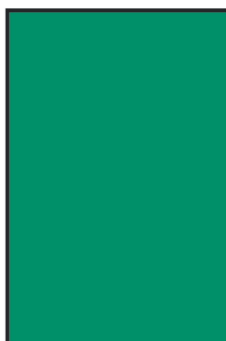


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considered in relation to the distinction between *potentia absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*. This distinction says that God can do anything in terms of absolute power, but that He has limited His own omnipotence by creating the world according to certain permanent orders. Moreover, God has promised some things to human beings and even made a covenant or a testament with them. The acts of creating, promising and making a covenant involve a voluntary self-limitation of divine power and are discussed in terms of *potentia ordinata*. 'Ordinance' (*ordinatio*) in this context means the self-limiting act of God; 'order' is the structure emerging as a result of the act of *ordinatio*.¹⁵

In late medieval theology this vocabulary was very prominent in discussions of grace and justification. Recent scholarship has pointed out that while this vocabulary was employed in order to refute Pelagianism, it was open to some Pelagian interpretations. The distinction between God's absolute and ordained power underlines both His sovereign omnipotence and the fact that grace is fundamentally and completely based on God's free act of acceptance. Semantically, however, the vocabulary of ordained power presupposes two subjects: in order for there to be a covenant or an agreement, two parties must be involved. Although God freely establishes the contractual relationship, the human being is in some way taken to be a contractual partner in this relationship.¹⁶ It is interesting that Gabriel Biel, for instance, thought that such a contractual relationship could not exist between God and a sinner, but only between God and a justified person capable of employing *liberum arbitrium*.¹⁷

The late medieval nominalist language of covenant, testament and donation or gift does not, however, presuppose two subjects in the sense of negotiability. God, by means of his sovereignty, establishes the covenant, makes the testament or gives the gift. In Pierre d'Ailly, for instance, there are two covenants: one which God made at the creation, making promises to Adam and Noah, and another established as the new covenant, the church. Whereas the former operates with natural causality in sustaining the

¹⁵ For general introductions to this topic see Hamm (1977) and Courtenay (1980), (1984) and (1987), pp. 210–16 (with reference to Ockham's ethics). Most recently on Ockham's politics, see Lambertini (2000), pp. 269–88. Oberman (1963), pp. 90–119, focuses on Gabriel Biel's ordinance ethics. Maurer (1979), p. 125, realizes how important the idea of ordinance is for Luther; but although he considers some medieval parallels, he is not aware of *potentia ordinata* and therefore concludes: 'Es zeigt sich, dass Luthers Ordnungsdenken nicht von den mittelalterlichen Traditionen bestimmt ist, die man nach seiner Anküpfung an die Hierarchienlehre vermuten könnte; weder neuplatonisches noch aristotelisches Ordnungsdenken sind grundlegend oder massgebend. Vielmehr wird alles, was über die Obrigkeit als göttliche Stiftung ausgeführt wird, aus dem reformatorischen Verständnis der Schrift gewonnen.' Cf. Lohse (1996), p. 363.

¹⁶ Hamm (1977), pp. 388–9; Greschat (1970).

¹⁷ Hamm (1977), pp. 403–4.

creation, the latter also involves subsequent theological causalities, such as the divine act of acceptance. But in both covenants human beings remain recipients.¹⁸

The *absoluta – ordinata* distinction has for the most part been considered in theological contexts; but it has proved fruitful in other areas as well, for example, in late medieval monetary theory, political theory and natural science.¹⁹ Given the biblical background of covenant terminology and the great variety of its late medieval applications, it is no wonder that the idea of divine ordinance is prominent in Luther's discussion of the three orders. I want now to look more closely at Luther's use of this terminology, bearing in mind that the three orders have more relevance to his mature thought of the 1530s and 1540s.

In his *Greater Commentary on Galatians* (1531), Luther makes the hermeneutic remark that we can infer from created things to divine matters, provided that we know that the created things express a divine ordinance:

You have often heard from me that civil and domestic ordinances (*ordinationes Politicae et Oeconomicae*) are divine, because God Himself has established and approved them, as He has the sun, the moon and other created things. Therefore, an argument based on an ordinance of God or on created things is valid so long as it is used properly ... [W]here there is a divine ordinance in a created thing, it is good to base an argument on it and to transfer it to divine matters ... These are divine ordinances: that fathers should give things to their children and that children should obey their fathers. Therefore, such arguments are good, since they are based on a divine ordinance. But if arguments are based on depraved human feelings, they are evil and have no validity at all. Such is the argument of Scotus: 'I love a lesser good; therefore, I love a greater good even more ... I am saying this to prevent anyone from objecting that an argument from human matters to divine ones is not valid.'²⁰

From this passage we see that the ordinances refer only to permanent structures which reflect God's established rule. Luther explains that when the Apostle Paul speaks 'in a human way' (Galatians 3:15), he is referring

¹⁸ So Courtenay (1984), pp. 116–18.

¹⁹ Courtenay (1980), pp. 192–4; Lambertini (2000), pp. 269–88.

²⁰ *WA* 40/1, p. 460, 22–p. 461, 26: 'Saepe a me audistis quod ordinationes Politicae et Oeconomicae sint divinae, quia Deus ipse ordinavit et approbavit eas, ut solem, lunam et alias creaturas. Ideo argumentum ab ordinatione vel a creaturis sumptum valet, modo eo recte utamur. ... [U]bi ordinatio divina est in creatura, bene potest ab ea sumi argumentum, et transferri ad divinum. ... Ista autem divinitus ordinata sunt, ut patres dent filiis, ut filii obedient patribus. Ideo tales argumentationes bonae sunt, cum sumuntur argumentationes ab ordinatione divina. Si autem ab humanis affectibus depravatis sumuntur argumentationes, malae sunt et omnino non valet. Qualis est argumentatio Scoti: Minus bonum diligo, ergo plus diligo maius. ... Haec ideo dico, ne quis cavilietur argumentationem ab humanis ad divina non valere.' Cf. *WA* 43, p. 21, 3: 'Sunt enim [Oeconomia et Politia] vitae genera divinitus ordinata et instituta.'

to the concepts of testament and of promise which by way of analogy can also be applied to the divine ordinances.²¹

In his late *Lectures on Genesis* Luther very often refers to all three ordinances, explaining their emergence and the difference between them. The church as an order was instituted when God gave the first order or command to Adam not to eat from the tree of knowledge. The household was created with Eve.²² Abraham is depicted as an example of piety in all three ordinances.²³ The church originated from Abraham's seed—this is God's promise and covenant.²⁴ Luther's hermeneutic approach in the *Lectures on Genesis* pursues the idea that the expositor can ascribe a specific divine plan to biblical verses which allude to the ordinances.

One way to achieve a deeper understanding of ordinances is to analyse them with the help of the four Aristotelian causes. This type of analysis, which distinguishes between the efficient, final, formal and material causes of a thing, was enriched in medieval theology by introducing the concept of instrumental cause and by distinguishing between primary and secondary causes.²⁵ Let us now look at one text in which such an analysis is employed.

Luther's *Exposition of Psalm 127* (1532) is, in fact, a lengthy treatise on politics and household ethics written from a distinctly theological perspective. His main thesis is that, although a philosophical ethics is able to outline the formal and material causes of these ordinances, their efficient and final causes can only be understood by means of theology.²⁶ Luther's theological explanation is that God is the real and effective cause in both the state and the household. Humans are God's co-workers in the sense of instrumental causes.²⁷ The final cause entails regarding everything as God's

²¹ *WA* 40/1, p. 462, 17–21.

²² *Ibid.*, 42, pp. 79–80.

²³ *Ibid.*, 43, p. 198, 28–31. Cf. Forsberg (1984).

²⁴ E.g., *WA* 42, p. 627, 41–2: 'Est enim amplissima et ver magnifica promissio, quod pacto confirmat Deus, ex Abrahae semine nascituram Ecclesiam ...' In *Lectures on Genesis* one can hardly avoid the terminology of *pactum*, *promissio*, *testamentum*, since the words are there in the biblical text.

²⁵ Courtenay (1984), pp. 97–102. For *causa instrumentalis* see Thomas Aquinas, e.g. *Summa theologia* I q. 45 a. 5 c; I–II q. 66 a. 3 ad 3; III q. 62 a. 1 c; for *causa prima – secunda*: I q. 19 a. 8 c; I–II q. 19 a. 4 c.

²⁶ *WA* 40/3, 202, pp. 30–3: 'Nam materialem et formalem causam solum tum Politiae, tum Oeconomicae norunt, finalem autem et efficientem causam non norunt, ho est, nesciunt, unde veniant Politia et Oeconomia et a quo conserventur, item quo tendant.' Cf. Bayer (1995), p. 142 and the analysis of Ebeling (1982), pp. 333–431, esp. 351–3) of this and other similar passages in Luther.

²⁷ *WA* 40/3, p. 210, pp. 31–5: 'Hic igitur Psalmus videtur quasi compendium et epiphonema eius libri esse, quo docet, et quae sit efficiens causa Politiae et Oeconomiae, sive Reipublicae, sive rei familiaris, et ad quem finem gubernatio ista tendere debeat: Nempe

gift and thus finally pertaining finally to God's glory.²⁸ Luther's exposition teaches us that in all our earthly work we should see ourselves as instruments of God. If we are successful, it is God's gift; if we fail, it is also God's will. In this sense God is the primary cause, whereas humans as instruments are the secondary cause.²⁹

In a somewhat puzzling way this exposition resembles late medieval discussions on grace. An individual does his or her best, and God freely grants them success or failure. Divine acceptance is not causally necessitated by the individual's own efforts or merits, but instead remains a free act of God.³⁰ So, we have a kind of covenant in which God remains totally free, but the individual is granted the status of secondary co-worker. It is well known that Luther rejects this kind of 'two subjects' covenant theology with regard to justification,³¹ however, he seems to view it more positively in the context of the non-soteriological ethics of state and household, given the over-arching importance of God as first, efficient and final cause.

Sinful human nature, Luther continues, tries to bend the divine ordinance so that humans see the rule of household and state as resulting entirely from their own activity. Awareness that these ordinances are a gift thus gets lost. The right way to think about the orders is in terms of receiving and accepting a gift.³² The household and the state are not given to us in order that we may think of ourselves as their originators. Humans, as instruments, remain co-workers, who labour as secondary causes and whose labours produce fruit but not merit.³³

Luther employs the analysis of causality and the terminology of ordinance and gift in order to downplay human activity in doing earthly good. This resembles the anti-Pelagian language of ordinance in William of Ockham or Gabriel Biel. The language of ordinance, however, leaves some room for human freedom in earthly affairs. This is shown by the

quod tantum simus ministri et cooperatores Dei, nec simus causa efficiens, sed instrumentalis causa, per quam Deus operatur et facit illa.'

²⁸ *WA* 40/3, p. 211, 24–5: 'Eodem modo de finali causa docet, ut intelligas omnia esse donum Dei et pertinere ad gloriam et cultum Dei, non ad nostram pacem, voluptatem, gloriam etc.'

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 214: 'Faciam enim, quantum in me est: Si succedit, agnoscam donum tuum et tibi agam gratias; si non succedit, patiar aequo animo, tu enim es prima causa, ego sum secunda causa, tu es creator et fac totum, ego tantum sum instrumentum.'

³⁰ Cf. Hamm (1977); Courtenay (1980) and (1984).

³¹ See e.g. Hamm's remarks (1977), pp. 377–90.

³² *WA* 40/3, p. 222, 35–p. 223, 23: 'Ergo cum conditae sint Politiae et Oeconomiae, cum leges et artes divina ordinatione cum homine concreatae sint, natura fere his abutitur in eo quod dicit: Ego faciam, ego gubernabo ... De dono debet dum gratiarum actione dicere: Hoc accipi; sed superbe et blaspheme dicit: Hoc feci.'

³³ *WA* 40/3, 236, 30–237, 25.

vocabulary: a human being is a co-worker, a secondary cause, one who accepts and receives. The notions of 'secondary cause' and of 'instrumental cause', which both occur in Thomas Aquinas, are among the stronger types of causality in the elaborate scholastic framework of distinctions between causes. As instances of natural and effective causality, they are stronger than the nominalist, non-natural 'covenant causality', in which something is accepted on the basis of the value assigned to it by the one who does the accepting.³⁴

In coming to this conclusion, it is not my intention to twist Luther's argument, which obviously attempts to stress God's overall rule in politics and the household. What I want to say is that the language of 'instrumental cause' pertains only to the earthly kingdom. Luther clearly cannot say that a human being is able to act in the spiritual kingdom, the church, as an instrumental or secondary cause in overcoming sin and in doing good works. That would be Pelagian. It is nevertheless proper to say that in the household and in politics humans are active in the sense that they function as the secondary and instrumental causes of bringing about good in these ordinances, in which humans act, or are acted upon, within the limits of natural causality. Given that God is the *prima causa*, Luther can stress the need for hard work within both the household and the state, as well as appealing to us to be industrious within the ordinances.³⁵

The specific nature of human agency within the three orders becomes even more visible when Luther explains why the church must be kept distinct from politics and the household. In his *Exposition of Isaiah 9:4* (1543/44) he says that the household and politics are 'external ordinances' which pertain to the external human being, not to spiritual matters. They are divine ordinances, but as such are related to productivity and corporeal life.³⁶ The church, however, deals with the spiritual realm. It is not subjected to earthly magistrates. It must be 'diligently and prudently' distinguished from politics.³⁷ Making this distinction is not easy for Luther, since in many other places he classifies all the divine ordinances together as promises of God or as instances of exemplary piety.³⁸ But, in the

³⁴ See Courtenay (1984), pp. 97–102.

³⁵ E.g., *WA* 50, p. 652 (see below).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 40/3, p. 646, 37–41: 'In oeconomia agrum exercemus, domum gubernamus, familiam regimus. Hae ordinationes divinae quidem sunt, sed tamen externae. Non pertinet oeconomia ad regnum coeleste, sed tamen ea opus est, dum hic vivimus. Sic et politicis ordinationibus opus est iisque secundum externum hominem sumus subiecti.'

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 646, 17–20 and 647, 1.

³⁸ E.g., *WA* 43, p. 198, 28–33: 'Prudenter igitur inspiciamus divinas ordinationes et exempla sancti Patriarchae Abrahae, qui de omnibus rebus Ecclesiae abunde nos docuit, et specimen pietatis suae praebuit non solum in Ecclesiastico vitae genere, tanquam Propheta Dei, sed etiam in Politicis et oeconomicis. Oportet enim esse gubernatores in hac vita, nec est posita Ecclesia ad subvertendam oeconomiam et politiam, sed ad instaurandam.' In an even more

commentary on Galatians, he writes: ‘God has various ordinances, laws, forms of life, modes of worship in the world; but these do nothing to bring forth grace or to achieve eternal salvation.’³⁹ Luther here distinguishes between the three ordinances by stating that, whereas household ethics pertains to the family and politics to ruling the state, the church takes care of our knowledge of Jesus Christ so that we may conquer sin, do righteous deeds and exercise mutual charity. These good works are not, however, works of the church unless they proceed out of faith and love.⁴⁰

This remarkable ‘definition’ of ecclesial order is not a dogmatic one, nor does it identify the so-called marks of the church (*notae ecclesiae*). Rather, it defines the divine ordinance of the church as a *genus vitae*, a community of living and doing, parallel to the definitions of the household and of politics in terms of external labour. Since Luther and Lutheranism seldom describe the nature of the church in terms of ethics and activity, this definition is remarkable. The last sentence is, however, crucial and gives the definition a specific Lutheran quality. We cannot identify spiritual works externally but only as works of faith. Faith and love identify a Christian’s spiritual activity. The ecclesial order is ‘spiritual’.⁴¹

One reason for this distinction is obviously that describing household ethics and politics in terms of the language of ordinance and of covenant leaves some freedom for human agency and ascribes to it an ‘external’ or ‘natural’ character. Since in the spiritual realm this would be Pelagian, the works of faith must proceed in a different manner. What we get is a twofold view of human agency. Whereas in the household and the state our activities must be seen both in terms of divine ordinances and as human actions, in the spiritual realm human agency is even more strongly theological. In addition to the divine ordinances and divine causality,

unified manner in *WA* 43, p. 226, 24–30: ‘Quia promissio Dei abunde in Christo exhibita et patefacta est. ... Habemus sermonem Dei, Eucharistiam, Baptismum, decalogum, coniugium, politicas ordinationes et oeconomiam.’

³⁹ *WA* 40/1, p. 544, 23–6: ‘Habet quidem Deus varias ordinationes, leges, genera vitae, cultus in mundo, sed ista nihil faciunt ad promerendam gratiam et ad consequendam vitam aeternam.’

⁴⁰ *WA* 40/3, p. 647, 35–p. 648, 7: ‘... distinctio et propria cuiusque status definitio, quod oeconomia pertineat ad gubernationem liberorum ac familiae, ut parentes regant domum, ut politici principes gubernent rempublicam, subditi obediant. Item: ut in Ecclesia doceatur cognitio Filii Dei, ut credentes omnes consentiant in eundem Infantem nobis datum et natum, ut occidamus peccatum, ut adiuvemus et sublevemus fratrem lapsum, ut subveniamus egenis, ut faciamus opera vitae contra mortem, opera iusticiae contra peccatum, opera consolationis contra conscientiae anxiam, contra diabolum et desperationem, ut exerceamus inter nos mutuam charitatem, ut non scindamus concordiam, ut largiamur eleemosynas etc. Haec pertinent ad Ecclesiam. Sed haec opera non sunt propria Ecclesiae opera, nisi fluant e fide et charitate.’

⁴¹ *WA* 40/3, p. 648, 35–37: ‘Prophetae ergo praedixerunt Ecclesiam fore regnum distinctum a mundi regno, non politicum nec oeconomicum, sed spirituale.’

Luther wants to say that human agency is properly ecclesial only if it proceeds out of faith and love. A pagan ruler can make a properly political decision without knowing the divine ordinance and divine causality. Only a person who has true faith, however, can perform a 'properly ecclesial' action. In other words, the language of ordinance and covenant is not sufficient to describe Christian life in the church, though it is adequate when it comes to the household and the political sphere. Moreover, instead of natural causality, one must employ a theological causality, a causality of faith and love.

This might explain the fact that Luther in practice does not often define the church in terms of order, although he repeatedly defines both the household and the state as ordinances. For him, these are primarily external and related to activity in this world. The church, however, has so many inward and spiritual aspects that its function as an 'order' is only one element of its deeper nature. 'Ordinances' of the church might sometimes be merely secondary for Luther.⁴²

In his *Von den Konziliis und Kirchen* (1539) this interplay is visible in an exemplary manner. After outlining his famous dogmatic view of the 'seven marks of the church', Luther discusses whether ethics can be one such mark. His answer is negative, since good works are also done by non-Christians and since we cannot infer 'backwards' from works to faith. Therefore, good works are not a 'certain' mark or sign of *ecclesia*.⁴³ But they can nevertheless be 'external signs' in the sense that a true church should exercise sanctification among its members. This is not only because of the moral law, but in order that the works of the Spirit can become visible.⁴⁴ The church, however, cannot be identified on the basis of external morality.

Luther concludes this work by referring to Psalm 127 and the three hierarchies.⁴⁵ Interestingly, he characterizes the three orders in this context in terms of doing. The first two ordinances give us a paradigm of the good life in which we must actively struggle to preserve it. The household calls for many kinds of active work. The society or the state also offers many tasks which must be fulfilled. These two ordinances require all our human powers. The third order, the church, requires in addition such good works of perfection as are beyond human capacity. But because the church is the order of the Holy Spirit, these requirements are not to be fulfilled through

⁴² E.g., *ibid.*, 40/1, p. 673, 27–34: '... permittit Evangelium ordinationes fieri in Ecclesia de feriis, de temporibus, de locis etc. ... Sed hoc fine permittit talia constitui, ut omnia in Ecclesia fiant decenter et secundum ordinem, 1. Cor. 14. Non ut servantes tales ordinationes mereantur remissionem peccatorum etc.'

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 50, p. 643, 27–37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 643, 6–26.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 652, 12–17 (quoted above).

human activity. Human activity in the church is either sweet and light, if it takes place through the Spirit, or a terrible and utterly impossible, if it is conceived in terms of human agency.⁴⁶

In this sense the three orders represent a graduated moral hierarchy. Whereas its requirements can to some extent be met in both household and in the state, the ultimate order of human conduct, the church, requires a perfection which lies completely beyond human capacity. When people do good works in the church, they do not do them in the same way they do hard work in the two other orders. Instead, proper ecclesial activity is sweet and light, since it takes place within a spiritual framework.

So, whereas the language of *ordinationes Dei* helps us to understand the ethics of the household and the state, it does not allow us to grasp the deeper nature of spiritual activity. There is a fundamental distinction between the co-worker model in the earthly realm, on the one hand, and spiritual or theological activity, on the other hand. Before the nature of this ‘theological action’ (*opus theologicum*) can be clarified, something needs to be said about the concept of prudence in Luther.

PRUDENCE IN LUTHER

I quoted above Reinhard Schwarz’s observation that the Aristotelian view of prudence at a first glance displays some similarities to Lutheran individual ethics, which stresses Christian freedom and the astute and flexible service of Christian love. If we pursue this comparison further, we see, however, that prudence remains a very ambivalent notion for Luther. In his early *Lectures on Romans* (1515/16), Luther remarks that in Romans 8:7 the phrase ‘scientia carnis’ should instead be translated as ‘prudentia carnis’, since Paul is not dealing with theoretical wisdom but rather with practical reason as related to action. Carnal prudence is always directed towards choosing one’s own good and avoiding the common good.⁴⁷ Only spiritual prudence can choose good and avoid evil.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 652, 18–32: ‘Das sind drey Ierarchien, von Gott geordent, und dürffen keiner mehr, haben auch gnug und uber gnug zu thun, das wir in diesen dreien recht leben wider den Teuffel. Denn sihe allein das Haus an, was da zu thun ist, Eltern zihen, regirn und versorgen, das wir gnug zu thun hetten mit dem Hausrecht, wenn sonst nichts mehr zu thun were. Darnach gibt uns die Stad, das ist weltlich regiment, auch gnug zu thun, ... das wir uberaus reichlich an diesen zweien rechten zu lernen, zu leben, zu thun und zu leiden haben. Darnach ist das dritte recht und Regiment, wo das der Heilige Geist regirt, so heisset Christus ein tröstlich, süsse, leichte bürden, Wo nicht, so ists nicht allein schwer, saur und schrecklich, sondern auch unmöglich, Wie Paulus sagt Rom. 8: Impossibile legis.’

⁴⁷ Ibid., 56, p. 361, 5–22. Cf. Työrinoja (2002), pp. 139–40.

⁴⁸ *WA* 56, p. 362, 28–31.

Aristotelian scholastics generally thought that even a sinful person recognizes the common good in a universal sense. Human beings only sin in their estimation of particular and concrete circumstances. This doctrine is related to Aristotle's practical syllogism, which consists of a universal major premise, indicating the end as the common good, and a particular minor premise, indicating the means of reaching the end. Luther, however, radicalizes the sinfulness of humanity, teaching that humans seek only their own individual good. As result of sin, a person is completely bound to himself (*incurvatus in se*) and therefore sees the individual good as the goal of human agency. A person might pursue some particular good means, but the overall end is sinfully egoistic and in this sense carnally prudent.⁴⁹ In the context of Romans 8:7 Luther makes an extensive list of all earthly goods. He remarks that God gives them all as a gift but that carnal prudence perverts them so that, as Augustine said, we use the things we should enjoy and enjoy the things we should use.⁵⁰

Because prudence always seeks an individual good and cannot serve the common good, Luther refers to it negatively in theological contexts as carnal prudence. But in other contexts, where the issue is earthly well-being, removed from the spiritual dimension, prudence can exercise a partially positive function. A well-known example, often repeated by Luther, is the question of whether it is better to have a morally bad ruler who is prudent or a morally good ruler who does not have prudence. Luther always defends the view that one should prefer a bad ruler who is prudent, since a society is ruled through the skill of prudence. A person who lacks prudence cannot rule a state at all, so that everything becomes the prey of evil people. A prudent but bad person does not rule the state in order to achieve the common good. Nevertheless, he rules all people and in so doing at least prevents chaos and anarchy.⁵¹

This example is connected to Matthew 10:16, where Jesus says that his disciples should be 'prudent as serpents'. For Luther, this means that a serpent has an evil overall intention but that it may nonetheless be astute with regard to the means.⁵² So, even this positive use of prudence is coloured by a residual ambivalence. This is also the case when Luther discusses ruling a state by means of the light of natural reason. Such reason is a very great gift of God and, if it works properly and prudently, can achieve magnificent things. In an almost Aristotelian manner Luther admits that with reason one can rule, pass legislation and institute laws, give good counsel and, generally speaking, administer public affairs in human

⁴⁹ So, e.g., Työrinoja (2002), pp. 138–42 and, more extensively, Raunio (1998) and (2001).

⁵⁰ *WA* 56, p. 361, 22–p. 362, 15.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20, p. 553, 21–8. For some parallel passages see the register: *ibid.*, 67, p. 545.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 42, p. 376, 13–15.

society.⁵³ As a theologian, however, Luther must immediately add that although reason ‘in suo genere’ provides this light, actual success in earthly things is granted by God alone.⁵⁴

In the *Greater Commentary on Galatians* Luther remarks that the ‘justice of law’ must be judged and taught according to prudence. This justice should not, however, be confused with justification of the sinner. In so far as they are justified before God (*iustitia passiva*), Christians live without law; but within the limits of earthly reality they are in the domain of ‘active justice’, that is, legislation and the ‘rule of the law’ in matters of society. The *paterfamilias*, whose duty is to teach and maintain this law, must be both faithful and prudent if this doctrine of law is to remain within its proper limits.⁵⁵ Luther adds that active justice can only exercise its earthly duty as God’s instrument after passive justification by faith has taken place.⁵⁶

In spite of his residual ambivalence with regard to human prudence, we may conclude that whenever Luther says something positive about prudence, he relates it to the activity of the *paterfamilias* and *paterpoliticus* in their role as civil rulers in society. The virtue of prudence has some positive use in social ethics or in the two earthly orders of family and state, although it is also constantly vulnerable to egoistic carnal prudence within these orders. A real and unequivocally good prudence is present in those rulers who, instead of trusting their own inclinations, allow themselves to be ‘instruments of God’s work’.⁵⁷ Because good prudence is subject to two different principles, it can perhaps be said, as Reinhard Schwarz suggests, that in the end it is the *cognitio Dei*, not *cognitio sui*, which determines the content of good prudence.⁵⁸ But since Luther almost always treats human prudence in terms of carnal prudence, the notion of prudence as such has almost no positive part to play in any overall explanation of Luther’s ethics.

A similar perspective can be observed in Luther’s use of the so-called golden rule: ‘In everything do to others as you would have them to do to you’ (Matthew 7:12). The golden rule is prominent everywhere in Luther’s theological ethics; but it is not prominent either as an expression of the so-called *ordo caritatis*, which claims that we should love better things more,

⁵³ Ibid., 40/3, p. 612, 32–613, 3: ‘Si ad votum et sententiam omnia succederent, si consilia eius tam feliciter ac bene caderent, quam sunt prudenter et sapienter cogitata, tum sane magnum et praeclarum quiddam praestaret. Potest regna et respublicas condere, legibus utilibus ea sepere et stabilire, bonis consiliis, salutaribus praeceptis moderari et gubernari, multa praescribere ad conservationem rerumpublicarum et societatis humanae utilissima.’

⁵⁴ Ibid., 40/1, p. 613.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 40/1, pp. 43–5.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 45–6.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 43, pp. 513–14, esp. p. 513, 2–4.

⁵⁸ Schwarz (1978), p. 34.

or as an expression of natural reason only. On the contrary, Luther's use of the rule is conditioned by his criticism of the medieval *ordo caritatis* and by his insistence that love as a divine gift is the model for truly Christian love.⁵⁹

Antti Raunio has recently discussed these features of the golden rule in Luther. The following conclusions are based on his findings. Although Luther views the golden rule both as a rule of inference for human conduct and as an expression of the 'natural moral law', his theological pre-conditions make it a concept which differs considerably from Aristotelian prudence. Good decisions cannot be made on the basis of evaluating the objects of one's love, since this love is always contaminated by the individual's egoism. Instead, we need a rule which proceeds from the deficiencies and needs of one's neighbour and which seeks to remedy them through the divine gift of love. But this kind of individual ethic is not prudential in the usual sense. Unlike Aristotelian prudence, it presupposes both human sinfulness and a theological ontology in which the giving and receiving gifts constitutes the basic structure of reality. Divine grace may illuminate this structure for an individual, who can then recognize the golden rule as a command to spread the divine gift of love to his or her community. How this can be done is a question which probably needs a strong concept of natural reason, but at the same time the gift-based and need-based foundations of the golden rule remain a strictly theological theory.⁶⁰

In sum, it seems that prudential reason is in some way operative in the hierarchies of family (*oeconomia*) and politics (*politia*), although humans should leave its use to God. This view of the hierarchies again resembles the covenant model, in which everything is granted by God as a gift, a testament and the fulfilment of a promise. The individual is prudent when he or she recognizes the gift-structure inherent in the golden rule, as well as in the ordinances of the family and the state.

In the ecclesial ordinance, which for Luther comprises both the individual's perspective (*ethica monastica*) and the theological life of faith, the issue is more complicated. Both the covenant model and the instrumental causality of human beings begin to look Pelagian when related to spiritual matters. We must therefore give further consideration to the nature of a genuinely 'theological action' (*opus theologicum*).

⁵⁹ So Raunio (1998) and (2001).

⁶⁰ Cf. Raunio (1998), esp. pp. 105–8, 121–2 and (2001), esp. pp. 302–5, 327–55.

THEOLOGICAL ACTION

As we have seen, it is only spiritual prudence which can pursue the common good. The interesting question is now, of course, how this good action in fact emerges? Reijo Työrinoja has recently considered the nature of specifically spiritual, or theological, action in Luther. In the following I shall relate my discussion to his remarks.

In *Greater Commentary on Galatians* Luther makes a distinction between theological and philosophical language. When we speak of doing and acting in theology, the words should not be understood in their plain, Aristotelian sense. In a theological context they are ‘new words’ which have a ‘new signification’. Whereas Aristotelians employ a ‘moral grammar’, theologians should employ a distinctly ‘theological grammar’ which alone can provide a proper understanding of theological issues.⁶¹

Luther’s distinction between philosophical and theological language is a complex matter which cannot be dealt with at length in this context.⁶² We must be content here with a rather intuitive and pragmatic analysis of the distinction, according to which theological terms and propositions resist any reduction to their philosophically proper meanings. The theological meaning can only be contextual and is found within the totality of biblical or theological doctrine.

When, for instance, the statement that a good tree bears good fruit is metaphorically applied to a Christian’s actions, the word *facere* cannot be analysed in an Aristotelian manner, since we are dealing with a genuinely ‘theological deed’ or ‘theological action’ (*opus theologicum*). A theological action is a deed done in faith (*opus fidele*). Faith gives the human intellect the right form, which it cannot achieve without it, since without faith the egoistic form prevails. The divine is present in theological human action in the same way that it is in the two natures of Christ.⁶³ ‘Doing’ in theology therefore means something different from ‘doing’ in philosophy and ethics. In philosophy, it means that the action follows from right reason and a well-disposed will. In theology it means that the action is a product of

⁶¹ Työrinoja (2002), pp. 147–8. *WA* 40/1, p. 411, 24–30 and p. 418, 19–24.

⁶² Recent studies include Streiff (1993); Rieske-Braun (1999) and Dieter (2001), esp. pp. 378–430.

⁶³ *WA* 40/1, p. 417, 12–26: ‘Permittamus igitur Spiritui sancto, ut loquatur in Scripturis vel de fide abstracta, nuda, simplici, vel de concreta, composita, incarnata; Omnia sunt fidei quae operibus tribuuntur. Non enim moraliter, sed Theologice et fideliter sunt opera inspicienda. Sit ergo in Theologia fides perpetuo divinitas operum et sic perfusa per opera, ut divinitas per humanitatem in Christo. ... Est ergo fides Fac totum (ut ita loquar) in operibus; ... ad obiecta adversariourum qui commiscunt Philosophiam et Theologiam et ex moralibus operibus Theologica faciunt, recte et facile respondere possitis. Theologicum opus est fidele opus. Sic homo Theologicus est fidelis, item ratio recta, voluntas bona est fidelis ratio et voluntas.’ Työrinoja (2002), pp. 151–2.

faith.⁶⁴ In justification by faith, the faith becomes 'informed' by Christ, so that Christ is, in a sense, the form of faith. Accordingly, the divine principle in theological action is Christ present in this faith as its form.⁶⁵

Thus faith, or Christ, is the sole and formal cause of the sinner's existence as a justified person. Faith is, theologically speaking, the divine moment of the deeds performed by the justified person. This formal cause is attributed to the material human being who is said to act in faith.⁶⁶ We might interpret this to mean that, although a good action in this theological sense 'formally' takes place as an act of Christ, 'materially' it remains a human act. Luther, however, is reluctant to analyse any further the philosophical issue of the subject of such action. Elsewhere he remarks that the question of Christian righteousness should be discussed in theology without focusing on the person himself. Such a focus is necessarily subject to the 'law', that is, to the natural or philosophical way of perceiving theological issues. One should instead focus on Christ and think of Christ and oneself as a unity.⁶⁷

Theological language, therefore, can show that some philosophical analyses are inadequate, but it cannot be employed as a philosophical tool in solving the philosophical issue of agency. One must in this sense be content with the answer that the individual actions of Christians should be understood as *opera theologica* in which faith and Christ's presence in this faith suffice to overcome egoism and consequently are able to determine the aim of the action. Spiritual prudence works in this way.

CONCLUSION: A COVENANT MODEL IN LUTHER'S SOCIAL ETHICS?

What role does Aristotelian ethics play in Luther's theology? It is clearly the negative counterpart against which Luther develops his theological ethics. At the same time, however, Aristotelian issues to some extent determine Luther's agenda. He derives his vocabulary and distinctions from

⁶⁴ *WA* 40/1, p. 418, 12–21 'Sunt igitur ista vocabula: Facere, operari, tripliciter accipienda, Substantialiter seu naturaliter ... moraliter et Theologicice. In substantiis seu naturis et moralibus, ut dixi, accipiuntur ista vocabula in suo usu. In Theologia vero fiunt plane nova vocabula acquiruntque novam significationem. ... Habent enim [hypocritae] facere, quod fluit ex recta ratione et bona voluntate morali seu humana. Ideo opus eorum est plance morale seu rationale, non fidele aut Theologicum quod includit fidem.'

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229, 15–30; p. 417, 29–p. 418, 11. Cf. Mannermaa (1989).

⁶⁶ *WA* 40/1, p. 417, 26–9: 'Ut fides in universum sit divinitas in opere, persona et membris, ut unica causa iustificationis quae postea etiam tribuitur materiae propter formam, hoc est operi propter fidem.'

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 282, 16–23. Cf. Työriñoja (2002), p. 152.

medieval Aristotelians. He is obliged to discuss the threefold division of ethics into individual, household and political ethics. He must deal with the role of prudence in action theory. His treatment of justice, or righteousness, presupposes that philosophers understand justice in an Aristotelian sense. For these reasons, Luther scholars need to have a solid knowledge of the Aristotelian tradition.

Recent studies on Luther's knowledge of Aristotle show that he not only acquired a theological Aristotelianism but also studied Aristotle in the humanist translations of Johannes Argyropoulos. Early in his career, Luther even attempted to offer some original and rather elaborate answers to the problems posed by Aristotle's physics. His later attacks on Aristotle's ethics and action theory were thus not based on second-hand knowledge. Instead, they need to be read against the humanist tradition of the early sixteenth century, which was critical of scholasticism in general and medieval dogmatic Aristotelianism in particular.⁶⁸

Rather than speaking of Luther's ethics as an autonomous discipline, we must speak of ethics within the framework of his theology. Even the two-thirds of his ethics which is not strictly related to faith, namely household and political ethics, can only partially be understood by philosophy, that is, in relation to their formal and material cause. The efficient and final causes of *oeconomia* and *politia* are found only in God and can only be explained theologically.

The most adequate definition of Luther's own contribution to ethics probably lies in his understanding of the golden rule in terms of the divine gift of love, which is the only way to overcome the pervasive egoism of every human being. From this core conviction Luther develops his criticism of both Augustinian *ordo caritatis* and Aristotelian prudence. But it is nevertheless interesting that Luther distinguishes between the three 'ordinances' or 'orders of life' in a quasi-scholastic manner. Whereas individual human agency in the church remains so vulnerable to egoism that we cannot even use the language of philosophy when speaking about it, social action in the household and the state can be discussed employing the vocabulary of ordinance, covenant and causation.

With regard to *politia* and *oeconomia*, the language of divine ordination is the theological tool which corrects the misunderstandings of Aristotelian philosophy. If we understand the household and the state as divine ordinances, we come to know something of their real efficient and final causes. The philosophical analysis of causality can then proceed with human agents as the natural causes of worldly events in the state and in the family, provided they are only secondary and instrumental causes in the light of theology. In pragmatic terms, human co-operation in these two

⁶⁸ Dieter (2001) brings together our knowledge of young Luther's attitude towards Aristotle.

ordinances is predominantly negative, since the best results are achieved when individuals submit their wills to the will of God. But, theoretically speaking, the self-binding act of divine ordinance opens up the possibility of co-operation between God and human kind. For this reason, human agency in the home and in society can be described as hard work by individuals in the service of domestic fairness and civil justice—a description which in theological terms would seem Pelagian.

These insights provided by the terminology of ordinance are the main findings of this study. Taking account of this terminology sheds new light on some frequently discussed problems in Luther's social ethics. But, of course, it also raises new questions. I shall mention only two. First, is there any explanation as to why egotism does not pervert social action as dramatically as it does individual action? Theoretically speaking, we might imagine that since social action is intended to benefit many people at the same time, it may be successful to some extent, even though the individual ruler might place his own benefit above that of others. The example of the prudent pagan ruler may offer support for this interpretation. I have not, however, been able to verify or to falsify this explanation.⁶⁹

Second, the language of gift giving can also be seen in a new light when explained in terms of divine ordinance. Like a testament and a promise, a gift is also a one-sided action of God.⁷⁰ At the same time, however, it is an act which involves two partners. Although the other partner, the human being, does not actually do anything, he or she still receives the promise, testament or donation. The language of gift giving is very prominent in Luther's soteriology and is commonly employed by him in strictly anti-Pelagian contexts. But does not the very idea of a gift presuppose a 'two subjects' framework which may result in an affirmation of some human freedom or some mutual exchange within the soteriological partnership? Certain Luther scholars have argued that this is indeed the case.⁷¹ The gift is, however, such a traditional and widely used theological topic that it cannot be reduced to an aspect of the language of ordinances. An awareness of this terminology in Luther may, nevertheless, help us to understand the nature of the gift in his theology.

⁶⁹ In *WA* 59, pp. 45, 11–17 and 46, 2–3, Luther remarks that seemingly altruistic political actions are nevertheless egoistic.

⁷⁰ E.g., *ibid.*, 40/1, p. 463, 13–15: 'Neque enim aliud est Testamentum quam promissio, ... Testamentum autem non est lex, sed donatio.'

⁷¹ Holm (1998) and esp. (2001). For Ockham, a gift is something freely given, that is, the giver is not under any obligation. See Courtenay (1987), p. 212.

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The Reason of Acting: Melanchthon's Concept of Practical Philosophy and the Question of the Unity and Consistency of His Philosophy

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I

Any examination of Philipp Melanchthon's commentaries on practical philosophy—not only on Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*, but also on Plato's *Laws*—has to be seen within a twofold framework, which itself plays a crucial role in understanding his practical philosophy. In the first place, Melanchthon's commentaries on Aristotle's practical philosophy seem to be among his most influential writings. There were five traditions of these commentaries: as early as 1529 he published the first two books of Aristotle's *Ethics* in his *Enarrationes aliquot librorum ethicorum Aristotelis*, which were published again three years later, accompanied now by the third and fifth books.¹ In the meantime, he published in 1530 his *Commentarii in aliquot politicos libros Aristotelis*, covering the first three books of the *Politics*.² In 1538 he issued his *Philosophiae moralis epitome*, the first systematic textbook of practical philosophy.³ His *Ethicae doctrinae elementa*, which appeared in 1550, was based on lectures delivered in 1548.⁴ And finally, ethical problems such as oaths, the question of excommunication and the difference between political and spiritual power were examined in his *Quaestiones aliquot ethicae* of 1552.⁵ During the sixteenth century there were at least 53 imprints of Melanchthon's textbooks and commentaries on Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*—clear evidence for the overwhelming success of his writings in this field.

¹ CR 16, 277–416.

² CR 16, 417–452.

³ CR 16, 21–164.

⁴ CR 16, 165–276.

⁵ CR 16, 453–494.

An investigation of this tradition of Aristotle's practical philosophy would be misleading, however, if it concentrated only on Melanchthon's commentaries and textbooks. For during the sixteenth century there was also a wide-ranging ethical and political discussion based on the *Corpus Aristotelicum*, which was more intense and broader in extent than the first reception of Aristotle's ethical and political writings in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as Charles Schmitt pointed out a few years ago.⁶ There were at least 120 commentaries and textbooks on Aristotle's ethics published in the sixteenth century, indicative not merely of a vigorous discussion, going beyond confessional boundaries, but also of a greater interest in Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* than is documented for the entire preceding millennium. This phenomenon cannot be explained solely by the progress of the new print industry but rather has to be examined within the context of the culture of early modernity by answering the question: what are the reasons for this widespread interest in Aristotle's writings on practical philosophy? Although Melanchthon might be considered, at least when it comes to ethics and politics, as having played an outstanding role in this second reception of Aristotle, his writings need to be seen against this wider background. To do what I am proposing would require a vast research project, which, of course, cannot be accomplished in this paper. Yet it is necessary to emphasize that Melanchthon's writings on Aristotle's practical philosophy need to be examined in light of the second reception of the *Corpus Aristotelicum* in the early modern period.

The second framework for exploring Melanchthon's practical philosophy concerns a systematic question which has not yet been investigated—the question of the unity and consistency of his philosophy. As is well known, Melanchthon wrote textbooks and commentaries on almost all disciplines of the *Corpus Aristotelicum*: natural philosophy, psychology, dialectics, rhetoric, ethics and politics. But there is one treatise on which he never wrote a commentary: the *Metaphysics*, which Aristotle wanted to be considered the perfection and conclusion of his natural philosophy. This is an important indication of Melanchthon's understanding of philosophy, which has to be understood without metaphysics. But beyond this, it raises the issue of the unity and consistency of his understanding of philosophy, if we are not to understand his philosophical works as occasional writings, which almost by chance are concerned with philosophical problems, without being at the core of his thinking. Melanchthon's understanding of Aristotelian philosophy has been characterized in different ways: it has been labelled a 'harmonizing' or 'eclectic Aristotelianism', or has been seen as an attempt to formulate a new Protestant and humanist Aristotelianism—that is, when his concept of

⁶ Schmitt (1983), p. 70.

philosophy has been taken seriously at all, as for instance in the classic monographs by Wilhelm Dilthey, Heinrich Maier and Peter Petersen.⁷ My own thesis, which I shall present in this paper, is that the core of Melanchthon's philosophy was his doctrine of intellect, which led to an intellectualist and anthropological sharpening of his understanding of philosophy. In the second part I shall discuss his doctrine of intellect in the perspective of the unity and consistency of philosophy with regard to practical philosophy by comparing his concept of ethics and politics with that of two major thinkers of the Middle Ages: Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas. In this way I hope to clarify the status of practical philosophy in Melanchthon's thought.

II

The thesis that the doctrine of the intellect was at the very centre of Melanchthon's understanding of philosophy seems by no means obvious if we look at past scholarship on him. Here I want to point out a feature which can be found in all of his philosophical writings. Melanchthon's commentaries normally begin with the theological and basically philosophical remark that all sciences are a mirror of God in which God wants to be recognized. So, in the introductory chapters of his natural philosophy, in which he deals, among other issues, with the question of the certainty of God's recognition in this discipline, he begins by saying: 'God wanted some sciences to be certain and secure for the guidance of life—as Plato said, the pleasing glory of God was dispersed into sciences, which, if they were uncertain and insecure, would neither show God nor would they be laws of life.'⁸ In his *Ethicae doctrinae elementa* of 1550, we find following epistemological principle: 'Firstly, the knowledge of those virtues'—as expounded in Aristotle's *Ethics*—'is a testimony to God's existence. For the eternal and indestructible distinction between good and bad in the human mind testifies that nature has not been created by chance but rather by the eternal mind of a master-builder. Secondly, it teaches what God is like. For when we distinguish between good and bad, then we recognize that God is wise, free, true, just, beneficial, sincere and merciful.'⁹ For Melanchthon, engagement in the arts and sciences is not

⁷ Dilthey (1986); Maier (1909), pp. 1-139; Petersen (1921).

⁸ CR 13, 185: 'Vult Deus artes aliquas vitae rectrices, imo ipsum quoque aliquo modo monstrantes, certas et firmas esse, ut dixit Plato, gratam Dei famam in artibus sparsam esse, quae si prorsus incertae essent, et nihil firmi continerent, nec Deum monstrarent, nec vitae leges essent.'

⁹ CR 16, 166: 'Prima: Quia earum notitia testimonium est, quod sit Deus. Nam aeternum et immotum discrimen honestorum et turpium in mente, testatur, hanc naturam non esse casu

simply a pedagogical duty, but above all a theological one: since God himself, in his existence and being, is manifest in sciences, sciences had to be treated with regard to their theological significance. That is, scientific knowledge is always at the same time a recognition of God. If, however, God can be recognized within these sciences, why do we need revelation and a discipline such as theology? We know from the condemnation of certain doctrinal positions in Paris 1277 that this question was one of the most momentous challenges which arose from the adoption of Aristotelian writings by Western theologians.

In order to avoid this challenge, Melanchthon usually starts his investigations of Aristotelian writings by dealing with two epistemological principles which are concerned with the basic distinction between theology and philosophy. As he remarks in his introduction to natural philosophy, the distinction between those doctrines must not be blurred: there is an immense difference between physics, on the one hand, and the Gospel, God's revealed promise of salvation, and those things which transcend human capacities, on the other.¹⁰ In his ethics, Melanchthon refers to this epistemological principle: 'The law of morality is the eternal and indestructible wisdom and rule of justice in God ... The Gospel, however, is the disclosure of penitence, revealing sins, and the promise of the remission of sins and of reconciliation, justice and eternal life, which are given freely by the son of God, the knowledge of whose promise is by no means inborn in human beings but rather was proclaimed from the secret bosom of the eternal father and stands above and beyond the sight of all creatures.'¹¹ This epistemological principle, which Melanchthon took over from Luther's distinction between law and Gospel, replies to the challenge which first arose around 1277 by maintaining that the theology of revelation is related

ortam, sed ab aliqua aeterna mente architectatrice. Secunda: Quia docet, qualis sit Deus. Cum enim discernimus honesta et turpia, intelligimus, Deum esse sapientem, liberum, veracem, iustum, beneficum, castum, misericordem etc.'

¹⁰ CR 13, 190: 'Denique etsi inter physicam et doctrinam Evangelii, et promissionem a Deo patefactam, ac longe positam supra captum humanum, ingens discrimen est, nec genera doctrinarum confundenda sunt ...'

¹¹ CR 16, 168: 'Lex moralis est aeterna et immota sapientia et regula iustitiae in Deo ... Evangelium vero est praedicatio poenitentiae, arguens peccata, et promissio remissionis peccatorum, et reconciliationis, iustitiae, et vitae aeternae, gratuita propter Filium Dei, cuius promissionis notitia nequaquam nobiscum nascitur, sed ex arcano sinu aeterni patris prolata est, supra et extra conspectum omnium creaturarum.' For Melanchthon's moral philosophy of 1538, see (CR 16, 21f): 'Quid est Philosophia moralis? Est notitia praeceptorum de omnibus honestis actionibus, quas ratio intelligit naturae hominis convenire, et in civili consequentia 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 actionibus praecipit ... Nam proprius Evangelii locus est promissio, qua Deus propter Christum promittitur nobis gratis remissionem peccatorum, et reconciliationem et donationem Spiritus sancti et vitae aeternae.'

to the divine order of salvation, above all to soteriology, while philosophy is always solely concerned with the possibility of inner-worldly knowledge. The philosophical knowledge of God only has to do with the recognition of his existence and being, but never with the revelation of his will for our salvation.

These two epistemological principles led to two notable consequences for Melanchthon's understanding of philosophy: on the one hand, any philosophical knowledge was a mirror of the recognition of God; on the other hand, any philosophical knowledge is related only to the possibility of inner-worldly knowledge, which is insufficient and irrelevant for revelation for and theology of salvation. Whatever is concerned with men's salvation belongs always and only to the theology of revelation. After having clarified the epistemological distinction between philosophy and theology, however, one question becomes much more urgent: how can philosophical knowledge—always ranked below the theology of revelation—be explained at all. How are human minds capable of attaining knowledge of sciences which must also be mirrors for the recognition of God?

Since the patristic era, the classical topos for this question was the doctrine of the similarity between God and human beings. In the context of this discussion, which I can only mention here,¹² Melanchthon's own understanding is close to the interpretation of the Church Fathers and the scholastic theologians who answered this question by combining St Paul's remarks in his letter to the Romans (1:23 and 3:23) with the Platonic and Neoplatonic theory of 'prototype image'. The crucial question which had arisen was the extent to which man's similarity to God had been lost or merely weakened by the Fall. Starting with Irenaeus of Lyon, it became a common practice to distinguish between the 'image' (*imago*), characterizing an anthropological structure of human minds which was not destroyed by the Fall, and the 'image' (*similitudo*), a similarity to Christ which had been lost through the Fall and which could also be lost through mortal sins. In scholastic theology, as presented by Bonaventure or Thomas Aquinas, the 'image' was understood as a similarity of human beings to God in terms of their intellect and will which was not destroyed by the Fall. Martin Luther, however, identified 'imago' and 'similitudo'. His fear that the human reason might take power away from God led him to conclude that the 'imago', man's permanent structural similarity in intellect and will with God, had also been lost through original sin. In relation to the issue of the epistemological status of human reason after the Fall, Melanchthon formulated a compromise. On the one hand, it was clear to him, as it had been to Luther, that the Fall had destroyed the original image of human beings as 'imago Dei'. On the other hand, by means of his theory of the

¹² For a further examination, see Frank (1995).

‘natural notions’ inscribed in human minds, he continued the patristic-scholastic belief in a permanent structural similarity of men to God. This theory of ‘natural notions’ was crucial for Melanchthon’s understanding of philosophy. Since God himself had inscribed these theoretical and practical notions in human minds as images of his own mind, it was by means of these philosophical principles that human minds were able to participate in God’s own mind. ‘These notions’, as Melanchthon emphasized in his psychology, ‘are rays of divine wisdom’ in the human mind.¹³ In this way he explained that when the human mind acquires any knowledge, which is possible only by means of these philosophical notions, it touches infinity and recognizes it ‘per participationem’. These two basic theological and philosophical positions—the doctrine of the image and Plato’s doctrine of participation (*methexis*)—are the foundations of Melanchthon’s doctrine of the intellect, which I shall now examine with regard to his concept of practical philosophy.

His most comprehensive and systematic exploration of the doctrine of intellect, which is at the centre of his psychology, is to be found in the chapter ‘De potentia rationalis seu Mente’ in his *De anima*.¹⁴ He starts with those epistemological principles which characterize his understanding of philosophy: psychology is a mirror for the recognition of God,¹⁵ because inscribed in the human mind are not only the knowledge of God, but also philosophical principles or ‘notitiae naturales’,¹⁶ which are the structural features of the image of God. According to Melanchthon, the doctrine of intellect itself belongs to the rational faculty of the human soul,¹⁷ which consists of two parts: intellect and will,¹⁸ that is, the *potentia cognoscens et appetens*. The intellect, for him, is the ‘the faculty of the soul which recognizes, recollects, judges and thinks about particulars and universals, which possesses certain engrafted and inborn principles of knowledge or principles of all the major sciences and which also possesses the capacity to reflect, by means of which it understands and judges its own actions and is

¹³ MSA 3, 327: ‘Talis est igitur Deus, ut hunc ordinem velit, et hae notitiae radii sunt sapientiae divinae.’

¹⁴ CR 13, 137–163.

¹⁵ Ibid. 137: ‘Etsi penetrari acie humanae mentis rerum natura non potest, tamen vult Deus eam ab hominibus aspici, ut in ea consideremus testimonia de ipso, quae ostendunt et esse Deum, et qualis sit.’

¹⁶ Ibid. 138: ‘Sicut autem homo conditus est, ut in eo luceat notitia Dei, et ut ei Deus communicet suam sapientiam et bonitatem, ita mentem humanam voluit evidentissimum de ipso testimonium esse. Cui et insita est lux, qua esse Deum agnoscimus, et insitae sunt notitiae, discernentes honesta et turpia.’

¹⁷ Ibid. 139: ‘Est igitur propria hominis potentia rationalis, ut nominant, quae est summa vis humanae animae.’

¹⁸ Ibid.: ‘Duae sunt potentiae in hac summa parte, ut sic dicam: Intellectus et voluntas.’

able to correct its errors.'¹⁹ The actions of the intellect are concerned with the knowledge of particulars, in their distribution and classification, in their faculty of drawing conclusions, in memory and judgement. The object of the knowledge of the intellect is, as Melanchthon remarks : 'being in the broadest sense, that is, God and the totality of all things are the object of the intellect, for the recognition of which we have been created'.²⁰

Regarding the epistemological aspect of knowledge, that is, the question of how the intellect attains knowledge of things, whether based on sense experience (as Aristotle maintained) or on a priori principles of knowledge (as Plato held), Melanchthon's concept of 'natural notions' once again plays a decisive role. He expressly defends this concept against the tradition of knowledge based on experience, as presented by Aristotle. In relation to the old fashioned controversy between Aristotelians and Platonists, Melanchthon states: 'It is simpler and more correct to hold the view that there are some principles in the human mind which are inborn, such as numbers, the knowledge of *ordo* and of proportions, the understanding of consequences in a syllogism. Similarly, principles of geometry and of natural and moral philosophy.'²¹ Melanchthon does not accept the consequences of the basic epistemological premise of Aristotle: 'Let us not be confused by the commonly held view that "Nihil est in intellectu, quin prius fuerit in sensu" ("there is nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the senses"). Unless this is understood in the proper way, it would be totally absurd, since universal notions and the judgement of the mind were not previously in the senses.'²² Melanchthon's epistemology therefore has nothing in common with Aristotle's position. According to his doctrine of intellection, the *intellectus patiens* receives all sense impressions, which then become the conceptions of the mind (*noëmata*). His understanding of the intellect is basically characterized by a Platonic apriorism: all knowledge is a conceptualization based on 'natural notions' which are inscribed in the *potentia cognoscens*.

The second part of the soul, according to Melanchthon's doctrine, is the will, which he describes in an Aristotelian way as the *pars animae*

¹⁹ Ibid. 142: 'Est potentia cognoscens, recordans, iudicans et ratiocinans singularia et universalialia, habens insitas quasdam notitias nobiscum nascentes, seu principia magnarum artium, habens et actum reflexum, quo suas actiones cernit et iudicat, et errata emendare potest.'

²⁰ Ibid. 143: 'Quod est obiectum intellectus? Ens quam late patet, hoc est, Deus et tota rerum universitas est obiectum intellectus, ad cuius agnitionem conditi sumus.'

²¹ Ibid. 143f: 'Sed simplicius et rectius est retinere hanc sententiam, esse aliquas notitias in mente humana, quae nobiscum natae sunt, ut numeros, ordinis, et proportionum agnitionem, intellectum consequentiae in syllogismo. Item principia geometrica, physica et moralia.'

²² Ibid. 144: 'Nec turbemur vulgari dicto: Nihil est in intellectu, quin prius fuerit in sensu. Id enim nisi dexte intelligeretur, valde absurdum esset. Nam universales notitiae et diiudicatio non prius fuerunt in sensu.'

intellectivae appetens. Its actions are *velle* and *nolle*.²³ It is, however, crucial for the status of practical philosophy that the principles of ethical and political knowledge are based not in the ‘*pars voluntativa*’ of the soul but rather in the *potentia cognoscens*, that is, in the intellect. As he explains in his interpretation to St Paul’s letter to the Romans (1:19f), ‘Paul names as truth the true notions of God and the law. These rays of divine wisdom shine in the *potentia cognoscens*.’²⁴ This means that the basic knowledge of practical philosophy is located in the intellective, not the voluntative, part of the soul: the law of nature, as a knowledge of the divine law (*notitia legis divinae*), is impressed into the intellective part of the soul, as are all the principles of the theoretical disciplines. Practical philosophy is clearly centred in the doctrine of the intellect. It is a theoretical discipline like all other sciences: their principles consist of ‘natural notions’ impressed into the *potentia cognoscens*, and the same is true of its practical principles, such as the law of nature and the laws which are deduced from it. For moral philosophy, which Melanchthon understands as synonymous with Aristotelian ethics, is the ‘explanation of the laws of nature, which assembles demonstrations according to the usual procedure in the sciences, as far as human reason is able to make judgements; its conclusions are the definitions of virtues or precepts concerning the discipline which should rule in all human beings, in agreement with the Decalogue, to the extent that it speaks about external discipline’.²⁵

What conclusion can we draw from our observations that even practical philosophy is centred in Melanchthon’s doctrine of intellect, making it a theoretical discipline, and that the doctrine of intellect is at the core of his understanding of philosophy? What does it mean for the status of practical philosophy as a theoretical discipline which deals with reflections concerning the life of individuals (ethics) as well as of the political order (politics)? In order to answer these questions, I want to discuss two major medieval concepts of practical philosophy, which arose during the period of the first reception of Aristotle’s philosophical writings in the thirteenth century.

²³ Ibid. 153: ‘Sed in hoc Aristotelico sermone, voluntatem nominamus potentiam seu, ut ita dicam, partem, animae intellectivae appetentem, quae potentia superior est adpetitu sensuum ... Actiones eius sunt: velle ac nolle.’

²⁴ MSA 3, 329: ‘Nominat (Paulus) autem veritatem notitias veras de Deo et de lege. Hi radii sapientiae Die lucent in potentia cognoscente ...’

²⁵ CR 16, 167: ‘Quid est philosophia moralis? Est explicatio legis naturae, demonstrationes ordine in artibus usitato colligens, quantum ratio iudicare potest, quarum conclusiones sunt definitiones virtutum, seu praecepta de regenda disciplina in omnibus hominibus, congruentia cum decalogo, quatenus de externa disciplina concionatur.’