

**THE STRUCTURES OF PRACTICAL REASON:
SOME COMMENTS AND CLARIFICATIONS**

BY

GERMAIN GRISEZ

[Reprinted from **THE THOMIST**, 52, 2, April, 1988]

THE STRUCTURES OF PRACTICAL REASON:
SOME COMMENTS AND CLARIFICATIONS



DR. BRIAN V. JOHNSTONE, C.Ss.R., pays particular attention to some of my early work in his recent article, "The Structures of Practical Reason: Traditional Theories and Contemporary Questions."¹ He plainly tries to present my views accurately. Still, Johnstone has overlooked some important things I said about the questions he considers. Moreover, in some cases he either misunderstands the positions I tried to explain and defend or, at least, puts matters in ways likely to cause others to misunderstand those positions. They still seem sound to me, although no doubt open to refinement and development. Therefore, since Johnstone is seriously trying to use my work to advance understanding of important questions, I offer these comments and clarifications to help keep open the way to a more adequate theory of practical reason.

I.

The first question Johnstone considers is: What is the specific truth of practical reason? To explore this question, he compares the theory of practical reason which I articulated with a "traditional" theory, exemplified by the work of Labourdette. Early in this comparison, in pointing out differences, Johnstone offers a summary and criticism:

If I understand Grisez correctly, he seeks to develop a theory of practical reason such that practical reason, in itself, can be understood—must be understood—without reference to the will FP,²

¹ *Thomist*, 50 (1986), pp. 417-46. Johnstone's article will be referred to henceforth as BVJ.

² FP refers to: Germain Grisez, "The First Principle of Practical Reason: A Commentary on the *Summa theologiae*, 1-2, Question 94, Article 2,"

p. 193). Further, he places such stress on the distinct way of knowing proper to practical reason, that he implies that the two (practical and theoretical reason) are quite disparate. These distinctions, I would suggest, are too sharply drawn. (BVJ, p. 425)

I agree with Johnstone in rejecting these positions, for, as formulated, neither is what I tried to explain and defend.

For practical reason precisely is reason directed to a work, which will not be done without an intervening act of an appetitive power corresponding to reason, and that power is the will. Hence, volition is included in the very concept of practical reason, and so it cannot be understood without reference to the will.

But in the place Johnstone cites (FP, p. 193), I did not say that practical reason can be understood without reference to the will. Rather, having argued that, because practical principles are self-evident truths, they do not presuppose a divine command, I said: "Nor is any operation of our own will presupposed by the first principles of practical reason." The argument for this is: The first operations of will are natural volitions of ends; these volitions presuppose knowledge directing to these ends; the directive knowledge is the principles of practical reason; therefore, the principles of practical reason do not presuppose any operation of our will.³

Moreover, I pointed out: "Of course we do make judgments concerning means in accordance with the orientation of our in-

Natural Law Forum, 10 (1965), pp. 168-201. Although I personally agreed with all of the propositions asserted in this article at the time I wrote it, and still agree with almost all of them, I did not and do not consider the theory proposed in it to be my theory, but that of St. Thomas (and, even more importantly, a very good theory) which I tried to understand, explain, and defend. Moreover, had the article not been a commentary, I would have put many things somewhat differently, and would have provided arguments for certain positions which can be taken for granted within the Thomistic framework.

³ In FP, p. 193, this argument is introduced by the sentence: "At any rate this is Aquinas's theory," and accompanied by references to his work, to signal the reader that assumptions are being made here which outside the Thomistic framework would require additional support. Johnstone overlooks the signal.

tention toward the end" (FP, p. 193). One essential function of practical reason is to reach such judgments (concerning means), which presuppose an act of the will (intention of the end). Thus, I by no means sought to develop a theory of practical reason such that it had to be understood without reference to the will.

Johnstone's other statement—that I implied that practical and theoretical reason are "quite disparate"—also is a misleading formulation. For "disparate" means "completely distinct" or "utterly different." However, while I argued that there are great differences between theoretical and practical reason, I also took for granted that there are important similarities.

My article on the first principle of practical reason was a commentary on a text of St. Thomas. Since he compares and contrasts theoretical and practical reason, so did I. But the whole analysis assumes that reason is a single power, and that whatever is characteristic of reason as such is common to both its theoretical and practical functions. Theoretical and practical thinking are the same in presupposing the principle of non-contradiction, proceeding according to the valid forms of syllogism, and so forth.

Johnstone sums up the "traditional" position, which he thinks differs relevantly from the one I defended, in two statements: "Practical reason, thus, does not abandon the theoretical structure of reason. Rather, it subsumes it in its own specific finality of directing towards the realization of the good known" (BVJ, p. 424). If "theoretical structure of reason" refers to what characterizes reason as such, I agree with these statements, and the two positions do not differ as Johnstone suggests.

However, Johnstone seems to have a different point in mind. Having argued that no operation of will is presupposed by the first principles of practical reason, I said: "The theory of law is permanently in danger of falling into the illusion that practical knowledge is merely theoretical knowledge plus force of

will" (FP, p. 193). In a note, I added that even excellent recent interpreters of Aquinas "tend to compensate for the speculative character they attribute to the first principle of practical reason by introducing an act of will as a factor in our assent to it." Johnstone quotes this remark and responds:

This line of criticism seems to suggest that a speculative or theoretical statement is somehow deficient or weak and needs to be supplemented by the extra force of willing. This debate is somewhat confusing. . . . Nevertheless, the basic differences are clear: according to one theory, in the basic role of practical reason, the will is necessarily involved; in the other theory it is not. (BVJ, pp. 423-24)

Johnstone then goes on to argue that the speculative understanding is not weak or deficient in force, since it is moved by intense interest in grasping the truth, and that the interpreters of Aquinas were not trying to compensate for a weak theoretical understanding (BVJ, p. 424).

In arguing thus, Johnstone misses the point. I did not suggest that speculative or theoretical statements are somehow weak or deficient, nor did I deny the natural appetite of intellect for truth. I did not say that interpreters of Aquinas were trying to compensate for any weakness in theoretical understanding. My claim, rather, was that some (and I referred to passages in works of Odon Lottin and Gregory Stevens⁴ as examples) mistakenly attribute a speculative character to the *first principle of practical reason*, and then try to compensate for this mistake by invoking an act of will as a factor in our assent to the principle, in order to make it operative.

Johnstone says that the interpreters of Aquinas are not trying to compensate:

Rather, they are concerned with the interrelationship of theoretical and practical understanding. Thus, they posit an initial grasp of the good, as the object of appetite, i.e. a grasp of a reality, namely

⁴ The references to Lottin and Stevens are in FP, p. 193, note 70. It seems to me that these and other Thomistic commentators I cited do say what I said they say, which often is not exactly what Johnstone thinks they say.

the appetite seeking the good as fulfillment and the good calling to the appetite, as that which fulfills. A grasp of that which is real, as true, is proper to the theoretical understanding. In response to that which is grasped, understanding becomes practical. (BVJ, p. 424)

He then adds the two statements, already quoted, summarizing the "traditional" position on theoretical and practical reason.

Toward the end of his article, Johnstone adopts a position similar to the one he attributes to the interpreters of Aquinas whom I had criticized. He realizes that, since on this position, the intellect's first recognition of the good is theoretical, he needs to explain how "ought" can be derived from "is," how a practical proposition can be derived from theoretical knowledge "expressed in such theoretical statements as: X is a good, or X is a good for humankind, or even X is a good for me." Johnstone suggests:

. . . that the way in which this might be approached is to recall what these statements are about. While the first recognition of the good may be expressed in the form of a theoretical statement, it is a proposition expressing the subject's being drawn to the good. That consciousness of being drawn and the response of the subject is what is present in awareness and what is expressed (abstractly) in propositional form. For the "traditional" theory, it was not a question of deriving an "ought" from an "is" as if the whole matter were located in the field of abstract logic. The "ought" arose, not from a proposition, but from the exigencies of the real good, and the awareness of this grasped by a moral consciousness where reason and will intimately inter-act. (BVJ, p. 443)

Johnstone's mention here of "moral consciousness" is relevant to another criticism he offers, which I shall consider in section five. At present, I will comment on these two passages only insofar as they concern the principles of practical reasoning.

In both passages, Johnstone uses language ("appetite" and "response of the subject") broad enough to refer either to the will or to nonrational appetites. But it seems that Johnstone means to refer to the will, for the first passage is part of his criticism of my remarks about the role of the will in mistaken theories of practical principles, and the second passage ends with "where reason and will intimately inter-act."

If Johnstone is talking about consciousness of the dynamic relationship between intelligible goods and the will's response to them, I agree that there are theoretical propositions arising from it. But these cannot be the first principles of practical reasoning—"the first recognition of the good by the intellect," to use Johnstone's phrase (BVJ, p. 442). For the will is a rational appetite, whose operations are specified by intellectual knowledge of a good. Thus, any theoretical proposition arising from consciousness of any act of the will necessarily presupposes a more basic intellectual knowledge of the good, without which the will could not be in act. Consequently, even if it were possible that there were no practical but only theoretical knowledge prior to the will's first operations, that knowledge could not possibly be based on consciousness of the will's seeking or response, since these either are or presuppose the will's first operations.

But perhaps Johnstone is talking about theoretical propositions based on consciousness of the dynamic relationships between nonrational appetites and their appropriate objects? If so, I grant that people are conscious of such relationships prior to practical reasoning and that such consciousness plays a role in the genesis of the first principles of practical reasoning. (This point will be considered in the third section.)

However, theoretical propositions about these relationships cannot be the principles of practical reasoning. For no matter what these theoretical propositions are about, insofar as they are theoretical they say only what *is*, not what *is to be*, while practical conclusions do say what is to be. Logically, sound conclusions cannot introduce something not in the premises. And the relationship between principles and conclusions is between propositions, and thus a matter of logic, even if the "whole matter" is not "located in the field of abstract logic." Therefore, the principles of practical reason must say what is to be, and so they cannot be theoretical propositions.⁵

⁵ Johnstone (BVJ, p. 443, note 51) cites Ralph McInerny, "The Principles of Natural Law," *American Journal of Jurisprudence*, 25 (1980), p. 8, and

II.

In the article (FP), which Johnstone uses as a chief source, I answered the question, "What is the specific truth of practical reason?" (without asking it), when I said: "Practical reason has its truth by anticipating the point at which something that is possible through human action will come into conformity with reason, and by directing effort toward that point" (FP, p. 176).

Johnstone overlooks this and apparently thinks I did not answer his question. It is, of course, legitimate to try to elicit from an author's work answers to questions which he or she did not ask. Johnstone tries to do this, articulating for me the following answer to his question:

If we ask then what is the proper truth of practical reason, it would seem that we would have to say, the conformity of practical reason to its own inner requirements, i.e. to itself or its own directive structure. (BVJ, p. 432)

Johnstone prefers what he thinks is an alternative position: that there are good reasons for holding that "the criterion of truth of practical reason is right appetite, i.e. appetite ordered to the true good of the subject" (BVJ, p. 433).

However, I agree that the criterion of truth of practical reason is right appetite—given that appetite is in act and is right. For, to repeat a point already mentioned, "we do make judgments about means in accordance with the orientation of our

also an article by William K. Frankena, as calling into question "the rigid distinction" between "ought" and "is" which "was once taken for granted" but "is often called into question in more recent writing." But in regard to the former, see John Finnis and Germain Grisez, "The Basic Principles of Natural Law: A Reply to Ralph McInerny," *American Journal of Jurisprudence*, 26 (1981), pp. 22-25. In regard to the latter, Johnstone himself admits in the same note: "Although I would not claim that this would correspond to what I have suggested here, there is sufficient similarity to provide a basis for discussion." Since logic is rigid, thinkers as different as St. Thomas and Hume agree that it is impossible to derive "ought" from "is." But St. Thomas is harder-headed even than Hume and his followers (see FP, p. 195, note 74.)

intention toward the end" (FP, p. 193). Every practical judgment concerned with means needs a criterion of its truth. That criterion is the intention of the end—ultimately that intention (of the true ultimate end) because of which the will is called "right appetite."⁶ Thus, bringing judgments about means into line with right appetite will bring what is possible through choosing and using those means into conformity with reason.

Still, the will cannot be right appetite until it is in act with respect to the goods one naturally wills. It cannot be in act with respect to these goods unless they are proposed by the intellect. Johnstone thinks they are proposed in theoretical judgments; above, I have tried once more to clarify the position that they are proposed by the principles of practical reason.

The account of practical truth which Johnstone tries to articulate on my behalf is not relevant to the truth of practical judgments directing means to ends, but only to the truth of the principles of practical reasoning. It should now be clear that their truth cannot be in conformity to right appetite. But it does not follow that the only alternatives are that these principles either are theoretical truths or that their truth is in their conformity to practical reason's own inner requirements (or to itself or to its own directive structure).

To clarify the alternative I defended, it will help to look at Johnstone's summary of the contrast between it and the "traditional" theories, which he here calls "inclusive":

For the inclusive theories, at least as far as I have understood them, the underlying structure to which all is ultimately referred is the structure of reality; the rational world order which is pre-given to reason. For Grisez, on the other hand, the underlying

⁶ See St. Thomas, *S.t.*, 1-2, qu. 57, art. 3, ad 3; *In Eth.*, vii, 2. Johnstone evidently is confused, since he realizes (BVJ, p. 431) that the criterion of right appetite applies only to practical judgments about means, and so could not possibly be an alternative to what I tried to clarify about the truth of the primary precepts of practical reason. For Johnstone, the real alternative is that these principles are both theoretical truths and imperatives (BVJ, pp. 442-43). He apparently sees no logical difficulty in this.

structures are the inner structure of practical reason itself, and the structure of intelligible actions. (BJV, p. 428)

This statement of the two positions makes the position I defended sound Kantian, while I criticized the other position on precisely that score.⁷ However, I will not pursue this point.

The important point is that Johnstone omits the position I actually defended. For while I denied that practical knowledge refers to intelligible reality pre-given to reason, I by no means asserted that the principles of practical reason refer to the structures either of practical reason itself or of intelligible actions. Instead, I said:

. . . the practical mind is unlike the theoretical mind in this way, that the intelligibility and truth of practical knowledge do not attain a dimension of reality already lying beyond the data of experience ready to be grasped through them. No, practical knowledge refers to a quite different dimension of reality, one which is indeed a possibility through the given, but a possibility which must be realized, if it is to be actual at all, through the mind's own direction. The theoretical mind crosses the bridge of the given to raid the realm of being; there the mind can grasp everything, actual or possible, whose reality is not conditioned upon the thought and action of man. The practical mind also crosses the bridge of the given, but it bears gifts into the realm of being, for practical knowledge contributes that whose possibility, being opportunity, requires human action for its realization. (FP, p. 176)

In other words, *the truth of practical knowledge with respect to its first principles is their adequation to possible human fulfillment considered precisely insofar as that fulfillment can be realized through human action* (which itself will embody and carry out practical intellection and volition).

This possible human fulfillment neither is an order of reality pre-given to reason nor the inner structure of practical reason itself. Rather, it is what human persons can be—the content of all the possible hopes of human individuals and communities.

⁷ In this case, I anticipated the misunderstanding and tried to prevent it (see FP, pp. 197-98), because I detected hints of it in some Thomistic commentators (cited there in notes 76-78).

The given reality of human nature with its capacities and natural inclinations mediates this content's possibility, and its realization depends not only on the structures of both practical reason and possible actions but also on the exercise of practical reason, right choices of actions, and the carrying out of these choices.

Since the realization of possible human fulfillment depends on the truth of practical knowledge rather than vice versa, the adequation which is the truth of the first principles of practical reason is not conformity to a pre-given world order. But neither is it some sort of formal "conformity." In this case, the intellect's adequation is not its conformity *to what it knows*, but the conformity *in what it brings about by knowing to itself*.⁸

III.

Johnstone thinks that the "traditional" theory involves a "classicist" view of the world, and suggests that my "emphasis on the inner structures of reason itself" represents a "turn to subjectivity" which might enable me to move away from that view (BVJ, p. 428). But it should be clear by now that the theory of practical truth which I defended involves no turn to subjectivity.

However, the theory I tried to explain is an alternative to a now widely-rejected theory of natural law, which was accepted by many Catholics before 1965, when I wrote the article on the first principle of practical reason. That rejected theory ignored historicity. According to the theory I defended, human nature changes in the sense that the possible human fulfillment

⁸ If all adequation were in the conformity of the intellect to what it knows, there simply would be no practical knowledge, for in that case reason would never bring about order but only find it pre-given. As for "the conformity of practical reason to its own inner requirements, i.e. to itself or its own directive structure," which is Johnstone's attempt (BVJ, p. 432) to articulate the position I defended, I am at a loss as to what the phrase means, though it sounds rather like Kantian formalism.

which can be realized in and through human action develops in the course of history as humankind unfolds its potentialities.⁹

Having attributed to me a turn to subjectivity with respect to the proper truth of the principles of practical reasoning, Johnstone also thinks he sees an important problem:

. . . the theory seems to contain a difficulty in the way in which it construes "the good". Thus, practical reason has an interest in grasping the goods as providing the necessary objectives for intelligible actions. Similarly, it is concerned with "affinity" [of the person for the good based in natural inclinations] as the basis of possibility of intelligible actions. But does it account sufficiently for the good as appealing to, as moving or attracting? Does it account adequately for affinity as embodying response or love of the subject for the good (BVJ, pp. 428-29)?

Johnstone is talking about a passage in which I tried to explain the statement of St. Thomas that reason grasps as goods all the objects of human natural inclinations (FP, pp. 170-71, 180).

Once more, the difficulty Johnstone perceives arises not from the theory I defended, but from a confusion. The account of how reason grasps as goods the objects of the natural inclinations makes explicit only part of the way the theory as a whole construes "the good." Prior to reason's grasping the objects of the natural inclinations as ends to be pursued by action, those objects in various ways "move" and "attract" nonrational appetites, which sometimes are experienced. And because of reason's grasping the objects of the natural inclinations as possible reasons for acting, these reasons for acting "move" and "attract" the will, specifying the basic natural volitions which underlie every subsequent response of the subject's rational love for any good and every subsequent choice to act for any good.

As I said near the end of section one, we are aware of our

⁹ See Germain Grisez, *Contraception and the Natural Law* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1964), pp. 115-21. This book will be referred to henceforth as CNL. For a more analytic treatment of the place of historicity and its distinction from historicism, see Germain Grisez, "Moral Absolutes: A Critique of the View of Josef Fuchs, S.J.," *Anthropos*, 1:2 (October 1985), pp. 169-77.

nonrational appetites and their corresponding objects prior to the formation of the principles of practical reason, and this awareness plays a role in the formation of these principles. The principles of practical reason are self-evident truths, not conclusions derived from prior knowledge. However, like the principles of theoretical knowledge, these practical principles presuppose experience on which the intellect works.

For example, nonrational appetites which lead to the behavior required to preserve life are experienced by everyone from infancy. A baby gets hungry, cries, nurses, and is satisfied. This experience could be the basis for theoretical insights: "Crying gets food," "Eating satisfies hunger," and so on. But a normal child soon shows that it has grasped a practical truth: Eating food (when hungry) is a good to be pursued by action. There are many similar specific starting points of practical reasoning, based on the natural inclinations of human persons as organisms. Together, these specific principles can be summed up in a formula for a whole category of basic human goods: Life—including health, safety, and the handing on of life—is a good to be protected and promoted.

The meaning of "good" which is relevant in forming such practical principles is "possible reason for intelligent action." But such a reason for action carries with it all the dynamism both of the nonrational appetite underlying the principle and of the volition to which it leads. Hence, the theory does account for the good as appealing, moving, and attracting, and also for the subject's response to or love for the good. The theory itself does not construe the good in a way which lacks dynamism. Rather, the formalism Johnstone imports impoverishes the good which is a reason for intelligent action, so that the good thus understood seems to him inadequate to the phenomena.

IV.

Johnstone also notes that in my early works with which he is concerned (FP and CNL) he does not find the distinction between making and acting; he thinks that sometimes I seem to

be concerned with action and at other times with making (BVJ, pp. 433-34). The reason why I did not mention the distinction in the article is that St. Thomas does not mention it in the text I was commenting on, and it is irrelevant to the points I wished to make.

In the book (CNL), not only the passage to which Johnstone refers but the whole exposition of the theory I defended is concerned exclusively with moral action, not with making. However, the distinction between making and acting was used in that work, when I criticized a form of consequentialism which I there called "situationism."¹⁰

Johnstone next suggests that the lack of the distinction between making and acting is important:

Does the lack of this clear distinction have any significant consequences? It could be argued that it does. In the first place, Labourdette's conception of the proper regulative function of practical reason, as applied to acting, requires him to point to the ultimate regulative principle of acting as conformity to the *ultimate end of human living*. Although Grisez occasionally refers to the ultimate end (FP, p. 183; CNL, p. 59) the concept has no real place in his theory; indeed, he seems to set it aside explicitly in some passages [footnote omitted]. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is his concern that, if we posit an ultimate end, this would imply a hierarchy of goods and thus the possibility that one or some basic goods could be subordinated to others. This Grisez clearly wants to reject. (BVJ, p. 434)

Here, Johnstone's attempt to understand the theory which I tried to explain seriously fails.

¹⁰ See BVJ, p. 434, note 34, where he takes the metaphorical expression, "practical reason shapes action from within," as evidence, that I sometimes seem to refer to making rather than to acting. See CNL pp. 54-55, for the use of the making-doing distinction in the critique of "situationism." For a more adequate formulation of this line of criticism, see German Grisez et al., *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, vol. 1, *Christian Moral Principles* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), chapter 6, questions B and G. (This book will be referred to henceforth as CMP.) The basic error of consequentialism or proportionalism is to try to reduce doing to making, but I usually do not say this in arguing against it, because its proponents can reject that argument as question begging.

First, to confirm the statement, "he seems to set it [the ultimate end] aside explicitly in some passages," he refers not to any passage in my work, but to a page in an article by Ralph McInerny, which does not support Johnstone's point. For on that page McInerny simply notes (and commends) the fact that I do not draw from "the concept of ultimate end as highest superordinating good the implication that there is some one goal or course of action that all men should pursue."¹¹

Second, the references Johnstone provides when he says "Grisez occasionally refers to the ultimate end" are not to the most relevant passages even in the works cited. For toward the end of the article (FP), I explicitly discussed the ultimate end:

The will necessarily tends to a single ultimate end, but it does not necessarily tend to any definite good as an ultimate end. We may say that the will naturally desires happiness, but this is simply to say that man cannot but desire the attainment of that good, whatever it may be, for which he is acting as an ultimate end [note omitted]. The desire for happiness is simply the first principle of practical reason directing human action from within the will informed by reason.

Because the specific last end is not determined for him by nature, man is able to make the basic commitment which orients his entire life. (FP, pp. 199-200)

And the explanation goes on.

Johnstone also overlooks the brief but complete sketch of the account of the ultimate end I provided in the book (CNL). The central paragraphs in that account concern the relationship between the basic human goods and the ultimate end:

In fact, it is only possible for man to love all of the goods properly if he considers each of them a participant in perfect goodness. Only in this way can he keep all of them separate from perfect goodness

¹¹ McInerny, *op. cit.*, p. 7. Johnstone does not mention and may be unaware of a study written during the same academic year as FP and CNL: Germain Grisez, "Man, the Natural End of," *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 9, pp. 132-38. Had Johnstone considered this study, he would have seen that the account of the true last end which I defend is not so different from that common to several other Catholic thinkers who have carefully considered the problem.

but irreducible to any other particular value, for only in this way will he see that each good uniquely represents the perfect good itself without ever encompassing its absolute goodness.

This complex orientation and delicate balance could provide man with a basis for establishing orderly direction in his life. Although the unity would not be monistic and although the actual achievement of goods could not be definitive, a man's love of all proportionate human goods as participations in pure goodness could guide him toward an existence both full and open.

The end of man, according to this theory, would be to achieve, insofar as possible, the goods accessible to man, and to maintain permanent openness for an even greater achievement. To this end moral action is naturally proportionate, simply because that action is morally good which is as proportioned to this end as human wits and freedom can manage.

Thus far philosophy. If the teaching of the Christian faith be considered. . . . (CNI, pp. 71-72)

Had Johnstone paid attention to this passage, he could hardly have thought that the theory I tried to articulate has no real place for the concept of the ultimate end.

On this theory, the ultimate end does not by itself imply a hierarchy among the basic human goods, insofar as they are principles of practical reasoning. But it does involve a twofold hierarchy. First, human goods are subordinated to the perfect good (God). Second, particular human goods (which could be considered as ultimate in themselves and pursued immorally) are subordinated to the whole set of human goods (which are considered as participations in perfect goodness and can be pursued in a morally upright way).¹²

¹² If the basic human goods are considered not simply as principles of practical reason, but in the light of the true ultimate end and first principle of morality (known either by reason or by faith) as constituents in any possible upright plan of life, there are further morally obligatory priorities among them. For moral goods such as practical reasonableness and justice are morally superior to the substantive goods such as truth and life. Moreover, among the moral goods, religion (harmony with the more-than-human source of meaning and value, i.e., with the good itself in which all human goods participate) is superior to the rest. See CMP, chapter 8, question I; chapter 20, question D; chapter 34, questions D-G.

A related point deserves clarification. In the early works which Johnstone uses, I confused two propositions: (1) that there are many *irreducible categories* of basic human goods, none of which as principles of practical reason is univocally more or less good than the others; and (2) that the *instantiations* of goods in prospective objects of choice are incommensurable, so that it is useless to try to guide free choices by saying: "Choose the greater good," or: "Choose the lesser evil." Later, I realized that these two propositions are distinct. That distinction is clear, for the second proposition holds true even of instantiations of goods within the same category of basic goods—for example, when someone chooses between two possible marriage partners.

I still think that both of these propositions are true. But if the first proposition were false, that would not undercut the second. Therefore, even if the objections Johnstone makes to the theory of practical reason which I defended were sustained, the argument involving the second proposition against the commensurability required by consequentialists or proportionalists would be untouched.¹³

V.

Since the true ultimate end specifies the first principle of morality, Johnstone, in ignoring the preceding account of the ultimate end, also overlooked the account which accompanied it of the first principle of morality. He points out that some think the first principle of practical reason is the first principle of morality, and then says:

¹³The argument against consequentialism or proportionalism was freed from the early confusion by 1977. See Germain Grisez, "Choice and Consequentialism," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association*, 51 (1977), pp. 144-52; "Against Consequentialism," *American Journal of Jurisprudence*, 23 (1978), 21-72. The latter is the fullest statement of the case, but it was updated by CMP, chapter 6, and further refined and updated in John Finnis, Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., and Germain Grisez, *Nuclear Deterrence, Morality and Realism* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), chapter 9.

In Grisez's account, however, the first principle [of practical reason] is not the first principle of *moral* consciousness, but the first principle of *directive* consciousness. (It includes all directives and prescriptions, whether to true goods or apparent goods, whether to moral acts or immoral acts.) It is thus, not the basis for the unity of ethics, but the basis for the unity of prescriptions. What then is the basis for the unity of ethics and moral consciousness in Grisez's theory? I find it difficult to discover what this might be. (BVJ, p. 442)

Johnstone goes on to suggest that a theory in which the first recognition of the good by the intellect takes the form of theoretical knowledge and in which the "ought" of practical reason arises in moral consciousness does better justice to the unity of the moral subject. I dealt with some aspects of this argument in the first section. Why Johnstone thinks the theory he prefers does better justice to the unity of the moral subject is puzzling. But I can answer the question concerning the basis for the unity of ethics and moral consciousness in the theory I defended.

Johnstone oversimplifies the account I gave of the first principle of practical reason when he says that it includes all directives and prescriptions. It does, but I also pointed out that "first principles do not sanction error" (FP, p. 188) and that "bad action fulfills the requirement of the first principle less perfectly than good action does" (FP, p. 189).

Moreover, Johnstone overlooks the main reason why the first principle of practical reason cannot be the first principle of morality: Immoral acts are inconsistent with the first principle of morality; but they are nevertheless human acts directed toward some human good (or some part or aspect of such a good); and so immoral acts are not inconsistent with the first principle of practical reason. To deny this entails that the thinking which leads to immoral choices is irrational—e.g., confused or insane—but if that were so, they would not really be immoral choices.

Since there is an ultimate end, there is a first principle of morality. In my early work, with which Johnstone is con-

cerned, I formulated it: "Whenever it happens that an attitude of nonarbitrariness toward the basic human goods requires us to have a certain intention, and that intention requires a certain action or omission, then we have a definite obligation" (CNL, p. 69). I no longer consider that formulation adequate. The current formulation of the first principle of morality is:

In voluntarily acting for human goods and avoiding what is opposed to them, one ought to choose and otherwise will those and only those possibilities whose willing is compatible with a will toward integral human fulfillment.¹⁴

"Integral human fulfillment" does not mean individualistic self-fulfillment; rather it is the ideal of the whole human community flourishing in all the human goods. This current formulation corresponds very closely to the early account of the ultimate end, quoted above, which Johnstone overlooked.

Of course, since the first principle of morality is not identical with the first principle of practical reason, a moral consciousness which is disintegrated by immorality will lack perfect unity as moral consciousness. For example, a Christian who simultaneously commits a mortal sin (which cannot be directed to the true last end) and maintains a commitment of true although not living faith (which is directed to the true last end) does not have a perfectly unified moral consciousness. Still, by virtue of the principles of practical reason which even sinners cannot ignore, such a person has the unity of practical consciousness necessary to reflect and become fully aware of his or her disintegrated moral consciousness.

VI.

Johnstone's second major question is: What is the nature of the requirement of practical reason? (I would rather formulate this question: What is the source of the "is to be" in the first

¹⁴ CMP, chapter 7, question F. It should be noted that in the light of faith, "integral human fulfillment" turns out to refer to the fulfillment of everything in Christ—i.e., the heavenly kingdom: see chapter 19, questions A-C; chapter 24, question D; chapter 34; questions D-F.

principles of practical reason?) To this question he devotes only a brief section. He summarizes the position I defended: "Thus, in Grisez's theory, the requirement of practical reason does not arise from any external factor at all, but solely from the nature of practical reason itself" (BVJ, p. 438). Depending on how one understands "any external factor," this summary might be accepted as helpful or rejected as misleading.

According to positions Johnstone considers as alternatives to the theory which I defended, the "is to be" is grounded either in theoretical knowledge, a reference to God, a divine command, a human volition, or the unconditional demand of moral goodness (BVJ, pp. 436-38). Now, all of these are factors external to the first principles of practical reasoning, in the sense that they are neither included in the meaning nor necessarily included in the reference of every such principle. (Some first principles do refer to some of these realities; for example, the principle which proposes religion as a basic good makes reference to God.) Hence, if one understands "any external factor at all" to refer to these factors, I do deny that the "is to be" of practical principles is grounded in an external factor.

However, the principles of practical reason are truths. Although they are self-evident, they do refer to a reality which transcends practical reason itself. That reality, as explained above, is possible human fulfillment, considered precisely insofar as that fulfillment can be realized through human action. Since the truth of the principles of practical reason is in their adequation to that reality, the "is to be" of these principles arises in part from it. That reality transcends "the nature of practical reason itself"; indeed, it transcends the conformity of practical reason "to its own structures as practical." It presupposes these, of course, but also includes what could really fulfill people as individuals and in communities—life and truth, integrity and friendship, justice and holiness, and so forth.

The "is to be" of the principles of practical reason plainly depends in a special way on the nature and act of practical intellect itself, just as the "is" of a theoretical truth depends in

a special way on the nature and act of the theoretical intellect. For neither theoretical nor practical truth could exist without appropriate acts of the intellect. But neither sort of truth is merely formal.

In sum, according to the theory I defended, the requirement of practical reason does not arise solely from the nature of practical reason itself. Rather, this requirement—the “is to be” of the principles of practical reason—arises in part from an external factor, namely that reality transcendent to practical reason which is signified by the word “good” in the first principle: Good is to be done and pursued.

VII.

Johnstone’s third question is: Does the requirement of practical reason have an imperative quality? Introducing his treatment of this question, he asks another: “Why is this question important in Grisez’s analysis?” To answer the latter question he says: “Grisez wants to move away from a theory which has its basic foundation in an imposed imperative (the will of God),” and: “He also wants to move away from a theory which takes its foundation in merely theoretical statements.” To avoid the second, Johnstone says, Grisez “must give the principle the status of a precept” but to avoid the former he “may not give that precept the status of an imperative” (BVJ, p. 439).

It seems to me that to introduce in this way the position which I tried to explain—Grisez *wants* this and *wants* that—is to suggest that it is posited arbitrarily. Johnstone does try to give the reasons for the position, but the manner in which he presents the case makes it appear that the arguments merely rationalize a prejudice, rather than cogently ground a rationally affirmed position.

To clarify the question, one must bear in mind that Johnstone and I agree that, among the various acts of practical reason, imperatives have an important place. Thus, the question is not exactly whether the requirement of practical reason has an imperative quality. To that, the answer is: Sometimes.

The question here is: Are the first principles of practical reason imperatives? The position I defended is that they are not; Johnstone thinks they are.

One argument Johnstone offers is that the position I defended

. . . seems to presume that if we accept that the first principles are imperatives, we must also accept that they are ultimately imposed by an external authority. This does not appear to be necessarily the case; could there not be an imperative arising from the moral consciousness of the autonomous person (BVJ, pp. 439-40)?

In this argument, Johnstone ignores half of the reasons I offered to show that the principles of natural law cannot be imperatives. For I tried to show not only that their prescriptive force does not express an act of an external authority (God), but that it cannot presuppose any operation of our will (FP, pp. 193-96). In making this point, I criticized in particular the position that a person's decision makes discourse practical (FP, p. 195).

Johnstone next suggests that it is very difficult to account for a precept of practical reason without reference to the will (he means: without presupposing an act of the will). He explains:

The "traditional" theory, at least in one of its forms, explained the matter as follows. Reason can intimate a direction in two ways: in one way it does so absolutely, i.e. when the intimation is expressed in the indicative mode, as when someone says to another, "This is to be done by you." In the second way, reason intimates something to someone, *moving* him to do it. This kind of intimation is expressed in the imperative mode: "Do this!" [note omitted]. In this case the imperium of reason participates in the preceding act of the will and in this way has the power to move. Grisez takes this into account in forming his own argument. (BVJ, p. 440)

The footnote refers to the place where St. Thomas states this distinction, just as Johnstone presents it.¹⁵

¹⁵ *S.t.*, 1-2, qu. 17, art. 1. Johnstone, while noting (BVJ, p. 440) that I made use of the distinction, again fails to notice the signal pointed out in footnote 3, above.

Johnstone next endorses the “traditional” view that practical reason presupposes an act of will (BVJ, pp. 440-42). This has been dealt with above. The point to be noticed here is that even if the first principles of practical reason presupposed some act of the will, it would not follow that they are imperatives.

For the volition which precedes an imperative is not any and every sort of will act, but a choice. Before one says, whether to oneself or to another, “Do this!” one has to have been aware that it might or might not be done, considered the possibility of doing it (or getting the other to do it), and chosen to do it (or to try to get the other to do it).¹⁶ So, if the principles of practical reason were imperatives, they would presuppose choices. And so, Johnstone would have to say that antecedent to direction by practical reason, one could not only will goods as ends but even choose among open options. Plainly, however, choices are specified by judgments directing toward goods—that is, by practical judgments. Therefore, even if the first principles of practical reason presuppose some acts of the will, they surely are not imperatives.

¹⁶ See St. Thomas, *S.t.*, 1-2, qu. 17, art. 1; art. 3, ad 1. Janice L. Schultz, “Is-Ought: Prescribing and a Present Controversy,” *Thomist*, 49 (1985), 12, similarly tries to show (what she thinks is the position of St. Thomas): “The first principle of practical reason is an imperative (=prescription) expressed by a gerundive.” She overlooks the fact that for Aquinas imperatives presuppose choices. She also thinks it supports her view—that some volition is prior to human cognition of the first and self-evident principles of practical reason—to point out: “While it is true that Aquinas contends that no willing is possible without prior apprehension, he also speaks of the first act of the will, i.e., its necessary orientation towards the universal good, as due not to the direction of reason but to the nature of a higher cause, namely God.” She cites texts to support this point, but with creditable honesty also cites texts which show that “every act of the will is preceded by an act of the mind” (her note 52). I think the solution to the seeming inconsistency is: God (not practical reason) is the first mover of the will in the order of *efficient* causality, but even the very first act of will is *specified* by an act of practical reason. Peter Simpson, “St. Thomas and the Naturalistic Fallacy,” *Thomist*, 51 (1987), 51 65-69 accepts Schultz’s conclusions as established; thus, his attempt to criticize “the Grisez/Finnis position” also fails. Both Schultz and Simpson however, raise some interesting questions about the relationship between *is* and *ought*, and so their efforts are worthy of careful study.

Johnstone also invokes the authority of authors who refer to the first principle of practical reason as an "imperative," although he notes that they do not raise the problems I addressed (BVJ, p. 442). This argument from authority is weak. Some authors, influenced by legalism, probably confused the concepts of imperative and precept; noticing that St. Thomas calls practical reason's principles "precepts," and not seeing how there can be prescriptive truths, they considered them imperatives.

Such confusion is the more likely on the part of those who think that the first principle of morality and the first principle of practical reason are identical. For such authors often propose as the first principle: "Do good and avoid evil!" which they consider to be a divine command. The use of "categorical imperative" in Kantian ethics to refer to the supposed first moral principle no doubt also contributes to the confusion.

* * *

Although other points in Johnstone's article could be challenged, the preceding should be sufficient to clarify the principal matters concerning which he and I differ.

GERMAIN GRISEZ

*Mount Saint Mary's College
Emmitsburg, Maryland*

The Thomist, 52 (April 1988), pp. 269-291