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Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity

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III

First, as scholars of medieval philosophy have shown in some recent publications, even for theologians such as Albert the Great or Thomas Aquinas, the doctrine of intellect framed the core of their understanding of philosophy, that is, philosophy was to be understood in terms of an anthropological sharpening.²⁶ But the key point was that they understood practical philosophy as a theoretical philosophy. A first and important summary of such an anthropologically sharpened philosophy can be found in an early work of Albert the Great, *De quindecim problematibus*, probably written shortly before the condemnations in Paris:²⁷ 'In philosophy it has been determined that man is solely intellect and that understanding is the proper and natural activity of man, which, if it is not hindered, is man's highest happiness.'²⁸ This remark shows the major features of Albert's anthropology: man is essentially reason; intellectual knowledge is his proper faculty, which constitutes human perfection. Such an anthropological sharpening must have consequences for the understanding of philosophy. In Albert's commentary on the *Metaphysics*,²⁹ there is no doubt that the philosopher—without any theological instruction—can reach his perfection through philosophy alone, a philosophical perfection, of course, which consists of a state of contemplation in accordance with his reason. 'The intellect of man, by means of continually extending itself to spheres higher than itself, finally reaches the contemplation of the heavenly of divine entities and in perfect contemplation of these he is like the sun.'³⁰ This sentence already contains Albert's complete philosophical programme. Since the intellect is tied to space and time, physics and mathematics are the preconditions for the sciences; for 'true wisdom', however, they are only the first steps and instruments. According to Albert, the divine discipline among all theoretical disciplines is metaphysics, which is at the same time the foundation for the objects of all other disciplines. For, as Albert adds, there is something divine in human beings through which they can transcend

²⁶ See Libera (1990); Brunn (1985); Craemer-Ruegenberg (1980) and (1981); Wieland (1999).

²⁷ See Wieland (1999).

²⁸ 'De XV probl.': 'In philosophia determinatum est, quod homo solus est intellectus et quod intelligere propria et connaturalis est operatio hominis, quae sic non sit impedita, summa est hominis felicitas.' (Ed. Colon. XVII/1, 34, 62–65).

²⁹ See Wieland (2000).

³⁰ *Metaphysica* XI 1, 9: 'Et intellectus hominis continue extendendo se a seipso superius, tandem per contemplationem caelorum devenit in contemplationem divinorum et in illis perfecte contemplans stat sicut sol.' (Ed. Colon. XVI 2: 473, 4–7)

space and time. And metaphysics itself ‘is the perfection of the divine intellect in us’.³¹

The core of Albert’s explanations of the priority of theoretical knowledge and the possibility of a philosophical perfection is his doctrine of the faculties of the soul, which characterizes the human soul as essentially rational. Albert adopted this *intellectus adeptus* doctrine from al-Farabi,³² who discussed his theory of the *intellectus adeptus* in the second book of his *De intellectu et intellecto*. Here, in interpreting Aristotle’s understanding of the intellect, he explained that if the intellect recognizes the intelligible as such, it becomes the *intellectus adeptus*. According to Albert, the *intellectus adeptus* is the state of perfect knowledge. As he explains in *De anima*, the intellect in this state of perfection does not need any mediation of sense experience. ‘Then it [i.e., the soul] no longer needs the faculties of the sensitive soul—just as someone who seeks a vehicle, as Avicenna says, in order to take him home, no longer needs the vehicle when he arrives at his home.’³³

To be sure, this theoretical sharpening of the doctrine of the soul’s faculties, above all his examination of Al-Farabi’s doctrine of the *intellectus adeptus*, turns Albert’s philosophy into an explanation of human perfection. He describes the aim of philosophy thus: ‘Then man is perfected in order to perform that activity which is his activity, insofar as he is a human being. And this is the activity which God performs, and this is perfectly, through himself, contemplating and understanding separate substances.’³⁴ Albert’s position on the perfection of men has important consequences for practical philosophy. Even if, according to him, men are essentially framed by their reason and are destined to the perfection of happiness, their actions in relation to individual happiness (ethics) and to political happiness (politics) are tied to the conditions of human actions, that is, they occur in space and time. How, then, can practical philosophy

³¹ Ibid.: ‘Inter theoreticas autem excellit haec divina, quam modo tractamus, eo quod fundat omnium aliarum subiecta et passiones et principia, non fundata ab aliis. Et ipsa est intellectus divini in nobis perfectio, eo quod est de his speculationibus quae non concernunt continuum vel tempus, sed simplices sunt et purae ab huiusmodi esse divinum obumbrantibus et firmatae per hoc quod fundant alia et non fundantur; admirabiles ergo sunt altitudine et nobiles divinitate.’ (Ed. Colon. XVI 2: 3, 18–26)

³² *De intellectu et intellecto; De intellectu adeptus*, Lib. II, De Intellectu et Intelligibili, cap. 8. See Daiber (1993); Galston (1990).

³³ *De anima* III tr. 2 c. 19: ‘Cum autem iam habeat scientiam, vocatur intellectus adeptus, et tunc non indiget amplius virtutibus sensibilis animae, sicut qui quaerit vehiculum, ut dicit Avicenna, ad vehendum se ad patriam, cum pervenerit ad patriam, non indiget amplius vehiculo.’ (Ed. Colon. VII/1, 206, 49–54)

³⁴ Ibid., III tr. 3 c. 11: ‘Et tunc homo perfectus est ad operandum opus illud quod est opus suum, in quantum est homo, et hoc est opus, quod operatur deus, et hoc est perfecte per seipsum contemplari et intelligere separata.’ (Ed. Colon. VII/1, 222, 6–9)

reach an absolute perfection and at the same time take into account human contingency? Albert saw the consequences clearly. They determined his approach to his commentary on the *Ethics*, written in the middle of the thirteenth century, as well as his to his paraphrases of the *Politics*, dating from the end of his life.

In his commentary on the *Ethics* examines this question in relation to Aristotle's discussion of whether happiness is the final objective of all actions (*operatum existens finis*).³⁵ In his interpretation, Albert distinguishes between an absolute and a relative final objective. The absolute final objective is God; but this, he points out, is not the question which has to be examined from an ethical perspective.³⁶ In ethics we determine the relative final objective, civil happiness (*foelicitas civilis*). The highest fulfilment, however, is the *foelicitas contemplativa* of the philosopher. But one must, of course, immediately add that, according to Albert, even civil happiness has to be related to the highest fulfilment, which the *foelicitas contemplativa*.³⁷ Men attain their perfection as human beings through philosophy, above all through metaphysics. For Albert, therefore, philosophers rank higher than politicians, who are committed to the political sphere. Since man is able to reach the world of the divine, which is his ultimate destination, by virtue of his intellect, he should not be totally wrapped up in the political sphere. Consequently, Aristotle's definition of man as a political being has to be understood as relating only to the inferior realm, necessary for the life, but in no way to his intellect.³⁸ Albert talks about the perfection of the *foelicitas contemplativa* of the philosopher. And he answers the question by emphasizing the continuity of the theoretical activity based on the perfection of the *habitus* which is sufficient for philosophical contemplation.

These basic considerations also shape Albert's paraphrases of Aristotle's *Politics*. Here too he emphasizes the priority of *foelicitas*

³⁵ *Nicomachean Ethics* 1097b 21.

³⁶ *Super Ethica* I 7: 'Dicendum, quod summum dicitur dupliciter: vel simpliciter, et sic est unum tantum, quod est deus; et sic non quaeritur hic.' (Ed. Colon. XIV 1: 32, 74–76)

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 33, 4–11: 'In quantum autem attingit intellectualitatem, sic actus eius est contemplatio, et sic finis eius et optimum est contemplativa felicitas. Et sic secundum duos ordines suo sunt summe bona hominis, quorum tamen unum ordinatur ad alterum, scilicet civilis ad contemplativam, quia omne regimen, quod est per civilem, quaeritur propter quietem, in qua libere possit esse contemplatio.'

³⁸ Ed. Colon. XIV 2: 761, 68–82: '... quod illa quae sunt ad utilitatem vitae, immediatius referuntur ad felicitatem civilem, tamen ibi non est status sed haec ulterius ordinantur ad contemplativam, ut supra dictum est... quod quantum ad perfectionem naturae philosophi sunt excellentiores illis qui sunt in potestate, sed illi sunt excellentiores quantum ad regimen multitudinis... quod homo est politicum naturaliter quantum ad inferiorem sui partem, secundum quam indiget necessariis, sed non quantum ad intellectum, neque politicum neque coniugale, secundum quem tamen est illud quod est hominis, in quantum est homo.'

contemplativa by pointing to the *intellectus adeptus*, which gives all philosophers a grounding in immortality. And Albert explains his position by using a Platonic argument: ‘everything which exists in something else exists in it according to the faculty of that being in which it exists, and not according to the faculty of that being which [as such] exists in it’.³⁹ If the indestructible truth exists in the intellect, then it is necessary that the intellect itself is indestructible.⁴⁰ Albert saw the consequences of his doctrine of the intellect for politics. In contrast to *foelicitas contemplativa*, the state of the highest perfection of philosophers, politics has to be related to civil society, but only according to those virtues which naturally make man a political animal (*animal civile*). Therefore, in his explanations of the second chapter of Book 7 of Aristotle’s *Politics*, where Aristotle himself discusses the question of which is the better way of life, in accordance with the ideal state, the *vita contemplativa* or the *vita civilis et politica*, Albert once again gives priority to the theoretical way of life of philosophers: ‘The reason is that politicians strive for the perfection of moral virtue and of civil happiness. Philosophers, however, strive for the perfection of intellectual virtue and of contemplative or intellectual happiness.’⁴¹

Albert’s considerations about the priority of the theoretical way of life, framed by his doctrine of the *intellectus adeptus*, have two far-reaching consequences, which, in his view, determine the status of practical philosophy. First, not surprisingly, Aristotle’s programme for achieving the highest possible happiness of all citizens in the best state—in other words, the possibility for the majority of human beings to attain happiness—has to be seen as relative, which means an even greater emphasis on the happiness of philosophy.⁴² This position is not, however, without ambivalence. As Georg Wieland stresses,⁴³ in the face of such a theoretical sharpening of the notion of contemplative happiness, Albert has to cope with a basic problem: one cannot stop at civil happiness which merely satisfies the necessities of life; yet what about those individuals who are not used to philosophizing and therefore are unable to taste the mature fruit of philosophical effort, which, in his scheme of things, is higher than the happiness which can be attained by politicians?

³⁹ *Pol.* I, 1, 6: ‘Quia dicit Aristoteles in VI Ethicorum, quod unumquodque quod in aliquo est, est in eo secundum potestatem ejus cui inest, et non secundum potestatem ejus quod inest ...’

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: ‘... et ideo si incorruptibilis veritas est in intellectu adepto, oportet quod et ipse incorruptibilis sit.’

⁴¹ *Pol.* VII, 2, 634: ‘Et ratio est, quia politici contendunt ad perfectionem virtutis moralis et felicitatem civilem: Philosophie autem contendunt ad perfectionem virtutis intellectualis et felicitatem contemplativam sive intellectualem.’

⁴² See Wieland (1999), p. 28f.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Thomas Aquinas, the most prominent student of Albert, did agree with the consequences of Albert's understanding of practical philosophy. In contrast to his teacher's divinization of the intellect, Thomas's concept of practical philosophy shows a greater focus on the conditions of human life in relation to actions. This can also be seen in his doctrine of intellect, which is consequently characterized by an orientation toward man's corporeality, linked to Aristotelian hylemorphism.⁴⁴ Unlike Albert's idea of philosophical contemplation, Thomas says that the intellect, in order to act, requires sense impressions, which are always the result of sensual, that is, corporeal, actions.⁴⁵ Perfect happiness cannot be therefore attained by transcending contingent reality, and this means that it cannot be reached in man's lifetime. This emphasis on corporeality has an even greater impact on Thomas's definition of ethics. According to him, man can only reach imperfect happiness by means of virtuous actions. But this happiness remains imperfect since human beings cannot reach perfect happiness in the present life.⁴⁶

In light of these two concepts of practical philosophy—that of Albert, based on the divinization of the intellect, and that of Thomas, grounded in the soul's corporeality—what can we say about Melanchthon's determination of the status of practical philosophy?

IV

Different as these two thirteenth-century concepts of practical philosophy are, it is necessary to lay stress on one major feature which they share: both are explicit attempts to construct a philosophical ethics and politics, that is, a practical philosophy. Both concepts are established within a philosophical framework, even though they have theological implications such as the question of immortality. The two concepts are guided by different interpretations of Aristotle's doctrine of intellect as the highest part of man's soul. While Albert's interpretation is framed by his reception of the Arabic doctrine of the *intellectus adeptus*, which leads to his idea of *foelicitas contemplativa* as an inner-worldly perfection attainable by human beings and which gives priority to the contemplation of philosophers, Thomas's interpretation is framed by the Aristotelian unity of body and

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26f.

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II qu. 4 a. 5: 'Operatio autem intellectus in hac vita non potest esse sine phantasmate, quod non est nisi in organo corporeo.'

⁴⁶ *In Ethicam* I lec. 16: 'Homines qui in hac vita mutabilitati subiecti non possunt perfectam beatitudinem habere.'

soul, or hylemorphism, which leads to his idea that the happiness attainable in man's lifetime is always imperfect.

Looking at Thomas's concept of ethics, restricted as it is to man's corporeal life, one might consider that his interpretation is more appropriate to 'la condition humaine'. Nevertheless, both these concepts which arose during the first reception of Aristotelianism in the thirteenth century are based on explicitly philosophical considerations. This constitutes the major difference between them and Melanchthon's concept of practical philosophy. His ethics and politics, as summarized in his moral philosophy textbook of 1538, are based on resolutely theological, not philosophical, arguments. So in considering the final objective of this discipline, he argues as theologian, maintaining that it is the explanation of the law of nature,⁴⁷ in other words, that the disciplines of ethics and politics are part of the *lex divina* which governs the external actions of men.⁴⁸ Moreover, his essentially theological perspective can be seen in his discussion of man's 'final objective'. For Aristotelians, it was always the explanation of inner-worldly happiness. Melanchthon, however, considers this question from a strictly theological viewpoint. In the chapter 'Quis est finis hominis?', a question which also played a central role for theologians in the Middle Ages, Melanchthon's theological perspective is obvious. After having mentioned the epistemological principles which I examined at the beginning of this paper, he states: 'Since moral philosophy is a part of the divine law, as was stated above, man's final objective is entirely the same according to the divine law and to the true philosophy, namely, to recognize God, to obey him and to proclaim and illuminate his glory, as well as to protect human society for the sake of God.'⁴⁹ No philosophical definition such as happiness in man's lifetime can be considered the final objective of man or of practical philosophy; instead, it has to be seen as recognition of God and obedience to him. Melanchthon's fundamentally theological definition of practical philosophy means that for him, strictly speaking, there is no *practical philosophy* at all, but rather a *practical theology*, consisting of the instruction to recognize God and the order to obey divine laws. Melanchthon, therefore, continues, in line with the epistemological considerations which frame his understanding of philosophy: 'The image of God is impressed on the human mind, so that this image shines in it and God may be recognized. For this image must

⁴⁷ CR 16, 167.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 28: 'Cum philosophia moralis sit pars legis Dei, ut supra dictum est, prorsus idem finis est hominis secundum legem divinam, et secundum veram philosophiam, videlicet agnoscere Deum, eique obedire, et eius gloriam patefacere et illustrare, et tueri societatem humanam propter Deum.'

display its prototype. Therefore, it is the final objective of man to recognize God and to proclaim his glory.⁵⁰

Melanchthon's essentially theological understanding of happiness is also apparent in the remarks which follow on Aristotle's views on this topic. Since, as he explains, the notion of God does not shine forth sufficiently in the corrupt nature of mankind, Aristotle discusses the final objective of men in a different way: for him, it is the right action (*recta actio*) of the highest faculty of the human soul, which is the action of virtue or of the virtues.⁵¹ He adds that Aristotle's view was based on a consideration of the order and dignity of the soul's faculties. 'if, however, he had sought the scale of actions, he would have revealed that the highest action is to recognize and obey God, and he would have seen that virtue has to be related to this final objective, that is, to the recognition of God.'⁵² Continuing in this theological vein, Melanchthon says that all students should understand that man is not his own final objective, but rather human beings were created for the sake of God. So, virtue *per se* is not the ultimate end in which the human mind may rest; for virtue needs to be related to recognition of and obedience to God. In order to emphasize the theological orientation of his practical philosophy, he introduces a distinction between the *finis principalis*, that is, recognition of and obedience to God, and *finis minus principales*, that is, virtuous actions.⁵³

Melanchthon also explains Aristotle's own definition of man's final objective within this theological framework. In the chapter 'Quae est ratio sententiae Aristotelis?', he says that, for Aristotle, the proper action of any nature is determined by its final objective; virtuous action has to be seen as the proper action of man and therefore his final objective.⁵⁴ Concerning Aristotle's definition of man's final objective, Melanchthon says that, although his demonstration is based on principles of natural philosophy, it needs to be explained by means of those principles of natural philosophy which are established in nature by divine instruction—in other words, the law of God. And the law of God consists of all *leges naturae* and *leges divinae*, all the practical principles which are inscribed in man's *potentia cognoscens*, because these are established in nature by divine instruction.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 'Homini enim impressa est imago Dei, ut in ea luceat et agnoscat Deus. Imago enim debet ostendere archetypum. Ergo finis hominis est agnoscere Deum, et patefacere eius gloriam.'

⁵¹ Ibid. 30.

⁵² Ibid.: '... sed si quaesisset actionum gradus, invenisset summam actionem esse agnoscere Deum et obedire Deo, et vidisset virtutem referendam esse ad illum finem, videlicet, ad agnitionem Dei.'

⁵³ Ibid. 30f.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 31.

⁵⁵ Ibid.: 31: 'Ideo enim leges naturae sunt leges divinae, quia divinitus in natura ordinatae sunt.'

The consequences of Melanchthon's theological account of practical philosophy are rather sobering for the philosopher. For it means nothing less than that ethics and politics seem to be reasonable only from a theological perspective. Considered philosophically, they have no foundation. One might object that even for theologians Melanchthon's solution is not satisfactory. Independently of the fact that this concept of ethics leads to an ethical turn within theology itself, that is, to the command to recognize God and obey his laws, his concept of ethics has to be regarded as an ethics in the context of Christian theology, which makes it, in principle, specific rather than general. In this sense, ethics can demand acknowledgement only within the context of Christian theology. This is the point where Melanchthon the theological moral philosopher cannot himself do without philosophical considerations. For the laws of nature, which are images of the *lex divina* inscribed in human mind at the creation and which remained indestructible even after the Fall, are philosophical principles of mind, comprising all the practical notions inscribed in the *potentia cognoscens* as well as all theoretical principles. This means that without elements borrowed from Platonic epistemology, which philosophers had labelled 'innate ideas', Melanchthon's theological ethics cannot reach its goal without losing its claim to general acknowledgement, rather than being merely a specific ethics within the context of Christian theology. Looking further ahead: the philosophical implications of Melanchthon's theological ethics proved to be untenable in more far-reaching discussions. John Locke, in his *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, demonstrated that such inborn principles of ethics and theology were unfounded. By doing so, he made Melanchthon's philosophical understanding of practical philosophy obsolete.

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Natural Philosophy and Ethics in Melanchthon

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The aim of this paper is to investigate those instances in the thought of Philipp Melanchthon where philosophy of nature and moral philosophy come together.

The philosophy of nature constituted the very substance of Melanchthon's understanding of philosophy. This is due to the fact that he eliminated metaphysics from his philosophical system. As a consequence, he was obliged to transfer all man's knowledge of things by means of their causes to a physical consideration of the phenomena. He divided his philosophy into three sections: logic, philosophy of nature and ethics.¹ He then subdivided the second section—philosophy of nature—into two sections: physics, or the nature of the cosmos, and anthropology, or the nature of man. But he also treated the third section—ethics—as a part of physics.²

¹ Melanchthon (1961a), *De corrigendis*, p. 34, line 1: 'Artium genera omnino tria sunt, λογικόν, φυσικόν, προτρεπτικόν.' Cf. Melanchthon (1843), *Declamatio*, col. 348: 'Integre complexus est [scil. Aristoteles] artes Dialecticen, Physicen et Ethicen.'

² Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, p. 163: 'Deinde et illud hominis eruditi est, hoc loco considerare, quod doctrina moralis oriatur ex physicis ...' Ibid., pp. 152–3: 'Inter cetera crimina Socrati obiectum est, quod, cum studia hominum traduxisset ad disputationes de moribus, aspernaretur naturae inquisitionem et physicen improbaret. Hanc calumniam gravissime refutat Xenophon, ac testatur eum non abduxisse homines a Physicis, sed ad ea adiunxisse potius hanc eruditorem doctrinam de moribus, neglectam a ceteris, cum quidem et haec pars utilissima vitae, methodo atque arte opus haberet. Etsi enim communia praecepta de moribus vulgo nota sunt, ac pleraque nascuntur nobiscum: tamen ad multa officia iudicanda, et ad perspiciendum verum discrimen iustarum et iniustarum actionum, et ad fontes earum intelligendos, arte et quadam eruditore doctrina haud dubio opus est. Inspicienda est natura hominis, considerandum, quis sit ordo partium, quod munus a natura singulis attributum; denique causae propriae actionum quarendae sunt. Socrates ipse, cum de providentia apud Xenophontem disputaret, vestigia divinitatis in natura colligit et commonstrat, ut persuadeat non solum esse deum, sed etiam deo curae esse res humanas. Harum disputationum fontes sunt in physicis.' Ibid., p. 159: '*Estne concessus usus huius doctrinae Christianis?* Respondeo: Manifestum est philosophiam moralem esse explicationem legis naturae. Est autem lex naturae vere Lex Dei, Romanos 1 (19.20). Quare

According to Melanchthon, the integration of ethics into the philosophy of nature is required primarily for two reasons. In the first place, it is not sufficient in ethical doctrine simply to propose a list of precepts, whether set out in the Ten Commandments or in Hesiod:³ philosophy must show that ethical precepts are demanded by nature itself and are based in nature.⁴ Secondly, the philosophical knowledge of man's nature by means of its causes requires co-operation between natural philosophy and moral philosophy on a point of great importance: the natural end of man, that is, his final cause. Indeed, the end determines the entire physical organization of a human being. This end is conceived as the good which is proper and appropriate to human nature, to which man naturally tends and which he should ultimately achieve. Ethics has its origin in a hypothesis formulated by natural philosophy: that human nature, like all other natures, must have an end of its own. But the philosophy of nature is not able to indicate what this end is. The principal task of moral philosophy, then, is defining what the good proper to human nature really is.⁵

sicut lege naturae aut Lege Dei uti licet, ita licet uti philosophia, quod ad externam et civilem consuetudinem vitae attinet.'

³ Melanchthon (1963), *Scholia*, p. 234: 'Est enim quaedam doctrina et paedagogia privatim formandis ad humanitatem moribus hominum opus, in quem usum primum poemata, qualia sunt Hesiodi et Homeri et similia scripta sunt. Postea diligenter natura hominis inspecta Philosophi causas illorum praeceptorum quaesiverunt et formas virtutum ordine descripserunt, ut in Officiis Ciceronem, in Ethicis Aristotelem fecisse videmus.' Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, pp. 162–3: '*Quid interest inter leges magistratum, paraeneticos libellos et integras disputationes philosophorum* — Leges magistratum et paraeneticum libelli continent nuda praecepta sine causis et rationibus. At philosophia quaerit demonstrationes et causas praeceptionum in natura positas; ut autem in aliis artibus primum summae traduntur, quae continent τὸ ὅτι, postea causae quaeruntur seu διότι, ita in doctrina de moribus prodest primum discere paraeneticos libellos, qualis est praecipue Decalogus, deinde alii huius generis, ut Hesiodi aut Phocylidis. Postea facilius intelliguntur demonstrationes.'

⁴ Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, p. 158: 'Et ut artes sunt naturae explicatio, ita demonstrationes in philosophia morali sunt explicatio naturae hominis.' Melanchthon (1965), *Commentarii*, p. 282: 'Tradiderunt [*scil.* philosophi] enim methodos, quaesiverunt fontes et causas praeceptorum in natura, distribuerunt ordine virtutum genera affinia et pugnancia, ut non sit mirum hos, qui in evangelio nihil tradi iudicant nisi praecepta morum, longe praeferre philosophorum libros evangelio, in quo illa neque ordine neque satis distincte tradi videntur. Sed philosophi sunt artifices harum disputationum de moribus. Apostoli aliud majus negotium tractant, videlicet evangelium de beneficiis Christi.' *Ibid.*, p. 283: 'Neque enim Apostoli, cum praeter evangelium tradunt legem de moribus aliam legem docent, quam quae reperitur apud ethnicos. Una est enim lex Dei de moribus, quae et in decalogo perescripta est et traditur a magistratibus et philosophis.' *Ibid.*, p. 302: Christians must know 'praecepta de moribus et politicis rebus pertinere ad rationem, sicut ars medicorum aut architectonica ad rationem pertinet'.

⁵ Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, p. 163: 'Est autem prima quaestio de fine, quia sicut physica quaerit alias causas hominis, ita philosophia moralis proprie quaerit de fine hominis:

We can now examine Melanchthon's definition of moral philosophy:

What is moral philosophy? It is the knowledge (*notitia*) of the precepts concerning all the virtuous actions which reason understands as appropriate to man's nature and necessary in the civil relations of life. [Man attains this knowledge] after having sought, as far as possible, [to establish] the sources of these same precepts, with the aid of the art [of moral philosophy] and of demonstrations. The most scholarly definition, however, is: moral philosophy is that part of the divine law which gives precepts about external acts.⁶

In this definition there are two dominant concepts. The first is that the object of moral philosophy is the study of the actions imposed on man by moral precepts. The formal aspect under which those actions are investigated is that of their appropriateness to human nature and of their necessity or suitability for social life. 'Action', therefore, is studied insofar as it is the natural achievement and perfection of human beings. Human reason conducts this study by means of its own independent natural light. The second concept contained in the definition is that the moral law, which is the object of moral philosophy, is not the divine law in its entirety, but rather a part of that law: the particular aspect of divine law which is now accessible to human reason by means of its own powers and which demands from man only that which is in his natural power—the execution of the external actions imposed on him by the law.

MELANCHTHON AND THE ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION OF ETHICS

Melanchthon's definition stresses an aspect of human moral action which Thomas Aquinas had also emphasized when he said that 'there are actions

ergo ad naturam hominis cognoscendam opus est etiam doctrina morali, quia integra cognitio cuiuslibet rei, quantum fieri potest, flagitat inquisitionem omnium causarum.'

⁶ Ibid., p. 157: "Quid est Philosophia moralis?" Est notitia praeceptorum de omnibus honestis actionibus, quas ratio intelligit naturae hominis convenire et in civili consuetudine vitae necessarias esse, quaesitis fontibus praeceptorum arte et demonstrationibus, quantum fieri potest. Sed eruditissima definitio est haec: Philosophia moralis est pars illa legis divinae, quae de externis actibus praecipit.' It is worth noting that Melanchthon defines a moral human act in terms of an external action, to which Ockham had denied all proper moral significance. See G. Biel (1984), *Collectorium*, Liber II, Distinctio 42, quaestio unica ('Utrum actus exterior, qui a voluntate imperatur, habet bonitatem vel malitiam propriam, propter quam magis quam solus interior voluntati imputatur'), articulus 2, conclusio I, p. 697, D1: 'Quantum ad secundum articulum est conclusio prima: Nullam propriam bonitatem moralem habet actus exterior, propter quam magis imputatur voluntati quam solus actus interior, secundum Occam ubi supra'. See also Ockham (1980), *Quodlibet* I, q. 20, p. 99: 'Utrum actus exterior habeat propriam bonitatem moralem et malitiam.' For the contrary opinion of Thomas Aquinas, see *Summa theologiae*, I^a II^{ae}, q. 20, a.4, *sed contra*.

which are appropriate to man in the order of nature and not only because they are imposed by a positive law'.⁷ Man's ethical acts are not a response to an injunction which is completely detached from any inner relation to the achievement of a good objectively appropriate to his nature. The human will is not confronted with a *dictamen*, an order of reason which imposes itself on it, independently from any reference to the specific value of the good it proposes for man's nature. Our will in its obedience to the precept is not totally indifferent, in its own nature, to objective good or evil. All this seems to me to indicate that Melanchthon was entirely opposed to the Ockhamist tradition on a point which is essential for moral philosophy: the nature of human action. His rejection of the Ockhamist understanding of human will and of human action is explicit and unequivocal. It is clear that, in his ethical doctrine, he is nearer to the Aristotelian scholastic tradition as represented, for instance, by Thomas Aquinas, than to Ockham.⁸

Melanchthon for the most part adopts Aristotle's concept of ethics. He sees that Aristotle, in describing man, developed his ethical philosophy in order to attribute to man the action which was proper to him, that is, his *finis*, an end and a good of his own in the exercise of his specific moral activity. In doing so, he sought in nature itself the causes of the virtues and of the order of human actions.⁹ Melanchthon explained moral philosophy in

⁷ See Thomas Aquinas (1926), *Summa contra gentiles*, L.III, cap. CXXIX, p. 394: 'Praeterea Homines ex divina Providentia sortiuntur naturale iudicium rationis, ut principium propriarum actionum. Naturalia autem principia ad ea ordinantur quae sunt naturaliter. Sunt igitur aliquae operationes naturaliter homini convenientes, quae sunt secundum se rectae et non solum quasi lege positae.' The contrary opinion of Ockham is well known. See Thomas Aquinas (1966), pp. 237–8: 'Le bien ne se définit plus par la plénitude de l'être, par la perfection convenant à l'homme; il signifie la conformité des actes d'un être libre avec un précepte extérieur. Faire le mal, c'est faire l'opposé de ce à quoi l'on est obligé (II Sent. qu. 4 et 5).'

⁸ Melanchthon (1550), *Commentarius*, ff. 139^r–140^r: 'Primum autem repudio opinionem recentium quorundam qui negant bonum esse obiectum voluntatis in appetendo, et contendunt voluntatem vere et sine simulatione velle posse malum, nulla ratione boni. Habeo eruditas causas cur hoc somnium rejiciam. Etsi est aliqua voluntatis libertas, tamen sic ordinata est, ut velit bonum. Hoc si quis non admittit, evertet totam rationem finium, nec magis causa erit cur voluntas acquiescat in Deo, quam in Tauro Phalaridis. Verum omitto confutationem, ac constituo obiectum movens voluntatem in hac infirmitate, et in iis, qui non gubernantur luce Evangelii. His igitur, ut Catoni aut Ciceroni, obiectum est voluntatis, in appetendo bonum finitum, quatenus ratio aut sensus decernit, id esse bonum humanae naturae aut societati. Rursus in fugiendo malum contrarium illi bono, obiectum erit. Hinc potest iudicari, quo usque humanae appetitiones sine Spiritu sancto progrediantur. Nam illius boni species sunt honestum civile, bona utilia, vita et vitae commoda. Item iucundum, ut voluptates, quae aut sensus aut ratio expetit. Intra hanc bonorum regionem versantur appetitiones'.

⁹ Melanchthon (1961b), *Oratio*, p. 130: 'Tandem hominis et animalium descriptiones addit: et ut homini proprias actiones attribuat, adiicit ethica, in quibus virtutum causas et ordinem

this same spirit. In his ethical doctrine, he took into consideration: (1) the natural inclinations and dispositions to act which are present and observable in human beings; (2) the organs, instruments and bodily members which perform an ethical act; (3) the faculties, either sensitive or intellectual, which command the bodily members in human beings to perform an ethical act; and, finally, (4) the ethical act itself as a physical act of man, involving *totus homo*, that is, man in his entirety.

In what follows I shall try to show the use which Melanchthon made of the philosophy of nature in his exposition of the necessary conditions for the exercise of external acts in man.

CONSIDERATION OF THE COSMIC INFLUENCES ON MAN'S BODY

Like all other natures, human nature possesses some predispositions to action. Scientific and philosophical knowledge of human nature also demands a knowledge of those predispositions. Studying the origin of these inclinations as we find them in the bodily, sensitive part of man, Melanchthon sees them as coming not only from heredity, but also from the heavens. According to him, the first influence exerted by nature on man which is relevant for moral philosophy is a cosmic one. In particular, the stars contribute to the shaping of man's inclinations to action from the time of his conception in the womb and at his birth.

The scholastic philosophical tradition had not neglected the study of the relation of the heavens to the sublunar world. Melanchthon's tenets concerning this aspect of cosmology must be seen as a continuation and a further development of the traditional considerations of the cosmic powers of the heavens as formulated in scholastic philosophy. Celestial nature had already been viewed as an instrument of God for the government of inferior, elementary things. Thomas Aquinas affirms that inferior bodies are governed (*reguntur*) by God through celestial bodies,¹⁰ and that the heavens

in natura quaerit. Nec ego nego plurima apud Platonem Ethica reperiri sapientissime cogitata. Sed sermones sunt ambigui ...'

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas (1926), *Summa contra gentiles*, L.III, cap. LXXXII: '*Quod inferiora corpora reguntur a Deo per corpora coelestia ... Corpora ergo caelestia sunt universalioris virtutis quam corpora inferiora. Universales autem virtutes sunt motivae particularium, sicut ex dictis patet. Corpora igitur caelestia movent et disponunt corpora inferiora.*' Compare Melanchthon's way of explaining, by means of astrology, the ethical inclinations of individual human natures in the 1546 horoscope for the son of Baumgartner: Melanchthon (1839) *Bomgartnero*, cols. 134–5: '*Genesin Filii tui consideravi, et video ἠθικὰ satis bona esse. Magna autem felicitas est ἠθῆ bona esse, etiamsi corpori aut fortunae minitantur sidera. Et Deus non est stoicus, sed mitigat causas secundas ut sumus experti tu et ego.*'

give movement to and confer particular aptitudes on earthly bodies. This would probably not be of overwhelming importance for ethics, if it were not for the fact that those natural dispositions and inclinations also apply to man and affect man's nature not only in its universal definition but also in its concrete existence. Such bodily dispositions to action are in themselves of a concrete, particular nature and differ from one man to another, since they are essentially genetic.¹¹

Melanchthon is well aware that moral philosophy, when dealing with human acts, is concerned with concrete, individual natures. He knows that in the order of real action, every act is singular and individual, as is every extant nature. More than any other thinker of his time Melanchthon tried to arrive at a kind of philosophical knowledge of the individual nature of man and of his individual dispositions and inclinations to act. This is why he introduced into his philosophy of nature some essential elements of astrology, an innovation which he regarded as a personal achievement. In doing so, however, he followed and developed a general trend in natural philosophy which was for the most part shared by the followers of Aristotle. Two points need to be taken into consideration. The first is that astral influences do not affect human responsibility on the higher level of the free choice of the will in performing a human act. This aspect is connected, for Melanchthon, with the fact that moral philosophy does not deal with the entirety of God's law but only with a part of it: the portion of natural and divine law which is accessible to human reason and which is commensurate to natural human forces. The second point which needs to be considered is that the heavens can exert their influences effectively on the

¹¹ Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, p. 176: 'Physici quaerunt talium inclinationum causam in temperamento, quod aliqua ex parte efficiunt stellae, sed tamen accedit motus divinus'. Melanchthon (1846a), *Initia*, co. 324: 'Cum autem in temperamentis insignes qualitates sunt bonae aut malae, plerumque ab astris oriuntur...'. Melanchthon (1838), *Praefatio*, col. 820: 'Postquam autem dictum est, temperamentum et inclinationes ab astris oriri, iam prudentes cogitent, magnam quidem partem haec initia actionum comitari, ut dicitur: Naturae sequitur semina quisque suae. Sed tamen cum sint tantum partiales causae, actiones aliunde regi possunt. Ac necesse est, eos, qui disciplina quadam regere vitam et mores volunt, scire triplices esse diversissimas actionum humanarum causas. Usitatissima est voluntas, quae aut assentitur, aut repugnat temperamentis...'. Ibid., col. 823: 'Ad hanc autem responsionem deinde haec addenda est, ne nunc quidem stellas scelerum causas esse, quia, etsi inclinationes ab eis oriuntur, tamen haec non sunt integrae actionum causae; sed voluntas praecipua causa est actionum, quae quidem et potest et debet frenare inclinationes. Non enim fatalem necessitatem constituimus, nec cogi Neronem a stellis ad tanta scelera dicimus, sed accersivit ipse sibi hos furores volens, et indulgentem cupiditatibus, magis magisque incitavit diabolus. Ac multo fit deterior Nero, quam qualem natura quamvis infausta, finxerat.' Likewise, Melanchthon (1846a), *Initia*, cols. 212–13: 'Ac regula tenenda est contraria Stoicis, voluntatem hominis posse non obtemperare obiectis et inclinationi.'

bodily, sensitive and organic parts of a human being. Melanchthon regarded this action of the stars as one of the main causes of individual temperaments, qualities, inclinations and dispositions, which exist in each person as a diversified impulse to act and which provide a positive or negative preparation for ethical behaviour .

The inclinations to moral action present in the bodily and sensitive parts of man raise a problem in Reformed theology. Man's personal temperament is located in the realm of concupiscence and the passions. We know that concupiscence is not in perfect accord either with reason or with God's law. In Lutheran theology, this situation of inner discord in man was considered to be sinful in itself. The assessment of the power and activity of the heavens appears to have changed from the medieval scholastic tradition to Lutheran thought. It seems that Melanchthon could no longer appeal to the saying which astrologers had formulated in order to show that the stars were not cause of sin: '[celestial] influences dispose, but do not oblige, us to sin'.¹² In Reformation theology, the inclination to sin is in itself sinful. So, if the stars incline us to sin, they are the causes of sin. Given his intention to make astrology, under certain conditions, a part of physics, Melanchthon had to explain how he could continue to defend the goodness of nature, of creation and of God himself, as his predecessors in philosophical speculation about the heavens had done. He did so by saying, with Luther, that the inclinations imposed on our corporal qualities by the stars are good in themselves. They become bad in man because they are received into a matter which has been corrupted by original sin.¹³ This answer, however, had no philosophical value. Philosophically, Melanchthon maintained that the saying which affirmed that the stars do not oblige us to sin was still true in relation to the ethical doctrine of the

¹² Martin Luther, *Decem praecepta Wittenbergensi praedicata populo*, in Luther (1883–), I, p. 404: 'Sed pulcherrime solvunt [*scil.* Astrologi] obiecta dicentes *Influentiae non necessitant, sed inclinant ad peccatum* etc. quasi non sit idipsum impiissimum sentire, quod deus fecerit creaturam ad inclinationem peccati, et non potius ad erectionem iustitiae, ut omnia cooperentur in bonum, non in malum, hominibus. Aut quasi ullus hominum necessitate pulsus peccet, et non potius semper inclinatione. Quis invitum dicet peccare? Omnis mala inclinatio non extra nos sed in nobis est. Sicut Christus: De corde exeunt cogitationes malae. Non quod intrat in homine etc. Et B. Jacob: unusquisque tentatur a concupiscentia sua abstractus et illectus, quae non fato sed origine peccati venit. Omnia enim quae foecit Deus, bona sunt: ideo ex natura sua non possunt nisi ad bonum inclinare. Quale est unumquodque, tale et operatur. Quod autem ad malum serviunt, non est natura sed iniuria eorum, sicut Paulus ait: Omnis creatura subiecta est vanitati non volens. Illi autem naturam eorum faciunt vanitatem. Volentes ex institutione Dei illa habere, ut ad peccandum inclinent.'

¹³ Melanchthon (1838), *Praefatio*, col. 822: 'Si hominum natura mansisset integra fulsisset in nobis lux divina, gubernatrix omnium motuum, et stellae in materia non contaminata alias actiones habuissent. At nunc in his sordibus infoeliciores sunt actiones et extincta est illa lux, quae rexisset humanos motus.'

Reformation. In fact, moral philosophy deals only with external acts and with the limited degree of liberty demanded by that part of God's law which is now accessible to human reason.¹⁴

All this leads to my first conclusion: Melanchthon's judgement on the morality of external acts coincides with the doctrine of scholastic philosophy on human voluntary acts. The two views are founded in the natural knowledge of God's law which man has today, independently from any special revelation received from God. Furthermore, the two doctrines are founded on the same limited degree of human freedom now extant in human nature, which is confined to the liberty to perform external acts.

My second conclusion is that in considering the mutual relations between natural philosophy and ethics, Melanchthon is particularly sensitive to a problem which had inevitably troubled the Christian philosophy of nature since its inception. It arises from the Christian doctrine of the historic and successive existence of two states of nature: the original state, which has been lost, and the present state, which is the only one we now experience and on which philosophy is constructed.¹⁵ This

¹⁴ In fact, we find in Melanchthon a double answer to the problem of inclinations coming from the stars: the one we have just seen, concerning the relation of concupiscence to original sin as *peccatum manens*; and the another in light of the requirements of *iustitia civilis*, a type of justice which, while forbidding a wrong external act, demands that man avoid actual sin and refrain from surrendering to concupiscence through the practice of discipline. See Melanchthon (1938), *Praefatio*, col. 822: 'Basilius in enarratione capituli de rerum creatione, siderum effectiones tollit hoc argumento. Si a sideribus vitiosae inclinationes aut scelera orirentur, Deus causa esset humanorum vitiorum ac furorum.' Melanchthon (1846a), *Initia*, col. 209, notes that if there was no freedom of choice available to human will, God would drive man to sin: 'Iam si nulla esset libertas voluntatis humanae, et nulla humanarum actionum contingentia, voluntates peccassent et peccarent, quia sic impelleret aut cogeret Deus, aut certe quia deus vellet peccatum. Haec cum nequaquam admittenda sint, sine ulla dubitatione, aliqua est libertas voluntatis, et contingentia aliqua humanarum actionum'. Ibid., cols. 211–12: 'Ac regula tenenda est contraria Stoicis, voluntatem hominis posse non obtemperare obiectis et inclinationi.' This is the interpretation which astrologers gave to the dictum, applying it to free external acts. See Pico della Mirandola (1522), *Disputationes in Astrologiam*, lib. IV, cap. VIII, p. 536: 'Sed solent cum hic urgentur dissimulare quod sentiunt, et de arbitrij libertate multa fundantes, cavendum praecipere, ne cogi putemus a stellis nostram libertatem, a quibus solum propensionem invitamentumque aliquod habemus, quod vel sequi vel declinare nostrae sit electionis.' To save *aliqua libertas*, Melanchthon also evokes the plurality of the causes intervening in the production of an human act: see n. 11 above.

¹⁵ This problem of the double status of nature entails the further problem of the mutability of natural law. Melanchthon does not admit any mutability of the *summae leges*, that is, the precepts concerning duties deriving from our knowledge of God in his unity; see Melanchthon (1850), *Enarrationes*, col. 391: 'Secundo sciendum est, quasdam leges simpliciter immutabiles esse, videlicet summas, quae praecipunt de agnitione unius Dei.' On other issues, such as, for instance, private property vs community of goods, reason may see the necessity of adapting to the present status of nature and decide that private ownership is a *lex naturae*: ibid., cols. 387–8: 'Indita est homini notitia, ubi voluntates in

vision of the history of humanity is due to a special revelation from God. It has a parallel, however, in the pre-Christian thought of the Greco-Roman classical world. Poets such as Virgil and historians such as Tacitus had affirmed that at the beginning of human history there had been a golden age of harmonious justice, from which humanity had gradually but inevitably fallen into its present existence, marked by individual egoism and the loss of the beneficial anarchy which had originally characterized it.¹⁶ Melanchthon, in constructing his philosophical thought, only takes into account nature as it presently exists. This is also true, in principle, of scholastic philosophy. Nevertheless, the vague feeling that mankind was originally differently disposed to perform moral acts is always present in Melanchthon, even unconsciously, as a kind of reference point by which the present state of fallen humankind can be compared to the ideal original state, of which man's nature bears some vestiges. In his ethical doctrine this happens, for instance, in relation to the inborn notions (*notitiae*), especially the notion of God (*notitia Dei*). Here, the light given to the human mind is described as 'shining' in the state of pure nature, but as 'obscured' in the state of fallen nature.¹⁷ Likewise, in the interpretation of the Ten Commandments, the light shed by the Gospel requires internal participation

quaerendis rebus et in communicatione non sunt similes, ibi dominia rerum distinguenda esse, et res legitimis contractibus pro rebus seu pretio aequali comunicandas. Sic philosophi hanc notitiam ex causis quaerendi et comunicandi sumptam vocant legem naturae, etsi alii hanc partem vocant ius gentium, quod philosophi non discernunt a iure naturae. Est enim communis notitia, de qua omnium gentium sani homines consentiunt. Quod vero dicunt, iure naturae res esse communes, ordo notitiarum considerandus est. Utrumque videt mens, in natura incorrupta res posse communes esse. Ubi vero causae quaerendi et comunicandi non sunt similes, ut in hac naturae corruptione, ibi mens relicto priore syllogismo amplectitur alterum, congruentem ad praesentem naturae imbecillitatem, is igitur nunc est lex naturae.'

¹⁶ Melanchthon (19863), *Scholia*, p. 234: 'Hinc a sapientibus viris quos Deus excitavit ad respublicas constituendas, leges etiam derivatae sunt, iuxta quas iudicia exercerentur, res dividerentur, punirentur maleficia. Has non dubitat Paulus vocare divinam ordinationem, vides manifestis scripturae sententiis has philosophiae partes probari.'

¹⁷ Melanchthon (1550), *Commentarius*, pp. 130–1: '*An notitiae principiorum nobiscum nascuntur?* Si integra esset humana natura, arderet ac luceret in nobis illustris notitia Dei, essent excitatiores κοινὰ ἔννοιαι quam nunc sunt, facileque iudicari posset, eas nobiscum nasci. Cum enim ad imaginem Dei conditi simus, fulsisset in nobis Dei notitia et discrimen honestorum et turpium. Nam has noticias imago complectitur, ut postea dicam. Sed cum haec imago deformata sit lapsu Aadae, ingens caligo secuta est. Manserunt tamen vestigia quaedam et notitiae subobscurae, a quibus artes oriuntur.' Perfect obedience to God is required from man according to the *notitia* of God given to him creation; but in philosophical thought we obey God according to the *discrimen honestorum et turpium* known by the light of reason; see Melanchthon (1846c), *Erotemata*, col. 649: 'Natura humana intelligit Deo obediendum esse in faciendis honestis, et vitanda turpitudine...' It is only this kind of obedience which is now inscribed in the human mind as a practical principle of moral philosophy.

of the heart in the law of God and a consequent act of loving God; but, as the Commandments are now perceived by the light of reason, only a participation in the external act is demanded.¹⁸ It is also true in the

¹⁸ It is important, when reading Melanchthon, to establish the meaning of *notitia* in any given instance. Indeed, the meaning may shift in the same passage from one context to another, that is, from a shining notion to an obscure one. This also happens when he speaks of natural law as identical to divine law. In order to avoid any confusion between Law and Gospel, it is of the utmost importance to determine in each case whether he is speaking of natural law according to the light of reason (*discrimen honestorum et turpium - externa delicta*) or according to the light of evangelical revelation (*perfecta oboedientia cordis - immundities cordis*). See Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, p. 157: ‘*Quid interest inter Philosophiam et Evangelium?*... Haec est enim solida et praecipua laus philosophiae moralis, intelligere quod vere sit pars legis divinae, et ut Paulus inquit Romanos I. Ius Dei (Rom. 1.32). ... Porro lex Dei est doctrina, quae praecipit nobis, quales nos esse oporteat, et quae opera erga Deum et homines praestanda sint, seu est *doctrina requirens perfectam oboedientiam erga Deum.*’ Ibid., p. 158: ‘*Ceterum philosophia pars est legis divinae. Est enim ipsa lex divina* ab ingeniosissimis hominibus animadversa atque ordine explicata. Constat autem legem naturae vere esse legem Dei de his virtutibus, quas ratio intelligit. *Nam lex divina hominum mentibus impressa est, sed in hac imbecillitate naturae obscurata est, ut non satis perspici possint illa praecepta, quae iubent statuere de voluntate Dei, et de perfecta oboedientia cordis praecipunt. Sed manet iudicium de honestis actionibus exterioribus, idque nobiscum nascitur, quod ipsum tamen est lex naturae et pars legis divinae. Nec habet humana natura ullam dotem praestantiorē hac notitia, hoc est discrimine honestorum et turpium.* Hoc est evidentissimum vestigium Dei in natura, quod testatur homines non exiisse casu, sed ortos esse ab aliqua aeterna mente, quae discernit honesta et turpia. *Quod si natura hominis esset integra, tum vero in hac notitia lucret Deus et mens hominis praedita magis perspicua notitia, multo esset illustrior imago Dei.* Magna dignitas est hominis, quod mentes humanae sunt velut speculum, in quo fulget *sapientia Dei, videlicet sapientia legis.* Nam praecipue Deus per hominem voluit innotescere. Magna igitur laus est philosophiae moralis, quod est pars legis divinae et sapientia Dei, etiamsi non est evangelium.’ See also Melanchthon (1965), *Commentarii*, p. 81: “*Qui cum sciant ius Dei.*” In fine observandum est, quod ait Gentes nosse ius Dei. Significat igitur illam *notitiam naturalem*, quam vocant *ius naturae* esse *ius divinum*. Accusat autem utrosque, videlicet hos, qui *externa delicta* habuerunt, et illos, qui, etsi non habuerunt externa delicta, tamen habent *immunda corda* et consensentia idolatriae aut aliis peccatis. Ita in *predicatione poenitentiae legem interpretamur*, ut intelligatur non solum argui *externa delicta*, sed praecipue *immunditiam et impietatem cordis.*’ The same applies to the *finis bonorum* and *summum bonum*: see Melanchthon (1550), *Commentarius*, f. 139r: ‘*Quod est objectum? Ut objectum intellectus esset Ens quam late patet, Deus et rerum universitas, si hominis natura integra esset, ita voluntatis idem esset obiectum, et inter appetenda et amanda, summum esset Deus, ut testatur lex divina Diligas Deum ex toto corde. Ad hoc objectum amandum et fruendum conditi sumus eoque vocasset nos in mentibus, ut dixi, noticia Dei fulgens, hunc fontem quaesivisset natura humana inde orta. Perspicuum igitur fuisset Deum esse homini finem bonorum, nec exiissent philosophorum certamina, de fine bonorum, et tot ambages ac labyrinthi opinionum. Expetivisset igitur humanus animus Deum, ut summum bonum, deinde res bonas caeteras eo ordine, quem Deus tradidit, virtutem, vitam, vitae commoda propter Deum, agnovisset se Deo servire in usu legitimo harum rerum, et Deum autorem celebrasset.*’ There is also a double conception of justice: philosophical, concerning external works; and theological, concerning works *ex corde*: see Melanchthon (1965), *Commentarii*, p. 268: ‘*Et docet [scil. Paul in Rom. 10.5] quid sit iustitia legis formaliter, et quid sit iustitia*

interpretation of man's personal or domestic justice, which, seen from the angle of original justice, demands the full harmony of all man's faculties according to their natural order; but in human nature as now experienced is limited to their co-operation in the performance of an external good act.¹⁹

This double way of envisaging the same reality of human nature—one side which is visible to reason with its present powers, and another which is obscure and about which man cannot securely speculate by means of the natural light of reason—is valuable both in scholastic and in Reformed thought. It defines what man can actually do and what he should do. The difference between the scholastic and Reformed thought consists mainly in their way of conceiving God's judgement on this situation, which affects human nature, especially in the case of regenerated man.²⁰

fidei. Non agitur de praemiis nec refert, utrum haec sententia civiliter de corporalibus praemiis aut aliter de praemiis aeternis intelligatur. Nam lex debet utroque modo intelligi: *politice de externis operibus et theologice de operibus vere ex corde factis in renatis.*' (My emphasis).

¹⁹ Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, StA III, 192, 5–11: 'Si enim natura hominis non esset corrupta vitio originis, omnes affectus obedirent legi Dei, et iudicio rectae rationis. Nam ad hanc obedientiam homines conditi sunt, sicut ad volatum aves ..., verum quia corrupta est vitio originis humana natura, amisit firmam et illustrem Dei notitiam, et virium inter se harmoniam, et oboedientiam.' Ibid., StA III, 177, 12–16: 'Ideo Deus vult omnes homines legibus coerceri et regi, et vix quisquam tam monstrosus est, in quo non sint aliquae στοιργαὶ φυσικαί, quae sunt bonae inclinationes communiter insitae hominibus ad plerasque virtutes.' Ibid., StA III, 192, 20–23: 'Hanc causam vitiosorum affectuum ostendit doctrina christiana, quae hoc magis amari debet, quia philosophia, cum admiretur naturae imbecillitatem, tamen causam non eruit.' The 'political' government exercised by the will over the bodily members in some rare cases, thanks to the providential intervention of God, approaches, on a natural level, this ideal harmony; see Melanchthon (1846b), *Liber*, col. 130: 'Secunda gubernatio in homine, quae nominatur πολιτικὴ, cum non tantum externa membra per locomotivam coercentur, sed ipsum cor congruit cum recta ratione, et honesta voluntate, motum persuasionem. Ut cum filius Thesaei Hippolytus abstinere a noverca Phaedra. Consentaneum est enim, eum corde abhorruisse ab ea, cogitantem incestam consuetudinem non esse leve scelus, et puniri atrocibus poenis. Cumque talis consonantia est recti iudicii, voluntatis, cordis et externorum membrorum, ea actio iuste nominatur virtus. Sed rara est in hac hominum infirmitate. Et sicubi est talis virtus, ut in Scipione, non est sine singulari motu divino, sicut honeste dictum est a Cicerone: Nulla excellens virtus est sine adflatu divino.' As in the case of the *storgai* and good inclinations, the heroic virtue achieved thanks to the providential intervention of God does not transcend the natural possibilities of human nature and does not fulfil the requirements of fear and love of God demanded by the first table of the Decalogue. In this sense, acts of perfect virtue are still actions concerning moral philosophy and external discipline.

²⁰ As for the Christian value of moral activity in regenerated man, Melanchthon's solution, in light of the Gospel, is to reabsorb all moral actions made in the light of natural law, into the worship of God. God considers these acts in such a person as *bona opera*. See Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, p. 160: 'Porro cum pii fidem et agnitionem Christi et timorem Dei addunt ad hanc diligentiam in regendis moribus, eamque praestant propter Christum, et referunt ad ornandam gloriam Christi, ita hi mores fiunt bona opera et cultus Dei. Et hoc loco vetus regula docenda est, quae docet peccata contra legem naturae esse

This duality in envisaging man's nature, however, should not be seen a case of the double truth: one theological, the other philosophical. The fact that God's law in its integrity surpasses what human nature can now know and do does not cancel the existence of an aspect of God's law which concerns man's external acts, as required by moral philosophy. Man's obligation to conform his actions to the law of God according to his nature—a bodily nature constituted of external members designed for good actions and good works—is true wherever God's law is found, even in original justice or in the justice of faith. It is a law of human nature expressed in the fact that man is composed of spirit and body. Melancthon's development of the doctrine of the external act makes it clear that man has a differentiated access to the one truth. The inferior, partial knowledge of truth, permitted by reason, is not destroyed by the superior form of knowledge; instead, it is purified and integrated into it as a legitimate aspect or a vestige of creation. This partial access to divine truth preserves its own rights and functions, even when the revelation of the Gospel comes to complete our knowledge of divine law by preaching penitence to all men.²¹

ETHICAL OBEDIENCE TO GOD AS FOUNDED ON NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

We come now to a consideration of the relation established between man and God on the basis of our submission to God's law through external

peccata mortalia, sicut facta contra expressa mandata Dei. Ex his liquet hanc doctrinam de moribus et concessam esse Christianis, et utilem ac plenam dignitatis esse, cum lex naturae sit lumen divinitus insitum animis et vestigium quoddam ac testimonium in natura nostra et longe antecellat ceteras artes.' For the scholastics, moral activity as such was the basis for a supernatural meritorious operation, given that bad concupiscence, although deriving from sin and driving us to sin, was not considered to be mortally sinful, at least in regenerated man.

²¹ The Gospel itself is conceived of by Melancthon as also bestowing on us the beginning of a restoration of nature (*instauratio naturae*). Man's original vocation to the sovereign and infinite good (*summum bonum*), which was proposed to him as his own end at creation, becomes again a real aim for man's knowledge and desire. The Gospel thus restores, in its full meaning, the natural end of man; see Melancthon (1550), *Commentarius*, f.140^v: 'Discedamus igitur a scholis philosophorum et sciamus nobis vocatis ad Evangelii agnitionem objectum esse voluntatis, bonum infinitum et caetera suo ordine appetenda, vocamur enim ad instaurationem naturae et proponitur nobis filius Dei Dominus noster Jesus Christus, qui testatur Deum non esse ociosum, sed vere nos curare, recipere in gratiam, exaudire, liberare. Cum sic agnoscimus Deum, incipimus eum amare, in eo acquiescere, ab eo bona expectare, ei obedire, et in recte factis ipsum intuemur, virtutem eo amplectimur, ut ipsi obtemperemus, ac ab ipso gubernari nos petimus.'

human acts. Our ethical relation to God is founded on arguments furnished by the philosophy of nature, since Melanchthon considers physics to be the backbone of all philosophy.²² Everything which was traditionally regarded as the proper subject of metaphysics and natural theology is regarded by him as the object of physics.

In his definition of the *summum bonum*, the sovereign good of man, Thomas Aquinas had appealed to a passage in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (I.iii, 938^a) describing how men became philosophers. It was their natural curiosity to discover the causes of the phenomena of experience all the way back to their first cause which gave birth to philosophy.²³ On the other hand, in Thomas's doctrine, causality implies participation of the cause by the effect and, consequently, a similarity of the effect to the cause. Thomas concludes that the good which is proper to each existing finite being is, in the final instance, its own assimilation to God according to its nature's participation in him as the *prima causa*, the first cause.

Melanchthon develops this same double insight of causality and similarity deriving from the Aristotelian tradition as a means of explaining the nature of our ethical relation to God. On a natural level of being and action in natural philosophy, our relation to God is apprehended as a primary one (traditionally, a metaphysical one), preceding all other subsequent relations which man may go on to establish in human society.

²² In Melanchthon's thought, man's philosophical relation to God is conceived of as leading him to a kind of philosophical religion which enables him to practice a certain reverence towards God but cannot establish an immediate contact with him; see Melanchthon (1961c), *Epitome*, p. 62: 'Philosophi leges naturae colligunt inspectis causis et effectibus propriis hominis, ut causae ostendunt esse Deum, Deum esse conditorem generis humani, Deum esse iustum, punientem atrocia delicta, Deo tanquam auctori esse obediendum. Hae notitiae pariunt qualemcumque reverentiam humanam seu naturalem erga Deum, quae apud philosophos etiam religio vocatur. Fateri enim eos oportet primam esse virtutem reverentiam erga Deum, etiamsi de his virtutibus, quibus immediate cum Deo agimus, philosophia non potest praecipere, quemadmodum opus est ... de his virtutibus concionatur Evangelium'. For Thomas Aquinas likewise, man's immediate relation with God presupposes an intervention by God himself transcending the natural order.

²³ Thomas Aquinas (1926), *Summa contra gentiles*, L.III, cap. XXV: "Quod intelligere Deum est finis omnis intellectualis substantiae." Cum autem omnes creaturae, etiam intellectu carentes, ordinentur in Deum sicut in finem ultimum; ad hunc autem finem pertinent omnia in quantum de similitudine eius aliquid participant: intellectuales creaturae aliquo specialiori modo ad ipsum pertinent, scilicet per propriam operationem intelligendo ipsum. Unde oportet quod hoc sit finis intellectualis creaturae, scilicet intelligere Deum.' The lines which follow seem almost to suggest some elements of Melanchthon's *prima societas*, to be discussed below: 'Ultimus enim finis cuiuslibet rei est Deus. ... Intendit igitur unumquodque sicut ultimo fini Deo coniungi quanto magis sibi possibile est. Vicinius autem coniungitur aliquid Deo per hoc quod ad ipsam substantiam eius aliquo modo pertingit, quod fit cum aliquis cognoscit de divina substantia, quam dum consequitur eius aliquam similitudinem. Substantia igitur intellectualis tendit in divinam cognitionem sicut in ultimum finem.'

To clarify this point, Melanchthon appeals to Cicero, who defines the inner relation of man to God as creating the *prima societas*, man's first association: the first social relation which man has is his association with God.²⁴ Responding to the possible objection that man's first society is instead his association with his fellow men, Melanchthon answers, interpreting the thought of Cicero, that God, as the cause of man, is nearer to man than man is to other men, who are all the effects of the same cause. In the familial society as well, a son is nearer to his father—that is, to his cause—than to his brothers, who are the effects of the same cause as he is.²⁵

Melanchthon then explains what this mutual society of God and man consists of philosophically. He says that it consists 'of the acknowledgement [on the part of man] of his author, that is, of his cause, and in the recognition of [his] similarity [to him]'.²⁶ Establishing that man's first society is with God gives rise to the idea of a natural pact (*foedus*) between God and man. This pact is constructed on the basis of the doctrine of external acts and of our natural knowledge of the mind of the divine architect, accessible to our own minds by means of causality and similarity. This pact is conceived of as regulated by God's request that man obey him and his law and order. On the other hand, God commits himself to protecting human society, empires and the political order, as long as they respect the natural order, and to rewarding individual men for respecting the law or punishing them for failing to respect that part of his law of which they have natural knowledge in their present condition.²⁷

²⁴ Melanchthon (1961b), *Oratio*, p. 133: 'Primam, inquit Cicero, homini cum Deo societatem esse. Quid enim dici potest eruditius, quid de hominis dignitate splendidius, quid ad deplorandam miseriam humanam accommodatius?'

²⁵ Ibid.: 'Sed cur primam societatem inquit homini cum Deo esse? An non propior est homo homini? Sapienter Cicero videt prius esse Causae effectum adiungendum, quam similes effectus inter se conferendos: propior est filius patri, quam fratri.'

²⁶ Ibid.: 'Sed qua in re constituta est societas inter Deum et homines? In duabus rebus, in agnitione auctoris seu causae, et agnitione similitudinis.'

²⁷ Melanchthon (1850), *Enarrationes*, cols. 385–6: 'Est igitur prima lex naturae: Mens humana agnoscit Deum esse aeternam mentem, conditricem bonarum rerum, et Deo obediendum esse iuxta discrimen bonorum et turpium. Huius legis multae sunt demonstrationes. Primum enim esse Deum, et curare humana, nec casu res oriri aut occidere, testatur pulcherrimus ordo naturae, qui sine mente et consilio aliquo existere non potuit, et physica ratio ostendit in serie causarum necessario perveniri ad unam primam causam, intelligentem, immensae potentiae. Deinde, cum mens intelligat naturam humanam a Deo ortam esse, intelligit nos subjectos esse causae, seu conditori, ac deberi ei obedientiam. Item, cum non frustra ordinaverit in mente hominis discrimen honestorum et turpium, et sit custos huius ordinis. Atrociam enim scelera punit atrocibus poenis, manifestum est eum postulare obedientiam. Item, cum videat mens similitudinem esse divinae et humanae naturae in cognitione, intelligit naturalem societatem esse Dei et hominum, et ordinem societatis servandum, ita ut nos obtemperemus, et Deus det bona, et e contra, ut puniamur non otemperantes. Ita Cicero sapienter dixit: Primam esse homini cum Deo societatem.' Thus far Melanchthon has explained what the *prima lex naturae* is. The

It is natural philosophy which provides the ethical doctrine formulated by Melanchthon with the basic principle that man is an *exemplum Dei*, an exemplary image of God, just as any effect is an image of its cause. This implies the existence in man of an internal harmony, philosophically knowable, which imitates the harmony existing in divine nature, given its simple unity of essence. Man must also be an image or *exemplum* of God in his concupiscible part, which produces human sentiments and affects (feelings and emotions), since in God, too, there are true sentiments and affects, such as true love, joy or anger. Human nature has to conform itself to the example of divine nature by an internal participation in the order which exists objectively between all its faculties according to divine law. This is, according to Melanchthon, the profound sense of the political power by which, in Aristotelian philosophy and in Melanchthon himself, reason exercises its *imperium*, or rule, persuasively and not despotically over the subordinate powers and appetites in man, until an external act is produced through an accord between reason, will, heart and affects. This idea has his counterpart in the idea of domestic justice which Melanchthon found in Aristotle.²⁸

Our task is now to show how, by referring to notions from natural philosophy, the conditions for such a harmony and unity between the different faculties can be shown to exist in man's nature.

THE SPECIFIC MATTER NECESSARY FOR THE PRODUCTION OF AN EXTERNAL ETHICAL ACT

In human beings, an external ethical act cannot be executed unless we receive a previous inclination to action from our sensitive part. On the other hand, an external act is not merely mechanical. It is an act of obedience to the superior faculties. Reason presents to the will the object to be imposed on the bodily members for execution. The external act is the effect of a co-

societas is derived from this physical context of the natural law. Melanchthon (1961b), *Oratio*, p. 133: 'Deinde multo magis movetur agnitione similitudinis. Quantum decus est, quod mens humana velut tabula est depicta ad similitudinem divinae? Et societatis officia apparent. Deus alit ac custodit genus humanum, retinet politias dum colunt iustitiam, et atrocita scelera punit, periura, tyrannides, latrocinia, incestas libidines. Haec cum videamus, societas intelligitur. Quamquam autem cernitur societas et causae societatis ac beneficia et poenae sunt in conspectu, tamen nos miseri saepe obliti hoc foedus iura societatis violamus, quae mutua officia sanxerunt, ut Deus nobis tribuat, nos obtemperemus'.

²⁸ He requires from everyone a double form of discipline: one private or domestic, the other civil or social; see Melanchthon (1835), *Burenio*, col. 851: 'Scimus Deum velle genus humanum disciplina domestica et civili, legibus et suppliciorum metu regi, ut multa dicta celestia testantur.'

operation between the superior and the inferior parts of man. The problem which Melanchthon encounters here is a classic one in philosophy: how can the superior, spiritual faculties of man influence the bodily faculties and members which execute the act? How is it possible for the bodily members to be connected to reason, as is implied in an external act?

Melanchthon knows that this problem cannot be completely solved by the light of reason we now possess. He does not, however, renounce the effort of attempting to indicate the direction in which we should look for a solution to the problem. He seeks a kind of matter in which human beings have a natural aptitude to perform the higher actions proper to them, such as thinking, judging, impressing local motion on bodily members. It is natural philosophy, in the context of human anthropology, which must provide him with the notion of such a matter.

When studying man's body, Melanchthon raises the following question: 'What type of matter is the machine of human body composed of, and for what uses was it built?'²⁹ This question is an essential one in Melanchthon's philosophical thought, since he has attributed to moral philosophy the task of showing how ethical acts are founded on nature and are to be studied in nature. Given that there are different functions in the human body, the question implies that there must be a matter which possesses a plurality of qualities which render it capable of performing a plurality of functions.

To find out what this qualitative plurality of human matter consists of, Melanchthon looks at the way the human semen develops into a foetus in the womb. From this observation, he is able to show how the matter from which a human being originates diversifies itself according to the different members which gradually appear in his formation. As always in his natural philosophy, Melanchthon is attentive to the qualities affecting the matter. Here again, in discussing the human semen, he looks for the temperament of the qualities included in it: wetness, dryness, coldness and heat. According to Aristotle, he says, the heat which is a quality in the semen is not like the heat produced by fire, which is destructive. It is instead a quality which gives life and is analogous to celestial light.³⁰ In this way, Melanchthon comes to the notion of a matter existing in man similar to the matter of celestial bodies, which possess only one quality: light. He has thus placed in the human body the quality of light, in which some thinkers,

²⁹ Melanchthon (1846b), *Liber*, p. 106: 'Quamquam autem huius mirandae aedificationis ratio non potest reddi, tamen ipsa machina humani corporis diligentissime aspicienda est, et considerandum, quae pars ex qua materia et ad quos usus condita sit.'

³⁰ Melanchthon (1846a), *Initia*, cols. 399–400: 'Memorable est autem quod Aristoteles dicit de calore in semine, hunc calorem non esse igneum, sed cognatum coelesti, seu ut ipse loquitur, ἀνάλογον coelesti calori, qui vivificus est. Nam igneus consumptivus est.'