

In Thomistic ethics, the obligations to love of friendship for God and neighbor are primary and self-evident. Since love of friendship has priority over love of concupiscence for Aquinas, if those obligations and our knowledge of them derived from love of concupiscence for happiness, contemplation or other such goods, those obligations would be neither primary nor self-evident. So when he ties morality to the will's inclination to act in accord with reason, he cannot principally mean accord with value judgments reason makes by the standard of goals like happiness or contemplation.

By drawing logical consequences from principles of Aquinas, as well as by other arguments, the article below shows that the primary standard must be the will's own goal of accord with reason, where "reason" means speculative knowledge of what things are, especially knowledge that God is infinitely perfect and beings that beings who determine their own ends are ends-in-themselves. Choosing as if God is not what He is or rational beings are not what they are is evil by the standard of the will's necessary finality. Lack of attention to the nature of that finality is at the root of is/ought, fact/value, reason/appetite and teleology/deontology problems. By filling this lacuna in Thomistic ethics I defend, without referring to it, John Paul II's connection between ethics and truth. I also show why love of God and neighbor are primary and self-evident and point out Aquinas's overlooked explanation of how objects of choice determine moral evil regardless of intentions or circumstances.

The article is not historical. Those interested in Aquinas historically will want to see footnotes 1, 2, 4, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24 and 26.

"Natural Obligation: How Rationally Known Truth Determines Ethical Good and Evil"

The Thomist, 66, 1, January 2002