



BRADLEY, Denis J.M., *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*

Michael Vertin

Volume 55, numéro 2, juin 1999

La pensée juive au XXe siècle

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/401240ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/401240ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Faculté de philosophie, Université Laval

ISSN

0023-9054 (imprimé)

1703-8804 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Vertin, M. (1999). Compte rendu de [BRADLEY, Denis J.M., *Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good*]. *Laval théologique et philosophique*, 55(2), 318–319.  
<https://doi.org/10.7202/401240ar>

D'un point de vue général, et malgré toutes les réserves du lecteur pour qui ce livre ne concilie pas assez « le cognitif à l'ethnographique » (l'expression est de Maurice Bloch), la thèse de Pascal Boyer demeure très stimulante pour la recherche. Il faut reconnaître que l'auteur s'est assigné une tâche difficile, de longue haleine et à géométrie variable : ébaucher une approche des représentations religieuses qui écarte, d'une part, les dogmes de l'ultra-relativisme et réintègre, d'autre part, les processus cognitifs et les mécanismes complexes de l'esprit humain.

Frédéric LAUGRAND  
Université Laval, Québec

Denis J.M. BRADLEY, **Aquinas on the Twofold Human Good**. Washington, DC, The Catholic University of America Press, 1997, xiv-610 p.

Denis Bradley, Professor of Philosophy at Georgetown University, has published many essays on the relationship of philosophy and theology. The focus of the present book is a further instance of that general theme, namely, the relationship of philosophical and theological considerations of morality in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. The book as a whole constitutes an argument for a bold thesis, namely, that there is no such thing as an authentically Thomist systematic moral philosophy. According to Bradley, Aquinas' systematic account of human agents portrays them as naturally desiring a supernatural goal, namely, the vision of God — Father, Son, and Spirit. That systematic account, however, is theological rather than philosophical ; for it presupposes the Christian believer's affirmation of God. Insofar as a Thomist considers matters just philosophically, thus prescinding from the supernatural goal toward which humans are oriented, she arrives at a paradox rather than a systematic account. Why ? Because Aquinas, by contrast with Aristotle, envisages a natural goal that, if achieved, would satisfy humans only imperfectly at best — hence the paradox of a natural desire for which no perfect natural satisfaction is possible. In short, if a Thomist ethics is systematic, it is theological ; but if it is philosophical, it is paradoxical rather than systematic.

The thesis Bradley presents is bold because, as he himself shows in detail, it contravenes a good deal of the "received wisdom" regarding Aquinas' moral science. The profundity and nuance of this thesis situates Bradley on the cutting edge of Thomist scholarship. (It strikes me that the thesis parallels one expounded earlier, albeit far more briefly, by Bernard Lonergan ; but Bradley does not seem to have been influenced by Lonergan in this regard. See "The Natural Desire to See God," in *Collection : Papers by Bernard Lonergan* [London, 1967 ; and Toronto, 1988].) Moreover, the methodological implications of his suggested rethinking are important not just for Thomists but for all philosophers and, indeed, academic investigators in general. By urging that if one is to appreciate the systematic integrity of Aquinas' ethical conclusions one must attend to the procedural integrity of Aquinas' investigative methods, Bradley contributes to the scholarly community's growing recognition that the fundamental criteria of sound scholarship reside on the level not of abstract normative principles but rather of concrete normative practices. (Bradley himself alludes obliquely to this connection on p. XIII.)

Bradley's actual elaboration of his argument is masterful. He complements and clarifies his thorough treatment of Aquinas with careful discussions of Aristotle, Aquinas' all-important predecessor, and Jacques Maritain and Santiago Ramirez, two influential twentieth-century successors.

He displays a broad and deep familiarity with the relevant classical, medieval, and modern scholarship. And his text is well organized, meticulously developed, and lucidly written. It is my judgment that this book is likely to have an important positive impact upon Thomist scholarship, especially in the area of moral studies, and perhaps upon more general scholarly methodology as well.

Michael VERTIN

*St. Michael's College, University of Toronto*

Patrick H. BYRNE, *Analysis and Science in Aristotle*. Albany, NY, State University of New York Press, 1997, XXI-303 p.

Patrick Byrne is Professor of Philosophy at Boston College. From his first days as a graduate student, his philosophical outlook has been influenced profoundly by the writings of Bernard Lonergan. Hence, given Lonergan's prolonged attention to epistemology, it is not surprising that most of Byrne's published papers have been centrally concerned with epistemological topics. The present book continues this trend. However, unlike the bulk of Byrne's previous work, it proceeds less by direct systematic argumentation than by historical analysis and interpretation. Specifically, it treats certain fundamental epistemological issues by exploring just how those issues are addressed by Aristotle.

The chief findings of Byrne's eight chapters are roughly the following. First, by contrast with many past and present-day accounts of Aristotle, "analysis" for Aristotle is not fundamentally the process of reducing a whole to its parts ; rather, it is the process from parts to the intelligible whole of which they are the parts. Second, "syllogism" is the fundamental form of valid argument — the fundamental form of expressing the necessary intelligible connections between the statement with which one begins and certain other statements that may be brought to light. Third, there are, on Aristotle's arrangement, three basic syllogistic figures. All proper but problematic statements, whether compact or complex, can in principle be reconfigured in terms of these three ; and all improper statements can be manifested as improper by being shown to fail at making the intelligible connections expressed by these three. Fourth, Aristotle presents his account not simply as articulating *analysis* as the process of discerning intelligible connections between conclusions and premises but also and more basically as articulating *science* (*epistêmê*) as certain knowledge of things in terms of their causes. Fifth, on the Aristotelian account of how scientific knowledge emerges, the crucial moment is one's preconceptual grasp of what subsequently is formulated as the middle term. This preconceptually discovered intelligible connection, rather than the antecedent sensations or the subsequent concepts, is what is key. Sixth, the typical Aristotelian scientific approach is not to begin with a principle (expressed by the syllogistic major premise) and a middle term (attributed by the syllogistic minor premise) and then *deduce* a fact (expressed by the syllogistic conclusion). On the contrary, it is to begin with a demonstrable fact and then seek to *discover* a middle term and a principle in terms of which that fact may be understood. Seventh, the ultimate principle of all scientific knowing is not itself a proposition ; rather, it is *nous*, the pre-propositional background or horizon within which our knowing proceeds — at root, the self-understanding of intelligence itself. Eighth, Aristotle not only develops a methodology of analysis and science but also develops actual sciences grounded in the normativity of *nous* ; and his regular aim in these enterprises is not (despite common misconceptions to the contrary) to *demonstrate conclusions* but rather to *understand matters of fact*.

*Analysis and Science in Aristotle* is clearly and sensitively organized, tightly reasoned, and very well written. Substantively, although Byrne refers to Lonergan only a few times in his actual