make do with *human* intelligence alone. To say that would hardly be Thomistic. I think Thomas would say it is hardly human. From Aristotle we learn that prudence is only as infallible as its field allows. We also learn that being an *excellence*, prudence must be rare, especially in its fully perfect state. But Thomas does not seem to think we need Aristotle to tell us that on the whole, the condition of our practical intelligence is very far from one of self-sufficiency. He clearly regards this as quite naturally apparent, to nearly everyone. And he likewise regards as quite natural what I think we could say is for him part of the 'realistic' response to this situation: namely, *religion*. I am referring to the famous passage on sacrifice as pertaining to natural law. 'Natural reason dictates to man that he be subject to some superior [being], on account of the defects that he perceives in himself, regarding which he needs to be aided and *directed* by some superior'. Man needs a *higher prudence*. 'And whatever that [being] is, it is this that among all is called a God'.²⁸ I do not know whether this constitutes an unqualified *praeambulum fidei*. Maybe it is a *practical* one.

²⁸ *STh* II-II, q. 85, a. 1.