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# A Revolution in English Moral Theology

LINWOOD URBAN\*

In his excellent study, *The Spirit of Anglicanism in the 17th Century*,<sup>1</sup> H. R. McAdoo stresses the dependence of early Anglican Moral Theology upon St. Thomas Aquinas. Bishop McAdoo makes so impressive a case that it would now be irresponsible to deny that Anglicans were more familiar with the *Summa Theologica* than had been thought and that St. Thomas exerted an extensive influence upon Anglican Theology with respect to organization and substance. Although Bishop McAdoo notes that Anglican authors often treated the material of the *Summa Theologica* with originality and were not slavishly dependent upon it, nonetheless the unwary reader might conclude that the essential positions of the *Summa* were represented in English theological writings. It is this conclusion which this paper will investigate with regard to a particularly important issue in moral philosophy. That issue is the relationship between what Kant called the Law of Nature and the Moral Law. To put the matter simply: Is an action morally right because it conforms to the Law of Nature, or, contrarily, is the Law of Nature to be followed because it conforms to the Moral Law? In the first of these positions, the specific requirements of the Moral Law are derived from the Law of Nature. In the second, the Moral Law is autonomous. The Law of Nature, also autonomous, is to be followed only when it conforms to the Moral Law.

Anglican Moral Theology begins with St. Thomas and the first view and then gradually moves to the second. While Richard Hooker restates St. Thomas's position on the relationship between the Law of Nature and the Moral Law, Joseph Butler reverses this relationship. It is this radical shift in English moral thinking which this paper seeks to demonstrate and explain. The crux of the change lies in Hooker's modification of one of St. Thomas's critical theses; and, once accepted, this modification made inevitable the reversal of the relationship between the Moral Law and the Law of Nature. In order to make clear the steps in this revolution, we shall first examine the views of St. Thomas and Richard Hooker. We shall next briefly investigate the views of the Cambridge Platonist, Henry More. Finally

1 Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965.

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we shall see the revolution completed in the writings of Joseph Butler. Of course we will not attempt to document all aspects of this radical change, nor will we claim that any of these men represented what might be called the moral view of their time. Rather we are maintaining that in the writings of these four influential thinkers we find the steps of a logical progression from one type of ethical theory to another. It is the steps of this logical progression which is our concern and not other historical questions, which are interesting and important in their own right.<sup>2</sup>

#### ST. THOMAS AND HOOKER ON THE MEANING OF "GOOD"

In his treatment on Law, St. Thomas makes the following points:<sup>3</sup>

1) "Every agent acts on account of an end, and 'to be an end' carries the meaning of 'to be good.' "

2) "Consequently the first principle of the practical reason is based on the meaning of 'good,' namely 'it is what all things seek after.' "

3) "Since 'being good' has the meaning of 'an end,' . . . it follows that reason naturally apprehends as good objectives the things toward which man has a natural tendency."

It is important to note that St. Thomas has presented us with a deduction. Since "good" means "end" or "that toward which something tends," and since all men naturally tend to do certain things, human goods can be characterized as those ends toward which human beings naturally tend. Hence men naturally take as good those objectives toward which they have a natural tendency. To this St. Thomas adds that, because men have a natural tendency toward self-preservation, "they naturally apprehend life as a good."<sup>4</sup> Thus the conclusion that the preservation of life is a good follows analytically from the definition of "good" as "end" when taken with the premise that men have a natural instinct for self-preservation. Thus one can evidently know that certain actions are good in virtue of Right Reason, e.g., analytical reasoning.

It is also important to make clear the dependence of the Moral Law upon the Law of Nature. "Good" is defined in terms of "end," that is, in terms of a natural property. In order to discover what is

2 Cf. H. R. McAdoe, *The Structure of Caroline Moral Theology* (Longmans, Green & Co., 1949), for such a treatment.

3 *Summa Theologica*, I II 94 2 *in corpore*. I have used the Latin-English text found in *S.T.*, Blackfriars, 1963, v. 28, p. 8of. In the main, I have followed the English translation given there.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

good for a particular being, it is necessary to discover what its end is. When we have discovered that toward which something always or for the most part tends, we have discovered its good. Hence it is impossible to know what the good of some being is without knowing the Natural Law which governs the activities of that being. Since "the good ought always to be sought and done,"<sup>5</sup> the primary rule of the Moral Law can be stated as: Act in conformity with nature.

Having just given an account of the meaning of "good" in the *Summa*, we are in a position to observe that in his *Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* Hooker follows St. Thomas very closely.

God alone excepted, who actually and everlastingly is whatsoever he may be, and which cannot hereafter be that which now he is not; all other things besides are somewhat in possibility, which as yet they are not in act. And for this cause there is in all things an appetite or desire, whereby they incline to something which they may be; and when they are it, they shall be perfecter than now they are. All which perfections are contained under the general name of Goodness.<sup>6</sup>

For Hooker like St. Thomas, "to be good" means "to have attained one's completion or perfection." Thus the good of any being is that toward which it tends or that for which it has a natural appetite. Like St. Thomas, Hooker also draws the conclusion that self-preservation is a good because all things naturally seek it.

The first degree of goodness is that general perfection which all things do seek, in desiring the continuance of their being.<sup>7</sup>

So it is not surprising that Hooker should conclude that Human Nature, understood as the final cause or end toward which men naturally tend, is the source of all our moral rules.

The knowledge of that which man is in reference unto himself, and other things in relation unto man, I may justly term the Mother of all those principles, which are as it were edicts, statutes, and decrees, in that Law of Nature, whereby human actions are framed.<sup>8</sup>

To be sure, neither Hooker nor St. Thomas believes that we can discover all that we need to know about man's end by natural reason. Nonetheless, the fact that we learn what man's last end is from revelation does not negate the claim that "the human good" means "man's end" or "human nature in its fulfillment."

5 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

6 *The Works of Mr. Richard Hooker* (Oxford, 1874), Vol. I, "Laws etc.," Bk. I, ch. 5, p. 215.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*, Bk. I, ch. 8, p. 230.

Thus far we have noted that Richard Hooker agrees with St. Thomas concerning the definition of "good." He also agrees that that toward which a being has a natural appetite or tendency is its good. Hence he agrees that the primary moral rule is: Act in conformity with nature. We must now examine the important divergences between the position expressed in the *Summa* and that found in Hooker's *Laws*.

#### THE KNOWLEDGE OF PARTICULAR ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Hooker and St. Thomas disagree about the way in which particular ethical principles are known to be true. St. Thomas regards these principles as analytically true, true in virtue of the meanings of the terms. Hooker regards them as self-evident to the rational man. An example may help to elucidate this difference. Up until the end of the nineteenth century, many mathematicians held that men merely intuitively apprehended the truth of the proposition "In a plane a straight line is the shortest distance between two points." More recently, mathematicians have argued that this same proposition is evident not because men intuitively apprehend its truth, but because it is analytically true. It is true in virtue of the meanings of the terms. When we understand the meaning of "straight line" and "the shortest distance between two points," we can see the truth of the proposition because the predicate is part of the definition of "straight line." Thus both schools of thought agree that the proposition is obviously true, but they give different accounts of what it means to be true. In exactly the same way, Hooker and St. Thomas give different accounts of the manner in which ethical principles are said to be known. However, since this interpretation of St. Thomas's position is not the standard interpretation, we must argue for it.

In Medieval Philosophy, the phrase which denotes "analytically known" is *per se nota*. For example, William of Ockham explains: "A proposition *per se nota* is one which is evidently known from a knowledge of its terms."<sup>9</sup>

This definition is of a proposition *per se nota* in the proper sense of that phrase. Ockham does allow for an improper sense of *per se nota* which means only "self-evident" in the weaker sense as explained above. However, the improper sense of *per se nota* need not concern us because it is clear that, in the relevant sections of the *Summa*, St. Thomas restates Ockham's definition of *per se nota* in its proper sense.

9 *I Sententiarum* (Lyon 1491), prologium, q. I 1 E: *Propositio per se nota est illa quae scitur evidenter ex quacumque notitia terminorum ipsius.*

A proposition is *per se nota* whose predicate belongs to the intelligible meaning of its subject.<sup>10</sup>

St. Thomas adds that there are some propositions which are *per se nota* in their natures, but which may not be known in this way to all. For example: "Man is a rational animal" is analytically true because "man" means "rational animal." However, someone who does not know the meaning of "man" might yet know that this proposition is true; but he would have to know this fact in some other way, perhaps by induction. Thus St. Thomas is affirming that, among *per se nota* propositions, some are self-evident to all; others can be known to be analytically true only to wise men after careful examination.

St. Thomas believes without question that there are many ethical principles which are analytically known or *per se nota*. In the same article of the *Summa*, he enunciates the principle: "Good is to be done and evil to be avoided." From the context, it is clear that this principle is to be taken as *per se nota* in its proper sense and thus is analytically true. If one knows what "good" means, then one knows that good is to be done. If one knows what "evil" means, then one can from that fact alone know that evil is to be avoided. Furthermore, St. Thomas does not think that only very general moral principles are *per se nota*; some particular principles are also *per se nota*. He not only says, "The first general precepts of the law of nature are analytically known to one in possession of natural reason,"<sup>11</sup> but he also says that such precepts are contained in the Decalogue. In the Ten Commandments are contained moral principles analytically self-evident to all. The Decalogue also implicitly contains other precepts which are known to be analytically true only to those who have the requisite knowledge of the meanings of the terms. There are

. . . those [precepts] which are primary and general which . . . are inscribed in natural reason as analytically known, such as that one should do evil to no one, and others such; and those which are found, on careful examination on the part of wise men, to be in accord with reason.<sup>12</sup>

10 S.T. I II, 94 2 *in corpore*, p. 78: . . . propositio dicitur per se nota cujus praedicatum est de ratione subjecti.

11 S.T. I II 100 4 *ad 1*, Vol. 29, p. 70: Sicut enim prima praecepta communia legis naturae sunt per se nota habenti rationem naturalem.

12 S.T. I II 100 3 *in corpore*, Vol. 29, p. 64: . . . illa scilicet quae sunt prima et communia, quorum non oportet aliam editionem esse nisi quod sunt scripta in ratione naturali quasi per se nota, sicut quod nulli debet homo malefacere, et alia huiusmodi; et iterum illa quae per diligentem inquisitionem sapientum inveniuntur rationi convenire. . . .

Of course the Decalogue also contains precepts which are *per se nota* only to the man in whom God has infused faith. The prohibitions against blasphemy and against images are of this last type. However, the fact still remains that for St. Thomas all Ten Commandments are analytically self-evident either to natural reason or to reason infused by faith.<sup>13</sup>

Having established that some precepts of the Moral Law are self-evident because they are analytically true and that some of these analytically self-evident precepts are contained in the Decalogue, we are now in a position to examine a text which has given St. Thomas's translators a great deal of difficulty:

All moral precepts must, of necessity, belong to the law of nature, though not all in the same way. There are some which immediately and of themselves the natural reason of every man judges to be done or not to be done, such as "Honor thy father and thy mother," and, "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal." These belong to the law of nature absolutely. Others there are which are judged by the wise to be done in the light of more careful consideration. These, indeed, belong to the law of nature, but as necessitating instruction on the part of ordinary people by the wise. . . .<sup>14</sup>

Translators of this passage have had a great deal of difficulty in rendering the *per se* (of itself) found at the beginning of the second sentence. They have tended to translate it in such a way that the sentence gives the impression that the sample commands are just self-evident and not analytically self-evident.<sup>15</sup>

13 *S.T. I II 100 3 in corpore.*

14 *S.T. I II 100 1 in corpore*, Vol. 29, p. 58f: . . . omnia praecepta moralia pertineant ad legem naturae, sed diversimode. Quaedam enim sunt quae statim per se ratio naturalis cujuslibet hominis dijudicat esse facienda vel non facienda; sicut, "Honora patrem tuum et matrem tuam," et, "Non occides," "Non furtum facies." Et hujusmodi sunt absolute de lege naturae. Quaedam vero sunt quae subtiliori consideratione rationis a sapientibus judicantur esse observanda. Et ista sic sunt de lege naturae, ut tamen indigeant disciplina, qua minores a sapientioribus instruantur. . .

15 Cf. A. Pegis, *Basic Writings of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Random House, 1945), Vol. II, p. 828: "For there are certain things which the natural reason of every man, of its own accord, and at once, judges to be done or not to be done." *St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologica* (Blackfriars, 1969), Vol. 29, trans. D. Bourke and A. Littledale, p. 59f: "There are some which the natural reason of every man judges straightway to be done or not to be done." *The Pocket Aquinas*, ed. V. J. Bourke, Washington Square Press, 1960, p. 200f: "For, there are some things that the natural reason of every man judges immediately and essentially as things to be done or not to be done. . ." The linguistic evidence is certainly in favor of coupling the *per se* with the *quae* and not with the *ratio naturalis* as these translators have done. This evidence further strengthens the interpretation given above.

But it is clear from the other passages which have been cited that in this passage the commands cannot be merely self-evident, but are analytically self-evident. St. Thomas seems to be saying that the commands of the Decalogue are self-evident in virtue of the meanings of the terms, and not just that everyone recognizes their truth. If one knows the meaning of "father," he knows that a father is to be honored; if he knows the meaning of "steal," he knows that one ought not to steal; and if he knows what "murder" means, he knows that one ought not to murder. In St. Thomas's strict use of "deduction," these principles are not deductively arrived at, because no premises are employed. However, in the looser twentieth century usage, his is a deductive ethics. As a caution, it is important to point out that for St. Thomas moral philosophy is not purely deductive even in the contemporary sense of that term. Many contingent facts must be taken into account in deciding what to do in particular circumstances. The contingent facts of the situation are always important in applying general rules. Sometimes even exceptions to these rules must be countenanced.<sup>16</sup> But the conclusion remains that the general precepts of the natural law are analytically self-evident.

In the passages cited above, St. Thomas employs "the natural law" in the sense of "moral law." We must now ask: What is the relationship between these analytically self-evident precepts of the Moral Law to the Law of Nature, understood as what beings naturally do? Another way to put this question is to ask: Why should one take a statement which is *per se nota* as imposing a moral requirement upon men? St. Thomas's answer links the discussion of the analytically true precepts to his earlier discussion of the Law of Nature.

Therefore, since human conduct is said to be directed toward reason, which is the proper principle of human action, that conduct is said to be good which is congruent with reason, and whatever is in discord with reason is called evil.<sup>17</sup>

One ought to take analytically true principles as morally binding, not only because they are true, but also because action in accord with reason is a natural tendency of man, and hence is good. Thus the two parts of St. Thomas's discussion, the "good" as "end" and "natural tendency," and the self-evident moral principles, are brought into close harmony.

<sup>16</sup> S.T. I II 94 4 *in corpore*.

<sup>17</sup> S.T. I II 100 1 *in corpore*: Cum autem humani mores dicantur in ordine ad rationem, quae est proprium principium humanorum actuum, illi mores dicuntur boni qui rationi congruunt, mali autem qui a ratione discordant.



HOOKER'S TREATMENT OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF  
MORAL PRINCIPLES

If this interpretation of St. Thomas is correct, we can now see how Hooker departs from him. Where St. Thomas thinks the simple precepts of the Moral Law to be analytically true, Hooker regards them as merely evident to natural reason. In an important passage in the *Laws*, Hooker mentions two ways to know the good:

And of discerning goodness there are but these two ways; the one, the knowledge of the causes whereby it is made such; the other, the observation of those signs and tokens, which being annexed always unto goodness, argue that where they are found, there also goodness is, although we know not the cause by force whereof it is there.<sup>18</sup>

He goes on to observe that "the former of these is the most sure and infallible way, but so hard that all shun it."

It is difficult, if not impossible, to know what Hooker means by "the knowledge of the causes whereby it is made such." He might mean that it is hard to discover the reasons why something ought to be taken as good; or he might mean that it is difficult to discover the good which is proper to a being by studying the causes why something is the kind of thing that it is, i.e. by discovering why it has a particular nature. The first interpretation fits the natural sense of the passage, but the second interpretation is congruent with what he has already said when he defines the good of a being as the perfection or completion of its nature. In any event, it is unnecessary for us to reach a conclusion concerning Hooker's meaning, since he proceeds to follow the second way.

Into the causes of goodness we will not make any curious or deep inquiry; to touch them now and then it shall be sufficient, when they are so near at hand that easily they may be conceived without any far-removed discourse.

The premise which Hooker adopts as the basis for following the second way is that there is an invariable connection between signs of goodness and goodness itself. From this premise one can argue that "where they are found, there also is goodness." Since Hooker does not attempt to give an account of this invariable relationship, it is safest to assume that he takes this relationship as a given and not to attempt to speculate upon Hooker's reasons for believing that there is one. It is sufficient for us to observe that Hooker believes

<sup>18</sup> *Laws*, I 8, p. 226.

that there is an invariable connection between the signs and tokens of goodness and goodness itself and to proceed on that basis.

"The most certain token of evident goodness is, if the general persuasion of all men do so account it."<sup>19</sup> For a general agreement of mankind nothing more is needed than the intuitive self-evidence of propositions under consideration. Additional passages support this interpretation.

The main principles of Reason are in themselves apparent. For to make nothing evident of itself unto man's understanding were to take away all possibility of knowing any thing. And herein that of Theophrastus is true, "They that seek a reason of all things do utterly overthrow Reason." In every kind of knowledge some such grounds there are, as that being proposed the mind doth presently embrace them as free from all possibility of error, clear and manifest without proof. In which kind axioms or principles more general are such as this, "that the greater good is to be chosen before the less."<sup>20</sup>

Hooker claims the same intuitive self-evidence for the precepts of the Decalogue and the Golden Rule.

Axioms . . . so manifest that they need no further proof, are such as these, "God to be worshipped;" "parents to be honoured;" "others to be used by us as we ourselves would be by them." Such things, as soon as they are alleged, all men acknowledge to be good; they require no proof or further discourse to be assured of their goodness.<sup>21</sup>

One might speculate as to the reasons why Hooker departs in this most significant way from St. Thomas. A likely explanation is that he mistook the meaning of *per se nota* where it appears in the *Summa*. Since *per se nota* literally means "known through itself," it would be quite easy to take it as meaning only "self-evident" and not as "analytically true." We have already shown that such a reading of St. Thomas is incorrect. We shall now point out the far-reaching consequences of such an emendation.

If the precepts of the Moral Law are merely self-evident, then knowledge of these precepts is reached independently of our knowledge of the natural. Thus, although "Act according to nature" is still the primary moral rule, we need not know what our nature is in order to know many of our duties. The autonomy of the precepts of the Moral Law has a second consequence. In order to connect the intuitively apprehended precepts of that law with natural tendencies,

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

Hooker does something very different from what St. Thomas does. Where St. Thomas affirms that because men have a natural tendency to be rational, to act according to reason is a good, Hooker makes a different point. He asserts that because men naturally judge certain actions to be good, this fact in itself reveals that they are acting according to nature. In putting his argument, Hooker falls back upon the Aristotelean *dictum* that "For of things necessarily and naturally done there is no more affirmed but this, 'They keep either always or for the most part one tenure.'"<sup>22</sup> From this he argues that . . . although we know not the cause, yet thus much we know; that some necessary cause there is, whensoever the judgments of all men generally or for the most part run one and the same way, especially in matters of natural discourse.<sup>23</sup>

Thus Hooker has changed the relationship between the self-evident Moral Law and the Law of Nature. For example, although he agrees with St. Thomas that because men have a natural tendency toward self-preservation, they apprehend life as a good, Hooker can also say that because men universally apprehend life as a good, this apprehension itself indicates that the preservation of life is a law of their nature. This change of view is of the greatest significance. It lays the groundwork for the position taken by Joseph Butler a century and a half later. Since the precepts of the Moral Law are known independently of the Law of Nature, in Butler's view the Law of Nature is to be followed only if it is in conformity with the Moral Law. However, before we examine the views of Joseph Butler, we shall further document the departure from Thomist principles in the writings of Henry More.

#### MORE'S TREATMENT OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHICS AND THE LAW OF NATURE

In his *Enchiridion Ethicum*, Henry More departs significantly from St. Thomas and Hooker concerning the relationship between the Moral Law and the Law of Nature. Where for St. Thomas as well as for Hooker the primary ethical precept is "Act in conformity with nature," More regards actions in conformity with nature as only a means to the good life. He does not regard the perfection of a nature as its highest good, but only as an instrument by which that good can be attained. Hence the human good is not characterized by ref-

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

erence to human nature. It is autonomously characterized as happiness or pleasure.

In what has just been said, we have carefully avoided saying that More defines "good" as "happiness." In fact, he gives no formal definition of "good." He approaches his subject in another way, with the question "What is the highest good?" and not "What do we mean by good?"

Early in the *Enchiridion* he implicitly identifies happiness or pleasure as the greatest good by remarking that "Ethicks are divided into two parts, *The Knowledge of Happiness, and the Acquisition of it.*"<sup>24</sup> He made the identification more explicit by arguing that all people desire "to live therein, or at least not without it." From this he argues only that men "highly value" pleasure and not, as did St. Thomas, that since the desire for pleasure is a natural tendency, pleasure is a good.<sup>25</sup> Thus, although More does not tell us whether or not "greatest good" means simply "happiness," he makes it clear that whatever the good, we seek it for the sake of pleasure.

More also believes that we can achieve happiness only when we live according to nature. Quoting from Aristotle, he describes pleasure as "A Restitution of every Creature from a state imperfect, or preternatural, unto its own proper Nature."<sup>26</sup> "And . . . that Restitution unto such a State must be the most intrinsic and peculiar Pleasure."<sup>27</sup>

For More, then, one could not be happy unless one fulfilled his nature. But in addition one could not be happy unless one were virtuous. For virtue is connected to nature as nature is connected to happiness.

Now a true Feeling and Possession of Virtue, is also the conversion or bringing a man about, from what is contrary to his Nature, to that which is conformable to it. . . . For (as the Emperor *Marcus Aurelius* observes) to act according to Nature or according to Reason, is in a rational Creature the same thing. Wherefore all pravity is repugnant to human Nature. But . . . Virtue is natural to human nature.<sup>28</sup>

Hence, "this is plain, that such inward Working and Conformity to Virtue's Law, is that which dominates true Happiness."<sup>29</sup>

24 *Enchiridion Ethicum*, English Translation of 1690 (Facsimile Text Society, 1930), p. 3.

25 *Ibid.*, pp. 4 & 5.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 5f.

29 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

With More we are in a different world from that of St. Thomas or of Hooker. By means of the virtuous life, we conform to nature; and by conformity with nature, we achieve our highest happiness or greatest good. Where St. Thomas and Hooker affirm that "what is natural to man is virtuous," More only affirms that "virtue is natural to man." Both St. Thomas and More agree that "happiness is a good because all men desire it"; but they treat this proposition in different ways. St. Thomas argues that happiness is a good because the pursuit of it is natural to man. More argues that happiness is a good because man's constant pursuit of it shows that men highly value it. As a result the Law of Nature is not that by which the Moral Law is to be specified. Conformity to the Law of Nature now merely serves the requirements of the Moral Law. Thus the relationship between the two has been radically altered.

#### HENRY MORE'S TREATMENT OF SELF-EVIDENT MORAL PRECEPTS

Henry More follows Hooker in treating the precepts of the Moral Law as intuitively self-evident and not as analytically true. He echoes Hooker in quoting from Aristotle that "some things are intelligible tho men know not the reason why." He then goes on to

draw forth a stock of . . . Principles, as being immediately and irresistibly true, need no proof; such, I mean, as all Moral Reason may in a sort have reference unto; even as all Mathematical Demonstrations are found in some *first undeniable Axioms*.<sup>30</sup>

Of these undeniable axioms, he further says:

These and such like *Sayings* may justly be called Moral Axioms or Noemas: for they are so clear and evident of themselves, that, if men consider impartially, they need no manner of Deduction or Argument, but are agreed to as soon as heard. And thus we are prepared, as with so many Touchstones, to let the inquisitive know what *Right Reason* is. For in short, *it is that which by certain and necessary Consequences, is at length resolved into some intellectual Principle which is immediately true*.<sup>31</sup>

Lest it be thought that "*the certain and necessary Consequence*" is analytic necessity, it is sufficient to examine a few of the Axioms and Noemas proposed by More. Although "What is good is to be chosen; what is evil to be avoided," could be taken as analytic, he also cites others which are clearly not analytic. "Among the several

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

kinds or degrees of sensible Beings which are in the world, some are better and more excellent than others." "In things of which we have no experience, we must believe those who profess themselves to have experience"; and "return good for good, and not evil for good."<sup>32</sup> Thus it is even clearer than it was in Hooker's case that for More, "self-evident" means merely "intuitively apprehended."

#### THE COMPLETION OF THE REVOLUTION IN JOSEPH BUTLER

We have come a long way from St. Thomas. Ethical principles are intuitively apprehended; and the Law of Nature serves the good and is not that by which we define the Moral Law. No clearer statement of these views is found anywhere than in the writings of Joseph Butler. He explicitly says that the Moral Law is intuitively apprehended.

That which renders beings capable of moral government, is their having a moral nature, and moral faculties of perception and of action. . . . That we have this moral approving and disapproving faculty, is certain from our experiencing it in ourselves, and recognizing it in each other.<sup>33</sup>

This moral faculty he sometimes called "conscience," and he emphatically states that the approbation of conscience is the only source of obligation.

But allowing that mankind hath the rule of right within himself, yet it may be asked, "What obligations are we under to attend to and follow it?" . . . That your conscience approves of and attests to such a course of action, is itself alone an obligation.<sup>34</sup>

One ought to stress the importance of this last passage for an understanding of Butler's moral theory. If the special moral faculty alone attests to the presence of an obligation, then a natural description of an action will not establish its moral worth. Something else will be needed, the attestation of conscience. Hence Butler can not agree with St. Thomas that if one knows what murder is, he knows that murder is wrong, or that if we know what a father is, then we know analytically that we ought to honor our parents. "That your conscience approves and attests to such a course of action is itself alone an obligation."

Butler's Intuitivism has further implications for the relationship between the Moral Law and the Law of Nature. Instead of the Law of

32 *Ibid.*, pp. 22-25.

33 "Dissertation II: Of the Nature of Virtue," *The Analogy of Religion, etc.*, George Bell & Sons, 1898, p. 334f.

34 "Sermon III," *Ibid.*, pp. 41of.

Nature defining the good, and thus it ought to be followed, Butler can only argue that the Law of Nature ought to be followed when it is in agreement with the Moral Law. After noting that "Reasonable self-love and conscience are the chief or superior principles in the nature of man," he concludes that self-interest can be followed because "Conscience and self-love . . . always lead in the same way. Duty and interest are perfectly coincident . . ."<sup>35</sup>

Whether or not Butler was correct in his assertion that duty and interest are thus practically identical, it is nonetheless true that he has completely reversed the relationship between the Moral Law and the Law of Nature as it appeared in Hooker and St. Thomas. As far as our knowledge of it is concerned, the Moral Law is now fully independent of the natural order of things. The epistemological independence of the Moral Law had far reaching consequences, not only for Butler's moral theology, but also for his natural theology. For he was now in a position to lay the groundwork for a form of the Teleological Argument which has had a venerable history. One form of the Teleological Argument is found in St. Thomas's Fifth Way. We note that in human affairs adaptation of means to ends is always the result of intelligent behavior. We also observe the adaptation of means to ends in the natural world. It is then argued that by analogy we must conclude that there must be an intelligent designer for the natural world.<sup>36</sup>

It is important to observe that in this form of the argument any adaptation of means to ends in the natural world will do. The purpose of the argument is limited, to demonstrate only that the world has an intelligent designer and not necessarily that the designer has a benevolent purpose.

However, the Teleological Argument can be put in another form. In this form a particular type of order is appealed to, what Harold Höffding called the propensity of the natural world for the preservation of human values. Such an argument was put by F. R. Tennant when he argued that nature is productive and protective of the moral life.<sup>37</sup>

It is not our purpose to discuss the merits of this form of the argument. It is rather to note that Butler suggests the possibility of such an argument.

Indeed the natural and moral constitution and government of the world are so connected, as to make up together but one scheme; and it is highly

35 "Sermon III," *Ibid.*, p. 414.

36 S.T. I II 2 3 *in corpore*.

37 *Philosophical Theology*, Vol. II (Cambridge University Press, 1930), Chapter 4.

probable that the first is formed and carried on merely in subserviency to the latter, as the vegetable world is for the animal, and organized bodies for minds.<sup>38</sup>

Thus while St. Thomas argues that self-preservation is a good because men tend to preserve their own lives, those who followed Butler's suggestion can argue that the instinct for self-preservation is a good because it tends to keep men alive. Life itself is a good because it is a necessary condition for the moral life. Nowhere is the difference between St. Thomas and Joseph Butler more forcefully shown. For the second form of the Teleological Argument can only be formulated when our knowledge of the Moral Law is independent of the Natural Law. Then one can ask the question: "Does the Law of Nature make possible the moral life?" If, however, the primary ethical precept is: Act in conformity with nature, then the question "Is nature productive of moral values?" cannot arise. For when the Moral Law is specified by the Law of Nature, it makes no sense to ask: "Does the Law of Nature support the Moral Law?" It is the Moral Law.

### CONCLUSION

In the course of this paper we have commented upon a revolution in English moral theory. The decisive step was taken when Hooker asserted that moral precepts were merely intuitively self-evident and not analytically true. Once this modification was made, the essential element in Butler's view was adopted. Having made this logical point, one ought to attempt some assessment of the fundamental issues involved. There is a whole nest of difficulties here and in a short paper one can only give a sketch of a possible resolution.

Certainly the central issue is whether moral precepts are analytically true or merely evident. Does a knowledge of what murder is entail that murder is wrong? One of the reasons why Intuitivists have adopted their view is because they could not see this analytical link. Any empirical description of an act seemed not to entail the additional statement that murder is wrong. In his book *Moral Notions*, Julius Kovesi discusses this controversy at length.<sup>39</sup> His conclusion is that if the description of an act comprises only its material components, then the Intuitivist is correct and there is no entailment. By material components of an act, e.g. murder, is meant the administration of poison, or the plunging of a knife into the heart, or the placing of a pillow over the face. From such descrip-

38 "Analogy of Religion," *Ibid.*, p. 179.

39 (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967) *passim* but espec. Chap. 1.



tions it does not follow that these acts are wrong. It is one of the strengths of the Intuitivist's position to have noticed this lack of entailment. But where the Intuitivists went wrong is in assuming that there is some extra non-empirical quality which acts have, i.e. goodness, or requiredness, or the like. The difficulty is that we seem not to be able to pick out such a quality. Professor Kovesi suggests that it is not the material components of an act which are significant for ethics, but its formal elements. The point or purpose of an action is what is relevant for its moral assessment and not its material components. That St. Thomas intended to include the formal elements of an action in his description of the act is clear from his discussion of lying.<sup>40</sup> According to St. Thomas, it is not the material elements, speaking a falsehood, but the intention to deceive, which constitutes lying. If the formal elements of an act are the relevant ones for moral consideration, then it may be analytically true that murder is wrong. If murder is characterized as the intentional killing of a human being for personal or private gain, then murder may always be wrong. If Mr. Kovesi is correct, St. Thomas is more nearly on the right track than is Hooker or Butler.

Although St. Thomas is correct in the notion that there is a fundamental connection between "good" and "end," it does not follow that because we naturally tend to do certain things, the objects of these natural tendencies are always good. From what has just been said, we can only conclude that ends are relevant to moral evaluation, and not that any natural end is a good. In this connection, we are not making the point that, since everything which happens is natural, it is impossible to divide natural tendencies into some more and some less natural. Nor are we making Butler's point that if a differentiation is attempted by noting that some desires are stronger than others, the relative strength of the impulses is not decisive for moral evaluation.<sup>41</sup> Nor are we making the point that it is difficult to decide what the natural end of an act is. Is the end of sex the precreation of children or is it merely the happiness of the partners? We are only making the point that although men have a strong natural desire to have a large family, it does not follow that the object of this desire is always a good. Thus if we are to criticize St. Thomas, it is for too readily assuming that the end of a natural tendency is always a good, instead of just maintaining that the end or point of an action is a highly relevant feature of the action when we evaluate its moral worth.

<sup>40</sup> *S.T.* II II 100.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Sermon III, p. 414.