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Measuring, Judging and the Good Life: Aquinas and Kant

The question of the Good Life and what it means to live well has a rich philosophical history. When, for example, we compare the teachings of moralists, such as the Pharisees, in the New Testament with the teachings of Jesus, we see two different ideas of what it means to live the Good Life. For the moralists, perfect obedience to the Law was the way in which one lives the Good Life. It is for this reason that Jesus responds rhetorically to the rich young ruler who asks how to inherit eternal life, “You know the commandments,” and he lists a few of the well-known ones, only for the young ruler, unable to give up his riches, to walk away sorrowfully (Luke 18:18).¹ Yet privately to his disciples, Jesus teaches something different about eternal life, saying, “Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ.” (John 17:3)

For Jesus, knowing God was the way in which one lived the Good Life—the way one inherits eternal life, because, while the moral law is good, it is not man’s ultimate end. These two conclusions about man’s ultimate end—either living morally or knowing God—is one that plays out when we compare the work of Immanuel Kant with St. Thom-

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¹ *The Holy Bible: New American Bible Revised Edition* (Nashville, Tenn.: Catholic Bible Press, 2010).

as Aquinas. For Kant, man's ultimate end is to live morally, while for St. Thomas, man's ultimate end is to see and know God.

This paper argues that, when we compare and contrast Kant's and St. Thomas's views of measuring and judging, particularly measuring and judging beauty, we see that the differences between Kant and St. Thomas are rooted in their understanding of the relationship between the intellect and the subjects in the world, and that two striking and interrelated inevitable outcomes result. The first of these outcomes is whether goodness has anything to do with beauty and philosophy at the highest level. The second outcome is St. Thomas's and Kant's different conclusions about the end and highest achievement of man.

For Kant, subjects in the world cannot be known, goodness has nothing to do with beauty, the moral law is the governing principle of man and the highest achievement man attains is to live morally. But for St. Thomas, subjects can be known, concentrated goodness is beauty and the highest achievement man attains is knowing the good and God. These respective outcomes will be demonstrated first, by considering the root of their differences, second, by examining their respective understandings of measurement and judgment, third, by considering their particular understanding of measurement and judgment in relation to beauty and fourth, by outlining how their respective differences in beauty relate to their understanding of man's end and highest achievement.

The Root of the Differences between St. Thomas and Kant

It should come as no surprise that the root of the differences between St. Thomas and Kant has to do with their respective views of the intellect and its relation to the outside world. It seems impossible for the root to be anything other than this. Kant believes the outside world is unknowable in itself, and instead there are representations of sub-

jects² (*phenomena*) but the subject in itself (*noumena*) cannot be known. St. Thomas and Aristotle, on the other hand, both accept that reality can be known, that the internal and external senses are legitimate sources and foundations of knowledge and that human beings are ordered to truth which is achieved through the act of science or philosophy.³

While the bulk of this paper is based on Kant's *The Critique of Judgement*, perhaps one of the clearest descriptions of Kant's view is one he gives in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, in which he writes:

There are many laws of nature that we can know only by means of experience, but conformity to law in the connection of appearances, i.e., in nature in general, we cannot discover by any experience, because experience itself requires laws that underlie its possibility *a priori*. . . . Even the main proposition expounded throughout this section—that universal laws of nature can be distinctly cognized *a priori*—naturally leads to the proposition: that the highest legislation of nature must lie in ourselves, i.e., in our understanding, and that we must not seek the universal laws of nature in nature by any means of experience, but conversely must seek nature, as to its universal conformity to law, in the conditions of the possibility of experience, which lie in our sensibility and in our understanding.⁴

This becomes where the roads of Kant and St. Thomas diverge. For Kant, there is neither knowable unity in subjects nor unity between the

² Throughout this paper, the terms subject and object will be used in the Thomistic sense—a subject being in the world while an object being an object of the intellect—even while discussing Kant's view, though Kant changes these terms in his own writing. The only time Kant's definition of these words is employed is in direct quotations of Kant.

³ Thomas Aquinas, *De unitate intellectus contra Averroistas*, ch. 1, n. 1. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

⁴ Immanuel Kant, "Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics," sect. 36, in *Modern Philosophy*, trans. Paul Carus (Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2009), 691. Note that throughout the quotations of Kant, unless otherwise noted, no italicizing is mine. Also note that the original spelling of "judgement" with an extra "e" has been retained in quotations.

knower and the thing known. Instead, there is only the unsurpassable chasm of the *noumena* and the *phenomena*. For Kant, the knower is caught in the thick of Cartesian dualism and all that is real and can be truly known are found solely in Kant's idea of an intellect⁵—if it can be found at all.

For St. Thomas, however, the world is understandable. This is because the truth and unity of the subject are real and correspond to the truth and unity of the intellect, and in this way, subjects are understood. For St. Thomas, human faculties are activated by formal objects stimulating the faculties, such as color stimulating sight.⁶ And the external and internal sense faculties of the knower act as philosophical principles to replicate imaginative likenesses that are active in the subject, or thing known, so that the knower can make judgments about the subject.⁷ The knower and the subject known constitute a single genus, and both the knower and the thing known measure each other. As St. Thomas writes, "For the intellect and the intelligible object must be proportionate to each other and must belong to the same genus, since the intellect and the intelligible object are one in act."⁸ For St. Thomas, sensory

⁵ What is interesting about this is that it is the same move as Plato, except instead of putting all knowledge in a separate world of Forms in the heavens, all knowledge is put in a kind of separate compartment in the intellect within. It is no wonder that both views cannot but lead into skepticism.

⁶ Peter Redpath, "How the substance known and the scientific knower are related to a scientific genus; the chief causes of the hierarchy of the sciences; and how the human person is a first principle of all science, philosophy" (lecture, PHS 731: *The One and the Many*, Holy Apostles College & Seminary, Cromwell, Conn., 20 October, 2020).

⁷ Peter Redpath, "The essential connection of Aristotle's 4 causes, virtual quantity, contrariety, and the division and methods of the sciences, philosophy, to organizational wholeness" (lecture, PHS 731: *The One and the Many*, Holy Apostles College & Seminary, Cromwell, Conn., 27 October, 2020).

⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's "Metaphysics,"* Prologue, trans. John P. Rowan (Chicago 1961). Available online—see the section *References* for details.

perception is a reliable knowledge of particulars and the intellect comprehends universals.⁹

When we compare Kant's view with St. Thomas's view, we see that the Kantian notions of *noumena* and *phenomena* result in absurdity because, for St. Thomas, a true understanding of subjects is the foundation of metaphysics. From St. Thomas's perspective, Kant did not write a prolegomena to metaphysics, he destroyed metaphysics by claiming that subjects in themselves are unknowable. And by destroying metaphysics, Kant cut off the very branch on which he sits, for metaphysics is the measure of all scientific knowledge.¹⁰ Without a knowledge of a subject found in the real relationship between the knower and the formal object, metaphysical abstraction is impossible. And since, for St. Thomas, metaphysics is the queen of the sciences that governs and measures all other sciences, by eliminating metaphysical abstraction and knowledge, Kant eliminates all knowledge, including his own.

Thus, the introductory groundwork has been laid as we proceed to the bulk of this paper, for all of this is essential to understanding measurement and judgment. If one cannot understand the world, then one cannot measure the world and one cannot judge the world. And if, like Kant, one only has a kind of lens through which the world is perceived, then the highest principle of that lens becomes the device by which one measures anything in order to make judgments. Although we have just demonstrated that, from St. Thomas's perspective, Kant undermines any foundation for knowledge, let us grant him his perspective in order to move forward in comparing and contrasting his understanding of measurement and judgment with St. Thomas's understanding of measurement and judgment.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Peter Redpath, "Why metaphysics is the queen of the sciences" (lecture, PHS 731: *The One and the Many*, Holy Apostles College & Seminary, Cromwell, Conn., 10 November 2020).

St. Thomas's and Kant's Respective Understandings of Measurement and Judgment

Both for St. Thomas and for Kant, we make judgments based on measurements. For example, the quality of a musician is judged by measuring the intensity of the applause of the audience.¹¹ This is true not only of the arts but of many scientific tools: the thermometer measures the temperature of the individual, and based on this measurement, we judge whether or not the individual is running a fever; or the stop watch measures the time of the athlete's activity, and we judge whether or not the athlete's activity attains a level of excellence or greatness. Judgment, therefore, is impossible without some kind of measuring and measurement without judgment is an ununified multitude of raw data. It is for this reason that Dr. Redpath teaches that judgment is a kind of measuring.¹² While both St. Thomas and Kant agree that judgment is based on measurement, they do not agree on judgment itself.

For Kant, "Judgement is the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal." But the universal, or laws, are given *a priori*. However, in Kant's work, there are two kinds of judgment: determinant and reflective. The difference between the two depends upon which is given: the universal or the particular. If the universal is given, then the judgment about the particular is considered determinant judgment. But if the particular is given, and the universal must be acquired, then the judgment is considered reflective. In both cases, however, Kant

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Peter Redpath, "The essential connection of the metaphysical principles of virtual quantity and privation to being a measure and widespread and analogous predication of unity, plurality, and measure" (lecture, PHS 731: *The One and the Many*, Holy Apostles College & Seminary, Cromwell, Conn., 6 October 2020).

maintains that judgment is *a priori*, even if it appears to be gained from experience.¹³

With determinant judgment, Kant's *a priori* claim seems easier to swallow: the *a priori* universal is in the intellect and it is through this law that judgment about the particular is made. This is easier to swallow in the sense that it is consistent with his notion of understanding the world based on *a priori* laws through which the world is interpreted. With reflective judgment, however, this becomes trickier. To explain this, Kant writes:

The reflective judgement which is compelled to ascend from the particular in nature to the universal stands, therefore, in need of a principle. This principle it cannot borrow from experience, because what it has to do is to establish just the unity of all empirical principles under higher, though likewise empirical, principles, and thence the possibility of the systematic subordination of higher and lower. Such a transcendental principle, therefore, the reflective judgement can only give as a law from and to itself.¹⁴

While both determinant and reflective judgment are *a priori*, in determinant judgment, the universal law is already in the intellect, while in reflective judgment, the universal law is, in a sense, “generated” by the intellect when the intellect is confronted by the particular in nature, and is still, therefore, *a priori*.

Again, for the sake of this paper, we will give Kant a pass on this. But it is important to point out that Kant here seems to claim that reflective judgment gives itself that which it is, since judgment is based on a unity of universal principles or laws, and the reflective judgment, which is universal *a priori* principles, “generates” a universal law. In other words, the judgment of the intellect is passive to itself as itself—it

¹³ Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, in *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 42, ed. Robert Maynard Hutchins, trans. James Creed Meredith (Chicago, Ill.: William Benton, 1955), 467.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

is its own potency as itself—rather than being passive to itself as other. Consider this in light of Aristotle, who considers this metaphysically impossible when discussing potency in *Metaphysics*, claiming, “insofar as something has developed as a natural whole, it cannot be passive to itself, since it is one thing and there is no other.”¹⁵

There are two important points to keep in mind that Kant has just revealed. The first is that judgment is divided into two types of judgment: determinant and reflective. But both divisions of judgment, and therefore all judgment, is acted upon *a priori*. This is an essential point to keep in mind as we continue this paper, and it is for this reason that this paper begins by demonstrating that this is the foundation of the differences in St. Thomas’s and Kant’s conclusions.

The second important point is Kant’s emphasis on maintaining the unity of principles in the intellect, as he wrote in the above quotation. This is one of a number of places of (at least some) agreement between Kant and St. Thomas. For Kant, measuring subjects and making judgments correspond to intellectual unity. However, for Kant, the intellectual unity does not correspond to the true unity in nature, but rather nature has the appearance of unity because we comprehend by means of intellectual unity as seen through the unity in the intellect.

Let us move on to St. Thomas’s view. For St. Thomas, as was already stated, the world is knowable, and this alone marks the difference between St. Thomas and Kant on the nature of what it means to measure and to judge. In fact, without a real knowledge of real subjects, measuring becomes impossible. As Dr. Redpath remarks in his lecture: one always measures subjects in terms of that which is actual because it is by virtue of that which we know to determine a subject’s identity.¹⁶

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IX, 1, 1046a28, trans. Joe Sachs (Santa Fe, N. Mex.: Green Lion Press, 2019), 18.

¹⁶ Peter Redpath, “The relation between equal and unequal qualitative measurement, contrary opposition, and analogous predication to understanding the division and meth-

However, to get deeper into St. Thomas, we read:

[I]n every genus there must be one first thing which is the most simple in that genus and is the measure of all the things in that genus. And because a measure is homogeneous to the thing measured, such first indivisibles will vary according to the diversity of genera.¹⁷

Therefore, St. Thomas recognizes that there are a variety of measures as there are a variety of genera—genera which can be known and exist in the world. Let us hold onto this thought concerning the first and most simple of a genus, as this will illuminate Kant’s perspective.

More than this recognition that the first in a genus is the measure in relation to genus and essence, and therefore to unity, St. Thomas teaches that “we judge anything chiefly according to the definition of its essence.”¹⁸ For St. Thomas, genus and essence are not unrelated. As Dr. Redpath writes:

A scientific genus, or nature, is an essence considered as acting as a generating principle, or *proximate cause* of a multitude that it assembles, unifies, as parts of a whole in relation to further generation, through specific cooperation of parts to the whole, of a complete act to satisfy an organizational aim or end.¹⁹

It is for this reason that it is mentioned above that there is some overlap between St. Thomas and Kant concerning unity since both recognize it to be important in some way. But, as was already mentioned, for St.

ods of the arts, sciences, philosophy and their respective forms of excellence” (lecture, PHS 731: *The One and the Many*, Holy Apostles College & Seminary, Cromwell, Conn., 13 October 2020).

¹⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle’s “Posterior Analytics,”* bk. 1, lec. I, trans. Fr. Fabian R. Larcher, O.P. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

¹⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *The Division and Methods of the Sciences*, q. 6, a. 2, trans. Armand Maurer (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1986), 77.

¹⁹ Peter Redpath, “How the generic subject of philosophy, science, is properly divided into species and how this division affects the nature of speculative philosophy, science, and philosophical, scientific, predication” (class notes, PHS 731: *The One and the Many*, Holy Apostles College & Seminary, Cromwell, Conn., 15 September 2020).

Thomas, the intellect (knower) measures the subject (known) as the subject in return measures the intellect, and in this regard, the two become one genus measuring each other. It is because there is unity in the intellect that corresponds to the unity in the subject that this is possible. Here we may turn to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* for a proper explanation of this:

And we speak of knowledge or sense perception as a measure of things for the same reason, because we recognize something by means of them, although they are measured more than they measure. But what happens to us is just as if, after someone else had measured us, we recognized how big we are by the ruler's having been held up to us so many times.²⁰

It is essential to appreciate the importance of unity in regard to measurement and judgment and how St. Thomas and Kant differ on this. Consider the following:

1. In every genus there must be one first thing which is the most simple in that genus.
2. That which is most simple is the measure of all in that genus.²¹
3. A genus is an essence considered as a generating principle that unifies a multitude into parts of a whole based on a common aim or end.
4. Therefore, the common aim or end is essential to the unity of the genus, and without this, there is no unity, and thus no measuring or judging.

Although it is true that there is some overlap between St. Thomas and Kant regarding unity, even here there is an important distinction to be made. First, as this paper has argued, this distinction is rooted in their respective understandings of the relations of the intellect to subjects in

²⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, X, 1, 1053a31ff, 188.

²¹ In an email sent on 9 October 2020, Dr. Redpath clarifies that, although within a genus all parts or species can be a measure, the best measure is the maximum in the genus because we use perfection—the maximally good or best—as the chief measure.

the world. Second, only in St. Thomas's work is there true unity in the subject. This is because St. Thomas acknowledges the reality of aims.

For Kant, there is no real unity in subjects because there are no aims in subjects.²² Kant writes:

Now the concept of an object, so far as it contains at the same time the ground of the actuality of this object, is called its *end*, and the agreement of a thing with that constitution of things which is only possible according to ends, is called the *finality* of its form. . . . The finality of nature is, therefore, a particular *a priori* concept, which has its origin solely in the reflective judgment.²³

The last statement, "which has its origin solely in the reflective judgment," is particularly important. This means the reflective judgment, which "generates" universal principles from particulars, is the originator of our Kantian concept of the end and finality of the forms of subjects. According to Kant, then, there is no end or finality of form in the subject, since this has its origin solely in the reflective judgment, and without the reality of aims, there is no true unity in the subject measured.

Therefore, although there is some overlap in recognizing the necessity of unity between St. Thomas and Kant, here we see an important breaking point. For Kant, unity exists *a priori* in the intellect alone. But for St. Thomas, without aims, no organizational unities can exist, for if there were no aims, then there would be no organizations operating toward anything. And without a unified operation, there are only multitudes instead of parts of wholes.

In Kant, then, measuring and judging become illusions, in a sense, and the act of measuring and judging is the intellect measuring and judging itself, since aims in subjects are kinds of illusions (or "rep-

²² Except for man, as we will address in the next section: "St. Thomas's and Kant's respective understandings of measurement and judgment in relation to beauty."

²³ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 467.

resentations”). But for St. Thomas, we measure by means of organizational perfection and completeness, which is only possible with the reality of aims. Without real organizational perfection or unity, there are no genera or species, and thus, for St. Thomas, Kant measures nothing but himself. As we will see, since, for Kant, man is the only subject that has an aim, this last statement is truer than it immediately appears, and it is why Kant concludes what he concludes.

To bring this back to this paper’s thesis, the quotation from St. Thomas earlier, in which he cites from Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* X, 1, not only gives us important information concerning the way in which we measure, but St. Thomas gives one reason Kant comes to the conclusion that he does concerning the way beauty is measured.²⁴ This is because Kant, in keeping consistent with his *a priori* concept of the unity of intellectual principles, considers, as St. Thomas says we do, the highest of the *a priori* intellectual principles to be that by which even beauty is measured. Kant, unaware of St. Thomas’s near total apprehension of the human intellect a few hundred years in advance, could not see that he concluded in the absurdity in which St. Thomas predicted he would.

Since, in Kant’s view, all that can be truly known is one’s intellect (since there is unity only in the intellect without the reality of aims in subjects apart from man), and in this all of nature becomes, in a sense, parts of the genus of the intellect (rather than various knowable genera), then the measure of all things in nature will be found in that which is first and most simple in the intellect of man,²⁵ which, for Kant, is the moral law. To put it another way, while in St. Thomas’s view the

²⁴ Another reason is because Kant makes a mistake that St. Thomas addresses, which is addressed in the later section of this paper: “The Respective Differences of St. Thomas’s and Kant’s Foundation and Understanding of Beauty Lead to Their Understanding of Man’s End and Highest Achievement.”

²⁵ Kant’s conclusion about man here seems eerily similar to Aristotle’s conclusion in *Metaphysics* XII about the divine intellect thinking itself.

knower and known constitute one genus, for Kant, the knower alone, in a sense, constitutes one genus, since what the knower knows is the knower's *a priori* intellect. And the moral law, being the highest aspect of the organization of the intellect, is closest to the organizational aim and communicates this to the rest of the genus, or intellect.

It is here that we see important framework for Kant's foundation and inevitable conclusion: that aesthetic beauty is measured and judged by the *a priori* moral law, and that the highest achievement man can attain is to live morally.

St. Thomas's and Kant's Respective Understandings of Measurement and Judgment in Relation to Beauty

The Critique of Judgement is divided into three major parts: the Introduction, the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement and the Critique of Teleological Judgement. The second part is further divided into two sections: the Analytic of the Beautiful and the Analytic of the Sublime. In order to maintain a tight focus, this paper draws its material almost entirely from the first major part, the Introduction, and from the first section of the second part, the Analytic of the Beautiful, though there are important passages that will be referenced in other areas of the work. Here, we will begin to take what we have seen about St. Thomas and Kant in regards to measuring and judging and compare and contrast the two specifically in regards to beauty.

In examining Kant's perspective in order to compare his work with St. Thomas, for the sake of space, there are only two main aspects of measuring and judging beauty on which we will focus. The first is that, for Kant, beauty has nothing to do with the good when the good is understood as a Kantian concept. As the text progresses, Kant doubles down harder and harder, emphatically denying that goodness has anything to do with beauty.

Consider the following three excerpts.

Excerpt 1:

This pleasure is by the judgement of taste pronounced valid for every one; hence an agreeableness attending the representation is just as incapable of containing the determining round of the judgement as the representation of the perfection of the object or the concept of the good.²⁶

Excerpt 2:

Objective finality can only be cognized by means of a reference of the manifold to a definite end, and hence only through a concept. This alone makes it clear that the beautiful, which is estimated on the ground of a mere formal finality, i.e., a finality apart from an end, is wholly independent of the representation of the good.²⁷

Excerpt 3:

Now, just as it is a clog on the purity of the judgement of taste to have the agreeable (of sensation) joined with beauty to which properly only the form is relevant, so to combine the good with beauty . . . mars its purity.²⁸

The reason Kant denies that the good has anything to do with beauty is because, for Kant, the good is only “represented” as a subject about which we universally (thus *a priori*) delight over as a concept (in the Kantian sense) which, for Kant, cannot be said about beauty.²⁹ This is because, as we will see, beauty is not in the subject itself, but instead subjects are judged to be beautiful by us, and we enforce this upon others because beauty is a symbol of morality and the morally good (which is separate from the good as a concept). Thus, here we have the first

²⁶ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 484.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 486.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 488.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 480.

main aspect that is important in comparing St. Thomas with Kant: for Kant, the good and the beautiful have nothing to do with each other.

The second important aspect in examining Kant is that the beautiful is a symbol of and measured and judged by morality. It is important here to point out that Kant is referring specifically to that which is aesthetically beautiful as being a symbol of morality, and not merely that which is virtuously beautiful, even though Kant refers to it as a symbol of morality. This is an idea that comes up in Aristotle. For example, Joe Sachs, in his translation of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, comments:

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle divides all goods into the beneficial, the pleasant, and the beautiful (1104b31), and identifies the beautiful as the aim of all moral virtue (1115b13). This is not an "aesthetic" sense of beauty, which would just be one kind of pleasure, but what we mean when we speak of something as a beautiful thing to do, one in which everything is right.³⁰

Because Kant considers beauty as a symbol of morality, one might be forgiven for thinking that Kant is merely referring to "a beautiful thing to do," as Sachs writes. But this is not merely what Kant means. Kant is referring to aesthetic beauty. However—and why the term "merely" has been used—this distinction is important for solving the impasse about the beautiful as the morally good but not as the good as a concept. This is because Kant confuses the "beautiful thing to do" with beautiful subjects in order to be consistent with his view of the relationship between the intellect and the world. So in one way, Kant is referring to "a beautiful thing to do," and in another way, he is not. This is because, for Kant, "a beautiful thing to do" is at the root of aesthetic beauty.

Before we blend all of this together, consider this, which is essential to this discussion of the beautiful as a symbol and measure of

³⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 240, footnote 14.

morality. Throughout the *Aesthetic of Beauty*, Kant repeatedly refers to one seeing something beautiful, declaring it to be beautiful and then demanding that others agree. It is in this way that the moral law, as the highest in the genus, manifests and guides our view of beauty, in Kant's understanding. This can be seen in a number of passages, such as the following:

In all judgements by which we describe anything as beautiful, we tolerate no one else being of a different opinion, and in taking up this position we do not rest our judgement upon concepts, but only on our feeling. Accordingly we introduce this fundamental feeling not as a private feeling, but as a public sense. Now, for this purpose, experience cannot be made the ground of this common sense, for the latter is invoked to justify judgements containing an "ought." The assertion is not that every one *will* fall in with our judgement, but rather that every one *ought* to agree with it.³¹

The framework and foundation for Kant's thoughts on this are beginning to take shape with all that has been said. For Kant, the highest principle for man is the *a priori* moral law. And when one encounters particulars, the universal law is "generated" *a priori*. Thus, one encountering a beautiful particular has "generated" an *a priori* principle, which is guided by the highest aspect and aim of man. And thus, that which is declared beautiful can only be declared as such in accordance with what is most known to man, namely, the moral law. It is no wonder, then, that Kant focuses his attention on the human behavior of adamantly demanding allegiance and agreement with what is declared beautiful rather than considering the intrinsic beauty of the subject, which requires a Kantian concept but, for Kant, is both rooted in feeling and projected onto *phenomena*, and therefore cannot be known and cannot have anything to do with the good.

³¹ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 492–493.

Also, in further establishing this framework and foundation, Kant writes that “all elaborate work of the faculties must unite in the practical as its goal.”³² These are the faculties of man’s intellect, and here we see what has been mentioned a few times already, namely, that man is the only subject with an aim or end. Although, for Kant, the pleasure of the beautiful is in no way practical,³³ this does not mean that judgment about the beautiful is engaged apart from the practical, which is how judgment of the beautiful becomes wrapped up in man’s end and the moral law. For, although it was earlier shown that Kant does not admit of ends in nature, there is one end that can be known: man’s end. For Kant, only man, out of everything in nature, has some kind of real end and it is for this reason that only in man is there an ideal of beauty. Kant writes:

Only what has in itself the end of its real existence—only *man* that is able himself to determine his ends by reason, or, where he has to derive them from external perception, can still compare them with essential and universal ends, and then further pronounce aesthetically upon their accord with such ends, only he, among all objects in the world, admits, therefore, of an ideal of *beauty*, just as humanity in his person, as intelligence, alone admits of the ideal of *perfection*.³⁴

With all of this in mind, it is no wonder that Kant concludes that the beautiful is a symbol of the morally good. Kant writes:

Now, I say, the beautiful is the symbol of the morally good, and only in this light . . . does it give us pleasure with an attendant claim to the agreement of every one else, whereupon the mind becomes conscious of a certain ennoblement and elevation above mere sensibility to pleasure from impressions of sense, and also

³² *Ibid.*, 477.

³³ *Ibid.*, 485.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 490.

appraises the worth of others on the score of a like maxim of their judgement.³⁵

But here our earlier mentioned impasse arises: why is Kant so adamant that the good has nothing to do with beauty, as previous quotations demonstrate, and yet concludes that the beautiful is a symbol of the morally good? This is because Kant is here referring to the good will, which is distinguished from a good concept, since this is a “feeling” as noted in the above quotation. In a sense, as was noted earlier, Kant is confusing Sachs’s and Aristotle’s notion of “a beautiful thing to do” with judging subjects as aesthetically beautiful by means of imposing *a priori* reflective judgments about the subject and then judging whether or not others agree with our judgment about a subject’s beauty, thus conflating beautiful subjects with beautiful, morally good actions.

Although, as was said, pleasure is not practical, the moral aspect is, and “all elaborate work of the faculties must unite in the practical as its goal.” This is consistent with the *a priori* moral law guiding man to consider beauty, because, for Kant, beauty is less about one judging a subject to be beautiful and more about one judging others based on whether or not they agree with one’s judgment. Thus, one’s judgment becomes an ought by which one measures the judgment of others. In this sense, beauty is a symbol of morality—beauty is measured and judged by the *a priori* moral law—and, by judging the subject as beautiful, one in turn measures and judges the judging capacity of others based on whether or not they agree with one’s judgment. In this way, beauty is a symbol of the morally good, and the human intellectual faculty, with the moral law as its chief guide, is oriented toward the practical, and in this is how one measures and judges beauty from Kant’s perspective.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 547.

Let us now turn our attention to St. Thomas. We will consider two areas in which St. Thomas writes about beauty in two replies to objections of his work regarding goodness. For St. Thomas, beauty and goodness are identical fundamentally because they are both based on the form. In the first reply, he writes:

But they [goodness and beauty] differ logically, for goodness properly relates to the appetite (goodness being what all things desire); and therefore it has the aspect of an end (the appetite being a kind of movement towards a thing). On the other hand, beauty relates to the cognitive faculty; for beautiful things are those which please when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion: for the senses delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is after their own kind—because even sense is a sort of reason, just as is every cognitive faculty. Now since knowledge is by assimilation, and similarity relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause.³⁶

In the second reply, St. Thomas writes that beauty is measured and judged by its pleasantness to apprehend and beauty is apprehended by reason. For St. Thomas, the senses which chiefly regard the beautiful are those which are the most cognitive and ministering to reason: sight and hearing. Thus, one does not speak of beautiful tastes or beautiful smells. St. Thomas summarizes this by writing, “Thus it is evident that beauty adds to goodness a relation to the cognitive faculty: so that ‘good’ means that which simply pleases the appetite; while the ‘beautiful’ is something pleasant to apprehend.”³⁷ It is for this reason that Dr. Redpath says that beauty is a kind of intensive quantity of goodness, a shocking presence of the right quality in a particular type of subject that

³⁶ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 5, a. 4. Available online—see the section *References* for details.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 27, a. 1.

arrests the attention of people, and why he argues that it is not a separate transcendental.³⁸

By introducing St. Thomas's concept of beauty and goodness and the relation to the two, we can return to St. Thomas's notion of measurement as it pertains to unity to introduce some important points. For St. Thomas, the measure is a sign of unity and unitative greatness and the measure is the means through which unity is communicated. As a principle of knowledge, the measure signifies the level of goodness or greatness a subject has, and thus how much unity and resistance to division it has.³⁹ Thus, for St. Thomas, when we judge and measure a subject as beautiful, we perceive the real unity in the subject, for measuring and judging are ways of perceiving unities and wholes. And the intensity of unitative greatness is apprehended by the intellect through the senses most oriented toward reason, and the subject is apprehended as striking in its intensity of goodness and beauty.

Although St. Thomas does not write as extensively on beauty as Kant does, what St. Thomas writes gives us enough material to compare the two and to continue the thesis of this paper. For Kant, beauty is measured and judged *a priori* based on man's highest and most simple aspect of the genus of the *a priori* intellect, which is the moral law. This is "generated" by the reflective judgment when man is confronted with the particular. Beauty is unrelated to goodness as a concept, but is a symbol of the morally good. Thus man, whose faculties are oriented toward the practical, is oriented toward that which is highest and most known in his faculties (the moral law) by that which can only be known (the intellect, since all subjects are *phenomena*). And when confronted

³⁸ Redpath, "The relation between equal and unequal qualitative measurement, contrary opposition, and analogous predication . . ." (lecture, 13 October 2020).

³⁹ Peter Redpath "Why the whole of philosophy, science, is chiefly a study of organizations involving overcoming oppositions so as better to know organizational truth" (lecture, PHS 731: *The One and the Many*, Holy Apostles College & Seminary, Cromwell, Conn., 17 November 2020).

with beauty, one measures and judges the subject to be beautiful based on the moral law (which is how it is a symbol of morality), and this judgment based on the moral law then inevitably bleeds into and manifests by judging and measuring others based on whether or not they agree with one's judgment (the *a priori* imposed moral ought). All of this is rooted in man's being stuck in his own head and perceiving the world through the *a priori* intellect.

For St. Thomas, beauty is goodness, a kind of concentrated and shocking dose of the good. Beauty is perceived by the knower because of the true unity and resistance to division that exists in the subject known. Beauty satisfies reason, as the senses that are oriented toward reason are those which perceive beauty. And while St. Thomas may agree with Aristotle about "a beautiful thing to do," this does not mean that, like Kant, the morally good is the only good in relation to beauty. For St. Thomas, beauty properly belongs to the nature of the formal cause, which is inextricable from the real final cause, and thus beauty can properly be said to have this relation to the good, which is related to the end of man who perceives beauty as a satisfaction of reason. All of this is rooted in man's real relationship to real subjects that are truly unified and perceived by the unity of man's intellect.

Thus, as we have seen, both St. Thomas and Kant have the foundations of their understanding rooted in the intellect's relationship to subjects in the world. This determines their respective understanding of measuring and judging. And when we look closely at the particular example of measuring and judging beauty, we see two fundamental differences. The first difference is beauty's relationship to the good. For St. Thomas, beauty and the good are the same and differ only in certain aspects. For Kant, the good (as a concept) has nothing to do with beauty.

The second difference is Kant's insistence upon beauty as a symbol of the morally good, and that the *a priori* moral law guides how we

measure and judge beauty as well as our measurement and judgment of others who either agree or disagree with our pronouncement of beauty. These differences are interrelated in that they both pertain to man's ultimate end and highest achievement. This is most pertinent to our argument and follows us through to the next section because in this we see that both St. Thomas and Kant regard the measurement and judgment of beauty as related to man's aim or end, in one respect or another, since, for St. Thomas, beauty is related to the good, and for Kant, beauty is related to the moral law.

The Respective Differences of St. Thomas's and Kant's Foundation and Understanding of Beauty Lead to Their Understanding of Man's End and Highest Achievement

Let us turn our attention to St. Thomas's and Kant's understanding of man's end and highest achievement. That man has an aim or end is common both to St. Thomas and to Kant. Both agree that man is the highest end of creation and both agree that man, as the highest of creation, has what might be called a high aim. Although this subject matter may be argued on its own, it is interesting that both St. Thomas and Kant find that their respective understandings of man's end weaves its way through beauty.

For Kant, man is regarded as the highest of creatures and what makes man the highest of creatures is man as a moral being. Kant writes, "It is, then, only as a moral being that we acknowledge man to be the end of creation."⁴⁰ In Kant, man's *a priori* moral law is what separates man from animals—and not only separates man from animals, but places man on the higher end of the hierarchy of created beings.

Earlier, we touched upon aims. For Kant, aims do not exist in subjects but find their origin *a priori* in the intellect. However, there is

⁴⁰ Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, 592.

one unique exception to this: man. For Kant, man has an aim or an end, and man finds his highest end in the moral law. Kant writes:

The whole question, then, is reduced to this: Have we any ground capable of satisfying reason, speculative or practical, to justify our attributing a *final end* to the supreme cause that acts according to ends? For that, judging by the subjective frame of our reason, or even by aught we can at all imagine of the reason of other beings, such final end could be nothing but *man as subject to moral laws*, may be taken *a priori* as a matter of certainty . . .⁴¹

Therefore, in Kant, the moral law is the leader and guiding principle of man as a substance, an organization, and man's unified operational aim is to live morally.

This is why, as has been pointed out a number of times, that in Kant's work, "a beautiful thing to do" is confused with beauty as understood in St. Thomas's work. For Kant, man, whose faculties are united in the practical and whose end is found in the governing *a priori* moral law as man's aim, sees beauty as a symbol of morality. Thus, beginning in the foundation of man's intellectual relationship to subjects, winding through beauty and terminating in man's ultimate aim, we see that, for Kant, the moral law is the highest aspect of man, it is that which can be most known being *a priori* in the intellect and it carries us through beauty and into this conclusion.

It is for this reason that we note earlier that St. Thomas, who has a clear grasp of the human intellect, predicts Kant's conclusion. St. Thomas writes:

When several things are ordained to one thing, one of them must rule or govern and the rest be ruled or governed, as the Philosopher teaches in the *Politics*. This is evident in the union of soul and body, for the soul naturally commands and the body obeys. The same thing is true of the soul's powers, for the concupiscible and irascible appetites are ruled in a natural order by reason. Now all the sciences and arts are ordained to one thing, namely,

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

to man's perfection, which is happiness. Hence one of these sciences and arts must be the mistress of all the others, and this rightly lays claim to the name *wisdom*; for it is the office of the wise man to direct others.⁴²

For St. Thomas, because Kant believes that the moral law is that to which man's intellect is ordered, it is no wonder that Kant concludes what he does. In fact, for Kant to conclude otherwise would be illogical. In Kant's world, the moral law is the one ruling or governing aspect under which the intellectual (and, for Kant, practical) faculties are oriented, and thus, with the intellect (or soul) governing in this way, the body must follow.

On the other hand, for St. Thomas, the good and God are man's highest end and this is because man—who is not the highest and moral creature but the highest and rational creature—is ordered not merely to the moral law but to truth, which includes the satisfaction of our rational capacity, our understanding of unity, the good, the beautiful and God. In his *Summa contra gentiles*, St. Thomas brilliantly begins by demonstrating that every agent acts for an end, which is the good, and man, as an intellectual creature, is ordered ultimately to know God, in whom man's happiness lies.⁴³

These different conclusions find their starting points in the roots mentioned earlier. Since, for St. Thomas, the world is knowable, man can be ordered to truth. But for Kant, since the world is full of *phenomena* and *noumena*, man cannot be ordered to truth and to be ordered to truth would be a cruel joke. Instead, man is ordered to what he can know for certain: the moral law, which is the highest aspect of all that can be truly known, namely, man's *a priori* intellect and the lens through which man sees the world.

⁴² Aquinas, *Commentary on "Metaphysics,"* Prologue.

⁴³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa contra gentiles* [S.C.G.], III, 3 & 25, in *Selected Writings*, ed. and trans. Ralph McInerny (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1998), 262–267.

Thus, just as Kant's highest view of man as a moral creature leads him through beauty and concludes in moral living, for St. Thomas, man, the rational creature, is oriented to truth and goodness, and beauty, which is no different than the good and is apprehended intellectually, is related to man's ultimate end. Man's ultimate end, then, for St. Thomas, is to apprehend goodness, which climaxes in the Beatific Vision. Only in this does man fully understand himself, as an intellectual being, whose aim is to apprehend ultimate goodness, which is God. St. Thomas writes:

Hence, since God is the cause of all created intellectual substances, as is clear from the foregoing, it is necessary that separate intellectual substances, in knowing their own essence, should know God himself in the manner of a vision, for only something whose likeness exists in the intellect is known through knowledge of vision, just as the likeness of a thing seen bodily is in the sense of the one seeing. Therefore, any intellect that grasps separate substance, knowing of it what it is, sees God in a higher way than in any of the previous types of knowledge of him.⁴⁴

Before wrapping this up, in the earlier section, "St. Thomas's and Kant's Respective Understandings of Measurement and Judgment," we noted that St. Thomas addresses a mistake that Kant makes. Kant makes two mistakes, in fact, according to St. Thomas. Here we will turn our attention to this. In his *Summa contra gentiles*, St. Thomas specifically deals with man's end. Both mistakes are addressed in St. Thomas's conclusion that man's end and ultimate good (or happiness) does not lie in acts of the moral virtues.

The first mistake, according to St. Thomas, is Kant's view of man as the end of creatures, or the highest animal. This in and of itself is not an error and it is a conclusion with which St. Thomas and Aristotle agree.⁴⁵ However, For Kant, it is the moral law that separates man

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 41, 286.

⁴⁵ Not including angels.

from the animals. The definition of man, for Kant, is not a rational animal but a moral animal. But, as St. Thomas writes:

Therefore his ultimate happiness must be sought in that good which is the most proper of all the human goods in contrast to the other animals, and the acts of moral virtues are not that, for some animals partake in something of liberality or courage, but no animal partakes anything of intellectual activity.⁴⁶

As St. Thomas notes, when we consider the moral law and moral virtues, we find that animals in some respects partake in them. This, in fact, does not separate man from animals enough to give us a proper definition of man. For St. Thomas, Kant's conclusion is illogical even under his own terms because, in Kant's logic, man is the only being with an aim, which is supposed to separate him from animals (since all other aims are *a priori* in the intellect). However, man's aim does not separate him from animals, which are supposed to have no aim, since both partake in morality. So it does not follow that man is separate from animals if man is separate by having a moral aim, since animals partake in aspects of morality. Kant, therefore, has no good reason for denying that animals have aims and no good reason for defining man as a moral animal. This is Kant's first mistake.

The second mistake Kant makes is that, as St. Thomas notes, the moral law is not an end since it is the means to something further. For St. Thomas, the end or aim of man is an activity, and on this he and Kant agree, but the activity, in order to be a proper end, must terminate as an end. St. Thomas writes that all moral activities are ordered to something further, such as courage in warfare is ordered to peace and victory and that justice is ordered to keeping the peace among men.⁴⁷ What is interesting about this is that Kant in *The Critique of Judgement* unknowingly agrees with St. Thomas. This is evident when we consider

⁴⁶ *S.C.G.*, III, 34, 278.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Kant's view of beauty. For Kant, beauty is a symbol of morality, and yet it is ordered to something further: it is ordered to measuring and judging whether or not other people are moral in their agreeing with my declaration of the beautiful object. So even for Kant, the moral law as a measure and judge of beauty is not an end but leads to something further, namely, measuring and judging others based on whether or not they agree with one's declaration of beauty.

Conclusion

Thus it is that these two thinkers, St. Thomas and Kant, both have views of man's end that begin in whether or not subjects in the world can be known, that weave their ways through their respective understandings of beauty and terminate in their understanding of man's aim or end. The foundation of each of these thinkers begins with whether or not subjects in the world can be known, and thus be measured and judged. This affects their respective understandings of beauty.

For Kant, beauty is not found in subjects but is a symbol of the moral law, which is the highest aspect of man's intellect, the guiding principle by which man measures and judges beauty. For St. Thomas, beauty is found in the goodness of subjects. For both of these thinkers, this directly relates to their respective understandings of man's highest aim or end. For Kant, the end of man is to live morally. For St. Thomas, the end of man is to apprehend intellectually goodness and ultimately God. Let us put it like this: for Kant, the highest achievement of man is to live the moral life, while for St. Thomas, the highest achievement of man is to see and know God. These two different understandings of man's ultimate end are rooted in whether or not man is stuck inside his own head, knowing only that which is highest within the intellect or whether man can ultimately know that which is totally Good, totally Beautiful and totally Other.

Immanuel Kant here finds himself on the side of the moralists and the Pharisees. For Kant, in order for human beings to live the Good Life, they must mature and develop toward perfect morals. But for St. Thomas, and for Jesus, the Good Life is richer than this. The Good Life, although including morals and virtues, is one in which human beings know God. In Kant, the world is closed off, it is known only through representations and daily life consists in an *a priori* list of dos and do nots. And this list permeates so much of who a human is that even beauty itself is merely a representation of this list. But in St. Thomas, the world is open to us, beautiful subjects can be known as beautiful and all that is in the world is oriented toward God and orients us as knowers toward God.



**Measuring, Judging and the Good Life:
Aquinas and Kant**

SUMMARY

This paper examines St. Thomas Aquinas's and Immanuel Kant's notions of measurement and judgment, particularly measuring and judging beauty, to demonstrate their respective conclusions about the highest achievement of man. For St. Thomas's view, I draw from a variety of St. Thomas's writings as well as rely on Peter Redpath's research into St. Thomas's understanding of measuring and judging. For Kant's view, I focus on Kant's perspective as written in *The Critique of Judgement*. In this paper, I argue that by examining the way both St. Thomas and Kant measure and judge beauty, we can see that, for Kant, man's highest achievement is to live the moral life, while for St. Thomas, man's highest achievement is to know the good and God. Interestingly, for both philosophers, their conclusions about man's highest achievements wind through their understanding of beauty and the way beauty is measured and judged.

KEYWORDS

Thomas Aquinas, Immanuel Kant, measurement, judgment, beauty, aim, end, genus, morality, intellect.

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