

DOCTOR COMMUNI'S 1980

P. LEO J. ELDERS, S.V.D.

*Socius Pontificiae Academiae Romanae S. Thomae
Professor in Seminario Maiori Rolduc (Olanda)*

VALUES ACCORDING TO ST. THOMAS AQUINAS

Introduction

The term « value » in the sense of things, possessing goodness and excellence in so far as valued by man, is unknown to St. Thomas Aquinas. But I shall try to show that he did know the concept we currently intend to express by the word « value ». We shall next examine the values Aquinas acknowledged, in order to determine which in his view are ultimate values.

The first problem we encounter in the study of values is the variety of interpretations with regard to the precise meaning of the term « value » itself. A whole gamut of things are called values: human dignity, freedom, truth and peace, religion and democracy, justice and the common good; virtue, art and things of beauty; actions which give us pleasure; leisure and comfort; honour, health and material goods; friends and society life. These are only a few of the things called values. A narrower use of the term, however, subordinates the theory of value to ethics.

In the various cultures different values may prevail. An interesting example of this is the development of the meaning of the term *aretè* (virtue) in Greece, from the days of Homer to the rise of Stoic philosophy: while at first *aretè* signified above all physical strength and bravery, later it came to mean such moral qualities as prudence, justice, magnanimity and temperance. This raises the question of whether all values are dependent on cultural factors and subject to change.

A second and no less formidable problem looms in our search of absolute values. If values are things or states of being which man wants to attain, he will try to set up a hierarchy of values according to the strength of his needs and desires. As a matter of fact we notice that according to the individual and the period of history different values are assumed to rank highest. While in the past not very much was thought

of vacation and entertainment, they are now highly regarded. Attempts have been made to set up an objective scale of values which would first list the so-called primary values, connected with our natural experience of the world; these are followed by the things which are necessary for our life (*Lebenswerte*), useful things, spiritual goods, luxury goods, sanctity (*Heiligkeitswerte*)⁽¹⁾. Theories of value group questions about the good, the end, obligations and rights, moral and aesthetic judgments under a common heading.

Since the world of Aquinas is quite different from ours, any comparison between his system of values and ours is difficult. What I also see as a serious obstacle to our investigation is the fact that St. Thomas' philosophy is an attempt to set up a strictly *objective* appraisal of values, based upon the ontological structure of reality (God, man's spiritual mind and embodiment, afterlife, the fundamental inclinations to self-preservation, knowledge of truth and community life, the prevalence of the common good). The same stress on objectivity is found in his ethics and applies to the basic criteria of morality. Relativism, individualism and subjectivism are wholly absent. In his philosophy the examination of the values is based upon quiet confidence in the power of reason to know reality.

It follows that in a study of St. Thomas theory of values we must go back to metaphysics and the philosophy of man. For a number of modern philosophers this creates a difficulty insofar as they doubt the possibility to reach an entirely objective order of things and hold that values are dependent on the image of the world we have. No one is ever without some such image. Some hold that Aquinas developed his philosophy within a particular, prescientific and no longer valid image of the world. One may think here of his view of a hierarchically ordered universe, at the centre of which the immobile earth is placed, his theory of sexual differentiation, his texts on capital punishment, etc.

According to pluralism or historicism any philosophy is a limited, partial approach to reality and must be completed by other opinions. Such, however, is not the view of Aquinas. Although he is keenly aware of the boundaries of human knowledge and the limits of the truth accessible to us, he nevertheless holds that it is possible to reach some degree of a universally valid understanding of things. One may perhaps say that this conviction itself constitutes one of the basic values of Aquinas's thought and is not dependent on medieval cosmology. But even for those who do not share St. Thomas doctrine of the universality

⁽¹⁾ See MAX SCHELER, *Schriften aus dem Nachlass*, I, 451.

of philosophical truth, it is still worthwhile to consider his opinions, because admittedly he is one of the greatest minds ever.

Our attempt at a coherent survey of the basic values according to Aquinas proceeds in the following order:

- a) being and its properties.
- b) the hierarchy of being; God as the ultimate value.
- c) natural and human rights as values; values in human activity: science, art and virtue; pleasure and play.

In the conclusion, some remarks follow on Aquinas's philosophy as seen from the point of view of value.

I

In a sense, for St. Thomas the supreme value is being, that is the reality of things. Being is the highest value objectively, but also for the human subject, since whatever man chooses as his values (pleasure, God, duty, wisdom...), it must have reality in order to be a value. This view presupposes that the human mind discerns several aspects in a given thing (say its reality, its essential content, accidental determinations) and grasps being as primary and basic. The intellect apprehends being in the particular things which are present to us through our senses. In sensitive knowledge the reality of things is manifested to us, so that it can be grasped by the intellect.

Being is basic, for it is the being of things which makes them exist and makes their contents real. For this reason being is the cause of the perfection things possess and the foundation and source of each individual thing and of whatever it is ⁽²⁾.

Being does not presuppose anything in things, but it is so fundamental that it is presupposed by everything else. Hence one can even say that being as such is more noble than being alive or being man ⁽³⁾. Being is the very reality of things; it is beyond extension and space; it is what is most intimate ⁽⁴⁾. It gives stability, so that things are what they are ⁽⁵⁾. Although being is carried through succession in time, it is itself in an instant which is no pulsation but a concentration of reality ⁽⁶⁾.

⁽²⁾ *Quaestio disputata de potentia*, 7, 2 ad 9: «...actualitas omnium actuum et propter hoc est perfectio omnium perfectionum».

⁽³⁾ *S.Th.* III 16, 9 ad 2; *De veritate* 23, 6 ad 1.

⁽⁴⁾ *SCG* I 20.

⁽⁵⁾ *SCG* I 20.

⁽⁶⁾ *S.Th.* I 11, 1.

For Aquinas being is what first enters the human mind. It will also be the ultimate fulfilment of the intellect when man meets God who is subsistent being itself. St. Thomas' stress on reality as the basic value implies that the human intellect must nourish itself with reality. According to Aquinas's theory of knowledge we do not know concepts but real things ⁽⁷⁾; the rent between concepts and things, as it is assumed to exist by many philosophers, is not admitted by St. Thomas. We know the things themselves, as united to the mind, although they exist outside us. It is not the human intellect which throws light upon the world, but physical things illuminate the mind and are its nourishment. As Jacques Maritain writes, «What we need are not a set of truths that serve us, but a truth we serve» ⁽⁸⁾.

It is the task of man to place the wealth of all beings in his intellect, that is to acquire truth. Truth is the purpose of intellectual knowledge and for this reason pluralism is not the normal condition of man's knowledge. Reality remains the same in its basic structure, and it can be known as such. Thomism rejects the corrosive doubt as to the value of our pre-philosophical knowledge; it refuses to give up truth in favour of verification and to substitute symbols for reality.

The richness of being is such and its contents so vast that an old philosophical tradition speaks of the properties of being, such as its thing-character, its unity, its truth, goodness and beauty.

a) We become aware of the fact that the beings we know are objects for our thought and we call them «things». Whatever exists, is such an object, has a certain essence. The opposite is simply not thinkable. Nevertheless in nihilism this thing-character of beings is denied. According to Nietzsche it is a gratuitous assumption that things have a certain nature ⁽⁹⁾. The concept of «thing» would be the transfer of a subjective feeling to beings. Sharing Nietzsche's nihilism Jean-Paul Sartre also holds that being is empty and dark, and that man must give it a meaning by using it.

b) A next property of being is unity. A thing which has no unity cannot exist. Unity is the mark of being, so much so that a thing is being in the manner it is one. Unity is also the condition of knowledge: things can only be known insofar as they are one. Without some unity multitude would not even belong to being ⁽¹⁰⁾.

⁽⁷⁾ Cf. *S.Th.* I 14, 6 ad 1 and *Expos. in librum de causis* 8, n. 207.

⁽⁸⁾ JACQUES MARITAIN, *Les degrés du savoir*, Paris 1946, 9.

⁽⁹⁾ See K. SCHLECHTA, *Nietzsches Werke in Drei Bänden*, III 555.

⁽¹⁰⁾ *S.Th.* I 11, 1.

It is a basic tendency of the mind to seek unity. The intellect brings things together in classes, it discerns common aspects and thinks the universal, while it tries to reduce multitude to unity. The tendency of the mind to unity is so strong that all through history monism has found numerous supporters: they are of the opinion that all process and all determination take place within a given unity, so that the deepest aspect of reality is unity. Being is imperfect unity⁽¹¹⁾. But over and against this Platonic view Aristotle and Aquinas emphasize the absolute priority of being: unity is an attribute of being, which says that being is not divided.

c) A next property of being is its truth. A major development in modern philosophy has been the shift toward a more subjective view of truth: according to Hegel reality must be thought by the human mind in order to be real; the mind makes truth by being actively engaged in thinking. Truth is the never-ending process of God unfolding himself in the world and of human reason becoming God. Truth is without beginning and end. Hegel's view exercised a profound influence on Marxism.

According to Nietzsche plain knowledge of reality is without interest or value. If man finds pleasure in knowledge, it is for the sake of his own illusions⁽¹²⁾.

The phenomenology of Husserl intends to approach things in an objective way. However, things do not appear to each of us in the very same way because our condition and situation influence our knowledge. Heidegger further developed this view: our encounter with reality depends on the moment in which it takes place⁽¹³⁾. He believes that a critical investigation does not really help: we have to wait until reality unveils itself to us. Apparently there is a rent between the mind and reality. In Heidegger's existentialism it is not clear to what extent true knowledge of things is possible; being may hide itself or reveal itself. According to Heidegger being apparently turns into an appearing which is not subject to objective rules⁽¹⁴⁾.

In the existentialist phenomenology of Sartre being is dark and isolated; it refuses to give itself to man; it has no essence and no meaning, unless when it serves some useful purpose. Likewise according to Maurice Merleau-Ponty the knowableness of being is rather limited; man's

knowledge depends on his situation and his previous experience and bodily condition⁽¹⁵⁾.

In neopositivism an empirical, factual approach prevails. It refuses to go beyond ascertaining and asserting facts. General propositions, neopositivists believe, have no bearing on reality.

Aquinas's position with regard to the truth of being is very different: the mind is made to reach truth⁽¹⁶⁾. Since the human mind is the highest thing in the world, one may even say that truth is the purpose and highest value of the universe⁽¹⁷⁾.

According to Protagoras things have no intelligible structure but for Aquinas things are ordered to the mind on which they depend (the divine Creator or the human craftsman) and to man's intellect, by which they can be known. Natural things can be understood. We cannot even speak of something that is not knowable, Samuel Peice writes, for that which is entirely unknowable does not exist⁽¹⁸⁾.

Indeed, « everything is knowable inasmuch as it possesses being ». Things do make sense and can be known by man⁽¹⁹⁾.

d) St. Thomas likewise affirms the goodness of being. While by the expression « the truth of being » we mean that being is the meaningful object of the intellect, by « goodness » we denote that being is the object of will. Things are willed because of their perfection and everything has a certain perfection, for it has a certain content and it exists. Hence every being is good. This means that everything is the object of a positive affirmation of the will, which appreciates and likes its perfection. Although not all things agree with our particular needs and desires at this moment, it is nevertheless a fact that in a more general way we discern the basic perfection of things, so that we affirm and will them. One may also express this in the following way: by his very nature man approves and likes being⁽²⁰⁾.

e) From the above said it also follows that when considered metaphysically all beings are beautiful. For we call beautiful that which pleases us when seen, heard or known by the intellect. The beauty of a thing depends on the harmony of its parts as well as on the clarity

(11) See J. TROUILLARD, *La mystagogie de Proclus*, Paris 1982, 93-101.

(12) *Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Vorrede 2; *Die Geburt der Tragödie* 15.

(13) See his *Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*.

(14) See A. DE WAELHENS, *Phénoménologie et vérité*, Louvain 1953, 116.

(15) *Phénoménologie de la perception* 73; 453; *Sens et non-sens* 187.

(16) I 16, 1.

(17) *S.C.G.* I 1.

(18) *Collected Papers*, 6, 338.

(19) I 16, 3.

(20) Cf. I 78, 1: « res nata animae coniungi et in anima esse »; *De veritate* 1,1: « anima nata convenire cum omni ente ».

of its form. Now the constitutive parts of all things have a certain harmony, for else the latter would not exist. Moreover in the perspective of the doctrine of participation one can say that their form shares in a likeness to God. Because the mind has a deep-seated desire of clarity, it experiences this harmony and the clarity as agreeable to itself. Besides unity, truth and goodness beauty is also one of the basic values ⁽²¹⁾.

Our summary has shown being as the basic value. But from the end of the seventeenth century philosophers began to consider the properties of being empty terms, which do not qualify things themselves ⁽²²⁾. A sort of devaluation of reality set in. According to Hegel the transcendental properties of being are the result of a dialectical process of becoming and no longer intrinsic to primordial being itself. Marxism replaced the transcendental terms by such qualities of physical matter as extension and change. Nietzsche spoke of a total devaluation of reality: there is no true world, there are no values to be discovered; man makes his own values and these are never definite. Man has no real home; everything is bound to disappear and seems to be in vain ⁽²³⁾. Even phenomenology did not succeed in returning to the philosophy of being; it did not go beyond a description of experiences. Thus truth is the interest one takes in a certain thing, and this depends on one's own condition and situation.

However, Aquinas holds that true objective knowledge of the physical world is possible. If man opens the gates of his mind to being, he does not discover animosity nor absurdity but objective values. If, on the other hand, we refuse to acknowledge the transcendental properties of being but make truth, goodness and beauty dependent on our own attitude, we introduce a subjective approach and consider reality from the point of view of its use rather than from that of being itself. The philosophy of value is an answer to the plight modern man finds himself confronted with. It attempts to recuperate what has been lost by extreme subjectivism, but stays short of a full recognition of the value of being ⁽²⁴⁾. « Only the recognition of the transcendental value of being prevents things from becoming merely objects of man's knowledge and instruments for his well-being » ⁽²⁵⁾.

⁽²¹⁾ See *In De divinis nominibus*, c. 4, lectio 5, n. 349; *De potentia* 4, 2 ad 32. According to Sartre things are never beautiful (*L'Imaginaire*, 245).

⁽²²⁾ See KANT, *KrV* 12.

⁽²³⁾ Also *sprach Zarathustra* (Schlechta II 511); *Aus dem Nachlass der Achzigerjahre* (Schlechta II 958); *Götzendammerung* (Schlechta II 958).

⁽²⁴⁾ Cf. GABRIEL MARCEL, *Les hommes contre l'humain*, p. 127.

⁽²⁵⁾ KENNETH SCHMITZ, « Toward a Metaphysical Restoration of Natural Things », in CH.J. O'NEIL (edit.), *An Etienne Gilson Tribute*, Milwaukee 1959, 245-262, p. 260.

II

Being as the basic value we have been speaking about is the being of physical things considered in their most general aspects. As we have seen Aquinas holds that being is the first thing to enter our mind and that the human intellect is subject to being in the sense that the order of reality and its laws are given and not man-made. Man discovers the panoply of specifically different things. Their essences have varying contents and meaning; each possesses its own treasure. For this reason biologists consider the extinction of a single species an irreparable loss. Aquinas was keenly aware of the value of natural things which he expresses by the term *nobilis* (*nobilior*). He frequently compares beings with one another to declare that one species is more noble than another ⁽²⁶⁾. As a matter of fact, St. Thomas orders things according to their growing perfection, that is their fuller determination of primary matter (or, in the case of spiritual substances, their greater proximity to God) ⁽²⁷⁾. The different species possess being in degrees ⁽²⁸⁾. In the world of visible things man is most perfect ⁽²⁹⁾, but in the order of spiritual beings, the angels are higher than man.

This does not mean, however, that the beings which make up the universe are themselves ultimate values. According to St. Thomas their mutability and contingency, the limits imposed on them as well as on their activities show that they depend on a Source of Being and Activity which is the Ultimate or Absolute. Thus we reach the Primordial Value. This ascent to the Ultimate, as Aquinas worked it out in the Five Ways, is logically compelling, although the conclusion of the arguments lies beyond the empirical world and is not itself subject to verification by sense experience. For God's existence is not immediately given to man.

Aquinas shows that God is Subsistent Being Itself and Pure Actuality. With St. Gregory of Nazianze and St. John Damascene he describes God as the limitless ocean of being. « Being » is, indeed, the best name of God, for the term does not signify a particular form, but being itself; other terms apply limits to being in some respect, while God is not limited by anything. Hence « Being itself » is a most proper name for

⁽²⁶⁾ For instance, the human soul is more noble than other souls (*S.Th.* III 5. 4), man than other living beings (I 99, 1), substance than the accidents.

⁽²⁷⁾ *De spirit. creat.*, 3; *Q.d. de anima*, 7.

⁽²⁸⁾ *S.C.G.* II 95. Aquinas follows the Neo-Platonic tradition as represented by St. Augustine (*De civitate Dei* 12,2; *De div. quaest.* 38,51,2) and Dionysius (See R. ROQUES, *L'univers dionysien*, Paris 1954, p. 37).

⁽²⁹⁾ « Persona significat id quod est perfectissimum in tota natura, scilicet subsistens in rationali natura » (I 29, 3).

him. Moreover the word «being» applied to God signifies being in the present tense, and this is appropriate to God, for God is not marked by past or future⁽³⁰⁾.

Other things can only exist by participating in God's being. All perfections created things possess, such as wisdom, goodness, power, are derived from God in whom they exist in limitless perfection and unity. God is the Cause of all beings and keeps the universe in existence, yet he is distinct from the effects which proceed from him. He is not the soul of the world nor the being of things, but he is the cause of their being. In his wisdom and love he called limited things into existence, allowing them to share in his own perfection.

By his intellect man seeks to know being; his mind extends to all reality and so he has a natural desire to know the Ultimate Principle, God. Consequent upon this knowledge is the love of God. Since God is the infinite good, man's will is drawn to love God more than anything else⁽³¹⁾.

It follows that God is man's supreme good and value, so that man finds his happiness in God. Here we must call attention to a certain duality in the concept of happiness: it is both the highest act of man by which he apprehends God and God as the infinite good which fills man with overflowing joy. This duality illustrates the union of the objective and the subjective in Aquinas's philosophy. When in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle stresses the subjective aspect of the act of happiness he calls contemplation, Aquinas, in his commentary, mentions several times the Good man must reach which is the object and source of his happiness⁽³²⁾.

God is a living, personal value and not a *thing* to be acquired. He gives himself to man. God is more intimately present in man than man himself. Thus Aquinas gives a typical solution to the debate on the immanence and transcendence of God: God is at the same time totally transcendent by his infinite greatness and intimately present by his causal action.

In all his actions man cannot but strive to attain some good, that is a participation in God's goodness. Therefore, he actually tends toward God, whether he wants it or not. Also in this way God is the ultimate value in the sense of the foundation of being, of perfection and of the end to be attained.

⁽³⁰⁾ I 13, 11.

⁽³¹⁾ I 60, 5.

⁽³²⁾ See *In I Ethic.*, lectio 9. See L. ELDERS, «St. Thomas Aquinas' Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics», in L. ELDERS and K. HEDWIG, *The Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Città del Vaticano 1984, 9-49, p. 17.

The coexistence of the Infinite First Cause with finite creatures is not without baffling difficulties. The Thomistic solution to this antinomy is that of love and friendship: God makes creatures be in order to have them share in his being. He also lets created things exercise their own activity in order to allow them to partake more fully in his own work⁽³³⁾.

III

As has been explained in the Introduction the term value, used in a broader sense, covers all kinds of rightness, virtue, knowledge and holiness. In other words, the acting person and man's actions can and must become values. How does St. Thomas view these values of the moral and juridical order? Everyone has the basic insight that the good has to be done and evil must be avoided, that is, that one must work for one's own perfection or fulfilment and well-being and do the good his nature demands from him. Human life finds its fulfilment and its meaning when man performs his basic tasks and returns to his Ultimate Good, God.

Everywhere in the universe we see finality. All things tend toward the good which is their fulfilment. By his very nature man strives to attain his good. The answer to the question «What is the good of man?» is: what right reason considers to be so⁽³⁴⁾. First reason formulates the basic principles of conduct. Prudence applies these to particular situations, and conscience judges whether certain actions are right or wrong. Man is bound to follow the verdict of his conscience. The basic moral principles and the judgment of conscience are the core of man's autonomy and responsibility in the field of ethics. These basic principles of moral law such as «one must respect one's parents», «one must respect the possessions of others», etc. are formulated without difficulty; they flow forth from man's natural inclinations toward his own life, human society, procreation, etc. The object of these obligations is what Aquinas calls the «*iustum naturale*», which not only means a basic right but even more a task and duty imposed on man. Unfortunately recent use of the word «rights» stresses that one has a claim to something, but it forgoes to point out the tasks and duties which correspond to the rights.

⁽³³⁾ In *SCG* III 69 Aquinas points to Plato's devaluation of the material world as the origin of theories which deny created things their own activity.

⁽³⁴⁾ I-II 18, 5: «Bonum hominis est secundum rationem esse».

In Aquinas' ethics the basic human rights are the just claims to those things which reason acknowledges as necessary to implement our natural inclination. These are conditions, means and actions to secure the object of the inclinations and make up the *ius gentium* ⁽³⁵⁾.

Our basic inclination is to happiness. Within this basic tendency there are the natural inclinations to preserve our life and health, to associate with others, to have sexual union and procreate offspring. Thus we have the right to marry, are entitled to own property and have a right to live and work. This «*iustum naturale*» depends on human nature and therefore it is the same everywhere in the world.

When we consider man as a social being another series of rights appear, such as the right to protection and help; the right to share in the order of law; the right to education and to participate in public life; a right to fulfil a task. — Other rights are proper to the human person as a transcendent reality, such as the right to religion and the right to freedom of conscience. With regard to these rights Aquinas explicitly insists on the duties which go with them: it is a primordial task for man to turn to his Creator and to develop his relationship with him, as it is also man's duty to form his conscience and to reach the right moral insight ⁽³⁶⁾.

When man acts in view of the good, following his basic natural inclinations, he acts morally and acquires the so-called virtues, that is those determinations of his faculties which allow him to perform his actions correctly. Virtues are divided into intellectual and moral virtues.

Intellectual virtues such as wisdom and science are among man's most precious possessions in this life. Wisdom ranks highest: it is the knowledge of the ultimate causes, that is, of the origin and end of all things. It is knowledge of God. The various sciences occupy also a high place in the scale of values. According to St. Thomas man's happiness in this life consists above all in intellectual work and true insight. Science gives a coherent view of the universal order. It is not a means to something else, but it is willed for itself ⁽³⁷⁾. Since the material things are ordered to the spiritual beings, whose highest activity is knowledge, Aquinas asserts that «*truth is the purpose of the universe*» ⁽³⁸⁾.

Man's highest operation is to know; speculative knowledge is not subordinated to any practical end; therefore, it is desirable for its own

⁽³⁵⁾ I-II 95, 4 ad 1.

⁽³⁶⁾ SCG III 119.

⁽³⁷⁾ See SCG I 102; *De veritate* 2, 15 ad 5; 5 ad 4.

⁽³⁸⁾ SCG I 1: «*Oportet igitur veritatem esse ultimum finem totius universi*».

sake. Speculative, scientific knowledge is what in this world comes closest to the vision of God in the next life ⁽³⁹⁾.

Speculative knowledge, however, remains imperfect, so that we are left with a deep-seated desire for a more perfect knowledge, which we cannot obtain by our own forces. But we know that in order to understand reality fully, we must know the First Cause. The vision of God constitutes the final fulfilment of man ⁽⁴⁰⁾.

Speculative knowledge concerns the universal, but because physical things exist as individuals, speculative knowledge finds its achievement in a return to the individual things ⁽⁴¹⁾. The arts deal with particular things and are practical knowledge, that is knowledge which is applied to action. As such they are determinations of the intellect which give it the correct and easy way of doing a certain type of work ⁽⁴²⁾.

The arts help to produce works of art, which partake in art itself, evoke admiration and invite to imitation. Arts are priceless goods of mankind and are necessary for human life. Comparing, however, human art with divine art, Aquinas points out that in many ways the works of divine art (nature) are more basic, for natural things exist by themselves, whereas human art adds accidental qualifications to natural things ⁽⁴³⁾.

The arts are divided into liberal arts and mechanical (manual) arts. As values they rank lower than the moral virtues: the end of the artist lies in the work of art he produces but it is not man's own life. The end of the arts is the «*factibile*», while moral virtues aim at man's own perfection ⁽⁴⁴⁾. Man cannot reach his end by art. Moreover in human life art needs the guidance of moral virtue ⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Moral virtues are determinations of our faculties which help us act in view of our true good. Man is free either to use the virtues he acquired or to act against them. If one acts in accordance with a virtue, his action is always morally right. In fact, virtues are interconnected and one cannot have one without the others ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

Hence the different virtuous acts transcend their own particular end; they all aim at man's real good and make him virtuous ⁽⁴⁷⁾. Aquinas

⁽³⁹⁾ SCG III 63.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ *Compendium theologiae* 104.

⁽⁴¹⁾ I 84, 7; SCG III 75.

⁽⁴²⁾ I-II 57, 5 ad 1.

⁽⁴³⁾ See FRANCIS J. KOVACH, «*Divine Art in Saint Thomas Aquinas*», in *Arts libéraux et philosophie au Moyen Age*, Montréal 1968, 663-671.

⁽⁴⁴⁾ SCG III 36; I-II 2, 5.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ II-II 47, 4 ad 2.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ I-II 65, 1.

⁽⁴⁷⁾ II-III 180, 2.

explains how they do so: virtues are dispositions which incline a person to what is his good, for instance, to fairness, justice, religion. Owing to the virtues he judges correctly in the different fields of action and takes the proper decisions⁽⁴⁸⁾. To live well and righteously consists in acting well. Acting well means that a man acts correctly according to reason and right choice (and not to passion). The different moral virtues make man tend toward his true ends. In order to determine whether certain particular acts are conform to these ends, prudence is needed.

Prudence is the highest moral virtue⁽⁴⁹⁾. The order of nobility of the other virtues is justice, fortitude, temperance. Justice resides in the will, fortitude and temperance in the irascible and concupiscible faculties. Justice not only regulates man's life for himself but also in regard to others.

Speaking of moral virtues we must mention the love of friendship as one of man's finest values. While love at the level of sensitive life is a passion, the love of the will is love of the good inasmuch as it is good. It is not a covetous love or self-interest, but our affective presence to a good.

When this good is in accordance with right reason, the love of it is morally good. The good which is the object of our love shows two aspects: it is a subject or in a subject and has a certain form. Love is directed to both. The love of friendship will a certain good for another. For friendship (in the sense of «amicitia honesta») is love of another because he is the other and pleases us. It is more than benevolence; it requires mutual love by which friends are willing to share with one another what they are and have⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Friendship is necessary to man. Without friends one cannot provide for one's needs and life loses its interest. Therefore it is one of the highest values⁽⁵¹⁾. Friendship is accompanied by joy and peace, because it is the presence in us of the good we love. It brings along peace, for it makes us want the same things. When we love our real good, our hearts are at peace and our strivings are unified⁽⁵²⁾.

The moral virtues are determinations of our faculties which facilitate to act in view of the right goods. We remain free, however, to use the virtues or to act against them. An action in accordance with virtue is al-

⁽⁴⁸⁾ I-II 58, 5.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ *In III Sent.*, d. 33, q. 2, a. 5.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ I-II 28, 2; 23, 1.

⁽⁵¹⁾ *In VIII Ethicorum*, lectio 1, 1539; 1544.

⁽⁵²⁾ II-II 28, 1; 29, 3.

ways morally right. Virtues are interconnected and one cannot have one virtue without the other⁽⁵³⁾. Hence the different virtuous acts transcend particular goods; they all aim at man's good as such. Moral virtues make us good⁽⁵⁴⁾.

Aquinas explains the way in which the virtues do so: they are dispositions which incline us to what is our good, e.g. to what is just, truthful, courageous, magnanimous, temperate. Owing to the virtues we can judge correctly about what to do and take the proper decisions⁽⁵⁵⁾. The different moral virtues direct man toward his true ends in the various fields of activity.

The virtue of prudence determines whether certain actions are conform to these ends. In a descending order of nobility the other moral virtues are justice, fortitude and temperance. These so-called cardinal virtues are subdivided. Moral virtues are as many values. They are among the highest goods of man: «Virtue is praised because of the good of reason (it brings about) and therefore it evcells over all exterior goods»⁽⁵⁶⁾.

The value of virtue is much higher than that of material possessions: virtue is the perfection of human nature, brought about by man's own good actions; virtuous activity gives its own joy when it reaches its end⁽⁵⁷⁾.

Moral virtues are more necessary to man than the intellectual virtues. However, considered on themselves these are higher values than the moral virtues. We do not ascribe moral virtues to God⁽⁵⁸⁾.

In pleasure a value? Aquinas acknowledges that a good number of people appear to consider pleasure the highest value⁽⁵⁹⁾. However, on closer inspection it becomes evident that every pleasure is a concomitant of actions which reach a good that agrees with man. Pleasure accompanies the use of a faculty in agreement with its nature. When this use is according to reason, pleasure is a good. If an action is not accompanied by some pleasure, it cannot be good, because pleasure terminates an action by way of an end⁽⁶⁰⁾. From this it appears that pleasure

⁽⁵³⁾ I-II 65, 1.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ II-II 180, 2.

⁽⁵⁵⁾ I-II 58, 5.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ *In IX Ethicorum*, lectio 3, 1788.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ *In II Ethicorum*, lectio 18, n. 592.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ I-II 66, 3.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ I 49, 3 ad 5; I-II 71, 2 ad 3.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ I-II 34, 4 ad 3.

is a powerful excitant and help. But man's inclinations must be informed by the virtues if pleasure is to lead him into the right direction.

The pleasure one finds in the activity of the mind is twofold: *a*) the pleasure which comes from the fact that one is thinking and willing; *b*) the pleasure caused by the object⁽⁶¹⁾. The pleasure of the senses, consequent upon perception, concerns minimal goods compared to the spiritual good of the soul⁽⁶²⁾.

Play, sports, entertainment are also values inasmuch as they give us some pleasure and relaxation which allow us to rest the mind so that it can return with greater vigour to its tasks⁽⁶³⁾.

Conclusion

Our enquiry has led us to the following insights: Aquinas's philosophy is an attempt to understand reality in its fundamental structure without using a subjective approach. The term «value», however, is a derivative notion which includes objective and subjective aspects, viz. values are whatever satisfies or contributes to satisfying man's desires and needs.

In order to study the place of value in St. Thomas' works one must analyse reality in its ordination to man. The relationship of the human subject and reality yields a scala of values: objectively being is the fundamental, God the highest value. In getting to know reality man discovers his own being, his spiritual mind and understands that he is the most noble being in the material world. In this sense the mind, freedom, man's life and health are values which rank highest among created goods.

Knowing being and God gives fulfilment and happiness, which is man's highest subjective value. The vision of God is man's true beatitude; in this life only imperfect happiness is to be found. Human values on the level of the speculative intellect comprize thought, wisdom and science; in the order of the practical intellect the arts are values (and the goods and beauty they help bring about); in the order of moral action virtues are values. Justice is the foundation of all values at the level of community life; love and peace are the effect of virtuous life.

⁽⁶¹⁾ *In IV Sent.*, d. 44, q. 1, a. 3, sol. 4 ad 4.

⁽⁶²⁾ I-II 2, 6.

⁽⁶³⁾ SCG III 25; II-II 168, 2 ad 3; I-II 1, 6 ad 1.

There is no single answer to the question of what is the highest value. Our answer must take into consideration the entire landscape of ontological facts, so as to be able to assign to things, actions and their effects their proper place and significance. The philosophical study of value presupposes the philosophy of nature, ethics and metaphysics.