SECONDARY-CAUSE AUTONOMY
AND DIVINE MOTIVATION

CHRISTIAN SCHRÖER

University of Augsburg

Abstract. An act-theoretical view on the profile of responsibility discourse shows in what sense not only all kinds of technical, pragmatic and moral reason, but also all kinds of religious motivation cannot justify a human action sufficiently without acknowledgment to three basic principles of human autonomy as supreme limiting conditions that are human dignity, sense, and justifiability. According to Thomas Aquinas human beings ultimately owe their moral autonomy to a divine creator. So this autonomy can be considered as an expression of secondary-cause autonomy and as the voice of God in the enlightened conscience.

I. TOPIC AND THESIS

What roles does the divine reason play in the motivation and commitment of human action? As noted Thomas Aquinas, one can ask this question in two senses, as he explains in the sum of theology:

> Even if the eternal law may be unknown to us, insofar as it is in the divine mind, as it is known to us still in some way, either by natural reason, which as its own image derived from him or by an additional revelation. (Summa Theologiae I-II q.19, a.4 ad 3)

In this paper I confine myself entirely to a discussion of natural reason, which, according to Thomas, corresponds to 'what human reason is able to understand about God'. According to Thomas, this concerns both theoretical and practical reason.

My thesis is that every moral motivation is essentially based on the use of practical reason. But this use is not possible without a basic acknowledgement of human autonomy. Human beings ultimately owe this moral autonomy to a divine creator. So the moral autonomy of human beings is an expression of secondary-cause autonomy. This then implies that the natural practical reason of the creature *is* the voice of God having an effect in the enlightened conscience. All other forms of religious motivation, just as a specific human motivation, can only be justified if they are compatible with the basic principles of this secondary-cause autonomy. Otherwise the instructions, which God gives by natural reason and revelation would not agree. (Cf. Aquinas, Expositio super librum Boethii De trinitate q.2, a.3c)

In the first step, I will introduce the systematic profile of a morally motivated action on the basis of responsibility discourse and deepen the topic by means of classical doctrines. I will then call on the basic forms of technical, pragmatic and moral motivation where they occur as part of this profile. In the last step I will show in what sense *all* of the seriously acceptable forms of moral motivation find their supreme normative condition in the three basic principles of secondary-cause autonomy.

II. THE BASIC PROFILE OF HUMAN ACTION

2.1. The Responsibility Discourse

The common theme of Socratic ethics is the responsibility discourse. Socrates calls on his fellow citizens to give answer for what they do and don´t do: *logon didonai*, which Cicero and the rest of Latin reception recite as *rationem reddere*. Plato emphasizes the universal character of this discourse several times through the picture of the judgment of the dead, which corresponds to the image of the Last Judgment in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tradition.

In order to hold a person responsible, six questions are necessary and only together sufficient. A responsibility discourse is usually triggered by an event seen as unpleasant or harmful and furthermore suspected to be attributable to human action or inaction. For instance, suppose that a train has derailed. In a first attempt to understand the situation, we will ask three questions, which relate to the matter of facts:

(1) We ask about the event: what exactly happened?

(2) We rate the event using two kinds of valuation, which usually arouse our interest in events: on the one hand judging it with regard to the difference of pleasant and unpleasant, and on the other hand with regard to the difference of useful and detrimental.

(3) We wonder about the cause: To what is it due that this event occurred? Was it a physical event only, just as other natural events? Or was it an action (such as sabotage / terrorism) or inaction (such as lack of maintenance)? If it was due to an action or inaction, then the question of what lead to the event is directed at a person. Only then it is expected that this person will be held accountable. The first three questions therefore concern three moments that are empirically recordable: event, rating, person.

Now if we actually can track down a certain person, we have to ask three more questions. For not everything people do can be attributed as an imputable act. John Austin describes the obstructive beginning of a day: I wake up, stumble over the carpet and spill my coffee. Here, all three verbs express an activity. Nevertheless, one would not readily speak of an attributable *doing*. You do not wake up, stumble and spill coffee *voluntary*. So we must ask:

(4) Did the actor really want to cause his action or inaction?

The fourth question thus concerns the voluntary mode of the doing (*hêkoûsion, voluntarium*).

Moreover, usually not every person is held responsible for every event they caused through their action or inaction. We do not blame the inventor of the railway for every train that derails. Rather, we focus on particular decisions of the actor, because with the decision to either take action or not, the actor usually intends to induce a very specific event. And this point also defines whether the actor will judge his action to have failed or been successful afterwards. Thus we can only speak of a morally attributable act if the actor knowingly induced or accepted an event as an inevitable event. The fifth question must therefore be:

(5) Did the actor knowingly cause exactly this event?

Only the sixth and last question leads to the actual motivation and reads simply:

(6) Why did the person do that? What induced the actor to do that?

Plato and Aristotle already called attention to the central point: Nobody does anything voluntary and knowingly without rating it *good* in at least one respect, 'because nobody wants something except he thinks, that it

is good' (Aristotle, Rhetoric 1369a3-5; cf. Plato, Gorgias, 467e1- 468b8). So we have to ask: Why did the actor think it was good to knowingly and wilfully bring about an event that is either enjoyable and useful or unpleasant and detrimental for the people affected? Only then we have posed the actual question of motivation.

The responsibility discourse already reveals three main classes of motifs: I do or don´t do something

(a) because I expect the induced result to be useful for myself or others,

(b) because I expect the induced result to be pleasant for me or others,

(c) because I have the opinion that I, by doing or not doing this, do something good.

Aristotle shows that, with regard to friendship, the moral motivation includes the two other forms of motivation, but not vice versa: A morally motivated friendship is also useful and pleasant for the friends, but a friendship simply based on pleasure or utility is not simply a completely good friendship. Those two forms of friendship are called friendship only because of the partial resemblance to a friendship based on moral motives. For the two other motivations can occur without dependency on a moral motivation. (Cf. Aristotle, EN VIII, 3-5)

2.2. Willing and Doing

In his dialogue *Gorgias*, Plato draws a basic profile of human action that completely reflects the just-mentioned structure of the responsibility dialogue. (Cf. Plato, Gorgias, 466a5- 467d10) The fundamental aspect is the distinction between what people want and what they do: No one wants to swallow bitter medicine, and yet people do. Merchants who go to sea might not want to go to sea, and yet they do go out to sea. So there is a difference between what one does and what one wants: what you do is swallowing the medicine, but what you want is to live healthy. What merchants do is going to sea, but what they want is to trade and thereby to be rich. As Aristotle adds in the Nicomachean Ethics, what we want is always something general (to be healthy, to be rich). In contrast, what we do is always something particular (to swallow medicine, to go to sea).

Thereupon, Plato distinguishes between the *actor*, the *object* and the *rating* of the action, and he does that for both the side of willing and the side of doing: The willing is directed to a general aim, which is considered to be *good*. The doing however is directed to a single end

as a specific result, which one intends to bring about, and with the successful achievement of which one is satisfied. This also explains the tension between doing and wanting: No one wants to swallow bitter medicine. This is because you want it only participating. You only do it because factually it is conducive (*ôphelimon*) to the aim you pursue, and thus its being voluntary is only conditioned, because what you do appears to be required (*prosêkon*) for the good will you pursue. So here again we can identify a six-membered basic profile of human action:

The human act: willing and doing			
	practical attitude:	practical object	< practical valuation>
Willing:	I want to:	live healthy	\<because it seems to me to be good>
Doing:	I want to: - participating -	swallow bitter medicine - in order to serve -	\<because it seems to me to be good> - required -

2.3. Intention and Execution

As Thomas Aquinas emphasizes, both of these triads complement each other in the same way as *intention* (*ordo intentionis*) and *execution* (*ordo executionis*) (cf. Summa Theologiae I-II q.1, a.4c): The *intention* of action is the willing to pursue a general aim, which is assessed to be good. The execution of action, either acting or deliberately not acting, is done to cause a result which, in case the desired end is achieved, satisfies the actor.

The determining sense of the relation of intention and execution is threefold: The will *subjectively* determines actions or inaction, the general aim *materially* determines the intended specific results, and the valuation of the general aim determines the *moral* value of acting or not acting beyond the positive outcome. Execution is accordingly determined threefold: The act itself is executed *voluntarily*. The results achieved *serve* the general aim. The delight at the success of the action or inaction is only then *morally* delightful, if the success seems to be a required for the goodness of the general aim. (Cf. Summa Theologiae I-II q.5, a.1) Corresponding to the three determining relations of intention, we can identify the three moments of *subjective willingness*, *materially serving* and *normative requirement* on the side of execution.

The human act: intention and execution			
	<u>Actor</u>	<u>What is done</u>	<u>< Value ></u>
Intention: - determinates -	willing (voluntas):	aim (finis)	< good (bonum) >
Execution: - determined -	action/inaction (actio)	result (terminus)	< satisfied (delectatio) >
	'I'm acting voluntarily'	'It serves my purpose'	'Good insofar required'

The intention therefore motivates the execution is a triple sense: Willing subjectively motivates whether you act or do not act. The object of action or inaction is materially motivated through the general aim. And the value of the achieved result is morally motivated through assessing the general aim as good.

With this, the basic pattern of every morally attributable motivation is defined: Someone does or does not do something as a genuine human action exactly then, when it is intended in the named tripartite sense, namely that it appears to be fulfilling, meaningful and good. The same applies to every single action, but also to all sectors of human praxis and for the human life entirely. So the highest possible happiness of human beings would thus be achieved through an eventually fulfilled, meaningful and good life.

To align one's actions in respect to one's intentions, usually three intermediary personal capabilities are necessary: Whoever wants to do something needs the necessary courage (*fortis*) to do it. To adequately define one's general aims in each case, one needs the necessary orientating knowledge (*wisdom*). To not be misled by superficial aspects of pleasure and utility in the rating of one´s action, one needs to be sober-minded (*temperans*). Each of these three attitudes deals justly when it does its job in order to the common good. The highest possible misery would hence be a life in paralyzing fear, hopeless distress and unforgivable guilt. The best possible good news (tidings of joy) would thus be the one that overcomes all fear, distress and guilt and through this paves the way for a fulfilled, meaningful and good life.

III. THREE SOURCES OF MOTIVATIONS

3.1. *The Basic Form of Moral Judgment*

Both intention and execution exhibit the structure of an intentional capability: The intention assumes shape of a judgment (*logos, iudicium*). But also the execution of an action has the structure of an intentional performance, insofar as the execution always grounds on sensuous and motoric capabilities, which on their part have an intentional structure. Only together they constitute the *single* human action in the distinctness of intention and execution, whereat the intention gives the form (*what* is done) and the execution the matter (in what the action consists). (cf. Summa Theologiae I-II q.1, a.2; q.17, a.4c)

The basic form of any intentional capability encompasses an act and a specific object appertaining to the household of this act. The seen in the act of seeing are always colours, the heard in hearing are always sounds, the smelled in smelling are always fragrances, etc. With dianoëtical capabilities, a twofold object appears. Thomas remarks frequently: The specific object of the intellect is the being and the truth. The specific object of the will, however, is the aim and the good. (Summa Theologiae I-II q.1, a.1c; q.1, a.2 ad 3)

According to Thomas, this very point characterizes rational capabilities, because this twofold object the structure of judgment is substantiated. This leads to the elementary parallelism of theoretical and practical judgments: the realized in realizing are general states of affairs, valued in distinguishing between true or false. And the wanted in willing are general aims, valued in distinguishing between good and bad.[1]

---

[1] The parallelism of theoretical and practical judgments is laid out in the works of Plato and Aristotle, but systematically carried out by Aquinas and includes three main aspects: 1) In a theoretical judgment we judge a thought state of affairs with regard to the universal difference of true and false. In a practical judgment however we judge a general aim or a general option of action or life with regard to the universal difference of good and bad. 2) How a (not just hypothetical) theoretical judgment raises a conceptual act of conviction, which necessitates the one who judges in that way to a corresponding speech, thus a (not just hypothetical) practical judgment raises a deliberate conviction that necessitates the one who judges in that way to a corresponding action or inaction. 3) The respects and accounts, under which we assess in theoretical considerations the truth of the thought state of affairs, correspond in practical considerations the respects and accounts, under which the goodness of an action option is being assessed.

In his late article 'The Thought', also Gottlob Frege insinuates the parallelism of theoretical and practical judgments, when he writes as follows: 'Just as the word beautiful leads the way for aesthetics, and the word good does so for ethics, so leads the word true the way for logic.' (Frege 1918-1919/2010: 87) Hence both the word *good* in ethical judgments and the word *true* in theoretical judgments are classified within the same semantic category. Consequently, both forms of judgments can be pictured as follows:

Theoretical judgment:	I think:	state of affairs	< true / false >
Practical judgment:	I want:	a general aim	< good / bad >

3.2. Emotions as Subjective Motivation of Action

With this Frege ties on a classical understanding of judgment, which is not any more readily available in modern philosophy. On the one hand a theory of redundancy of truth is dominant, where the twofold object of theoretical acts of judgments is reduced again to one single proper object. On the other hand, generally only one capability of judgment is assumed. The only judging capability of human reason is the intellect; the intellect judges and in judging it merely distinguishes between true and false. David Hume concludes correctly: From states of affairs which are true or false an act cannot be reasoned to be good or bad. Consequently, the source of moral motivation has to be found elsewhere. If though the intellect is only capable of theoretical judgments, the only motivator left is emotion.

The motivation by emotions however is perceived fundamentally different to this in the classic Socratic ethics. The most consequential analysis can be found with Aristotle. Again, the three-membered structure of actor, object and valuation is fundamental: Each intentional act has a self-reference sensible to emotions. An unimpeded self-realization is received as pleasant and gratifying; a disturbed self-realization conversely is felt as unpleasant and annoying. Disturbances can occur both on the side of the capability and on the side of the object. Hence pleasure develops if a capability is undisturbed and successfully directed towards an object belonging to its specific household. So it seems to be an 'unimpeded activeness of a nature-conforming habit' (EN VII, 13, 1153a12-15, cf. VII, 14, 1153b9-12) Aristotle defines his findings more precisely in his second discourse of pleasure: Pleasure *is*

not an undisturbed act of doing, but *adds* to a successful act of doing and *completes* the act in its subjective affectivity. (EN X, 4, 1174b31-33)

In every intentional act, pleasure thus comes up as subjective motivation, treating every successful activity with a pleasant self-referential sensation. Precisely because of this circumstance pleasure is no reliable motivator. This is because human action usually is comprised of the activation of several intentional capabilities. The acts of different capabilities however can come to compete with each other: it is pleasant for the hearing to listen to enjoyable music, but enjoyable music might occasionally disturb successful thinking. (Cf. Summa Theologiae I-II q.5 a.1 ad 3) For the will it would be pleasing to reach the goal of being healthy again, but for the taste it is not delightful to take bitter medicine. However, in this sense the immanent delighting acts of single capabilities might come to compete with a holistic human joy of living a life perceived to be an overall fulfilling, meaningful and good life.[2]

3.3. Utility as a Secondary Motivation of Action

Utility as well is not a primary principle of moral motivation. It is important for the Socratic concept of action, that we consider the relation of wanting and doing not as a connection of cause and effect. If it were simply meant that the actor swallows the physical medicine to produce a special organic effect, Plato's text would not describe what is done as *to ophelimon* (what serves), but as *to chrêsimon* (what is useful). For the proposition rather says, that to swallow the medicine (what I particularly do) *serves* to be healthy (what I generally want).[3]

The concept of serving (*ophelimon*) signifies an *in-order-of*-relation (i.e. a *for-the-purpose-of*-relation), so correlates reciprocally to the *by*-relation between several terms which describe an action: I get wealthy *by* swallowing the bitter medicine, so taking the bitter medicine serves in that case to live healthy again. I become rich *by* going to sea, so going to sea serves to become rich. (Cf. Goldman 1971) Doing this by doing that

---

[2] So Jeremy Bentham is right when he says, that 'nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure', but this fact doesn't establish a moral principle (Bentham 2003: c. I, n.1).

[3] In his dialog Gorgias Plato introduces his action-profile in three steps: In the first step he exposed the difference between wanting and doing (466a5-467d10), in the second step the universal state of rating predicate good (467e1-468b8) and in the last step the concept of what serves (to ophelimon) (468b9-e6). There is no talk about what is useful (to chrêsimon) in this text passage.

refers to the order of intention and here to the inner constitution of one action in the unity of the two aspects what is done (general form) and in what does the action consist (single matter). However to use single means to cause another single event or effect refers to the causal relation between two single and different circumstances. Using something describes only a technical necessity, and in that view we consider our action somewhat from outside as a chain of several events. But to say *this serves to do that* in the sense that we do that by doing this signifies only one single event, and in that case we consider our action from the actor's intentional point of view.[4]

As has been shown already, the concept of moral motivation bonds with the normative concept of what seems required: Whoever wants a general aim the actor has considered to be good also believes the respective action to be required. From the profile of action outlined so far, now three basic forms of normativity can be defined more precisely:

(1) A certain action or inaction is *technically required,* when within an act of execution single measures need to be taken to accomplish single results: If I want to be on time for my appointment at the doctor´s, *I have to* leave now. In the profile of action, technical requirements emerge as a horizontal compulsion within the level of execution.

(2) Action or inaction is *pragmatically required,* if for the reason of an actual intention one feels compelled to act or not act: If I want to live healthy again, *I have to* swallow the medicine. In the profile of action, pragmatic requirements emerge as a vertical compulsion between the level of intention and the level of execution.

(3) Action or inaction is *morally required,* if one wants to act because the general aim has been assessed to be fulfilling, meaningful and good in regard to the human life at all: Insofar it is fulfilling, meaningful and good to care about human wellbeing, *I should* think about what one can do to maintain health and which measures I can set to realize these actions or inactions.

---

[4] The difference between to ophelimon (what serves, cf. opheilô: I should, owe, must) and to chrêsimon (what is useful) is lost in the course of the transition into the Latin terminology, because at least since Cicero both words are translated with utilis. Also the modern lexica give useful for both Greek words. Plato itself heeds the difference strictly in all his dialogs.

> Moral requirements therefore originate in a compulsion, which emerges on a horizontal level of intention, thus in the practical judgment itself.

So if someone wants to act in a way that his action is morally good (*eu prattein*), he will start off from the practical judgment considering three forms of thought: A first consideration is concerned with the *forming of will*: Are the general aims along which I orient my living and doing, fulfilling, meaningful and good? The second consideration is concerned with *consulting*: How I can effectuate my general aims by means of achievable single results? The third consideration concerns the *execution*: Which measures, competences and resources can I draw on to achieve those results? Hence, a morally good acting or not acting reveals, as was said as early as by Demokrit, the form of a threefold-birth (*tritogeneia*). So the earliest definition of prudence (*phronêsis*) as moral reason given by Demokrit is: The one is prudent who has good speech (*eu legein*), deliberates correctly (*eu logizesthai* resp. *eu bouleuein*) and then does what is to do (*práttein hê dei*). (FVS 68, B2) Thus the moral quality of a human action is decided by the moral quality of the leading intention.[5]

The objects of our needs, desires and interests as well as our self-concept or corporate identities may thus be motives which inspire us pragmatically to our actions. However, it is up to us whether we let us move from these motives or not move, and we are always able to subject these motives to the critical question of whether it is good to me to meet these needs, desires and interests or to follow those personal or social self-concepts.

---

[5] Two persons give alms, but in a different purpose: one wants practice charity, because he considers it good. The other wants to be admired by the people because this seems to him to be good. The first person has reached his goal of action when the need is help, the second actor, however, only when he is also admired for his act. Usually we make a difference between the moral qualities of these two cases. But both actions are the same in execution and differed only on the intention. So, the reason for the difference in moral evaluation is only found in the different intention. Cf. Summa Theologiae I-II q.1, a.3 ad 3.

IV. AUTONOMY AND HETERONOMY

4.1. Heteronomy and Autonomy of Moral Motivation

The classical difference between autonomous and heteronomous morality relates to nothing else but to the question of the general aims or intentions one has to follow. Indeed, one can ask: Do I follow maxims set by someone else, or should I only follow maxims I set myself? This question is as old as the Socratic ethics itself. Already in the Apology of Socrates, Plato distinguishes two forms of speech, i.e. the rhetorical speech and the Socratic speech: Rhetoric speech is violent, because it is the goal of rhetoric to actuate the audience to act in accordance with the speech of the rhetor. Socrates begins his speech for the defence with the words:

> What my prosecutors have done to you, men of Athens, I don´t comprehend (*ouk oîda*); I for myself almost forgot myself [!] over them; as they talked so suavely (*pithanôs elegon*). (Plato, Apology, 17a1-3)

Furthermore, in the Dialogue *Gorgias* the title character extols precisely this power of rhetoric 'that one is able to persuade by words', specifically as its greatest good (*megiston agathon*):

> For you have this in thy power, so the doctor will be your slave, the gym teacher will be your slave, and from that acquisition man (*chrêmatistês*) it will be shown that it acquires another (*allô*) and not himself (*ouch hautô*) but thee, who canst thou talk (*legein*) and to persuade the amount (*peithein*). (Plato, Gorgias, 452d3; d9-e7)

The power of the Socratic speech, however, lies solely in the insight whether the *logos* that guides the action is good and just. In this sense Socrates checks along with Crito, whether he should follow the speech of the people or the speech of Crito or the speech of the laws. Hence he continues:

> Jointly (*koinêi*), you Good, let's think about that, and if you oppose something (*antilegein*) to what I speak, oppose, and I will obey you (*peisomai*). If not, so stop it to tell me the same speech again and again therefore that I should against the Athenians will (*akontôn Athenaiôn*) go away from here. For it is surely of worth to me if you persuade me to do this, but not involuntary (*mê akontos*). (Plato, Kriton, 48d8-e5)

The Socratic speech stresses the utmost importance for each interlocutor to not consent to a demand of action before he himself has carefully examined it. So the Socratic speech treats the audience as a human being, who does not follow any demand but one he has appropriate to himself and has made it his own leading intention after an authentic process of thorough review. Precisely this motif is carried via Aristotle and Cicero to Thomas Aquinas and via Rousseau finally to Kant.

4.2. Non-cognitive Objections

As far as we assume that general aims or maxims mainly arise from accustoming to the moral standards of our educators and our social environments, moral convictions coincide with what in psychology is called *superego* (Freud) or *parent I* (Harris). But insofar as we are not masters in our own house, as Freud says, this entails just a moral heteronomy. In contrast, in order to preserve moral autonomy, other authors emphasize the freedom of human beings and defend pointedly the free choice of maxims, for which we can give only more or less plausible reasons (Hume, Tugendhat). John Stuart Mill combines both views in the conviction that what we refer to as conscience is nothing else but an emotional barrier fundamentally determined by education, and he sees no reason why those feelings 'may not be cultivated to as great intensity in connection with the utilitarian, as with any other rule of morals'. (Mill 1861: III 5)

The demand to explain not only the technical needs and pragmatic requirements, but also to justify the choice of his maxim seems to be avertable with the argument that this would only shift the problem, because such a justification would in turn be justified such that the reasoning gets only into the aporias of each final justification (Popper, Albert, Habermas). But if there are no objective criteria for justifying general moral standards, then internalized or freely chosen maxims are the last instances of human action justifications. In this case moral autonomy seems preserved, but at the cost of a lost generally binding morality. On the other hand, whoever argues that a justification of objective moral criteria, which binds the human will, is quite possible exposes himself to the accusation of moral heteronomy.

The concept of moral judgment in the tradition of the Socratic ethics agrees in a certain sense with the non-cognitive doctrine, that moral statements are neither true nor false and insofar they are not truth-apt;

a practical judgment does not say that a state of affairs is *true or false*, because it says that to act in a certain way is *good or bad*. Strictly speaking it also denies the claim that 'moral judgments are capable of being objectively true [!], because they describe some feature of the world' (Garner & Rosen 1967: 219-220), but this fact does not imply that there can't be any generally binding criteria of morality.

Given moral decisionism it is seemingly implied that moral maxims are based on decisions. But from the fact that maxims are set by the actor, it does not follow that there can't be any objective criteria for such settings. For until proven to the contrary the possibility remains open, that the choice of maxims does not appear randomly (conventional) or merely *de facto* (pragmatic), but in a certain sense inevitable (categorically). Maxims quite get their subjective validity for the actor by an act of consent. But this does not exclude the possibility that a maxim also has an objective validity, in the sense that there is no chance to deny it in a serious way, for it can be represented in an inescapable sense as reasonable and good towards any human being. If, however, the moral quality of an individual action or inaction were finally measured on the moral quality of the leading intention, it would be able to show that in certain cases there is no maintainable maxim that allowed a serious justification of the intended action or inaction.

4.3. Three Absolute Principles of Autonomy

This leads to a last pointed emphasis of our question: Do criteria exist to determine which leading intentions one can, must, or must not accept? Also in this point Aquinas refers to the parallelism of theoretical and practical reason. Commonly accepted are the main conditions of theoretical judgment. So anyone who wants to testify anything is necessitated to take into account three basic conditions of the theoretical judgment in his statement:

(1) No suspension of propositional attitude: Thinking that I do not just think would suspend the thinking at all. (Cf. Summa Theologiae I q.76, a.1c) From this first principle derives the Cartesian cogito argument and all transcendental arguments for self-assurance.

(2) No cancellation of what is said: Statements such as *The circle is square* or *The part is greater than the whole* are not conceivable because in these links one term cancels the other. Conversely, in sentences such as *The circle is round* or *That part is not greater*

than the whole the combination of the terms will appear necessary, since in this case it seems not possible to think one term without the other term. (Cf. Summa Theologiae I q.2, a.1 arg.2) On this second principle are based all analytically true and false sentences.

(3) No waiver of truth reference: Who claims that there is no truth, must refer at least for this claim to the difference of true and false. Otherwise he would not seriously claim that there is no truth. (Cf. Summa Theologiae I q.2, a.1 arg.3)

These hints make it clear that each of the three constitutive moments of theoretical judgment has its own necessary condition that must be met for a serious statement. A claim that explicitly or implicitly nullifies one of these three principles thus inevitably destroys the basic conditions of a theoretical judgment at all. Therefore such a statement can no longer be represented as a serious judgment.

So an answer looms as well to the question according to the modalities of human wanting. To this subject Thomas dedicates a whole *quaestio* (Summa Theologiae I-II q.10), and it also leads Kant to the basic formulas of the categorical imperative. But it is also already apparent in the earliest Socratic ethics, that there are exactly three absolute limits of a rational consent. The answer stems from a simple observation: Whoever imposed upon me a moral standard, whether I myself or my educators or my social environment or my divine creator, must consider three necessary and jointly sufficient conditions.

Dignity: The first principle relates to the subject of intent: No one can seriously accept a general standard which denies the actor any right to an independent, voluntary consent. Aristotle uses this motif in the friendship books when he compares the relation of a lord to his slave by the relation of a craftsman (*technítês*) and a tool (*organon*). If the lord looks at the movements of the slave only as the execution of his own act, the lord looks at the slave merely as a tool. But toward a mere tool there can be neither justice nor friendship. Now the slave is at the same time also a human being. But then toward him there is justice:

> For it seems that there is a certain justice (*ti dikaion*) in particular for all [!] who have the capacity to participate in legal and contractual communities (*ton dynamenon koinônêsai nomou kai synthêkês*). (Aristotle, EN VIII, 13, 1161b6-8)

But if justice, then also friendship. So there can be no justice for the slave, as long as the slave is used as a mere tool, but rather as being a human

being (*kath` hoson anthrôpos*). Cicero connects this argument with the notion of dignity that each person belongs by virtue of his humanity. Therefore this principle finds its expression in the concept of humanity (*humanitas*). Adam Smith finishes the main chapter of his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* with the words: 'No action can properly be called virtuous, which is not accompanied with the sentiment of self-approbation.' (Smith 1759/1985: III, c.6; last sentence). Finally Kant dresses this principle as is well known in the so-called self-purpose formula: Nobody can seriously accept a maxim that looks on him only as a means and does not respect him as an aim in itself.

Sense: The second principle concerns the object of intention. No one will seriously accept a principle by which his own actions would become meaningless, be it contradictory or utopian. Wolf Biermann, a political songwriter in the former East Germany, said in a quite critical remark: Who preaches people hope is a liar. But he added immediately: Who takes peoples' hope is a bastard. The classical ethics therefore is compelled to have a highest common goal that can be willed itself as a fulfilling, meaningful and good. Without such an aim held eternally for its own sake and therefore able to lend meaning and orientation to all other aims all human doings would become 'senseless and void'. (Aristotle, EN I 1, 1094a20-21; cf. Summa Theologiae I-II q.1, a.4c) Especially Camus clearly underlines the principal character of this point: Where people experience the lack of a deeper reason for life, all action and suffering appears as useless and even human life banal. So the question remains whether life is worth the effort to be lived 'the fundamental question of philosophy. [...] Everything else comes later'. (Camus 1950/1997: 10) Kant addresses this second condition in the natural law formula: Nobody can seriously accept a maxim that leads to an absurd practice.

Justifiability: The third principle relates to the valuation of the intended object: Nobody is going to accept a principle that can be represented in any way as well. Aristotle points out that even the hedonist must maintain necessarily that pleasure is a good. (Cf. Aristotle, EN X, 2, 1172b35-1173a4) For Thomas, every moral judgment based on the fact that a human being, in contrast to other animal, is able to refer to the *bonum universale*. No one will accept an ultimate goal if he could not value that goal as a good target. Kant dresses this third moral principle in the formula of the common dominion of aims[6]: In a common practice in which everyone is affected by the maxims of the other, only those maxims can be accepted that appear compatible with all other maxims,

whose goodness cannot be seriously denied. So no one can seriously accept a moral intention which cannot be justified in a universal space of good intentions over all other general intentions whose goodness cannot be seriously disputed.

The top three limiting conditions, under which a leading intention can be seriously accepted, are therefore: dignity, meaning and justifiability. The point that puts Kant in the centre is that these three conditions just apply to each maxim that you choose yourself:

> Our own will, so far he would act only on the condition of a possible universal legislation by its maxims, this potential will in us in the idea, is the real subject-matter of respect, and dignity of humanity consists just in this ability, to be general lawgiving, although with the conditional, to be subjected to this same legislation. (AA IV, 440. 5-10, transl. in Egger 2014: 273)

The moral autonomy, therefore, constitutes not only all absolute rights, but also all absolute obligations of human beings. For each practical judgment which satisfies these three criteria is morally possible in a universal sense; if it does not meet these criteria in any way, it is morally impossible; and any practical judgment, in regard to which the denial does not meet these criteria in no way, is morally necessary. So, human action and inaction can be morally rated as far as they are suitable to realize dignity, sense and justifiability within the bounds of human contingency. But above all, the principle of autonomy ensures an essential self-respect that is due to the human being as a morally acting being.

That leads us back to the thesis of this paper: Human beings ultimately owe their moral autonomy to a divine creator. So this autonomy is an expression of secondary-cause autonomy. All other forms of religious motivation as human motivation can only be justified if they are compatible with the basic principles of this secondary-cause autonomy that are at the same time the basic principles of morality at all.

---

6 The term used 'kingdom of ends' is considerably misleading, if end is considered as result (terminus) instead of aim (finis).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bentham, Jeremy. 2003. 'An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation', *Utilitarianism and On Liberty. Including Mill's 'Essay on Bentham' and selections from the writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Austin*, ed. by Mary Warnock (Oxford: Blackwell), pp. 17-51

Camus, Albert. 1950/1997. *Der Mythos von Sisyphos. Ein Versuch über das Absurde* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt)

Egger, Mario. 2014. *Philosophie nach Kant* (Berlin: De Gruyter)

Garner, Richard & Bernard Rosen. 1967. *Moral Philosophy. A Systematic Introduction to Normative Ethics and Meta-ethics* (New York: Macmillan), pp. 219–220

Frege, Gottlob. 1918-1919/2010. 'Der Gedanke. Eine logische Untersuchung', *Die Philosophische Logik Gottlob Freges. Ein Kommentar*, ed. by Wolfgang Künne (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann), pp. 87-112

Goldman, Alvin. 1971. 'The Individuation of Events', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 68.1: 761-774

Mill, John Stuart. 1861/1998. *Utilitarianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Smith, Adam. 1759/1985. *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Oxford: Oxford University Press)