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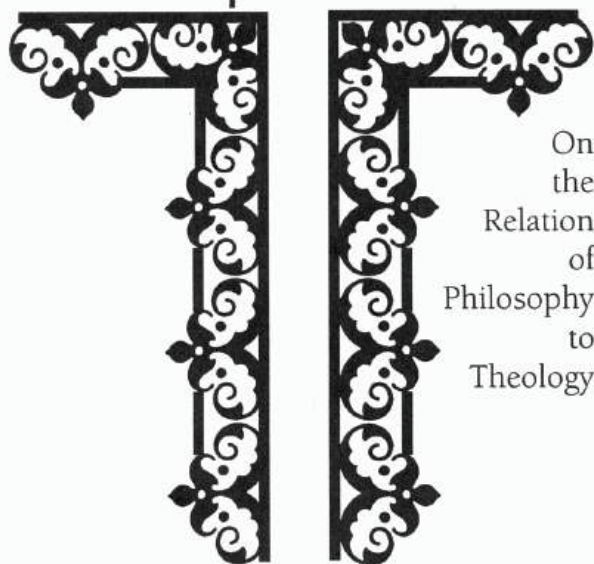
Philosophical Works



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On
the
Relation
of
Philosophy
to
Theology

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Translated and Edited
with Introduction and Notes
by Joseph C. McLelland

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Vermigli's Introduction to the Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics

Philosophy and Theology

[THE NATURE OF PHILOSOPHY]

I. [I] All our knowledge is either revealed or acquired. In the first case it is Theology, in the other Philosophy.¹ The word *philosophia* is a compound. Some say that wisdom [σοφία] is the knowledge of everything that exists. But since wisdom consists only of certain and firm knowledge, it can by no means include everything, for particulars are unknown—accidents and contingencies cannot be known on account of their impermanence.² Others hold that philosophy is the knowledge of things both divine and human. But we find great variety among the divine and the human: celestial bodies, constellations,

¹On the *duplex notitia*, see also ROM 1:19 and 7:15, COR 1:21, PPS Ps. 19(2), and “Visions,” §1, p. 138, below. Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) 44, provides an excellent survey of the discussion of twofold revelation/knowledge in Calvin’s thought.

²Cf. Plato *Republic* VI.484–485, 500c.

In primum, secundum et initium tertii libri Ethicorum Aristotelis ad Nicomachum.... Commentarius doctissimus (Zurich: Froschauer, 1563) Praefatio, fols. 1–10. Selected paragraphs appear in LC/CP 1.1.5–11. We include the LC section numbers, with the original foliation in brackets. My translation is based on one kindly supplied by Leszek Wysocki of the Classics Department, McGill University.

elements, minerals, plants, and animals. They ascribe heaven to God because it is eternal, saying that lesser things are unsuitable for human beings, since they are corruptible. But where will they place mathematics?³ So it seems that philosophy should be defined as a capacity given by God to human minds, developed through effort and exercise, by which all existing things are perceived as surely and logically as possible, to enable us to attain happiness [*felicitas*].

All the kinds of causes are there:⁴ the form, that is a capacity; the matter in which it resides, that is the human mind and reason; whatever it apprehends as objects, namely all that exists that is knowable not simply and absolutely but as certainly as possible; agency is also involved there, since God is clearly the author. He endowed our minds with light, and planted the seeds from which the principles of all knowledge arose. That is why Cicero said in book 1 of the *Tusculan Disputations* that “philosophy is the gift and invention of the gods.”⁵ This is also conceded by Lucretius, even though he was an Epicurean.⁶ Since assured knowledge of all things is more desired than expected, and more easily loved than possessed, and since the more we reach toward it the more we are inflamed with it, for this reason it is called “desire of wisdom,” *philosophia*. The author of this term was Pythagoras, who had come to Phlius and conversed with its tyrant Leo. Marveling at Pythagoras’s genius and eloquence, Leo asked which art or science he professed. Pythagoras would not say that he was “wise,” but that he was “devoted to wisdom,” that is, a “philosopher.”⁷

2. [2] Thus defined, philosophy is divided into active and contemplative, both of which Aristotle investigated as the subject required.⁸ They differ inasmuch as contemplation [θεωρητικὸν] only observes, while action [πρακτικὸν] does what is known. Therefore, they are distinguished as to their ends: theory rests in the very contemplation of things, since it cannot create them. Like-

³See p. 9, n. 14 below.

⁴For Aristotle’s concept of fourfold causality (formal, material, efficient, final) see *An. Post.* II.11.94a20ff.; *Phys.* II.3.194b16ff.; *Meta.* V.2.1013a24ff.

⁵Cicero *Tuscul. Disp.* I.21.

⁶Lucretius *De Rerum Natura* IV.10ff: “Hear me, illustrious Memmius—a god; / Who first and chief found out that plan of life / Which now is called philosophy...”

⁷Pythagoras of Samos (b. ca. 582 BCE), one of the so-called seven sages of ancient Greece; he left no written record.

⁸Martyr has in mind Aristotle’s *NE* book 10: contemplative is superior to active knowledge because it is self-sufficient; the minimum of necessities to survive makes do. This allows likeness to God, since “perfect happiness is a contemplative activity” and “the activity of God, which surpasses all others in blessedness, must be contemplative.” Cf. Aristotle *Meta.* VI.1.1025b25; *Topics* VI.6; also Jill Kraye, “Aristotelian Ethics,” in *CHRP* 325ff.

wise, practice observes, but only insofar as it may express what it knows in action. Clearly we see two operations in man, for he thinks and then acts. God not only understands himself, being happy and perfect in himself, but also creates by his providence and rules what he has created; even so is human happiness considered to be twofold. The one we may call action [πρακτικὸν], of which Aristotle writes in book 1. The other, far more perfect and admirable, is contemplation, which he discusses in book 10. Thus it is obvious that man may approach to a small degree the likeness of God, if this is accomplished through such double felicity.⁹ That is why Plato in his *Phaedo* said that philosophy is “likeness to God, according to human capacity.”¹⁰ Nor is the distinction between practice and speculation the same as that between the operations of our will and intellect respectively, as some think.¹¹ This is not admissible, since the sciences are distinguished by their objects. If anyone examines the matter more diligently, he will see that it must be taken in regard to objects of the understanding. For they have God and nature as their cause, and so would pertain to the speculative genus, since we cannot create them by our own will. Those other things of which we are the cause, which we are able to will and to choose, belong to the practical faculty.

Which of the two is superior remains to be seen. The common and accepted belief is to prefer the speculative to the active, for action is subjected to contemplation, and not the reverse. And no one doubts that whatever is subject to something else is less worthy. They also object that the theoretical genus belongs to action, since we behold nature so that we may love its author, and we seek to perceive God in order to honor him. For this reason some call our theology practical. But those who reason like this are wrong. A science is called practical not because it is accompanied by some action but because the very same object is attained that was known beforehand.¹² When we contemplate nature and heaven, even if worship and the love of God follow, we cannot call such knowledge active, since what we contemplate is not something produced. No one can create heaven and nature, so that all the results of such contemplation are said to happen by accident. Not all who contemplate these things love or cherish God; on the contrary, they are most

⁹Cf. SAM, introduction: prophecy corresponds to theory, history to practice.

¹⁰Plato, *Theaetetus* [sic] 176B: “The way of escape lies in becoming as like God as possible.” Cf. Plato *Tim.* 90D.

¹¹e.g. Aristotle *NE* III.2.112a15ff.

¹²See §5, p. 14, below; Donnelly, CSV 88, remarks, “Martyr disagrees with both Plato and Aristotle and awards pre-eminence to the practical intellect”; cf. Aquinas, ST I.4 resp., “Sacra tamen doctrina comprehendit sub se utramque.... Magis tamen est speculativa quam practica”; Gregory Nazianzen *Orat.* XX.12; PG 35.1080B: “*Praxis* is the ladder to *Theoria*.”

often alienated from him. Thus the works which result from that knowledge, and our theology itself, seek to know God [3] more and more so that in heaven we can look closely at him face to face. Christ our Savior confirmed this belief, saying: "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."¹³

This distinction applies not only to philosophy but also to our minds; thus some minds are called practical and others contemplative. But it is not as if there were two powers or faculties of the mind, for they are called so relatively, depending on whether they concern themselves with action or contemplation.

Speculative philosophy is divided into three parts:¹⁴ when things are averse to and quite separate from matter, such as God or intelligence, they constitute metaphysics; when they are so closely connected with matter that they cannot be defined without it, they are accordingly physics; or they take a middle course when they cannot exist without matter—iron or wood, etc.—yet can be defined and understood without it, such as mathematics.

[PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY]

3. Such matters could be defined further, but I will refrain from doing so, and distinguish practical philosophy by providing the rules that refer to the life and upbringing of one person or many. If an individual is concerned, it is ethics; if more than one is concerned it is important whether they are many or fewer. If fewer, the subject is domestic economy; if more, it is politics. But where do we put the arts? These are included under the third kind of the practical; they pertain to politics, and are not to be excluded from the category of wisdom. For art is "a system of devices exercised for some end which may be useful in anyone's life."¹⁵ Two things are clear in this definition. First, that art is a means that relates to knowledge through which some things are understood with certainty, through trial and experience. Thus it cannot be removed from wisdom. Nor can we doubt that those who invented these arts or excelled in them were called wise by the ancients; accordingly, Bezalel and Oholiab are called wise in Scripture.¹⁶ On the other hand, we say that this

¹³John 17:3.

¹⁴See Aristotle *Meta.* III.2.997b20, VI.1.1026a18: "There must, then, be three theoretical philosophies, mathematics, physics, and what we may call theology."

¹⁵See *NE* II.4.1105a21ff. Cf. Aristotle, *Meta.* A(1).981a.5: "Now art arises when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgment about a class of objects is produced."

¹⁶Ex. 36:1. Cf. Josephus *Antiq.* III.8.4: "Bezalel and Oholiab appeared to be the most skilful of the workmen"; Calvin, *Inst.* 2.2.16.

knowledge is practical because its objects are known through practice, and through its devices something is provided and effected which leads to a pleasant life. So ropedancers, jugglers, and others of this sort who provide nothing useful for human life are not masters of an art but should be called impostors and triflers.

The arts may be divided into those which produce some work and those which are fulfilled by their own act. From this it follows how we should judge dialectics, for it should itself be considered among the arts, and it brings about things most useful in life.¹⁷ Hence it is not to be separated from wisdom, [4] since it is the method, the instrument, and the way by which we claim wisdom for ourselves, and the way should not be cut off from its goal. In this manner in his *Prior Academics*, Cicero made distinctions within philosophy, so that in part it concerns life and morals, in part nature and higher subjects, or else the art of discussion, which idea he owes to Plato.¹⁸ Galen does not differ from this opinion. Also, it should be noted that from these authors of philosophy more is gained for the world than from Ceres, who gives us fruit, or Bacchus, from whom we receive wine, or Hercules, who rid the world of monsters. These have to do with aspects of physical life, but philosophy nourishes and instructs the very soul.

In these books of practical philosophy, the first of which we have at hand, namely *Ethics*, stands out from the entire corpus like the book *On Physical Hearing*.¹⁹ In the latter the fundamentals of the natural sciences are described; in the former you will find the first principles of economics and politics. Therefore, we will interpret this book before any other treatise. We may acknowledge that ethics has borrowed something from physics, for example the discussion of the parts of the mind or the rule that the same effects are found in the same minds, and that on these principles it bases many of its premises and draws numerous conclusions. Yet it cannot be considered an auxiliary science, because physics and ethics are quite unlike in kind, and this is not characteristic of auxiliary sciences, where the subject of a superior science must include that of an inferior.

¹⁷Classical dialectics was a discipline preparatory to theoretical philosophy (theology, physics, mathematics) or what today we would call formal logic. Whereas the Middle Platonist Albinus harmonized Plato and Aristotle, in his *On Dialectic*, Plotinus "is content to summarize Plato's statements about *dialektikê* and to distinguish it sharply from Aristotelian logic"; see CHGM 68, 235. Aristotle's methodological propaedeutic to his theoretical works was regarded by his school as the general instrument (*organon*) for all science; in modern terms the Organon includes his logical works.

¹⁸Plato *Academica* I, 5; cf. Plato, *Soph.* 253.

¹⁹The *De Audibilibus* is now ascribed to Strato (d. 269 BCE).

Ethics takes its name from *to ethos* [ἀπὸ τοῦ ἠθους], that is, “custom.” And *ethos* comes from the verb “to be accustomed” [ἐθίζω] with “epsilon” changed into “eta”; for the only way for us to acquire morals and good habits is by custom.²⁰ That whole book is concerned, moreover, with the human: how one becomes endowed with virtues, and attains the happiness which may be acquired in this life. Hence Plato in the *Theaetetus* called this part of philosophy “the greatest harmony”²¹—not as if it dealt with sounds, voices, or lyres, but because it is concerned with the harmony of the parts of the mind with reason. It is not difficult to see what method of teaching Aristotle uses. He distinguishes and defines, and uses almost every kind of argument. Sometimes he uses examples, sometimes induction, occasionally enthymemes, at times that perfect form of reasoning called syllogism, and even demonstrative syllogism, although rarely, since the nature of morals is shaky and uncertain.²² Frequently he uses comparisons and sometimes explanations, but these “a posteriori” and almost never or very rarely “a priori,” as causes.

The discoverers of this part of philosophy are said to have been Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, while all the philosophers of earlier times—Parmenides, Melissus, Anaxagoras, Democritus, Empedocles, and Hippocrates—were wholly preoccupied with the examination of nature. Socrates was the first to have focused in earnest on establishing the principles of the moral life. Before him, the seven Greek sages at times spoke reasonably about [ς] what constitutes the good life—Solon, Pittacus, and others—but what they had to say were merely aphorisms; even though elegant and famous, they contained nothing elaborate or complete. After Plato came Aristotle, a man of singular genius, who subjected all the relevant material to methodical analysis and arranged it with the greatest accuracy. He was born seven years after Rome had recovered from the Gauls. His place of birth was Stagyrā in Thrace, a village otherwise obscure except that he was its citizen. His father was Nicomachus, by profession a physician whom King Amyntas, the father of Philip, esteemed on account of that profession. For a time, Aristotle was a pupil of Socrates, and of Plato for a full twenty years.²³ Alexander of Macedon was educated as Aristotle’s pupil; he used to say that he owed

²⁰Aristotle, *NE* II.1.1103a16 ff.: “moral virtue comes about as a result of habit, whence also its name *ethikē* is one that is formed by a slight variation from the word *ethos*.”

²¹Perhaps *Phaedo* 93–94 on the soul as giver of harmony.

²²Aristotle analyzes these types in his two *Analytica*. Discussing “logical and probable reasons,” Martyr, *ROM* 8:38, notes: “Probable arguments cannot by themselves persuade completely, but when joined to firm and demonstrative reasons make something more evident”; cf. “Reformed Scholasticism,” p. xxvi, above.

²³Aristotle (384–322 BCE) spent twenty years (368/7–348/7) in association with Plato’s academy in Athens. He was never a pupil of Socrates (d. 399).

more to Aristotle than to King Philip his own father, for Philip merely made him live, whereas Aristotle made him live well and happily. In thanks to his teacher, he restored Stagyra, which Philip had destroyed, and raised it to better political shape than it had before it was overthrown. The school of Peripatetics sprang from Aristotle: it had fewer errors than any other school, and flourishes to this day.²⁴

[THE NICOMACHEAN ETHICS]

This *Ethics* is called Nicomachean because it was dedicated to Nicomachus, the author's son, just as was Cicero's book *De Officiis*. Both Aristotle and Cicero were great writers, yet neither of their sons matched the parent in teaching and fame. I know that there were several people who thought that Aristotle's son Nicomachus wrote these books, since he was the first to receive the teaching from his father, and afterwards collected the writings and put them in one volume. Suidas holds that Nicomachus wrote ten books on morals, but whether these are one and the same is most doubtful. Cicero also (in book 5 of the *De Finibus*) seems to assume that Nicomachus composed these books. The *Magna Moralia* are extant, and so is what is called the *Eudemean Ethics*, but they are not to be compared with this treatise.²⁵

The position of this moral teaching in relation to other sciences was established by the ancients so that someone who had already gone through grammar, rhetoric, and dialectics would then turn to moral subjects. For if the mind is inflamed with desire and overwhelmed by vice, it is unsuitable for mathematics or for divine and human contemplation, since such matters require a calm and peaceful mind. Among these moral subjects, the first place is surely held by ethics, then economics, and finally politics. I see this order as circular. Through ethics, those who are its students will, one by one, become good. If they prove upright, they will raise good families; if the families are properly established, they will in turn create [δ] good republics. And in good republics, both law and administration will aim at nothing less than each

²⁴Aristotle taught in an Athenian home that featured a covered walking place (*peripatos*), hence the school name Peripatetic. The Renaissance revival of Aristotelianism was marked at Padua, where Martyr studied under Pomponazzi's successor, Genua. See p. xxii above.

²⁵Suidas, *Lexicon*, c. 950. Modern opinion held that Nicomachus probably edited his own course of ethics, and Aristotle's friend Eudemus another, called Eudemean; see W. D. Ross, *Aristotle* (London: Methuen, 1923) 14. Confusion arose because the Nicomachean and the Eudemean ethics share three books, probably originally from the former. The *Magna Moralia* is a later Peripatetic compilation based on the Eudemean. Anthony Kenny, *The Aristotelian Ethics: A Study of the Relationship between the Eudemean and Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), argues that Aristotle's mature moral theory appears in the *Eudemean* and not the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

becoming a good citizen, for they have eyes for the spirit as well as the body, and will take care that citizens live according to virtue.²⁶

Therefore, as far as our method of analysis is concerned, let us accept the following outline of these ten books. First, the goal of human life is discussed, being defined in book 1, where it is taught that happiness is the carrying out of perfect virtue.²⁷ This requires a consideration of the nature of virtue, which occurs in book 2, in which the virtues are first dealt with—not yet those of the intellect, but those which pertain to moderate desires; it is then asserted that virtue is the state between excess and defect.²⁸ In book 3, the principles of virtue are taught: voluntary, involuntary, choice, and that sort of thing.²⁹ A detailed discussion of particular virtues begins specifically with courage, and to this matter all of books 4 and 5 are devoted. After that, in book 6, Aristotle examines those capacities which enrich the reason or the intellect, that is, prudence, industry, skill, and many others of this order. Book 7 is about the virtue of heroism, which far surpasses those already mentioned, and about temperance and intemperance, neither of which truly belongs to the category of virtue or vice. Books 8 and 9 treat of friendship. Book 10 contains an elaborate discussion of pleasure. The book ends with a discourse on true and absolute happiness, which is based on contemplation, especially of things divine. For my part, I will apply the following reasoning and form of interpretation. First, I will analyze the text of Aristotle; second, I will explain the scope and proposition of a chosen passage, with its proof; third, I will study its meaning and comment on terms which may require exegesis; fourth, I will expose to view any doubts that have arisen; and last, I will note and discuss those passages which agree or disagree with Scripture.

[A WARNING FROM SAINT PAUL]

4. Now I can easily proceed to the exposition of Aristotle, except that a certain hindrance must first be removed. It consists of what Paul said in Colossians 2: “Beware lest anyone prey on you through philosophy.”³⁰ Truly, with

²⁶See Aristotle *Pol.* 1.2ff. for these distinctions. Aquinas *Comm. ad loc.*, followed Eustratius in describing the tripartite division according to subject matter, with the names *monastica*, *oconomica*, and *politica* (cited in CHRP 304).

²⁷NE I.8.1098b30. *Εὐδαιμονία* means happiness or well-being; Martyr translates it by “felicitas.”

²⁸NE I.6.1106b25, *affectus moderandos*: Aristotle’s doctrine of *metriopatheia* tempered the Stoic *apatheia*. Cf. ROM 1:24, “The Peripatetics judged that the wise man should not be completely without affections; they allowed those that were moderate.”

²⁹Martyr’s own commentary breaks off at the beginning of book 3.

³⁰Col. 2:8.

such words he seems to frighten Christians away from the study of philosophy, but I am sure that if you properly grasp the meaning of the Apostle's statement you will not be disturbed. Since true philosophy derives from the knowledge of created things, and from these propositions reaches many conclusions about the justice and righteousness that God implanted naturally in human minds, it cannot therefore rightly be criticized: for it is the work of God, and could not be enjoyed by us without his special contribution.³¹ What Paul censured is that philosophy corrupted by human invention and by the bitter disputes of philosophers. If they had remained within limits and discussed only what creaturely knowledge has revealed about God and nature by the most certain reasoning, they would not have strayed from the truth. [7] Hence the Apostle says: "By this philosophy," i.e. "empty deceit" by exegesis;³² then he adds: "which has its origin in human tradition and is inspired by cosmic forces." That the universe is eternal was taught by human beings, not by lower creatures. Nature did not show the universe to be composed of the random conjunction of atoms; this was conceived by empty speculation. Stoic fate and impassibility [*ἀπάθεια*], the perpetual doubt of the Academics, the motionless and idle deities of the Epicureans—who would question that such ideas are "empty deceit?" They dreamed of the community of property, of wives openly traded, of pleasure as the highest good, and of gods worshipped in vulgar ways; yet they did not learn such things by any natural illumination or by practical principles known in themselves by sure reasoning. Surely these things are poisons and corruptions by which the devil, through evil men, perverts that gift of God, philosophy. This polluted and spoiled philosophy is what Paul wishes to avoid.

[THE BIBLICAL CRITERION]

5. Now we must see how what we have so far discussed agrees with Holy Scripture. There also we have active and contemplative knowledge. The things in which we believe and which are contained in the articles of faith pertain to contemplation [*θεωρητικὸν*] since we perceive them but do not create them, and although they are not included within knowledge they are nonetheless understood. What is contained in the laws, deliberations, and exhortations should be referred to practical knowledge. So far these matters agree, yet they also differ, for in philosophy action [*πρακτικὸν*] precedes contemplation

³¹See "Nature and Grace," p. 18 ff., below.

³²per ἐπεξηγήσις: Martyr mixes Latin and Greek to render Col. 2:8: "Philosophy and empty deceit ... according to the elemental spirits of the universe."

[θεωρητικὸν] because, as it is said, we can contemplate neither God nor nature by human powers unless our emotions are first at rest.³³ But in Scripture speculation comes first, since we must first believe and be justified through faith.³⁴ Afterwards, good works follow, which occur more abundantly the more frequently we are renewed by the Holy Spirit. That is what Paul shows in his letters: for first he deals with doctrines, only afterwards coming to moral instruction and principles for living. So also were the children of Israel first gathered in Egypt under the faith of one God the Deliverer: afterwards in the desert, they received laws that refer to practical knowledge. The same order was kept in the Decalogue. First it is said, “I am the Lord your God,” which belongs to faith or theoretical knowledge. Afterwards there follow precepts that look to the works commanded by God. The cause of this difference is that human contemplation is gained by study and diligent reflection; therefore, moderation of emotion is required. But what we believe is received by the inspiration of God and so there is no need of those preparations. According to human reason, men should first do righteous deeds before there is justification. But the order of divine sanctification is established far otherwise; first we believe, and afterwards are justified, then [8] the powers of our minds are restored by the Spirit and by grace, and finally just and honest deeds follow.

6. The goal of philosophy is that we reach that beatitude or happiness which can be acquired in this life by human powers, while the goal of Christian devotion is that the image in which we are created in righteousness and holiness of truth be renewed in us, so that we grow daily in the knowledge of God until we are led to see him as he is, with face uncovered. From these *Ethics* we will not learn about the remission of sins, about fear and faith towards God, nor justification through faith, nor yet about Christ and similar things. Such matters are brought to light by God’s will; they cannot be produced by natural knowledge from anything created. We do not deny that it often happens that these *Ethics* commend the same things as God commands in Holy Scripture. In such cases the topic is the same but not its form, properties, and principles; for here the rationale is different, as are the qualities and

³³Aristotle *NE* X.7–8: Contemplation reduces bodily necessities to a minimum, as close as possible to the impassive deity whose likeness is sought.

³⁴Aristotle *NE* X.7.1177a27ff., sees self-sufficiency and leisure as requirements for “the contemplative activity.” For Augustine, on the other hand, contemplation of divine truth constitutes human blessedness: “The highest good is God; but God is the truth, and one enjoys truth by beholding it and resting in its contemplation”; for Aquinas, “the *verum* toward which the intellect aims is higher in rank than the *bonum* toward which the will strives”; see W. Windelband, *A History of Philosophy* (N.Y.: Harper & Bros., 1958) 1:286, 331. Cf. ST 2a2ae.8.3: intellectus est donum speculativeus ... contemplatio Dei.

foundation, just as water from rain and from a spring is the same in substance while its powers, properties, and essentials are far different. One comes from the heat of heaven and the clouds and cold of the middle regions of the air, while the other is drawn through the subterranean channels of the earth and from the sea, and comes out sweet through filtering, or else by converting air to water from the cold of the place where the spring arises. Thus what Christians do occurs by the impulse of the Spirit of God, for those who act according to the Spirit are sons of God. What philosophers do about ethics happens under the guidance of human reason. They are urged to action according to what they judge to be honest and correct; but Christians because God judges so. The former think that they improve and perfect themselves if they act in this way; the latter think that if they act it is because one should be obedient to the divine. The former believe in themselves, the latter in God and the words of the law that he himself gave. The former labor from self-love [φιλαυτία] while the latter are driven by the love of the one God. From these numerous differences it happens that substantially the very same thing may be pleasing to God or damned by his judgment. Let this suffice concerning these differences and agreements between divine Scripture on the one hand and human philosophy on the other.

7. Let us return to the point from which we digressed, namely whether this discipline contradicts piety. I say that it is more against it than is astrology or the nautical or military arts, or else fishing and hunting, also the knowledge of human law which everyone understands as necessary for public administration. Jurisprudence forms its own laws and institutions out of propositions concerning the justice and goodness innate in our minds; moral philosophers analyze the same propositions and probe them minutely, so that they themselves might know them thoroughly, and also transmit them to others with great clarity. Thus among the Greeks wisdom is called *sophia* as if it meant “clarity” [σαφεία] and “wise” is *sophos* as if it meant “clear” [σαφής], no doubt because it clarifies its subject matter and makes it obvious. Therefore, those learned in the law may easily regard [φ] their own science as part of philosophy, even if they judge virtue, honesty, and justice less severely in their legislation than philosophers do in their debates. For example, philosophy detests ingratitude in any human condition, but the laws do not punish it unless committed by children against parents, or by freedmen against their patrons. Human laws do not compel anyone to give his goods to the needy, but philosophy commends liberality and generosity towards all. What more should be said? In praise of this kind of philosophy Cicero exclaimed in *Tusculanus* 5: “O philosophy, guide of life, O explorer of virtue and expeller of vice! Without

you what would have become of me and even of human life itself? You have given birth to cities, you have called scattered human beings into the bond of social life, you have united them first of all in common dwellings, then in marriage, then in the ties of common literature and speech (you have discovered law) you have been the teacher of morality and order,” etc.³⁵ Everyone acknowledges how splendid it is to know the power of herbs, rocks, metals, and medicines, nor do we deny this in the least. But does it not follow from all this that here is a worthy faculty by which human acts, choices, arts, methods, skills, virtues, and vices are to be perceived? What could be more noble than to know oneself? This we know in the first place through philosophy. We should also keep in mind what Plato said, that it may easily happen that ardent love for virtue is aroused in us if now and then its likeness meets our eyes.³⁶ On the other hand, the chief cause of our vices is that we could never see virtue with our own eyes.

The pleasure derived from this science is not small, to know within what bounds the illumination that nature sheds should confine itself, and how far it may extend itself in its own right. Moreover, the Christian religion is spurred by the knowledge of pagan ethics, for we understand through comparison how far those things taught in Scripture surpass philosophy. It is a common saying that when opposites are compared with one another they become clearer. Errors cannot be easily avoided unless they are first understood. Therefore, whoever knows both faculties will more easily avoid the mistakes of human philosophy, especially when properly demonstrated.³⁷

³⁵Cicero *Tuscul. Disp.* 2.5.2.

³⁶Plato *Symp.* 210–211.

³⁷The introduction concludes with a paragraph that provides “a shorter division of Aristotle’s treatise,” and features the governing concept of the end, τέλος.