KARL RAHNER AND
THE OPTION OF GRACE IN FREEDOM

A Critical Examination of Rahner's Understanding of both Fundamental Option and Virtue Ethics and the Link Between them in the Light of their Classical Antecedents and Contemporary Developments in Moral Theology, Moral Philosophy and Fundamental Theology

by

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any University; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

Material submitted for the honours degree in divinity of the Melbourne College of Divinity has been made use of in the following sections: 5.2.2 to 5.3.3. This material has been extensively revised and modified for this thesis.

Jim Warner

DEDICATION

Dedicated to all those who have supported and guided the author in this work, through the grace of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

* * * * *

Choice ... is thought to be most closely bound up with virtue, and to discriminate characters better than actions do.

Aristotle: *The Nicomachean Ethics* (1111b 5.6)
(trans. David Ross, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 53

* * * * *

Virtue is the good use of free choice.

Augustine: *On Free Will* II, 19
quoted in Thomas Aquinas: *Summa Theologiae* IaIIae, Q.55, A.1
trans. J A Oesterle: *Treatise on the Virtues* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 50

* * * * *

ABSTRACT

1 Aim of this Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to critically examine the understanding of the relationship between fundamental option and virtue ethics in the work of Karl Rahner. This is done in the light of:

- both the classical heritage of virtue ethics and its contemporary recovery in post modernity;
- both the pre-history of the fundamental option and the contemporary issues of post modernity surrounding it.

The work of Karl Rahner has been chosen as the subject of this thesis because, first, as the pre-eminent post-conciliar Catholic theologian, he developed the leading theory of fundamental option based on fundamental freedom, and second, as a self confessed Thomist, he also included virtue theory within his theology. These two traditions in moral theology, of virtue theory and fundamental option theory, have not only developed in relative mutual isolation (the former largely confined to the English speaking world, the latter a product of continental moral theology) but they have also been seen in some quarters as irreconcilable. This thesis uses the example of Karl Rahner to provide a bridgehead between these two distanced ethical theories.

The example of the reconciliation of these two traditions in the work of Karl Rahner will be pursued in the setting of postmodernity. This provides the opportunity to assess the continuing significance of the theology of Karl Rahner.

2 The Scope of the Thesis

The thesis begins by stating the problem under examination, that is, that there has been no sustained analysis of the link between virtue ethics and fundamental option in the work of Karl Rahner (or any other contemporary moral theologian). The setting for this thesis topic is briefly considered. First, the setting of postmodernity is examined and then second, the profound impact of the Second Vatican Council on contemporary moral theology is examined, in particular with regard to the development of the perspective of moral agency.

In order to establish the link between virtue ethics and fundamental option, an understanding of these two approaches *per se* is developed, beginning with the precursors of fundamental option (in particular, the approach of Aquinas) and then the recovery of virtue and its classical antecedents, (in particular, Aristotle and Aquinas). Both these concerns have been influenced by the shift in moral theory from moral act to moral agency, with a concern for the moral dimension of the psychology and communitarian perspective of the human person. Attention is also given to the role of passions and the *hexis/habitus* controversy in virtue theory insofar as they impinge on the understanding of freedom in fundamental option. This general setting of the history of Christian ethics is then given a narrower focus with the work of Karl Rahner. Various aspects of his thought are examined, in particular his intellectual heritage, his transcendental anthropology, and his perspectives on moral theology. The focus is narrowed further to particular components of his theology, viz. his understanding of fundamental option, fundamental freedom, Ignatian mysticism, supernatural existential, virtue ethics, theology of grace and metaphysics of knowledge. The Rahnerian understanding of virtue ethics

and fundamental option is considered further with regard to the issues raised in the contemporary debate on these subjects. His metaphysics of knowledge is also considered in relation to the contemporary concern of virtue epistemology and the rediscovery of metaphysics. The link between fundamental option and virtue ethics in the work of Karl Rahner is examined with reference to antecedents in Aquinas *et alii* and contemporary minimalist approaches.

3 Conclusions

Despite the fact that there is no systematic treatment of either fundamental option or virtue ethics in the *Foundations of Christian Faith* (Rahner's most systematic work) and further, that Rahner seemed unaware of the recovery of virtue ethics, it has been possible to establish in Rahner's work a link between fundamental option and virtue. The link is explicitly embedded in an obscure way in diverse works but it is more importantly and implicitly preeminently dependent on the theological virtues. For example, faith is the exercise of a fundamental option for or against God, not a process of categorical choice or habit, but a state of fundamental freedom. What stands behind the exercise of faith, and the other theological virtues of hope and love are all the components of his transcendental anthropology, viz. fundamental freedom, supernatural existential, grace and metaphysic of knowledge. They all have as their terminus the virtue of faith, that is belief with absolute assent. Rahner also gives centrality to the virtues of hope and love. The three theological virtues are the three basic perfections of Christian existence which abide and last. They are interrelated, distinguishable yet possess a unity and condition one another. The theological virtues *vis-à-vis* the fundamental option are pre-eminent, have unity in diversity and are linked intimately with both the supernatural

existential and fundamental option in grace and freedom. They are at the centre of Rahner's anthropology even if they are heavily camouflaged. They reflect Rahner's Thomist heritage, they lend themselves, via Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge, to a virtue epistemology, to a recovery of metaphysics and they contribute to a contemporary philosophical psychology in the setting of postmodernity and engagement with the leading concerns of postmodernism.

CONTENTS PAGE

Title Page (i)

Declaration (ii)

Dedication (iii)

Abstract (iv)

Table of Contents (viii)

List of Abbreviations and Glossary (xvi)

Preface (xvii)

Acknowledgements (xxi)

PART I - THE SETTING OF MORAL THEOLOGY AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY 1

CHAPTER 1 PROLEGOMENA - VIRTUE, FUNDAMENTAL OPTION AND THE EXIGENCIES OF POST MODERNITY (OR HEAVEN KNOWS, ANYTHING GOES) 2

1.1 Statement of the Problem Under Consideration in Moral Theology and Moral Philosophy 3

1.2 The Exigencies of Post Modernity and Post Modernism 9

1.3 Aim of this Thesis 14

1.4 Outline of the Research Approach of this Thesis 15

CHAPTER 2 PRE-CONCILIAR CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY AND THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (OR FAREWELL AND ADIEU TO THE HAIR SHIRT AND THE MANUALS) 17
2.1 Manualist Moral Theology 18
2.2 The Origins of the Manualist Tradition 21
2.3 The Reform of the Manualist Tradition 22
2.4 Conclusion 27
CHAPTER 3 THE PRE-HISTORY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL OPTION 28
3.1 The Biblical Foundations for the Fundamental Option. 29
3.2 The Patristic Contribution. 32
3.3 The Thomistic Contribution. 37
3.3.1 The *Finis Ultimus*. 38
3.3.2 The Distinction between Mortal and Venial Sin. 41
3.3.3 The *Aversio a Deo*. 42
3.3.4 The Role of the Heart. 44
3.4 Kierkegaard and Choosing in Subjectivity. 45
3.5 Blondel and the Twentieth Century. 50
3.6 Conclusion 52
CHAPTER 4 VIRTUE ETHICS - THE CLASSICAL HERITAGE AND ITS RECOVERY 54
4.1 The Classical Heritage - Introduction 55
4.2 Aristotle and the Bag of Virtues 57
4.2.1 Aristotelian Anthropology 59

4.2.2 *Hexis/Habitus* and Voluntariness 63
4.2.3 Virtue and Emotion 64
4.2.4 Conclusions 69
4.3 Biblical Virtue 70
4.4 Augustine: Love, Knowledge and the Will 77
4.5 Aquinas: happiness, passion and *habitus* 82
4.5.1 *Treatise on Happiness* 84
4.5.2 *Treatise on The Passions* 87
4.5.3 *Treatise on The Virtues* 93
4.6 A Short Note on Kierkegaard and Virtue 106
4.7 The Recovery of Virtue 111
4.8 Conclusion 115

PART II - RAHNER'S THOUGHT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MORAL THEOLOGY 119
CHAPTER 5 THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY - THE NATURE OF RAHNER'S THOUGHT 120
5.1 Introduction 121
5.2 The Sources of Rahner's Thought 123
5.2.1 Mysticism and Ignatian Spirituality 123
5.2.2 Transcendental Thomism 132
5.2.3 Hegel and Heidegger 138
5.2.4 Other Influences 144
5.3 Rahner's Transcendental Anthropology and Method - An Overview 147
5.3.1 Introduction 147
5.3.2 Difficulties in the Definition of the Term 'Transcendental Method' 151

5.3.3 The Exposition of the Transcendental Method in *Foundations of Christian Faith* 157
5.4 Conclusion 159
CHAPTER 6 SOME ASPECTS OF RAHNER'S MORAL ANTHROPOLOGY 160
6.1 Introduction 161
6.2 The Natural Law 162
6.3 Rahner's Existential Ethics 167
6.4 Rahner's Understanding of Sinfulness 170
6.5 Conclusion 175
CHAPTER 7 THE DEEPEST LONGING AND ITS HORIZON - THE SUPERNATURAL EXISTENTIAL AS PRECURSOR TO THE FUNDAMENTAL OPTION 176
7.1 Introduction 177
7.2 The Debate on Nature and Grace 181
7.2.1 Nature and Grace in the Twentieth Century 182
7.2.2 Karl Rahner, Extrinsicism and Intrinsicism and Their Resolution 189
7.3 The Supernatural Existential and Rahner's Metaphysic of Knowledge 195
7.3.1 *Spirit in the World* 197
7.3.2 *Hearer of the Word* 215
7.3.3 The Metaphysic of Knowledge as the Foundation for the Supernatural Existential 218
7.4 The Status of the Supernatural Existential 220
7.5 Conclusion 235

PART III - RAHNER ON FUNDAMENTAL OPTION AND VIRTUE ETHICS AND THEIR LINK IN THE LIGHT OF THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE 237

CHAPTER 8 *GRUNDENTSCHEIDUNG* - RAHNER ON FUNDAMENTAL OPTION 238

8.1 Terminology and typology of the Rahnerian Fundamental Option 239

8.2 Rahner's Transcendental Anthropology and the Fundamental Option 242

8.3 Fundamental Freedom 245

8.3.1 Fundamental Freedom and Fundamental Option 246

8.3.2 The Grounding of Fundamental Freedom in Rahner's Thought 248

8.3.3 Difficulties in the Understanding and Pursuit of Freedom 251

8.3.4 Fundamental Freedom and the Priority of God and Grace 257

8.4 Rahner's Mysticism, Ignatian Spirituality and Fundamental Option 258

8.5 Rahner, Fundamental Option and the Heart 262

8.6 Problems of the Rahnerian Fundamental Option 265

8.6.1 The Distinction between Mortal and Venial Sin 265

8.6.2 The Conservative Critique 266

8.6.3 The Philosophical Basis for the Fundamental Option 270

8.6.4 The Difficulty of the Rahnerian Negative Fundamental Option 274
8.6.5 The Fundamental Option and the Distinction of Levels in The Moral Subject 276
8.6.6 Fundamental Option and Decision 279
8.6.7 Fundamental Option and Social Sin 284
8.7 Rahner and Issues in the Contemporary Debate on Fundamental Option 289
8.7.1 Present Status of the Fundamental Option within The Church and Among Theologians 289
8.7.2 *Nulla Prima Optio Extra Ecclesiam Romanam* - Why is the Fundamental Option confined to Roman Catholic Theology? 291
8.7.3 Fundamental Option and Sacramental Life 294
8.7.4 The Chronological Position of Fundamental Option as Life Event 303
8.7.5 The Nature and Typology of Fundamental Option 306
8.7.6 Fundamental Option and Conversion 309
8.8 Conclusion 314
CHAPTER 9 AND NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY, THESE THREE - RAHNER ON VIRTUE ETHICS 317
9.1 Introduction - Rahner and The Recovery of Virtue 318
9.2 Rahner's Definition of Virtue 321
9.3 The Constituent Elements in Rahner's Theory of Virtue 329

9.3.1 The Role of Disposition and *Habitus* in Virtue 330
9.3.2 Grace and Virtue 340
9.3.3 Some Aspects of Rahner's Understanding of the Theological Virtues 344
9.4 Rahner and Some Issues in the Contemporary Debate on Virtue 350
9.4.1 Rahner and Virtue Epistemology 350
9.4.2 Other Issues in Rahner's Virtue Theory 357
9.5 Conclusion 359
CHAPTER 10 THE OPTION OF GRACE IN FREEDOM - THE LINK BETWEEN FUNDAMENTAL OPTION AND VIRTUE 361
10.1 Possible Approaches 363
10.2 A Typology of Different Contemporary Approaches to the Link Between Fundamental Option and Virtue Ethics 364
10.3 The Link Between the Precursors of Fundamental Option and Virtue in the Christian Tradition 368
10.3.1 The Biblical Antecedents of the Heart 368
10.3.2 The Patristic Antecedents 368
10.3.3 The Thomist Antecedents 370
10.3.4 Kierkegaard and the Link Between Virtue and Fundamental Option 372
10.4 The Link Between Fundamental Option and Virtue Ethics in The Work of Karl Rahner 373
10.4.1 The Role of the Theological Virtues 373
10.4.2 *Habitus* and Fundamental Freedom 379

10.4.3 Rahner's Anthropology, the Link Between Fundamental Option and Virtue, and the Priority of Grace 380
10.4.4 The Role of the Heart 382
10.5 Conclusion 385
CHAPTER 11 CONCLUSION - THEN WE SHALL BE SEEING FACE TO FACE 387
BIBLIOGRAPHY 402
12.1 Primary Sources 402
12.2 Secondary Sources 406

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND GLOSSARY

Aversio	*Aversio a Deo, per conversionem ad creaturam* - Turning away from God and a turning toward creatures
Beatitudo	The Beatific Vision of God
Conversio	*Conversio ad phantasma* - Conversion to the phantasm
CTD	*Concise Theological Dictionary* (Rahner and Vorgrimler)
Desiderium Naturale	Natural Desire
ET	English Translation
FCF	*Foundations of Christian Faith* (Rahner)
Finis Ultimus	Final end or Ultimate Purpose
Habitus	State of Character
Hexis	State of Character
HW	*Hearer of the Word* (Rahner)
ITC	*International Theological Commission*
NE	*Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle)
Natura Pura	Pure Nature
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (of the Bible)
Potentia Obedientialis	Obediential Potency
Sacramentum Mundi	Dictionary of Theology (Rahner)
ST	*Summa Theologiae* (St Thomas Aquinas)
SW	*Spirit in the World* (Rahner)
SZT	*Schriften zur Theologie* (Rahner) (ET-*TI*)
TI	*Theological Investigations* (Rahner)
Vorgriff	Anticipation

PREFACE

This thesis had its origins in December 1993 with a suggestion by Professor Robert Gascoigne and Dr Neil Ormerod for a project to examine the link between fundamental option and virtue theory. After a preliminary foray into the subject area it became obvious that Karl Rahner was a major and seminal contributor to the theory of fundamental option, and moreover, his work was relatively accessible in English. His contribution to virtue theory was more problematic, as this thesis will attempt to reveal. Nonetheless, the Rahnerian flag was hoisted on the stern of this dissertation vessel and it set sail on the sometimes choppy waters of moral theology.

The attendant tension between virtue theory and fundamental option provided the dynamics of this thesis. At times it seemingly developed a schizoid dynamic where the left hand of the fundamental option was not engaged with the right hand of virtue theory. This was reinforced by the consideration that virtue theory draws extensively on moral philosophy, whereas fundamental option draws extensively (and exclusively) on moral theology. I trust that this thesis has managed to produce a balance and a coherence despite this schizoid dynamic. However this dynamic has had its advantages. The thesis could be said to have acquired (in livestock husbandry parlance), 'hybrid vigour', insofar as there has been a cross pollination of ideas from these different areas, from moral philosophy to moral theology and *vice versa,* which it is hoped has been more productive than counter productive.

Nonetheless, the particular subject area for this thesis of the link between fundamental option and virtue theory has consisted of largely uncharted

waters. This student navigator at times made no headway and was forced to change tack. Such is the stuff of doctoral dissertations. There were a few charts available from the Rahner *corpus,* however the soundings were few and far between. Happily, while on these seas, I was not forced to jettison all the cargo and have been able to return with a theological tale to tell.

It was only after the near fundamental option had been made of the selection of Karl Rahner as the main vehicle for this thesis that another significant consideration emerged, the backdrop of postmodernity and the interaction of Rahner's thought with the challenges of postmodernism. I hope that, given the provisional nature of the assessment of postmodernism, Rahner's contribution to the contemporary world of ideas in the light of that challenge emerges with some clarity. Another later, and important development, particularly *vis-à-vis* postmodern concerns, was the emergence of the importance of Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge as the grounding of supernatural existential and fundamental option, and its link to virtue epistemology.

Every doctoral candidate regards the subject of his dissertation as important, (or at least as somehow relevant) to his academic discipline. This candidate would argue that the subject area for this thesis has considerable significance for moral theology in general (and also to a less extent for moral philosophy) but also, in particular, for the moral theology of the Roman Communion. Fundamental option, as the thesis illustrates, has been of more than passing concern for the Roman Communion, as has been reflected in a number of Church documents. The conundrum, which this thesis addresses in a limited way, is why fundamental option has not generated a similar *frisson* in non-Roman circles. This student, as a

member of the Anglican communion, has at times contested with feelings of presumption, that, as a relative outsider, he should comment on what could be regarded as in-house matters for the Roman communion. However, I believe, (and I would hazard that Rahner would have agreed with me) that the importance and validity of the fundamental option is not confined to the Roman Communion, but is the property of all those who adhere to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Further, Rahner's anthropology has been of considerable influence on two of the most important contemporary theologians in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, John Macquarrie and John Milbank.

So the significance of this thesis topic is considerable for Christian ethics. However, I do claim the indulgence of the reader for these attempts to grapple with this important topic. The very importance of the topic does not guarantee the competence of the researcher pursuing the topic. At times, I have felt intimidated, not only by fundamental option and virtue theory, but also by that massive navigation manual, the theological thought of Karl Rahner. At times I have imagined that I have navigated in an Antarctic sea of unidentified icebergs while attempting to steer a course according to Rahnerian co-ordinates. Perhaps special navigation aids are required for these rarefied Antarctic Rahnerian latitudes and one is dependent for a good steer from one's network of supporters (such as all those mentioned in the acknowledgements, and others). Although Rahner himself strenuously attempted to convey the essence of his thought to the world at large, he was aware of the demands that his thought (and that of his other transcendental Thomist colleagues) placed upon the believer.

Despite occasional navigation hazards I have been gladdened by, and grateful for, this opportunity to voyage with this subject and to appreciate at length the incomparable thought and spirituality of that master spiritual navigator and theologian, Karl Rahner.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis deals with (*inter alia*) the shift in the focus of moral theology from moral act to moral agency in community. These acknowledgements (to pursue the optical metaphor) mirror that focus, insofar as a thesis (as Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge would have it), is the result of engagement with various ideas that do not simply come out with the stars in the night sky, but are the result of engagement, (however peripheral) with the world of other people's approaches to these ideas. Being a beneficiary of this communication has regularly reminded this student of the following advices and queries:

> Listen patiently, and seek whatever truth other peoples' opinions may contain for you. Think it possible that you may be mistaken... Remember that no one can live to himself; be ready to seek help and counsel from one another... Are you loyal to the truth; and do you keep your mind open to new light, from whatever quarter it may arise?[1]

I trust that this thesis, if not having precise focus, or sufficient exposure time, may be at least light sensitive, and present a coherent composition. The myopia is all mine.

These acknowledgements would have to begin with Dr Neil Ormerod, who, after guiding me through the translucencies of the B.D.(hons), demonstrated a near *Grundentscheidung* by suggesting a general topic area in consultation with Professor Robert Gascoigne. Both Robert and Neil were courageous and kind enough to take on the supervision of the project and manifested true virtue in seeing it through. In this regard I have much to be thankful

[1] London Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends: "Advices and Queries" in *Church Government* (Friends Book Centre: London, 1968), 702, 703 (original advices and queries, 1682)

for. I was not subjected to the experiences that the philosopher Bryan Magee had been subjected to as a post-graduate. His supervisor:

> employed the terror tactics of Oxford philosophy as a teaching method, which is what I gather his own mentor ... had done. No sooner would I have completed any assertion to him, however small or slight, than I would find myself backed up against the wall and the bullets would be smacking round my head. And scarcely would I have got out of one tight corner before I found myself in another. The whole of each supervision would consist of Strawson gunning for me and me fighting for my life.[2]

Both Neil and Robert were members of wider scholarly communities of a benign ambience. The dimensions of this thesis topic were very usefully explored at post-graduate seminars and also by way of luncheons replete with ecumenical goodwill. I also have to acknowledge the support of teaching, administrative and library staff at both the Educational Centre Randwick and the Australian Catholic University (both Strathfield and Signadou Campuses). I am also grateful to Dr Warwick Neville of the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference for presenting at times a different perspective on moral theology.

Pursuing this intensely Roman Catholic subject area of fundamental option did have its attendant difficulties, and I am indebted to St John's Anglican Theological College, Morpeth, in all its serene unawareness of the theology of fundamental option, for the support provided by its staff and students. Father Neville O'Brien provided many hours of his time in presenting (*inter alia*) Anglo Catholic perspectives on moral theology and Father Richard Tutin provided the solidarity for a fellow labourer in the doctoral (Hunter

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[2] Bryan Magee: *Confessions of a Philosopher* (London: Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1997), 126

Valley) vineyard. I am also indebted to many students of St John's, both those with whom I have studied and those whom I have taught, particularly those in the Moral Theology Workshop of the Winter School of Theology for their fresh insights into Christian ethics.

The Staff of St Mark's Anglican National Theological Centre Canberra, provided a slightly different perspective, and I am indebted to both Colin Dundon and Doug Hynde for discussing some of the more obscure aspects of moral theology while sharing table.

This thesis benefited from a more diffuse contribution. I am indebted to the participants at both the Australian Catholic Theological Association Conference at the swansong for St Patrick's Manly, and also for the Anglican Theologian's Seminar at both Perth and Brisbane, both examples of the community of goodwill in scholarship. Goodwill and hospitality was also extended on various occasions by the De La Salle Brothers at houses in New South Wales and Victoria, and the Anglican Franciscans at Stroud, New South Wales.

I must acknowledge many other friends who have contributed, especially Alan Roberts, who has trod the Ph.D. path, and Greg Young for his philosophical acuity. The Rev Dr Rob de Caen was a constant source of encouragement, support and the provider of a perspective of fresh spirituality. The Rector and Parishioners of the Anglican Parish of Bungendore have contributed to this thesis in their own way. Various parts of this thesis have been presented as sermons by this lay minister, who followed Karl Rahner's injunction that the first purpose of theology was to aid in the preaching of the Word. The apposite feedback from those long

suffering people at St John's Lake Bathurst and St Philip's Bungendore has been keenly appreciated.

Another long suffering person who has been exposed to the trials of the gestation of a Ph.D. thesis is Tricia Meares who coped with revised chapter sequences and formats and all the other demands of committing a thesis to the tender mercies of a word processor.

Finally, my family has lived with this thesis for several years now. Penny Warner-Smith and David Smith, fellow pilgrims on the dissertation track, have provided timely injunctions. Ken and Fay Warner have provided the home away from home for the work at Morpeth and have endured the *angst* of a doctoral candidate. My children, Andrew, Jeremy and Zoe, have had their own trials of learning and have endured the intrusions of Ph.D. work into family life. My wife and helpmate Katie, has supported me emotionally and materially for these last four years. Her command of psychiatry has provided memorable moments of insight into the emotional life and passion of the human person, as has her grasp of the subleties of the (North) German language.

This thesis, it is hoped, is not only a testimony to the brilliance, insight and relevance of Karl Rahner but also to the goodwill, kindness and insight of all those who have helped in this endeavour.

Jim Warner
Tuross, NSW
Easter Sunday
1998

PART I

THE SETTING OF MORAL THEOLOGY AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY

* * * * *

CHAPTER 1 Prolegomena - Virtue, Fundamental Option and the Exigencies of Postmodernity (or Heaven Knows, Anything Goes)

CHAPTER 2 Preconciliar Catholic Moral Theology and the Impact of the Council (or Farewell and Adieu to the Hair Shirt and the Manuals)

CHAPTER 3 The Pre-History of the Fundamental Option

CHAPTER 4 Virtue Ethics - The Classical Heritage and its Recovery

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CHAPTER 1 - PROLEGOMENA - VIRTUE, FUNDAMENTAL OPTION AND THE EXIGENCIES OF POSTMODERNITY (OR HEAVEN KNOWS, ANYTHING GOES)

Karl Rahner:

"Would [Professor Macquarrie] agree that [the coherence or indeed unity between natural and revealed theology] is based on the presupposition that **owing to the universal salvific will of God, everybody in his own freedom is challenged to a choice between the acceptance or the refusal of God's objectively offered grace?** ..... it would follow that anyone who undertakes philosophical reflection today is confronted with a choice between the free acceptance or rejection of this existential grace of God, and his propositions must bear the signs of this choice. Would Professor Macquarrie agree that reasoning such as this supports his own position?"

John Macquarrie:

"Well, I never thought I would have the honour of getting a *viva* from Dr Rahner ..... I may say that those of us who teach at Oxford try to make things a little easier. But I do not think there is any serious matter of disagreement here. There may be differences of terminology ..... I think I have always believed in what I might call a **common** grace; that as well as the specific Christian grace given in Jesus Christ there is a ... grace of creation which is available to all human beings.

> From questions posed by Karl Rahner to John Macquarrie at the conclusion of the latter's lecture *The Anthropological Approach to Theology* delivered in honour of Rahner's eightieth birthday at Heythrop College in the University of London in the presence of the *honorandus* on 17 February 1984.
> Reprinted in John Macquarrie: *Theology Church and Ministry* (London: SCM, 1986), 61.

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1 PROLEGOMENA - VIRTUE, FUNDAMENTAL OPTION AND THE EXIGENCIES OF POSTMODERNITY (OR HEAVEN KNOWS, ANYTHING GOES)

1.1 Statement of the problem under consideration in moral theology and moral philosophy.

The renewal of the Roman Catholic Church brought about by the Second Vatican Council (11 October 1962 - 8 December 1965) encompassed a number of significant developments in moral theology which are still in progress. One of these developments, the theory of the fundamental option, has had a considerable impact on moral theology in particular and foundational and systematic theology in general. It has been described as

> the dynamism of the self's inner core through which people are conditioned in full freedom by God's graced presence to make the choices in which they both find expression of who they are and give meaning to their life.[1]

The German Jesuit Karl Rahner (1904-1984), one of the pre-eminent exponents of fundamental option, was a leading *peritus* (or theological counsel) at the Council and has been referred to as the Council's chief engineer on certain theological questions.[2] His influence in many areas of theology is still with us today, to the extent that he is regarded by some as the greatest Catholic theologian since Thomas Aquinas.[3] No other Catholic

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[1] G Kelly: *Karl Rahner* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 45
[2] cf. Joseph H. Wong: "Anonymous Christians: Karl Rahner's Pneuma - Christocentrism and an East-West Dialogue" *Theological Studies* Vol. 55, No 4, December 1994, 612
[3] cf. Stephen Duffy: *The Dynamics of Grace* (Collegeville: Glazier, Minn. 1993), 261

theologian has made a greater contribution to the development of contemporary theology.[4]

The centrality of Rahner and his theology for this thesis is not simply because of his postconciliar theological pre-eminence, great as it is, but just as importantly because of his pioneering efforts in the development of the fundamental option. These pioneering efforts by Rahner, along with other moral theologians and systematic theologians, were prompted in part by the difficulties in the pre-conciliar understanding of the distinction between mortal and venial sin. This early work widened in scope in later post-conciliar Catholic moral theology circles so as to include and develop the concept of moral agency and leave behind the more restricted concern of moral act and the attendant distinction between mortal and venial sin. Rahner's influence on the development of fundamental option is still with us today in the area of moral theology to the extent that his presence "behind the scenes of *Veritatis Splendor* is pervasive and palpable."[5]

A few steps behind this development of the fundamental option (and somewhat 'out of synch') was the parallel development of the recovery of virtue ethics. Virtue ethics had been the ethical theory *par excellence* of antiquity, of Aristotle, Aquinas and Spinoza. Alasdair MacIntyre sees Jane Austen as the last exponent of the virtues (via Shaftesbury) in the English language classical tradition.[6] Even a nineteenth century bridge figure

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[4] cf. Neil Ormerod: *Introducing Contemporary Theologies* (Sydney: Dwyer, 1990), 93

[5] Andrew Tallon: "The Role of the Connaturalized Heart in *Veratitis Splendor*" in M.E. Allsopp and J.J. O'Keefe (eds) *Veritatis Splendor - American Responses* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 137

[6] A. MacIntyre: *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1985), (2nd Edn with Postscript), 181-87, 239-43

between modernity and postmodernity such as Soren Kierkegaard is seen to be in the classical virtue tradition.[7]

However, unlike the conciliar origin of the development of fundamental option (see Section 3.6 *passim*), the origin of the recovery of virtue ethics can be found not so much in the modern moral theology influenced by the Council, overwhelmingly continental moral theology, but more in a particular strain of moral philosophy, in modern Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy and also in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and Stanley Hauerwas. The latter pair's work has been an attempt to deal with the problems of moral theology and philosophy *vis-à-vis* postmodernity, in particular the problems of cultural pluralism, ethical relativism and competing theories of ethics, although it has had a decidedly Aristotelian/Thomist cast to it. It has been developed virtually independently of the conciliar renewal and fundamental option.[8]

Karl Rahner, although considering himself to be a Thomist (of a very particular sort it should be stressed), was a theologian in the conciliar continental tradition and was not part of this recovery of virtue ethics. As a self confessed Thomist he was certainly familiar with the place of the virtues in moral theology. He defined virtue in the widest sense as:

> any perfectly developed capacity of man's spiritual soul, or the development itself. There can therefore be virtue, for example, in the domain of cognition: intellectual virtues. In the narrower sense, virtue is the power (ability, skill, facility) to realize moral good and

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[7] R.C. Roberts: "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and a Method of 'Virtue Ethics'", in M. Matustik and M. Westphal: *Kierkegaard in Post Modernity* (Indianapolis: Indiana U.P., 1995), 148

[8] For the recovery of virtue from the perspective of liberation theology see A. Moser and B. Leers: *Moral Theology* (Tunbridge Wells: Burns and Oates, 1990), 153

> especially to do it joyfully and perseveringly even against inner and outer obstacles at the heart of sacrifice.[9]

However Rahner's treatment of virtue, compared to fundamental option has received little attention.

Protestant ethicists are not exempt from scrutiny either. Some have subscribed to virtue ethics but there appears to be a pervading theological ignorance or indifference with regard to fundamental option, attitudes shared with secular ethicists. Now, Rahner's contribution to theology has ecumenical dimensions. From a Protestant perspective, George Lindbeck has referred to the possibility of a Rahnerian Protestant systematic theology[10] which is underpinned by the stature of Rahner. Lindbeck himself was an observer at the Council and described Rahner at the time as:

> A man who in comprehension and sheer intellectual quality can, alone among contemporary Catholics, be ranged alongside of Barth and Tillich, and who in terms of balance is perhaps the greatest of the three.[11]

Therefore Rahner is important for the purposes of this thesis not only because of his pre-eminence and his pioneering work in fundamental option, but also because of the representative nature of his theology for Catholic theology as a potential bridgehead to Protestant theology through his transcendental Thomism (cf. John Macquarrie and Heideggerian existentialism[12]) and potential shared Thomist insights (eg, Hauerwas[13]),

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[9] K. Rahner: *Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 1794
[10] George Lindbeck: "The Framework of Catholic Protestant Disagreement" in T.P. Burke (ed): *The Word in History - The St. Xavier Symposium* (London: Collins, 1968), 104
[11] George Lindbeck: "The Thought of Karl Rahner, S.J." *Christianity and Crisis* 25 (October 18, 1965), 211-215
[12] John Macquarrie:

commensurate with the increasing influence of Thomism on Protestant theology, to the extent that this Thomist influence for Protestants may be greater than the influence of Thomism on contemporary Catholic theology.[14]

The *raison d'être* for this thesis is that the moral theology of postmodernity is heir to two potentially rival, but also potentially mutually enriching, ethical traditions, that of fundamental option theory on the one hand, and virtue ethics on the other. They could be perceived as rivals in a post-modern context because the former could be categorised as universalist and transcendentalist and inimical to post-modern concerns, whereas virtue ethics could be seen as narrative bound, vernacular and hence a rejection of universalist fundamental option theory. But what if there is, in fact, a link between virtue ethics and fundamental option theory? Does this link of itself refute post-modern approaches to ethics or does it reinforce them?

The problem under consideration for this thesis is that there has been little ostensible clarification of the relationships between fundamental option and virtue ethics, by Rahner or others. There are major questions

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An Existential Theology (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980)
Existentialism (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977)
Heidegger and Christianity (London: SCM, 1984)
"Karl Rahner" in A.W. Hastings (ed) *Theologians of our Time* (Edinburgh: T.T. Clark, 1966)
Studies in Christian Existentialism (London: SCM, 1966)
Three Issues in Ethics (London: SCM, 1970) (Passim) -
see also the translator's preface in Martin Heidegger: *Being and Time*
Translated John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) (Original 1962) -
for a valuable personal dialogue between Macquarrie and Rahner on an anthropological approach to theology see Macquarrie's *Theology Church and Ministry* Ch. 6, (London: SCM, 1986)

[13] Stanley Hauerwas:
Character and The Christian Life Ch. 2, (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, Texas, 1985) (Original 1975)

[14] cf. Jean Porter: *The Recovery of Virtue* (London: SPCK, 1994), 172

to be answered. Has this relationship, link or nexus between fundamental option and virtue ethics been one of identity, overlap or complementarity? In particular, if the fundamental option is identified with one of the theological virtues, faith, hope or love, what can be said of the unity of the virtues or the place of a master virtue? Conversely, is the fundamental option nothing more and nothing less than the master virtue or the unity of virtues? Is it the unity of the virtues operating in a wider theological context? Or is it rather, the God oriented freedom of the will? For many of these questions there is simply no contemporary response in the literature. This relationship is patently an important one for moral theology, given the importance of fundamental option and virtue ethics in the moral theology agenda, however it is also one seemingly ignored and shrouded in ignorance as demonstrated by the paucity of literature on the subject.

This thesis will aim to pursue the question of the link between virtue ethics and fundamental option in the work of Karl Rahner, but there are *caveats*. Rahner's treatment of the fundamental option appears to be at variance with those of Häring, Fuchs *et alia.* These ostensible differences need to be understood. Similarly Rahner's treatment of virtue ethics appears to be at variance with those of Pieper, Guardini, Häring *et alia.* A similar *caveat* applies. Further, how does Rahner's treatment of both virtue ethics and fundamental option square with contemporary developments in biblical interpretation, patristics, ecumenical rapprochement, the teaching of the magisterium, moral psychology, developmental psychology and philosophy of mind and further, the whole bundle of ideas loosely referred to as postmodernism, given that the present recovery of virtue could be seen, in a sense, as postmodernist.

Rahner himself saw the necessity for the presentation of theology in such a way that it "encourages a genuine dialogue between the best of traditional thought and the exigencies of today."[15] It is apparent that Rahner's work has to be placed in the context of his dialogue with the contemporary world, therefore for the purposes of this thesis it will be examined in the light of the contemporary debate on fundamental option and virtue ethics. Further, this contemporary intellectual *milieu* is one concerned with questions such as pluralism, anti-realism and anti-foundationalism, in short, what is referred to as postmodernism. The recovery of virtue ethics could be seen, in a sense, as post-modernist. To reiterate, an important question for this thesis is, how relevant is Karl Rahner's transcendental anthropology to post-modern concerns?

1.2 The Exigencies of Postmodernity and Postmodernism

What are these, postmodern concerns? What is postmodernity? What is postmodernism?

Now it has been argued that "postmodernism does not represent 'the philosophy of our age' or the spirit of the times as some of its advocates have maintained."[16] There is a need, therefore, to assess the dimensions of postmodernism. What precisely is post modernism? How is postmodernism to be distinguished from postmodernity? Postmodernism, as a collection of ideas that has attracted varying perceptions of its coherence, needs to be distinguished from the historical notion of

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[15] Karl Rahner in *Karl Rahner in Dialogue*
(ed) Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 22
[16] Max Charlesworth: "Postmodernism and Theology", *The Way* Vol. 36 No 3 July 1996, 190

postmodernity, which has enjoyed more acceptance. Postmodernity is seen, first, as the present historical time span, of the last decade of the twentieth century, in contrast to the post-Enlightenment two hundred year time span of modernity, beginning in 1789, which ended with the fall of communism in 1989.[17] Second, it is seen as a "dislocating human condition ... because it tends to throw people out of the world views they have traditionally held. It is a cultural event happening right now wherever people are educated in and acculturated to Western Civilisation."[18] We will return to this question of postmodernist culture shortly.

What has been the response to this perceived dislocation? Postmodernism has been characterised[19] as a rejection of any attempt to 'totalize' reality. This involves[20] a:

- rejection of foundationalism;
- rejection of realism;
- rejection of universal psychological factors;
- a radical pluralism;
- pragmatism;
- interpretive relativism;
- perception of language as value-laden and a source of ideology.

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[17] D.S. Dockery: "The Challenge of Postmodernism" in D.S. Dockery (ed) *op.cit,* 25
[18] *ibid.*, 14
[19] cf. Thomas Guarino: "Post Modernity and Five Theological Issues" *Theological Studies* Vol. 57 No 4 Dec 96, 654
[20] cf. William Dean: *History Making History: The New Historicism in American Religious Thought* (Albury: State University of New York Press, 1988), 6-7, quoted Erickson: *op.cit,* 55 also J. Shire: "Logocentricity and Postmodern Apologetic: On Being a Fool for Christ and an Idiot for Nobody."
(unpublished paper presented at the Wheaton Theology Conference 7-8 April 1994, quoted in P.S. Dockery (ed): *The Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1995), 14

Although the position of postmodernism is not vouchsafed in the contemporary debate on the history of ideas, it does enjoy a considerable measure of recognition. One of the perspectives of this thesis will be the monitoring of Rahner's anthropology within the context of these issues of postmodernity.

What are perceived as its intellectual sources? They are heterogeneous yet also have a philosophical cast, viz:[21]

- Nietzsche;
- Heidegger;
- Wittgenstein;
- semiology and the structuralism of de Saussure and Lévi-Strauss;
- the theory of the interpretation of texts (hermeneutics);
- forms of sociology influenced by Kant (the social construction of knowledge);
- versions of neo-Marxism and neo-Freudianism;
- contemporary feminist thinking.

We will see in later chapters of this thesis that Karl Rahner also draws on some of these sources, but definitely not all. What form has the engagement of theology with postmodernism taken? David Griffin has advanced four postmodern theologies distinguished by their degree of change from modernist theology.[22]

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[21] cf. Thomas Guarino: *op.cit.*, 655

[22] D.R. Griffin: *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* (Albury, New York: State University of New York, 1989), 1-7

- Deconstructive Postmodernism

  This rejects the objectivity of foundationalism, and also the objectivity of the use of language. Interpretation is necessarily deconstructive.

- Liberationist Postmodernism

  Liberationist approaches are not radically deconstructive, rather they focus on social structures and social issues.

- Constructive Postmodernism

  David Griffin refers to the postmodernism of artistic, literary and deconstructive philosophical circles as *ultra-modernism* or *most-modernism* which arise from taking the presuppositions of modernity to a logical conclusion. However, opposed to this, he writes:

  > In contrast with this holistic deconstructive postmodernism I speak of a constructive, reconstructive or revisionary postmodernism in which many of the presuppositions of modernity are challenged and revised.[23]

- Conservative or Restorationist Post-modernism

  This sees elements of modernism that are worth retaining, but goes beyond modernism, yet building on some modernist elements.

The chronology of Rahner's work, in particular, the development of his transcendental anthropology predates these various postmodern theologies, nonetheless, as we shall see, Rahner anticipates some of the elements of these postmodern theologies, especially constructive postmodernism.

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[23] D. Griffin: *Archetypal Process: Self and Divine in Whitehead, Jung and Hillman* (Evanston, Illinois: North Western University Press, 1990), 6-7

To narrow the scope of our view of postmodernism, how has theology engaged with the questions of postmodernity and culture? From his position as an influential postliberal North American theologian, George Lindbeck has advocated a cultural linguistic approach to theological questions that he has hoped would avoid the 'pitfalls' of the experiential approach to theology of Karl Rahner.[24]

> In the words of Karl Rahner [the underlying unity of religious experience] is the experience 'in which what is meant and the experience of what is meant are one'.[25] [This and other] characterisations create a nest of problems that ... cultural - linguistic approaches avoid.[26]

Although he stresses the need for theological engagement with culture, the relevant question here is how does Lindbeck engage with postmodernist culture, given what is perceived as its nihilist perspectives, and can Rahner's experiential approach deal with it more effectively? Now postmodernism has been seen as the potential determinant of secular culture, with all the attendant problems.

> One aspect of contemporary secular culture deserves special treatment, because it may well represent a paradigm shift. It is a clue to a change in the whole culture to which we are relating as we articulate our theology. In a sense Christianity, and specifically Christian theology, is or should be, a counterculture. What we are seeing today, however is the rise of another counterculture, which may itself eventually become the dominant culture. We must be aware that we might find ourselves developing our theology in relationship to a culture which already has been displaced.[27]

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[24] George Lindbeck: *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 32
[25] Karl Rahner: *Foundations of Christian Faith,* (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 17
[26] Lindbeck: *op.cit,* 32
[27] M. Erickson: *Where is Theology Going?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 54

So, this perceived ascendant counterculture of postmodernism is relevant for contemporary theology in two respects. First it may be the main dialogue partner for Christian theology because it may become the dominant culture and second, it may displace Christian theology or otherwise effectively compromise it, or leave it so enfeebled as to provide no viable alternative.

With this in mind one of the concerns of this thesis will be to include within its purview the nature of Rahner's transcendental anthropology insofar as it relates to the issues of postmodernity. How does Rahner anticipate the potential dialogue with postmodernity? Is Rahner's anthropology in any qay, vitiated by postmodern concerns.

1.3 Aim of this thesis

The aim of this thesis is to:

- define precisely and understand fully the link between fundamental option and virtue ethics in the work of Karl Rahner in the light of the contemporary developments and debates in these subjects in contemporary moral theology and moral philosophy in the setting of postmodernity;

- to examine the implications of this link between fundamental option and virtue ethics including the assessment of the continuing significance of Karl Rahner for theology in a postmodern setting.

1.4 Outline of the research approach for this thesis

The problems outlined at (1.1) will be considered in the following sequence.

- In Part I, the nature of preconciliar Catholic moral theology will be examined briefly and the theological impact of the Second Vatican Council will be noted. The history surrounding first, the fundamental option, and second the classical heritage of virtue ethics and its recovery, will be surveyed briefly, particularly with reference to Rahner.

- In Part II the focus will narrow to examine the source of Rahner's thought and his transcendental and moral anthropology.

- In Part III Rahner's treatment of fundamental option and virtue ethics will be examined, with particular reference to the issues in the contemporary debate. The link between virtue ethics and fundamental option in Rahner will then be examined and the implications pursued.

- Part IV presents the conclusions.

Of necessity, the research topic will be examined from both above and below, to borrow a theological metaphor. It will be examined from both a theological and philosophical perspective. The theological work will be influenced by Rahner himself and his transcendental Thomism, however the contribution of other contemporary perspectives such as analytical philosophy will be considered where appropriate.

The primary source material will be Rahner's writings, especially *Theological Investigations*, but there will also be a critical appraisal of the primary and secondary literature on fundamental option and virtue ethics and also the secondary literature on Rahner.

CHAPTER 2

PRECONCILIAR CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY AND THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (OR FAREWELL AND ADIEU TO THE HAIR SHIRT AND THE MANUALS)

The contemporary Spanish Marian visionary Conchita Gonzalez commented after wearing a hair shirt for penance:

> The Virgin didn't recommend these kinds of penances [ie, hair shirts] ..... and placed more emphasis on the virtues such as obedience ..... She [the Virgin] also insisted on the virtues of humility, purity, prayer, charity, etc.

Jose Ramon Garcia de la Riva: *Memoires d'un Curé de Campagne Espagnol* (Paris ND) (ET: *Memoirs of a Spanish Country Pastor,* trans S Meehan and L Lussier) quoted in *Garabandal* Vol 29 No. 1 Jan/Mar 1996, 10

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2 PRECONCILIAR CATHOLIC MORAL THEOLOGY AND THE IMPACT OF THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL (OR FAREWELL AND ADIEU TO THE HAIR SHIRT AND THE MANUALS)

Karl Rahner has been described as the theological father of the Second Vatican Council,[1] and, at the time, there was the apocryphal reference to him as "the Holy Ghost writer of the Council."[2] Rahner's contribution to the Council was not some form of monomania but covered a vast range of issues confronting the Church, to the extent that he was active "to the point of exhaustion."[3] In this work he moved in concert with like minds, but also engaged vigorously with those of different views. As Rahner himself said, "there were a lot of cooks at the Second Vatican Council."[4] The renewal of theology in general, and moral theology in particular, brought about by Rahner and others at the Second Vatican Council is germane to the central questions of this thesis, but what were the precursors to these post conciliar developments? What were the antecedents to developments such as Rahner's theory of fundamental option?

2.1 Manualist Moral Theology

The preconciliar Catholic moral theology was referred to as 'manualist' and characterised as "casuistic, unecumenical, unbiblical, 'domestic' in its

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[1] Gareth Jones: *Critical Theology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1995), 58
[2] Karl Rahner: *I Remember* (New York: Crossroad 1985), 81
[3] Herbert Vorgrimler: *Understanding Karl Rahner* (London: SCM, 1986), 100
[4] Karl Rahner: *I Remember, op.cit.*, 81

concerns (social morality being relegated to the periphery) centrally controlled, natural law oriented and sin-centred."[5]

It has been argued from a Protestant perspective that contemporary Roman Catholic moral theology has "reacted against the rigid 'manualist' tradition with some vehemence."[6] 'Manualist' refers to the pervasive influence of the moral theology manuals, or *Institutiones*, the manuals designed to equip seminarians for their future roles as confessors, which some see as holding sway from the eighteenth century,[7] whereas others see their influence felt prior to the Reformation.[8] They were available in numerous editions that incorporated only slight revisions and were uniformly similar in content and approach, with a stylised format. They were overwhelmingly clerical in their purpose of equipping the would-be priest with the confessional intellectual apparatus to deal with the penitent's moral quandaries and petitions. It has been noted with regard to the content of the manuals 'the key moral question seemed to be "Is it sin?" and if so "Is it mortal or venial?"'[9] This distinction between mortal and venial sin has its classical statement in the *Summa Theologiae*,[10] where Aquinas advances three conditions for the commission of a sin to be regarded as mortal. There must be:

- sufficient awareness of reflection on the act;

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[5] R.A. McCormick: "Retrospective", *Religious Studies Review* 13 (1987), 37
[6] J M Gustafson: *Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective* Vol 2, (Chicago: University Press, 1992), 64

[7] cf. A. Moser & B. Leers: *Moral Theology*, (Tunbridge Wells: Burns & Oates, 1990), 19
[8] J Philip Wogaman: *Christian Ethics - A Historical Introduction* (London: SPCK, 1994), 81
[9] R P Hamel and K R Himes (eds): *Introduction to Christian Ethics, a Reader* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 1
[10] *ST* I-II ae, 88, 2 & 6

- full intention or consent of the will to perform the act;
- grave matter as the object of the act.

The preoccupation with the distinction between mortal and venial sin, and with the moral act *per se*, was stamped on the manuals. This was hardly surprising, considering the confessional, penitential *raison d'être* of the manuals. This gave rise to an individualist orientation in ethics, in particular, a preoccupation with particular, very particular, moral acts and also with a negative bias. Ethics was not so much about the good to be pursued as about the evil to be avoided.[11] Enda McDonagh[12] proffers four further peculiarities of the manuals:

- There was a failure to present the foundational aspects of moral theology;
- There was a dominance of both canon law and natural ethics (natural law);
- The manuals possessed a formally structured legal framework;
- There was an unavoidable emphasis on casuistry.

In addition, the manuals "may have deflected attention from broader systemic questions",[13] in particular, they did not develop, and, more importantly, allowed to languish, the Thomist emphasis on moral self and virtue.[14] These legalist, narrowly focused manuals held sway for nearly four centuries. How did they come to have such an enduring influence on seminary training in particular and moral theology in general?

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[11] J Philip Wogaman: *ibid,* 80
[12] Enda McDonagh: 'Moral Theology - The Need for Renewal' in E McDonagh (ed): *Moral Theology Renewed* (Dublin: Gill, 1965), 15
[13] Wogaman: *ibid*
[14] cf. Charles Curran: *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* (Notre Dame: U.P., 1976), 223

2.2 The Origins of the Manualist Tradition

The origins of the manualist tradition can be found in the *Libri Penitentiales*, the 'Penitential Books' of Ireland of the sixth and seventh Centuries, which accompanied the rise of the practice of private penance.[15] They provided the penitent with a list of common sins bracketed with their appropriate penance.

Annual confession became obligatory with the resolutions of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and led to the distribution of *Summae Confessariorum* (Summaries for Confessors)[16] which not only listed sins and their corresponding penances but also rudimentary moral principles and clarifications. Although Thomas Aquinas contributed in one sense to the manualist tradition with his incorporation of the patristic teaching on mortal and venial sin in the *Summa Theologiae*,[17] the scholastics did not countenance any division between moral theology and systematic theology, as the manuals were later to do. This is simply demonstrated in the first question of the *Summa*, which establishes the unity of theology.[18]

The origins for the other subsidiary development in the growth of the manualist tradition, that is, the close link between moral theology and canon law, can be traced to the decree of Gratian of 1140, which codified the collections of laws within the church and led in particular to the codification of canon law and its rigorous supervision of the manuals,[19]

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[15] cf. E McDonagh: *Invitation and Response* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1972), 16
[16] *ibid*
[17] *ST* I-IIae, 88, 2 & 6
[18] *ST*, Ia, 1, 5
[19] E McDonagh: *Invitation and Response op cit.*, 16

with the result that Catholic morality came to be construed from a legalist perspective.

Along with the Thomistic revival of the beginning of the sixteenth century, the decrees of the Council of Trent (1545 - 1563) introduced a reformed administration of the sacrament of penance and in addition, a system of seminaries to produce the required confessors. These developments saw both the separation of systematic theology from moral theology and also the full manifestation of the manualist tradition. The archetypical manualist author could be said to be John Azor (1536 - 1603) with his *Institutiones Morales* which in essence remained unchanged until the Second Vatican Council.[20]

2.3 The Reform of the Manualist Tradition

By the nineteenth century there were signs of change, in particular in Germany at the University of Tübingen. John Michael Sailer (1751 - 1832) and John Baptist Hirscher (1788 - 1865) not only explored the scriptural foundations of moral theology but also became conversant with both the rediscovered patristic corpus and also the contemporary developments in the nascent social sciences, in particular psychology.[21]

Although this leavening of the manualist tradition persisted in Germany, it was curtailed in its dissemination throughout the church by both the First Vatican Council and the *Syllabus of Errors*. Further, as Bernard Häring

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[20] cf. David Bohr: *Catholic Moral Tradition* (Huntingon, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990), 55ff

[21] T E O'Connell: *Principles for a Catholic Morality* (Revised Edn) (San Francisco: Harper, 1990), 20ff

points out, these less than manualist German manuals were not translated into any of the other European languages,[22] and consequently, did not have any influence beyond the German speaking theological world.

It was left to Häring himself, and his colleague, Joseph Fuchs, in the aftermath of the Second World War, with their appointment to their new teaching posts at the pontifical universities in Rome (the Alphonsianum and the Gregorianum respectively), to disseminate these new perspectives on moral theology. As Bernard Häring recounts:

> The newly elected Superior General of the Redemptorist Order, Leonard Buijs ... got in touch with me immediately after I finished my doctorate. He spoke with me about his plans to help overcome an ancient error in Catholic moral theology. For a long time the religious superiors and bishops had sent all of their prospective professors of moral theology to study canon law or both canon law and civil law in Rome. That served to confirm institutionally the legalism of Catholic moral theology. He envisioned a Theological faculty which would specialise in moral theology in its complete thematic breadth and theologico-philosophical depth in order to train authentic moral theologians and prepare them for their real task ... He placed great stock in getting a professor from a Tübingen school ....[23]

The reform continued in Germany. In the nineteenth thirties in Bonn, Fritz Tillman had further developed the scriptural basis of moral theology which inevitably led to its reintegration with systematic theology.[24] Other scriptural scholars such as Rudolf Schnackenburg and Ceslaus Spicq continued the reform and in doing so set the stage for the mandated renewal of moral theology at the Second Vatican Council.

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[22] B Häring: *Free and Faithful in Christ* Vol I, (Homebush: St Paul, 1979), 2nd Edn, 54
[23] Bernard Häring: *My Witness for the Church* (New York: Paulist, 1992), 31
[24] E McDonagh: *ibid*, 16

A number of the conciliar documents gave form to this renewal. *The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium/De Ecclesia, 21 November 1964)*[25] recognised the importance of Christian life for the theological agenda, as did the *Declaration on Religious Freedom (Dignitatis Humanae, 7 December 1965)*[26]. The most explicit reference is found in the *Decree on Priestly Formation (Optatam Totius, 28 October 1965)*[27] which reframes moral theology thus:

> Its [moral theology's] scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation of the faithful, and their obligation to bring forth fruit in charity for the life of the world.[28]

Bernard Häring again presents an 'inside' view:

> When in the next-to-last vote on priestly formation (*Optatam Totius)*, many Council Fathers demanded a clear prohibition of legalistic books on moral theology, the responsible commission asked me to try to deal with these requests. At first I presented my doubts about condemnations: for then one would have to carefully describe what one was condemning, and not much would be gained thereby. Thus I formulated the following constructive suggestion:
>
> > "Special care should be given to the perfecting of moral theology. Its scientific presentation should draw more fully on the teaching of Holy Scripture and should throw light upon the exalted vocation of the faithful in Christ and their mission to bear fruit in love for the life of the world" (No 16).
>
> The text was presented for its own vote and was almost unanimously approved.[29]

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[25] Reproduced in W Abbot (ed): *The Documents of Vatican II*, (Dublin: Chapman, 1966), 14
[26] *ibid*, 675
[27] *ibid*, 437
[28] *ibid*, 452 (*OT* 16)
[29] B Häring: *My Witness op. cit.*, 60

Optatam Totius, besides emphasising the urgency for the reframing and rethinking of moral theology, also pointed to the shift in the audience for moral theology, from clerical exclusivity to lay inclusivity, in sum a call to moral regeneration and spiritual orientation not simply for the clergy but for all the people of God.

Enda McDonagh has listed further 'fruits' of the Council in moral theology:

- The unity of moral and systematic theology;
- Its integration with the theology of the Christian life;
- The putting away of the manuals and their link with canon law;
- The new emphasis on moral agency and fundamental moral theology.

These fruits are seen as a result of the impact of several movements of renewal, namely the biblical, liturgical and ecumenical renewal and the movement of the theology of the laity.[30] The result of these movements was to make the manuals 'entirely irrelevant.'[31] However the recovery of Thomas' emphasis on virtue, and virtue ethics generally, would come later.

Given the importance within the manualist tradition of the concern for the distinction between mortal and venial sin, the relevant question here is how did the impact of the conciliar documents in particular, and the conciliar renewal of the church in general, affect the traditional dichotomy of mortal and venial sin? The emergence of the post-conciliar theory of the fundamental option as developed by Rahner, Häring *et alii* represented an important disjunction with the manualist tradition. The use of the

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[30] Enda McDonagh: 'Moral Theology: the Need for Renewal' *op cit.*, 15
[31] Enda McDonagh: *Invitation and Response op cit.*, vii

fundamental option was a clear attempt to resolve the perceived weaknesses in the post Tridentine dichotomy of mortal/venial sin.

The manualist understanding of the human person was dominated by an emphasis on the moral act. Further, moral choice was characterised by the application of a universal principle, the natural law, to the particular moral circumstance. Rahner developed a transcendental anthropology which included an awareness of the existential dimension of the moral circumstance of the human person. He called this a 'formal existential ethic' which was also a response to the Protestant initiative of situation ethics. Further, the post-Tridentine pre-conciliar disjunction between moral theology and other branches of theology was replaced by the attempt to ground moral theology in a new anthropology in the spiritual life of the believer, ie, Rahner's supernatural existential and fundamental option, where the extrinsicism of the manuals[32] gave way first to the intrinsicism of the *nouvelle théologie* and then to the mediating position of the supernatural existential. Although the manualist emphasis on moral act was superseded by a particular new emphasis on moral agency, ie, the supernatural existential and fundamental option, there was the possibility of another avenue of development. The recovery of the Thomist emphasis on virtue would be delayed or 'lagged' which would find its most complete expression in secular agent-based virtue ethics which made the "virtue, motivation or other internal states of the agent ethically fundamental."[33] The later chapters of this thesis will examine in detail Rahner's transcendental anthropology and his moral theology, but first, there is a

[32] cf. G. McCool: *A Rahner Reader op.cit.*, 185
[33] Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski: *Virtues of the Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 80

need to examine the origins of both the theory of fundamental option and of virtue theory.

2.4 Conclusion

The pre-conciliar manualist tradition in moral theology had its origins in a penitential system that was concerned with the enumeration of sins (and their relevant penances) and in particular with a concern for the distinction between mortal and venial sin. This preoccupation with moral acts, rather than moral agency, was displaced by the postconciliar reforms that emphasised moral agency within a context of spirituality, renewed biblical theology and fundamental theology. One of the important products of this reform was the emergence of the theory of fundamental option.

CHAPTER 3

THE PRE-HISTORY OF THE FUNDAMENTAL OPTION

Nemo repente fuit turpissimus

No one ever reached the depths of depravity all at once

Juvenal: *Satires* ii 83

* * * * *

Hier stehe ich. Ich kan nicht anders.

Got helffe mir. Amen.

Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise.

God help me. Amen.

Martin Luther
Apocryphal Speech at the Diet of Worms, 18 April, 1521
quoted in R Bainton: *Here I Stand*
(Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1990), 187

* * * * *

I used to think I was indecisive, now I'm not really sure

Anon

* * * * *

But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander.

Gospel according to St Matthew Ch 5 v 18 (NRSV)

* * * * *

3 THE 'PRE-HISTORY' OF THE FUNDAMENTAL OPTION

Rahner wrote explicitly of the origins of the fundamental option:

> the biblical and Augustinian concept of the heart, the concept of subjectivity in Kierkegaard, the notion of action in Blondel, shows understanding that there is such a basic act [*sic*, read fundamental option] of freedom and embraces and shapes the whole of human existence.[1]

What were the dimensions of these origins of the fundamental option and was Rahner's view of the origins complete and accurate?

3.1 The Biblical Foundations for the Fundamental Option

As Rahner noted, the biblical precedents for the fundamental option largely devolve upon the notion of the 'heart'. What was this notion of the 'heart'? The Hebrew term *leb* had the connotation of "the midst", innermost, or hidden part of anything."[2] As such it came to have the meaning of the seat of motives, will, emotion, passion, appetite, but most importantly, of understanding, thought processes, cognition and moral judgement (eg, Deut 6:5). It gained the dimension in biblical psychology of both corporate personality and awareness of personality.[3]

The New Testament term of *kardia* takes up these meanings and also expands them. The Gospel speaks of the right state of heart, of purity of

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[1] K. Rahner: "Theology of Freedom" *TI VI,* 186
[2] O.R. Brandon: "The Heart" in W.A. Elwell (ed) *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1990), 498
[3] *ibid*

heart (cf. Mt 5:8, 5:28, 15:29, 18:35, 22:37).[4] The Pauline epistles refer to the heart as the personality or inner life, as the seat of volition and also affectivity (cf. 1 Cor 14:25, Rom 2:5, 9:2),[5] in short as the "integrating centre of man [*sic*] as a rational, emotional, volitional being."[6] Further, there is an important moral dimension, which highlights the dichotomy of hardness or softness of heart. Hardness of heart reveals an obduracy to the divine will whereas softness of heart can be open to its reception. This divine appeal is addressed to the heart of the human person and is the *locus* for inward renewal and regeneration, ie, *metanoia*,[7] and takes us to the threshold of the theory of fundamental option.

Karl Rahner has not only recognised, but also adopted, this biblical notion of the heart in his systematic theology, even if at times it is attenuated.[8] For example, one of his extensions is an area that Rahner devoted considerable time to, the theology of the sacred heart. Nonetheless, Rahner has given us a useful summary of the notion of 'heart':

> a basic concept of primitive anthropology ("primordial word") which designates that single centre of the personal spirit's self control and psychosomatic autonomy which can only be reached asymptotically.[9]

Many of the other major proponents of the fundamental option have also perceived its basis to be in scripture. Bernard Häring agrees with Karl Rahner (in his collaboration with J. B. Metz) in relating the fundamental

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[4] *ibid*
[5] *ibid*
[6] J.D.G. Dunn: *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word, 1988), 100
[7] Brandon: *ibid*
[8] "Behold this Heart" *TI* III, 321
[9] CTD, 203

option to the "biblical vision of 'the heart of man'",[10] which does not refer to a person "withdrawn into interiority", but rather, "the inmost focal point where the person is sensitive and open to the other",[11] where there can be a choice for the other and others, or a choice for destruction and emptiness. Häring elaborates that where there is a fundamental option, there is a heart filled with the Holy Spirit (Ep. 5:18), but initially this heart of man is determined by his 'value centre' (Mt 6:21), in the context of the covenant with God and of conversion. Other commentators have produced variations on this theme:

- Franz Böckle argues for *Grundoption*[12] from a biblical-soteriological perspective, that faith in God's redemptive act in Jesus Christ gives to the fundamental option its 'basic ground and sense'.[13]

- Charles Curran explains the development of the fundamental option by Catholic theologians "relying heavily"[14] on biblical theology, and building on the biblical notion of sin, especially the Pauline doctrine of *Hamartia.*[15]

- Regan sees the biblical teaching on *metanoia* leading to an emphasis "on the totality of mans' posture before God (fundamental option) rather than on his individual choices."[16]

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[10] B. Häring: *Faithful and Free in Christ* Vol 1, 185ff
[11] *ibid.*
[12] Franz Böckle:*Fundamental Moral* (2nd Edn) (Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1978)
[13] cited in R. McCormick: *Notes on Moral Theology,* 75
[14] C. Curran: *New Perspectives in Moral Theology,* 397
[15] C. Curran: *A New Look at Christian Morality,* 205
[16] G.M. Regan: *New Trends in Moral Theology,* 42

Curiously there appears to be either ignorance of, or disinterest in, this biblical material on the part of theologians who have attempted to overturn or otherwise discount the fundamental option almost exclusively from a philosophical/theological perspective.

3.2 The Patristic Contribution

Rahner has referred to Augustine's concept of the heart but what was the wider patristic dimension of the precedents for fundamental option? In the patristic period the separation of doctrine and morals was indistinct. The Fathers did not ostensibly provide an extensive, systematic presentation of Christian ethics. Rather, far more immediate and practical concerns preoccupied them in their defence of the pursuit of the Christian life in the face of pagan opposition.[17] Although this lack of a formal moral theology means that the origins of the fundamental option are more obscure in the patristic period, nonetheless there are significant aspects of church life, nascent doctrine and patristic theological speculation that both build on the biblical foundation and prepare the way for the later developments of fundamental option.

First, the most visible aspect was that of conversion (cf. the biblical notion of *metanoia*). Given that in modern moral theology the connection between conversion and fundamental option is intimate yet imprecise (ref 8.7.6), this is even more the case with the patristic authors. For the potential convert, conversion, (or turning around, *epistrophé, conversio*), concentrated the mind wonderfully, (to invoke Dr. Johnson). Potential converts were only

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[17] cf. D. Bohr: *Catholic Moral Tradition* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1990), 44

too well aware of the harsh price of conversion, as a succession of savage Imperial persecutions only too tragically illustrated. This had the implication that conversion, in the era of the early church, could be seen, from a modern perspective, as a social fundamental option, as could its corollary, apostasy.

The second visible aspect was that of sacramental norm. Boundary setting had the other consequence that conversion, for the early Christian community became a ritualising, boundary setting conversion, ie, Baptism. This had the further consequence that the sacrament of Baptism (and also the Eucharist) provided the reference point for the regulative life of the early church. Baptism made possible the entry of the convert into the new community and also made possible for them the forgiveness of sin. Baptism washed away previous sin but the early church was then confronted with the dilemma of how to respond to post-baptismal serious sin. The *Shepherd of Hermas*, for example, is an early account of advocacy of harsh treatment of post-baptismal major sin.[18] It allows only one repentance after baptism. Like Constantine, many catechumens dealt with this dilemma by postponing baptism until the point of death.

The third visible aspect was the emergence of a penitential system and the problematic distinction between minor and serious sin. The rigorist approach of *Hermas* was accentuated by Tertullian, who although previously approving a second penance, adopted the Montanist stance of refusing a second chance for adulterers (he then came to refer to *Hermas* as the 'Shepherd of Adulterers'). Tertullian's stance has highlighted the

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[18] J. L. Womer: *Morality and Ethics in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 10

question of what constituted serious sin. In Acts 15 the Council of Jerusalem outlawed actions which were to be interpreted as major sins, viz. idolatory, murder and sexual immorality.[19] However a penitential system slowly developed to deal with these serious sins. First, adultery was tolerated (witness the toleration of *Hermas* for adultery). Next, idolatory became tolerated after the Decian persecution of 249 when Cyprian readmitted the lapsed after acts of penance.[20] Lastly, murder became tolerated in a marginal sense by the church when the Council of Ancyra (314CE) decreed that a murderer could become a penitent and receive the eucharist with the approach of execution. By the second century a nascent penitential system was extant, with the corollary that the church, in the form of the bishop, was seen as possessing penal authority[21] in the area of penance. The attempt to grapple with the problem of minor and major sin was evident, although the subleties of mortal and venial sin had not yet exercised opinion within the church. The implication of this for the origin of the fundamental option is that the evidence of the early church demonstrates that a sacrament, ie, baptism, could be seen as a fundamental option with the consequence that all serious sin was not to be tolerated. The question of toleration then became problematic but also swung on the question of what constituted serious sin. The solution was found in the delineation of serious sin by resolution of church councils, with all the problems that entailed.

The fourth visible feature was the theological contribution of the Cappadocians. Basil the Great wrote:

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[19] *ibid*, 11
[20] *ibid*
[21] cf. Mt16; 18

> There are in [the mind] two faculties, according to the view of those of us who believe in God: the evil and demonic, which draws us on to the apostasy of the demons; and the divine and the good, which brings us to the likeness of God.[22]

Gregory of Nyssa extended this dualist claim by stressing choosing in freedom: "the twofold direction of the movement of free choice..., towards temperance on the one hand, or towards licence on the other."[23] This dichotomy of the play of virtue in freedom was focussed in its origin on the human person, "The power of becoming bad [resided] in the will"[24], with the injunction that it was desirable to, "pray for the choice of good things to come to us from God."[25] Although it is not explicit, the Cappadocians are able to posit a dichotomy of ultimate good and evil, the resolution of which rested on the free choice of the human person, dependent on the will, resulting in virtue and ultimately the beatific vision, (or otherwise vice and Hades) and for which the intercession of God, as petitioned in prayer, was necessary.

The fifth visible feature is the contribution of Augustine. Charles Curran agrees with Rahner when he says the fundamental option is "definitely rooted" in the thought of Augustine.[26] However a conservative moral theologian such as William May, although not agreeing with all the ramifications of the doctine of fundamental option, would agree with Curran that Augustine's significant contribution to the understanding of sin, and indirectly fundamental option, is the definition of sin as the "turning

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[22] Basil: *Epistolae* 233.1
quoted in Jaroslav Pelikan: *Christianity and Classical Culture* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1993), 282
[23] Gregory of Nyssa: *Orationes de Beatitudinibus,* 2, quoted in Pelikan *op.cit.*, 283
[24] Gregory of Nyssa: *Contra Eunonium* I.92, quoted in Pelikan *op.cit.*, 283
[25] Gregory of Nyssa: *Homiliae in Orationem Dominicam* 4, quoted in Pelikan *op.cit.*, 283
[26] C. Curran: *A New Look at Christian Morality,* 204

away from God and turning towards the creature." *(aversio a Deo, conversio ad creaturam,* hereafter *aversio)*[27]. This is linked to the biblical concept of 'heart', in that a total commitment of the human person is required which ensures the freedom for good action. According to Augustine, "Change your heart and your work will be changed."[28] There is a decided volitional aspect to this. Bernard Häring sees Augustine as positing a fundamental option for either self-giving love (*dilectio*), or the converse of self-centred love, with the added volitional consideration (according to Augustine) that, "The right will is good love; perverted will is an evil love."[29]

Augustine also contributed to the laying of the groundwork for another precursor of the fundamental option, that is the notion of the ultimate end *(finis ultimus)* of the human person. Before Augustine, the *Shepherd of Hermas* had spoken of the duty of the person to strive for "the world to come."[30] Augustine, in his Platonist perspective developed the notion of *Hermas*. "We are not Christians in order to seek earthly happiness; rogues and criminals often enjoy this. We are Christians for the sake of another kind of happiness, a happiness that we receive when this present life is completely over."[31] So, Augustine would have it that the end of the human person is in the hereafter but what is the exact nature of this end? The life to come is "life under God, life with God, life from God ... God himself is life."[32] If God is the end of the human person, what does this mean? God

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[27] St Augustine: *De Libero Arbitrio*, 2:53 quoted in W. May: *An Introduction to Moral Theology* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994), 159
[28] St. Augustine: *Sermo* 72, 4 PL 38, 468 quoted in B. Häring: *Free and Faithful in Christ op.cit,* 187
[29] St. Augustine: *City of God*, Bk 14 Ch. 7 PL 41, 410, quoted in Häring *op.cit,* 187
[30] Vis IV, 3, 5; cf 2, 8
[31] *En. In Ps.* 62 n.6 quoted in K. Hörman: *Moral Theology* (London: Burns and Oates, 1961), 15
[32] *Sermo* 297, c.5, n.8, quoted in Hörman *ibid*

as the end of the human person *ipso facto* provides for the complete happiness of the human person, the complete satisfaction of the person's desire for happiness.

> He is the end of our desires, is seen without end, is loved without wearying, praised without ceasing[33]... there we are so perfected that no greater perfection is possible and all that we need is there given us.[34]

Augustine's Platonism permeated his approach to both the *aversio* and the fundamental option. The further development of these precursors of the fundamental option (and others) was to rest with Thomas Aquinas and his new Aristotelian/Platonist synthesis.

3.3 The Thomist Contribution

Although Rahner saw the most obvious precedents for the fundamental option in the thought of Augustine,[35] it is with Aquinas, building on the work of Augustine, that the latency and potentiality of the fundamental option within Christian thought becomes more obvious.[36]

This potentiality for the fundamental option has been seen largely in four different areas of Aquinas' thought, first, the *finis ultimus*, ie, final (or last or ultimate) end (or goal or purpose), second, the distinction between mortal and venial sin, third, the *aversio a deo*, ie, the turning away from God, and fourth, the role of the heart.

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[33] *City of God*, 22, c.30, n.1
[34] *In Joann.* Tr 63, n.1, quoted in Hörman *ibid*
[35] "Theology of Freedom", *op.cit.*, 186
[36] cf. J. Mahoney: *The Making of Moral Theology, op.cit.*, 32

3.3.1 The *Finis Ultimus*

The *finis ultimus* has received considerable attention in the literature as the precursor of the fundamental option, but significantly, not in the Rahnerian literature. It represents, along with transcendental freedom and biblical *metanoia* one of the three prevalent approaches to fundamental option. The Rahnerian approach is not from *finis ultimus* but from transcendental freedom, with references to *metanoia*. However, in order to understand all the dimensions of theories of fundamental option it is necessary to consider briefly the *finis ultimus*. What exactly is the *finis ultimus*? To begin, Thomas' debt to Aristotelian philosophy is only too evident in his moral theology with its teleological perspective. The *finis ultimus* can be perceived as the starting point of Thomas' moral theology insofar as, like Aristotle, he sees ethics as a search for happiness, and this happiness is found in the *telos*. In order to achieve happiness the human person must fulfill their purpose or *finis ultimus*. However, whereas Aristotle argued for a natural eudaimonianism (or a morality of achieving happiness (and virtue) by fulfilling one's natural capacities, or end), Aquinas deepens this by arguing for a supernatural end for humanity. In short, human nature has its ultimate end in God. What exactly is this ultimate end in God? He argues that the only acts which can be considered moral acts are those which proceed from the human person who is ultimately a rational and free being. These acts proceed in particular from the human will, the human will conditioned in knowledge and freedom, and are directed to some goal. The goal or objects of these acts is the good. There is always some goal for a human act which is the ultimate explanation of that act. However the particular end of a human act cannot give perfection, fulfillment or satisfaction to the human will which is orientated to the universal good and

is only fully satisfied, fulfilled and perfected in the universal good. This perfection, satisfaction and fulfilment is beatitude or happiness. In short, the *finis ultimus* is *beatitudo* (beatitude). This *beatitudo* is the beatific vision of God[37] (cf. 1 Jn 3:2, 1 Jn 4:16, 2 Pet 1:4). Following this teleological and eudaemonological understanding of the human person, and under the operation of the human will as it is set towards the *finis ultimus*, it is precisely within this context of the "dynamic and innate orientation of the will"[38] that the human person makes particular choices. The connection between *finis ultimus* and fundamental option appears to be quite marked, insofar as there is a dynamic of the human person, oriented to a fundamental end of goodness that, in freedom and knowledge, influences the making of particular choices.

Although this summary of the *finis ultimus* may attest to its plausibility, the attempt to understand the *finis ultimus* is not plain sailing and has been described as "one of the most difficult issues in Aquinas' moral theory."[39] However, because of its importance as a precursor to the fundamental option it is necessary to examine briefly difficulties raised by the *finis ultimus*.

Frederick Copleston argues that Aquinas' claim that the perfect happiness of the human person rests in the *beatitudo*, in the vision of God "raises very difficult problems".[40] Copleston refers to one approach where Aquinas' approach to the *finis ultimus* is assimilated to that of Aristotle, i.e., it is

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[37] cf. *ST Ia IIae*, Q1-5 also
F. Copleston: *A History of Philosophy* Vol 2 part II (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 119-120
E. J. Gratsch: *Aquinas' Summa* (New York: Alba, 1985), 75
[38] F. Copleston: *Aquinas* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1982), 202
[39] J. Porter: *The Recovery of Virtue* (London: SPCK, 1994), 72
[40] F. Copleston: *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 120

naturalist insofar as it is consistent with Christian revelation. However, what is at variance with the view is the fact that not only does Aquinas refer to the vision of God in the accepted sense but he also refers to a *desiderium naturale* (natural desire) for this vision.[41]

Copleston also puts the difficulty that the *desiderium naturale* may imply that the human person has an exclusively natural desire for the beatific vision and so compromise the gratuity of the supernatural order. However it may be that the word natural is used in distinction to "unnatural" rather than supernatural. Copleston regards this view as arbitrary[42] and instead presses his case that the human person is called to a supernatural end (the *finis ultimus*) with the corollary that "the natural movement of the human intellect towards truth is *de facto* the vision of God ... because *de facto* the only end of man [*sic*] is a supernatural end."[43] This reinforces the theological perspective of Aquinas' approach, over the philosophical.

Jean Porter is more expansive in her critique.[44] The problem for Porter is that for Thomas' approach to the *finis ultimus* there is a tension between on the one hand, *utrum homo ordinet omnia in ultimum finem* (whether there is an overriding purpose in all that the human person does),[45] ie, as Porter renders it "every human action is aimed, directly or indirectly, at the attainment or preservation of some one good which the agent believes will perfect him as a human being, that is, render him happy."[46] On the other hand *utrum [beatitudo consistat] in aliquo bono creato* (whether [happiness

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[41] Copleston: *ibid*
[42] *ibid*
[43] *ibid,* 122
[44] Porter *ibid*
[45] ST Ia IIae, Q1, A6 *ibid,* 2, 3
[46] J. Porter *ibid*

lies] in any created value)[47], ie, as Porter would have it "there is one end, and one only, in which human happiness truly can be found."[48] Porter argues that although Thomas has consolidated these two queries, they are in reality independent.

Porter has done us all the singular service of teasing out the implications of the *finis ultimus*. Are these implications compatible with the fundamental option? The answer is yes. If Thomas sees the *finis ultimus* as the dynamic of the human person, oriented to a final end of goodness, conditioned in freedom and knowledge, which thereby influences our making particular choices, then Porter has developed this with the notion of a social *finis ultimus*, achieved by choice in role playing and influenced by narrative lives. Porter has provided a valuable *entrée* to the theory of the social fundamental option, however it is an *entrée* seemingly ignored by that most influential of (Transcendental) Thomists, Karl Rahner.

3.3.2 The Distinction between Mortal and Venial Sin

Jacques Maritain argued that the fundamental option was 'latent' in Aquinas explanation of the distinction between mortal and venial sin.[49] Thomas' explanation, which has been claimed to be the clearest and fullest explanation available,[50] has it that the main principle of the moral life of the human person is love, in particular love of God, with the further consideration that through love of God we are oriented to God as our *finis*

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[47] ST Ia IIae, Q2, A8 *ibid,* 30, 31
[48] Porter *ibid,* 72
[49] *ST Ia Iiae,* Q88, A1 & A2
[50] *ST Ia IIae,* Q88, A1 & A2, cf. J. Mahoney: *the Making of Moral Theology,* 32, May: *An Introduction to Moral Theology* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994), 167

ultimus. If this love is vitiated there is no comparable influence **within** the person to alleviate the sin. In short, mortal sin overturns love which is the *animae vita*, the life of the soul.[51] If this life of the soul is destroyed, only God can restore it. However Thomas further argues that this life of the soul is not destroyed by only **some** sinful acts. This implies that the person has access to a healing principle, which can reorder his life. This principle is none other than love itself. This aspect of the pre-eminence of love in the life of the soul and its impact on the distinction between mortal and venial sin is important as a precursor to the fundamental option, because it posits a principle **within** the human person, a principle that does not rely on the traditional three conditions for mortal sin, ie, grave matter, full consent of the will and sufficient reflection,[52] but a principle that is exclusively inward.

3.3.3 The *Aversio a Deo*

The third precursor to the fundamental option in Thomas' thought is the *aversio a Deo, conversio ad creaturam*, the turning away from God, the turning to the self. One of the main contemporary proponents of fundamental option, Bernard Häring, links the fundamental option to the *aversio*, which he sees as a "grievous act",[53] requiring the "possibility of basic identity through experience, reflection, knowledge and freedom."[54] A critic of the fundamental option, William May, refers to the *aversio* in the following way that, curiously, seems to strengthen its connexion to the fundamental option:

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[51] *ST IIIa*, Q65, A4c
[52] *ST Ia IIae*, Q88, A2 & A6
[53] B. Häring: *Free and Faithful in Christ, op.cit.*, 188
[54] *ibid.*

> St Thomas held that even the unbaptised are able, by virtue of their power of self determining free choice and with the help of God's unfailing grace, to accept God and his law of love or to repudiate Him and his law in their first fully human act of self determining free choice.[55]

Although May made this comment in the context of the operation of conscience it does illustrate strikingly the role of freedom and the *aversio*.

As noted earlier (ref. 3.2), Augustine was the first to develop the *aversio*, but it was developed within his Platonist framework, with the consequence that Augustine appeared to be unappreciative of the worth of created goods such as knowledge and beauty, regarding them as simply means to the *finis ultimus*, i.e., God, whereas Aquinas regarded them as 'ends' or points of existence subordinate to the *finis ultimus*,[56] and thereby appreciated their intrinsic worth. The relevance of this is that the *aversio* is not simply the turning away from God and towards the creature, it is also, *pace* Augustine, an **absolute** turning toward the creature.[57]

Thomas argues that the human person does not act in an evil way for the sake of evil itself but because of some appealing good.[58] The *aversio*, the turning from God is not the intention of the sinner but simply a byproduct, a privative aspect, an unintended consequence of self gratification. The point of the *aversio* for the fundamental option is that the choice made by the human person can be compatible with God's purpose and ought to be compatible.[59] So the *aversio*, in its privative aspect, is a back-door entry to

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[55] W. May: *An Introduction to Moral Theology, op.cit.*, 161 cf. *ST Ia IIae*, Q89, A6
[56] cf. *ST* Ia IIae, Q94, A2, also *Gaudium et Spes nn* 38-39, May, *op.cit.*, 162
[57] May, *ibid*
[58] *ST Ia IIae*, Q72, cf. May, *ibid*, 163
[59] May, *ibid*

evil, but an entry that has consequences for fundamental option even if these consequences for the fundamental option were outside the purview of Aquinas.

3.3.4 The Role of the Heart

Some have seen a fourth precursor of the fundamental option in Aquinas, that of the old biblical and Augustinian notion of the 'heart' of the human person.[60] The *Summa*[61] has been seen as outlining the first fully human act of self determination, the "basic or 'first' spiritual act of man [*sic*] is the weighty act, a total self disposal."[62] Rahner's colleague, Bernard Häring, sees this as constituting the fundamental option,[63] which is endorsed by Jacques Maritain with the extension that the first act "is so great that in later life it will be reached only seldom."[64] Now Häring sees the *locus* of this fundamental option to be within the 'heart' of the human person. It is developed in the scholastics, in particular Abelard and Bonaventure, who share with Aquinas the great theological vision which emphasised the fundamental option of the human heart. This vision competed with the legalist approach of the canonists who were "more concerned for a precise external control than for discernment about profound attitudes of the heart of man."[65] This dichotomy, (although not strictly in these terms) surfaces in the contemporary debate.

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[60] cf. Bernard Häring: *Free and Faithful in Christ op.cit,* Vol 1, 185ff
[61] *ST Ia Iiae,* Q89, A6
[62] B. Häring: *op.cit.*, 187
[63] *ibid,* 188
[64] *ibid,* 220, n.57
[65] B. Häring: *Sin in the Secular Age,* 167

By way of aside, despite their biblical orientation, the Reformers seemed to contribute little, if anything, to the pre history of the fundamental option and this is, in itself, a perplexing phenomenon which will be discussed at 8.5.2 (*Nulla Prima Optio Extra Ecclesiam Romanam* - Why is the fundamental option confined to Roman Catholic Theology?). However, the theory of fundamental option has been seen as going back to the Enlightenment figure of Kant (and possibly Descartes), with the import that it is no accident that Rahner is referred to as a 'transcendental Thomist' in his effort to combine Thomist and Kantian approaches with particular reference to the question of the meaning of personhood, in particular, interiority (and moral agency).[66]

3.4 Kierkegaard and Choosing in Subjectivity

Rahner specifically cites Kierkegaard as one of the progenitors of fundamental option, in particular with his notion of subjectivity.[67] In addition, Kierkegaard is claimed as one of the voices of post-modernity. So, the figure that looms large out of the post-Enlightenment mists in fundamental option theory is Soren Kierkegaard, but what is his notion of subjectivity? Although he dismissed his own work as 'a bit of cinnamon',[68] that is as a corrective (ostensibly to the Hegelianism of which he had such a low opinion), his legacy has been bequeathed to both Christian and secular thought, to both Barth and Sartre and also to those straddling both traditions such as Martin Heidegger. Given Kierkegaard's standing, it is even more significant for the present purposes of understanding the pre-history of the fundamental option when the comment is made that "in Kierkegaard, choice

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[66] T.E. O'Connell: *Principles for a Catholic Morality op.cit.*, 264
[67] *TI VI*, 186
[68] cf. Colin Brown: *Philosophy and The Christian Faith* (Leicester: IVP, 1968), 131

or decision becomes highlighted as the most important feature of human existence"[69]. Choosing becomes the *entrée* for subjectivity. In his writings Kierkegaard continuously stresses the need for choosing in subjectivity. For example, in his correspondence he writes:

> My Friend,
>
> What so often I have said to you I say now once again, or rather I shout it at you:
>
> Either/or! .... [There follows a solemn discourse on the vital importance of resolute and decisive choice]
>
> [Editor's comments] ...
>
> For me the moment of choice has the utmost seriousness ...
>
> The personality is already interested in the choice before a man chooses, and when one defers the choice, the personality chooses unwittingly, or rather the choice is made by the obscure forces within it."[70]

Kierkegaard also argues:

> But what is it I choose? Is it this thing or that? No, for I choose absolutely, and the absoluteness of my choice is expressed precisely by the fact that I have not chosen to choose this or that. I choose the absolute. And what is the absolute? It is I myself in my eternal validity. Anything else but myself I never can choose as the absolute, for if I choose something else, I choose it as a finite thing and so do not choose it absolutely.[71]

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[69] D. Allen: *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (London: SCM, 1985), 245

[70] Soren Kierkegaard: *Samlede Vaerker* (Works) Vol II pp.171-183 ed A.B. Drachmann et.al. Copenhagen 2nd Edition 1920-36, quoted by W. Lowrie: *Kierkegaard* Vol 1, 79-84 (New York: Harper, 1962), (or ed. 1938)

[71] S. Kierkegaard: *Either/or* Vol II trans. W. Lowrie (Princeton: U.P., 1974) (Org edn. 1959), 218 (Pseudonymous editor Victor Eremita, author Judge Wilhelm 1843)

These excerpts indicate the significance and centrality of choosing one's self absolutely for Kierkegaard. But it needs to be quickly pointed out that this significance of choosing was integrated with another aspect of Kierkegaard's thought, not only his notion of subjectivity or subjective truth, but also his delineation of 'spheres' or 'stages' of existence, ie, the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious. Further, they all pointed to a role for ethics that was beyond the normative, but rather dependent on faith, and a significance of choosing in subjectivity that was beyond good or evil but rather good and evil or indifference.

However, it must be said immediately that Kierkegaard would claim that there is not so much ethics as ethical tasks. He evinces antipathy to all abstract ethical discussion by dismissing naturalistic and positivistic ethics.[72] "All is lost for ethics, and it has contributed to the loss of all."[73]

He breaks with ethics because ethics cannot answer the questions he poses, ie, paradoxes. However, it can be argued that Kierkegaard attempts to find a new basis for ethics, not within natural theology or metaphysics but within the nature of man seeking existence, the existential imperative. The human person has been forced by despair to choose, because every thing in the aesthetic sphere has lost its value. When the decision is taken for committment, there must be a point of committment. This cannot be external, as all externals of the aesthetic sphere are valueless. It must be inward, one's own self, the only absolute left, not an ideal self, but the only self which for the person is actually existent

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[72] cf. *The Concept of Dread - A Simple Psychological Deliberation Oriented in the Direction of the Dogmatic Problem of Original Sin* trans. W. Lowrie (Pseudonymous Author Vigilious Haufneinsis) (Oxford: U.P., 1946), 15-18

[73] *ibid,* 17

> but I do not create myself, I choose myself. Therefore while nature is created out of nothing, while I myself as an individual personality am created out of nothing, as a free spirit I am born of the principle of contradiction or born of the fact that I choose myself.[74]

For Kierkegaard, ethics inevitably arises from inwardness, from the depths of the person whose end is in itself. His ethics is existential, and is confronted by life itself in a process of conflict of universals. There are universals of duty to family, society and conscience. This conflict of universals and its attendent moral tension undermine the person's sense of ethics, but further, there is the conflict of ultimate universals. The new total committment within this ethical sphere has brought with it a sense of right and wrong with attendant feelings of guilt or moral superiority. In short the person is consumed yet again by despair because of constant self scrutiny and self judgement.

However the perception of virtue which is sought is beyond the self and there is also the recognition that if individuality is asserted there is a sense of sin because of deviation from the universal, whereas if individuality is not asserted there is the sense of not manifesting oneself. The person becomes convinced that he needs virtue, ie, his own notion of the capacity to be ethical but Kierkegaard refutes this, rather what is needed is the virtue of faith. The exercise of faith provides the transition from the sphere of ethics to the religious sphere.

Within the religious sphere, Religiousness A is a general, 'natural' religiosity whereas Religiousness B is true Christianity with the offensive

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[74] *Either/or* Vol II *op.cit.*, 220

paradox of the God man at its centre. Kierkegaard attacks Religiousness A because it is the dark religion of the person in the street, of the natural and supernatural which brings with it a sufficiency and totality which distracts too easily the person into illusions about God and themselves.

By contrast, Religiousness B is the 'leap over the ditch', the suicidal leap across the threshold of guilt and moral despair by means of faith. Faith is an act of will, the ultimate act of volition. Faith leads to a suspension, not a denial of ethics. Kierkegaard's example of Abraham in Genesis 22ff demonstrates faith as absolute trust. Kierkegaard pursues this question of trust and sees the ultimate *telos* as belief and trust to an absolute degree as evoked and sustained by the God-man.

> I, Johannes Climacus .... have heard tell of a highest good in prospect which is called an eternal blessedness, and that Christianity will bestow this upon me on condition of adhering to it....[75]

What does Kierkegaard's thought contribute to the pre-history of the fundamental option? It can be seen that Kierkegaard places subjectivity and choosing at the centre of human existence, that choosing in subjectivity, although inclined to a normative ethics, supplants normative ethics. Further, the virtue of faith when allied with love and hope is taken up in this movement of existential decision, and provides a link with this precursor of fundamental option, subjectivity.

From the perspective of the late twentieth century and its engagement with post-modernism, it is obvious that Kierkegaard supplies many of the components for our understanding of fundamental option even if it is

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[75] *Concluding Unscientific Postscript, op.cit.*, 545

uncertain whether there is in fact a Kierkegaardian fundamental option. This is not surprising as the fundamental option is overwhelmingly a product of Roman Catholic moral and fundamental theology. However another of the early Catholic advocates of fundamental option in addition to Rahner was Bernard Häring, who like Rahner gives considerable importance to the post-Enlightenment figure of Kierkegaard, in particular his work *Stages on Life's Way.*[76] Häring sees Kierkegaard as an essentially modern figure closely related in his thought to modern depth psychologists such as Erik Erikson, where the emphasis is on the dynamic development of the subject and adherence to a predominant scale of value, which has an underlying affinity with the fundamental option.

3.5 Blondel and the Twentieth Century

Kierkegaard has been seen as the herald of twentieth century theology and also as a harbinger of post-modernism. Kierkegaard influenced Karl Rahner directly[77], but also indirectly through the work of Maurice Blondel, Joseph Maréchal,[78] and Martin Heidegger. If Heidegger's existentialism influenced Rahner's metaphysics, then Blondel's philosophy influenced directly Rahner's approach to the fundamental option.[79] How so? Rahner refers to the notion of action in Blondel.[80] Blondel was concerned with action and will, in particular with the 'willed wills' terms, the possible objects (of human concrete choices).[81] This close scrutiny of the dialectic

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[76] B. Häring: *Free & Faithful in Christ* Vol 1, 179
[77] cf. "Theology of Freedom" *TI VI,* 186
[78] cf. Joseph Fuchs: "Good Acts and Good Persons" in John Wilkins (ed): *Considering Veritatis Splendor* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 21
[79] K. Rahner: *Theology of Freedom, ibid*
[80] "Theology of Freedom", *TI VI,* 186
[81] G. McCool: *From Unity to Pluralism* (New York: Fordham U P., 1992), 44

of the will, according to Blondel, made the human person confront the possibility of an unavoidable 'free option'.[82] It has been argued that Blondel posits that the human person

> can choose to open himself in reverent humility to a possible supernatural revelation or he can deliberately refuse to do so. In the latter case, his negative 'option' condemns him to utter frustration in his quest for life's meaning.[83]

Blondel's approach was the linking of fundamental option to supernatural order and could be construed as a metaphysical fundamental option, but there was the inevitable moral dimension to it.[84] Its importance for Rahner becomes obvious in that Rahner's concept of fundamental option was linked to his well known concept of supernatural existential which was in turn derived from his metaphysic of knowledge and theology of grace. Rahner's debt to Blondel (via Maréchal) is obvious, however the full-blooded development of the fundamental option would have to wait for the post-conciliar *aggiorniamento*.

A curious feature of the discussion up to this point is that although Blondel used the term 'free option', nowhere has the term 'fundamental option' surfaced. It is only with the early part of this century that theologians start to use a terminology which approximates to that of fundamental option. O'Connell claims that the 'general understanding'[85] of fundamental option can be traced back as far as 1922 to German theologians, in particular D. von Hildebrand and his *Sittlichkeit und ethische Werterkenntis*. He also

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[82] *ibid*
[83] *ibid*
[84] cf. W. Shepherd: *op.cit.* 61ff
[85] T.E. O'Connell: *Principles for a Catholic Morality,* Second Edition (New York: Harper, 1990), 264

claims that it entered the manual tradition with Joseph Fuchs and his *Theologia Moralis Generalis*, and provides a point of contact with the dramatic appropriation and development of the theory in the post-conciliar texts. The term itself, "fundamental option", according to O'Connell, has its origins in the German term *Grundentscheidung* or "basic choice", and was coined by a translator rendering Karl Rahner's reference to *Grundentscheidung* into French as *option fondamentale*.[86]

3.6. Conclusion

Although the theory of fundamental option emerges in the post-conciliar period as one response to the manualist tradition, there have been many precedents in the history of Christian thought. The fundamental option can be seen in the biblical concept of 'heart', which is the seat of cognition, volition and affectivity that is also the *locus* of *metanoia* in the context of *hamartia* and soteriology. The Church fathers provided more obscure precedents. With the development of a penitential system and the fixing of the administration of the sacraments, the distinction between mortal and venial sin emerged and also the foundations of manualist moral theology. Nonetheless, other developments contributed to the purcursors of the fundamental option. The Cappadocians provided a distinction between the two faculties of good and evil and the attendant decision in freedom for or against good/evil with its origin in virtue. Augustine also provided precedents with the articulation of the *finis ultimus* and also the *aversio*.

[86] O'Connell: *op.cit.*, 264, cf. "Theology of Freedom" *TI VI passim.*

Aquinas took over many of these precedents, in particular the 'heart', *aversio*, and *finis ultimus*, and as such provides a foundation for the later development of fundamental option theory. By contrast, Karl Rahner appears indifferent to some of these precursors, notably *finis ultimus*. Kierkegaard provided a later contribution with his notion of choosing in subjectivity. Kierkegaard's volitional approach was echoed by Blondel. The post-conciliar emergence of the fundamental option was cemented in place by several papal documents, which also served to highlight some of the more controversial aspects of fundamental option theory.

CHAPTER 4

VIRTUE ETHICS - THE CLASSICAL HERITAGE AND ITS RECOVERY

For the virtues, however conceived, always must stand in some determinate relationship to the passions, and any cogent account of the virtues requires at its foundation a cogent account of the passions and their relationship to reason.

Alasdair MacIntyre
Revisions- changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy
(Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1983), 9

* * * * *

What is to preserve private virtue, the only security of public freedom and universal happiness?

Mary Wollstonecraft: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
(London, 1891), xxix

* * * * *

Fatal human malice is the staple of narrators, original sin the mother fluid of historians. But it is a risky enterprise to have to write of virtue.

Thomas Keneally: *Schindler's Ark* (Sevenoaks, 1983), 1

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4 VIRTUE ETHICS - THE CLASSICAL HERITAGE AND ITS RECOVERY

4.1 The Classical Heritage - Introduction

Karl Rahner described himself as a Thomist, and as such was aware of the place of virtue in Thomist theology. He described virtue as

> "any perfectly developed capacity of man's spiritual soul, or the development itself. There can therefore be virtue, for example in the domain of cognition; intellectual virtues. In the narrower sense, virtue is the power (ability, skill, facility) to realise moral good and especially to do it joyfully and perseveringly even against inner and outer obstacles at the heart of sacrifice."[1]

With regard to Rahner and his understanding of virtue, the question needs to be addressed, how does it square with the understanding of virtue in the present post-modernist recovery of virtue ethics?

In order to answer this question we need to begin with a brief review of the classical heritage of virtue, since it is "impossible to understand modern virtue theory without some understanding of the history of ethics."[2] This review will particularly focus on the teleological Aristotelian/Thomist understanding of virtue, especially with regard to the understanding of the passions and *hexis/habitus.*

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[1] K Rahner: *Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 1794
[2] Greg Pence: "Virtue Theory" in P. Singer (ed) *A Companion to Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 251

Virtue ethics was the ethical theory of antiquity *par excellence.* It has been remarked that this tradition of antiquity gave the virtues "an iconography in the shape of glamorous young ladies who somehow fail to fit the concepts of modern society."[3] Modernity had tended to see them as "quarrelsome, toothless old hags."[4] Certainly, for modernity, virtue ethics had lost the centrality and intensity it once had. The very understanding of virtue had been circumscribed from meaning moral excellence to temperance, abstinence, or even joyless living.[5] The recovery of virtue in postmodernity has altered this perception significantly, but what was this classical heritage of virtue?

All of the principal writers of antiquity on ethics took up the question of 'what is virtue?' but their answers produced a coherent diversity which in part has been inherited by present day virtue ethics. They dealt with such questions as, is virtue:

- necessary to the attainment of an ideal form of human existence or happiness?
- the possession of a particular knowledge?
- obeying an inner law? [6]

Although Socrates and Plato, provide the *entrée* to Hellenistic virtue it is the Aristotelian account of the virtues that "decisively constitutes the classical tradition as a tradition of moral thought".[7]

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[3] A. Moser & B. Leers: *Moral Theology* (London: Burns & Oates, 1990), 153
[4] Max Scheler, quoted in A. Moser & B. Leers, *ibid*
[5] John Oerstele: Introduction to Aquinas' *Treatise on the Virtues* (Notre Dame: U.P., 1984), xiii
[6] cf. W. D. Hudson: *New Studies in Ethics* Vol 1 (London: Macmillan, 1974), vii
also W.J. Prior: Virtue and Knowledge (London: Routledge, 1991), 4
[7] Alasdair MacIntyre: *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1992), 147

It has been argued that this tradition:

> always uses the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* as key texts, when it can, but it never surrenders itself wholly to Aristotle. For it is a tradition which always sets itself in a relationship of dialogue with Aristotle, rather than in any relationship of simple assent.[8]

4.2 Aristotle and the Bag of Virtues

It is ironic that, in 1958, when Elizabeth Anscombe was launching the offensive for the recovery of (Aristotelian) virtue and for an adequate philosophy of psychology, a young American psychologist, Lawrence Kohlberg (1927-87) completed his dissertation at the University of Chicago which "laid the foundations for what has been the dominant program in moral psychology for the last thirty years,"[9] foundations which are at variance to the recovery of virtue theory in philosophical circles. Kohlberg had been scathing of Aristotelian virtue, describing it as the "bag of virtues" and explicitly rejecting the view that the human person was divided into "cognitive abilities, passions or motives, and traits of character,"[10] in stark contrast to the importance given to the role of emotion in the philosophical recovery of virtue. However he did not entirely escape the hold of virtue theory. He saw virtue as one and "the name of this ideal form is justice."[11] Was Kohlberg correct in his view of virtue? What was (is) Aristotelian virtue?

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[8] *ibid*
[9] Owen Flanagan: *Varieties of Moral Personality* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 182
[10] *ibid*, 183
[11] *ibid*, L. Kohlberg: *Essays on Moral Development Vol 1 The Philosophy of Moral Development* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 30-31

Aristotle (384 - 322), Plato's greatest pupil and in a sense his greatest rival, undoubtedly exceeds him in contemporary influence. Raimond Gaita has remarked that "contemporary moral philosophy is marked by an Aristotelian revival, not only amongst scholars but amongst moral philosophers generally"[12] *pace* Lawrence Kohlberg. However, Aristotle has provided an ethical *corpus* that does not fit easily in to modern ethical categories. It has the semblance of a postmodern pluralist *cachet* to it. As Stanley Hauerwas observes "His ethics is at once teleological and deontological, naturalistic and non-cognitivist, subjectivistic and objectivistic."[13] Further, as Hauerwas again observes, Aristotle's approach to ethics is not the modern concern of whether an **action** is good or bad, but rather how the **agent**, through his actions becomes good or bad.[14] This important perspective for virtue ethics of moral agency will be examined in further detail but first it is important to present a brief exposition of the received wisdom on Aristotelian virtue.

What was Aristotle's definition of virtue? In the NE, Aristotle writes that the virtue (*areté*) of a human person is "the state of character which makes a man [*sic*] good and causes him to do his own work well."[15] The definition contains three useful components

- state of character (*hexis*);
- action;

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[12] Raimond Gaita: *Good and Evil* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 83
[13] Stanley Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1985), 36
[14] *ibid* 37
[15] NE 2.6.1107A

- the morally good.

We will touch on some of these components shortly but first we need to understand how the received wisdom derives Aristotelian virtue from Aristotle's theory of the identity of the human person.

4.2.1 Aristotelian Anthropology

Aristotle was Platonist in such respects as the designation of virtues and vices, however he deviated from his mentor at many points, most notably with regard to the theory of forms. He rejected Plato's approach of the influence of universal ideas and instead began with a concern for the realisation of the ends of the human person, the moral agent. Like all other biological forms of life, the human person has a function to fulfill or an end to achieve. Further, Aristotle's view of the soul differed from Plato's. The form had immanence, it is **in** particular things. The soul has an internal orientation towards its *telos* of the body. Contrary to Plato, who argued that the human person's goal is the mastering of the knowledge of the idea of the Good, Aristotle argued that the good was integral to the human person, that it could be retrieved by understanding the essential nature of the human person and was achieved through proper ordering of everyday life. In short Aristotle's approach to ethics posited a natural teleology located within the functions of the soul.

What was this *telos*, this end for the human person? At the end of the *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle briefly and cryptically refers to the end of man as the contemplation of God. We will meet this again with Aquinas, but for our present purposes, Aristotle gives another end for the human person.

Aristotle's second answer was *Eudaimonia*, which is variously translated as blessedness, happiness, prosperity, the state of being well and doing well.[16] *Eudaimonia* is an activity of the soul. It is the chief human good and is linked to human functioning. If this human functioning follows a principle of reason then this activity of soul is in accordance with virtue. *Eudaimonia*, as the *telos* of the human person, consists not just of virtue but in activity in the human soul according to virtue. In short, *Eudaimonia* is the fulfillment of the distinctive, unique function of the human person and is the activity of the human soul in excellence or virtue (*areté*).

This leads to the question, what did Aristotle understand by the human soul? For Plato, body and soul are two entities, whereas for Aristotle the soul is the form of the body's matter. It approximates to what we would refer today as the personality,[17] it refers to the total person. It has three functions, the vegetative, (responsible for growth and reproduction), the animal (responsible for perception and movement) and the human function (responsible for feeling and thinking). On the basis of these functions Aristotle advanced a bipartite division of the soul, unlike Plato's tripartite division. The soul has a rational and irrational part. (Perhaps rational and non-rational is a better description. As will become obvious later, the irrational part is not hostile to the rational part).

The non-rational part of the soul is linked to the vegetative and animal (or appetitive) functions. The rational part of the soul is linked to the human function, in particular, thinking. To each of these parts there correspond virtues, (to the rational part the intellectual virtues and to the non-rational

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[16] cf. MacIntyre *op.cit.* 146
[17] MacIntyre, Alasdair: *A Short History of Ethics* (New York: MacMillan, 1966), 64

part the moral virtues). According to the received wisdom on Aristotle, the conflict between these rational and non-rational parts provides the grist for Aristotle's ethics. The soul functions to obtain its end of happiness by conforming to reason, ie, the rational part attempts to control or order the non-rational part of the soul. Aristotelian virtue is seen in the received wisdom as the fulfillment of the uniquely human functions by the rational control of the passions and also by choosing the mean between extremes (Aristotle's celebrated, but questionable, doctrine of the mean). However choice also involves voluntariness and awareness of the unchosen alternatives. This choice gives rise to virtuous action which is the motivation to fulfill our end as human persons.

With regard to the rational part and the intellectual virtues, Aristotle posits a division between the scientific faculty (*to epistémonikon*) and the calculative faculty (*to logistikon*).

The scientific faculty is concerned with logic, facts and truths, that is, with uncontingent and necessary things. It has as its intellectual virtues *epistémé,* "the disposition by virtue of which we demonstrate"[18] (or science or scientific knowledge), and *nous,* (intuitive, indicative or philosophical reason as intelligence, or wisdom).[19] The conjunction of *nous* and *epistémé* is a *sophia,* or theoretical wisdom, which is concerned with the highest objects of human reflection, in particular metaphysics.

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[18] *NE* 1139 b31-2 quoted in F. Copleston: *A History of Philosophy* Vol 1 Part II (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 84

[19] *NE*, Z, 6 1140 b31-1141 a8, Copleston *ibid.*

The calculative faculty is concerned with weighing-up and choosing, it has as its concern objects that are contingent, it is the faculty of opinion.[20] It has as its virtues *techné*, (art or technical skill) and *phronésis* (understanding, prudence, or practical wisdom). In short the intellectual virtues are excellences of the part of theoretical and practical reason giving philosophical wisdom and understanding by enabling the human person to choose the appropriate means to achieve a *telos*, and further, enabling the right choice of *telos*. The intellectual virtues have to be taught and understood. In particular it is impossible to have any virtue without *phronesis*. For Aristotle *phronesis* approximates to the master virtue.

With regard to the irrational part of the soul and the moral virtues, Aristotle saw the moral virtues (twelve in all, compare the total of four Platonist moral virtues), as excellences of the part of the soul which controls the appetitive function, ie, its desires, through the use of reason. It is amenable to reason but does not reason itself. It is also concerned with response to pleasure and pain. It is not acquired through teaching but, so some would argue, through habituation of character. The key word here is *hexis* which is sometimes translated as habit, but this translation is the subject of considerable controversy. The relevant concern here is the understanding of voluntary action. Alasdair MacIntyre argues that virtues are only manifested in voluntary actions, and for voluntary actions choice and deliberation have a key role.[21]

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[20] Copleston *op.cit.*, 84
[21] A. MacIntyre: *Short History, op.cit.*, 68

4.2.2 *Hexis/Habitus* and Voluntariness

To better understand *hexis* and voluntary action, there is a need to examine further Aristotle's use of *hexis.* In the *Nicomachean Ethics* we have:

> Virtue (*areté*) then, is a state of character (*hexis*) concerned with choice, lying in a mean, ie, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the mean of practical wisdom would determine it.[22]

Yves Simon comments that in the above translation by W.D. Ross,

> Ross knows better than to translate *hexis* by *'habit'*, but he is not familiar with *habitus*, and so he settles for the second best expression to convey a stable, objective disposition of the diverse parts of the soul, a state of character.[23]

Simon argues that, for Aristotle, virtue is not reducible to habit but rather a 'special kind of quality' which he refers to as *habitus* which "may resemble either habit or opinion but is neither."[24] If *habitus*, (*hexis*), instead of being translated "state of character" is translated as habit, Aristotle's whole theory of ethics, says Simon, "quickly dissolves into nonsense."[25] For Aristotle, moral virtues are "paragons of voluntariness and thus the very opposite of habits."[26] In addition, the four intellectual virtues of science, philosophical wisdom, art and understanding are not only not habits but neither are they states of character. Simon prefers to stay with the original Latin term

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[22] *NE* 2.6.1107a, trans D Ross rev. edn. J Ackrill and J. Urnson, (Oxford University Press, 1980), 39
[23] Y. Simon: *op.cit.*, 105
[24] *ibid.*, 47
[25] *ibid.*, 57
[26] *ibid.*, 58

'habitus'.[27] He contrasts it with that of habit in terms of objective necessity. In addition habits operate automatically or mechanically whereas *habitus* is "characterised by unmistakable vitality".[28] Elizabeth Anscombe and others reinforce Simon's analysis. They claim that Aristotle "clearly identified" the causal relationship between *habitus* and free choice.[29]

4.2.3 Virtue and Emotion

However there is a further problem here that centers on the role of the emotions. The received wisdom, that which Stanley Hauerwas refers to in particular as the 'faculty' psychology,[30] seems at odds with Aristotle himself where there is a dichotomy between animal desire and human reason, where the virtues are seen as the fulfillment of uniquely human functions by the rational control of the passions. As the Stagirite himself says:

> moral virtue ..... is concerned with passions and actions, ... but to feel [passions] at the right time with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right nature, and in the right way, is what is both intermediate and best, and this is characteristic of virtue.[31]

The link between virtue and emotion for Aristotle is obvious. Now it should be noted that not only does Aristotle contribute to contemporary understanding of virtue in a fundamental way but he also does the same

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[27] *ibid.*
[28] *ibid.*, 60
[29] G.E.M. Anscombe: "Thought and Action in Aristotle" in J. Barnes (ed) *Articles on Aristotle 2*, also R. Cessario: *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 35
[30] S Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life op.cit.*, 47
[31] NE Book II Ch. 1 1106b 15-29 Translated David Ross, *op.cit.*, 38

service for contemporary understanding of emotion. Although William James has contributed to contemporary philosophical debate a sensate theory of the emotions, ie, that emotions are simply physiological reactions, it is Aristotle who, although writing twenty five hundred years ago in his *Rhetoric*, developed a 'strikingly modern' theory of emotion that "stands up to the most contemporary criticism and provides an important alternative to the still dominant Jamesian theory."[32] His discussion of emotion overlaps with that of virtue and is found principally in the *Rhetoric, de Anima* and the NE. Simply, correct emotion is a large part of virtue.[33] This is subtly integrated into his wider metaphysics.

In *de Anima*, Aristotle reiterates his philosophical psychology, his understanding of the human psyche or soul, ie, the division into rational and irrational parts which nonetheless form a unity and this is extended to the emotions where there is a cognitive element as well as physical sensations. Thus, by arguing that cognition, physical activity and physiology are in complete unity with emotion, he manages to avoid a dichotomy between the rational and non-rational, between the cognitive and the physical. This follows on to the consideration that emotions are not necessarily irrational, uncontrolled reactions to circumstances. Emotions may be appropriate or inappropriate and this leads on to his treatment of virtue, in that appropriate emotion is a large part of virtue.[34]

Several writers have taken up this question of Aristotle's treatment of virtue *vis à vis* emotion. G Simon Harak argues that Aristotle sees virtue as

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[32] C Calhoun & R C Solomon: "What is an Emotion" in their *What Is An Emotion?* (Oxford University Press, 1984), 3
[33] cf. J Oakley: *Morality and the Emotions* (London: Routledge, 1993), 39
[34] cf. C Calhoun & R C Solomon *op.cit.*, 42-43

concerned with pleasure and pain which "are consequences of every passion and every action...."[35] Each virtue has its specific passion which is the 'ground', the 'material', for each virtue. Passion is an ethical affectivity. Harak sees the Cartesian model, where the person is virtuous "to the extent that his 'rationality' can 'take control' of the passions"[36] as wholly inadequate, where the person is in fact cut off from the passions. Where does this leave the received wisdom for Aristotle? Is the passion of the human person an habituation? What is the relationship between freedom and passion? Stanley Hauerwas has provided a useful commentary on Aristotle's treatment of these questions. He points to the capacity for human moral agency where choice, the determinant of virtue is a unique blend of reason and desire (*orexis).*[37]

Justin Oakley has written a masterful account of morality and the emotions from an Aristotelian, aretaic perspective.[38] He argues that Aristotle appears to hold that "emotions are the *archetypal* province of moral virtue, for Aristotle's account of the virtuous life is perhaps most importantly an account of what emotional sensibilities a good person will have."[39] Oakley stresses that some contemporary theories of emotion, using the Aristotelian starting point, would undervalue both emotion and virtue. "Could courage still be considered a virtue, if in fact it were just a matter of undergoing a peculiar kind of bodily agitation?"[40] Oakley believes that Aristotle, by telling us that moral virtue requires having the right emotions, is actually

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[35] NE 1104 b15, cf. 1104b 28-29; 1105a10-17 G Simon Harak: *Virtuous Passions: The Formation of Christian Character* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 2
[36] Harak *ibid,* 9
[37] Stanley Hauerwas *op.cit,* xvi (2nd edn)
[38] J Oakley: *Morality and the Emotions* (London: Routledge, 1993)
[39] Oakley: *op.cit,* 200 note 3
[40] *ibid,* 2

saying that moral virtue requires the "right complexes of cognition, desire and affectivity."[41]

With regard to the 'right complex' Oakley makes two suggestions. First, he stresses the role of *phronesis*, understanding or practical wisdom, which for Aristotle approximates to the master virtue. Oakley sees it as a "deliberative capacity" with the role of directing an emotional response toward the right object (and away from bad objects).[42] This means that *phronesis* is not:

- empirical or indicative or scientific knowledge;
- a *priori*, or theoretical knowledge;
- technical skill,

but rather *phronesis* is the "capacity to see what in general is good for man, [*sic*] and to see what this entails one ought to feel and do in the variety of situations one finds oneself in."[43] This has the further consideration that virtues, such as love, can be misdirected, they can focus on morally bad objects, unless *phronesis* guides them. Oakley argues that, for good character, *phronesis* "works hand in hand with certain emotions and highlights when virtues and vices are at stake."[44] *Phronesis* has another role, which is important for the considerations of freedom and the virtues. Oakley argues that *phronesis* is not a knee jerk reaction, a simple disposition "to act and feel in certain ways, which is activated when certain

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[41] *ibid*
[42] *ibid*, 81, 82
[43] *ibid* cf. NE VI Ch. 3-6, 1139b 14 - 1141a 9
[44] *ibid*, 82

situations arise."[45] Rather *phronesis* has the important role of turning our perception to 'ethically salient particulars' where *phronesis* is helped by certain emotions to discern these 'ethically salient particulars'.[46] *Phronesis* is not mechanist but is integrated with cognition.

Oakley's second suggestion concerns the Aristotelian role of emotion with regard to habituation and virtue. The problem here is how can the human person develop their emotional capacities? Can it be learned? Aristotle, suggests Oakley (following Kosman's interpretation,[47]) considers that it is not possible to 'inculcate' emotional capacity in a direct fashion, and here Oakley invokes the example of virtue, where, so he argues, virtues are states *(hexis)* brought about by habituation. If we leave this particular question to one side for the moment, we now follow Aristotle's (and Oakley's) suggestion where it is possible to develop emotional capacity, "it is ... possible to engage in a certain range of conduct deliberately designed to make one the kind of person who will characteristically feel in appropriate ways at appropriate times and so on."[48] That is one should engage in actions which are associated in a particular way with particular emotions. Oakley concludes that 'much of the point' of Aristotelian thought on emotion and virtue is to learn how to become 'properly skilled' in emotion.[49] The contribution of Oakley and others to the question of the relation of virtue to freedom and emotion has augmented the work of Hauerwas *et al.* Oakley focuses on both *phronesis* and learning,

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[45] *ibid*
[46] *ibid,* cf. NE BK VI Ch.11 1143b 14, BK VI Ch.12 1144a 32-5
[47] *ibid,* 82, L A Kosman: "Being Properly Affected: Virtues and Feelings in Aristotle's Ethics" in A O Rorty (ed): *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: Univ of Californian Press, 1980), 112-113
[48] Kosman *op.cit.*, 113
Oakley *op.cit.*, 145
[49] Oakley *ibid,* 140

considerations which provide a useful cognitional counterpoint to the understanding of *hexis*.

4.2.4 Conclusions

Elizabeth Anscombe, who can be seen as initiating the recovery of virtue ethics, has claimed that Aristotle did not say enough about virtue,[50] although he has written enough for some contemporary commentators, as the preceding accounts of Harak, Hauerwas, Oakely *et alia* would indicate. To summarise, some of the leading theorists on Aristotelian virtue, namely Simon, Anscombe and MacIntyre, stress that virtues are products of choice and are paradigms of voluntariness, with the corollary that Aristotle clearly recognised the relationship between *hexis* (state of charcter, *habitus*) and freedom. All of this is grounded in the consideration that the capacity for moral agency of the human person is a prerequisite for the acquisition of virtue. Now, the free act is one derived from and predicated upon the *hexis* (state of character) of the actor (the human person). That is, the act is voluntary if the initiative for the act lies within the moral agent herself. In particular, the voluntariness of the act is predicated upon the use of choice. Choosing, which is the determinant of virtue, is itself determined by both reason and desire. Further, desire is a 'mix' of will, emotion and appetite. With regard to a particular virtue, the relevant emotion is the ground for that virtue. In general, the relevant, appropriate emotion is a large part of any virtue. Yet a virtue requires not only emotion, but also the right 'mix' of emotion and cognition.

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[50] cf. Owen Flanagan: *Varieties of Moral Personality* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 181

Aristotle's analysis of the components of virtue requires one further consideration. The particular virtue of *phronesis* (prudence, understanding or practical wisdom) utilises cognition when it directs the emotional response of the human person to the right object. That is to say, the relevant appropriate emotion which grounds a particular virtue is conditioned by *phronesis*. *Phronesis* is not automatic or mechanist but is integrated with cognition, and by extension, it is possible to learn how to become skilled in emotion. In short, virtue is integrated into the moral agency of the human person where volition, emotion, cognition and voluntariness all hold sway and condition one another. This analysis of Aristotle is important for the argument of this thesis because, as we shall see when we consider the work of both Aquinas and Rahner on virtue, Aristotle along with the biblical perspective on virtue lays the ground work for the virtue tradition and in particular the contemporary recovery of virtue. Further, when considering the link between virtue and fundamental option in the work of Karl Rahner, we will be confronted with these very questions of *hexis/habitus* and the role of freedom in virtue theory.

4.3 Biblical Virtue

Recent biblical scholarship, in dialogue with virtue ethics, has uncovered much of the richness of the biblical *corpus* in its understanding of virtue and character ethics. For example, William Brown,[51] when confronted with the problem of the lack of a readily identifiable theological centre, or literary form,[52] in the wisdom *corpus* (Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes), resolved the tension between the anthropocentric and theocentric exegetical

[51] W. Brown: *Character in Crisis* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1996)
[52] *ibid*, 1

entrée to the *corpus* by opting for an anthropocentric framework of the human person as moral agent, and then focussing on character formation.

> The appeal of suggesting character formation as the central framework and goal of biblical wisdom lies in the literature's focus on the developing self in relation to the perceived world, thus bridging the gulf between the anthropocentric and theocentric frames of reference that run through the wisdom corpus.[53]

Brown concludes that "there is an *integrity* to the person of character, a wholeness or completeness regarding the exercise of virtue. Such a holistic notion of integrity is crucial to biblical wisdom, particularly in the character of Job."[54] Brown's work is a striking example of the contemporary biblical contribution to virtue ethics, however there is a need now to expand our view beyond the Wisdom *corpus* to that of the Old Testament and New Testament in general, and at the same time narrow the focus on the biblical understanding of virtue.

The classical Hellenistic term for virtue, *areté*, is used rarely in scripture, to the extent that it has been claimed that it is not biblical.[55] However, according to Kittel, the Septuagint, although finding "no use for the Greek idea of virtue", uses *areté* only in a sense of "excellences or fame".[56] (At the risk of quibbling, surely "excellence" is the very Greek idea of virtue). Nonetheless, Kittel does supply the only three instances of *areté* in the New Testament, (viz. Phil 4:8, 2 Pet 1:5, 1 Pet 1:9), and supplies the meaning of

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[53] *ibid*, 4
[54] *ibid*, 12
[55] Bohr: *op.cit.*, 195
[56] G. Kittel & G. Friedrich (eds): *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Abridged 1 Vol edn. by G. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 77

excellence or fame.[57] We need now to consider the main features of New Testament virtue.

- As Bultmann notes, the notion of a system of virtues is established in the New Testament, in particular, Paul incorporates the Hellenistic catalogues of virtue, via Jewish Hellenism, in the New Testament.[58] However even a casual reading of the Gospels indicates the specificity of Christian teaching on the virtues, eg, the Beatitudes.[59]

- As has been noted above, the virtues concept is not the dominant idea in the Christian paranesis, it is rather that the demands of God are seen as the principal good.[60] Virtue is subordinate.

- Although the evangelists may use cognates of *areté* sparingly, and *areté* itself virtually not at all, the substance of virtue theory in the New Testament is presented as an "interior principle of the moral life which directs the individual's relationship with God and with neighbour"[61] or similarly "as an activity of the whole person in conformity with love of God and love of neighbour."[62]

- Virtues are a result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is by the agency of the third person of the Trinity that virtue is operative in freedom[63] (cf. Acts 6:3, 5, 8). This attests to the priority of grace.

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[57] *ibid*
[58] Bultmann *ibid*
[59] Cessario *op.cit.*, 1
[60] Bultmann: *ibid*
[61] Cessario: *op.cit.*, 1-2
[62] Farley: *op.cit*, 160
[63] L. Dewar: *An Outline of New Testament Ethics* (London: University of London Press, 1949), 104

It becomes apparent that there is a shift in the use and understanding of virtue from Old Testament to New Testament. The Old Testament does not provide virtue lists like those of the New Testament. They have "to be gleaned from stories and texts".[64] Although Gunter Bornkamm cites the virtue lists of Proverbs,[65] his mentor, Rudolph Bultmann claims that the concept of virtue (ie, *areté*) is foreign to the Old Testament,[66] however the precursors are there. The word *hayil* has the connotation of ability or efficiency, often indicating moral worth, (as in Ruth 3:11 and Proverbs 12:4[67]), which leads to the claim that the Old Testament writers invoke righteousness more than virtue because it gives priority to the action of God rather than human achievement.[68] This theological point should be stressed. As Farley observes:

> Throughout the Bible one truth remains supreme that provides the fundamental metaphysics of any biblical ethics of character: no one is saved by exercising virtue; nor is anyone damned for the lack of it. God and God's grace comes first.[69]

Given the supremacy of grace, how are we to understand and explain the shift in understanding of virtue from Old Testament to New Testament? Perhaps the most useful *entrée* is by assessing the influence of Hellenistic Judaism. Here, there appears to be one readily acknowledged feature, the role of the *Stoa*. Now the most curious feature of New Testament ethics is the use of lists of virtues and vices. As early as 1932 B. S. Eason wrote:

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[64] B. W. Farley: *In Praise of Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 3
[65] G. Bornkamm: *Paul* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1971), 203*ff*
[66] R. Bultmann: *Theology of the New Testament Vol 1* (London: SCM, 1976), 76
[67] D. O. Swann: *"Virtue" New Bible Dictionary* (Leicester: IVP, 1990), 1239
[68] J. F. James: *"Virtue" Harpers Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco, 1985), 1114
[69] B. W. Farley: *In Praise of Virtue op.cit.*, 3

> It is now generally recognised that the catalogues of virtues and vices in the New Testament are derived ultimately from the ethical teachings of the *Stoa*.[70]

Other sources have been shortlisted, Qumran, Hellenistic Mystery religions, even Ancient Iranian religion,[71] but the *Stoa* is the preeminent contender. Edward Lohse sees the Jewish doctrine of virtue that emerged in the synagogues of the Hellenistic period, and eventually in the Diaspora, as deriving not only from scripture but also from Cynic-Stoic ethics that focussed on human failings.[72] In particular, lists of human vices and virtues were fairly abundant in the Hellenistic Jewish literature, notably in Philo of Alexandria.[73]

This gives rise to a further difficulty. If Christianity has been seen as a religion that derived most of its philosophical content from Platonism and later Aristotelianism, how is it that the stoicism of the Hellenistic synagogues could influence something as central as the theological virtues in the New Testament? The short answer is that Hellenistic thought was markedly syncretist, especially at the time of the New Testament.

Alasdair MacIntyre may provide a more extended solution to the question of the influence of Stoicism on Christian virtue *vis-à-vis* Aristotelianism. He argues that for the *Stoa,* unlike Aristotle, *areté* was

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[70] Eason: *ibid*
[71] Kruse *ibid*
[72] E. Lohse: *Theological Ethics of the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 21
[73] B. S Easton: "New Testament Ethical Lists" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932), 1-12, quoted in C. C. Kruse "Virtue and Vices" in G. F. Hawthorne *et.al.* eds: *Dictionary of Paul & his Letters* (Leicester: IVP, 1993)

> essentially a singular expression and its possession by an individual an all or nothing matter .... with virtue one has moral worth, without it one is morally worthless.[74]

In short, Stoicism abandoned the Aristotelian *telos*, a simple moment virtue supplanted teleological virtue. This raised the very significant problem of how could a "morality of implacable law"[75] ie, the Torah, be engaged with this concept of virtue? The answer lies with Aristotle. Now as Farley observes

> it is not enough to wander through the Bible and identify first this human quality and then another and so on until one's list of 'virtues' approximate Aristotle's.[76]

Apart from the consideration that first, this procedure would be interminable, and second, that there is a theological prerogative for the virtues anyway, we need to look at the parallelism of Aristotelian virtue with that of the New Testament. New Testament virtue, even if its content differs significantly from the Aristotelian, does share the same 'logical and conceptual structure."[77] They both lead to the human *telos*. New Testament virtue leads to a supernatural rather than natural good for the human person, ie, the entry to the *Basileia* rather than *Eudaimonia*, but they both have a teleological structure. In addition, as MacIntyre points out "the relationship of virtues as means to an end [ie, the *Basileia*] is internal and not external, just as it is in Aristotle."[78]

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[74] A. MacIntyre: *After Virtue op.cit,* 168
[75] *ibid,* 170
[76] Farley *ibid,* 92
[77] MacIntyre: *op.cit.,* 184
[78] *ibid*

Further, *Basileia* and *Eudaimonia* both precede *areté*, virtue is a secondary concept.[79] It is not monist virtue. However our problem is only solved in part. How does the 'implacable law' relate to virtue? MacIntyre gives one answer.

> The concept which needed to be supplied to make that relationship [between virtues and law] intelligible, was that of a form of community constituted by the shared project of achieving a common good.[80]

And that concept of the shared project which constituted a form of community was to be fully articulated in the medieval tradition. The difficulty here is the provision of a communitarian rationale for virtue.

However there is a different approach. L.D. Hurst[81] argues that the Pharisees, for example, believed that "ethics consisted mainly in taking the Law and doing what it says."[82] He then contrasts it with the Gospel account where if one is of bad character, a person of vice and not virtue, then there is an inability to follow the Law. Ethics consists of not what one does, (of acts), but of what one is, (of character). If the tree is good, then good fruit (acts) will result (Mt. 7:16-20). I would agree with Hurst so far, but then his argument becomes more tenuous. He argues that this character ethic of Jesus is opposed to not only Pharisaism "but also to classical Greek ethics, especially those of Aristotle."[83] He argues that Aristotle sees virtue as a product of habit, if "habit is the product of constantly doing the right thing;

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[79] *ibid,* 185
[80] *ibid,* 174
[81] L.D. Hurst: "The Ethics of Jesus" in J.B. Green *et.al* (eds): *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Leicester: IVP, 1992), 210ff
[82] *ibid,* 215
[83] *ibid,* 215

if one does it long enough, it becomes habitual, and one ends up being good. Aristotle and the Pharisees could agree that goodness is achieved by doing right until it becomes a habit."[84] Hurst argues that Jesus sees this as impossible, "only a good tree can produce good fruit."[85] (cf. Rom. 7:4-6, Gal. 5:22-23). Presumably, Hurst is arguing for the priority of grace over virtue.

The difficulty here is Hurst's reading of Aristotle's use of (presumably) *hexis* which he translates as habit. This *cause celèbre* also occurs with Aquinas' use of *habitus*. We have already discussed the problem of *hexis* and there will be further space devoted to the problem of *habitus*. However, Hurst's main line of argument is incontrovertible, that Jesus' endorses an ethic of character, what can loosely be referred to as the heart, and gives central importance (in the language of moral philosophy) to moral agency. Moral acts are derivative from moral agency. The problem of the Law remains. Is moral law incompatible with an ethics of virtue? The ensuing tradition in Christianity would say not, and to this tradition we now turn.

4.4 Augustine: Love, Knowledge and the Will

Augustine's treatment of virtue, like so much of his thought, was a product of an intense biblical understanding utilising a Platonist framework. The central reference point for his biblical understanding was Mt 22:39 and parallels. "To live well is nothing other than to love God with all one's

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[84] *ibid*
[85] *ibid*

heart, soul and mind."[86] However it should be noted that Augustine is concerned to live well, that is, his ethics are eudaimonistic,[87] which derives in large part from his neo-Platonist inheritance. Alasdair MacIntyre writes:

> The Platonic dichotomy between the world of sense perception and the realm of forms is Christianised by St Augustine into a dichotomy between the world of the natural desires and the realm of divine order. The world of natural desires is that of his love for his mistress before his conversion and that of the *realpolitik* of the earthly as against the heavenly city. By an ascetic discipline one ascends in the scale of reason, receiving illumination not from that Platonic anticipation, the Form of the Good, but from God. The illuminated mind is able to choose rightly between the various objects of desire which confront it. *Cupiditas*, the desire for earthly things, is gradually defeated by *Caritas*, the desire for [the] heavenly.....[88]

What is of considerable importance here is the role of the will and the choice between objects of desire. It has been argued that, given that Aristotle had no concept of the will, the modern conception of the will was discovered and consummately developed by Augustine.[89] But what role is there for virtue *vis-à-vis* the will? To put it simply virtue is subordinate. "It is not the virtue of your soul that makes you happy, but he who has given you the virtue who has inspired you to will, and has given you the power to do so."[90] In turn the will is subordinate to God. What place is left for virtue?

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[86] Augustine: *De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae* I, 25.46 quoted in John Haldane: "Medieval and Renaissance Ethics" in P. Singer (ed.): *Companion to Ethics op.cit.*, 138

[87] cf. F Coplestone *op.cit.* Vol 2 part 1, 96

[88] A MacIntyre: *History, op.cit.*, 117

[89] cf. A Dihle: *The Theory of the Will in Classical Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) quoted in Jean Porter: *The Recovery of Virtue* (London: SPCK, 1984), 113, 199, n.11

[90] Augustine: *Sermons* 150, 8, 9 quoted (as amended) in Copleston *op.cit.*, 96

Augustine's ethics are eudaimonistic, he sees the actions of the human person arising from a quest for happiness. "All persons want to be happy and no persons are happy who do not have what they want." Augustine asks what is it a person should obtain? He replies that it should be something that can be obtained when it is wanted, and it should be permanent and enduring.[91] God is permanent and enduring, the person who has God is happy. But how does one have God? Augustine's failed interlude with the Manichees made him discount reason and instead give primacy to faith. One needed to first believe and then seek to understand. However Augustine also gave primacy to love. God is truth, and happiness is found by loving God (cf. Mt 22:39). This love is a gift from God and through divine illumination the mind of the person partakes of divine truth. This Platonist perspective is extended when Augustine argues that similarly, with conscience, which is endowed by God, the person becomes aware of the moral law. However the actions of the person will only conform to the moral law if there is the appropriate nature, ie, love. And here we happen upon Augustine's celebrated doctrine of love. His earliest definition of love is cast negatively. "What is not loved in its own right is not loved."[92] That is, the object of love that is not loved for its own sake is not loved at all, it is a means for something else. Further, Augustine distinguished between different types of love by referring to what was the object of love *propter se*, in its own right and not *propter aliud*, because of something else.[93] In short, love is right or wrong by virtue of the appropriateness of the object of that love.

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[91] *De Beata Vita* 2.11 *op.cit.*
[92] Augustine: *Soliloquia* 1.13.22
cf. Babcock: "Cupiditas and Caritas: The Early Augustine on Love and Human Fulfillment" in R.J.Neuhaus (ed): *Augustine Today* (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1993), 9
[93] Augustine: *Soliloquia* 1.13.22, Babcock *ibid.*

Further, although each object of love is a legitimate object of love because each comes from God, no more can be expected from an object than what its unique God-given nature can provide. The nature of the human person is such that only God who is infinite can give infinite happiness, and love for a finite object that is loved for infinite happiness is a disordered love.

> A good and honest life is not formed otherwise than by loving as they should be loved those things which we ought to love, namely God and our neighbours.[94]

What then of virtue? Virtue is the conforming of love to the world that has been given by God. This has a number of aspects.

- Augustine sees virtues which are not grounded in God and are sought for themselves as not genuine virtues.[95] In short, virtues are not good in their own right. Their goodness is derived from the goodness of the love of which they are dispositions.

- The Cardinal Virtues of prudence, courage, justice and temperance are defined as forms of love with God as their object.[96]Prudence is love that distinguishes impediments to its progress towards God from that which assists it. Courage is love enduring all things readily for the sake of God. Temperance is love which keeps entire and incorrupt for God.

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[94] Augustine: *Epistles* 137, 5, 17
quoted in Copleston *op.cit*, 97
[95] cf. Augustine: *City of God* 19.25
J Langan: "Cardinal Virtues", in J Macquarrie *et.al.* (eds.) *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (London: SCM, 1986), 77
[96] Augustine: *On the Morals of the Catholic Church* 15
cf. Langan, *ibid.*

Justice is love which serves God alone and by so doing governs everything else well.[97] There is also the possibility that if the cardinal virtues do not have God as their object, they are not true virtues but rather, splendid vices.[98] This had consequences for the Reformers, who, following their Augustinian heritage, discounted natural virtues that were not grounded in God.

- Augustine saw the virtue of Christ himself as the main support for the human person.

> Now we require many virtues and from these virtues we advance to virtue itself. What virtue, you inquire? I reply: Christ, the very virtue and wisdom of God. He gives diverse virtues here below, and he will also supply the one virtue, namely himself, for all of the other virtues which are useful and necessary in this vale of tears.[99]

This is a striking example of the synthesis Augustine achieved between biblical revelation and Platonist virtue theory.

- Augustine gives a strong emphasis to the Platonic Unity of the virtues.

> Surely [the philosophers] do convince us in this case. The person who possesses one virtue, possesses them all, and the one who lacks a single virtue lacks them all. For prudence cannot be cowardly, nor unjust, nor intemperate, since where any of these qualities actually exist, prudence can not.[100]

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[97] *ibid.*
cf. A F Holmes: *Ethics* (IVP: Leicester, 1984), 118
[98] cf. M A Reid: "Theological Ethics" in P Atkinson *et.al.* (eds.): *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (London: IVP, 1996), 844
[99] Augustine: *Enarrationes in Psalms* 83, 11 quoted in Cessario *op.cit* n.2, 157
[100] Augustine: *Letter to Jerome* no 167 Ch.2, quoted in Cessario *op.cit.*, 138

This unity is markedly subordinate, via the theological virtues, in particular love, to the Trinity. Contrary to Aristotle, virtues are not the attainment of happiness *per se*.

The culmination of love's striving is found not in virtue itself, but in knowledge, in knowledge of the Trinity. Love integrates virtue and knowledge. This is further testimony to Augustine's indebtedness to the Platonist tradition, in particular the engagement of virtue with knowledge, an engagement that has recently been rediscovered in the theory of virtue epistemology.[101] This Platonist/Christian synthesis of Augustine provided some of the foundation for Thomas Aquinas, but for the latter Aristotle took precedence over Plato.

4.5 Aquinas: Happiness, Passion and Virtue

As noted earlier, Rahner's understanding of virtue was derived from his thorough grounding in Thomism. Now, the theological standing of Thomas Aquinas is near monumental in the Roman Catholic theological tradition. This is vouchsafed by a succession of papal encyclicals such as *Aeterni Patris*, which testify to the genius and praiseworthiness of the angelic doctor. Recognition is also forthcoming from a variety of contemporary philosophical and theological circles, particularly circles concerned with virtue ethics. There have been references to the "philosophical genius and permanent value of Aquinas"[102], to Aquinas as a "central influence" on the

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[101] cf. L.T. Zagzebski: *Virtues of the Mind - An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: U.P., 1996)
[102] A. Kenny: *A Path from Rome* (Oxford: University Press, 1986), 51

theory of virtue[103], and as "the high point for reflection on virtue",[104] because he produced a compilation of the work of Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism and Augustine "in an extraordinary complex manner."[105] This medieval synthesis of Aquinas is reflected in a contemporary synthesis by ethicists who are also turning to Aquinas.[106]

The elements in this new synthesis of Aquinas will become obvious as we examine in detail his account of the virtues. However, recent work on ethical theory of the late thirteenth century[107] has produced an important *caveat* on the Thomist 'standard story', as espoused by figures such as Etienne Gilson, that holds that the Thomist synthesis of the integration of Aristotelian's thought with Augustine's was the only attempt to derive a mean between radical Aristotelian philosophy and conservative Augustinian theology. In particular, Bonnie Kent[108] argues that Alasdair MacIntyre extends the 'standard story' by including ethical thought, and further radicalises it by substituting for rival scholastic theological schools much grander (and more dubious) ethical traditions. However the reality (according to Kent's historical research) is that classical virtue ethics was transformed across the board[109], and in particular, virtues were not located (*à la* Aquinas) in the sense appetites, but rather (*à la* Scotus) in the will. One of the reasons for this voluntarist transformation was that free will was seen (especially by the Franciscans) as being better safeguarded by freedom

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[103] R Cessario: *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1991), 5
[104] S Hauerwas: *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1986), 122-123
[105] *ibid*
[106] G Simon Harak: *Virtuous Passions* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 52
[107] Bonnie Kent: *Virtues of The Will: The Transformation of Ethics in the Late Thirteenth Century* (Washington: Catholic University Press: 1995)
[108] *op.cit,* Ch 2, *passim*
[109] *ibid,* 93

of the will (*libertas voluntatis*) than by free decision (*liberium arbitrium*).[110] The implications of this for fundamental option are considerable.

What was the Thomist understanding of virtue? The single most manageable account of Thomist virtue is to be found in the *Treatise on the Virtues*, ie, *Summa Theologiae* QQ49-67, however it should be noted that this Treatise is preceded by two others in the *Prima Secundae* (Ia IIae) of the *Summa*, first, the *Treatise on Happiness* (with the *Treatise on Human Acts)* (QQ1-21) and the *Treatise on the Passions* (QQ22-48). These three treatises, along with the addendum of Law and Grace (QQ90-114), form the entirety of the *Prima Secundae* and as such form a masterful integration of moral theology, ie, Aquinas' 'new' synthesis, with virtue as one of the main vehicles for his synthesis.

4.5.1 The Treatise on Happiness

In order to gain a balanced perspective on Thomist virtue it is necessary to examine briefly some of the preliminary discussion in the preceding treatises, ie, the *Treatise on Happiness* and the *Treatise on the Passions.* This point should be reiterated. Jean Porter makes the convincing case that in the contemporary recovery of virtue, the full dimension of Thomist virtue can be lost.[111] She argues that both Stanley Hauerwas' and Alasdair MacIntyre's approach to virtue is 'very different' from that of Aquinas. In

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[110] *ibid* Ch. 3, *passim*

[111] Jean Porter: *The Recovery of Virtue* Chs. 2, 3, *passim* (London: SPCK, 1994)

short, the former duo provide the explanatory innovation of narrative unity as "a substitute for Aristotle's [and Aquinas'] account of the true end of the human life."[112] This teleological point of difference impinges on the debate on *finis ultimus* (see above 3.3.1) and inevitably on the question of fundamental option. Therefore, we shall reconsider some aspects of the teleology of the *Treatise on Happiness*.

Porter notes that Aquinas (unlike Hauerwas) "grounds his theory of the virtues in a general theory of goodness and the human good."[113] In the first article of the *Prima Secundae,* in order to answer the question "what in fact is acting for the good?", Aquinas asks a subsidiary question of "what does it mean for the human person to act for an ultimate end?".[114] Immediately, in discussing virtue we are in the country of the *finis ultimus* and by extension in the country of fundamental option.

As noted above (3.3.1), Aquinas begins the *Prima Secundae* with the claim that there is an appropriate end, a *finis ultimus* (a final, ultimate end), for the human person to attain. He then posits happiness as such an end (cf. QQs 1-5). In Question 2 he dismisses any prospect of a created good fulfilling happiness. In Question 3 he demonstrates that the happiness of the human person consists in seeing the *beatitudo*, this is the perfection of the being of the human person. Imperfect happiness can be acquired in this life but perfect happiness requires divine assistance (cf. IaIIae Q5 A5).

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[112] *ibid,* 82
[113] Porter: *op.cit.,* 104
[114] *ST* Ia IIae, Q1, A3 cf. Porter *op.cit.*, 34-35

However Aquinas agrees with Aristotle that happiness approximates an activity or operation. This activity requires both the intellect and the will.

> Every act of the will is preceded by some act of the intellect. But there is an act of the will that is prior to an act of the intellect, for the will moves toward the final act of the intellect which is happiness.[115]

This serves as an *entreé* to the next section, the *Treatise on Human Acts* (QQ6-17) which analyses further metaphysical concepts such as voluntariness, intention and choice "with a thoroughness which represents a great advance on Aristotle."[116] It constitutes "a philosophical treatment of the nature of the human will which bears comparison with anything written on the topic ever since,"[117] *pace* Bonnie Kent.

The concluding questions on the treatise (QQ 18-21) deal with the subject of what makes a human act good or bad. This has been referred to as the kernel of his ethics.[118] The particular relevance for Aquinas' theory of the human good and for virtue is that, as Hauerwas observes, Aquinas gave considerable importance to the "agent's perspective", that is with regard to the agent and his act it is important that the goodness or otherwise of the act is not dependent on the goodness or otherwise of the agent's intention. That is, the goodness of an act precedes the good intention of the agent.

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[115] *ST* Ia IIae, Q4, A4 R2 in
Trans & ed J Oesterle "*Treatise on Happiness*" (Notre Dame: University Press, 1983), 45
[116] A Kenny: *Aquinas, op.cit.*, 22
[117] *ibid*
[118] *ibid*

The intention is only morally significant insofar as the intention forms or moulds the agent of the act.[119]

4.5.2 The Treatise on the Passions

But what of the agent and the influence of the passions? What of the relationship between virtue and passions? How are the Thomist virtues located in the sense appetites, rather than in the will? The *Prima Secundae* has an extended account in the *Treatise on the Passions* (QQ22-48), which immediately precedes the *Treatise on the Virtues*, indicating the direct connection for Thomas between emotion and virtue. Also the *Treatise on the Passions* is the largest treatise in the *Summa*, which indicates its importance for Thomas, however, it has been seen as the least understood,[120] and does not receive the attention it deserves.[121]

What does the *Treatise* tell us? In short it deals with what it means for the human person to be morally responsible for the life of emotion.[122] In this, Thomas follows Aristotle (see 4.4.3), contrary to Descartes, arguing that what is of importance in the moral life is not the denial, repression or extirpation of the passions, but rather, their cultivation and

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[119] cf. *ST* IaIIae Q18, A2; Q19, A2; Q20, A1 Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life, op.cit.*, 67

[120] G Simon Harak: "Child Abuse and Embodiment from a Thomistic Perspective", *Modern Theology* Vol 11 No 3, July 1995, p.316 also P J Waddel: *The Primacy of Love* (New York: Paulist, 1992), 79

[121] cf. Hauerwas' and MacIntyre's brevity. See comments by Jean Porter: *The Recovery of Virtue op.cit.* Chs 2, 3

[122] Harak: *ibid*, 327

transformation.[123] However there is a significant difference with Aristotle. Thomas emphasises the passion of the human person as not only dimensioned by bodily or sensate action, but also by the notion of the **other**, that is an interactive model of the emotions. Indeed, he refers to the other as the **agent** of the human person's passions.[124] By emphasising the human person as suffering the action of the other he leads to the consideration of the ultimate action of the other on the human person, that is the effects of God's gifts on us, in particular the infused theological virtues of faith, hope and love.[125] By way of aside, given Karl Rahner's relative lack of interest in affectivity, one ponders how Aquinas' understanding of the polarity of affectivity could have been integrated with Rahner's *Vorgriff.* (ref. 7.3.1).

However it also needs to be stressed that in contradistinction to the other, the human person itself is both composite and integrated, that the passions "are in the soul by the virtue of the fact that they are in the body,"[126] and that as Etienne Gilson reminds us, for Aquinas, "the intellect, will, passions and senses are all different aspects of one creature that engages reality in a complex yet fundamentally united way."[127]

There is now a need to narrow the focus on this one aspect of the human person, the role of the passions *vis-à-vis* virtue. How does Aquinas

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[123] cf. Waddell: *ibid*, 79
[124] cf. *ST* IaIIae Q22, A1; Q22, A2
[125] Harak: *ibid*, 316
[126] *ibid*, 327
[127] Porter: *op.cit.*, 113

proceed? With the first question of the *Treatise* (Q22) Thomas establishes a number of considerations. At 22.1 he starts with an aspect of human identity, whether there can be passion in the soul. He establishes that the passions are crucial because they are in the soul, they do constitute part of our identity, in particular the passions are linked with bodily changes and bodily action.[128] Further, the passions are grounded in the human person by the responses to the surrounding environment, to the other, a response which is non-rational (or pre-rational) yet which is conscious and also cognitive.[129] Now these passionate, conscious responses of necessity have objects. Passions can be distinguished by their intentional objects.[130] In this, passion and affectivities approximate appetite insofar as they are grounded in necessity.[131] However there is also a polarity to this appetite, that of approach and avoidance. When passions function correctly, they make the human person approach that object which is good and avoid that which is bad, even if the criterion for goodness/badness is mere sensation.[132] However there is also the consideration of the intrinsic attraction of the object, of the other. It can be said that the goodness of the other attracts the *appetitus*, that the human person is able to experience a "delightful or joyful love in the other."[133] Ultimately, passions can be determined by love for the ultimate other, ie, God.

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[128] cf. The implications of this are dealt with by G Simon Harak in *Virtuous Passions* (New York: Paulist, 1993), 71
[129] *ST* IaIIae Q22, A2, Q23, A1 & A2, cf. Porter: *op.cit.*, 113
[130] *ST* IaIIae Q23, A1-4, cf. Oakley: *op.cit.*, 10
[131] *ST* IaIIae Q22, A2, Q23, A4, Q26, A2
[132] *ST* IaIIae Q22, A2, Q23, A1, cf. Porter *ibid*, 113
[133] Harak: *Virtuous Passions, op.cit.*, 73, *ST* IaIIae Q23, A4

Now, if the *appetitus* is pre-rational, what place does the reason have *vis-à-vis* the passions, if it is not to suppress, deny or extirpate them. The short answer is that the passions are good insofar as they are linked with reason.[134] Oakley sees Aquinas as saying that "emotions are desires of the soul which if not controlled (by reason) are without exception morally evil."[135] However, Oakley is overlooking the wider context of Aquinas' position. At Q34.3 of the *Prima Secundae* Thomas asks how can the human person be fully rational, and also how can he best find joy? The answer is that all the passions of the human person must be taken up in the one rational passion for God.[136] That is, the key to understanding how reason interacts with the passions is how the final goal of the human person is related to joy or delight.[137] That which is the most rational is that which is the most joyful. Here Thomas argues that reason provides the constraints for joy or delight, that delight does not exceed certain bounds,[138] for if it exceeds certain bounds delight ceases to be delight. Ultimately the rational passion of the human person can anticipate the *finis ultimus* of *beatitudo*.

In addition to the concern of reason and passion, there is also the concern of the will and passion. Here the will can be said to be similar to passion insofar as they are "both expressions of our fundamental appetite for the goods that are appropriate to our nature."[139] The implication of this for virtue is that, as Oakley comments on *ST* IaIIae Q24, A1, only what is

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[134] *ibid*, 77, *ST* IaIIae Q24, A3
[135] Oakley *ibid*, 42, *ST* IaIIae 24.2
[136] cf. Harak: *Virtuous Passions op.cit.*, 77
[137] *ibid*, 91 *ST* IaIIae Q27, A2
[138] *ibid*, 92, *ST* IaIIae Q25, A2, Q26, A2
[139] Porter: *op.cit*, 113

subject to the will is morally significant[140] *pace* Bonnie Kent. Here Aquinas has departed from Aristotle, for Aristotle had no concept of the will, in particular it could be argued that Aquinas was dependent on Augustine who, it is claimed, formulated the concept of will.[141] Aquinas himself is acutely aware of the impact of intellectual history for this understanding of the will when he observes that the Stoics held that all passion was evil because they,

> made no discrimination between sense and intellect, and hence between the sensory orexis [*appetitus*] and the intellectual. Accordingly they made no distinction between the emotions [passions] and the movements of the will, since the emotions belong to the sensory orexis and the simple movements of the will to the intellectual orexis. They applied the term **will** to every orectic movement that was under rational control, and the term **emotion** to every one that was not.[142]

However Aquinas is able to say that "insofar as the emotions are subject to the control of reason and will, moral judgements do apply to them."[143] Therefore, unlike the Stoics he acknowledged the interdependence of emotion, will and reason, again *pace* Bonnie Kent.

In conclusion, Aquinas' *Treatise on the Passions*, is a "crucial beginning point"[144] for the ethics of Christian virtue, because the highest passion is the passion for God. Now Harak observes the importance given in the *Treatise*

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[140] Oakley: *op.cit.*, 82
[141] Porter: *op.cit.*, 113
[142] *ST* IaIIae Q24, A3 Blackfriars Edition - (Eric D'Arcy: The Emotions) Vol 19, (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963), 37
[143] *ibid* Q24, A1, 33
[144] Harak: *Virtuous Passions op.cit*, 96

on the Passions to *habitus* (as we have seen with *hexis* problematically translated as 'habit') and how this serves as an *entrée* to the discussion of virtues in the *Treatise on the Virtues*. As noted earlier, and in particular, at Q28.5, Harak sees the role of the passions in polarity with objects, with the other. That is, the very form of the object pole creates a habit of *appetitus* (or approach/avoidance) towards the object pole in the subject pole. This can be construed that the grounding of a *habitus* is in bodily change, or in other words, "the self in passion is physically habituated to the other."[145] The implications of this approach to Thomas are considerable for the understanding of virtue theory. Harak argues that, given that the passions have to be integral with reason for the human person to have the passions "in the right way, at the right time, to the right extent",[146] there is also the consideration that reason is needed for the passions to endure, "for the right passions to become habitual for us,"[147] with the conclusion that "just such an habitualised right passion would, it seems to me, be a virtue."[148] It is at this point that we encounter the problems of *habitus* writ large. Is Harak correct?

The problem we have here is how can freedom be reconciled with the role of the passions and the will as the determinants of virtue. Do the passions and the will militate against freedom in virtue? Given that the understanding of *habitus* is of prime concern for Aquinas (and, as we shall see later, Rahner), we now turn to the consideration of the *Treatise on the Virtues.*

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[145] Harak: *Virtuous Passions op.cit.*, 95
[146] *ibid*, 96
[147] *ibid*
[148] *ibid*

4.5.3 The Treatise on the Virtues

To begin, there is a need to appreciate Thomas systematic treatment of virtue in the Treatise. His *schemata* runs as follows:

QQ 49-54	*habitus*
QQ 55-56	essence of virtue
QQ 57-61	intellectual and moral virtue
Q 62	theological virtue
Q 63	cause of virtue
Q 64	the mean of virtue
Q 65	the connection of the virtues
Q 66	the equality of the virtues
Q 67	the duration of the virtues

Since nearly one third of the *Treatise* is concerned with the operation of *habitus*, the importance of *habitus* is self-evident. How does Aquinas proceed in his treatment of *habitus?* It is useful to outline Thomas' account through the eyes of someone who accepts *habitus* at face value, that is he translates it as habit. Benjamin Farley has written an account of virtue in a

Christian context from a biblical perspective, his orientation can be summarised as Protestant evangelical.[149] He is unable to avoid dealing with Thomas' account of the virtues and gives considerable space to it. He argues that Aquinas follows Aristotle in his use of *hexis/habitus* by calling virtue a habit, (NB: **not** *habitus,* or state of character). Farley then sees Aquinas arguing that habits imply 'dispositions' and 'operations', but which must be in proportion to the end or goal..... hence, habits are necessary for the perfection of ends."[150] Further, "since 'like habits cause like ends', they can be increased as easily as diminished. It all depends on the will."[151] By way of aside, one can ask, in the context of this Augustinian perspective, what is the role for freedom in the development of virtue? However, Farley presses on: "virtues develop then as forms of habits."[152] Further, when habits are virtuous they dispose the human person "more permanently"[153] towards the *finis ultimus*, that is virtues, construed as 'operating habits', make the human person and all their actions good.[154] That, briefly is Farley's account of *habitus* and virtue, an account which is questionable because of its uncritical acceptance of the translation of 'habit' for *habitus*.

Now in this business of *habitus* Farley is not alone. Jean Porter is quite explicit in her understanding of the Thomistic link between *habitus* and virtue. She translates *habitus* as 'habit', but argues that to understand the concept of habit there is a need to understand the perspective of scholastic philosophical psychology where not only intellect and will but also the

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[149] B W Farley: *In Praise of Virtue* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 17ff
[150] Farley: *ibid*, 18, cf. *ST* IaIIae Q49, A4
[151] *ibid* cf. *ST* IaIIae Q52, A3
[152] *ibid*
[153] *ibid*
[154] *ibid*, 18-19 cf. *ST* IaIIae Q56, A3

passions, in order to function properly and not be constrained by their indeterminateness, must be given content and form. This habitual process of formation of intellect, will and passion is known as virtue.[155] Porter's approach squares with that of Harak, who as we have just seen in his treatment of the passions (ref. 4.7.2), uses habit and passion in a similar way as an *entrée* to virtue, an approach that starts with bodily disposition and change, and concludes with *beatitudo* which has the unfortunate consequence that the role of freedom in the development of the virtues may seem to be at a discount. This also has ramifications for the understanding of virtue *vis-à-vis* fundamental option, insofar as the Rahnerian fundamental option is predicated on fundamental freedom with the attendant question of the role of fundamental freedom *vis-à-vis* the virtues. To simply equate *habitus* with habit is to create a major problem for the understanding of the link between Rahnerian fundamental option and virtue. This difficulty does not seem to have attracted the attention that it deserves.

Other commentators are more cautious. Stanley Hauerwas anticipates this problem in his treatment of Aristotle and *hexis* (ref. 4.4), that is, activity which is perfectly free can be explained in terms of *hexis.* Activity which does not include *hexis* would be incomplete and simply movement.[156] Hauerwas argues that, for Aquinas, "habits which are virtues do not spring from man's [*sic*] essence in some automatic way,[157] because habits are not only modifications to human nature but also dispositions which "are not acquired in a mechanical way... what equips man [*sic*] to receive habits is

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[155] Jean Porter: "Moral Habit" in N.P. McBrien (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Catholicism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993), 600
[156] Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life op.cit,* 42
[157] *ibid,* 73

that he already possesses reason and will."[158] Further, habit is not a "passive and inert modification"[159] of human existence because to acquire a habit is to acquire actuality, so that habit "is a kind of medium between pure power and pure act."[160] The important consideration for Hauerwas is that habit is subject to will (and reason) and thereby habit is in the middle ground between potency and actuality. Romanus Cessario takes up this point. He argues that there has been a failure in some quarters to take 'proper account' of Aquinas' use of *habitus.*[161]

> The scholastic theologians understood the important function that *habitus* has in shaping human conduct. Accordingly, they described *habitus* as holding a middle position between potency - the capacity for action - and full actuality - actually doing something. Voluntary activity, then always remains a realisation of one or another *habitus.* A person without any *habitus* lacks what is required for sure comportment and finds any kind of purposeful activity difficult and burdensome.[162]

Cessario has even more adamant brothers-in-arms. Servais Pinckaers in his article "Virtue is not a Habit"[163] argues *habitus* means "above all; openness to creative activity, not stilted repetition."[164] Again, in a later article he writes: Virtue is much more than a habit. It is formed by the repetition of interior actions that insure excellence and progress in performance.[165] Yet

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[158] *ibid,* also *ST* IaIIae Q49, A1 and A2
[159] *ibid*
[160] *ibid ST* Ia Q87, A2
[161] R Cessario: *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics, op.cit.,* 35
[162] *ibid.*
[163] *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 80 (1960)
[164] Cessario *op.cit.,* 36
[165] Servais Pinckaers: "Rediscovering Virtue" *Thomist* Vol 60 No 3 July 1996, 372

Cessario can still point to writers who have an understanding of *habitus* as an 'acquired pattern of behaviour"[166] which is the result of repeated similar actions, "like putting so many creases in a starched linen cloth."[167]

Thomas and the scholastics located *habitus* within the philosophical category of quality, a means of identifying a substance (in the scholastic sense) as a special predictable kind of theory.[168] According to Aquinas, this quality of *habitus* refers to a "real modification of a person's moral character. Vicious *habitus* produce a vicious individual; virtuous *habitus*, a virtuous person."[169] Cessario stresses that for Aquinas to recognize a quality as a *habitus* there must be an element of permanence of the *habitus* in the persons' psychology. Most importantly he distinguishes *habitus* from dispositions precisely on the basis of how easily dispositions change *vis-à-vis habitus*, ie, dispositions change readily, *habitus* has some measure of permanency.[170] To take this concept of permanence further, at the beginning of Aquinas' exposition of the virtues in the *Summa*, when he wrote "the virtue of anything has to be judged in reference to a good. Human virtue therefore, which is an operative *habitus*, is a good *habitus* and productive of good" he emphasized that virtue is a good operative *habitus* which is productive of good ends.[171] The distinction between *habitus*, permanence and good ends on the one hand, and habits and inconstancy or temporality on the other, is of major importance for understanding virtue ethics. Similarly, Hauerwas argues that the *Summa*

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[166] *ibid*, 35
[167] *ibid.*
[168] *ibid.*
[169] *ibid.*, 40
[170] *ibid.*, 41, cf. *ST* IaIIae, Q49, A2, ad3.
[171] *ST* IaIIae, Q55, A3, cf. Cessario *ibid.*, 46

Theologiae, like the *Nicomachean Ethics'* use of *hexis,* uses *habitus* as a pivotal component in the definition of virtue,[172] with the attendant problem of the understanding of voluntariness, permanency and repititiveness *vis-à-vis habitus*. Cessario, and to a lesser extent, Hauerwas, appear to have partially resolved the problem of *habitus*/habit in that their usage is not uncritical, however one is still left with the question of whether it is still acceptable to use 'habit', and not *habitus,* insofar as the former has a very clear impact in contemporary usage of automatism, for example a heroin habit, which is only modified by intention and where free choice is at a discount, where it is a vicious *habitus*.

It is relevant here to refer to the strongly argued perspective of the late Yves Simon. He claims that "the use of *habitus* may well be one of the most interesting in all the history of philosophy."[173] He is quite candid when he says that he has tried to do something about *habitus* for over thirty years because it is a "very important philosophical term" which is "useful in several philosophical contexts and absolutely indispensable in a realistic theory of ethics."[174] He sees the "conventional translation of the Latin *habitus* as 'habit' "..... that creates the worse problem", (rather than *hexis* as 'habit'). The nub of the problem is that, according to Simon, if *habitus* is translated by "habit" it means that "for Aquinas acts proceeding from virtues are done involuntarily, which is totally absurd."[175] For Simon, this is decisive because "virtues are paragons of voluntariness and thus the very

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[172] S Hauerwas: *A Community of Character op.cit.,* 123
[173] Yves Simon: *The Definition of Moral Virtue op.cit.*, 55
[174] *ibid,* 55-56
[175] *ibid,* 57

opposite of habits,"[176] although Simon describes both habit and *habitus* as "stable dispositions established through repetition of acts."[177] He argues that one way to distinguish *habitus* from habit is to ask whether it is grounded in objective necessity, that is the necessity present in habit is subjective necessity, whereas in *habitus* it is objective necessity, such as in science.[178] In addition, habit and *habitus* can be distinguished by their *modus operandi.* Habits, according to Simon operate 'automatically' or 'mechanically' whereas *habitus* is marked by "unmistakeable vitality."[179] Simon stresses this point. "Habit relieves us of the need to think; but *habitus* makes us think creatively."[180] Simon has done this subject area of virtue and *habitus* a considerable service by stressing the voluntary aspect of *habitus.*

Simon's thought represents the culmination of twentieth century neo Thomism, but it should be noted in conclusion that with regard to the *habitus* controversy there have been contributions from other philosophical circles. As noted by Anthony Kenny, analytical philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Ryle have expressed interest in Aquinas' use of *habitus*, regarding it as an "original philosophical investigation of great importance."[181] Kenny, in particular, first undertook his analysis of the notion of disposition in his apparatus to Articles 49-54 of the IaIIae in Volume XXII of the Blackfriars edition of the *Summa.*[182] The importance of this work for the philosophy of mind can be gauged by the fact that

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[176] *ibid*, 58
[177] *ibid*, 58
[178] *ibid*, 58-60
[179] *ibid*, 60
[180] *ibid*
[181] A Kenny: *Aquinas* (Oxford: U.P., 1980), 22
[182] A Kenny: *The Metaphysics of Mind* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 160

Anthony Kenny's chapter on "Abilities, Faculties and Dispositions" in *The Metaphysics of Mind*[183] shadowed Chapter 5 of Ryle's *Concept of Mind.*[184] This latter chapter which "drew to the attention of philosophers of mind the importance of distinctions which had been emphasized by Aristotle [and Aquinas] but ignored or despised by modern philosophers,"[185] is regarded by Kenny as the most important in the book.[186] Kenny, for his part, points to the dimension of the *habitus* controversy relevant for the philosophy of mind.

> Beliefs and volitions, though they may both be described as dispositions, and contrasted in this way as something habitual rather than something episodic like a particular action or utterance, should not be thought of as being habits. Dispositions are not the same as habits (though all habits are dispositions).[187]

This comment illustrates the dimension of the ramifications of the IaIIae and in particular the impact on contemporary ethical theory of the link between philosophical psychology, philosophy of mind and virtue theory. The particular relevance for this thesis of the *habitus/hexis* controversy is that if virtue is involuntary because *habitus* is involuntary, and if there is a direct *nexus* between fundamental option and virtue, what role is left for freedom in FO?

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[183] *ibid*
[184] *ibid*
[185] *ibid,* vii
[186] *ibid*
[187] *ibid,* 89

In summary the *habitus*/habit controversy in some respects is a re-run of the *hexis* controversy for Aristotle. Aquinas, like Aristotle, grounds virtue in the total moral agency of the human person. Now Harak sees Thomist virtue in the light of the role of emotion and in this he has done us a singular favour. Virtue is seen as an **habitualised** appropriate emotion. Emotion is integral with reason and reason is needed for moral emotion (that is passion) to endure and become habitual. But where is voluntariness in all this? Has Harak installed passion as the consort to virtue at the expense of voluntariness? Porter's approach is more nuanced. She locates *habitus*/habit within scholastic philosophical psychology. The **habitual** process of formation of cognition, volition and passion is known as virtue. But again, where is voluntariness? Hauerwas adopts the middle ground. First, activity without *habitus* is simply movement. *Habitus* is pivotal and is predicated upon reason and volition. He translates *habitus* as habit and argues that it does not emerge from human identity in some automatic way. Hauerwas holds that habit, according to the scholastics, is the middle ground between pure power and pure act, between potency and actuality. Cessario although using the term *habitus* and not habit, agrees with the scholastic distinction of potency and actuality, however he also introduces the consideration that although voluntary activity always remains a realisation of *habitus*, *habitus* is distinguished from disposition because of the readily changeable nature of disposition. *Habitus* has the quality of permanence and endurance. Simon reinforces this. He stresses both the voluntariness of *habitus* and also the permanence of *habitus* (and habit) as a stable disposition established through repetition. However habit is automatic, mechanist and involves no cognition, whereas *habitus* has unmistakeable vitality dependent on rational thinking.

In short, the mix of emotion, cognition and volition is known as virtue. Virtue is predicated upon *habitus* which is a stable disposition, a middle ground between potency and actuality. It does not emerge from human identity in a mechanist, automatic way but is voluntarist and cognitional.

So far in the IaIIae Thomas has cleared the ground for his work on virtue. He began with the *finis ultimus,* worked through happiness, human acts, the passions, habits and now focuses on virtue. It is almost an anti-climax. Certainly, of necessity, a number of aspects of virtue have been anticipated in the preceding treatises. However at Q55, when Thomas takes on the task of considering the essence of virtue, his initial point is that "Virtue designates a certain kind of a perfection of a power."[188] As Oesterle observes, this phrase lays the groundwork for Thomas' definition of virtue by first, locating virtue in distinctively human powers and second, stressing the "wholly positive" nature of virtue in that virtue is a perfection, ie, the apex of human powers.[189] Next, Thomas presses into service *habitus* which disposes the human person to the *finis ultimus.*[190] In short the virtues make the human person and their acts good.[191]

Following Aristotle, Aquinas separates virtues into either intellectual or moral virtues deriving from two principles of human action, reason and appetite.[192] Following Plato, yet utilising the Aristotelian *schema,* Aquinas

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[188] *ST* IaIIae Q55, A1 Trans. J Oesterle, *Treatise on the Virtues* (Notre Dame Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 51
[189] J Oesterle: *op.cit,* xiii
[190] cf. *ST* IaIIae Q55, A1
[191] cf. *ST* IaIIae Q56, A3
[192] *ST* IaIIae Q56, A5

posits the four cardinal virtues. When the appetitive side of the human person, (that is the irascible and concupiscible powers), are in step with reason, courage and temperance will come about.[193] By contrast, the intellectual virtue of prudence (or wisdom) is brought about when the 'first principle' of human acts, that is reason, is perfected.[194] In general the intellectual virtues perfect the reason. Aquinas goes beyond Aristotle when he sources the virtues in God. Courage is the constancy of God, justice is the divine obedience of the eternal law, temperance is the Divinity gazing on himself alone, and prudence is the divine mind himself.[195]

This leads on to Aquinas' treatment of the theological virtues. Natural principles, eg, reason, are not sufficient to bring the human person to the *beatitudo*, it is only the theological virtues that can achieve this.

> These additional principles are called theological virtues: first, because they have God as their object, inasmuch as by them we are rightly ordered to God; secondly because they are infused in us by God alone; and finally, because these virtues are made known to us only by divine revelation in Sacred Scripture.[196]

Only these infused, theological virtues are perfect because only they can direct the human person to God. However there is a further consideration. Thomas refers to the natural virtues on the one hand, which arise from the potentiality of human nature and are perfected by *habitus*, and on the other

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[193] *ST* IaIIae Q56, A6
[194] *ST* IaIIae Q57, A5
[195] *ST* IaIIae Q61, A5
[196] *ST* IaIIae Q62, A1

all the infused virtues. By the latter he means that the theological virtues *per se* are infused in the human person by God[197] but in addition, because of the pivotal position of the infused theological virtue of love all the moral virtues are able to be infused. "All the infused moral virtues ... depend on charity."[198] Further this infusion is teleologically ordered to the *finis ultimus.*

> Now all virtues, intellectual and moral, which are acquired by our actions, proceed from certain natural principles which pre-exist in us... In place of these natural principles, God has bestowed on us theological virtues whereby we are ordered to a supernatural end... Hence it was necessary that other [*habitus*] corresponding proportionally to the theological virtues be caused in us by God which are related to the theological virtues as the moral and intellectual virtues are to the natural principles of virtues.[199]

This gives rise to the consideration that:

> only the infused virtues are perfect virtues and are to be called virtues unqualifiedly for they order man to his ultimate end absolutely. The other virtues, the acquired ones are virtues in a restricted sense, and not unqualifiedly, for they order man well regarding the ultimate end in some particular kind of action, but not in regard to the ultimate end absolutely.[200]

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[197] ST IaIIae Q63, A1-2
[198] *ST* IaIIae Q65, A2, R
[199] *ST* IaIIae Q63, A3
cf. Oesterle: *op.cit*, 128, also
R. Sokolowski: *the God of Faith and Reason* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), 77
[200] *ST* IaIIae Q65, A2

Hence, for the passage in Scripture, "all that is not from faith is sin" [Rom: 14:23], a gloss of Augustine reads: "Where knowledge of truth is lacking, virtue is false even in those with the best behaviour."[201] Here Thomas has followed Plato and Augustine in establishing the nexus between knowledge and virtue. This nexus may be seen as one of the precursors for the contemporary rediscovery of virtue epistemology, however, despite Aquinas' treatment of the intellectual virtues (*à la* Aristotle), his epistemological interests were "comparatively slight".[202]

The place of natural law *vis-à-vis* the virtues in Aquinas should also be given brief mention. Recent work by D M Nelson[203], pursued independently, but corroborating earlier work done by Dom Odon Lottin[204], argues that Thomas' guidelines for moral reasoning are located not within his brief treatment of natural law within the *Summa Theologiae* but rather within an ethics of prudential virtue. The role of natural law for Thomas is to move the human person to have an inclination to the end of virtue. Nelson's Thomist interpretation sees virtues as dependent on principle (ie, natural law) only "insofar as principles themselves are expressions of prudential behaviour."[205] That is, there is an interdependence between principle and virtue. Also, natural law is seen in an anthropological context rather than in a functional or normative way. This highlights the fact that Aquinas' understanding of virtue was not monist or essentialist, that is

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[201] *ST* IaIIae Q65, A2, Oesterle: *op.cit,* 143
[202] A. Kenny: "Introduction" to *Aquinas: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 4
[203] Daniel Mark Nelson: *The Priority of Prudence: Virtue and Natural Law in Thomas Aquinas and the Implications for Modern Ethics* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1992)
[204] Dom Odon Lottin: *La Théorie du libre arbitre dépuis S. Anselme jusqu'à S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Louvain: St Maximin, 1929)
[205] James F Keenan: Review of Nelson's work in *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol 34, No 3, Sept 1994, 388

virtue was not the single unique determinant of moral action, but rather, virtue was integrated with other ethical principles, yet not a hand maiden to those principles.

4.6 A Short Note on Kierkegaard and Virtue

We have already examined Soren Kierkegaard's contribution to theory of fundamental option, initially because of the mention made of him by Karl Rahner, but also because of the importance of Kierkegaard's approach to existential choosing and subjectivity. However, there is now a need to examine Kierkegaard's thought with regard to virtue theory for four good reasons.

- Kierkegaard, along with Aquinas and possibly Augustine, represents the early rudimentary, tentative attempts to establish some link between virtue and fundamental option (however well camouflaged). The task for the present is simply to outline Kierkegaard's approach to virtue, but this is a necessary preliminary for the attempt to sketch the antecedents of the Rahnerian nexus between fundamental option and virtue in Chapter 10.

- Kierkegaard is a harbinger of postmodernity. Kierkegaard is seen by Alasdair MacIntyre, at least with regard to *Either/or* as "at once the outcome and the epitaph of the Enlightenment's systematic attempt to discover a natural justification of morality."[206] That is, MacIntyre sees the contrast between the aesthetic and ethical stages in *Either/or* as a

[206] A. MacIntyre: *After Virtue, op. cit,* 39

harbinger of the plurality and capriciousness of contemporary moral culture, and also that, in dialogue with Kant, Kierkegaard showed that "the precepts of reason could not themselves be rationally vindicated."[207] In short, MacIntyre sees Kierkegaard as a pivotal figure of modernity but his understanding of Kierkegaard for the intellectual lineage of virtue theory does not go uncontested. There has been mention recently in philosophical circles of the "Kierkegaard effect in Post-Modernity"[208] which is typified in the comment that "Kierkegaard, like Nietzsche, deserves to be a full partner in contemporary philosophical conversations."[209] Habermas and Derrida have engaged with his thought, the latter referring to Kierkegaard as a deconstructionist ahead of his age,[210] in sum Kierkegaard is one of the pre-eminent dialogue partners in postmodernism.

- Kierkegaard with his nominal Lutheran doctrinal background, has been located both historically and in systematic theological perspective between Roman Catholic perspectives and those of the Reformed Church. As such he can be seen as a proto-ecumenicist, and may in fact be quite close to Karl Rahner's position on virtue and fundamental option, in particular in "his understanding of freedom's rule in faith and grace."[211]

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[207] Robert Wokler: "Projecting the Enlightenment", in J. Horton & S. Mendus (eds): *After MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), 112
[208] M. Matustik & M. Westphal: *Kierkegaard in Post-Modernity* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), ix
[209] *ibid*, vii
[210] *ibid*, xi
[211] cf. L. Dupré: *Kierkegaard as Theologian: The Dialectics of Existence* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963),x-xi, referred to in D.J. Gouwens: *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 9

- If Kierkegaard is claimed by both the Enlightenment and also postmodernism, he is also only too well entrenched in the virtue tradition. In fact it has been argued that Kierkegaard is far nearer the classical tradition of virtue than to the near *cliché* of 'existential volitionism' of Sartre *et alii*,[212] where Kierkegaard is seen as a proto-existentialist.[213]

> "Important as 'will' and 'decision' are for him, Kierkegaard stands rather in the broad tradition - extending from Plato and Aristotle through Plutarch, Orthodox Christianity and addressed anew in Pietism and in moral philosophers such as Kant - of ethics as virtue."[214]

Although this comment illustrates the tension between the decision/fundamental option tradition on the one hand and the virtue tradition on the other, it does us the equally important service of placing him firmly in the virtue tradition. As Robert C. Roberts, a leading theorist in virtue ethics has said "Kierkegaard is pre-eminently a 'virtue ethicist'."[215] What was the immediate background for Kierkegaard's treatment of virtue? Despite his fulmination against Hegel, Kierkegaard had, rather, another mentor. As Alasdair MacIntyre notes "It is ... Kant's moral philosophy which is the essential background for Kierkegaard's treatment of the ethical."[216] Kierkegaard inherits a tradition from Kant and this influences Kierkegaard. The Rahnerian parallels become obvious. What exactly was Kierkegaard's account of the virtues?

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[212] Gouwens: *op.cit.*, 11
[213] R.C. Roberts: "Kierkegaard, Wittgenstein and a Method of "Virtue Ethics" in Matustik, *op.cit.*, 148
[214] *ibid*, 94
[215] *ibid*, 148
[216] MacIntyre: *After Virtue, op.cit.*, 43

Here, it is profitable to follow a recent account by David Gouwens which is totally focussed on Kierkegaard's anthropological ethical thinking as it relates to the theological virtues.[217] We will also refer to Robert C. Roberts' critique of Kierkegaard who argues that in Kierkegaard's "analysis of various virtues we find a model for the central method of virtue ethics, a method largely neglected by present day practitioners of the discipline."[218] This model is the "sustained grammatical analysis"[219] of several virtues, in particular, the theological virtues.

However, there is a need to establish what Kierkegaard sees as the essence of virtue. To begin, he is reluctant to use the term 'virtue' although the concept of virtue is plain enough in his work. The simple explanation for this is that, for Kierkegaard, the word 'virtue' is associated wtih our old acquaintance 'habit'.[220] Robert C. Roberts argues that Kierkegaard perceives virtues as invoking will-power and skill, not habit.[221] This extends to his circumspection with regard to the Aristotelian understanding of virtue where he perceives it as "moderation dealing only with habit, not with free acts."[222] As Roberts points out, when Kierkegaard says that "the opposite of sin is not virtue, but faith"[223], although faith is incontrovertibly a theological virtue, and *ipso facto* a virtue in itself, Kierkegaard obviously has a different understanding of the term 'virtue'. It is more akin to the

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[217] David Gouwens: *Kierkegaard as Religious Thinker* (Cambridge: Unviersity Press, 1996)
[218] R.C. Roberts: *op.cit.*, 148
[219] *ibid*, 164
[220] cf. *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers* (ed) & trans. H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong (London: Indiana University Press, 1967-78) I 893 Paper IV C 17 n.d. 1843-43 ref. Gouwens: *op.cit.*, note 31, 101
[221] cf. R.C. Roberts: "Will Power and the Virtues" *The Philosophical Review* 93 (April 1984): 227-47 cf. Gouwens *op.cit.*, 100-101
[222] cf. Gouwen: *op.cit.*, 101, *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, op.cit.*, I 892 (Paper IV c16 n.d. 1842-43)
[223] *The Sickness Unto Death* tr. H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 82, cf. Roberts: "Kierkegaard" *op.cit.*, 151

discounted Hellenistic concept of the virtuous person as the person of excellence and accomplishment, of a virtue that is acquired unaided, a Pelagian antithesis to theological virtue. He distinguishes between the 'bare continuity'[224] of habit and a true ethics of disposition that necessarily requires freedom and will.[225] Virtue, for Kierkegaard, is not to be found in habit but in active resolution, in personal formation.[226] Implicated in this is a rejection of a type of eudaimonism, that happiness as a reward for virtue should be thought of as distinct from virtue.[227]

Rather, for Kierkegaard, although virtue is 'essentially significant';[228] its philosophical dimension is secondary, where he recasts eudaemonistic ethics in terms of relationship with God, just as Aquinas had also recast eudaemonism[229] (ref. 4.7). This is also linked to the perception that the cultivation of the virtues, *qua* virtues, subjects the human person to the dangers of narcissism and self absorption.[230] In short, virtue is rather the God given gift of faith and also hope and love, conditioned in inwardness and passion.[231]

> Morality is character; character is something engraved ... but the sea has no character, nor does the sand, nor abstract common sense, either, for character is inwardness.[232]

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[224] Gouwens: *op.cit.*, 101
[225] *ibid*
[226] *ibid*, 101, 109
[227] *ibid*, 99
[228] G.E. Arbaugh: "Christian Virtues" in Thulstrop & Thulstrop (eds): *The Sources and Depths of Faith in Kierkegaard* I, 100 cf. Gouwens: *op.cit.*, 94
[229] Gouwens: *op.cit.*, 115
[230] *ibid*, 116
[231] *ibid*, 117, 96
[232] Soren Kierkegaard: *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution & The Present Age: A Literary Review* tr. H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong (Princeton: University Press, 1978) 77-78, cf. Gouwens *op.cit.*, 95

By way of aside, if Kierkegaard stresses the primacy of grace (i.e., the infusion of the theological virtues) over virtue, and if he stresses interiority, voluntariness and volition, does he have any place for knowledge and virtue? His notion of the spheres of existence (see 3.4) would tend to discount it, and also his use of paradox. For Kierkegaard, virtue epistemology would appear problematic. However in summary, Kierkegaard represents the Reformed tradition in virtue yet is also within the classical tradition where he sees virtues, primarily faith, as invoking skill and volition, not habit.

4.7 The Recovery of Virtue Ethics

Alasdair MacIntyre sees Hume and Smith as the last great moral philosophers in the classical tradition of virtue.[233] At the same time as this demise of virtue of the classical tradition, the manualist tradition in its assumption of pre-eminence in moral theology came to be synonomous with a narrow legalist perspective. Apart from its dependence on canon law, it also found congenial the prevailing system of moral philosophy and moral theology, namely natural law. Roger Crisp[234] argues that the legalist perspective of moral act and moral obligation rather than moral agency were transmuted into Kantian deontologism and Benthamite utilitarianism, all at the expense of the virtue tradition. In the former 'the right action is performed out of respect for the moral *law*', in the latter the right act is one which 'one is required to perform by morality.'

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[233] Alasdair MacIntyre: "Moral Philosophy - What Next?" in MacIntyre *et.al.*(eds.) *Revisions* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 9 (Although the later MacIntyre does not have a positive view of Hume, cf. *Whose Justice?*)

[234] Roger Crisp: 'Modern Moral Philosophy and the Virtues' in R Crisp (ed) *How Should We Live* (Oxford, 1996), 1

Although virtue ethics fell into disfavour for the better part of the last two centuries, (Kierkegaard notwithstanding) it has enjoyed a postmodern resurgence in acceptance in philosophical circles over the last two decades particularly in British philosophy within the Analytical tradition.[235] This 'recovery' of virtue can be traced to the seminal article of Anscombe's, 'Modern Moral Philosophy' in *Philosophy* of January 1958. In one of the most influential philosophical journal articles of this century,[236] Elizabeth Anscombe saw moral philosophy of the twentieth century as plagued by legalist approaches that bore little credibility following the demise of natural law. Anscombe looked to a number of remedies such as an adequate philosophy of psychology and of the inadequacy of the moral sense of ought, but also the recovery of virtue. She "launched an offensive against modern moral philosophy in its Kantian and Utilitarian forms"[237] by reviving interest in Aristotle and virtue and attempting to rehabilitate virtue ethics in contemporary moral philosophy circles. In moral theology there had been similar excursions. James Gustafson sensed the importance of the dispositions and began to develop some of Richard Niebuhr's ideas on the nature of the self.[238] There was also an interaction between moral theology and moral philosophy. In 1973, the first issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics* published a debate between advocates of virtue ethics on the one hand and act-based ethics on the other. In this and subsequent issues debate was joined between influential figures such as William Frankena and Stanley Hauerwas.

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[235] Romanus Cessario: *The Moral Virtues and Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame: UP, 1991), 12
[236] G E M Anscombe: 'Modern Moral Philosophy' *Philosophy* 33 (1958)
[237] Owen Flanagan: *Varieties of Moral Personality* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 181
[238] cf. Stanley Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1985), xiii, xviii

By 1975, Anscombe's re-evaluations had begun to reach a wider audience, in particular Stanley Hauerwas, who wrote a far more extensive treatment of character, (read virtue), from both a theological and philosophical perspective. *Character and the Christian Life* owed as much to Aquinas as to Aristotle but it was a significant treatment of virtue from a Protestant theological perspective. Its influence reached near and far, especially the University of Notre Dame. A close colleague of Hauerwas at Notre Dame, Alisdair MacIntyre, produced *After Virtue* in 1981. This was the culmination of the percolation of the recoverist initiative through philosophical (and literary) circles. A brilliant and prodigious book, *After Virtue* set a large part of the agenda for the mainstream debate on virtue ethics that was to develop in the next two decades. Although in a sense idiosyncratic, it focused on an Aristotelian teleology but also pulled into the debate such issues as community, narrative and tradition. Its main concern was philosophical ethics but by the completion of the next two volumes in the trilogy, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* it was apparent that there was a debt to theological ethics, in particular, Thomism. Although MacIntyre had set a large part of the agenda for the debate in 1981 with *After Virtue*, the debate was not confined to MacIntyre's concerns and spilled over into other areas, such as moral agency, emotion and the relationship of ethics to moral psychology and philosophy of mind. The 1980's saw the emergence of a debate over an ethical theory, ie, virtue ethics, that was a catalyst in changing the direction of ethical theory by re-examining its relationship with other disciplines and also re-examining its own internal agenda. For example, although virtue ethics could be seen as a 'first order' ethical theory, such as consequentialism or deontologism, it has had ramifications for meta ethics, as for example the role of the passions or emotions in a moral context.

Whether virtue ethics can now be reinstated to an acknowledged position alongside Utilitarian or Kantian ethics is a question generating much interest. Certainly it has been said that the preeminence of the latter moral philosophies are under threat and their predominance may already be over.[239] Virtue ethics is also seen in some quarters as the offspring of postmodernity. Virtue ethics, which has been ignored or ridiculed for most of this century *vis-à-vis* consequentialism and deontology has found itself a new recognition.[240] As Servais Pinckaers remarks: "Virtue is back."[241]

A more particular account of virtue ethics, that of Karl Rahner, is given in Chapter 9. Now it has been claimed that virtue ethics has played a minor role in post conciliar moral theology, at least in Roman Catholic circles.[242] There has also been speculation that virtue ethics is virtue ethics and fundamental option is fundamental option and never the twain shall meet.[243] What is remarkable is that the virtue tradition that once dominated much of moral theology should not receive more attention with the postmodernist recovery of virtue ethics in philosophical (and some theological) circles. This is highlighted by the divide between postmodern, non-universalist virtue ethics and postconciliar universalist fundamental option theory. There are several further reasons for this lack of engagement between moral theology and virtue ethics? It can be argued that there has been a distrust of Hellenistic and therefore non-Christian sources of virtue ethics, ie, Plato and Aristotle. There is also the perception that there is an inherent

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[239] R Crisp: *op.cit.* p.2, for the *contra* see John Coleman: "Values and Virtues in Advanced Modern Societies" *Concilium* No 191 (3, 1987)
[240] Julia Annas: "Virtue as a Skill" *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* Vol 3(2), 1995, 227
[241] Servais Pinckaers: "Rediscovering Virtue" *The Thomist* Vol 60, No 3, July 1996, 361
[242] R. Cessario: *op.cit.*, 12
[243] F. Moloney: pers. comm. 1 Nov 1996

individualism in virtue ethics to the detriment of communitarian ethical approaches. Further this individualism may become egocentric to the extent that cultivation of virtue may become a cerebral version of anaerobics. This is linked to Protestant concerns that see virtue ethics bordering on the Pelagian.[244]

However within the phenomenon of the recovery of virtue ethics one possible link has emerged. As noted in Chapter 2, the demise of manualist moral theology saw a shift in focus from moral act to moral agency. Now one version of contemporary secular virtue ethics, 'agent-based' virtue ethics, (as opposed to 'agent-prior' or 'good-based' virtue ethics) which makes "virtue, motivation or other internal states of the agent ethically fundamental",[245] may provide a close link to the moral anthropology of fundamental option. Before examining this link in the work of Karl Rahner we now need to examine the nature of his thought and his transcendental anthropology.

4.8 Conclusion

Hellenistic virtue, in particular Aristotelian virtue, has provided the foundation for the recovery of virtue. Although Plato provided the perspective of virtue as knowledge, Aristotle explored the relationship of virtue to such considerations as affectivity, voluntarism, habituation, volition, teleology, Eudaemonia, reason and cognition. Some of the leading Thomist commentators on Aristotelian virtue stress that virtues are products of choice, paradigms of voluntariness, predicated upon the *hexis* of the

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[244] Cessario: *op.cit.*, 18ff, B.W. Farley: *In Praise of Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 2
[245] L. Zagzebski: *Virtues of the Mind, op.cit.*, 80

moral agent. A moral act is voluntary if it lies within the moral agent himself and is predicated upon the use of choice, which in turn is determined by both reason and desire. Desire is a mix of volition, emotion and appetite. Virtue is integrated into the moral agency of the human person where volition, affectivity, cognition and voluntariness all hold sway.

Biblical virtue provides a development of, and perspective to, this Aristotelian virtue. The Gospels endorse an ethic of character and moral agency, which could loosely be described as the heart. Further, the *telos* of the human person is found in the *Basileia* and is not dependent upon the exercising of virtue *per se*, but rather through the prevalence of God's grace. Virtue is the result of the primacy of grace indwelling with the Holy Spirit in freedom.

Augustine synthesised a biblical understanding of virtue within a Platonist framework. He developed an approach from volition, where virtue is subordinate to the will and the will is subordinate to God. This is engaged with Augustine's doctrine of love where the rightness and wrongness of love is determined by the appropriateness of the object of that love. Virtues are not good in their own right, their goodness is derived from the goodness of love of which they are dispositions. The virtues are not monist but possess a unity which is subordinate, via the theological virtues to the Trinity. The culmination of the virtue of love is found not in virtue itself but in knowledge, in particular, knowledge of the Trinity.

Aquinas built on the work of both Augustine and Aristotle. He transformed the *telos* of *eudaimonia* to that of the *beatitudo.* The *finis ultimus* of the

human person is the happiness found in *beatitudo*. Aquinas also looks to the cultivation and transformation of affectivity. The passions have objects and they function correctly when they make the human person approach that object which is good and avoid that which is bad. Ultimately, passions can be determined by the virtue of love for the ultimate other, i.e., God. An important component of virtue is *habitus*, which is seen as a middle position between potency and actuality. It is marked by both vitality and permanence yet is subject to the will and reason. It is not mechanist and determined. Although Aquinas sources the cardinal virtues in God, only the theological virtues are perfect because only they can direct the human person to God, and further, because of the pivotal nature of the infused theological virtue of love, all the moral virtues are able to be infused. These infused virtues are teleologically ordered to the *finis ultimus*.

Kierkegaard represents the reformed tradition on virtue. He saw the virtues as invoking volition and skill, not habit. They are found in personal formation, not habit and are ultimately the product of grace. Virtue is ultimately the God given gift of faith, and also hope and love conditioned in inwardness and passion. The recovery of virtue has taken a largely secular perspective of most of the elements of these traditions, and provides an atlernative to the prevailing ethical theories of deontology and utilitarianism.

In summary, the tradition of virtue ethics has given priority to such concerns as reason, volition, affectivity and voluntariness. A pivotal concern in this tradition has been the understanding of the use of the term '*habitus*' which has been construed as on the one hand as something autonomic or habitual, and on the other as something purely voluntary.

This problem will recur when we examine Rahner in his understanding of virtue and in particular the link between virtue and fundamental option, given that the Rahnerian understanding of fundamental option is predicated on fundamental freedom. There is also the attendant concern that virtue is in some way linked to knowledge, and again, we will encounter this concern of virtue epistemology when we deal with Karl Rahner's anthropology.

PART II

RAHNER'S THOUGHT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MORAL THEOLOGY

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CHAPTER 5 Through a Glass Darkly - The Nature of Rahner's Thought

CHAPTER 6 Some Aspects of Rahner's Moral Anthropology

CHAPTER 7 The Deepest Longing and its Horizon - The Supernatural Existential as a Precursor to the Fundamental Option

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CHAPTER 5
THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY - THE NATURE OF RAHNER'S THOUGHT

This anthropology is naturally to be understood as a transcendental anthropology. A **transcendental investigation** examines an issue according to the necessary conditions given by the possibility of knowledge and action on the part of the subject himself. Such an investigation presupposes that the subject of the act of knowing is not simply a 'thing' among others which can be made at will. The object of a statement including other objects, but which is not present at all - even implicitly - in statements purely about other objects. If I speak of Australia I have not said anything, not even implicitly about Java. But in such a statement (from the point of view of its content and import) I have said something implicitly about man as its subject.

Karl Rahner: "Theology and Anthropology", *TI* IX, 28

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The metaphysical anthropology underlying our reflections [on moral theology] would of course, require to be worked out and proved more exactly.

Karl Rahner: *"Guilt and its Remission" TI* II, 265

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5 THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY - THE NATURE OF RAHNER'S THOUGHT

5.1 Introduction

In the closing decades of twentieth century postmodernity, it has become clear that Karl Rahner has occupied a pivotal and pre-eminent position in modern theology. His anthropology has been chosen for the subject of study of this thesis not only because of its pre-eminence but also because of its pervasive influence on moral theology.

- The most influential theory of fundamental option has been the Rahnerian theory based on the distinction between transcendental (or fundamental) freedom and categorical freedom. Although other approaches to fundamental option have been developed, Rahner's theory is the type that is most commonly accepted (and is able to be reconciled with other approaches to fundamental option). His is the most representative.

- Rahner, as a self-confessed Thomist, accepted the Thomist approach to virtue. Accordingly he gives recognition to the ethics of virtue, albeit in a modest way. As such Rahner represents a strong link with the Catholic tradition of *Aeterni Patris*, but also may provide a bridgehead to the thinkers standing squarely in the movement of the recovery of virtue.

- Because of Rahner's work on both fundamental option and virtue, he may provide some link between these two theories. This will be pursued in Part III. However for the moment it is necessary to understand the background and dimensions to his thought.

Although the task of this thesis is to consider certain aspects and extensions of Rahner's moral theology (viz. fundamental option and virtue), it is important at the outset to focus on the philosophical and fundamental theological influences on his thought. It is important because a theologian is never completely independent of their circumstances in society, or their intellectual lineage. In assessing these influences new perspectives on their thought may develop.

This is especially true in the case of Karl Rahner for several reasons:

- Rahner is notoriously difficult to understand which led his brother Hugo to quip that he would have to translate Karl into German sometime;[1]
- Rahner's theology is a near compendium of European intellectual history, viz: Maréchal and neo-Thomism, Heidegger and both existentialism and phenomenology, Kant and Hegel and German idealism, Aquinas, Augustine and the patristic authors, not to mention Aristotle, Plato and various minor European philosophers;
- As Vass comments, anyone who attempts to understand Rahner is living "not only in a linguistic but also in an ideological no-man's land

[1] N. Ormerod: *Introducing Contemporary Theologies* (Sydney: Dwyer, 1990), 93

between German and Anglo-Saxon worlds."[2] It is essential that a student of Rahner crosses this divide of ignorance and distance;

- Rahner himself was a model of modesty and discounted his contribution to theology. For example, he referred to himself as an 'amateur theologian'.[3] By this he meant that his theology was not systematic, which was in a sense correct, as he never wrote a *magnum opus*, although *Foundations of Christian Faith* was more than a cursory overview of his theology. Again, when asked during a colloquium at Fordham University in New York in 1980 to elaborate on his philosophy, he replied "I do not have a philosophy".[4] By that he meant that faith and theology do not begin with philosophy, but with an encounter with Jesus of Nazareth.[5] However, for Rahner, philosophy did play an important role in the elaboration of theology, a role that can only be ignored by the student at the peril of a gross misunderstanding of his work.

5.2 The Sources of Rahner's Thought

5.2.1 Mysticism and Ignatian Spirituality

Karl Rahner has been described as the most significant and the most important mystical theologian of the Twentieth Century[6], a "Doctor

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[2] G. Vass: *A Theologian in Search of a Philosophy: Understanding Karl Rahner,* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985), XIII
[3] J.A. Di Noia: "*Karl Rahner*" in D. Ford (ed): *The Modern Theologians,* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 183
[4] W.F. Dych: *Karl Rahner, op.cit.,* 18
[5] *ibid,* 29
[6] Harvey Egan: *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism,* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1991), 598-599

Mysticus",[7] that there is no one who has written as "profoundly or convincingly ... of the experience of God as the mystery who haunts every human heart".[8] We are able to apply that much debased word "mystical" to Rahner's theology because "it takes seriously the **experience**, albeit often hidden or repressed, of God's self-communication."[9]

But if this is all to do with **God's** self-communication, what place is left for the fundamental option, or alternatively, how is the fundamental option of the human person related to God's purpose? Rahner has written:

> In every human being there is something like an anonymous unthematic, perhaps repressed, basic experience of being orientated to God, which is constitutive of man in his concrete make-up (of nature and grace) which can be repressed but not destroyed, which is 'mystical' or (if you prefer a more cautious terminology) has its climax in what the older teachers called informal contemplation.[10]

What Rahner appears to be saying is that the dichotomy between the human person and God becomes subordinated to the infusion of God in the soul, to the unitive mystical state. Rahner confesses that even the mystic has difficulty in "describing his own genuine experience in appropriate language."[11] In addition, Rahner has to admit that within the body of Christian theology, "there is no generally received theology of mysticism".[12]

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[7]Egan (ed.): *I Remember, op.cit.*, 3
[8]*ibid*
[9]*ibid*
[10]"Teresa of Avila: Doctor of the Church" in Karl Rahner: *Opportunities for Faith* p. 125 quoted in Egan *op. cit.*, 599
[11]*Sacramentum Mundi, op.cit.*, 1010
[12]T.I *XVIII*, 175, quoted in Lehmann et al. *Practice of Faith*, 56

Notwithstanding these qualifications Rahner can state that "Mysticism has existed and still exists".[13] He continues that the subjects of mystical experience report experience of grace, of God:

> the direct presence of God, and union with him in the Spirit, in the sacred night, or in a blessed illumination, in a void silently filled by God. They say that, at most within the mystical occurrence itself, they do not doubt that they experience the direct presence of the self-communicating God as the action and actuality of God's saving grace in the depths of their existence, and that that experience is the 'experience of the Holy Spirit'.

This mystical experience occurs within a framework of grace and faith, which is no different from the ordinary life of grace.[14] Rahner stresses that to approach mysticism from any other theoretical perspective would be to fall foul of either gnosticism or theosophy, or to overestimate mysticism and to underestimate the profundity of the "ordinary life of Christian grace".[15]

However Rahner augments this experiential, individualist approach to mysticism with his understanding of its social setting:

> There are some words in which the knowledge, the hope and the love, the ideals of whole generations and centuries are gathered, words which attempt to say at once all that moves mankind, and which, because they attempt to say everything are in constant danger of signifying everything and nothing. Such words were, for example, in the history of Western man: Logos, Illumination, Spirit, Nation (*Volk*) and others. And among them also belongs the word 'mysticism'. This too is one of those words in which man seeks to comprise everything that he believes and wants to be.[16]

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[13] *Spirit in the Church*, 7
[14] *Sacramentum Mundi*, 1010
[15] *ibid.*
[16] "The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World" *TI III*, 278

In the wider, objective context of understanding mysticism, Rahner is aware of such questions as

- Is there a natural mysticism?
- Is supernatural mysticism found outside Christianity?
- Is the central phenomenon of Christian mysticism infused contemplation?
- Can there be any middle ground between faith and the immediate vision of God.[17]

Although Rahner has stated that there is no generally received theology of mysticism it is apparent that there is some nexus between theology and mysticism (or spirituality), but what exactly is it?

Several commentators have stressed the importance of Rahner's mystical perspective *vis à vis* his theology with the recognition that the Ignatian influence is probably the most fundamental.[18] Geffrey Kelly argues that if Rahner's mysticism is ignored, the real key to Rahner's theology is missed.[19] Gerald McCool sees a deepseated, harmonious unity between Rahner's mysticism and his theology.[20] Herbert Vorgrimler regarded Rahner's two reflective, mystical works *Happiness through Prayer* and *Encounters with Silence*[21] as so important that he could write that they were "the best and most influential part of his work, for in the last resort, what is

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[17] *ibid,* 279
[18] M.E. Hines: *The Transformation of Dogma* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 121
[19] Geffrey Kelly: *Karl Rahner,* 56
[20] Gerald McCool: *A Rahner Reader,* 313
[21] Karl Rahner: *Happiness through Prayer* 1958, *Encounters with Silence* 1960

learning by comparison with the realization of God in the heart of the individual in solitary human being."[22]

Both German and English-speaking commentators, both intimate collaborators and disciples and second generation commentators, are convinced of the importance and integral value of Rahner's mysticism for his theology. But what did Rahner say? In one of his conversations in *Karl Rahner in Dialogue* we find the following comment:

> For me in my theology the giveness of a genuine, original experience of God and His Spirit is of fundamental importance. This precedes logically (and not necessarily transparently) theological reflection and realization and is never adequately overtaken by this reflection.[23]

Rahner saw significant consequences for this finding:

> The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist. Fundamentally it means only that an immediate, personal experience of God must be found.[24]

Rahner's unapologetic use of the term mystic reinforces his view that mysticism is foundational for theology and is the hope of the future. But this is not to say that theology, in particular theological anthropology is optional. This is indicated by Rahner's comment on Aquinas. "Thomas' theology is his spiritual life and his spiritual life is his theology."[25] It has been pointed out that this can also be said of Rahner, particularly as Rahner always regarded himself as a Thomist. And here we have another indicator

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[22]H. Vorgrimler: *Karl Rahner: Life Thought and Works* quoted in Kelly *op. cit.*, 61
[23](ed.) Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons: *Karl Rahner in Dialogue, op.cit.*, 328
[24]*ibid,* 176
[25]*Everyday Faith* p.188 quoted in Kelly *op. cit.*, 56

to Rahner's thought. Rahner's philosophical inheritance is considerable, Maréchal, Heidegger, *et alii*, but he also has a considerable spiritual/mystical inheritance. Not only is he an inheritor of Thomas but, like his brother Hugo, in his early years Karl Rahner had made a considerable study of the Church fathers. It has been described as a prayerful, mystical inspiration from the fathers.[26] Rahner was also familiar with the Spanish Carmelite mystics of the sixteenth century, John of the Cross and Theresa of Avila but the figure that looms larger, much larger, is Ignatius of Loyola. During the early period of his life, along with his brother Hugo, he made a special study of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius which assumed a central importance in his later work.

> I think that the spirituality of Ignatius himself, which one learned through the practice of prayer and religious formation was more significant for me than all learned philosophy and theology inside and outside the Order.[27]

Again Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, said Rahner, were a "literature of piety which forestalls theological reflection".[28]

Although Rahner's early philosophical works of *Spirit in the World* and *Hearers of the Word* may give the impression of being the foundations of his system of thought, the reality is that the original inspiration is "a faith seeking to understand more fully and to pray more lovingly in a movement that seems to generate its own foundational setting from within".[29] This turn to the interior, in particular the use of Ignatian discernment of spirits

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[26]Kelly *op. cit.*, 61
[27]*Karl Rahner in Dialogue, op.cit.*, 191
[28]*Dynamic Element in the Church, op.cit.*, 85
[29]Kelly *op. cit.*, 59

will be examined more fully below. But first, the place of grace in Rahner's mysticism must be studied.

Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* poses the dynamic tension between grace and sin in the human soul. Rahner, in his own work *Spiritual Exercises*, takes Ignatius as his starting point, in his focussing on God and grace:

> The 'spiritual life' is life with God and toward God. We are leading this life when we forget ourselves for God, when we love Him, praise Him, thank Him. All that is certainly an unforced gift of the free grace of God.[30]

There are the methodological implications. Leo O'Donovan cautions against the tendency to interpret Rahner by his transcendental anthropology which would be 'lop-sided'. Rather, there is the dialectic of mysticism which starts with grace and God's presence, then, according to O'Donovan, moves to "the experience of communicating in the freedom of Christ" and the moves to "a worship without words".[31]

According to O'Donovan then, grace is the mystical starting point. But there are difficulties. As Rahner himself observes, is the experiential contact with grace in infused contemplation compatible with the theological data concerning the nature of grace?[32] Given Rahner's considerable contribution to the debate on nature and grace, I would argue on balance that Rahner is able to reconcile grace in infused contemplation with the theological deposit, such as it is.[33]

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[30]*Spiritual Exercises, op.cit.*, 69
[31]quoted in Kelly *op. cit*, 59
[32]"The Ignatian Mysticism of Joy in the World." *TI* III, 279
[33]*ibid*

This is reinforced by Rahner's mystical approach, an approach of everyday mysticism in the world. He writes of the Ignatian method.

> By means of a true retreat a person is able to get out of his own desperate situation and into infinite breadth of God. If we do what we can, then God will bless us with his grace during these days, even though we may not be able to perceive it, and perhaps we will then be able to say with Jacob 'I have seen God!'[34]

So Rahner prays for an exposure to grace in the pursuit of the Ignatian exercises. McCool reinforces this when he argues that Rahner sees the Christian life as a life of surrender to grace. It follows that "some form of self-denying asceticism must be part of every Christian's life".[35] This leads to Rahner's treatment of the Reformation concern of *simul justus et peccator* and also to his ideas on concupiscence. We also need to recollect Rahner's use of discernment in his formal existential ethics (cf. 6.3).

In the last years of Rahner's life an interviewer put the following question to him:

> Isn't also the 'nontheological' master, Ignatius with his spirituality of finding God in all things and his theological ethos of decision, essential to your theology, including how you address basic moral questions (eg. the justification and limits of situation ethics)?[36]

Rahner's response was "by all means!" with the rider that "I hope I have remained faithful to the Ignatian spirituality of my order." It has been

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[34]*Spiritual Exercises, op.cit.*, 14
[35]McCool: *op. cit.*, 318
[36]Karl Rahner: *Faith in a Wintry Season* (ed) Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons, *op.cit.*, 18

argued that Rahner has developed Ignatian insights for his theology in several places[37] and that Rahner invoked Ignatius to show that:

- in personal decision (not just moral decisions) there is an individual element which is above the general (cf. formal existential ethics 6.3).

- This individual element assists in making our personal decision a genuine discernment of God's will.

- This discernment is not only by reason but by the Ignatian discernment of spirits.[38]

Further, Rahner shows that this Ignatian theory of election, ie, making a major religious decision, involves the discerning of God's will for the person above the divine will found in natural law, Scripture and the magisterium.[39] Given the three modes of Ignatian election, the second mode requires the discernment of spirits. Rahner defines this as: "The ability to hear and recognise God's call to this man alone among many voices all calling him in different directions; the 'spirits'."[40] A further part of this discernment is the experience of God which Ignatius referred to as "consolation without a cause" (*consolación sin causa*),[41] or objectless consolation. Rahner defines it as "the absence of object in question is utter receptivity to God"[42] and it is a consolation "which cannot decline because

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[37]E. Allsopp: Karl Rahners' Existential Ethics: A study" *Australasian Catholic Record* (1973) 50, 125
[38]*Dynamic Element in the Church, op.cit.*, Part III
[39]*Dynamic Element in the Church*, 89-101 quoted in J. Dorr: "Karl Rahners' Formal Existential Ethics" *Irish Theological Quarterly*, July 1989 Vol XXXVI No 3, 214
[40]*The Individual and the Church*, 634 quoted in Allsopp *op cit*, 125
[41]*Dynamic Element in the Church, op.cit.*, 154 also Dorr, *op. cit.*, 217
[42]*ibid*, 149

it carries its own evidence with it."[43] Further, "the source itself is perceived, the diverse origin of the consolation is not merely inferred, as something distinct from the consolation itself."[44] In short, the source of this objectless consolation, 'consolation without a cause', is God. Rahner continues to invoke his transcendental method. This objectless consolation is the experience of transcendence itself, there is no categorical mediation of the consolation.[45] However, Rahner is intensely aware that there is distinction between the mystical, existential experience and theological meditation. There is a "great difference between real 'exercises' and theological meditation, even when these both are explicitly based on the *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*.[46] And again

> It should never be forgotten that true spiritual exercises... are not a series of pious mediations that a person with good will can make anywhere and anytime... (they) are the serious attempt... to make a definite decision or choice at a decisive point in one's life. This is a kind of decision that cannot be deduced from the general principles of the faith or from common human wisdom alone; a decision such as this is received from God and from this grace alone in a kind of logic of existential knowledge gained in prayer.[47]

5.2.2 Transcendental Thomism

Rahner spoke of being a student of Thomas Aquinas and always claimed to be a Thomist,[48] but what sort of Thomist was he?

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[43]John P. Boyle: "Faith and Christian Ethics in Rahner and Lonergan" *Thought* Vol 50 No 188, Sept '75, 262
[44]*Dynamic Element in the Church, op.cit.*, 138, also Dorr *op cit*, 215
[45]J. Boyle *op cit.*
[46]*Spiritual Exercises*, 9
[47]*ibid*, 8
[48] Dych: *op.cit.*, 2

In 1879, when Leo XIII issued the encyclical *Aeterni Patris,* he commended to the church the study of philosophy and in particular the study of St Thomas Aquinas. This led to a renewal of scholastic study but is was only after the First World War that neo-Thomism became established. By the middle of this century it had become a dominant influence in Catholic thought and was also found in other quarters such as Anglo-Catholicism, and the writings of E. L. Mascall. Nonetheless the centre of gravity of this school was in the French and Belgian seminaries. Its influence proliferated and one variant that resulted was the Transcendental Thomism of Joseph Maréchal of Louvain. Mainstream neo-Thomism maintained its distance. Etienne Gilson, for example, could never admit that Transcendental Thomism was either good Thomism or good philosophy.[49] Nevertheless, when Rahner was engaged in his early studies at Feldkirch and Pullach from 1924 to 1927, he not only followed the obligatory Scholastic lectures, but also "spent his private time taking copious notes from Maréchal's volumes on *The Starting Point of Metaphysics".*[50] This intense study of Maréchal laid the foundation for his future writings.[51]

Rahner himself commented that:

> I owe my most basic, decisive philosophical direction... to the Belgian philosopher and Jesuit, Joseph Maréchal. His philosophy had already moved beyond the traditional neo-Scholasticism.[52]

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[49] McCool: *op.cit.,* xviii

[50] F.P. Fiorenza in introduction to Karl Rahner: *Spirit in the World,* (New York: Continuum, 1994), xxi
Joseph Maréchal: *Le Point de départ de la metaphysique: Leçons sur le développement historique et théorique du problème de la connaissance.* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1922-1949)

[51] cf. Stephen Duffy: *The Dynamics of Grace* (Collegeville: Glazier, 1993), 262

[52] quoted in G. Kelly: *op.cit.,* 4

And again:

> But one thing I remember well. In the third year of my philosophical studies in Pullach I read with extraordinary eagerness and with great care the fifth volume by Joseph Maréchal S.J. *Le point de départ de la métaphysique*. I made long excerpts from it which I no longer have. During this reading, I believe, I encountered Thomas for the first time in a more personal way that fascinated me; this was of course mediated by Maréchal's method ..... In my case this Maréchalianism was transformed into what others later called "transcendental philosophy and theology". To the extent that Maréchal again and again tries to prove his thoughts through Thomas, I can certainly say that Thomism formed my philosophy and at a step removed, my theology.[53]

What was this Transcendental Thomism that Rahner had studied extremely thoroughly and to which he attributed his first real philosophical insight?

Maréchal was the first Catholic thinker, despite the strictures of the campaign against modernism, to attempt an engagement between Thomism and German idealist philosophy (and other sources). Maréchal took as his starting point the critical epistemology of Kant (and also used the insights of Fichte, Blondel and Rousselot). Kant bequeathed a formidable metaphysical and epistemological problem to European philosophy. Having been awakened from his 'dogmatic slumber' by Hume, Kant attempted to resolve the conflict between rationalism and empiricism. His basic question was "How are *a priori* synthetic judgements possible?"[54] Kant reached a negative conclusion. Since Kantian forms (space and time) and categories are only applicable to 'sensible' objects, knowledge is only possible of things as they are in their appearance, ie, phenomena. Things-in-

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[53] Karl Rahner: *Faith in a Wintry Season* (ed.) P. Imhof and H. Biallowons, (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 43

[54] I. Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason,* 55 (Kemp-Smith edn)

themselves, noumena, are beyond our capacity to know by 'pure' reason. However, knowledge of the noumenal world is within the grasp of individuals as they have a sense of 'oughtness' which guides them. This 'oughtness' is the famous categorical imperative which could lead to 'practical' certainty of a rational faith which also assured the existence of God, freedom and immortality. Thus Kant produces a near intellectual sleight of hand where the faith which he destroys by pure reason is restored through practical reason. The dilemma for philosophy was how to bridge the Kantian 'gap' between pure and practical reason, if, that is, one accepted Kant's premises, which British empiricism, in particular, did not.

Maréchal, who stood in the European tradition, and a religious tradition at that, in order to get beyond Kant, integrated the insights of Fichte, Blondel and Rousselot to ultimately form a dialogue of synthesis between Thomism and critical idealism, ie, Kant. Maréchal utilized some of the insights of Fichte (but definitely not all) to bridge the gap. Fichte used a basis of the dynamism of the human spirit where the intuiting of the spiritual activity of the human subject in knowing and willing produces an awareness that this activity of knowing and willing is a striving towards the Infinite Absolute.[55] Therefore God becomes the basis for the knowledge, that Kant ascribed to pure reason. "The God-inspirited dynamism of the human mind would constitute for both Maréchal and Rahner a vital part of the bridge they needed to cross over from Kantian idealism into the realm of Thomistic metaphysics".[56] The focus on Blondel had a volitional cast where Fichtean spiritual dynamism was transformed it into an affirmation of the orientation

[55] cf. G. McCool: *op.cit.* p.xiv and G.B. Kelly: *op.cit.*, 5
[56] G.B. Kelly: *op.cit.*, xv

of the human will to God which affects the rational concrete choices of human action (see 4.1.5).

Maréchal also focused on Rousselot and his *The Intellectualism of Saint Thomas*[57] which was an attempt to rescue Aquinas by means of the analysis of Blondel from the neo-scholastics' distortions of the nineteenth century manuals. How did Maréchal integrate all these sources? In the fifth volume of his work *The Starting Point of Metaphysics*,[58] the philosophy of St Thomas engages with the philosophy of Kant.[59] In the first part, running with, but not necessarily endorsing Kantian critical philosophy, he examined the position of Aquinas and stressed the dynamism of the mind and its movement toward being. Maréchal held to a Thomistic perspective insofar as he held that Thomist epistemology had anticipated the Kantian gap between phenomena and noumena and further, rejected as invalid the Kantian position that human knowledge was phenomenal, not noumenal, with the consequence that God could only be known by practical and not pure reason. On the other hand Thomism claims that the human person, in their metaphysical knowledge can have some grasp of absolute reality in itself independent of material knowledge.[60] Maréchal saw as fallacious the Kantian analysis of a *priori* structures of knowing because it limited its perspective to the link between sensory perception and abstract ideas which overlooked a fundamental structure of conciousness that was integral to the Thomistic perspective.[61] Aquinas asked the simple question: why do we

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[57] *L' Intellectualisme de Saint Thomas* Beauchesne Paris 1924, ET *The Intellectualism of Saint Thomas* (trans) J.E. O'Mahony, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1935)
[58] *Le point de départ de la metaphysique* Vol V *Le Thomisme devant le philosophe critique* Desclée de Brouwer Paris 1926
[59] cf. J. Donceel: "Transcendental Thomism" *The Monist* Vol 58, No 1, Jan 1974, 70
[60] J. Donceel: "Transcendental Thomism", *op.cit.*, 70
[61] Stephen Duffy: *The Dynamics of Grace* (Collegeville: Glazier, 1993), 263

give abstract names to the objects of our sense experience? The answer is that we are in the business of making judgements and seeking answers, that our mind is engaged in seeking truth and reality. Maréchal saw Thomas as a source of support for his view that the mind had its own dynamism and its own movement toward being.[62] In the second part he argued that if the starting point of critical philosophy is accepted there is a necessity to proceed beyond Kant's conclusions into metaphysics. (For further discussion of Maréchal and his metaphysics of knowledge see 7.3).

There is also the extension here, that as von Balthasar notes, metaphysics is concerned with absolutes, and the only existing absolute is God.[63] Maréchal starts from this absolute point and 'explains all spirit in terms of the orientation towards this ultimate end."[64] However, as von Balthasar also notes, Maréchal was not able to find the meeting ground for metaphysics and mysticism.[65] The relevance of this for Rahner is that if Maréchal was an important influence for Rahner, and if Maréchal was not able successfully to link metaphysics to mysticism, how did Rahner resolve the problem? This is of considerable importance, for if Rahner considered Ignatian spirituality to be the most important influence on his work, how did it relate to his metaphysics? This is considered further in the context of Rahner's existential ethics. (ref 6.3).

To conclude, Maréchal saw that a consistent application of the (Kantian) transcendental method to human knowledge would:

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[62] S Duffy, *ibid*
[63] H.U. von Balthasar: T*he Theology of Karl Barth* Holt, (New York: Reinhart & Winston, 1971), 238
[64] *ibid*
[65] *ibid*

> lead to a remarkably similar dynamic structure of human knowledge in both Kant and in St Thomas and to the metaphysical affirmation of the Pure Act of Being. Consequently it is reasonable to anticipate, Maréchal believed, that the transcendental method could be extended beyond epistemology and be used to ground a general metaphysics whose form and structure would resemble the metaphysics of St Thomas.[66]

Maréchal left this task to his successors in the school of Transcendental Thomism, including Karl Rahner. G.B. Kelly refers in particular to Rahner's abortive doctoral work at Freiburg which

> stamped him as the successor to Maréchal: this was particularly so because Rahner was able to take the idealism of Hegel and the phenomenal ontology of Heidegger and add them to the creative synthesis that was Transcendental Thomism.[67]

What were these influences of Hegel and Heidegger?

5.2.3 Hegel and Heidegger

The influence of Hegel on Rahner appeared in his two early philosophical works *Spirit in the World* and *Hearers of the Word.* In these works, Rahner revealed his position that the dialectic of Hegel could make a positive contribution to the understanding of a dynamic interpretation of Thomistic metaphysics and epistemology. There is also the Hegelian use of spirit (*Geist*). Hegel developed the Kantian concepts of sensibility and understanding through the union of knower and known in the spirit's act of knowledge. This act of knowledge requires the "prior identity in Absolute

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[66] G. McCool: *op.cit.*, xv, xvi
[67] G.B. Kelly: *op.cit.*, 6

Being as the condition of its possibility".[68] This Hegelian absolute idealism carried Rahner's thought beyond the critical idealism of Kant to the extent that Hegel has replaced Kant as one of the two principal dialogue partners of the German Transcendental Thomists.[69] This has not been without its difficulties. There has been some questioning of the coherence of "Hegelian Thomism" which is an integral part of Rahner's theological synthesis.[70]

The other principal dialogue partner of the German Transcendental Thomists was one of the principal trail blazers for postmodernity, Martin Heidegger and his phenomenological ontology.[71] However, the exact nature of Rahner's indebtedness to Heidegger appears problematic. Although Rahner has been categorized as one of the 'Catholic Heidegger School'[72] Rahner never considered himself a Heideggerian, although he did acknowledge the insights of Heidegger.[73] There is some evidence that Rahner accorded Heidegger considerable deference. He said he had many good professors but only one teacher, i.e., Heidegger[74] and referred to him as 'my master...., the only one I can regard as my teacher.'[75] However, Rahner seemed ambivalent in acknowledging the influence of Heidegger, giving more weight to Maréchal. He acknowledged that Heidegger taught him how to think in a certain way.

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[68] G. McCool: *op.cit.*, xviii
[69] *ibid.*
[70] *ibid.*, xxii
[71] *ibid.*, xviii
[72] G.B. Kelly: *op.cit.*
[73] W. Dych: *op.cit.*, 2
[74] John D. Caputo: "Heidegger and Theology" in C.B. Goignon (ed): *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: U.P., 1993), 287
[75] T Shean: *Karl Rahner* p.xi quoted in S. Duffy: *The Dynamics of Grace* (Collegeville: Glazier, 1993), 267

> I learned something about thinking itself, about how to think.....He taught us how to read texts in a new way, to ask what is behind the texts, to see connections...the courage to question anew so much in the tradition considered self evident[76]

When asked by James Bacik how important Heidegger was for the development of his theology, Rahner responded sharply by asking 'how much had Heidegger had ever written on God, Christ, Church and the Sacraments?'[77] However this needs to be squared against the fact that Heidegger himself considered his work more theological than philosophical, "Without my theological origin, I would never have attained to the way of thinking."[78] As Rahner himself points out "Heidegger did begin as a theologian. Furthermore, he always worked on Kierkegaard and never got quite free, if it can be put like that, of his theological Christian past."[79]

Rahner was also acutely aware of the problem of Heidegger's philosophy:

> Already in *Hearer of the Word* my philosophy stood entirely in the service of my theology. For this reason, I couldn't tell you now what developed over the years from my philosophical studies, except for a few basic ideas. Even while studying with Heidegger, I was uncertain. I'm also uncertain that you can find any Heideggerian influence on me now, aside from some rather abstract philosophical structures that one might problematically call transcendental method.[80]

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[76] W. Dych: *op.cit.*, 2
[77] James Bacik: *Contemporary Theolgians* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1989), 14
[78] M. Heidegger: *On the Way to Language* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 96
[79] Karl Rahner: *Karl Rahner in Dialogue* (ed) P. Imhof and H. Biallowons, (trans) H. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 311
[80] Karl Rahner: *Faith in a Wintry Season* (ed) P. Imhof & H. Biallowons (trans) H. Egan (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 16

Perhaps this is just as well as scholarly opinion of Heidegger is strikingly polarised. To some detractors, Heidegger is regarded as dangerous, obfuscating and fraudulent.[81] Other criticisms are more specific.

> In England, Heidegger is most often referred to as a horrible example of just how meaningless metaphysics can be..... certainly such sentences as 'Nihilation is neither an annihilation of what-is, nor does it spring from negation... Nothing annihilates itself' leave one with the impression that something has gone very wrong indeed.[82]

Passmore represents an earlier Anglo-Saxon empiricist/analytical tradition. His comments are valuable insofar as they draw attention to this tradition which is largely ignored by Rahner. Rahner stands squarely in the German idealist tradition, yet conversely this tradition has been largely ignored by many in the Anglo-Saxon philosophical tradition. As Bryan Magee observes:

> One of the most conspicuous features of Oxford philosophy [in the nineteen-fifties] was the low valuation it placed on past philosophy... People whose job it was to teach philosophy would announce with obvious complacency, even pride, that they had never read some of the great philosophers. I knew some who claimed not to have read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason.* At Yale this would have been considered like teaching Christian theology without having read the New Testament... it was usual for a [Oxford] PPE student who got a first class degree specializing in philosophy not to have read a word of Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, ... Hegel, Marx, Schopenhauer, Nietzche, Husserl, Heidegger or any other philosopher who had practised outside the British Isles.[83]

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[81] cf. Paul Redding: 'Heidegger - Megalomania and Modesty in Philosophy' *Philosopher* Vol No 2 Winter 1995, 17

[82] J. Passmore: *A Hundred Years of Philosophy,* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1978), 477

[83] Bryan Magee: *Confessions of a Philosopher,* (London: Wiedenfield and Nocolson, 1997), 71ff.

At this point it is useful to consider the view of John Macquarrie, a theologian who besides being only too familiar with analytical philosophy, was the English translator for Heidegger's *magnum opus, Being and Time.* In *An Existentialist Theology* Macquarrie has examined Heidegger extensively and at close quarters, and summarizes his existentialist approach to theology by the use of two terms:

- *Fragestellung*, or manner of putting the question "which treats theological questions as primarily questions of man's existence in relation to God, and interprets the sacred writings as statements which primarily concern man's existence."[84] (for the ramifications of this for Rahner see 7.3.1).
- The *Begrifflichkeit* which Macquarrie describes as "the system of basic concepts derived from the philosophy of existence, which claims to have analyzed in suitable concepts the understanding of existence which is given with existence."[85] (This provided the backdrop for Rahner's derivation of the supernatural existential. See 7.1).

These two concepts, Macquarrie argues, are of "considerable importance" for Heidegger and, *pace* Passmore, indicate the theological approval of Heidegger.

But Macquarrie also notes Heidegger's concern with phenomenology. He asks the question by what method is Heidegger's existential analytic of *Dasein*, or 'being-there', to be undertaken? The answer is phenomenology. This method, developed by Husserl in reaction to nineteenth century

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[84] J. Macquarrie: *An Existential Theology,* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1980), 13
[85] *ibid.*

scientific Positivism, acknowledges that scientific knowledge is never final or certain. In addition, scientific method is not scientific knowledge and the assumptions made by the scientist in his investigation cannot be established by science. The phenomenologist holds that certainty is achieved only by focusing on the experiences of the self which stand outside the natural world. These experiences of the self are not reasonings but the descriptions of what is observed, viz. the phenomenon.[86]

> For Heidegger phenomenology is directed to being - the being which shows itself in Dasein's own understanding of himself. The existential analytic consists in the descriptive analysis of that which is revealed to Dasein in his own self-disclosure as existing.[87]

Macquarrie's analysis is also useful insofar as he illuminates the standing of the subject vis-a-vis *Dasein.* This may be Heidegger's most important contribution. Macquarrie is of the opinion that "no philosopher had more influence than Heidegger on the theology of the twentieth century",[88] who as a Catholic influenced not only Rahner, but also Protestant theologians such as Bultmann, Tillich and Otto.[89] It may also resolve the polarization with regard to Heidegger's thought. Paul Redding observes that it is difficult to 'fence-sit' on the question of Heidegger's philosophy, but notwithstanding that, Redding sees Heidegger as a

> very important recent philosopher, one who might be grouped with a dozen or so other philosophers of this century thought of as making important contributions not only to philosophy as a discipline but to human thinking and understanding more generally.[90]

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[86] cf. *ibid.*, 35
[87] *ibid.*
[88] J. Macquarrie: *Heidegger and Christianity* (London: SCM, 1994), 6
[89] *ibid.*
[90] Paul Redding: 'Heidegger-Megalomania and Modesty in Philosophy' *Philosopher* Vol 1 No 2 Winter 1995, 18

Redding characterises this Heideggerian contribution as being concerned with the death of the subject, with a concern central to post-modernist thought of the demise of the Cartesian ego, however Rahner's concerns were not the same, they were transcendental anthropology,[91] and it is here that Rahner did employ an important Heideggerian doctrine, that of existentials, which determined Rahner's anthropology through the use of the supernatural existential (see Chapter 7) and in this respect emphasised Rahner's 'heavy' obligation to Heidegger.[92] An existential designated "those components which were constitutive of human existence, that is, those features which were proper to and characteristic of a human existent"[93], such as freedom.

The concern of this thesis is with Heidegger only insofar as he affects Rahner, and although the preceding pages have indicated the controversial nature and complexity of the writing of Heidegger, it is not possible to pursue Heidegger's theology or method. It is hoped that the description above of Heidegger's writing is sufficient to establish its essential features and its connection with Rahner's approach, namely transcendental anthropology.

5.2.4 Other Influences and the place of these influences in Rahner's thought

Karl Rahner lived during turbulent times. He saw the rise and the destruction of Nazism, the confrontation between East and West and the

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[91] *ibid,* 19
[92] Louis Roberts: *The Achievement of Karl Rahner* (New York: Herder, 1967), 15
[93] W. Dych: *Karl Rahner* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), 36

impoverishment of the Third World. He was not left untouched by these developments but he was in no way polemical or short sighted in his judgements. A number of his students were murdered by the Nazis but he focused his efforts on aid and comfort for the homeless and dispossessed of the War. He responded to the East-West confrontation by lecturing in both the United States and Eastern Europe. He responded to the need of the Third World.

These worldly influences were coupled with a more other-worldly influence, the Second Vatican Council. As a *peritus*, or adviser, to Cardinal König of Vienna he was a significant figure in the formulation of the theological responses to the questions posed by the Council. His concept of anonymous Christianity gained considerable attention as did his ecumenical views. The latter consideration gave rise to the most curious feature of Rahner's writing. Although ecumenically minded, his writing was very much in the European Catholic tradition. Hans Küng and Hans Urs von Balthasar, for example, in their early work both adopted Karl Barth as a dialogue partner, but Rahner demonstrates very little, ostensible, awareness of the concerns of Barth, even if their approaches may have run in near parallel on certain questions, eg, the Trinity. This leads to the consideration that Rahner was intensely philosophical but, although his theological doctoral dissertation was on Chapter 18 of the Gospel of John and its relation to the origins of the Church, his writing on specific biblical subjects was minimal. He certainly did not consider himself to be an exegete. The lack of biblical references is a surprise for the reader coming from a Protestant tradition, but that is not to deny the intensity of Rahner's Christian message.[94]

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[94] N. Ormerod: *op.cit.*, 95

Kelly makes the comment that Rahner is more than the sum of his early philosophical influences.[95] However those early influences pointed Rahner and his theology in a certain direction. Reno argues further that his relationship to these philosophical influences is 'eclectic and opaque'[96], that Heidegger is 'explicitly set aside', that Maréchal is 'rarely mentioned' and that Thomas is 'separated from Rahner's thought world by a chasm far too deep to fathom.'[97] He cites Fergus Kerr, who is not interested in the particularity of the influences on Rahner but with the broader concern of Rahner's 'metaphysical way of thinking'. This avoids 'tortured questions of historical influence.'[98] Rahner said as much himself.

It is relevant to conclude with a few words from Rahner himself *a propos* of Aquinas, which also apply to Rahner himself. The examination of historical influences are important but more important are the writings themselves:

> However much the inquiring into the teaching of Thomas is a historical investigation, it is also meant to be philosophical. Our concern then, is not with the Thomas who was conditioned by his times and dependent on Aristotle, Augustine and the philosophy of the day. There is also such a Thomas, and we could conduct a historical investigation about him. Whether or not we are correct in doubting that such an approach could get to the really philosophical in Thomas, the primary concern of this historical work is not to be history, but philosophy itself. And if what matters is to grasp the really philosophical in a philosopher, this can only be done if one joins him in looking at the matter itself.[99]

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[95] G.B. Kelly: *op.cit.*, 6
[96] R.R. Reno: *The Ordinary Transformed* (Grand Rapids, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1995), 176
[97] *ibid*
[98] Fergus Kerr: *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986) quoted in Reno *op.cit.*, 176
[99] K. Rahner: *Spirit in the World, op.cit.*, xlix

5.3 Rahner's Transcendental Anthropology and Method - An Overview

5.3.1 Introduction

The style of Rahner's theology has been characterised by the term 'the turn to the subject'.[100] This has the significant implication that, as Duffy[101] argues, the two traditional entry points for theology are not available. The first entry point, the concept of "God" is unavailable because the contemporary perception sees it as empirically unverifiable, or not available to philosophical or scientific process of induction. The second entry point, the historical Jesus' revelation of God, is also not available because again, the contemporary perception sees historical criticism and induction as nullifying this possibility. Therefore Rahner turns to anthropology, in particular, a transcendental anthropology founded on the experience of transcendence in the world.[102]

Three *caveats* concerning Rahner's transcendental anthropology need to be made at this point. First, as Reno observes, transcendence is not the property of Kantians.[103]

> To transcend" simply means to step over, climb beyond or surmount. We might transcend a river or a mountain range on our travels. We could say that a criminal transcends the law. We might regard an overreaching politician as someone who transcends the limits of his or her office. In each instance, use of the concept of transcendence

[100] cf. Neil Ormerod: *Introducing Contemporary Theologies* (Sydney: Dwyer, 1990), 94 and Stephen Duffy: *The Dynamics of Grace* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1993), 262
[101] *ibid*
[102] Duffy, *ibid*
FCF, 68; *TI IX*, 28-45
[103] R.R. Reno: *The Ordinary Transformed* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Earlmans, 1995), 1 ff

> simply denotes a movement, a change in location or status. No philosophical theories or metaphysical commitments are entailed ..... a glance at the structure of Christianity indicates the crucial role of transcendence.[104]

Reno proceeds to develop the centrality of transcendence in the Christian tradition, particularly with reference to Karl Rahner. However he actively exercises his discernment in the treatment of Rahner's transcendental anthropology. He agrees with Fergus Kerr[105] who focuses on Rahner's "basic tendencies of the metaphysical way of thinking" rather than "foundering over the transcendental form of argument which provides the 'methods' for Rahner's distinctive philosophical explorations."[106] Reno and Kerr provide a more distanced perspective on the well trodden path of Rahner's transcendental anthropology, his transcendental method. Nonetheless the task of the following chapters is to understand the place of the supernatural existential and the fundamental option in Rahner's work and to do this requires proceeding down this well trodden path of the transcendental method.

This gives rise to the second *caveat.* Richard Lennan comments that it is received wisdom when studying Rahner to 'begin with an exposition of the ontology and transcendental method before proceeding to discuss other aspects of his work.'[107] Lennan himself adopts a different technique, that of situating the transcendental method within the context of Rahner's 'applied' theology, in Lennan's case, ecclesiology. However, since this present work is not just concerned with moral theology, but with **fundamental** moral

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[104] *ibid,* 1-2
[105] F. Kerr: *Theology after Wittgenstein* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986)
[106] Reno *ibid,* 177
[107] R. Lennan: *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (Oxford: U.P., 1995), 10

theology, ie, the understanding of supernatural existential and fundamental option is central to this thesis, it will be necessary to examine their central location, that is with relationship to the transcendental method and transcendental anthropology.

Third, in the *milieu* of postmodernity there is a marked disenchantment with the transcendental. Thomas Guarino notes the post-modernist "deconstruction of classical and modern ontologies, of substance and transcendental subject".[108] However, Guarino also notes that Rahner, while defending his transcendal anthropology,

> ceaselessly sought to show the extent to which historical and hermeneutical consciousness had a deep and lasting effect on meaning and interpretation. As his thought progressed, Rahner argued with increasing vigour for the influence of postmodern horizons on the formulation of doctrines, without ever abandoning the theological ontology of his critical starting point.[109]

Guarino cites Rahner's later work in "Mysterium Ecclesiae" in TI XVII and "Yesterday's History of Dogma and Theology for Tomorrow" in TI XVIII as evidence for his argument. However there should be another *caveat* superimposed on our original *caveat,* insofar as the post-modernist critique itself is a controversial issue. Nonetheless similar arguments against Rahner's transcendentalism were brought to bear by his close colleague and former student, Johan Baptist Metz. We will return to Metz's criticisms after the present exposition of Rahner's transcendental anthropology.

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[108] Thomas Guarino" "Post-modernity and Five Fundamental Theological Issues" *Theological Studies* Vol 57, No 4, December 1996, 661

[109] *ibid*, 660

There are a variety of opinions concerning the *locus* of Rahner's transcendental anthropology, viz. fundamental freedom as the key concept at the heart of Rahner's anthropology,[110] or the supernatural existential and the fundamental option as cornerstones of Rahner's anthropology,[111] or possibly the link between faith and freedom as the key concept.[112] Stephen Duffy sees Rahner's entire theology as a theology of nature and grace[113] which is supported by Rahner's comment that:

> my basic theological conviction [is that] grace is obviously a reality which is God-given unmerited, free, dialogical - in other words - supernatural. But for me grace is at the same time a reality which is so very much a part of the innermost core of human existence in decision and freedom always and above all given in the form of an offer that is either accepted or rejected, that the human being cannot step out of this transcendental peculiarity of his being at all.[114]

Karl Rahner himself, in a letter to Andrew Tallon[115] wrote that the concept of becoming a person (*Person - werden*), personal becoming (*das personale Werden*) "is the central idea of my philosophico - theological anthropology."[116] How much weight Rahner would place upon the role of fundamental option in personal becoming remains to be seen but fundamental option certainly cannot be ignored, nor for that matter can the supernatural existential. What is clear is that the prominence given to different components of Rahner's anthropology by different commentators does not make those components mutually exclusive, quite the contrary, as

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[110] R. McCormick: *The Critical Calling,* 171, 173
[111] G Kelly: *Karl Rahner, Theologian of the Graced Search for Meaning, op.cit.,* 47
[112] W.V. Dych: "The Achievement of Karl Rahner" *Theology Digest* 31:4 Winter 1984, 325
[113] S. Duffy: *The Graced Horizon, op.cit.,* 85
[114] Karl Rahner: *Faith in a Wintry Season* (ed) P. Imhof & H. Biallowons (trans) H. Egan (New York: Crossroads, 1991), 21
[115] A Tallon: *Personal Becoming, op.cit.,*.1
[116] *ibid.*

the *Foundations* demonstrates that these components are inextricably linked. However another problem arises. As Gerald McCool has observed:

> It is regrettable... that Rahner has not provided a more careful and detailed account of the metaphysics of the supernatural existential which is such a vital element in his whole system. Rahner's commentators have had difficulty understanding its precise metaphysical status.[117]

Given that the supernatural existential is one of the more problematic items in Rahner's bag of 'philosophico - theological' tools it is now necessary to examine Rahner's methodology, the transcendental method, and to derive a better understanding of the supernatural existential and other problematic items in his anthropology.

5.3.2 Difficulties in the Definition of the term 'Transcendental Method'

Although the term 'transcendental method' appears quite frequently, if not inevitably, in the literature on Karl Rahner, different commentators understand it in different ways and attribute to it a different precedence and standing.

For example, Di Noia has commented that different 'conceptual frameworks' and 'theological interests' intersect in Rahner's work but that none of them has an "all-encompassing, systematic" status in Rahner's theology, whose internal coherence arises not from "his espousal of a single unitary conception of methodology but from a vision of the human reality as

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[117] G. McCool: *A Rahner Reader, op.cit.*, xxvi

being completely embraced and irreversibly transformed by divine grace."[118]

Similarly, Kelly argues that Rahner was aware that the understanding of his theology by others was flawed at times by their "neat reductionist formulas: which held that his method was "purely transcendental" or "solely anthropological".[119] Kelly then comments that Rahner once wondered out loud whether he really did have a method in theology at all.[120]

> Even his 1969 essay in which he wrote about theological method for the first time provides only clues to how he would conceptualize his own approach to the theological enterprise.[121]

However Kelly does admit that Rahner acknowledged his reliance on an approach to theology which combined a 'transcendental method'[122] with "reflection on the historical experience humanity has of itself".[123]

Anne Carr is another commentator who is aware of Rahner's disclaimers of any special concern with method[124] but finds the description of Rahner's approach to theology via a transcendental method as "accurate" and further volunteers[125] that Rahner himself wrote of the contemporary importance and necessity of transcendental theology. However, Carr faced an

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[118] J.A. Di Noia: "Karl Rahner" in D. Ford (ed): *The Modern Theologians, op.cit.,* 186
[119] Kelly: *op.cit,* 33
[120] L.J. O'Donovan" "Ortho Praxis and Theological Method in Karl Rahner" in L. Salm (ed): *Proceedings of the Thirty Fifth Annual Convention of the CTSA* 35 (1980): 47 quoted in Kelly *op.cit.,* 32
[121] Kelly *op.cit.,* 33, cf. K. Rahner: "Reflections on Methodology in Theology" in *Theological Investigations* XI, 68-114
[122] Kelly: *op.cit.,* 33
[123] O'Donovan: *op.cit.,* 49
[124] cf. *Theological Investigations* (TI) XI, 68-114
[125] A. Carr: "Karl Rahner" in M. Marty and D. Peerman (eds): *A Handbook of Christian Theologians, op.cit.,* 523

additional problem. In her doctoral dissertation on Rahner's views on method she found it necessary to shelve the same 1969 article, "Reflection on Methodology in Theology" *(TI XI)*, and to reach his methodology by inference from his writings on more particular topics.[126] This is understandable as the article in question did complicate the understanding of Rahner's methodology. Vass claims that in the article Rahner did not give a comprehensive methodology[127] but did introduce a first aspect of theological method which was later developed in *Foundations of Christian Faith.* Rahner, concerned at the prevalence of contemporary religious pluralism, referred to it as 'indirect method'. He argued that with the overwhelming quantity and complexity of insights caused by the plurality of the various branches of knowledge the indirect method was available to lead us out of this plurality by bypassing this plethora of insights and justifying faith by focusing on one area for conscious reflection.[128] Vass argues that:

> Rahner can express his mistrust of reducing theology to an all embracing methodology. Theology is not only its own hermeneutics in which the knife is sharpened before cutting the meat. The subject matter of theology should be not faith and its theological exploration by a methodical way, but the very object aimed at: surrender to the object of faith. This is the ultimate task of all theology.[129]

The reticence and tendency to obscurity of Rahner in dealing with questions of the transcendental method become even more understandable when two further relevant considerations are brought to bear.

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[126] B. Lonergan in W. Kelly (ed): *Theology and Discovery, Essays in Honour of Karl Rahner,* 54
[127] G. Vass: *The Mystery of Man and the Foundations of a Theological System: Understanding Karl Rahner* Vol. I, *op.cit.*, I.8
[128] *ibid.*
[129] *ibid.*, 10

a) The term transcendental method has been seen to designate not one, but two features of Rahner's methodology.[130] The first, or logical sense refers to the transcendental 'deduction' or 'reflection', as Di Noia notes "a class of arguments which defend the activity of certain states of affairs by demonstrating that the conditions for their possibility do in fact obtain."[131] These arguments in themselves present difficulties because they have a reverse sequence to a normal argument, ie, they begin rather than end with the conclusion to be proposed.[132] In addition, Rahner uses them not so much to "demonstrate the conditions for the possibility of certain states of affairs actually obtaining than to display the conditions for the possibility of our knowing or believing that they obtain."[133]

The second feature of Rahner's methodology is the more general, and grander one, associated with his philosophical theology and fundamental theology. It considers both the possibility of the human knowledge of the existence of God and also the nature of the receptivity of the human subject for supernatural revelation.[134]

> In Rahner's philosophical theology, the Kantian cognitional *a priori* is transformed into a metaphysical *a priori*. Along with his already noted preference for transcendental arguments, Rahner's reliance here upon a transcendental account of the metaphysics of human knowledge explain why his program is commonly described as an instance of transcendental theology.[135]

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[130] J.A. Di Noia: *op.cit.*, 189
[131] *ibid.*
[132] *ibid.*
[133] *ibid.*
[134] *ibid.*, 290
[135] *ibid.*

> In short, the sustained application of the tool of transcendental 'reflection' or 'deduction', as applied to his anthropological starting point, results in the transcendental method, which, if viewed generically, can apply to all human intellectual endeavour, in that it is simply a style of radical questioning. It also needs to be stressed that the method is intensely philosophical and consequently involves the perennial difficulty of theological method vis-à-vis philosophy.

b) This leads to the second consideration that the method is the theology.[136]

> To grasp the method is to have an approach to any and all theological questions. It is the open ended heuristic nature of Rahner's method which indicates its powerful foundational value.[137]

Ormerod has referred to this open ended and heuristic nature of Rahner's methodology/theology which in a sense explains much of the obscurity in attempting to understand the transcendental method, but he also stresses Rahner's metaphysical approach to theology which rests on "a complex metaphysical theory which is really only made explicit in his doctoral work *Spirit in the World.*[138] This again invites the question of Rahner's theology vis-à-vis his philosophical understanding. At times the two appear so tightly interlocked as to be inseparable,[139] but in the *Concise Sacramentum Mundi*[140] Rahner made the following clarification. Transcendental theology, although 'modelled' on the analogy of transcendental philosophy, is not simply the application of transcendental philosophy to theological

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[136] N. Ormerod: *Introducing Contemporary Theologies, op.cit.,* 101
[137] *ibid.*
[138] *ibid.,* 102
[139] cf. K. Rahner: *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 3, 24ff
[140] K. Rahner (ed): *The Concise Sacramentum Mundi, op.cit.,* 2748f

subjects, but is genuinely theological. Transcendental theology, at first sight, is coloured by transcendental philosophy but possesses a genuine theological character because the consideration of the persons' 'nature' as the "condition for the possibility of grace" is theological, although it has philosophical aspects. There is the further consideration, "the special and authentically theological question", that the transcendental questioning for the "conditions of possibility of knowledge in the subject himself" can be envisaged "with regard to an object of revelation and faith".[141] There is 'every reason' that transcendental philosophy should "limit itself to its own proper sphere", otherwise philosophy falls victim to *hybris* and "becomes a brutal effort to dissolve everything in its reflections".[142]

So Rahner, in his own fashion has drawn attention to the role of transcendental philosophy (cf. transcendental reflection/deduction) in transcendental theology. He has also drawn attention to the special character of transcendental theology insofar as it utilizes transcendental philosophy but also starts with anthropology and epistemology. It is noteworthy that in the article in the *Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, nowhere does Rahner use the term 'transcendental method.'

This short account has attempted to illustrate the difficulties attendant on the understanding of the term 'transcendental method'. We now turn to the material under consideration in *Foundations of Christian Faith* with an examination of the exposition of the transcendental method and thereby encounter these difficulties at closer quarters.

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[141] *ibid.*
[142] *ibid.*

5.3.3 The exposition of the transcendental method in *Foundations of Christian Faith*

In the recapitulation of his method in the section on Christology in *Foundations* (pp 208-12), Rahner posits five stages of argument.

1. He begins with anthropology, 'the turn to the subject'. The human person transcends themselves in "every categorical act of knowledge and of freedom".[143] This transcendence leads towards the 'incomprehensible mystery' which we call God.

2. Although we are inescapably finite, we dare to hope that this mystery "gives itself as the fulfillment of the highest claim of existence for the possession of absolute meaning and of the very unity which reconciles everything."[144]

3. There is a unity between historicity and human existence which means that God's self communication and the hope thereof are mediated historically. There is the need to consider how "God can not only reveal 'something' which can be expressed categorically, but can reveal himself in revelation which takes place in categorical words and do this without making himself finite."

4. We search in history in hope for the final and irreversible self-promise of God which is eschatological fulfillment, or, if history continues, which is of such a nature that makes the promise irrevocable.

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[143] *FCF*, 209
[144] *ibid.*

5. Only a person who is a free subject, who "surrenders every inner-worldly future in death"[145] can be the expression of the historical mediation of "God's irreversible presence to the world". Such an "individual" destiny has "exemplary" significance for the world as a whole. Such a man with this destiny is what is meant by an "absolute saviour".[146]

The exposition of the transcendental method above, found in *Foundations* VI:3 - "Transcendental Christology", is used because of brevity and also because it includes the christological orientation that is found in Rahner's wider works. The more frequent citation is that of *Foundations* - Introduction, I - The Hearer of the Message, II - Man in the presence of Absolute Mystery, which is a more extended account without the Christological conclusion. The former has been used by Fiorenza[147] whereas the latter has been used by many other commentators such as Gerald O'Collins[148] and Leo O'Donovan.[149] All of these accounts do not refer directly to *Spirit in the World*, *Hearers of the Word* and "Reflection on Methodology in Theology," in *Theological Investigations XI*.

However the latter account only "differs somewhat in enumeration but not content"[150] to the account explicated above, whereas the two earlier philosophical works suffer, ipso facto, by comparison, ie, they are 'early Rahner' and have more of a philosophical bent. Further, Lehmann and

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[145] *ibid.*, 211
[146] *ibid.*
[147] *ibid.*
[148] Gerald O'Collins: *Fundamental Theology*, (New York: Paulist, 1981), 49f
[149] L.J. O'Donovan: *A World of Grace*, (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 1-50
[150] F. Fiorenza: *op.cit.*, 39

Raffelt comment that the brief section on Christology in *Foundations* contain difficulties in understanding precisely because "statements from several phases are put together in one text".[151] It is apparent that even a simple exposition of the transcendental method, as found in *Foundations*, presents many unanswered questions.

5.4 Conclusion

We have pursued the scrutiny of the nature of Rahner's thought. The pluriformity of the sources of Rahner's thought became abundantly apparent, viz. the adventure of his embrace of Maréchal and transcendental Thomism, the appeal of Heidegger's existential questioning and the pre-eminent influence of Ignatian spirituality and the Christian mystical tradition, with its faith experience and passion for enquiry and truth. We have also unpacked the basic components of Rahner's transcendental anthropology and method, in particular the important role of the supernatural existential and fundamental option. These two pivotal components in Rahner's anthropology will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Seven. What this chapter has attempted to present is an overview of Rahner's transcendental anthropology, and in doing so, to illuminate the basic components in his anthropology and their relation to the transcendental method. However, now we need to examine some aspects of Rahner's moral anthropology.

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[151] K. Lehmann, A. Raffelt and H.D. Egan (eds): *Karl Rahner - The Content of Faith,* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 33

CHAPTER 6

SOME ASPECTS OF RAHNER'S MORAL ANTHROPOLOGY

We should recall that the implications of an earnest and radical no to God - this belongs to the essence of that which in Christianity one calls a serious sin - are often not demonstrable.... At issue here is the question of how negative behaviour toward the world, myself, and my neighbour is to be understood and interpreted in relation to God.

One simply says: God has established this and that as moral norms; and if you do not obey these, then the one who established these norms will regard you as evil. Here an anthropomorphic view of God is presupposed. Nevertheless, I cannot accept the idea that my inner, final, really free moral or immoral conduct has nothing to do with God. Just how we clarify this complex issue further is another question.

I would, for example, offer this as my personal, theological opinion. If I did not have the relationship based solely on grace, of immediate, personal love with God, who gives himself to me in this love, then the breaking of the so-called Natural Law or - to express this differently - doing injury to human nature and the world would not so "offend" God, as the Christian - correctly, I think - presupposes.

Karl Rahner in an interview with Karl-Heinz Weger and Hildegard Lüning for South German Radio (SDR), Stuttgart (19 March 1979). Reprinted in Karl Rahner: *Karl Rahner in Dialogue* (ed) Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 224

6 SOME ASPECTS OF RAHNER'S MORAL ANTHROPOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

A potential difficulty for understanding Rahner's treatment of moral theology is that it is commonly acknowledged that he is not a moral theologian, as such[1], although his contributions to moral theology have been of "singular significance"[2], and "considerable influence"[3] and that through his pioneering work moral theology would be "forever altered."[4] These contributions has been largely drawn from his fundamental theology, eg, fundamental option from fundamental freedom, formal existential ethics from theological anthropology. The philosophical dimension is also important:

> Rahner has not fully elaborated on ethics, although he has touched on ethical questions in his extensive writings. He works from a fully articulated philosophical base, which promises full explanation of his philosophical position.[5]

There is also the anthropological focus:

> Rahner seldom touches directly on these staple topics of ethics and when he does take up one or another of them, he hesitates to infringe on the professional ethician's territory. He limits his contribution to deeper issues which lie behind all that ethicians do but which they

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[1] W Dych: *Karl Rahner, op.cit.*, 131
[2] A Carr: *op.cit,*, 537
[3] G McCool: *A Rahner Reader, op.cit.*, 271
[4] R McCormick: "Moral Theology 1940 - 1989" *Theological Studies*, 8
[5] J.P. Boyle: "Faith and Christian Ethics in Rahner and Lonergan" *Thought* Vol 50 No 198, Sept 1975, 247

> frequently do not choose to explain. Rahner elaborates a theory of the human person and freedom.[6]

In short, Rahner's approach to moral theology can be characterised as a moral anthropology. The twist for moral theology is that it can be argued that the chief locus for Rahner's anthropology of becoming is ethics.[7] Certainly Rahner himself admitted that:

> the concept of becoming a person (Person werden), personal becoming (das personale Werden) is the central idea of my philosophico - theological anthropology.[8]

And the locus of personal becoming may just be the fundamental option. [See 10.4]. However, before narrowing the focus of this thesis in Chapter 8 on Rahner's understanding of fundamental option, it is necessary to give a brief wide angle view of some components of Rahner's moral anthropology because some of these components interact quite critically with Rahner's understanding of fundamental option. Further, as Modras observes, "the ethical implications of Rahner's anthropology are in some ways as revolutionary as its principles are traditional."[9]

6.2 The Natural Law

Rahner saw moral theology as, like Caesar's Gaul, divided into three parts, viz., the theological virtues, natural law and the commands of the Church:

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[6] J.F. Bresnahan: "An Ethics of Faith" in L. O'Donovan (ed): *A World of Grace, op.cit.*, 169
[7] Tallon *op.cit.*, 8
[8] quoted by Tallon *op.cit.*, 1
[9] Ronald Modras: "Karl Rahner: Moral Theology" *Theology Digest* Vol 31, No 4, Winter 1984, 339

> If we set aside Faith, Hope and Love on the one hand and the positive commands of the Church on the other, we see that the major part of **moral theology** is obliged to concern itself with what we call 'natural law'.[10]

Rahner accepted the main claims of the Catholic natural law tradition, yet he was faced with the difficulty, like his transcendentalist colleague, Bernard Lonergan, of making it interface with his transcendental anthropology. From a Protestant perspective, James Gustafson, observes, that the celebrated "turn to subject" in Catholic philosophy of Rahner and Co. has provided bases for a reconsideration of the nature/person relationship.[11]

What were the claims of traditional natural law theory? They have been[12] seen as the conviction that:

> the moral ideal and moral obligation are rooted in being, in the structures of being called human nature. So the central claim of natural law is that morality can be discussed reasonably and explained at least in part by investigating that nature.[13]

Now Rahner has been seen as endorsing "essential" ethics[14], the anthropological understanding that sees the essence or nature of the human person as providing the means to determine whether particular human acts are good or evil. However, Rahner, because of the development of his moral anthropology saw limitations in the earlier natural law theory for its

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[10] *TI* IX "Theology and Anthropology", 44
[11] James Gustafson: *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (University of Chicago Press, 1978), 91
[12] see James Bresnahan: "An Ethics of Faith" in *A World of Grace* (ed) Leo O'Donovan (New York: Crossroads, 1980) also "Rahners Ethics: Critical Natural Law in Relation to Contemporary Ethical Methodology" *Journal of Religion* 56 (1976), 30-60
[13] *ibid,* 172
[14] *ibid.*

inability to focus on the uniqueness of the human person in being and action. Rahner saw a need to revise natural law theory to include the perspective of transcendental anthropology, in particular, fundamental freedom, and *ipso facto* fundamental option. In short, starting from a traditional position he reinterpreted natural law and gave it a quite untraditional meaning.[15]

One characteristic of Rahner's anthropology, historicity, has been seen as having particular relevance for the natural law theory,[16] that is, Rahner sees Christian salvation in traditional terms, both mediated and revealed historically. Developing his metaphysic of knowledge (in particular the conversion to the phantasm, see Ch 7.3.1), Rahner argued that the most sublime metaphysical and moral concepts are derived through concrete perceptions of the senses, that is the historical and the categorical. As Modras notes, "Any notion of human nature must necessarily include the concept of historicity and the capacity for self-creation."[17] The implications for the traditional Catholic doctrine of natural law are that, according to Rahner, the human person's transcendental approach to God, via the supernatural existential is immutable, but our categorical physical nature in time and space is always subject to modification. This has ramifications for the theory of fundamental option in that the fundamental option is set in the context of, not only supernatural existential, but also fundamental or transcendental and categorical freedom.

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[15] cf. J.P. Boyle: "Faith and Christian Ethics in Rahner and Lonergan" *Thought* Vol L No 198, September 1975, 261
[16] Modras: *ibid*
[17] *ibid,* 340

In a sense Rahner has opened up traditional natural law theory to accept the polarity of the transcendental/categorical. As Bresnahan argues:

> when natural-law thinking observes this new accent on freedom and its grounding structure, it must pursue the task of essential ethics differently than before. Ethicians will continue to look for what is unchangeable in nature, a core nature that limits and channels the person's freedom so that acts which have the effect of trying to change this core nature will be declared immoral. But ethicians will also have to acknowledge the possibility that some dimensions of what has been considered in the past to be unchangeable nature do not pertain to this core, on peripheral structures in the being of the person.[18]

It is with this revised approach to natural law that Rahner approached particular questions of natural law and their interface with contemporary social developments, such as genetic engineering and contraception, where humankind through technology is able to manipulate the physical nature of the human person.[19] This impact of technology reinforces the recognition that many characteristics of the human person, that were previously assumed to be immutable structures of human nature and part of natural law, are now seen to have an historical origin, to be socially and culturally dependent with the consequence that the importance of history, science and culture cannot be ignored in moral theology.

The unmasking of these certain false assumptions of immutable human nature is reinforced by the following consideration. Rahner's defence of natural law of necessity, pulls in the transcendental method.

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[18] Bresnahan: *ibid*, 175

[19] cf. "Experiment with Man" *TI IX*
"Human Vitae" *TI VI*

> Particularly in moral theology a transcendental anthropological theology would be able to gain insights of considerable practical importance, especially (though not exclusively) in the matter of eliminating claims which pose illegitimately as natural law.[20]

It is needed, according to Rahner, to indentify the immutable elements of human nature. This is compounded by the consideration that for Rahner, "nature" or *Natura Pura* is a residual or *Restbegriff*, identified only by revelation, with the result that reason of itself, without the assistance of grace is not able to determine what 'nature' truly is.[21]

Rahner's anthropology, with its turning point of the mediation of grace and its attendant concerns of virtue, freedom, and *Potentia Obedientialis* gives rise to a new understanding of human nature which takes precedence over natural law:

> The basic meaning of the Christian ethos is not that we must respect objective material norms which God has imposed on reality. For all these material norms become real norms only once they become the expression of the very structure of the person. All other structures of things are placed below man. He may alter them, he may twist them as far as he possibly can, he is their master and not their servant. The only ultimate structure of the person which expresses it perfectly is the person's basic capacity for love, and this capacity is boundless.[22]

To reiterate Rahner gives priority to his anthropology and his revised understanding of human nature over the demands of the natural law, to virtue, grace and fundamental option over natural law.

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[20] *TI* IX "Theology and Anthropology", 45

[21] eg, "The Dignity of Man" *TI II*, 244
cf. J.P. Boyce: "Faith and Christian Ethics in Rahner and Lonergan" *Thought* Vol L 1975 No 198, September, 252

[22] "The 'Commandment' of Love in Relation to the Other Commandments" *TI* V, 456 quoted in Dych: *op.cit.*, 132

However Rahner not only had to deal with the old in the form of natural law theory, but also the new in the form of situation ethics. His essential ethics now included a 'formal existential ethics'. What was this? Did it contradict the natural law?

6.3 Rahner's Existential Ethics

Rahner's innovative (for the time) approach to Catholic moral theology he referred to as 'formal existential ethics'.[23] Simply, Rahner attempted to establish a *via media* between normative or essential ethics (in particular, the Thomistic natural law tradition) and a situation or extreme existential ethics by supplementing essential ethics with a formal existential ethic.[24] Now, for Rahner an essential ethic refers to "the moral principles or laws derived from the essential elements of human nature."[25] Further, an essentialist ethic has been defined as maintaining that "all individual choices are but 'instances' of general moral norms".[26] Rahner understood a situational ethic as denying that a universal norm:

- carried universal obligation i.e. obliging on everyone, and
- obliges in every case, when one judges a concrete situation in view of that norm.[27]

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[23] cf. "On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethics" *TI II*, 217
[24] Daniel M. Nelson: "Karl Rahner's Existential Ethics" *The Thomist* Vol 51, 1987, 461
[25] *ibid*, 462
[26] Jeremy Miller: "Rahner's Approach to Moral Decision Making" *Louvain Studies* Vol. V No. 4 Fall 1975, 351
[27] *ibid*

So Rahner is faced with a dilemma, on the one hand he finds a situation ethic unacceptable because of:

- concerns of moral relativism and nominalism[28]
- concerns of the understanding of the uniqueness of the moral subject
- concern at the conflict between a situation ethic and the deposit of faith.[29]

However Rahner also sees the appeal of a situation ethic, which is able to tackle the complexities of modern life. As Nelson[30] argues, Rahner pushes for the development of a qualified situational ethic (i.e. an existential ethic) because:

- essential ethics cannot adequately incorporate fundamental freedom[31]

- essential ethics, using a syllogistic scheme of practical reasoning, cannot adequately deal with the reality and distinctiveness of a concrete situation[32]

- essential ethics can only set boundaries for a moral choice. Negative precepts mark the boundary, but positive precepts in their vagueness can only offer a variety of possible options for moral choice, and this, according to Rahner, is not good enough, there is only one right choice, it is not a matter of indifference.[33]

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[28] *TI II,* 216
[29] *ibid,* 352
[30] Daniel Nelson: "Karl Rahner's Existential Ethics" *The Thomist* Vol 51 1987, 465
[31] *TI II* p.247, *TI II,* 187-190
[32] *TI II,* 220-225
[33] *TI II,* 224-5

It becomes apparent that much of Rahner's work on a formal existential ethics is augmenting the methodological framework for the fundamental option, eg, the focus on fundamental freedom and the one, right moral choice. But Rahner still has to come up with his *via media.* Wallace has dubiously described Rahner's approach as the "unfortunate combination of mysticism and casuistry",[34] but he has given us a clue to part of Rahner's approach, that of mysticism.

But how does Rahner construct his *via media*? He attempts to bring out the "core of truth which is also found in the false situation ethics,"[35] by his use of existential ethics, that is the value of uniqueness for the human person. Rahner argues that the applications of moral norms are valid but are incomplete. They cannot deal with human individuality. The individual human is more than common humanity. So we are confronted with the existential aspect of human nature, of freedom, subjectivity and individuality.

Rahner refers to 'moral prescriptions' that can augment moral precepts, ie, these prescriptions are linked to human individuality, the prescription is more than the precept. This ontology of Rahner then gives way to epistemology. He searches for a formal structure for individual ethical reality and finds it partially in the role of conscience. Conscience has two

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[34] D.M. Nelson: *op.cit.*, 461
W.A. Wallace: "The Existential Ethics of Karl Rahner: A Thomistic Appraisal" *The Thomist*, 1963, Vol 27, 493
[35] *TI II*, 220

faculties, that of applying universal norms and that which grasps what is not made clear by universal norms.[36]

As Rahner says:

> There must be some function of conscience which does not merely apply the universal norms to all of my particular situations but which moreover grasps also what has not yet been made absolutely clear by the situation and the universal norms, and which is precisely and as such what has to be done by me individually.[37]

But we are then faced with the problem, how does this faculty of conscience recognise a prescription? Rahner replies that it is technique, an art for 'learning' individual imperatives. It is:

> the charismatic art of 'discernment of spirits'... the ability to discern the unique call of God for the individual as such.[38]

And at this point Ignatius of Loyola enters stage right (cf. 5.3.1). The Ignatian discernment of spirits is integral to existential moral choice, and consequently, to fundamental option. The dimension of this perspective of Ignatian discernment of spirits is taken up at length in Chapter Eight (esp. 8.4.5).

6.4 Rahner's Understanding of Sinfulness

We have seen how Rahner has taken up traditional concerns in moral theology, eg, natural law, and extended and adapted them to contemporary

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[36] *TI II,* 229
[37] *TI II,* 227
[38] "Dangers in Catholicism Today" in *Nature and Grace,* quoted in Nelson *op.cit.,* 467

concerns. Yet again, with regard to the important area of moral theology best described as sinfulness, Rahner has reinterpreted the traditional Roman Catholic theology in order to make it more relevant and comprehensible to contemporary theology.[39] There is also the further consideration that Rahner's moral anthropology is tightly integrated so that, on a wider frame of reference, any area of his theology which is influenced by his moral anthropology is also influenced by his understanding of sinfulness.

Consider the following quotation which illustrates how Rahner combines elements of natural law, formal existential ethics and supernatural existential under the rubric of a doctrine of sin:

> In the usual theory of sin we treat sin too exclusively as the mere offence against a universal diverse norm. Could not an existential ethics help us to see more clearly that sin, over and above its property of being an offence against the law of God, is also and just as much an offence against an utterly individual imperative of the individual will of God, which is the basis of uniqueness. Would we not perceive sin more clearly in this way as the failure of the personal - individual love of God? Even though this has been developed in a formal ontology which in itself is of a philosophical kind would it not offer a set of categories applicable and useful in a theology of the supernatural as an immediate personal encounter with the personal God as he is in himself?[40]

Rahner's focus on sinfulness can be pivotal. Certain elements of this doctrine of sinfulness have also been given considerable weight viz: "Rahner's theological concept of concupiscence is fundamental to his theological anthropology,"[41] and again "Any area of Rahner's theology

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[39] cf. T.K. Allik: "Nature and Spirit: Agency and Concupiscence in Hauerwas and Rahner" *Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol 15, No 1, Spring 1987, 20

[40] "On the Question of a Formal Existential Ethics" *TI II*, 232

[41] T.K. Allik: "Nature and Spirit: Agency and Concupiscence in Hauerwas and Rahner" *Journal of Religious Ethics* Vol 15 No 1 Spring 1987, 20

which is influenced by his theological anthropology is also influenced by his understanding of concupiscence."[42]

What then, is Rahner's doctrine of sinfulness? Rahner advances this opinion:

> Death precisely as the coming to an end of the history of freedom is an event that has always existed even prior to sin. Wherever there is history, it will have an end. Freedom and fulfillment belong together. A fulfillment that in coming to an end does not possess itself and cannot control itself, but occurs as a coming to an end in the incomprehensibility of a divine judgement, such a death has something to do with sin. The darkness is a sign of the person's sinful condition.
>
> It is still another question whether this sinful condition has come to be through personal sin or is a consequence of a sin in the beginning of human history or whether it is both.[43]

It can be seen under two headings, first the personal and second, the non-personal. The latter is essentially Rahner's reworking of the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of original sin, a reworking that takes into account his transcendental anthropology so that "original sin is the absence of that supernatural elevation planned originally for man."[44] The universal state of sinfulness, through not only the absence of the supernatural elevation but also the historical conditioning of descent from Adam, and transmission of sin in the history of humankind, is juxtaposed with the offer of sanctification brought about by God's universal saving will. Original sin is a universal state of sinfulness marked by history and the sinfulness of other

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[42] *ibid*

[43] Karl Rahner in an interview with Gerhard Ruis for *Die Furche,* Salzburg 2 April 1980. Reprinted in Karl Rahner: *Karl Rahner in Dialogue* (ed) Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 239

[44] Roberts *op.cit.*, 207

persons that impinges on and precedes our exercise of transcendental freedom.[45]

Another given of our existence that is in a sense premoral and precedes our exercise of freedom is that of concupiscence. Rahner's treatment of this important element in his doctrine of sinfulness was first put forward in his article "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia",[46] written in 1941 at the same time as publication of *Hearer of the Word* and which had its origins in *Spirit in The World* as the experienced dialectic of spirit and matter.[47] It is no accident that in this article there is first mention of fundamental option, since the two are intimately linked in Rahner's anthropology. At p.358 Rahner defines concupiscence in a generic sense as desire (*Begehren*). He then narrows the meaning to that of power of desire or appetite (*Begehrungsvermögen*) and finally narrows the meaning even further as "spontaneous desire, in so far as it precedes his free decision and resists it."[48] This polarity between concupiscence and free decision is the "primary focus"[49] of his essay. Within this context, concupiscence encompasses everything in a sense pre-moral which spontaneously precedes free decision, everything subliminal or unconscious.

Concupiscence may precede the free decision but it may also *per se* resist it.[50] In short "the free decision never succeeds in disposing of the person as

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[45] Some of the principal sources for original sin in Rahner's writings are:
"Theological Reflections on Monogenism *TI I*, 229
"The Sin of Adam" *TI XI*, 256
FCF 107
[46] *TI I*, 347
[47] A. Tallon: "Spirit, Matter, Becoming: Karl Rahner's *Spirit in The World*" The Modern Schoolman XLVIII January 1971, 162
[48] *ibid*, 360
[49] Allik, *op.cit.*, 20
[50] *TI I*, 360

a whole because of concupiscence."[51] It should be noted here that fundamental option because of concupiscence (and original sin), may never realise the full potential of fundamental freedom. Concupiscence provides a further twist. It is not necessarily equated with sin or with the presence of sin however it does imply the possibility of conversion to total evil or total goodness and in this sense reinforces fundamental option.[52] That is to say a fundamental option may be made in either a positive or negative sense, first, a surrender to a "transcendent order of truth and value whose ground is God,"[53] or second, the fundamental choice of self, i.e., self love or concupiscence.

If original sin and concupiscence precede the free decision what is the impact of the free decision on sinfulness? Put simply, the received understanding is that for Rahner, sin is a misuse of human freedom.[54]

> A morally bad realisation of freedom, though still free, is a false realisation of its purpose, since God created freedom not on the possibility of subjectively performing good or evil, but as the possibility of the creature positing of the good as such.[55]

Now it has been noted that for Rahner wherever there is freedom, there is sin,[56] which leads to Ron Highfield's trenchant criticism that for Rahner we have a freedom so radical that even God is an object of choice.[57] Highfield has used Rahner's doctrine of sin and freedom as the *entrée* to a radical

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[51] Allik *op.cit.*, 21
[52] *ibid*
[53] McCool: *op.cit.*, 240
[54] *Schriften VI*, 231 cf. Roberts *op.cit.*, 30
[55] Roberts *op.cit.*, 205
[56] A Carr: "Karl Rahner" in ed M Marty *et alii A Handbook of Christian Theologians* (Cambridge: Lutterworth, 1984), 531
[57] R Highfield *op.cit*, cf. "Theology of Freedom" 181, FCF 99

critique of Rahner *per se.* The implications for Rahner's doctrine of fundamental freedom and fundamental option are pursued at sections 8.3 and 8.5.9.

6.5 Conclusion

We have now seen that various components of Rahner's moral anthropology are subordinated to more fundamental principles of his theology.

- Natural law is subordinated to his understanding of human nature and virtue, grace and fundamental option.
- Formal existential ethics is subordinated to the play of natural law and Ignatian discernment of conscience.
- Sinfulness is located in the context of the exercise of transcendental freedom, and *ipso facto* fundamental option.

That is to say, some traditional concerns of manualist moral theology, e.g., natural law, are significantly reordered by Rahner's transcendental anthropology. Now, in addition, as McCool observes, Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge 'dominates' Rahner's understanding of concupiscence, natural law and "the need and possibility of a formal existential ethics and moral theology."[58] In the next chapter we consider his metaphysic of knowledge in relation to the supernatural existential and fundamental option.

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[58] G. McCool: "The Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner's Theology" *Theological Studies* Dec 1961, Vol 22, No 4, 538

CHAPTER 7

THE DEEPEST LONGING AND ITS HORIZON - THE SUPERNATURAL EXISTENTIAL AS PRECURSOR TO THE FUNDAMENTAL OPTION

At least at one time, grace, assisting grace, and the outward circumstances shaped by God's grace in human life were conceived extrinsically, as discrete realities that occurred now and then and which could be lacking completely in the sinner or the unbeliever. My basic theological conviction, if you will, is in opposition to this. What we call grace is obviously a reality, which is God-given, unmerited, free, dialogical - in other words - supernatural. But for me grace is at the same time a reality which is so very much a part of the innermost core of human existence in decision and freedom, *always* and above all given in the form of an offer that is either accepted or rejected, that the human being cannot step out of this transcendental peculiarity of his being at all.

Karl Rahner: *Faith in a Wintry Season - Conversations and Interviews with Karl Rahner in the Last Years of His Life*
(ed) P. Imhof and H. Biallowons, (trans) H. Egan
(New York: Crossroad, 1991), 21

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In the deepest chasm of all our hearts there is a love and longing for God our Father ..... The Eternal Father is the deepest longing of the human heart.

Marija Pavlovic, Bosnian Visionary
quoted in
J.T. Connell: *The Visions of the Children*
(New York: St Martins Press, 1993), 132

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7 THE DEEPEST LONGING AND ITS HORIZON - THE SUPERNATURAL EXISTENTIAL AS PRECURSOR TO THE FUNDAMENTAL OPTION

7.1 Introduction

Although the principal concern of this thesis is the understanding of the fundamental option and its link with virtue, the supernatural existential provides the **context** for the fundamental option, i.e., the fundamental option of life with God is predicated upon the possibility of God's offer of **grace,** i.e., the supernatural existential, (at least with regard to **Rahner's** understanding of fundamental option). Rahner argues that the precursor of the fundamental option, fundamental freedom, "must first of all be freed by God's grace for its real task of loving God."[1]

However before narrowing the focus on the supernatural existential to its relationship to Rahner's theology of grace, we need to see how the supernatural existential is regarded in a more general context. The supernatural existential has been dealt with briefly in the context of the transcendental method (ref. 5.3), but to recapitulate it is 'the capacity for the God of self bestowing Love' which is the 'central and abiding existential of human beings as they really are.'[2] We have an intriguing illustration of this possibility with the following news report:

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[1] "Guilt, Responsibility and Punishment" *TI VI* p 201 cf. Richard Lennan: *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (Oxford: U.P., 1995), 186 and
Karl Rahner: "On the Situation of Faith" *TI XX,* 27-28

[2] Karl Rahner: "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace" *TI I,* 312

> London: United States researchers believe they have discovered a "God Spot" in the brain - a circuit of nerves which could explain humanity's almost universal belief in a deity....
>
> Research is at an early stage, but the scientists said the results appeared to show that the phenomenon of religious belief could be inbuilt in humans...
>
> A spokesman for the Anglican Church said the question of the "God Spot" was one for scientists not theologians. "It would not be surprising if God had created us with a physical facility for belief", he said.[3]

However, what is an existential? It is a Heideggerian term that designates "those components which were constitutive of human existence, that is, those features which were proper to and characteristic of a human existent"[4], such as freedom. One of Rahner's earliest definitions of 'existential' was "an enduring, continuing condition of a finite spiritual person, that which enables and is the ontological predetermination of personal behaviour (that which, therefore, is involved in the free acts of a person)".[5] He then continues by extending this definition to the supernatural existential.

> This existential is supernatural not only because it directs man toward the supernatural grace, but also because it is unowed. It is existential because it does not (as does the existentielle) stem from the free act of the person, but rather is its pre-supposition.[6]

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[3] Australian Associated Press reported in *Sydney Morning Herald,* 3 November 1997, 12

[4] W. Dych: *Karl Rahner* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), 36

[5] "Über das Verhältnis des Naturgesetzes zur übernatürlichen Gnadenordnung" *Orientierung* XX (1956), 9
quoted in Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 87, n 14
cf. "Eine Antwort" *Orienterung* XIV (1950), 141-145
"Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace" *TI* I, 297

[6] *ibid*

To spell out the meaning of the supernatural existential, it is an enduring, continuing condition or basic structure of human existence. It is both the continuing offer of grace and the orientation of the human person to this offer, (preceded by the *potentia obedientialis*). As such it is not so much a part of human nature, but it is the result of divine gratuity which becomes a part of the conditioned, historical circumstances of the human person. As Rahner says:

> these 'existentials' of man's concrete 'historical' nature are not purely states of being beyond consciousness. They make themselves felt in the experience of man. By simple reflexion on himself, in the light of natural reason, he cannot simply and clearly distinguish them from the natural spiritual activity which is the manifestation of his nature.[7]

It is universal, all humankind are recipients of this gift, yet it is also supernatural in that it goes beyond the hypothetical state of pure nature.[8] What is the status of the supernatural existential in Rahner's theology? It has been referred to as 'the central concept of Rahner's entire theology',[9] a 'crucial element',[10] and the heart of his theology with which it reaches an 'indisputable climax'.[11] Although there are other candidates for this claim of centrality (refer 5.3.1) the very fact of this claim does indicate the perceived importance of the supernatural existential for Rahner's theology. Although Weger, for one, can refer to the supernatural existential as 'indisputable',[12] a number of trenchant criticisms have been arrayed against

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[7] *TI?*
quoted in E. Lantin: *The Christian Mystery and Human Understanding* (East Asia Pastoral Institute), 118
[8] cf. Neil Ormerod's discussion in his as yet unpublished Th.D. Thesis, 176ff
[9] S.J. Grenz and R.E. Olson: *Twentieth Century Theology* (Illinois: IVP, 1992), 244
[10] Duffy: *ibid.*, 85
[11] K.H. Weger: *Karl Rahner* (London: Burns & Oates, 1980), 86
[12] Weger: *op.cit.*, 86

it. It has been labelled 'highly debatable', 'idiosyncratic', 'highly unstable', 'highly ambiguous' and of 'dubious value.'[13] These criticisms are not only a problem for Rahner's theology, but also for this thesis, insofar as the possible invalidity of the supernatural existential would most probably vitiate Rahner's notion of fundamental option and thereby discredit one of the major approaches to the fundamental option. Does the imperial supernatural existential have no theological clothes? If so, what are the consequences for fundamental option?

It becomes readily apparent that it is of considerable importance to assess the validity, or otherwise of the supernatural existential. Now, in order to understand a vital dimension of Rahner's concept of supernatural existential, it is necessary to understand his theology of grace. It has been claimed that in Rahner's theory of the supernatural existential "we have the single most significant contribution to an understanding of the nature - grace dialectic in the twentieth century."[14] In this century no other theologian has done more than Karl Rahner to restore the theology of grace to its position close to the centre of Christian thought.[15] Consequently, Rahner's concept of the supernatural existential has assumed a pre-eminent position in the evaluation of Rahner's theology in particular, and in the theology of grace in general. Perhaps the easiest *entrée* to the supernatural existential is to consider the historical setting for its development, i.e., the sustained debate on nature and grace.

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[13] Grenz & Olson: *op.cit.*, 246

[14] S.J. Duffy: *The Graced Horizon Nature and Grace in Modern Catholic Thought* (Collegeville Minn: Glazier, 1992), 206

[15] R. Haight: "Sin and Grace" in F. Schussler Fiorenza and J.P. Galvin (eds): *Systematic Theology - Catholic Perspective* Vol. II (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 109

7.2 The Debate on Nature and Grace

In the middle of this century there occurred a 'mind changing'[16] debate in Catholic theological circles on nature and grace. This debate fueled a Papal encyclical (*Humani Generis*), and flowed into the *Weltanschauung* of the Second Vatican Council. The two major players in the debate were the French Jesuit Henri de Lubac (1896 - 1991) and Karl Rahner.[17] In 1957, just before the Council, and in the middle of his difficulties with Rome, Rahner wrote:

> By and large nowadays only "specialist circles" concern themselves with the subject "nature and grace", but at least it *is* again being talked about, and not disregarded except when mention of it cannot be avoided. It is a subject which arouses passionate discussion. Views differ over it and the controversy is not merely academic. This is splendid. For since the controversy between Catholic and Protestant theology died down and became sterile in the eighteenth century, and the traditional scholastic theology was back in victory over the thin-blooded theology of the Enlightenment in the nineteenth century, for a short time it was generally thought that the subject "nature and grace" was closed, that everyone was agreed about it and more or less everything worth knowing was now known.".[18]

The rediscovered debate was, as Rahner notes, the culmination of the development in the traditional Catholic distinction between nature and grace that surfaced with De Lubac's criticism of the extrinsicism of the scholastic interpretation of grace and Rahner's own mediating response between intrinsicism and extrinsicism that resulted in the supernatural existential.

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[16] S. Duffy: *The Graced Horizon op.cit* , 50
[17] *ibid.*, 9
[18] K. Rahner: *Nature and Grace - Dilemmas in the Modern Church* trans Dinah Wharton 1964 114 reprinted in Kelly *op.cit*, 96

Although Rahner referred to the recent manifestations of the debate, it did, in fact, have an impressive pedigree going back to Aquinas and perhaps beyond. Augustine used the terminology of nature and grace in some of his writings and although he made a substantial, seminal contribution to the theology of grace *per se*, the systematic development of the nature/grace distinction began with Thomas Aquinas.

7.2.1 Nature and Grace in the Twentieth Century

Karl Rahner has isolated three historical considerations that produced a renewed examination of grace and nature in the twentieth century. The first consideration was the dialogue between Catholic and Protestant theologians on the central Reformation questions of grace. The second was the increase in historical study, both patristic and post-tridentine on the nature grace dialectic. The third was the philosophical enquiry of Joseph Maréchal (1878 - 1944) the founder of transcendental Thomism.[19]

However Rahner may have overlooked the influence of Maurice Blondel (1861 - 1949). A number of commentators, Duffy, Shepherd and McCool[20] for example, regard Blondel as important. Henri de Lubac gave credit to his friend Blondel for providing the 'main impulse' for 'Latin theology's return to a more authentic tradition' with regard to nature and grace.[21] Not strictly

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[19] K. Rahner: *Nature and Grace: Dilemmas in the Modern Church* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1964), 119-123, quoted in S. Duffy: *The Graced Horizon op.cit,* 51

[20] Stephen Duffy: *The Graced Horizon, op.cit., passim*
William Shepherd: *op.cit,* 58ff
Gerald McCool: *From Unity to Pluralism, op.cit,* 44
Paul McPartlan: *Sacrament of Salvation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 48

[21] H. de Lubac: *A Brief Catechesis on Nature and Grace* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1984): translation of *Petite Catechèse sur nature et grâce* Communio Fayard Paris 1980, 37 quoted in McPartlan, *op.cit,* 48

speaking a Thomist, Blondel attempted to translate the Christian Gospel into a philosophy of action which was a dialectic of "the willing will, the spiritual dynamism whose built in yearning would be satisfied by nothing short of the concrete God of revelation".[22] (See Section 5.2.2).

With regard to nature and grace, both Maréchal and de Lubac were influenced by Blondel's earlier works *L'Action* and the "Letter on Apologetics".[23] Although not a strict Thomist, Blondel has been seen as having a close relationship to the Scotist school within traditional scholasticism and dealing a "fatal blow" to Thomist extrinsicism.[24] He has been seen as the first thinker of the twentieth century to "articulate a viable alternative to Thomist thought on nature and grace."[25] What was this alternative?

Shepherd sees Blondel making four contributions to the problem of nature and grace, viz. His method of immanence, his distinction of volitional activity, his *option fondamentale* (*sic*) and last the specificity of the supernatural.[26] First, Blondel described his method of immanence in the following way:

> [It] can consist in nothing else than in trying to equate, in our own consciousness, what we appear to think and to will and to do with what we do and will and think in actual fact - so that behind factitious negations and ends which are not genuinely willed may be

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[22] McCool, *ibid*
[23] *L'Action: Essai d'une Critique de la Vie et de la Pratique* (Paris: Alcam, 1892), reprinted Presses Universitaires de France 1950 "Lettre sur les exigences de la pensée contemporaine en matière d'apologétique et sur la méthode de la philosophie dans l'étude du probleme religieux" *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne* Jan-July 1896
[24] W. Shepherd: *op.cit*, 60
[25] *ibid*, 60-61
[26] Shepherd *op.cit*, 61

> discovered our most innermost affirmations and the implacable needs which they imply.[27]

So the order of immanence is an epistemological concern with the end of the human will and 'action'. It has a remarkable similarity to Rahner's metaphysics. Blondel concludes that the supernatural is finally seen as the sensor for the phenomenon of will in the first place.[28]

Second, Blondel distinguishes two types of volition when he regards the will as more important than the intellect. *The volonté voulante* is a basic appetite, a non cognitive driving force, with its object specified by the supernatural order. It is the 'engine' of personal dynamism.[29] The *volonté voulu* is free, cognitive and responds to the demands of the intellect. The two wills are in conflict, with the victory of *volonté voulante* won by asceticism. The development of the will leads to a further consideration that:

> [it] constrains us to the avowal of our insufficiency, leads us to recognise the need of a further gift, gives us the aptitude not to produce or to define but to recognise and to receive it, offers as in a word, by a sort of prevenient grace, that baptism of desire which, presupposing God's secret touch, is always accessible and necessary apart from dry explicit revelation, and which, even when revelation is known, is, as it were, the human sacrament immanent in the divine operation.[30]

Blondel attempts to show through the will, the inevitable need for an approach to God. Human persons, by themselves, cannot reach God, but

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[27] *Lettre op.cit,* 157
[28] *ibid,* 159 and *L'Action passim* cf. Shepherd *op.cit,* 63
[29] *L'Action op.cit,* xxii also Shepherd *op.cit,* 63
[30] *L'Action,* 162-163 cf. Shepherd *op.cit,* 65

they need to reach God if his *telos* is to be realised.[31] Third, at this stage of his argument, Blondel produces, according to Shepherd, his fundamental option, of "whether or not to make room for the supernatural. Choosing openness to God's action is the good option."[32]

Fourth, this fundamental option is inextricably linked to the supernatural order. The human person's being, through the dynamism of the will, of the *volonté voulante*, is impelled to choose the fundamental option of receptivity to the supernatural order. The natural order, of itself, is insufficient and gives way to the fundamental option of openness to the supernatural order.[33] At this point Blondel appeals to Christian revelation, where the supernatural order, understood properly, is "finally recognised by subjective faith, by personal appropriation."[34] Further, Blondel argues that the gratuitious gift of God is required in order to establish that the supernatural order is the *telos* of the human person. Here Blondel echoes the natural desire when he sees God as the *telos* of the human person, but its attainment requires supernatural means.[35]

As Duffy observes, Blondel's phenomenology of action demonstrates the gulf between the dynamism of the human will and the natural order with the corollary that the supernatural inevitably completes human action. "It [the supernatural] is absolutely necessary, yet absolutely unobtainable by human resources alone.[36] Although Boyer could argue that Blondel destroyed the

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[31] *ibid,* 388 cf. Shepherd: *ibid*
[32] *Letter,* 163 cf. Shepherd *ibid,* 66
[33] *Letter,* 163, *L'Action* p.487 cf. Shepherd, *op.cit,* 66
[34] Shepherd, *op.cit,* 66
[35] *ibid,* 67
[36] Duffy: *The Graced Horizon op.cit,* 81

gratiuity of grace,[37] it would appear that Blondel had mounted a philosophical breakthrough in the understanding of nature and grace, and a breakthrough which in a sense, anticipated the breakthrough of Karl Rahner,[38] insofar as there are many similarities in Blondel's approach with Rahner's metaphysics and the supernatural existential. Blondel puts his understanding of the natural or 'immanent order' so:

> What has been ignored is the fact that previously to habitual grace there is another grace, a first vocation, a state which results from the loss of the initial gift, but which continues a need and an aptitude for recovering it.[39]

Rahner himself has noted the similarity between Blondel's 'immanent order' and the supernatural existential,[40] and in a sense acknowledges Blondel (and Brisbois) as his predecessor in the pioneering of the supernatural existential. It also needs to be stressed here that (according to Shepherd), Blondel has also pulled out of his metaphysical hat the fundamental option. Rahner's debt to Blondel is a considerable one.[41] However, Rahner acknowledged that his greatest debt lay with Joseph Maréchal,[42] and it is to the work of this transcendental Thomist that we now turn.

Maréchal developed his Transcendental Thomism by an intensive study of both Kant and Thomas. With regard to the latter, Thomas had been proposed in *Aeterni Patris* as the model for the scholastic theology and

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[37] *ibid*
[38] cf. Shepherd, *op.cit,* 70
[39] *History and Dogma,* 284 n.1 cf. Shepherd *op.cit,* 69-70
[40] "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace" *TI I,* 298 n.1
[41] cf. Duffy: *Graced Horizon op.cit,* 108
[42] cf. *Faith in a Wintry Season op.cit,* 43

philosophy of the church. As for the *duplex ordo*, the scholastic double decker view of nature and grace, the question arose for Maréchal and others who were grappling with Thomas, was this the correct view? The result was that the wall between the natural and the supernatural disappeared, the *duplex ordo* was vitiated because it was rediscovered that for Thomas there was a positive reality in human nature which corresponded to the supernatural. It went by the name of natural desire.[43] As Hans Urs von Balthasar observes:

> [Maréchal] resorted to neo-Thomistic principles to explain that the natural version of God remains an ineffectual and conditional desire in pure nature - a pure velleity. We must never forget that a great *reversal of perspective* lies at the core of the thinking. We must turn back from the dynamic thrust toward the necessary being that it presupposes.[44]

Given that Maréchal grounded his Kantian perspective on Thomistic epistemology through his understanding of intellectual dynamism, i.e. 'a tension of thought toward reality by reason of its Teleological drive, independently of conceptual structure'[45] (see also 5.2.2 above), Duffy summarised Maréchal's relevance to the nature grace dialectic under three headings.

- The dialectic is static but acquires full meaning in the context of intellectual dynamism.

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[43] cf. C. Meyer: *op.cit,* 88

[44] Joseph Maréchal: *De Naturali perfectae beatitudinis desiderio,* (Mélanges 1930, 327-337), *Le problème de Dieu d'après M. Ed. LeRoy* (Melanges *op.cit.*, 258) quoted in H. Von Balthasar: *The Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 238

[45] Duffy: *Nature and Grace op.cit,* 51

- The image that the human person has of nature and grace indicates a transcendent 'noumenal' reality,[46] i.e. subsisting truth.

- This subsistent truth can be identified with God.

More relevant for the present purposes, the desire for God is a 'transcendental condition for all cognition and volition.'[47] This Maréchalian view was relevant to the grace nature dialectic because first, orientation to the supernatural was not seen as part of a two storey universe but as part of an integral human nature and second, it was conducive to the study of how grace affects the human person who is already oriented to God.[48]

Maréchal's contribution together with the groundswell of the twentieth century critique of post-Tridentine understandings of nature and grace led to the intervention by the magisterium. On 12 August 1950 Pope Pius XII issued the encyclical *Humani Generis* which warned against undermining the doctrine of the true gratuity of the natural order. It was aimed at the exponents of the *nouvelle théologie*, of which Henri de Lubac SJ (1896 - 1991) was the principal exponent in the area of nature and grace.

The problem for both de Lubac and the magisterium was how could natural desire be truly human and yet grace remain truly gratuitous. In the same year as *Humani Generis* but predating it by several months, Karl Rahner published a response to a summary by 'D' (by most accounts identified as

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[46] *ibid*
[47] *ibid*
[48] *ibid*

Pierre Delaye[49]) of de Lubac's view. It was simply entitled "Eine Antwort"[50] and republished later in an extended version in *TI*, viz. "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace".[51] (A later essay of 1957, "Nature and Grace", has been regarded as a brief statement of the problem and a summary of Rahner's position lacking the precision of the 1950 article.)[52]

This response to 'D' marked Rahner's entry into the lists on the debate on nature and grace, an attempt at a *via media* between Scholasticism's extrinsicism and de Lubac's perceived intrinsicism. It also marked the formulation of the supernatural existential. Although Rahner referred to *"übernatürliche Existential"* in an article of 1941 "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia"[53], the full dimension of supernatural existential is revealed in the 1950 article, in the context of nature and grace. To this article we now turn.

7.2.2 Karl Rahner: Extrinsicism and Intrinsicism and their Resolution

The majority of Catholic theologians did not fully understand de Lubac's arguments and consequently subjected them to misplaced criticism, however a minority regarded them with approval. Karl Rahner was also one of the minority who subjected de Lubac's arguments to a "careful, informed critique."[54] What was this critique?

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[49] cf. W.C. Shepherd: *Man's Condition* (New York: Herder, 1969), note 2, 81
[50] *Orientierung* 14 (1950), 141-145
[51] *TI I* pp.297-317 also *Schriften* I, 323-345
[52] *TI IV* pp.165-188 (*Schriften* IV, 209-236)
cf. Shepherd *op.cit,* 81 note 1
[53] cf. *TI* I pp.374-382 (also *Schriften I,* 406-414)
[54] H. U. Von Balthasar: *op.cit,* 241

In his 1950 article in *Orientierung*[55] Rahner notes the impact of the *nouvelle théologie* (and that of its opponents) with regard to nature and grace, and also anticipates the concerns of *Humani Generis*. He then plainly states that he is not concerned with the 'whole complex of questions'[56] of nature and grace, neither on an historical nor systematic basis, but simply to "set in motion a few considerations of principle."[57] From little theological acorns overarching theological oak trees grow.

Rahner quickly dismisses the 'text book conception' of nature and grace as 'extrinsecism' *[sic]* where "grace appears there as a mere superstructure."[58] Further 'the ontological presuppositions of this extrincesism *[sic]* are equally problematic.' Apart from the comforting fact that those of us unlettered on the nature/grace pilgrimage are in on the scandal that Rahner and/or his ET editors have had difficulties with the spelling of extrinsicism, it should be noted that this paragraph is the launch pad for the supernatural existential, where it appears at footnote 1, from sublime obscurity to central importance in one short step. However the immediate consideration is that Rahner is anxious to show that God's gift of grace cannot be understood simply as a phenomenon external to the human person. 'The ontological presuppositions of the extrincesism *[sic]* are equally problematic'[59], in particular the notion that where grace has not visited the human person who is aware of freedom but has not been justified, then his orientation to the

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[55] 'Eine Antwortet' *op.cit*
[56] *ibid*, 297
[57] *ibid*
[58] *ibid*, 298
[59] *ibid*, 302

supernatural *telos* consists only 'in a divine decree external to the man.'[60] Rahner continues:

> On the contrary, **must** not what God decrees for man be *eo ipso*. An interior ontological constituent of the concrete quiddity 'terminative', even if it is not a constituent of his 'nature'? ..... not just an imperative proceeding from God but man's *[sic]* most inward depths?[61]

Rahner links this *telos* to the *beatitudo*, with the additional import that there is an ontological change in human existence. If God has given the human person a supernatural *telos* then:

> man *[sic]* (and the world) is by that very fact always and everywhere inwardly other in structure than he would be if he did not have this end, and hence other as well before he has reached this end partially (the grace which justifies) or wholly (the beatific vision).[62]

Rahner states bluntly that seemingly there is a 'genuine concern' of theology to decently bury extrinsicism. He also gives short shrift to the *desiderium naturale.*

Extrinsicism is not 'wholly overcome' by arguing that the *potentia obedientialis* includes:

> a yearning.... for the immediate possession of God in the depths of the essence..... For so long as this yearning is really conceived of as conditional ..... this desiderium remains so hypothetical that nature can always become enclosed within its own plane.[63]

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[60] *ibid,* 302
[61] *ibid*
[62] *ibid,* 303
[63] *ibid,* 303

The interpretation by the *nouvelle théologie* of *Natura pura* also comes in for criticism:

> .... is this inner reference of man to grace a constituent of his 'nature' in such a way that the latter cannot be conceived without it, i.e., as pure nature, and hence such that the concept of *natura pura* becomes incapable of complete definition? It is at this point that we are bound to declare our inability to accept the view which has been attributed to the 'nouvelle théologie' and has met with so much opposition.[64]

Rahner retains the concept of *natura pura* to ensure the gratuity of grace. He argues that the *natura pura* is, merely a residual or 'remainder concept' *(Restbegriff),* a 'left-over', if the supernatural existential were extinguished. The reality for Rahner is that the consideration that the offer of God's grace was universal meant that the prospect of a human person existing in a state of *natura pura* was simply fictional,[65] but also sets out the starting point (*à la* Malevez) for the supernatural existential in a footnote on p.302.

> Toute volonté divine ad extra se définit par le terme, qu'elle pose; si donc le décret divin, qui a présidé à la création, a été un décret de destination des hommes au Royaume, cette destination a dû se traduire par un certain effet au plus profond de nous-mêmes; au décret immanent à la volonté divine, à répondu en nous une certaine disposition, une ordination aux biens qui nous étaient promis.[66]

Rahner argues that the supernatural existential is not advanced to deal with the problems of the *potentia obedientialis*, to 'explain why nature has an affinity with grace.'[67] Rather it is to explain the gratuity of grace.

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[64] *ibid,* 303
[65] *ibid,* 313
[66] *ibid,* 302 n.1
[67] *ibid*

The 1950 *Orientierung* article crystallised Rahner's concerns about both the neo-Scholastic approach to grace and de Lubac's radical departure. However, there are much earlier precedents. The main support for de Lubac's position derived from the rediscovery of the *desiderium naturale*, but Rahner had expressed scepticism about *desiderium naturale* as early as 1937 in *Hörer des Wortes*[68] *(ET/Hearer(s) of the Word)*:

> Thomas himself speaks of a natural desire for the immediate intention of God. It is not quite certain what Thomas meant exactly by this expression. Every theologian who has written about it seems to have an interpretation. At any rate, it shows that Thomas admitted that there are, between our spiritual nature with its dynamism (its desiderium) and the beatific vision, relations that do not merely derive from the fact that humanity has been called by grace to the immediate intention of God, but that are previous to this invitation and rooted in human nature.[69]

Based on the philosophical theology as developed in *Hearer of the Word*, Rahner applied a thorough scrutiny to de Lubac's argument. As Vass notes,[70] Rahner agreed with de Lubac that the *beatitudo* was an existential given. However, true to his transcendental method, Rahner went beyond de Lubac's position of acknowledgement of this experience by asking what were the *a priori* conditions.

The first step was Thomas' *potentia obedientialis*. In *Hearer of the Word* Rahner had seen the *potentia obedientialis* as the anchoring of a

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[68] Karl Rahner: *Hörer des Wortes - Zur Grundlegung einer Religions philosophie* (Munich: Verlag Kösel-Pustet, 1941)
ET *Hearer of the Word - Laying the Foundation for a Philosophy of Religion* Trans. Of 1st edn by J. Donceel, (ed) A. Tallon (New York: Continuum, 1994)
[69] *Hearer of the Word, ibid,* 63
[70] Vass: *op.cit,* 64

transcendental dynamism towards the totality of being.[71] However the *potentia obedientialis* of *Hearer of the Word*, although it will be the basis for the relationship between nature and grace, is inadequate to the task of explicating this relationship. Rahner's *potentia obedientialis* of *Hearer of the Word* is only fully exploited with Rahner's development of supernatural existential in 1950. So it can be seen that the supernatural existential arose not just from Rahner's transcendental anthropology but also from his pursuit of the understanding of grace, in particular, the relationship between nature and grace. Rahner was no slavish imitator of the proponents of the *nouvelle théologie.* His theological brilliance consisted in his use of de Lubac as a starting point subject to the application of his transcendental anthropology. What resulted was not only the decent burial of the *duplex ordo* and the emergence of the supernatural existential but also curiously, the strengthening of the Thomist *potentia obedientialis* and the Tridentine *natura pura* at the expense of the *desiderium naturale*, with the further result of both the overcoming of the shortcomings of scholastic extrinsicism and the amelioration of the *nouvelle théologie* with its attendant intrinsicism and potential debasing of the gratuity of the divine gift.[72]

We should include here a short afterword on the nature/grace debate. It has been argued that there is a distinction between the Catholic and Protestant understanding of nature and grace. As Thomas Guarino observes,

> for Catholics, the two orders, ontological and soteriological, are distinct (at least notionally) but in fundamental continuity. For

[71] *ibid,* 64 (also *Hearer of the Word, Hörer* 79f)
[72] *ibid*, 67

> traditional Protestantism, on the other hand, a wedge has been driven between fallen and corrupted nature and the work of the Redeemer.[73]

It has been argued that this has the consequence, that because Protestant theology has eschewed the attractiveness of the Catholic idea of nature, creation, as a reality intelligible of itself and notionally separate from the grace of Jesus Christ, it has found the postmodern deconstruction of ontology legitimate and useful. We could ask what consequence does this have for Rahner's supernatural existential? We may find an Anglican answer in the work of John Milbank, whom we will consider in Section 7.4.

The metaphysic of knowledge that Rahner developed in *Spirit in the World* is the other entrée to the understanding of his development of the supernatural existential. It is significant that he completed this work and *Hearer of the Word* and then turned his attention to the basic dogmatic question of nature and grace.[74] We now turn to *Spirit in the World.*

7.3 The Supernatural Existential and Rahner's Metaphysics of Knowledge

Many of the leading commentators on Rahner and the supernatural existential give more weight to Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge as the *entrée* to the supernatural existential, rather than to the debate on nature and grace. For example, Stephen Duffy argues that it is 'more correct' to perceive the supernatural existential deriving, not from the debate on de Lubac's intrinsicism, but from his earlier approach to metaphysics in the

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[73] Thomas Guarino: "Postmodernity and Five Fundamental Theological Issues", *Theological Studies* Vol 57, No 4, December 1996, 658

[74] R.R. Reno: *The Ordinary Transformed* (Cambridge: Eerdman, 1995), 89, n.6

thirties, "only within this framework can [the supernatural existential] be adequately understood and related to the perennial and technical nature-grace problematic."[75] Similarly, Richard Lennan[76] argues that the importance of the supernatural existential cannot be "fully grasped" without recourse to Rahner's theory of knowledge. William Shepherd sees the main focus of this where Rahner is able to integrate profoundly his theological doctrines by "developing a metaphysics of knowledge which subsequently becomes the major conceptual vehicle for his theological assertions. It provides the necessary concepts for articulating his basic proposal regarding how God's mode of action is related to man's."[77] Shepherd devotes over one half of his book to developing this argument. Since the fundamental option is made in the context of the supernatural existential it becomes necessary to fully understand this metaphysic. However a *caveat* needs to be made. It can be argued that if the philosophical basis laid in *Spirit in the World* is justified then Rahner has

> won the right to proceed with his theological anthropology; but if, on the other hand, they are not so justified, then, despite its individual successes in dealing with one problem or another, his theological anthropology as a systematic theological method will be doomed to failure.[78]

This critique may not address all the dimensions of Rahner's foundational work but it does illustrate its importance.

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[75] S. Duffy: *The Graced Horizon op.cit,* 207
[76] R. Lennan: *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner* (Oxford: U.P., 1995), 49
[77] W.C. Shepherd: *Man's Condition, op.cit,* 99
[78] Gerald McCool: "The Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner's Theology" *Theological Studies* Vol 22, No 4, Dec 1961, 561-2

What was this metaphysical 'engine-room',[79] this 'major conceptual vehicle' of metaphysic of knowledge? The answer can be found in *Spirit in the World* published in 1939 as *Geist in Welt.*[80] We now begin the "long and difficult march through the dense undergrowth of his philosophical foundations,"[81] cutting it down to size by the flail mulcher of tactical abbreviation. A very cursory overview of Rahner's metaphysic of kowledge using FCF and a transcendental perspective has already been provided in Section 5.4.5.

7.3.1 *Spirit in the World*

Andrew Tallon once asked Karl Rahner whether there was a **development** in his anthropology. Rahner replied 'obviously and hopefully', hopefully because he had 'kept on learning something new.'[82] He observed that his anthropology in *Spirit in the World* was 'very rudimentary and not very explicit' and that it stood at the beginning of his philosophical and theological work.[83] However Rahner was able to add that since *Spirit in the World* "his fundamental conception has remained completely unchanged."[84] It was not only Rahner's earliest work but also his 'only explicitly philosophical one.'[85] *Spirit in the World* represented the new blood of transcendental Thomist philosophy, the legacy of Maréchal, which was also to flourish in the work of Bernard Lonergan and Emerich Coreth.[86]

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[79] cf. John Honner's review of R. Lennan *op.cit.* in *Pacifica* Vol. 9, No. 2, June 1996, 221
[80] *Spirit in the World* trans. W. Dych (New York: Continuum, 1994)
German Edition *Geist in Welt* (Munich: Kösel Verlag, 1957) (originally 1939)
[81] John Honner: *ibid*
[82] Andrew Tallon: "Personal Becoming" in *The Thomist* Vol 43 No. 1 January 1970, 3
[83] *ibid*
[84] *Spirit in The World,* xlvii
[85] W.C. Shepherd: *op.cit,* 100
[86] *ibid,* 101

How can *Spirit in the World* be characterised?

The subtitle, which was dropped from the English edition, is helpful: *Towards a Metaphysics of Finite Knowledge according to Thomas Aquinas*. To reinforce this, Rahner's first sentence in the introduction stated that "This work intends to present one part of the Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge."[87] The importance of Thomas, metaphysics and epistemology (not necessarily in that order) are obvious. Further, Rahner said he could just as well have titled the work *Conversio ad Phantasma,* as *Spirit in the World* is an extended treatment of this critical component of the turn to the sense image in Thomist metaphysics. However Rahner did not confine himself to Thomas. J.B. Metz, in his foreword to the much revised (by himself) 1957 second edition of *Spirit in the World*, commented that:

> *Spirit in the World* uses a Thomistic metaphysics of knowledge explained in terms of transcendental and existential philosopy to define man as that essence of absolute transcendence towards God insofar as man in his understanding and interpretation of the world respectfully "pre-apprehends" (*vorgreift*) towards God.[88]

With this evocation of transcendental and existential philosophy, one begins to appreciate the complexity and pluriformity of Rahner's project. Tallon has observed that *Spirit in the World* is neither "an epistemology, a rational psychology nor a natural theology" although it has elements of all three. Rather, it is more a philosophical anthropology based on an extended

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[87] *Spirit in the World,* xlix
cf. A. Tallon: "Spirit, Matter, Becoming: Karl Rahner's *Spirit in the World", The Modern Schoolman,* XLVIII January 1971, 151
[88] *Spirit in the World,* xvi

treatment of human cognition,[89] which becomes a reflection on the possibility of metaphysics.[90]

This pluriformity is reflected in the intellectual sources Rahner uses for the project. His examination of one article, in one question, of the *Prima Pars* of the *Summa* (ST.1a, Q84, A7), which affirms for the human person, the knower, the necessity of the conversion to the phantasm (or turning to the sense image of the intellect), comes to be viewed through Maréchalian/Kantian transcendental lenses with a further ontological perspective from Heidegger. Rahner is fascinated by the juxtaposition of the Maréchalian/Thomist perspective on the dynamism of the human mind and the Heideggerian fundamental question about being (*Dasein*) (ref 5.3 for the Heideggerian and Maréchalian sources of Rahner's thought). However Rahner himself says that the main perspective is transcendental Thomist:

> If Pierre Rousselot and Joseph Maréchal are mentioned more than others, this should emphasise that I feel the work particularly indebted to the spirit of their interpretation of Thomas.[91]

Thus, in a sense, *Spirit in the World* was a reaction to the Kantian problematic as retailed by Maréchal and Rousselot, that is, the problematic of the very possibility of theological arguments *per se,* subsequent to Kant's critique of the metaphysical knowledge of God (ref. 5.3.2 for the contribution of Kant). Francis Fiorenza, in his Introduction to the 1968 English edition of *Spirit in the World,* gave it considerable emphasis, it is "vitally important" since, in his view, it concerned the "central problem of

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[89] Tallon: *ibid,* 160
[90] cf. G. McCool: "The Philosophy of the Human Person in Karl Rahner's Theology" *op.cit.,* 54
[91] *Spirit in the World* xlvii

philosophy", ie, the dimension, indeed the relevance, of metaphysics (also more than a passing problem in postmodernism), with the attendant question of the possibility of a "speculative and rational theology."[92] Maréchal himself had concerns other than Kant. Like many of his neo-scholastic colleagues, he had seen his main work as providing an epistemological foundation for a Thomistic theology. This would, it was hoped, solve the problem of knowledge with which philosophy had wrestled since Descartes. Catholic theology itself, in the course of the nineteenth century, had seen its dependence on metaphysics shaken by the impact of both Kant and empiricism. Maréchal saw his immediate task as the realist grounding of metaphysics in cognition and thereby ensuring the good standing of Thomism.

Maréchal developed his own answer for this challenge. Using both Thomas and Kant, he argued that:

> even though the entire content of the mind's idea is derived from sense experience, the dynamic finality of the mind itself, which directs the operation of sense and intellect in the abstraction of conceptual objects, refers these objects to an infinite, unconditional absolute in the judgement that affirms them. The early Neo-scholastics were not able to defend themselves successfully against the charge of empiricism because they failed to appreciate two very important elements in St Thomas' metaphysics of knowledge. The first of these is the role assigned to judgement in the unitary process of abstraction and affirmation; the second, the role assigned to the mind's finality in the whole of that uniting process.[93]

This answer of the realist metaphysics of knowledge that Maréchal provided to these global questions of theology and philosophy was to provide the

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[92] *Spirit in the World* xix
[93] G. McCool: *From Unity to Pluralism, op.cit.*, 92

agenda for Rahner in his early work. How does Rahner tackle these questions? What in fact does he say in *Spirit in the World*?

He begins in Part I with an approach to one article in the *Summa* (*ST Ia, Q84, A7),* the details of which are repeated in the body of *Spirit in the World*, ie, Part II (Chapters 1-4). The basic question is how can we know anything? Further, the seminal Thomist question here is, can the human person know anything through the intellect without first knowing it through the senses? That is, to say can the human person through the intellect (*intellectus actu intelligens*) know of metaphysical concerns (*species intelligibilis*) on the one hand by intuition, or on the other, only by sense imagery provided by the senses (*phantasma*)?[94] We are presented with a dichotomy between intuition and sensibility, between concept formation and sense data, between concept and percept. As Shepherd argues, Rahner, as a good Thomist, gives the requisite priority to sensibility (or sense data, or percept), for knowing. "Concepts without percepts are empty; percepts without concepts are blind - blind, but still first in the order of knowing. The problem is, of course, to clarify the process by which concepts and percepts go together to make up human knowing."[95]

This may sound like an epistemological issue for Plato and Aristotle,[96] but Rahner transforms it from cognition and epistemology into a general metaphysics of knowing.

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[94] *Spirit in the World*: 18ff
cf. Vass: *op.cit*, 31ff,
Tallon: Personal Becoming *op.cit.*, 31ff
[95] Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 103
[96] Vass: *ibid*

> The possibility is opened for a metaphysical critique of human knowledge, a critique which is not a theory of knowledge but a metaphysics of knowledge.[97]

In particular, the intuition is understood by Rahner not merely as the means of knowing, but gives it an ontic reality where the act of knowing "is a kind of being."[98] With regard to sense imagery, Rahner perceives it as the tension between the knowledge of the particular, the contingent, the categorical, the concrete of sense imagery on the one hand, and the knowledge of universal and metaphysical objects on the other. Further, as Tallon argues, there are two principles involved in this experience of knowledge. First, the experience as an intuition through sensibility where the knowing subject and the knowing object become one. Second, at the same time the intellect produces an objectification where subject and object are distinguished.[99]

By far the most important (and voluminous) section of *Spirit in the World* is found in Part II, which consists of Chapters 1-4.[100] In the First Chapter of *Spirit in the World,* Rahner is concerned with Heideggerian[101] questioning, or notion of questionableness (*Fragwürdigkeit*). He begins with the pregnant and striking sentence "Man [*sic*] questions. This is something final and irreducible."[102] This is Rahner's anthropologically oriented starting point, located in Aquinas yet borrowed from Heidegger.[103] (cf. Heidegger's use of *Fragstellung* or putting the question, see 5.3.3). Rahner

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[97] *Spirit in the World* 19, Vass: *ibid*
[98] Vass: *ibid* 32, cf. *Spirit in the World*, 15, 17
[99] *Spirit in the World*: 33ff, 42ff, cf. Vass: *ibid*
[100] cf. A. Tallon: "Spirit, Matter, Becoming" *op.cit.*, 160
[101] cf. Carr: *op.cit.*, 521
[102] *Spirit in the World*, 57
[103] cf. J.M. McDermott: "The Analogy of Knowing in Karl Rahner" *International Philosophical Quarterly* Vol 1 XXXVI No 2 June 1996, 202

uses questionableness to uncover the meaning of being. Being is only accessible to the human person via questioning, via something questionable (*Fragbarkeit*), "that he himself **is** insofar as **he asks about being.**"[104] Further, "man [*sic*] exists as the question about being."[105] Even further, the question turns upon itself and questions the questioner, ie, the human person. In this self reflection the human person reveals the redolence of being within their own questioning.[106] However, this questioning also reveals the human person's ignorance.

> But insofar as in metaphysics the question about being as a transcendental question consciously turns upon itself, looks at and questions itself, it reveals itself as a **knowledge** of man about his own questioning essence: he is already with being in its totality (*beim Sein im ganzen*); otherwise how could he ask about it? In his first question (which always takes place with the question about being as its ground) he is already *quodammodo omnia* (in a certain way everything), and still he is not yet that, he is still nothing.[107]

So the human person, from ignorance, questions and gains knowledge but also in self reflective awareness uncovers the 'beingfulness' of the act of questioning. What in fact is being? Rahner supplies a suprisingly simple answer.[108] In the experience of the human person as questioner there is revealed knowledge for the knower which is to-be-present-to-self (*Bei-sich-Sein).*

> Being is questionability. Now one cannot ask about being in its totality without affirming the fundamental knowability, in fact a certain *a priori* knowness of being as such.[109]

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[104] *Spirit in the World*, 57
[105] *ibid*, 58
[106] *ibid*, cf. Vass *ibid*, 33
[107] *ibid*, 60
[108] cf. Vass, *ibid*, 35
[109] *Spirit in the World*, 68

Rahner argues that presence to self is not only the starting point of knowing but is also the being itself of the knower.

> Knowing is the being-present-to-self of being, and this being-present-to-self is the being of the existent.[110]

This intensity of being in the human person is found in proportion to his function of knowing in the elementary sense or sense of starting point of being-present-to-self. From this Rahner can assert the unity of knowing and being.[111] "Thus being and knowing exist in original unity."[112] It has been stressed that from this "fundamental unity of being and knowing Rahner develops the metaphysics of knowledge which lays the groundwork for all his later theological efforts."[113]

In Chapter 2 of *Spirit in the World*, Rahner explores the dimension of knowing as found in sensibility, or the possibility of sense data being cognised.[114] To put it another way, if Rahner has argued that "if being is primarily presence to self, then the real and proper object of a knowing being is that with which it originally is: itself',[115] then how is it possible for the human person to know the other in its own being-present-to-self?[116] Here, Vass argues that Rahner provides a solution which, while remaining a faithful interpretation of the Thomistic metaphysic of knowledge, is

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[110] *ibid*, 69
[111] cf. M.E. Hines: *The Transformation of Dogma* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 13
[112] *Spirit in the World*, 68
[113] Hines: *ibid*, 14
[114] Shepherd: *ibid*, 105
[115] *Spirit in the World*, 75
[116] cf. Vass: *op.cit.*, 36

nonetheless a 'bold reinterpretation' which addresses the Kantian problem of the objectivity of human knowledge of the world.[117]

Given Rahner's positing of being-present-to-self, he argues, as a good Thomist that the human person appropriates the world through sensibility, through understanding sense data. Because of this appropriation, sensibility itself is *per se* material and further, the human person is locked into the material world. Further, as Rahner argues:

> If knowing is the being-present-to-itself of being, but knowing the other as proper object means essentially and ontologically being-away-from-self-with-the-other (Weg-von-sich-beim-andern-Sein), then the being of the sentient knower can only be understood as the mid point poised between a real abandonment to the other of matter and an intrinsic independence of being over-against matter, so that the sensible act is in undivided unity material (*actus materiae*) and, as material, the act of the assertion of being (of form) over-against matter (*actus contra materiam*).[118]

Now for Rahner, as for Thomas, *materia*, the material, the worldly, is the contradistinction of the human person for existence, it cannot be cognized or perceived or made existent except with another, ie, the human person. "It is totally present to others, hence contrary to what being means."[119] However, being engages both sides of the human/material divide and grounds both.[120]

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[117] *ibid*, 36-37
[118] *Spirit in the World*, 81
[119] Vass, 39
[120] Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 108

In Chapter 3 Rahner deals with the question of the abstraction from sense data, that is with the human person as a knowing subject engaging with objects in the world, with the other, and yet remaining present-to-self.

> The capacity of the one human knowledge to place the other, which is given in sensibility, away from itself and in question, to judge it, to objectify it and thereby to make the knower a subject for the first time, that is, one who is present to himself (*bei sich Selber*) and not to the other (*beim andern*), one who knowingly exists in himself, this we call thought (*Denken*), intellect.[121]

So abstraction is both epistemological and ontological, yet another expression of Rahner's concern with the fundamental unity of being and knowing.[122] Abstraction is both self awareness and self appropriation where the knowing subject engages with the objects of knowledge that he encounters.[123]

However there is a further dimension to abstraction. With this engagement of knowing, not only is there the experience of being-present-to-self and an appropriation, or apprehension, of the object of knowledge, but there is also the awareness of all this within the context of a dim, vague apprehension of the totality, the universality of being, which provides for the discernment of individual beings.[124] This is Rahner's famous *Vorgriff*, a term he derived from Heidegger,[125] which has been variously translated as pre-concept, pre-grasp, pre-apprehension, prehension and anticipation. Shepherd leaves *Vorgriff* untranslated as does Donceel in *Hearer of the Word,* because

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[121] *Spirit in the World*, 118
[122] cf. Hines: *op.cit.*, 14, Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 109
[123] Shepherd: *ibid*
[124] cf. Hines: *ibid*
[125] Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 110

"clarifying its meaning is one of Rahner's major assignments."[126] However Rahner initially posits it as:

> This transcending apprehension of further possibilities, through which the form possessed in a concretion in sensibility is apprehended as limited and so is abstracted we call "pre apprehension" (*"Vorgriff"*).[127]

He then invokes Thomas:

> Although this term is not to be found literally in Thomas, yet its context is contained in what Thomas calls *"excessus"* (excess), using a similar image.[128]

The difficulty in translation of *Vorgriff* needs to be raised. The above translation from *Spirit in the World* of 'pre-apprehension' is rejected by Tallon. He argues that "Rahner does not mean an apprehension that occurs before the concept but rather an action interior to and constitutive of the concept,"[129] and again "Rahner himself is very explicit that the act named *Vorgriff* is not even necessarily cognitive, but makes cognition possible."[130]

Tallon's opinion should be balanced against the recognition that the English Translation of *Geist in Welt* unashamedly translates *Vorgriff* as pre-apprehension, including the introductory remarks by Metz. Vass uses 'pre-apprehension', (in fact heads the section on *Vorgriff* with pre-apprehension) yet appears to be aware of the tenuousness of pre-apprehension insofar as

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[126] *ibid*
[127] *Spirit in the World*, 142
[128] *ibid*
[129] Tallon: "Spirit, Matter, Becoming" *op.cit.*, 155
[130] Tallon: Introduction to *Hearer of the Word* (New York: Continuum, 1994), xiv

he emphasises the questioning that goes 'beyond' the "reality of our own act."[131] Shepherd states plainly that:

> A *Vorgriff* has to do with "something we grasp in advance - in a fore-conception." Heidegger, *Being and Time, 191.* Rahner will want to say that a fore-connection of Being is an *a priori* condition for knowing. "Conception" here is misleading, however, as it intimates "**conscious** awareness of."[132]

In his translation of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, John Macquarrie notes that "'*Vorgriff*' ('what we grasp in advance' or 'fore-conception') is related to the verb '*vorgreifen*' ('to anticipate') as well as to the noun '*Begriff*'."[133] However Tallon claims that "*Vorgriff* is not *Vorbegriff*."[134] Tallon's overall argument is persuasive, however for our present purposes it is simply expedient to note these difficulties and be aware of the possibilities.

Rahner relates the *Vorgriff* to the traditional Thomist term of the active or 'agent intellect' (*intellectus agens*) the human intellect as 'dynamic, as appetite for being'.[135] He also presses into service the transcendental method and asks what could be the "conditions for the possibility of the process of abstraction."[136] This is the *excessus (Vorgriff) ad esse*, the anticipation of Being of the Agent intellect, which is invoked to explain the phenomenon of abstraction, it is the condition for the possibility of any objective knowledge,[137] for abstraction and thought. If the knowing subject,

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[131] Vass *op.cit.*, 33
[132] Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 110
[133] *Being and Time* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 1991 n.2
[134] Tallon: Introduction *Hearer of the Word, op.cit.*, xiv
[135] Tallon: "Spirit, Matter, Becoming" *op.cit.*, 155
[136] Shepherd: *ibid*
[137] Hines: *op.cit.*, 15

the agent intellect, has knowledge of a particular object, then the context for the object is also known.

However, since the subject has an unlimited desire to understand, the context for the object appears to be infinite, it constitues an unlimited 'horizon'.

> So our task will be to determine the breadth of the horizon, comprehended *a priori*, which horizon, apprehended as such in the pre-apprehension, offers the possibility of experiencing the forms of sensibility as limited, of differentiating them from the ground of their limitedness, the sensible "this", and thus of creating for knowing the possibility of a complete return.[138]

Now this horizon, which provides the context for the particular object is Being in general (*esse in generali*).[139] That is to say, with every act of knowing an object, the knowing subject's *Vorgriff*, its anticipation, its *excessus*, in reaching out to the infinite horizon of Being, fundamentally grounds all possibility of knowledge. Further, this reaching out to the horizon of being by the knowing subject, the agent intellect (which Rahner also refers to as Spirit *(Geist)*) can only experience as finite anything grasped by the knowing subject. However for the knowing subject, the agent intellect, although by abstraction it grasps sensible objects in their universal aspect, what of metaphysical objects which have no sensible dimension or phantasm? They are grasped by the 'light' of the agent intellect, the actualisation of the agent intellect which also enables the

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[138] *Spirit in the World*, 143
[139] *ibid*, 142-145, 153-154, 169
cf. Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 111

context of any particular phantasm to be known.[140] At this point we encounter the subject matter of Chapter 4, the conversion to the phantasm.

In Chapter 4 of *Spirit in The World* Rahner comes to the Thomist centre of cognition, of knowing in its very unity[141], by using the notion the conversion to the phantasm. Having dealt with questioning, abstraction, horizon and pre-apprehension, Rahner perserveres and derives a cognitional unity by means of the notion of the application of concept, or judgement, to percept or sensibility, that is to say of mental conversion (*conversio*) of one to the other.[142] Following Aquinas, each judgement about sensible objects is abstracted where the perception of a sensible object is converted into a phantasm or image.[143]

What exactly is this Thomist notion of conversion to the phantasm (*conversio ad phantasma*)?

First, a phantasm is a sensible image produced or arising in the imagination by the perception of a particular sensible, material object.

Second, this invokes Thomas' theory of the intellect. We have referred earlier to the active or agent intellect (*intellectus agens*). This (briefly) means the intellectual capacity to abstract universals from particular sense experience. The passive or receptive intellect (*intellectus possibilis*) is the 'storehouse' of those universals once they are produced.

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[140] Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 112
[141] cf. Roberts: *op.cit.*, 25-28
[142] cf. Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 105
[143] cf. Kelly: *op.cit.*, 7

Third, Thomas uses the term 'species' to denote the understanding of a sensible object. That is to say the activity of the agent intellect through its natural power (not through divine infused power), 'illumines' the phantasm, and thereby derives from it the universal or intelligible species or ideas (*species intelligibilis*). The impressed species are the intelligible species residing as the universal or common element in the passive intellect. The expressed species are the species residing in the passive intellect which are drawn upon by the active intellect to derive universal meaning for the perception of particular sensible objects.

Fourth, the conversion to the phantasm is that process where the agent intellect, after abstracting the intelligible species, is only capable of knowing in its full sense through a conversion, or recourse to, or turning of attention to, the phantasms (*phantasmata*). In this, the agent intellect has apprehended, or discerned, the universals and thereby knows indirectly or reflexively the particulars of sensible objects as represented by the phantasms. What the conversion explains is the transition from sensible and particular knowledge to universal, intellectual cognition. It also highlights even the philosopher's dependence on sensibility. This is the bare bones of the Thomist notion of the conversion to the phantasm.[144] How does Rahner proceed with the *conversio*?

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[144] cf. *ST.Ia*, QQ84-89
For various standard accounts of the conversion to the phantasm see *inter alia:*
F Copleston: *A History of Philosophy* Vol 2 Part II (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 109ff
: *Aquinas* (Harmondsworth: Pelican, 1982), 48ff
A Kenny: *Aquinas* (Oxford: UP, 1980), 68ff
: "Intellect and Imagination in Aquinas" in A Kenny (ed): *Aquinas - A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1970), 273ff
N Kretzman: "Philosophy of Mind" in N Kretzman and E Stump (eds): *The Cambridge*
: *Companion to Aquinas* (Cambridge: UP, 1993), 140ff

Rahner himself stresses this (almost postmodern) perspective of unity, within plurality, of knowing:

> From the fact that the pre-apprehension of absolute *esse*, which takes place in the judgement, has already and always surmounted the horizon of space and time, although only in a pre-apprehension (*Vorgriff*), it follows that "spirit" (*Geist*) in man, however much it would be blind without the intuition of sensibility, is the more original element in man, and that the one unifying knowledge and the one unifying being of man are more originally defined by what we call "thought" (*Denken*) in the one human knowledge. Therefore it will be our task to grasp the plurality and unity of man's cognitive powers in the light of the original essence of precisely human intellectuality.[145]

Rahner starts by considering the Thomist term phantasm (*phantasma*) as such:

> The phantasm cannot be considered a thing: It is the keyword designating sense knowledge as such. When, therefore, it is asserted in the proposition about the conversion to the phantasm that human intellectual knowledge takes place essentially in a turning to the phantasm, this says that intellectual knowledge is possible only with a simultaneous realisation of sense knowledge.[146]

What Rahner is reinforcing is this unity of perception and cognition. As Roberts argues, *"Conversio ad phantasma* is the name for the act of sensible intuition which as united with an act of intellectual thought forms the one complete act of human knowledge."[147] Now, the two sides of the dichotomy that are resolved, (that is unified), in the *conversio*, that is sense data and abstraction, have been presented in the preceding two chapters of

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[145] *Spirit in the World*, 240
[146] *ibid*, 237
[147] Roberts, *op.cit.*, 28

Spirit in the World. Following the Thomist argument of *conversio*, if the agent intellect is to know, the two sides of the dichotomy must be resolved. However, the bald fact of human existence is that knowing does take place, therefore the inescapable reality of *conversio* is apparent. The real question, as Shepherd points out, involves 'the ontological conditions' for *conversio.*[148] It should also be added that for Rahner there is a transcendental aspect to the *conversio.* However, before considering these ontological and transcendental aspects of *conversio,* it should be noted that Rahner posits a small but important detail for the extension of the Thomist *schemata* of *conversio.* He identifies the agent intellect with Spirit (*Geist*), and by further extension, the material becomes the World (*Welt*), hence the title of *Spirit in the World.* That is, we have a dichotomy of, on the one hand, intellect or spirit, and on the other sense data, matter, or the world. The *conversio* then becomes the starting point for the resolution of the question, "Can the human spirit, incarnate as it is and must remain, know anything beyond the world?"[149], or to put it differently, as ST I, Q84, A7 states:

> *Utrum intellectus possit actu intelligere per species intelligibiles quos penes se habet, non converterdo se ad phantasmata.* (Can the intellect actually know anything through the intelligible species which it possesses, without turning to the phantasms?)[150]

Now, we have to elucidate the ontological and epistemological perspectives. On the one hand, sense data are discerned by the illumination of the agent intellect or 'spirit', on the other, abstraction is again brought about by the illumination of the agent intellect by, as we discovered in the earlier

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[148] Shepherd: *op.cit.,* 113
[149] Tallon: "Spirit, Matter, Becoming", *op.cit.,* 161
[150] *Spirit in the World,* 2-3

chapters of *Spirit in the World*, the *Vorgriff*, the preapprehension of Being and *Beisich-sein*, the renewed presence to self. To follow the original Thomist argument, the *conversio* is brought about by the agent intellect illumination of sensible objects in representation to the consciousness. As Shepherd argues:

> If one thinks of abstraction as light emanating from the side of the subject to the object, which is grasped in the "form" of its phantasm, then conversion has already occurred *in potentia*, and conversion or abstraction are simply two sides of the same process. Abstraction informs the phantasm, itself a construct, through the operation of the light of the *intellectus agens* upon it, and this uniting process is what actualises knowledge.[151]

The end result is that the intelligible species, that is, that which comes to be known at the end of this process, is brought about, precisely when the phantasm is illumined by the agent intellect.

Now the ontological and transcendental aspect of this process is that the condition for this process is when the *Vorgriff* (or *excessus ad esse*) "anticipates and grasps in a preliminary fashion the universality of Being".[152] That is to say, that Rahner (along with Thomas) holds that spirit (or agent intellect) is "desire (dynamic openness) for absolute being",[153] of being as evidenced by the *Vorgriff/excessus ad esse*. However, this totality of being is only available as ever distant horizon, consequently the agent intellect is only ever finite spirit. Further, the horizon for this agent intellect has far greater distance than the horizon of sense, however the only objects

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[151] Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 114
[152] *ibid*, 114
[153] *Spirit in the World*, 280

of human knowledge that are able to be grasped are precisely the sensible objects of sense data.

If anything is to be known beyond sense data, then it can only be known non-objectively. The *Vorgriff/excessus ad esse* is seen by Rahner as the agent intellect "reaching out to know all being, in its stretching toward the horizon of the fullness of being."[154] Now for the knowing subject the *Vorgriff/excessus ad esse* both reflects their *a priori* 'cognitional structure'[155] and also their longing (*Begierde*) and orientation to the infinite world of sensible objects which can only possibly be realised through the cognition of a singular sensible object. The corollary is that this singular cognition if only realised by the illumination of the agent intellect, ie, the *conversio*.[156]

Part III of *Spirit in the World* concerns itself in a truncated fashion with "the possibility of metaphysics on the basis of imagination"[157] and as such serves as a preamble to *Hearer of the Word.*

7.3.2 Hearer of the Word

If *Spirit in the World* was Rahner's earliest work and only "explicitly philosophical"[158] one, then *Hearer of the Word* could be more correctly described as a work of philosophical or fundamental theology,[159] where a

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[154] Tallon: *ibid*, 161
[155] Shepherd: *ibid*
[156] cf. Shepherd, *ibid*
[157] *Spirit in the World: ibid*
[158] Shepherd: *ibid.*, 100
[159] *ibid*

metaphysical anthropology transmogrifies into a fundamental theology,[160] in particular, a search for God in history.[161] Originally presented in the summer of 1937, as fifteen lectures at the Seventh Salzburg *Hochschulwoche* entitled 'On the Basis of a Philosophy of Religion',[162] *Hearer of the Word*, focussed on the relationship between philosophy and theology. As such, like *Spirit in the World*, the influence of Aquinas, Maréchal and Heidegger was obvious, although in the case of the latter, a negative approach to metaphysics was transmuted into a positive theological one.[163]

Hearer of the Word was both an extension and development of *Spirit in the World*. The theory of knowledge developed in *Spirit in the World* was summarised in the first Chapters of *Hearer of the Word* (ie, Part I, Part II) with recourse to the familiar terms of *conversio, Vorgriff, etc.* As in *Spirit in the World, Hearer of the Word* posited a metaphysic of knowledge, via an existentialist interpretation of *Esse* where the nature of being is to know and to be known, that is the basic *a priori* structure of the human person is an integrated knowing and being where knowing implies self awareness that becomes a unity of knowing and being known.[164]

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[160] cf. J. Boyle: "Faith and Christian Ethics in Rahner and Lonergan" *Thought* Vol 150 No 198 (Sept 1975), 247
T O'Meara: "Karl Rahner Theologian" *Doctrine and Life* Jan 1967, 31
[161] Duffy: *The Dynamics of Grace, op.cit.*, 268
[162] H. Vorgrimler: *op.cit.*, 63
[163] cf. H Neil: "The Old and New in Theology: Rahner and Lonergan", *Cross Currents* Vol XVI No 4, Fall 1966, 463
[164] cf. Neil: "Old and New" *ibid*
N.D. O'Donoghue: "Rahner: Early Philosophy" *The Irish Theological Quarterly* Vol XXXVII No 4 October 1970, 322
H. Neil: "Honouring Karl Rahner" *The Heythrop Journal* 1965 Vol VI No 3, 259

Using this metaphysic of knowledge as a launching platform, Rahner opens his enquiry up (in Parts III and IV) to other considerations, to freedom, to history and to the *potentia obedientialis* of the human person for historical divine revelation. The importance of this for our present purposes are twofold. First, Rahner gives, for the first time, close attention to the question of freedom in Chapters 7 and 8 of *Hearer of the Word*, and as such anticipates many of the later questions associated with fundamental freedom and fundamental option, although these terms are never made explicit.

> We have now advanced one step further and shown that the openness of human knowledge for this God of an eventual revelation, which belongs to our basic human makeup, is always at the same time and essentially an openness which, in its inner concrete structure, is determined by our free attitude.[165]

Second, there is the groundwork for the supernatural existential, a term which Rahner would first coin and employ in a seminal way within the space of five years. In the second German edition of *Hearer of the Word*, J.B. Metz (Rahner's Boswell), provides supplementary notes which give illuminating detail on this transition. By this stage Rahner had most of the components in place, eg, *potentia obedientialis, Vorgriff,* in a context that took his metaphysics of knowledge as starting point.

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[165] *Hearer of the Word*, 88

7.3.3 The Metaphysic of Knowledge as the Foundation for the Supernatural Existential

After this examination of both *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word* it may have become apparent that Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge is truly seminal for his theology. Shepherd writes:

> Holy Spirit, uncreated grace, general revelation, objective justification, supernatural existential, all these terms are finally precisely equivalent in Rahner's work.... all find their formulations on the basis of a metaphysics of knowledge which speaks of an ultimate "participative" horizon encompassing all human knowing and acting.[166]

Leaving to one side Shepherd's identification of the supernatural existential with the Holy Spirit and different forms of grace, how exactly does Rahner derive the supernatural existential from his metaphysic of knowledge?

His metaphysic of knowledge is concerned not only with the process of knowing but also the ontological dimension of knowing, in short, being is linked to knowing. The *Vorgriff ad esse,* the reaching out to an unlimited horizon is implicit in every act of knowing. Being is a constituent of this horizon where finite objects are set against the infinity of this horizon. This being of unlimited scope is approached in a finite way by any act of knowing and becomes the object of the human person in knowing. This being could be designated God.[167]

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[166] Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 201-2

[167] see various accounts of the link between the supernatural existential and metaphysic of knowledge.
Tallon: *Personal Becoming, op.cit.*, 38-42
Eberhard: *op.cit.*, 555
Shepherd: *op.cit.*, 201ff

At this point, *potentia obedientialis* and transcendental revelation becomes a key staging point. The human person has a *potentia obedientialis* for both transcendental revelation and historical, categorical revelation (see 5.4.4 - 5.4.7). As Rahner would have it, transcendental revelation becomes the connection between the God of the infinite horizon of knowing and Being to that of God revealing himself to the human person by categorical revelation. Duffy sees transcendental revelation as the 'key' to a full understanding of the supernatural existential.[168] It means everyone is offered grace independent of particular circumstances. In short, through the *Vorgriff,* the knowing anticipation of self transcendence, the unlimited horizon of being both conditions all knowing and is integral to its realisation. This infinite God of the transcendental horizon is both the cause and meaning of the being of the human person. This is then focussed by categorical revelation so that the infinite horizon is none other than the God of salvation. The infinite and universal offer of God's grace to the human person brought about by salvation from God himself can be referred to as the supernatural existential. The capacity for its acceptance is mediated by *potentia obedientialis* and fundamental option.

It may also be seen that the metaphysic of knowledge also links with the nature/grace dichotomy. *Hearer of the Word* had downgraded the role of *desiderium naturale,* the Thomist buttress for de Lubac's position (see 7.2.4).[169] Rahner went further and looked for the origins of *desiderium naturale.* In *Hearer of the Word* Rahner looked to the being of the human person as an answer, in particular the *potentia obedientialis,* the dynamic of

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Duffy: *Graced Horizon, op.cit.,* 207ff
Vass: *Understanding Karl Rahner* Vol II *op.cit.,* 64ff
[168] Duffy: *Graced Horizon, op.cit.,* 209
[169] *Hearer of the Word:* 78-82, cf. Vass Vol II: *op.cit.,* 64

the human person towards being and ancillary to the supernatural existential.

7.4 The Status of the Supernatural Existential

We now return to the question of whether the imperial supernatural existential has no clothes and, if so whether the fundamental option is vitiated? Karl Rahner's standing as the pre-eminent post-conciliar Catholic theologian has assured him of a plethora of critique of his theology, both favourable and unfavourable. Perhaps the critiques with the greatest circulation and currency have been those of Hans Urs von Balthasar, George Lindbeck and John-Baptist Metz.[170] These critiques are wide ranging and concerned with fundamental questions such as the transcendental moment rather than the *entrée* to Rahner's systematic theology as constituted by the supernatural existential. Nonetheless, they may provide some insight into the theological difficulties associated with the supernatural existential. For example, Von Balthasar's criticism from the 'right' dealt with the inner life of the Trinity in such a way that Rahner's theology was seen as making 'faith inadmissibly easy', and trivializing "the seriousness of God's history with humanity."[171] Rahner was to respond that von Balthasar conceived:

> of a theology of the death of God which seems to me to be basically gnostic. To use somewhat primitive terms, there is no point in my

[170] cf. H.U. von Balthasar: *Cordula oder der Ernstfall, The Theology of Karl Barth op.cit.*, 241-5 (1956)
George Lindbeck: *The Nature of Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984) *passim*
J-B Metz: *Faith in History and Society* (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), 155ff
also J.A. Colombo: "Rahner and his Critics: Lindbeck and Metz" *The Thomist* Jan 1992 Vol 56 No 1, 71
H. Vorgrimler: *Understanding Karl Rahner, op.cit.*, 121ff
[171] Vorgrimler: *op.cit.*, 124

> getting out of my muck and filth and despair if - to put it crudely God is just as mucky.[172]

However, von Balthasar was able to bring a closer focus on to the supernatural existential.

> How can Rahner hold even the possibility of man's being created without a supernatural finality and maintain that such a concept [supernatural existential] would be meaningful and intelligible?[173]

Rahner answered this criticism by appealing to freedom and grace within interiority. That which is interior to the human person cannot be demanded, only given in freedom.[174]

We have the other example from the 'left'. In a less acrimonious vein, Metz criticised Rahner's theology of transcendence, where the idealist legacy of Kant and Hegel of the turn to the subject was seen by Metz as failing to address effectively the questions raised by the concrete historical and social dimensions of the existence of the human person. This criticism by Metz is deployed by Neil Ormerod with regard to the supernatural existential.[175] Ormerod compares Rahner's resolution of the nature/grace controversy with that of Bernard Lonergan. The theology of the supernatural existential *ipso facto* maintain that there is a universal offer of grace which forms part of the transcendental constitution of the human person, whereas Lonergan through his work on conversion, implies that the universal offer of grace is mediated by the "agency of a universally

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[172] *ibid,* 125
[173] R. Bechtle: "Karl Rahner's supernatural existential: A Personalist Approach" *Thought*, Vol XLVIII No 188 Spring 1973, 70
[174] "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace", *TI I,* 302-3
cf. Bechtle: *op.cit.*, 70
[175] Ormerod: Th.D. Thesis, 179

efficacious providence."[176] Ormerod argues that Rahner, in using the supernatural existential to defuse the tension between the bipolarity of universal offer and concrete mediation of grace, by advancing an 'existential' availability of grace, promotes "an individualistic understanding of the human subject and of human salvation, by neglecting the concrete mediation of grace."[177] And this is precisely the criticism by Metz of Rahner's work as a whole. By way of aside, the notion of a social fundamental option (see 8.5.13) may redress this weakness in Rahner's approach.

The difficulty, at this point, is to confine our ambit to the supernatural existential and fundamental option. It is also useful to note that many of the more recent criticisms of Rahner's supernatural existential have had the benefit of thirty years reflection, yet are not able to benefit from the direct response of Rahner himself, only insofar as it is a posthumous response. We need to clear the ground by looking briefly at the more cursory criticism of the supernatural existential and then proceed to the more sustained criticisms, especially as they relate to the fundamental option.

Grenz and Olson claim from an evangelical Protestant perspective that the supernatural existential is a 'highly debatable and idiosyncratic idea."[178] The first claim, of the debatable status of the supernatural existential, is attested to by the preceding discussion and in a sense testifies to its pre-eminent status, but the second claim, of its being idiosyncratic, is less obvious. Every theologian makes contributions of a personal and individualist kind, some more than others, but when does 'individualist'

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[176] *ibid*
[177] *ibid*
[178] *op.cit.*, 246

become 'idiosyncratic' or even 'eccentric' or 'egocentric'? John Macquarrie may provide a solution when, addressed by Rahner himself on the reality of the supernatural existential, Macquarrie would respond that at Oxford they tried to make things a little easier, but he could see no "serious matter of disagreement here,"[179] only a difference in terminology where he would prefer to use the term common grace.

Grenz and Olson make three further claims against the supernatural existential.

- It is not a traditional concept of Catholic thought.
- It cannot be established biblically.
- It cannot be established philosophically.

The response to the first claim is that although the supernatural existential is not a traditional concept of Catholic thought, it is both a solution to an intense controversy within Catholic tradition of thought, ie, the nature/grace controversy, and is also built on two foundation blocks of Thomist thought, the *potentia obedientialis* and the light of faith.[180] However it does also use more contemporary sources, notably Heidegger.

The response to the second claim is that although the supernatural existential may not own a direct biblical citation, there are however biblical

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[179] J. Macquarrie: *Church and Ministry* (London: SCM, 1986), 61

[180] The light of faith is the gift of grace which enables the human intellect to understand that which is beyond the comprehension of the natural light of human reason.

perspectives to it, like most other theological concepts propounded by theologians. Eberhard[181] claims that because God's revelation is the only way to make known the implications of grace for the human person, Rahner begins his theology of grace (ie, the supernatural existential) with biblical revelation. He cites Rahner's 1939 foray into the subject, "Some Implications of the Scholastic Concept of Uncreated Grace"[182] which demonstrated Rahner's reflection upon NT studies as important for his theology of grace. Eberhard cites Rahner's use of Paul's understanding of grace where the human person is 'spirited' (by sanctifying grace) because he has been given the "spirit" which is the self gift of God himself.

> .... for St Paul man's inner sanctification is first and foremost a communication of the personal Spirit of God, that is to say, in scholastic terms, a *donum increatum;* and he [Paul] sees every created grace, every way of being *pneumatikos* as a consequence and a manifestation of the possession of this uncreated grace.[183]

In addition, Rahner used the theology of the Gospel of John to reach the same conclusion. The importance of this for the response to Olson and Grenz is that Rahner argued that the traditional Catholic concept of sanctifying grace was not consonant with a biblical approach. As Eberhard would have it, Rahner is in fact trying to reconcile the NT evidence with Catholic tradition, with the result that Rahner sees the NT concept of *Pneuma* as demonstrating that "grace is primarily the free personal self communication of God as he is. This, in turn, makes man himself gracious when he freely accepts this diverse communication." The biblical

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[181] K D Eberhard: "Karl Rahner and the supernatural existential" *Thought* Vol XLVI, No 180, Spring 1971, 537
[182] *TI* I, 319-345
[183] K Rahner: "Some Implications ..." *op.cit.*, 322

antecedents of the supernatural existential for Rahner have become obvious, a product of the attempt to reconcile scripture with the Catholic tradition.

As for Grenz and Olson's third and last claim that the supernatural existential cannot be established philosophically, this is problematic. What guarantee do we have that grace or any of the traditional claims of the biblical revelation can be established philosophically? As John Milbank argues:

> Philosophy is able to say nothing about the content of supernatural grace, precisely because grace is a divine gift over and above the capacities of human reason. It is nonetheless able to affirm our need for grace, and the fact that in every human action it is either accepted or rejected.[184]

Rahner employs philosophy to clarify, and at times exploit, the biblical revelation. The more relevant question is how coherent is Rahner's use of philosophy? Grenz and Olson are on firmer ground when they claim that the supernatural existential is a highly unstable concept insofar as the existential dimension of the supernatural existential may stress the universal with the danger of a lapse into intrisicism, or otherwise if the supernatural dimension of the supernatural existential is stressed there may be a lapse into extrinsicism. Although, in one sense, this is a re-run of the whole *nouvelle théologie* debate there is this dichotomous aspect of the supernatural extistential which has attracted criticism from other sources.

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[184] J Milbank: *Theology and Social Theory - Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 210

A more sustained critique of the supernatural existential is given in *Theology and Social Theory - Beyond Secular Reason*[185] by John Milbank who writes in the Anglo Catholic social tradition. Although he describes his critique as being "misleadingly summarised", nonetheless, it benefits from the standing of the book as a whole which has been described by one reviewer as possessing "provocation and brilliance",[186] with which it would indeed be churlish to disagree.

Milbank posits a post-conciliar integralist revolution, that is, the integral unity of the human person's subjection to grace such that there is no pure nature, and no natural/supernatural dichotomy. This revolution has two sources:

- a French source which derived from the *nouvelle théologie* and such thinkers as de Montcheuil and de Lubac, but more ultimately from Maurice Blondel, which Milbank characterises as supernaturalising the natural;

- a German source, meaning, primarily the thought of Karl Rahner, which is characterised as naturalising the supernatural.[187]

Milbank acknowledges that Rahner, like de Lubac, rejects the *duplex ordo* (see 7.2.4, 7.2.5) yet Rahner parts company with de Lubac when he argues the *natura pura* should:

> apply not only to a possible humanity which has not, but might have been created, but also in a regulative fashion to the real human beings who actually exist. Without a 'formal distinction' of a merely natural humanity within the concrete human person, there must be a

[185] (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993) first published 1990
[186] *Times Higher Education Supplement*, quoted in Milbank *op.cit.*, book cover
[187] Milbank: *op.cit.*, 207

> natural enquiry for grace which betrays its gratuitous character. If the supernatural is also what is most intimate to us, as for de Lubac, then, Rahner claims, it is really naturalised.[188]

Milbank then runs with Rahner when he says that for the gratuity of grace to be preserved the formal distinction of *natura pura* is required. In order to avoid extrinsicism, Rahner posits the supernatural existential, which Milbank describes as "an inner orientation to the beatific vision, which is given, along with the 'formal object' of this orientation to every human being."[189] Milbank locates the supernatural existential in the context of the *potentia obedientialis,* itself an "active longing for God"[190] which is present in "the *Vorgriff* of Being in general, that is given with every act of understanding."[191] Milbank then notes that Rahner's entire approach is ordered to the avoidance of extrinsicism while safeguarding the gratuity of grace.

However Milbank further notes that Rahner's conception of *natura pura* is different from de Lubac where the latter claims that:

> God's gift of Himself is not gratuitous in relation to a hypothetical nature, nor to an aspect of real human beings that could be 'merely' natural, but rather remains gratuitous within itself, such that although the human person is only fulfilled through this gift, he must continue to enjoy it as a gift.[192]

Milbank proceeds by claiming that the human person with their 'inbuilt' supernatural existential must then start to 'enact grace' because of the very

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[188] *ibid,* 221
[189] *ibid*
[190] *ibid*
[191] *ibid*
[192] *ibid,* 222

fact of this 'inbuiltness' or else the limitless supply of grace will remain extrinsic to the very needs of the person.

> Hence, it not suprprisingly turns out that the contextual structure of the supernatural existential seems almost indistinguishable from that of the natural *vorgriff* of Being.[193]

In short, Milbank sees Rahner's error as the attempt to resolve the nature/grace problem precisely by means of the supernatural existential in that, although Rahner wants to preclude the hazards of naturalism while upholding "the otherness, the unprecedented character of grace", he is committed to locating this otherness in the *a priori* structure of the human person where, so Milbank argues, it is impossible to give any content to grace or to distinguish it from the object of grace for the supernatural existential or indeed the *Vorgriff* of Being.[194] Further, by preserving the *natura pura* in the human person in order to ensure the validity of the supernatural, Milbank claims that Rahner ends up with "extrinsicist doctrinal formulas confronting an account of human aspirations and human ethical norms which is thoroughly naturalised."[195] Hence we have Milbank's use of the tag 'naturalising the supernatural'.

Now Milbank uses this critique to substantial effect, it becomes an important component in his *tour de force* of systematic theology. However our focus is on the supernatural existential, and here it is a relief to note that others have perceived that Milbank may not have taken the full measure of Rahner's supernatural existential. There are a number of arguments that can be ranged against Milbank:

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[193] *ibid*
[194] *ibid*
[195] *ibid*

- Rahner owes as much (if not more than) to de Lubac as to Blondel;

- David Burrel notes that if Milbank eschews an account of grace located in a metaphysical explanation of human nature, his proffered alternative of locating it in a divine 'initiative from creation through the offer of redemption .... renders an autonomous treatment of nature suspect.'[196]

- Milbank is critical not only of Rahner but also of the Thomist (and Aristotelian) tradition in general.[197] This is curious for a writer self-confessedly in the Anglo-Catholic tradition, and also presents difficulties insofar as Thomas is the patriarch of the nature/grace debate. Nonetheless, this is a large area of disputation (ref: 5.3.2) and our concerns are more immediate (ie, the supernatural existential).

- Milbank appears to have a curious understanding of the supernatural existential. Nicholas Lash notes that Milbank refers to the supernatural existential as meaning that the "encounter with grace is situated *at the margins* of every individual's knowing,"[198] which prompts Lash to respond that Milbank "virtually obliterates, at a stroke, the principle - which is at the heart of Rahner's theology - that the possibility of experiencing grace and the possibility of experiencing grace as grace are not the same thing."[199]

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[196] David Burrel: "An Introduction to *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason" Modern Theology* 8: 4 October 1992, 319
[197] R Gascoigne: unpublished review
[198] *ibid,* 208, 221
[199] Nicholas Lash: "Not Exactly Politics or Power" *Modern Theology* 8: 4 October 1992, 356 also *TI* Vol I, 300

- Lash sees Milbank so fixed on the business of keeping the graciousness of creation to the fore that he runs the risk of blurring the distinction between creation and both election and incarnation, distinctions which Rahner "with that sustained sacramentality of perspective to which Milbank seems quite blind, sought to secure."[200]

- Milbank seems unaware of some of the subtle distinctions in the Rahnerian terminology of supernatural existential. He refers to the *Vorgriff* as 'preconception'[201] which betrays a lack of awareness of the controversy of meaning for that term.

- There is a collapsing of the *Vorgriff* into the supernatural existential,[202] which again does not do justice to Rahner's exposition.

- Although Rahner referred to *Natura Pura* as a *Restbegriff,* or residual concept, it is nonetheless extant in his work and saves Rahner from the unwarranted charge of extrinsicism.

Lash makes the useful comment that Milbank's sense of where the weaknesses in Rahner's work might lie is similar to the concerns of George Vass,[203] a former student of Rahner, who, I would argue, gives a more sustained and substantial critique of the supernatural existential. Vass' understanding of Rahner's resolution of the problem of nature and grace has been initially presented in an abbreviated, fragmented form at 7.2.5.

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[200] Lash: *ibid*
[201] Milbank: *op.cit.*, 210
[202] *ibid*, 222
[203] Lash: *op.cit.*, 356

Vass prefaces his queries concerning the supernatural existential by arguing that the supernatural existential is intended as a "mediation between man and God",[204] which is always a theoretical task, a classical task for the theologian of *fides quaerens intellectum.*[205] Vass raises four concerns about the supernatural existential.

- How is the supernatural order of the medievals justified? It is a necessity as it deals with the relationship between God and humankind, but the 'how' divides the Catholic and Protestant traditions. The Catholic tradition sees the need for this mediation between God and humankind already operative within the creation of humankind, whereas the Protestant tradition sees the need for such a mediation for only a fallen and sinful humankind. This has impinged on the supernatural existential. Vass sees Rahner's intervention within the nature grace debate as "apparently"[206] within the Catholic tradition yet criticised by Protestants.

- Can Rahner's version of the supernatural order solve the theological conflicts which result? Vass notes that the objections to the supernatural existential have derived precisely for Rahner's ostensible solving of the conflict of extrinsicism and intrinsicism. However, there are further developments. Vass argues, *pace* Milbank, that Rahner's entry into the lists *vis-à-vis* the *nouvelle théologie* was not hostile. Yet he proceeded further down the nature/grace path. Vass claims that Rahner makes a tactical move which leads to a 'highly dialectical position.'[207] Rahner

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[204] Vass: *op.cit.*, 67
[205] *ibid*, 68
[206] *ibid*, 70
[207] *ibid*, 72

advanceds "two universally valid principles which however are not opposed on the same level."[208] At the essential level, Rahner invokes *natura pura* with *potentia obedientialis.* Their activation in the supernatural existential is the principle for understanding the human person at the existential level. Vass sees the essential principle of *natura pura* and *potentia obedientialis* as a result of an ontic way of thinking, the existential principle and the use of the supernatural existential as an ontological way of thinking. These two principles can then be deployed to alternatively push intrinsicist or extrinsicist perspectives. Now the distinction between ontic and ontological has the further ramification that ontological, as Rahner uses the term "means becoming conscious of what is ontic".[209] If 'becoming conscious' is a free and autonomous human act which transforms that of which it becomes aware, then the supernatural existential would constitute such an influence on the human person in knowledge and freedom, that "it even continues to mould his existence when he refuses it."[210] If it is then the case that the supernatural existential, "determines man's being ontically and ontologically preceding all his decisions",[211] Vass then poses the question of whether Rahner is speaking of a "choice before free action could take place."[212] Vass responds that this would amount to an existential beyond everyday experience, indeed beyond human ken. It raises the further problem, what is the role of the fundamental option *vis-à-vis* the supernatural existential; if the supernatural existential precedes and determines the fundamental option. However

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[208] *ibid*
[209] Weger: *op.cit.*, 168, n 29
also Vass: *ibid*, 72
[210] Weger: *ibid*, 88, Vass: *ibid*, 74
[211] Weger: *ibid*, Vass: *ibid*
[212] Vass: *ibid*

in a later article, "Nature and Grace",[213] published ten years after the seminal "Concerning the Relationship between Nature and Grace",[214] the supernatural existential reappears in an **experiential** garb, or indeed is itself an experience of the human orientation toward God. This has the implications, according to Vass, that the supernatural existential is no longer a "theoretical postulate in defence of gratuitous grace, but as a mode of human transcendentality"[215] with the further consequence that it is a conscious, experienced orientation of the human person toward God. The ramification of this is that, according to Vass, we are now (*pace* Milbank) back at de Lubac's position. To press the point, Vass asks whether the Rahnerian correction of *nouvelle théologie* was much ado about nothing?[216]

- Vass then pursues the philosophical connotation of the supernatural existential. 'Supernatural' was a term borrowed from the Medieval Roman Catholic tradition, whereas its qualifying term, existential is irrevocably Heideggerian. Vass claims that the coupling of these two disparate modes of thought could render the supernatural existential ambiguous *ipso facto*. However, as just noted, the supernatural existential of "Nature and Grace" of 1960 has undergone a transcendental transformation. With this change, Rahner attempts to fuse two dissimilar philosophical approaches, the transcendental and the existential, which prompts Vass to provide another slightly divergent approach.

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[213] *TI IV*, 169f
[214] *TI I*, 296-317
[215] Vass: *ibid*, 75
[216] Vass, *ibid*

- Vass notes that the supernatural existential, although not a linear continuation of Catholic thought, does not capitulate to the Protestant tradition, but rather, attempts to provide a common ground. If the Catholic tradition of grace moves from creation to redemption and the Protestant *vice versa*, they do have in common, as Rahner acknowledges, that humankind would not be human without an essential reference to God.[217] Vass sensitizes this relationship and points to the problematic understanding of God's sovereign freedom *vis-à-vis* humankind's freedom in its 'commerce' with the divine. Vass pursues this problem through the rest of his work, a task with which we must demur because of the constraints of space.

However, this concern of Vass gives rise yet again to the place of fundamental freedom and fundamental option with regard to the supernatural existential. It should be mentioned here that other more trenchant criticisms,[218] that like Vass's criticisms develop an unease with the underlying philosophical tension of the supernatural existential, (i.e., transcendental, Thomist and existential perspectives in friction), seek a resolution in process theology. This turn to process theology raises further difficulties which cannot be pursued here, except to note that yet again we have a critique of Rahner's neo-Thomism.

Although this is useful insofar as it maintains the debate within a framework of metaphysics, it becomes hostage to the weaknesses of process theology (and philosophy). If it is accepted that the supernatural existential is the

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[217] Vass: *ibid*, 79

[218] Shepherd: *op.cit, passim*
M C Taylor: *God is Love: A Study in the Theology of Karl Rahner* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986) Chs 3-5, also Duffy: *Graced Horizon, op.cit.*, 206ff

"single most significant Catholic contribution to an undertanding of the nature-grace dialectic in the twentieth century"[219] then Vass has done us the singular service of considering the supernatural existential, (in an ecumenical setting) with regard to the question of freedom both divine and human. If we can say that the imperial supernatural existential is clothed, it may be that some of the ensemble is inappropriate and lacks durability. To pursue another lifestyle metaphor, it now becomes apparent that the core of theological focus on Rahner has now been volleyed from the supernatural existential to the other side of the net, that of fundamental option and fundamental freedom. We have come to the point where it becomes apparent that the supernatural existential and fundamental option are locked into one another, they condition one another. That is to say the supernatural existential, which is both the offer of, and the capacity to receive grace is ultimately completed in the acceptance or rejection of that grace, that is in the exercising of the fundamental option by the human person. This interlocking is also conditioned to a lesser extent by Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge and by the other components of Rahner's anthropology, such as *potentia obedientialis* and *Vorgriff.*

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has pursued the question of the soundness of the components of Rahner's anthropology by focussing on the dimensions of the supernatural existential, especially the nature grace debate and the formulation of his metaphysic of knowledge. It has also invoked the relationship of the supernatural existential *vis-à-vis* the fundamental option. The examination of a number of critiques of the supernatural existential and

[219] Duffy: *The Graced Horizon, op.cit.*, 206

fundamental option by both Protestant and Catholic theologians leads to the conclusion that notwithstanding some fraying of the fabric, the imperial supernatural existential is theologically robed. The fundamental option (and indeed other components of Rahner's anthropology) may enhance the viability of the supernatural existential. There is now a need to more closely examine Rahner's account of the fundamental option.

PART III

RAHNER ON FUNDAMENTAL OPTION AND VIRTUE ETHICS AND THEIR LINK IN THE LIGHT OF THE CONTEMPORARY DEBATE

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Chapter 8 *Grundentscheidung* - Rahner on Fundamental Option

Chapter 9 And Now Abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, These Three - Rahner on Virtue

Chapter 10 The Option of Grace in Freedom - The Link Between Fundamental Option and Virtue

Chapter 11 Conclusion - Then We Shall be Seeing Face to Face

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CHAPTER 8 - *GRUNDENTSCHEIDUNG* - RAHNER ON FUNDAMENTAL OPTION

I was always free up there (pointing to her head). My mind, my principles, what I believed in.

Aung San Suu Kyi upon her release from house arrest
in Myanmar (Burma), July 1995.
(ABC Television News Bulletin, 12.00 pm, 13 July 1995)

* * * * *

We are [God's] children. He has given us free will. That is how we are different from the trees or the flowers or the fishes or the birds. We can choose every minute to obey God our Father or not. No other creatures of God have that possibility.

Vicka Ivankovic - Bosnian Visionary quoted in
J.T. Connell: *The Visions of the Children*
(New York: St Martins Press, 1993), 105

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Kein Mensch kann das Ganze seines Lebens, seiner Grundentscheidung voll zu einer expliziten, ausdrücklichen Aussage bringen.

(Nobody can convey by explicit declaration the entirety of their life, or explain completely to another their fundamental option.)

Karl Rahner in a letter to Klaus Fischer,
documented in K. Fischer: *Der Mensch als Geheimnis. Die Anthropologie Karl Rahners* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 404-5
quoted in M.C. O'Callaghan: *Unity in Theology*
(Washington: University Press of America, 1980), 39-40

8 *GRUNDENTSCHEIDUNG* - RAHNER ON FUNDAMENTAL OPTION

8.1 Introduction - Rahner and the Terminology and Typology of Fundamental Option

The antecedents of the fundamental option can be traced back to scholastic, and beyond that, biblical sources (see 3.1, 3.2, 3.3), but the actual term itself is only of recent origin (see 3.5). It has been claimed that 'fundamental option' has its origins in the term *Grundentscheidung* (alternatively 'basic choice'), and was coined by a translator rendering Karl Rahner's reference to *Grundentscheidung* into French as *option fondamentale*.[1] Curiously, this term in French is retained in the older translations of Rahner's seminal article "Theology of Freedom" in the *Schriften*, that is *TI* VI, and in possibly the first use of the term by Rahner in the 1941 article "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia"[2]. More recent translations, in addition to using inclusive language and translating Rahner's Latinisms, have also translated *Grundentscheidung* into plain English 'fundamental option', viz: "the total project of human existence, one's own total self understanding or fundamental option..."[3] Other earlier English translations press into service the term "basic decision" viz: "The possibility of sin... shows that a basic decision can take place in us that reaches down into the deepest recesses of our being".[4]

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[1] T. O'Connell: *Principles for a Catholic Morality, op.cit.*, 264
[2] *TI I*, 376
[3] E.T. in Karl Lehmann & Albert Raffelt (eds) (Harvey Egan trans) *Karl Rahner The Content of Faith, op.cit*, 102, cf G. McCool: *A Rahner Reader, op.cit.*, 258
[4] Karl Rahner: *Spiritual Exercises* (trans. K. Baker), *op.cit.*, 31

Rahner's contemporaries and fellow pioneers in the use of the term "fundamental option" provide variations in their understanding of Rahner's use of the term. Two leading moral theologians have provided their own understanding of Rahner's use of *Grundentscheidung*. Bernard Häring, in *Free and Faithful in Christ*[5] quotes Rahner in *Grace in Freedom* as understanding the fundamental option as "the total self understanding and radical expression."[6] Joseph Fuchs has claimed that Rahner's preferred term was not, in fact "fundamental option", but "the human person's disposition of his self as a whole."[7] Häring and Fuchs have not only invoked the question of appropriate translation, but in the case of the latter also the very understanding of the terminology itself, insofar as 'disposition' is a controversial term. Unfortunately, they do not provide any further elaboration.

I would argue that the more recent translations of Rahner, ie, the use of the term 'fundamental option', reflect the reality in the theological literature, that the term 'fundamental option', however imprecise that term may be, does have general recognition in contemporary moral theology, although the theory itself does not have universal acceptance.

With this post-conciliar recognition and partial acceptance, moral theologians have followed their honourable calling of attempting to fully understand this new term of fundamental option. A basic and widespread approach in this attempt has been to distinguish different 'types' of fundamental option, for example,

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[5] *op.cit.*, 166
[6] *ibid.*
[7] Joseph Fuchs: *The Tablet* 6 Nov 93, 14

- O'Keefe[8] Transcendental Freedom (Rahner)
  Biblical/depth psychology (Häring)
  Thomistic/God as ultimate end (Fuchs)

- Curran[9] Transcendental Freedom
  Biblical notion of sin
  Thomistic ultimate end
  Personalist understanding of grace

- Johnstone[10] Transcendental (Rahner)
  Biblical/*metanoia*
  existentialist/personalist (Thomistic)

- Grisez[11] Fundamental Freedom (Rahner, Fuchs, Glaser, Fransen, O'Connell)
  Basic Commitment (Flick, Alszeghey, Häring)

This sample of approaches indicates quite clearly the ubiquity and pre-eminence of the Rahnerian approach to the fundamental option, ie, the approach via the notion of fundamental or transcendental freedom. The question then surfaces, is it legitimate to so closely identify Rahner's approach to the fundamental option with that of fundamental freedom? In the following pages I will attempt to demonstrate that, although fundamental freedom is seminal and prevalent for Rahner's approach to the fundamental option, it is more nuanced than that. By way of illustration, Rahner's contemporary and colleague, Bernard Häring, saw Rahner's approach to fundamental option in terms of transcendental philosophy and, in addition, psychological experience.[12] However Häring did not extend his

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[8] M. O'Keefe: "Social Sin and the Fundamental Option" *Irish Theological Quarterly* Vol 58 No 2, 86
[9] C.E. Curran: *A New Look at Christian Morality,* 204ff
[10] B. Johnstone: 'Fundamental Option', *op.cit., The New Dictionary of Theology,* 407
[11] G. Grisez: *The Way of the Lord Jesus, op.cit.,* 383
[12] Häring: *op.cit.*, 166

own approach (that of biblical *metanoia* and 'heart'), to Rahner, a missed opportunity for developing both approaches.

What does become apparent in the examination of Rahner's approach to fundamental option is that it is not exclusively and solely an approach from fundamental freedom, although fundamental freedom is by far the most dominant Rahnerian approach. Rahner does in fact refer to, and entertain ideas about one of the other ubiquitous approaches, that of biblical *metanoia*, linked to the understanding of the heart. He also includes the approach from Ignatian discernment (cf. Häring). Curiously, what does appear to be at a discount for Rahner is the Thomist approach via *finis ultimus*.

Accordingly, this chapter will first examine Rahner's transcendental anthropology and then consider in turn the fundamental option and fundamental freedom, Ignatian discernment and finally the Heart, before concluding by examining problems and issues, raised by the theory of fundamental option.

8.2 Rahner's Transcendental Anthropology and the Fundamental Option

How is the fundamental option situated in Rahner's transcendental anthropology? It has been seen as being situated in the context of God's self-communication in the conferring of grace and freedom. Now, we have devoted much space in Chapter 7 to the scrutiny of the supernatural existential *vis-à-vis* the fundamental option in the offer and acceptance of

grace. Our task then is to narrow our focus on the fundamental option. To begin, how does Rahner understand the fundamental option?

> We are personally existing, ... we can dispose of our lives as we ourselves wish. One characteristic of this freedom is its finality, which is the exact opposite of the ability constantly to re-do. It is also characterized by its totality .... a basic decision [fundamental option] can take place in us that reaches down into the deepest recesses of our being - there where all of our essential parts and developments are rolled into the one undifferentiated unity of the "heart". This basic decision can and must express itself in everything that a person does, therefore, it can also be made definitely reflective and consciously known. But precisely because of its totality, it cannot appear adequately reflective in any one (therefore necessarily partial) act. Hence a certain fear and trembling of ultimate uncertainty necessarily remains with regard to what we have made of ourselves through the use of our freedom.[13]

This account of fundamental option of Rahner raises several features. It refers to freedom, the 'heart' and existence, amongst others, but what exactly is Rahner saying about fundamental option and what are its implications? We have already used Geffrey Kelly's definition of fundamental option and in the following account we will draw on his perspective of the Rahnerian fundamental option.[14] By way of introduction, in the above quotation from the *Spiritual Exercises* Rahner has only obliquely mentioned the location of fundamental option *vis-à-vis* the working of God in his creation. Kelly sees Rahner's understanding of fundamental option consisting of "the outgrowth of God's impacting on people in their growth toward and exercise of spiritual maturity."[15] This carries with it the possibility of a negative fundamental option, of the

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[13] K Rahner: *Spiritual Exercises, op.cit.*, 30-31
[14] cf. Kelly: *Karl Rahner, op.cit.*, 44-47
[15] *ibid*, 45

rejection of God's wooing of the human person in their fundamental freedom and supernatural existential. "Rahner wishes to establish that what people do with their lives is itself governed in some way by their experience of the holy mystery of God."[16] To reiterate, this is the context for the fundamental option, the divine gift of God himself by this gift of grace (supernatural existential) and freedom (fundamental freedom). This also invokes Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge insofar as Rahner invokes the "transcendental horizon" of freedom[17] which is the "fullness of being in God" then acts on the human person as:

> the source from which the drive towards truth and goodness begins and beckons them as the goal toward which human experience, in the quest for meaning aspires. The fundamental option thus becomes animated by God's presence in the human subject in the inner moment when a person's life becomes orientated to God.[18]

Kelly has done us the service for the introduction to the theory of fundamental option of highlighting the context of the fundamental option in its orientation to God's love. However we are still faced with the above account at p.315 of Rahner's understanding of fundamental option. What is the mechanism of the fundamental option? In the following sub-sections we will examine the role of fundamental freedom, Ignatian discernment and the notion of the heart in the theory of fundamental option. This relates to the treatment of the supernatural existential in Chapter 7 insofar as it completes Rahner's transcendental anthropology. However, by way of introduction and utilizing the above quote from *Spiritual Exercises* we can say that we have everyday or categorical choices, as Rahner would have it

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[16] *ibid.*
[17] *ibid.*
[18] *ibid.*

"everything that a person does".[19] However these categorical choices are in fact the 'expressions' of the fundamental option. As Rahner says, "we dispose of our lives as we ourselves wish".[20] Now this freedom to dispose of ourselves is marked by its totality and finality; which explains why the fundamental option is seen as reaching "down into the deepest recesses of our being",[21] and at this point Rahner invokes a notion of identity as constituted by fundamental option, that of "the one undifferentiated unity of the heart".[22] However, we now need to give greater scrutiny to the role of fundamental freedom in fundamental option.

8.3 Fundamental Freedom

The link between the fundamental option and fundamental freedom is immediate. The fundamental option is the name given to any exercise of fundamental freedom. In Rahner's terms this is the exercising of freedom at its most fundamental level where the very self of the human person is formed in responsibility. This is not to say that all fundamental options are immediately objectively fulfilled.

> This basic essence of freedom is realised in time. The total self understanding and the radical self expression, the *option fondamentale*, remain at first frequently empty and objectively unfulfilled.[23]

However Rahner is able to conclude that there is a fundamental act of freedom, the fundamental option, "which penetrates the whole of

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[19] K. Rahner: *Spiritual Exercises, op.cit.*, 30-31
[20] *ibid.*
[21] *ibid.*
[22] *ibid.*
[23] *Grace in Freedom*, 213

existence",[24] and that is truly freedom in being, even if the effect is realized in time. In short, the freedom that enables the self-realisation and self-determination of the human person is precisely the fundamental option that occurs in all those categorical choices of the human person.[25]

8.3.1 Fundamental Freedom and the Fundamental Option

Richard McCormick argues that the notion of fundamental freedom entered systematic theological reflection "largely through the writings of Karl Rahner."[26] This view appears to have general endorsement particularly in the light of Rahner's contribution to transcendental Thomism. But what exactly is fundamental (or transcendental) freedom? For the present purpose, we can use the definition given in *Grace in Freedom*[27],

> Freedom is never a mere choice between individual objects, but it is the self realization of man who makes a choice, and only within this freedom in which man is capable of realizing himself is he also free as regards the material of his self realization.

What I believe Rahner is saying is that the human person is composed of different "layers" of freedom. At the "centre" of the human person is core or fundamental or transcendental freedom. This core freedom makes it possible for the person to fully realize or dispose of themselves. How is this so? The core freedom is not the categorical choice between objects, rather it is the "achievement of the choice of self".[28] This obligatory choice of self or personhood is *per se* either "self realisation in the direction of

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[24] *ibid*
[25] cf. W. Dych: *Karl Rahner, op.cit.*, 133
[26] *The Critical Calling, op.cit.*, 171
[27] Karl Rahner: *Grace in Freedom, op.cit.*, 212
[28] G. McCool: *A Rahner Reader, op.cit.*, 255

God or a radical refusal of self to God."[29] This basic idea has been at the centre of considerable controversy in moral theology since the Second Vatican Council because of its relationship to fundamental option, but it is in essence a simple idea. It is its ramifications that have produced the difficulties. Fuchs notes freedom is one single reality[30] but its effects occur in two different but related spheres, that is, on the one hand, the sphere of categorical freedom of everyday moral choices and on the other the sphere where in decisions about particular actions the person has already committed himself *in toto* in fundamental freedom. The contrary perspectives on this idea, in particular the perspective that Kantian and transcendental approaches may be flawed will be presented at 8.5.4.

Rahner himself appears to present a shift in his perspective over the course of his writing. His early pre-war works, *Spirit in the World* and *Hearer of the Word*, although concerned with transcendental method, and the freedom of the human person for revelation were not expressly concerned with the notion of fundamental freedom as expounded by the later Rahner. Fundamental option, for example, is not mentioned. In the works of the fifties, i.e., the early volumes of *Theological Investigations*, in particular the article "The Theology of Freedom", there was the working out of this concept for systematic and moral theology. By the seventies there had been a perceptible shift in his thinking. For example, in *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit* Rahner stresses not merely the categorical dimension of ethical decision but more importantly the further social dimension of ethical decision,[31] perhaps under the influence of his disciple and dialogue partner J.B. Metz.

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[29] *ibid.*
[30] Joseph Fuchs: "Good Acts and Good Persons", *Tablet*, 6 Nov 1993
[31] Karl Rahner: *Mediations on Freedom and the Spirit*, 38-39

Given this transition in Rahner's thinking and other difficulties, it is important to understand how he 'grounds' his idea of fundamental freedom.

8.3.2 The Grounding of Fundamental Freedom in Rahner's Thought

Rahner, unlike Barth, does not give exclusive primacy to categorical revelation, or in other words, revelation through the Word of God. Nonetheless, Rahner is aware of the biblical sources for freedom, "freedom is really the central content of the Christian message of the New Testament".[32] Rahner cites both the Gospels and the Epistles for this scriptural understanding of freedom, viz

Jn 8:32,36 - "The love of the Father sets us free"

2 Cor 3:17 - "Where the spirit is, there is freedom"

Gal 5:1 - "It is for freedom, that Christ made us free"

Jn 8:31, 36, Rom 6:18, 23 - "freedom from sin"[33]

Rahner extends his scrutiny from the Gospels and Epistles to that of 'Christian consciousness'. "The Scriptures and Christian consciousness regarded it as self evident that man is ... a free responsible person even in his relationship with God".[34] He also acknowledges within his scrutiny the contribution of tradition and the pronouncement of the magisterium of the Church,[35] but does not confine himself to this inheritance of the Church. He starts with the 'Graeco-Western' notion of freedom, which is regarded as the freedom from "social, economic and political coercion, or compulsion"[36] The notion then becomes more privatised, more individual.

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[32]*Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit*, 39

[33]"Freedom in the Church", *Theological Investigations* II, 96

[34]*ibid*, 90

[35]*Grace in Freedom*, 103

[36]Freedom in the Church *TI II*, 91 also *Grace in Freedom*, 204

One is free when one has *autopraxia*, that is when one can do what one wants. Rahner argues that the notion becomes more interiorized, where the moral subject "can really be himself".[37] Rahner then makes a significant shift in the argument:

> even the true freedom of choice, that is the freedom which consists not only in the absence of external compulsion but in the fact that man must freely decide about himself,... and which is therefore a demand rather than 'freedom' - this freedom becomes evident only in Christianity, because only there each individual is eternally valid (in the personal love between God and Man) and hence must realize himself in perfect responsibility and thus in freedom. [38]

This citing of individual worth and validity with its derivation from God's love indicates that the Christian inheritance is a profound source of inspiration for Rahner in his understanding of freedom. It is useful to highlight two aspects of this source.

- Rahner draws on both the Gospels and the Epistles for his understanding of freedom., but "especially St Paul",[39] to then claim that freedom is "lived in the Scriptures rather than made the object of theoretical reflections"[40]

- There is also a Trinitarian cast to Rahner's understanding of the Scriptures as a source of understanding of the idea of freedom. Rahner notes that "in the New Testament, freedom is.... oriented towards God through the *Pneuma* in Jesus Christ".[41] Rahner also notes that this

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[37] *ibid*
[38] *Grace in Freedom*, 204
[39] "Freedom in the Church", *TI II*, 90
[40] *ibid*
[41] *Meditations on the Spirit*, 37

> "*Pneuma*" is the name given by the Bible to the grace of justification and sanctification or sanctifying grace.[42]

Given this profound Christian orientation to the notion of freedom what role does philosophy play in all this for Rahner? Rahner's anthropology provides a starting point. In the *"Dignity and Freedom of Man"*,[43] Rahner characterizes man as

- spirit;
- freedom;
- an individual;
- community building person;
- incarnate mundane person.

So, in Rahner's view of the human person's nature, freedom has a significant role, however the grounding of this freedom in the human person is a "dynamic drive towards incomprehensible Holy Mystery".[44] For the full dimension of this 'drive' see the section on Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge and *Hearer of The Word* (7.3). Rahner argues that this 'structure of being' enables the human person to act and think in an objective and self conscious way.[45] Freedom, for the human person at the core of their being, means the responsibility for determining their own self and the striving to achieve this. Freedom is also the capacity to do, or not to do, this within the structures of nature. Freedom is also the capacity for

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[42]Freedom in the Church, *TI II*, 94
[43]*TI II*, 234
[44]K. Rahner: *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Chs 1 & 2 also James F. Bresnahan: 'An Ethics of Faith' in Leo O'Donovan (ed) *A World of Grace, op.cit.*, 174
[45]*ibid*

moral action at the categorical level of the 'grounding structure' of the person, but also at the transcendental level of the "structures which encompass, limit and channel freedom".[46]

8.3.3 Difficulties in the understanding and pursuit of freedom

If we accept that the grounding of this freedom in the human person is as a "dynamic desire towards incomprehensible Holy Mystery",[47] then we have a considerable problem, as Rahner himself explains:

> A theologian ought to point out in advance that, on close inspection, both the concept and the reality of freedom again and again escape from reflection into the sphere of incomprehensibility, where man and God ultimately dwell.[48]

This may partly explain why, according to McCormick, the notion of fundamental freedom has been "misunderstood, misrepresented and abused",[49] however one of the main critics of fundamental freedom, Germain Grisez is quite accurate when he says that Rahner's understanding of fundamental freedom "corresponds to the pre-conceptual orientation of intellect to God."[50] So Grisez has no difficulties with the emergence of mystery in understanding fundamental freedom.

The general criticisms of fundamental freedom and fundamental option will be discussed later, but for the present, there is the need to discuss the difficulties with fundamental freedom that Rahner himself raises. In one of

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[46]*ibid*
[47]*ibid*
[48]Karl Rahner: *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit, op.cit.*, 76
[49]Richard McCormick: *Moral Theology 1940-89, op.cit.*, 9
[50]Germain Grisez: *Way of the Lord Jesus, op.cit.*, 404 (Note 11)

his earliest essays on the subject, "The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia",[51] Rahner sees that the "essential feature of the free decision is thus what is personal and free, as opposed to that spontaneous act of the appetite which, because of its non-free character is essentially pre-moral".[52] So here Rahner has extended the sphere of categorical choice to bound the sphere of the pre-moral, determined, appetitive act. The difficulty is where does the categorical free choice end and the determined appetitive act start? Without taking on the whole problem of behaviourism it should be mentioned that it is a particular problem with relation to the theory of virtue where the notion of virtuous passions have come to the fore. Are virtuous passions appetitive and are they free or determined?

Rahner raises the problem of manipulation with regard to free choice. In *The Experiment with Man* [53] Rahner claims that freedom is the power "to determine oneself to an absolutely irreversible final state that what a man will be for all eternity is what he has made himself".[54] Following on from this claim of fundamental freedom, Rahner hazards that "today for the first time, man's possibility of transcendental self-manipulation takes on a clear and historically categorical form".[55] This concern obviously stayed with Rahner, for in a later work, *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit*, he places freedom and manipulation in a social context.

> Freedom should be and is also always exercised in time and space within society. It is therefore simply inevitable that its expression by one person changes another's space for freedom... Manipulation of

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[51]Karl Rahner: 'The Theological Concept of Concupiscentia', *Theological Investigations* I, 347
[52]*ibid*, 360
[53]*TI IX*, 205
[54]*ibid*, 212
[55]*ibid*, 213

> the other is, intentionally or unintentionally, a part of freedom itself.[56]

Rahner sees this manipulation as sinful especially if it is institutionalised.[57] Rahner has also, in a sense, come full circle because he sees this sinful manipulation as a product of concupiscence.[58] He also sees the history of humankind as the "history of freedom struggling against manipulations".[59] The difficulty, for our present purposes, is how this categorical freedom is related to fundamental freedom. And further, how concupiscence and manipulation are related to the fundamental option. What Rahner does provide is the argument that social freedom conditions what he refers to as 'religious freedom'[60] for two reasons:

- The human person, the subject of 'religious freedom' can only "express himself freely, responsibly and definitely in this material world".[61]

- Eternity (presumably the end of religious freedom, as salvation or its absence) is not distinct from the categorical (life, time and space) but "is something definitive, the end (or transformation) of our real history here on earth".[62]

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[56] *Meditations on Freedom and the Spirit, op.cit.*, 42-43
[57] *ibid*, 43
[58] *ibid*, 44
[59] *ibid*, 46
[60] *ibid*, 40
[61] *ibid*
[62] *ibid*

Rahner raises another difficulty in addition to manipulation. He refers to 'bad freedom'.[63] His argument runs as follows. Because the consideration of freedom involves theology as well as a metaphysics of freedom

> the objectively and subjectively morally right action of freedom and the objectively and subjectively wrong and reprehensible free decision may not be regarded merely as two equal, co-existent species of realization of simply one and the same nature of free action.[64]

Rahner continues that the 'bad' act of freedom does not, on the one hand, succeed in attaining that object associated with freedom, namely the good, but on the other hand it also does not succeed in attaining

> the most proper and innermost nature of freedom itself, since the morally evil realization of freedom is also indeed a free but evil, unsuccessful realization of freedom itself because God has not created freedom as the possibility of the creature positing by a subject of what is good and evil but as the possibility of creatively positing what is good; hence freedom also fails to attain itself.[65]

To recapitulate, a decision of fundamental freedom which is evil, because of the impact of God's sovereignty, is fatally flawed. Presumably, this also flows on to the fundamental option.

Rahner raises a further difficulty, what he refers to as the "most radically false freedom".[66] He asserts that everything depends on "the object of one's freedom".[67] He continues that

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[63]'Guilt-Responsibility-Punishment, within the View of Catholic Theology', *TI VI*, 210
[64]*ibid*, 209
[65]*ibid*, 209-10
[66]Freedom in the Church, *TI II*, 92-3
[67]*ibid*, 92

> it would seem that man [*sic*], being free to choose, must have free and autonomous access to his salvation; his salvation must, therefore ultimately be himself. But it is precisely this that is false. The conception of the consummation of human existence, which presupposes and affirms this is the most abysmal falsehood of all. And the freedom which is understood in this way, not only as a call, but as something of itself capable of achieving what it is called to, is the most radically false of all.[68]

In this interiorization, this withdrawal into oneself, the human person would become estranged from everything else and would become not free but a prisoner of the "inescapable limitation of his nature".[69] Freedom would become a complete negation and its own private hell. The fundamental option based on this fundamental freedom would become a fundamental extinction.

There is a similar difficulty. Rahner argues that fundamental freedom can only be looked at by the human person only in its 'constitutive sign'[70], "and in the objectifications of his freedom".[71] However the human person, in order to confess sin, must have sufficient accurate data from the "objective, material data of his internal and external life".[72] Yet again, according to Scripture, there is the commandment not to judge others but this necessarily means the human person cannot pass absolute judgement on themself. In short, judgement remains to God alone. This means, says Rahner, that the human person must surrender himself unconditionally to God[73]. The difficulty here is that how does one construe the fundamental option based

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[68]*ibid*
[69]*ibid*
[70]Guilt and its Remission, *TI II*, 275
[71]*ibid*
[72]*ibid*
[73]*ibid*, 276

on this notion of fundamental freedom? Is the fundamental option made under these circumstances a truly free option?

A final difficulty is the relationship between freedom on the one hand and fate, destiny or providence on the other. This intensely metaphysical issue is addressed briefly by Rahner in *Grace and Freedom.*[74] He acknowledges it as one of the great questions of humankind. He claims that Christian faith does not help us to understand fully this dichotomy of fate and freedom but it will "give us courage and humility to accept both and to integrate their uncomprehended unity into that infinite mystery which we call God".[75] Again, Rahner claims that judgement is left to God alone. "If a man believes in the omnipotent, omniscient and loving God his life will be destiny in an even deeper sense: for he is wholly borne by the power of God without which nothing, not even man's own free act, can exist".[76] Further, Rahner argues that the human person is obliged to use their freedom to determine their life. The responsibility of exercising personal freedom is itself part of destiny. This could be extrapolated to argue that the fundamental option is part of one's destiny. How then would Rahner deal with the problem of predestination or indeed justification? (see 8.3.4 and 8.5.2)

What has emerged from the preceding pages is the primacy that Rahner gives to God and grace in the understanding of fundamental freedom. We now focus on this consideration.

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[74]*Grace and Freedom, op.cit.*, 262ff
[75]*ibid*
[76]*ibid*, 263

8.3.4 Fundamental Freedom and the Priority of God and Grace

It has become apparent that Rahner places the exercise of freedom in the context of God's grace. However Rahner does not evade the difficult aspects of grace and freedom. Working from the revelation of Scripture Rahner sees the great paradox that

> man's freedom, while remaining responsible and without being destroyed, nevertheless falls under the slavery of the diabolical powers of sin and death... and that freedom must first of all be freed by God's grace for its real task of loving God in an inner inclination towards the law.[77]

Although it is implicit that the anthropological framework of grace is the supernatural existential, Rahner argues (via Scripture) that freedom of choice is the basis for salvation or damnation but this freedom of choice becomes fundamental freedom when the human person can "decide about himself as a whole by his freedom",[78] that freedom is then seen to be "first and foremost freedom of being".[79] Here Rahner has argued from grace to fundamental freedom with the difficult question of justification and freedom. In a later work Rahner insists that the traditional Reformation controversy over justification should be left behind.

> I do not think that today there is or should still be a controversy between the Christian Churches and denominations as to whether freedom exists in salvation and justification and whether the theology of man [sic] should or should not describe him as a free being.[80]

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[77] Guilt, Responsibility, Punishment, *TI VI*, 201
[78] *ibid*, 202
[79] *ibid*
[80] *Grace in Freedom, op.cit.*, 229

He continues

> God must be understood as the all-efficient Giver who gives himself both the potency of freedom and its good act according to his grace that is neither derived nor compelled, and which nothing in man [*sic*] precedes. Hence all specious sharing out of divine and human causality in this matter is false and an heretical attack on the absolute sovereignty of God.[81]

He concludes that God's grace must set freedom free for God.[82]This divine saturation of freedom is echoed in Rahner's other remarks that God is present in every free act as its "fundamental impulse and final goal".[83] This consideration will reappear when we consider the role of freedom in the virtues, in particular the Theological Virtues.

8.4 Rahner's Mysticism, Ignatian Spirituality and Fundamental Option

It has been argued that the fundamental option "pervades Rahner's writings on grace, sin, conversion, the moral life in general and above all the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius." Does this mean that Ignatian spirituality is more important to Rahner's theory of fundamental option than fundamental freedom or the supernatural existential?[84] How, then, is Rahner's Ignatian spirituality linked to the fundamental option?

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[81] *ibid*
[82] *ibid*
[83] *ibid*, 206
[84] R. McCormick: "Moral Theology 1940-1989, An Overview", *Theological Studies* March 1989, Vol 51, No 1, 8

In the discussion of Rahner's formal existential ethics it becomes readily apparent that the Ignatian discernment of spirits is integral to the existential moral choice. The relevant question here is what role does this process play in the fundamental option? Rahner's writing on fundamental option is not systematic, rather it is fragmentary. and these fragments are scattered through his plethora of writings, both those writings formally theological and those devotional. The task now is to review these writings and piece together an analysis of Rahners' Ignatian mysticism and fundamental option.

In Rahners' own volume with the Ignatian title *Spiritual Exercises* he writes:

> The Spiritual Exercises (ie. the Ignatian exercises) are not a theological system. From a theological point of view, the Spiritual Exercises are nothing but an election or choice: the choice of the means and the concrete way in which Christianity can become a living reality in us. St Ignatius is only interested in this: that a man place himself before the Lord of the 'Kingdom of Christ' and the 'Two Standards' and ask: What should I do? What do you want from me according to the sovereignty of your divine will?[85]

Here Rahner asserts that although Ignatian election is not theological, it is about choice, the choice for a living Christian reality and, as such, encapsulates the basic ethical question "What should I do?" Rahner provides further details:

> A personal election is the most important thing in the Ignatian retreat... it must proceed from what St Ignatius calls the "Foundation"... the framework of the Exercises placed at the

[85] *ibid*, 11

> beginning, containing the key ideas that are to run through all the meditations.
>
> The concept of God that interests us here is essentially "practical". It demands a decision either for or against God, and is itself only attainable in decision. It is a turning to the living God. (1Th 1,9; Lk 1, 16) [86]

Here, starting from Ignatian election Rahner has progressed to effectively incorporate fundamental option in his *schemata.* From this perspective the fundamental option is nothing if not a choosing for or against God. In this paragraph Rahner has also invoked the biblical concept of *metanoia* which is another approach to fundamental option, (ref. Section 3.1).

The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius are concerned with the tension between grace and sin. The theory of fundamental option has partial origins in the distinction between mortal and venial sin. Again Rahner manages to work from an Ignatian election to the fundamental option in the context of grace and sin. In the Rahnerian *Spiritual Exercises* we have the following explication in the context of the Ignatian exercises.

> The consideration of sin brings us to the realisation that we are personally existing, that we can dispose of our lives as we ourselves wish. One characteristic of this freedom is its finality, which is the exact opposite to the ability constantly to re-do. It is also characterised by its totality. The possibility of sin (it is sin that damns man forever) shows that a basic decision [fundamental option] can take place in us that reaches down into the deepest recesses of our being - there where all of our essential parts and developments are called into the one undifferentiated unity of the "heart". This basic decision can and must express itself in everything that a person does.[87]

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[86] *ibid*, 15
[87] *ibid*, 30

Again, in this paragraph, in an Ignatian context, Rahner has managed to invoke, sin, fundamental freedom and the biblical concept of heart in connection with fundamental option (basic decision). But Rahner can also say that Ignatian election and fundamental option are not just theoretical possibilities but are concretely grounded in life.

Here is Rahner explicating this position in the appropriately titled *Christian at the Crossroads*:

> The "Exercises" are and remain choice and decision in a concrete life situation and not a mere theoretical invitation into the essence of Christianity. This is not only because they have been so understood historically, but particularly because the basic total *metanoia* (fundamental option) [NB Rahner's terminology] which is not just a theoretical - and not concretely possible only as a theoretical - cultivation of Christianity, is possible only in the concrete life situation and that situation's origin and decision.[88]

Again Rahner combines biblical, mystical and transcendental perspectives for his understanding of fundamental option, but with the twist that it is grounded in the concrete circumstance of life. Rahner makes a further extension to this perspective of practicability when he places Ignatian election in an historical and social context:

> For Ignatius the moral conversion was simply the first thing that had to be accomplished - the first week (of the retreat) demonstrates that. Today previous to moral conversion, though this need not occur in an external temporal sequence, a theological conversion would be the first thing.[89]

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[88]*Christian at the Crossroads* quoted in (ed) Lehman and Raffelt, *Practice of Faith, op.cit.*, 102
[89]*Karl Rahner in Dialogue*, 179

And he continues:

> The final conquest of humanity's present difficulties is basically capable of being attained only by the final loving and hoping capitulation of the person into the incomprehensible mystery that we call God.[90]

All these above examples, although scattered throughout Rahner's work, present a certain coherence. The pervasiveness of Ignatian mysticism is readily apparent, a mysticism that is at ease with transcendental method and biblical example and that is geared to the problematic concrete life situations and a wider social and historical context. To attempt to understand Rahners' approach to the fundamental option and to ignore his Ignatian mysticism is to ignore a subtle yet seminal aspect of fundamental option, nonethless we are left with the afterthought of whether the role of Ignátian decision in the understanding of fundamental option may stress the role of 'decisionism' (ref. 8.7.8) at the expense of other Rahnerian concepts.

8.5 Rahner, Fundamental Option and the Heart

What was Rahner's understanding of the role of the heart and fundamental option? Rahner defines the heart as a dynamic principle of composite unity:

> a basic concept of primitive anthropology ... which designates that simple centre of the personal spirit's self control and psychosomatic autonomy which can only be reached asymptotically.[91]

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[90] *ibid*
[91] *CTD*, 203

What were the dimensions of this 'basic concept of primitive anthropology? We have previously discussed the role of the heart in the pre-history of the fundamental option at 3.1 and 3.3.4. By way of recapitulation, the biblical notion of the heart derived in the Old Testament from the term *leb* meaning the innermost or hidden part of anything with the implication of not only the seat of motives, will, emotion, passion and appetite but also of understanding, thought processes, cognition and moral judgement. The New Testament term *Kardia* extended these meanings. It refered to a right state of heart which integrated the life of the human person and was open to the reception of the divine will with the consequence that it was the *locus* for inward removal and regeneration, i.e., *metanoia.*

Now Rahner has referred explicitly to this biblical understanding of heart in the context of the fundamental option:

> biblical concept ... of the heart... shows understanding that there is such a basic act [i.e., fundamental option] of freedom and embraces and shapes the whole of human existence.[92]

However, in this writing he does not elaborate on this potentially important connexion, notwithstanding that the biblical approach to the fundamental option and the approach from fundamental freedom are possibly the two most pervasive approaches in the literature.

This biblical understanding of heart is at odds with current philosophical usage which largely ignores it, and "even theology has a hard time with it".[93]

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[92] "Theology of Freedom" *TI* VI, 186

[93] Andrew Tallon: "Connaturality in Aquinas and Rahner", *Philosophy Today* Vol XXVIII No 2/4 Summer 1984

However a noted commentator on Rahner, Andrew Tallon, characterises Rahner's understanding of heart as based not just on the biblical foundation, but on Rahner's foundational anthropology and his metaphysics of knowledge. Tallon cites *Geist in Welt* to argue that:

> Heart then for Rahner is felt spirit, embodied spirit, spirit as experiencable, feelable, lived, *le vécu.* Spirit becomes heart only in and through the first emanation, but before the emanation of intellect and will as distinct powers... Now this identification of heart with embodied spirit, i.e., not with soul as distinct from body - means the powers of knowing and loving are distinct from one another until borught forth by dialogal encounter with those who actualise them ... Concretely we must look for the major mystery of the change of heart, conversion, *metanoia,* being reborn.[94]

Tallon has done us the service here of linking heart to fundamental option by means of the metaphysic of knowledge but also with reference to the biblical concept of *metanoia.*

However, the difficulty for Tallon's approach is that it is pre-volitional, it possibly ignores transcendental freedom and may thereby vitiate his approach to Rahner's understanding of fundamental option. This problem recurs when we examine the concept of heart for a link between virtue and fundamental option.

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[94] *ibid.*

8.6 Problems of the Rahnerian Fundamental Option

8.6.1 The Distinction Between Mortal and Venial Sin

Jacques Maritain considered that the fundamental option was "latent in Aquinas' explanation of the differences between mortal and venial sin,"[95] and the theory of the fundamental option was developed in some quarters to mean that mortal sin was an action which involved a fundamental option,[96] or alternatively that a venial sin remained a peripheral action which "did not involve the core decision of the person."[97] This is one of the more visible areas of controversy insofar as the post synodical apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* has stated that "care will have to be taken not to reduce mortal sin to an act of fundamental option."[98] The ITC has provided further clarification when it concluded that the fundamental option is not "a criterion that allows one to distinguish concretely between grave and venial sin. The concept, rather is a help to make the nature of grave sin theologically clear."[99] This has been amplified by its proponents when they say that the fundamental option does not distinguish light and grave matter but rather is concerned with the gravity of personal sin *in toto,* not the gravity of the matter.[100]

Rahner in his article "Justified and Sinner at the Same Time"[101] was aware of the limitations of the mortal/venial sin dichotomy.

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[95] Mahoney: *op.cit.*, 32
[96] Curran: *New Look at Christian Morality,* 206
[97] Curran: *Themes in Fundamental Moral Theology,* 159
[98] *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia,* 67
[99] ITC: *Penance and Reconciliation,* 247
[100] cf. R. McCormick: *op.cit.*, 184
[101] *TI VI,* 218-30

> The teaching of the permanent sinfulness of man by venial sins represents a continuous question for us as to what we really are deep down. We must always answer this question in a positive sense, placing our hope in the grace of God but we can never do this proudly and self assuredly with a theoretical centitude of salvation.
>
> Hence all must somehow pass beyond the distinction between mortal and venial sin, however much it is materially and objectively correct, since it cannot be carried through completely in concrete reflection on our own existence.

It is also useful to note here that in "Justified and Sinner at the Same Time" Rahner has provided an *entrée* from the question of the distinction of mortal and venial sin to more reformed themes, in particular Luther's formula of *simul justus et peccator.*[102]

8.6.2 The Conservative Critique

John Finnis in his *Fundamentals of Ethics*[103] questions seriously the nature of the fundamental option. He only cites McCormick and would not appear to deal with Rahner, Häring or Co., and, in that sense, his account is diminished, *pace* McCormick. Finnis appears to question Rahner's whole concept of fundamental freedom. He acknowledges that his own concept of fundamental options are 'strategic options' and there are differences 'in degree'[104] of decisions but this notion of hierarchy seems to be ignored and an imprecise sense of linear decision making emerges.

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[102] cf. R.C. Highfield: "The Freedom to Say No" Karl Rahner's Doctrine of Sin, *Theological Studies* Vol 56, No 3, Sept 1995, 495

[103] J. Finnis: *Fundamentals of Ethics* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1983)

[104] *ibid.*, 144

McCormick has noted that in six short paragraphs Finnis has dismissed "one of the major developments in theological anthropology",[105] and is unaware of the "enormously rich literature"[106] of the past twenty years. McCormick focuses on two particular mistakes among what he perceives to be many others. First, Finnis conceives of "fundamental freedom being actualized apart from concrete choices",[107] which McCormick says is simply not the case, self disposition in fundamental freedom can only occur through categorical behaviour and choice. McCormick insists that Finnis' presentation of fundamental freedom is unrecognizable to its proponents. Second, McCormick argues that Finnis' second mistake is "simply to assume that human freedom is restricted to **freedom of choice**"[108], ie, categorical choice, he cannot imagine that, like sin or conversion, freedom is an analogous concept. It would appear that Finnis' objections to the fundamental option are somewhat limited.

A more thoroughly sustained series of objections to the fundamental option would appear to be provided by Germain Grisez. In his introductory text on ethics *Beyond the New Morality*, Grisez offers a one paragraph critique of the fundamental option. He argues that "some" theories of fundamental option "posit a mysterious comprehensive exercise of freedom",[109] of which we are unaware. He argues that, first, it is "impossible to verify the existence of a freedom which, by the theory itself, is never accessible to consciousness"[110] and second, "it is entirely possible to account for the

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[105] R. McCormick: *The Critical Calling,* 184
[106] *ibid.*
[107] *ibid.*
[108] *ibid.*
[109] G. Grisez and R. Shaw: *Beyond the New Morality,* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University Press, 1988), 31
[110] *ibid.*

overall orientation of our lives by our conscious exercise of freedom of self determination, without positing the existence of anything so mysterious as a 'fundamental option'.[111]

On this account, again, the issue of core freedom is at stake. Grisez has not specified his dialogue partners but presumably it is Rahner and the transcendentalists, biblical approaches are not considered. Categorical freedom will do in determining the orientation of our lives says Grisez, even if we could verify the existence of fundamental freedom which he says is impossible anyway. In this abbreviated account, Grisez appears to fall foul of some of the traps to which Finnis succumbed. However in the *Way of the Lord Jesus* there is a lengthier account and McCormick also provides a critique.

McCormick argues that Grisez' objection of the inaccessibility of fundamental option to conscious awareness rests on a misunderstanding. "Those who propose transcendental or core freedom as the basis of serious moral acts do not say that such freedom is 'unavailable to conscious awareness.' They say it is not *completely* available to *conceptual* awareness ....[112] Rather, it is in Rahner's words 'a resolute, radical and radically conscious ... adoption of Christian life.'[113]

However, Grisez lists two other objections:

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[111] *ibid.*
[112] McCormick: *op.cit.*, 187
[113] *ibid.*

- Current theories of fundamental option do not explain the distinction between grave and light matter; and,

- The Tridentine teaching of the duty to confess mortal sin would be in error if the penitent could discover no mortal sin where a fundamental option had brought the required change to mortal sin but was in itself inaccessible to conscious reflection.

In the first case, McCormick argues that proponents of the fundamental option do not advance it as a principle distinguishing light and grave matter. Fundamental option is concerned with the gravity of personal sin not the gravity of the matter. In the second case, it is answered above where Rahner stresses that the fundamental option is accessible to consciousness.

However, what should be stressed is that McCormick notes that Grisez *does* accept the fundamental option albeit in attenuated form.[114] Grisez understands the fundamental option as faith, "as a particular moral act of assent by free choice (that) can be located in conscious reflection."[115] McCormick argues that for Grisez the fundamental option is a **categorical**, not a transcendental, act and that it is an act of assent, not of total disposition or charity. In short the underlying transcendental anthropology that gave rise to the fundamental option has disappeared.[116] Nonetheless, from a conservative critique, here we have a valuable example of the link between fundamental option and virtue, in this case the virtue of faith, albeit at the expense of fundamental freedom.

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[114] *ibid.*
[115] *ibid.*
[116] *ibid.*, 188

8.6.3 The Philosophical Basis for the Fundamental Option

Much of the debate on the fundamental option has been focused on the Rahnerian transcendental version of the fundamental option. In turn the debate has usually been pegged home to questions of fundamental freedom.

Grisez is forthright in his assessment of fundamental freedom. In some respects it is a re-run of some of the critiques of the supernatural existential. He argues that for fundamental freedom there is[117]

- no experience that can be cited for fundamental freedom (of its own admission);
- no philosophical argument for it;
- no scriptural, patristic or magisterial argument for it.

In short, "the logic of the case for the fundamental option is an argument for a hypothesis."[118] This in itself is not a shortcoming as many theories have been built on mere hypotheses (what else could they be built on?) but the substance of Grisez' arguments do require scrutiny. Leaving aside the question of the lack of scriptural etc evidence, it is really an argument about Rahner's approach to fundamental option.

There are side issues. Rahner was influenced to some extent by Heiddeger, and through him, Husserl and phenomenology. Karol Wojtyla was also heavily influenced by Husserl, which leads Grisez to refer to the fact that in *The Acting Person* he clearly describes the phenomena of self determination

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[117] G. Grisez: *op.cit.*, 402
[118] *ibid.*

which are by no means unavailable to self consciousness.[119] But this simply illuminates the indifference of phenomenology to transcendental method.

Thus, we are left with the problem that, as Rahner holds, the fundamental option is the name for the exercise of any transcendental freedom[120] (*pace* Häring *et alia*) but, as has become apparent in the preceding pages, this has attracted critics. To reiterate, Peter Fransen,[121] a contemporary of Rahner who approaches the fundamental option from the perspective of grace, also refers to fundamental freedom and has often noticed that he was not understood on the issue of categorical and fundamental freedom.

> The fundamental option is not one particular action, more important than others, following or preceding the more specialised choice of some concrete action. It is not a matter of determining in the first instance a fundamental option and then freely developing all the concrete implications...
>
> For this fundamental option, this existential and total engagement is also impossible if it is not at the same time actualised in a series of particular actions, forming the visible woof of our life. It is therefore not a concrete action, it is an orientation freely imposed on our whole life....
>
> There is therefore continual interaction between the particular, perceptible and conscious actions of every moment and the fundamental option, obscurely conscious, exercised and present in every particular act.[122]

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[119] Grisez: *op.cit.* p.405 (*The Acting Person op.cit.*, 108-115)
[120] K. Rahner: *Grace in Freedom op.cit.*, 213, also O'Connell: *op.cit.*
[121] P. Fransen:"Towards a Psychology of Divine Grace" *Lumen Vitae* 1958, 36
[122] *ibid.*

In summary, the understanding of the person as a self transcending subject is the "foundation for a theory of the fundamental option."[123]

Much of this ground has been covered earlier under the consideration of other issues such as the distinction between mortal and venial sin. Further the philosophical basis for Rahner's thought has been covered earlier (see Chapters 5 and 6). Rather we will follow Fuchs who outlines, in his discussion on *Veritatis Splendor*, the consequences for the fundamental option of the approach from Transcendental Thomism.[124] He argues:

- "What we can know about good and evil is limited to our actions, decisions and desires" (ie, the fundamental option is not available to consciousness);

- "Since the fundamental option goes deeper than ethical choices about particular actions, it will be difficult to shift a person who is good and rooted in grace and his option is established."

- "Nonetheless peripheral decisions and actions can gradually lead to a point where fundamental option is reversed."

Fuchs has dealt with the problem of the reversal of the fundamental option but, more importantly has also stressed the operation of grace. Rahner's emphasis on grace is only too well known, which in this case, in the form of the supernatural existential, provides the context for fundamental option.

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[123] Curran: *Moral Theology a Continuing Journey*, 72
[124] J. Fuchs: *Tablet op.cit.*

However there is a further critique of Rahner's understanding of fundamental freedom. Ronald Highfield, in a sustained and penetrating article,[125] finds an ambiguity in Rahner's treatment which is also reflected in the commentators.[126] He argues that Rahner sets down two basic truths of every human act:

- "total origin from God in every respect";
- "independent freedom".[127]

This then raises the problem of theodicy, of God and wicked freedom. Rahner replies that an evil act has "less of being and less of freedom."[128] It should be stressed that Rahner here is referring to categorical, not transcendental freedom. What of transcendental freedom? Highfield sees Rahner as saying that freedom is the 'subjective grasp of one's own entire being (*Beisichsein*, "being-with-self")',[129] "**a coming to oneself, a being present to oneself**, with oneself."[130] In short, the human person utilises freedom for its true purpose of coming and conforming to the will of God. Further, only God has being to the fullest degree, therefore both being and freedom are fully realised only in God, therefore the human person does not have freedom absolutely.[131] However "no being other than God can be thought to decide about God freely and definitively."[132] What then is left

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[125] R.C. Highfield: "The Freedom to Say No? Karl Rahner's Doctrine of Sin" *Theological Studies* Vol 56 No 3, Sept 1995, 485
[126] eg, T.C. Knoebel, cf. Highfield *op.cit.*, 493
[127] Highfield: *op.cit.*, 490, cf. SM "Grace and Freedom"
[128] *ibid*
[129] *ibid*, 493
[130] *ibid*, cf. *Hearer of the Word*, 98
[131] *ibid*, 503
[132] *ibid*, 505

for the supernatural existential and fundamental option, both positive and negative? We now turn to this problem.

8.6.4 The Difficulty of the Rahnerian Negative Fundamental Option

Ronald Highfield has developed a critique of Rahner's doctrine of sin and human freedom, which, if correct, "indicates foundational inadquacies in his theological system" and also, by extension, the fundamental option.[133]

Highfield argues that Rahner defines sin as a free 'no' to God, that is a negative fundamental option. Highfield poses the question, is this negative fundamental option equal in its freedom to a positive fundamental option? Highfield scrutinizes the relevant texts intensively and concludes that Rahner is inconsistent. He argues that in FCF, Rahner has it that the 'yes' and 'no' are equally free,[134] yet in *Grace and Freedom* Rahner argues against the equality of 'yes' and 'no'.[135] However the latter argument is initially within a categorical context, ie, "categorical transgressions of the moral structures of the created world."[136] However, in a later section in the FCF[137] Rahner argues against the complete equality of the positive and negative fundamental option in a transcendental context. Highfield argues that this is reinforced in Rahner's article "The Punishment of Sin",[138] where it is argued that "the 'no' to God cannot actualise human nature as can a 'yes', but rather it sets up an inner contradiction between itself and the

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[133] R.C. Highfield: "The Freedom to Say No? Karl Rahner's Doctrine of Sin" *Theological Studies* Vol 56, No 3, Sept 1995, 485
[134] *ibid*, 489, cf. FCF 97
[135] *ibid*, 489
[136] *ibid*, 490
[137] *ibid*, 491, cf. FCF 102
[138] *ibid* 492 cf. *Encyclopedia of Theology*

supernatural existential, which constitutes the essence of hell. Sin... is its own punishment."[139]

Rahner's concern is to quash any viability of the idea that the human person may 'escape God' and their created nature by "authentically realising themselves in a 'no' to God, by becoming in reality absolute." In short freedom is not to be used to place hell alongside heaven, the inferno beside the *beatitudo*, with a second, equal *telos* for the human person.

Now Highfield pushes the argument further. He sees Rahner positing the equality of the positive and negative fundamental option where he wants to "demonstrate the possibility of real sin and full human responsibility for sin",[140] yet stresses their inequality when he "wants to avoid compromising the *omni causality* of God and the eternal and total dependence of the creature on the Creator."[141]

Highfield argues that Rahner cannot have it both ways. He sees Rahner's understanding of freedom as contributing to the dilemma (cf. 8.5.9) insofar as freedom is freedom for God, not freedom for sin. In addition, Rahner's doctrine of sin makes sin definitive, ie, it is the 'no' to God, so how can it be forgiven by God? Highfield sees the taproot of the problem as the construction of Rahner's anthropology where the human person is seen as a union of grace (supernatural existential) and (pure) human nature. Absolute Freedom, which is the prerogative of the divine, is transferred to the limited human person under the flag of grace with the extension that the human person is then able to decide definitively for or against God. However

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[139] *ibid*
[140] *ibid*
[141] *ibid*

Highfield argues that "no being other than God can be thought to decide about God freely and definitively."[142] In short, Rahner's solution violates the scriptural texts and creates this 'hopeless' internal contradiction. Highfield has raised some serious objections which, in a sense run parallel to those of Millbank. There is no need here to cover old ground but simply to refer to the arguments presented in 7.4 and Chapter 7 generally. However we can conclude by simply noting that Rahner's understanding of fundamental option and fundamental freedom at a basic level rests on an understanding of the priority of grace where the soveriegnty of God precedes the dispensation of freedom.

8.6.5 The Fundamental Option and the Distinction of Levels of Action in the Moral Subject

The first treatment of this issue is found in Thomas' teaching on the ultimate end (*finis ultimus*, (cf. *ST* Ia IIae.1,1). This has been taken up by the fundamental option exponents to argue that, at the top of the tree, so to speak, ultimately there are only the two possible fundamental choices, love of God or love of creature, (ie, self).[143] These two possible fundamental choices constitute the fundamental option and are predicated upon the notion of the multileveled structure of the human person as free agent with 'core' freedom. This notion was first advanced as early as 1922 by Dietrich von Hilderbrand[144] but was also taken up by Rahner at an early stage in his transcendental anthropology, and is implicit in his understanding of

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[142] *ibid*, 505

[143] cf. Curran: *New Look at Christian Morality*, 204

[144] D. von Hilderbrand: "Sittlich keit und sittliche Werterkenntnis", *Jahrbuch für Philosophie und phänomenologische Forschung* 5 (1922), 463
cf. J.W. Glaser: "Transition between Grace and Sin: Fresh Perspectives", *Theological Studies* Vol 29 No 2 June 1968, 260

fundamental freedom.[145] In this context, there is a coalescing of approach to fundamental option from *finis ultimus* and fundamental freedom. They are not completely independent.

This is a contentious and problematic area. McCormick has commented that:

> the notion of fundamental freedom can be and has been misunderstood, misrepresented and abused ..... We can no longer think of the moral - spiritual life in terms of the clear and distinct categories that were generated by an anthropology that conceived of freedom exhaustively as freedom of choice. Things are just not that simple.[146]

Fuchs is more explicit on this question in the context of the debate on the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*. "The Pope's advisers do not grasp that the fundamental option and everyday moral choices happen on different levels of the same person and so cannot be categorical on the same level of objective awareness."[147] He continues that because the fundamental option and moral choices are on different levels "the theory stresses rather their mutual relationship and interpenetration."[148] Fuchs may have overlooked the view of the Pope himself. In *The Acting Person* Karol Wojtyla deals with the question of freedom[149], but also stresses the integration of the person particularly through moral acts.[150] This work reflected the phenomenological approach to ethical problems and the exponents of the

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[145] eg., Karl Rahner: "Das Leben der Toten", *Schriften 4*, 432
cf. Glaser, *op.cit.*, 262
[146] R. McCormick: "Moral Theology 1940 - 1989 - An Overview" in *Theological Studies* Vol 50 No 1, 9
[147] J. Fuchs: "Good Acts and Good Persons" in *The Tablet* 6 March 1993, 1448
[148] *ibid.*
[149] *The Acting Person* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979), 93
[150] *ibid*, 252

English speaking tradition of the interpretation of moral theology may encounter difficulties in the 'translation' of these phenomenological ideas.

A more familiar critic of the fundamental option is Germain Grisez whose moral theology has been extremely influential, particularly with regard to *Veritatis Splendor*.[151] His approach to the problems of the distinction of levels in the moral subject is sometimes parallel and sometimes divergent with the theory of the fundamental option. His exposition is as follows:

- Large choices place one in the position of having to carry them out by very small choices;
- Incompatible choices co-exist but they are in tension;
- Certain large choices which organise one's life are called commitments;
- The choice to accept Christian faith opens up certain possibilities, excludes others and affects one's whole life.

Given all this, which reflects some of the theory of the fundamental option, Grisez argues that the assumption that one can and must make a choice between God and creature is "no choice".[152] He offers no convincing reasons for this but he does note the significance of free choice made from day to day (presumably categorical choices) that determine our identity by the way we live. It appears to be a case of 'now you see it, now you don't' insofar as Grisez acknowledges the primacy of large choices which organise ones life which he refers to as commitments, yet on the other hand he also appears to give primacy to everyday choices.

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[151] cf. Jean Porter: "Direct and Indirect in Grisez' Moral Theory" *Theological Studies* 57 (1996), 611

[152] *The Way of the Lord Jesus*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald, 1983), 54

8.6.6 Fundamental Option and Decision

In the preceding pages there has been reference to the distinction between moral action and moral agency and again between the fundamental option and particular choices, largely in the context of Catholic moral theology, (notwithstanding the Protestant contribution of Kierkegaard). It is now appropriate to consider these distinctions from a slightly different perspective, from the Protestant perspective of decisionism.

It has become almost a commonplace that, at one level, ethics is perceived simply as right action, ie, decision, but some have seen this as a limited and potentially misleading perception. James McClendon sees the origins of this approach in the Renaissance preoccupation with the will.[153] Although this preoccupation could in turn be possibly sourced to the prophets of the Old Testament, for the Renaissance the problem of, on the one hand, the unruly will, and on the other the good, occupied most thinkers.[154] The Enlightenment provided the response, via Kant, of attempting to give reasoned order to the human will. Kant saw the locus of ethics as the direction "of the transcendent human will in accordance with the categorical imperative."[155]

In turn, possibly the most significant response to the Enlightenment view of decision was that found in Kierkegaard and existentialism. Kierkegaard's approach has already been examined and its successors will be examined shortly, but it also needs to be noted as McClendon argues[156] that these

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[153] James W. McClendon: *Ethics - Systematic Theology Vol 1* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 56
[154] *ibid.*
[155] *ibid.*
[156] *ibid.*

were not only the heirs of Kant, ie, the deontologists, but also the heirs of Jeremy Bentham, the utilitarians or consequentialists. However this claim is uncertain as Kierkegaard has been seen to be strongly in the virtue tradition. (cf. 4.8). What both approaches have in common is that they see ethics as decision. At times they almost seem to be the Protestant equivalent of the Catholic manualist tradition insofar as they stress decision at the expense of moral agency.

This Enlightenment turn to the subject and turn to decision was compounded by the Reformation and the phenomenon of interiorization and piety. McClendon argues, following Krister Stendahl, that the heirs of the Reformation acquired the introspective interpretation of justification by faith not through Paul, but through the interiorization of Augustine and Luther.[157]

So the two concepts of will and interiorization converge in decisionism. 'Decide' in Latin meant to 'cut off', to end a struggle by decisive resolution.[158] Decisionism has the implication of the resolution of an interior struggle by the prevailing of the will. James Gustafson sees the 'crisis of decision' as a term used by Protestant existentialists with the following implications:[159]

- It has a sense of radical freedom.

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[157] Of peripheral interest is the recognition that Luther, as an Augustinian Monk, was obsessed with the place of penance. One wonders how he would have reacted to the Fundamental Option with regard to penance.
[158] *ibid.*, 58
[159] James Gustafson: *Protestant and Roman Catholic Ethics* (Chicago: UP, 1978), 72

- It has a sense of deep seated anxiety caused by the absence of, or antipathy towards, principles that provide objective certainty, eg, natural law.

- The rightness of a decision is only answerable to subjective verification (cf. Kierkegaard's subjective truth).

Now, one Catholic commentator has argued that the concept of decision in the existential sense is nothing other than the fundamental option.[160] This is echoed in some Protestant Theologians. For Bultmann, for example, this 'crisis of decision' is all important. It is a decision taken by the human person, a decision for faith and God and against the world. This new creation in Christ is the work of grace. The demands of God in the teaching of Jesus:

> arise quite simply from the crisis of decision in which man stands before God... Its meaning is simply that this moment of decision contains all that is necessary for the decision, since in it the whole of life is at stake...[161]

Bultmann's approach was paralleled by that of Emil Brunner. He defined two sets of moral imperatives in order to resolve the conflict between the Gospel and the World. The first was the Commandments derived from created human nature, the second, (and more relevant for the present purpose) was the divine direct command of the moment of decision, of serious choice. "Precisely on the borderline between the past and the

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[160] G. Langmeyer: "Decision" in W. Beinert and F. Schüssler Fiorenza (eds) *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 165-6

[161] R. Bultmann: *Jesus and The Word* New York 1934, 87 quoted in Gustafson *op.cit*, 72

present stands the present moment, the moment of decision."[162] As Keeling comments:

> All the guidelines of the past, including the biblical revelation, could contribute to the decision, so too could the promise of faith for the future. But the dynamic of Christian ethics was in fact that the knowledge of the past and the hope for the future converged on the present moment. The decision taken now would be the right decision.[163]

However Bultmann rejected the idea of certitude for response to the divine command.

> The past is abrograted, and the present is not to be viewed as a continuous development of the past; even the continuity of human experience is of no real significance as a confirming test. The person is in crisis; human freedom makes that inevitable...[164]

Gustafson refers to Bultmann's occasionalism and subjectivity in the moment of decision which he sees partly paralleled in Barth, but with a very different theological grounding.

> The command of God as it is given to us at each moment is always and only one possibility in every conceivable particularity of its inner and outer modality. It is always a single decision, including all the thoughts and words and movements in which we execute it... He wills us precisely the one thing and nothing else, and measures and judges us precisely by whether we do or do not do with the same precision the one thing that He so precisely wills.[165]

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[162] E Brunner: *The Divine Imperative* (London: Lutterworth, 1937), 122 quoted in M. Keeling: *The Foundations of Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 12
[163] Keeling: *ibid.*
[164] Gustafson *ibid.*, 72
[165] K Barth: *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 663-4, quoted in Gustafson *ibid.*, 72

This occasionalism is tempered by a law, not the natural law, but that of divine command in decision. Barth represented a mediating position between that of Bultmann and Bonhoeffer. The latter pointed to the presumption and arrogance of the human person attempting to know good and evil and represents a falling away from our unity with God, as in the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden. The human person overturns God's role of choosing and becomes the source of moral decisions rather than itself the object of the divine choice. The signs of our fall are the knowing and the choosing of good and evil from our own source,[166] as with the tree of knowledge. Bonhoeffer provides a curious dissonance with Kierkegaard and also represents a rejection of decisionism. Perhaps when it is reflected upon that the strongest expression of decisionism can be found in Jean Paul Sartre[167] then decisionism could be said to have reached its terminus.

The other trains departing on alternative platforms have been seen by Gustafson to be phenomenology and a 'sort of Kantian moral philosophy'[168] but he neglects the recovery of virtue. James Nelson, for one, suggests that the crucial step in moral decision making is not from context to rules or values but, in addition, to reflection upon motives, intentions and character.[169] Here is character, virtue and moral agency writ large. But what of fundamental option and decisionism? It is acknowledged in the present debate that fundamental option goes beyond mere particular choices but how does that square with the crisis or moment of decision?

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[166] cf. McClendon *ibid.*, 59
[167] *ibid.*, 57
[168] Gustafson *ibid.*, 74
[169] James Nelson: *Embodiment - An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1978), 127 quoted in C L Kammer: *Ethics and Liberation* (New York: Orbis, 1988)

The simple answer is that the occasionalism has to be modified, that the existential context for fundamental option requires close examination as does its grounding in freedom. Karl Rahner's formal existential ethics provide just such a possible resolution, particularly with regard to his work on fundamental option. Further, the importance of both fundamental freedom and social fundamental option (cf. 8) provide an antidote to the excesses of decisionism.

8.6.7 The Fundamental Option and Social Sin

Rahner's anthropology has attracted a critique from the left of a diminished social context for his anthropology, e.g., Metz (ref 7.4). Contemporary fundamental theology (especially that of Karl Rahner) has been influenced since Kant by the 'turn to the subject'. This has also influenced moral theology where a more personalist moral theology has become evident. This is not without its difficulties. Charles Curran writes that "the problems facing the world today are of such social complexity that a narrowly personalist approach will not be able to cope with them."[170] The insights of the Second Vatican Council, eg, the importance of biblical interpretation for the People of God, have contributed in part to this development of the resolution of the tension between the turn to the subject and the understanding of social sciences.

> Insights gained from Sacred Scripture will lead also to an ecclesial and social morality. Salvation history indicates that God has chosen a people to himself and calls the individual within community. Man's personal response to God never occurs apart from community and man cannot ignore this corporate dimension of his moral life.[171]

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[170] C. Curran: *Themes in Fundamental Moral Theology,* 156
[171] G.M. Regan: *New Trends in Moral Theology,* 42

The understanding of social sin has been developed in such documents of the magisterium and the Second Vatican Council as *Gaudium et Spes* and *Raeconciliatio et Paenitentia.* Karl Rahner, as a pre-eminent *peritus* of the Council, made his own contribution. For Rahner existence is *Mitmenschlichkeit* or co-existence. The human person exercises their freedom by categorical choice within history, albeit sinfully,[172] within a context of the sinful choices of **others.** As Duffy observes of Rahner: "The sin of each is the sin of all and the sin of all is the sin of each. The sinfulness of the human situation has a power exceeding the sum total of individual sins."[173] For Rahner, social sin is unavoidable.

However the concept of social sin has attracted its sceptics. Orlando Costas argues that the dichotomy between personal and social sin is both "senseless and false."[174] Further, James Hug claims that interest in a theology of social sin has diminished since the mid 1970's except in "social action circles and liberation theologians."[175] He claims confirmation for this by the decline in publication of articles on social sin since that time.[176]

Given this situation we are still faced with the predicament of the understanding of the relationship between fundamental option and social sin. It has been claimed that the theory of social sin and fundamental option have developed in isolation.[177] However there have been attempts to link the two. Boff sees the relationship between social sin and personal sin to be

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[172] FCF 106-116, cf. S Duffy: *The Dynamics of Grace, op.cit.*, 326
[173] Duffy, *ibid*
[174] M. O'Keefe" *What Are They Saying About Social Sin,* (New York: Paulist, 1990), 102
[175] *ibid,*. 102
[176] *ibid.*
[177] M. O'Keefe: "Social Sin and the Fundamental Option" *Irish Theological Quarterly* (1992) Vol 58, 85

understood as the fundamental option.[178] O'Keefe builds on Rahner's theory of fundamental option and advances an exposition of the understanding of the relationship between social sin and fundamental option which is seminal, insightful and sustained but which also may have its difficulties.[179] We now pursue this Rahnerian perspective of O'Keefe. It is predicated on an understanding of the social nature of freedom, knowledge and value.

> A fundamental option theory of sin might seem as susceptible to claims of individualism as earlier understandings of sin. This is not the case, however, where freedom, knowledge and value are understood in their appropriate social context.[180]

O'Keefe follows the Rahnerian approach of categorical and transcendental freedom and argues that with regard to social sin

> the social nature of knowledge and of freedom is clearly operative at the categorical level, where the person recognises value and chooses to act for values. This has obvious implications for fundamental option itself, for the exercise of transcendental freedom cannot be isolated from the social inter-relationships in which the person finds himself or herself.[181]

A striking illustration of fundamental option and social context is found in the contribution of Jean Vanier and the experience of the L'Arche communities. A carer in a l'Arche community, John Guido,[182] has asked whether carers are able to take serious risks in allowing people with

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[178] *ibid.*, 85
[179] *ibid,* 87ff
[180] *ibid.*
[181] *ibid.*, 88
[182] John Guido: "To Go Further than just Listening" *Letters of L'Arche* No 92, June-August 1997, 14

cognitive disabilities "to make real and informed choices for their own lives..."?[183] Institutionalised people have very little choice, how did L'Arche cope with this question? Guido gives an account of a woman with a cognitive disability who was drawn to a choice that was 'clearly destructive'. The L'Arche community gave professional competent team support with 'loving guidance' that did not vitiate her autonomy of choice. "What happened then was transformational."[184] Guido relates that:

> because we had given support but not taken away her choice, this woman discovered herself in a whole new light - her self-esteem strengthened. She needs support to make her own informed choices yet she is capable of making them; she also needs support to deal with the consequences of her choices. Yet to really know that we wanted her to be free and would walk with her whatever the consequence - even if she had chosen the clanger - was an experience not merely of her rights, but that she was loved and valued.[185]

This example of L'Arche underscores the social context of choice fundamental option and transcendental freedom and, happily, does not concern itself with social sin.

However to return to O'Keefe, he argues that the relationship between the fundamental option and social sin

> is *rooted* in the relationship between the transcendental and categorical levels of freedom. Just as categorical choices influence and affect the fundamental option without being identified with it, so too social sin influences and affects the fundamental option without determining it.[186]

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[183] *ibid*, 15
[184] *ibid*
[185] *ibid.*
[186] *ibid.*, 92

The end result of this is that social sin creates and permeates our environment and thereby makes it more difficult to make good categorical choices with the result that the positive fundamental option becomes "more difficult to integrate and strengthen."[187]

Although O'Keefe refers to the Lonerganian notion of 'bias' in his treatment of social sin, he does not refer to Fuchs or to Häring's psychological approach and in this sense is also limited. Further, Georg Langmeyer argues contra to O'Keefe and transcendentalism, that "the concept of decision in its existential sense, which is also called the 'fundamental option', carries within it the tendency to withdraw theological statements on the human person from empirical enquiry."[188] He argues that the fundamental option between faith and unbelief is not made outside *praxis* but in and with *praxis,* for example, the fundamental option in the time of the early church was also a decision for martyrdom. In effect, he argues that the fundamental option "must remain related to the situation that is limited with regard to time and space."[189] O'Keefe's account is a pioneering and ground breaking one, and will necessarily benefit from scrutiny by dialogue partners but its relevance is that O'Keefe is dependent on a Rahnerian transcendental approach, with, in addition, the development of the Rahnerian categorical notion of Social Freedom (see 8.3.2).

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[187] cf *ibid.*, 93
[188] George Langemeyer: "Decision" in W. Beinert & F. Schüssler Frorenza (eds) *Handbook of Catholic Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 165-6
[189] *ibid*

8.7 Rahner and Some Issues in the Contemporary Debate on Fundamental Option.

8.7.1 Present Status of the Fundamental Option within the Church and Among Theologians.

Given that Rahner has been described as "the quiet mover of the Roman Catholic Church"[190] and the "Father of the Catholic Church in the twentieth century"[191], what is the present status within the Church and among theologians of one of his more palpable contributions to the post-conciliar church, the fundamental option? Is it recognised in church teaching? Is it supported by the great majority of theologians? The question of its status is at the centre of the debate on the fundamental option and, in the literature there are a number of answers to this question, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive or contradictory. They are:

- It has been claimed that the fundamental option has been "adopted by the magisterium."[192]

- Although McCormick argues that the fundamental option is "all but taken for granted" by the majority of theologians,[193] there are significant exceptions. For example, Carlo Caffarra in his introductory text on moral theology "Living in Christ" studiously avoids any reference to the fundamental option, while Germain Grisez refers to the "so-called

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[190] K. Rahner: *I Remember, op.cit.*, 2
[191] *ibid*
[192] J. Neuner & J. Dupuis: *The Christian Faith*, 667
[193] R.A. McCormick: *The Critical Calling*, 174

fundamental option".[194] It would appear that there is not complete unanimity on the status of the fundamental option among theologians.

- If the fundamental option, while not enjoying unanimous support, has acquired majority support amongst theologians and has been adopted by the magisterium, there remains the difficulty of what is the status of the objections to fundamental option by that minority of theologians opposed to the fundamental option. Are they in breach of the magisterium? Keily,[195] a supporter of the fundamental option, argues that the fundamental option is "legitimate but inferential", while Häring claims that it is "not yet integrated".[196] It would appear that a fuller understanding of the fundamental option is required by theologians and as such is a legitimate exercise under the purview of the magisterium.

- Moral theologians of the Eastern and Reformed Churches appear to be in near total ignorance of the theory of the fundamental option. This near silence from non Catholic traditions in moral theology leads on to the question of 8.7.2, namely why is the theory of fundamental option confined to the Roman Catholic Church.

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[194] G. Grisez: *Beyond the New Morality*, 31
[195] B. Keily: *Psychology and Moral Theology*, 246
[196] B. Häring: Sin in "Post Vatican Ii Theology" 105 in J.A. Selling (ed): *Personalist Morals*, 105

8.7.2 *Nulla Prima Optio Extra Ecclesiam Romanam* - Why is the Fundamental Option confined to Roman Catholic Theology?

In the course of this study no evidence has come to light that any substantial work on the fundamental option has been done by any writer from any Christian tradition other than the Roman Catholic. Even with the considerable recent debate on *Veritatis Splendor* there have been, on the one hand, passing negative references, such as Oliver O'Donovan, an Anglican Evangelical, referring to the 'absolutizing' of the fundamental option[197], or Stanley Hauerwas' (a self described High Church Mennonite) criticism of fundamental option via fundamental freedom, that is, it comes straight out of German idealism and is neither fundamental nor on option[198], and on the other, positive references, such as the Anglican moral theologian Dunstan McKee who refers to the 'bowdlerised' treatment of fundamental option in *Veritatis Splendor* which "gets the concept of 'fundamental option' so completely wrong, that very little can be salvaged from the argument."[199] This near silence is curious for a number of reasons.

First, in the Anglo-Catholic tradition of moral theology (which largely paralleled Roman Catholic moral theology), two of the principal building blocks for fundamental option were already in place. Thomism, of the

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[197] Oliver O'Donovan: "A Summons to Reality" in John Wilkins (ed): *Considering Veritatis Splendor* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 43

[198] Stanley Hauerwas "Veritatis Splendor: Why the Pope is Right" ACU Research Seminar, North Sydney, 11 am 29 June 1995

[199] Dunstan McKee: "Truth and Authority: *Veritatis Splendor* and The Moral Quest" *Colloquium* 29/1 (1997), 32

Anglo-Catholic variety, held sway in the writings of Anglo-Catholic moral theologians such as Kenneth Kirk[200] and R.C. Mortimer.[201] In addition, in the confessors' manuals for Anglo Catholic private confession[202] there was understandably a concern with venial and mortal sin, albeit with a variety of solutions. However there is no evidence available that either an independent discovery of fundamental option was made, or that the developments within the Roman communion were taken on board. A striking example is found in the work of John Macquarrie, possibly the most pre-eminent Anglican theologian of the post conciliar period. He has been actively involved in ecumenical activity[203] and has confessed that "among contemporary theologians I have found Karl Rahner the most helpful."[204] He is aware of the contribution of Rahner's formal existential ethics[205], and of transcendental Thomism and its anthropological weighting.[206] Yet this proximity to post conciliar Catholic theology and in particular to Karl Rahner does not appear to have led to engagement with the fundamental option. The most striking example of this is that, as editor of *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (and also associated with *A New Dictionary of Christian Ethics*[207] edited with James Childress), Macquarrie seemed oblivious to fundamental option. A contribution by Charles Curran, on Roman Catholic Moral Theology in *A New Dictionary* does mention fundamental option but there is no further mention of it in any other articles. This student finds this silence perplexing in the extreme.

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[200] cf. K.E. Kirk: *Some Principles of Moral Theology* (London: Longmans, 1946)
[201] R.C. Mortimer: *The Elements of Moral Theology* (London: A & C Black,1953)
[202] cf. F.G. Belton: *A Manual for Confessors* (London: Mowbray, 1949) *passim*, but especially 50-55
[203] cf. His contribution to the Ecumenical Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary
[204] *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1977), viii
[205] J. Macquarrie: *Three Issues in Ethics* (London: SCM, 1970), 41
[206] *ibid*, 50
[207] *A Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (London: SCM, 1967)

Second, there has been considerable dialogue between the Lutheran and Roman communions, particularly with regard to the doctrine of Justification by Faith in *Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue VII*.[208] In this ecumenical essay in reconciliation, Avery Dulles, from the Catholic side, explicitly refers to fundamental option and to Rahner's concepts of fundamental freedom and supernatural existential but this appears to have been lost in the drifting ecumenical sand dunes[209], despite Gilbert Meilaender's observation that the fundamental option bears many similarities to the Reformation language of faith,[210] and despite the call for another critical principle to justification by faith alone in the search for Lutheran-Roman Catholic unity.

Why is it that Christian ethics in the Protestant tradition has not adopted the fundamental option? The fundamental option has been referred to as an act of faith[211] and perhaps this semblance of *Auto da fe* may have deterred Protestants. On a less gothic level it may be that the great Reformation doctrine of justification by faith is too strongly fixed in traditional protestant theology and that the concerns of mainstream Roman Catholic moral theology such as fundamental option are considered irrelevant by less traditional Protestant ethicists. This may be reinforced by a distrust of a preoccupation with ethical decision, in short with all that is represented by decisionism and also conversion (see 8.6.6 and 8.7.6), however this is to ignore the richness of the approach of fundamental option. This may also be reflected in the relative lack of interest in Rahner (and also Lonergan and

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[208] ed. H.G. Anderson, T. Austin Murphy and J.A. Burgess, (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985)
[209] *ibid* Avery Dulles: "Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology" pp 264-267
[210] Gilbert Meilaender: "Veritatis Splendor - Reopening Some Questions of the Reformation" *Journal of Religious Ethics* 23:2 (1995) p 233
[211] cf. *Veritatis Splendor 66*

Transcendental Thomism generally) by Protestant theologians, Macquarrie, and the critiques of Lindbeck and Milbank notwithstanding.

8.7.3 The Fundamental Option and Sacramental Life

The origins of the theory of fundamental option lie in the theological issues surrounding one particular **sacrament**, the sacrament of penance, that is the problem of the distinction between mortal and venial sin for the confessor. What is of considerable relevance here is that the early church attached much significance to *mia metanoia* (one conversion, or fundamental option), that is, lapsed Christians were admitted only once to the sacrament of penance. This was linked to the prevailing view that by the sacrament of baptism the Christian was compelled to embark on a new life, in short, baptism represented a *metanoia*, a conversion, a fundamental option. The question then arises, how far did the *mia metanoia* represent a second fundamental option. Further, if it is false to regard the transition from the early church's system of penance to the enclosed confessional system of the Catholic tradition today as a distinction between 'public' and 'private' penance,[212] how should we regard the sacrament of penance as it is practised today? Is it a form of fundamental option itself? If the absolution is given for a serious sin, eg, absolution for a convicted murderer prior to execution, does the reception of the absolution constitute a fundamental option? Has the wheel turned full circle, does the presence or absence of fundamental option in the heart of the penitent depend upon the seriousness of the sin and if so how do we then determine the seriousness of the sin if a fundamental option has not been made up until the absolution? Or, if the

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[212] S Richter: *Metanoia - Christian Penance and Confession* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 42

fundamental option has been made unconsciously, eg, the penitent has previously committed a murder and *ipso facto* has made a fundamental option, does the reception of absolution constitute a conscious fundamental option? However, the question of the validity of an unconscious fundamental option has been discussed at 4.4, rather, the further consideration that emerges is does a fully conscious fundamental option (if that is possible) have a different status to that of a fundamental option where its conscious aspect is somehow vitiated? Just as in English criminal law *mens rea* is required for manslaughter to become murder, does a completely unconscious fundamental option have a lesser status to that of a conscious fundamental option, is it in fact less fundamental? If a sacrament is so constituted that full consciousness is one of its attributes (such as reception of the host, exchanging of marriage vows, ordination, confirmation, reconciliation but not baptism or anointing) are lesser sacraments in these terms such as baptism, fully restored by a social fundamental option, ie, the faith of the Church?

Further, the theological framework that surrounds the fundamental option includes the important and unavoidable concept of grace, in particular the mediation or otherwise of grace to the moral subject. The sacraments also mediate grace. The important question here is how is the fundamental option related to the sacraments? Is the fundamental option brought about or reinforced by the sacraments? If a conservative moral theologian such as William May can invoke Thomas Aquinas insofar as that even the unbaptised are able by virtue of 'their power of self determining free choice and with the help of God's unfailing grace, to accept God and the law of love or to repudiate him and his law in their first fully human act of self

determining free choice',[213] what does this say of fundamental option with regard to sacraments? Is the reception of (or the orientation of the subject to) the sacraments, brought about by the fundamental option? Are death bed confessions and anointing the only sacramental perspectives on the fundamental option? The immediate answer is that the sacramental life is somehow involved with the fundamental option but there is little elaboration in the literature. The relation of the fundamental option to the sacraments has been largely ignored, particularly in view of the 'strategic' role of all seven sacraments in the moral life of the subject, especially with regard to life-events.

However, there is one particular example of sacramental life that is available to us that can provide some interesting questions and some even more interesting answers. The rite of exorcism is not a sacrament, but it does invoke sacramentals and has a biblical basis, even if its status is subject to considerable theological scepticism brought about by Hollywood hyperbole and other distractions.

Two preliminary comments need to be made. For the present purpose, there will be no engagement with the question of nature and dimension of the demonic and the diabolical, but it will simply be taken as a given for the rite of exorcism. Second, possibly the most fruitful *entrée* to the study of exorcism is via the study of the psychology of evil but again for the purposes of this study of exorcism, it will be taken as given.

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[213] W. May: *An Introduction to Moral Theology* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 1994), 161 cf *ST* Ia IIae 89,6

A very useful introduction to this subject can be found in M Scott Peck: *People of the Lie*[214]. Here, Peck attempts to understand the psychology of evil, in particular its manifestation in possession and its cure by exorcism.

The exorcism follows a set procedure but the critical moment has been referred to as the 'expulsion'[215] which can be seen as being predicated on fundamental option, and also social fundamental option. Peck relates that:

> I cannot fully explain what happens at this moment, but I can state that the role of the exorcist in this moment is the least important. The desperate prayers of the team are more important. These prayers are for God or Christ to come to the rescue, and each time I had a sense that God did just that. As I said earlier, it is God that does the exorcising.
>
> But let me amend that human freewill is basic. It takes precedence over healing. Even God cannot heal a person who does not want to be healed. At the moment of expulsion both these patients voluntarily took the crucifix, held it to their chests and prayed for deliverance. Both chose that moment to cast their lots with God.[216]

It can be said of Peck's account (and he would agree) that one swallow (or even two) does not make a summer, but he alludes also to other evidence, in particular the work by Malachi Martin, *Hostage to the Devil.*[217] The value in Martin's work is not just the provision of the corroborating empirical evidence, but Martin, as a conservative, corroborates the work of Peck, a liberal. Further, and most importantly, with regard to exorcism, Martin, as a conservative, uses the very term fundamental option. Martin writes of the process of possession:

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[214] M Scott Peck: *People of the Lie* (London: Random House, 1990)
[215] *ibid,* 225
[216] *ibid,* 225
[217] M Martin: *Hostage to the Devil* (London: Hutchinson, 1988)

> For all the blandishments of success and happiness, for all the visions of special freedoms that may have led to this point, once control is yielded, virtually all personal freedom ceases from that point on. This is the most profound personal choice that can be made - significantly, the option to relinquish all freedom of choice rests upon that very freedom guaranteed by God as long as the person chooses to be free. The choice can only be made *by* the person; it can never be made *for* him. If the fundamental option [*sic*] is made to relinquish that freedom of will, then possession has been accomplished in its most essential and conclusive step. The simultaneous decision is to reject God and Jesus and the humanness Jesus made possible.[218]

It is significant that in these case studies of Martin all the ingredients of the fundamental option are in plain view, the role of categorical choice, of core freedom and of grace. However, with regard to fundamental option and sacrament it could be argued that these case studies are not valid because exorcism is a rite and not a sacrament, it is *ex opere operantis* rather than *ex opere operato*. The simple rejoinder is that sacramentals (prayers, blessings, bible, etc) are used in exorcism. Their role is limited precisely because exorcism is an election, there is no guarantee that the fundamental option for God will prevail, that the rite will be effective. As Peck noted, the success of the exorcism depended on the choice made by the possessed. This needs to be qualified insofar as, *ex opere operantis,* the exorcist is required to use both his office and his skills to bring about the successful exorcism in collaboration with the rest of the team. In this sense the possessed could be said to exercise a social fundamental option. Martin presents a curious variation on this theme. He recounts an exorcism where the exorcist was aware that the possessed had undergone an incomplete baptism. He resolved to rebaptise the possessed during the next stage of the

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[218] *ibid,* 439-40

exorcism. However, before the recommencement of the baptism, as Martin explains:

> Being relatively free, then and not out of contact with the exorcist, the victim of the familiar must *be active* in his own exorcism. He, in fact, must be the final source of his own liberation by accepting the healing and salvation from God. And, in this sense, the exorcee in such a case is the one who enables the exorcist to complete his work.
>
> Mark [the exorcist] spent quite a lot of time explaining to Jamsie [the possessed] this peculiarity of his forthcoming exorcism. Jamsie, like many others, had never reflected on his freedom. Free will was just a vague and abstract term for him. It took Mark a good deal of explaining to get Jamsie to understand that he had to exercise an option. This was the basic option [*sic*] of *free will*. Mark could only indicate to Jamsie *when* he should make a tremendous effort of will. Only Mark would be in a position to know the precise moment at which Jamsie could most effectively make that choice.[219]

So in these circumstances there is the invocation of a sacrament, namely baptism, which is *ex opere operato*, but also within the context of a rite which looked to the prevailing of the fundamental option. For baptism the possessed would be subject to prevenient grace as well as fundamental option. (By way of aside and to end the suspense, all's well that ends well. In this case study of Jamsie the exorcism was successful.)

It becomes apparent in the course of these accounts of Peck and Martin, that the rite of exorcism can provide a useful *entrée* for the study of fundamental option and sacrament with the following considerations:

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[219] *ibid*, 302

- The components of the fundamental option are on plain view viz: the sovereignty of God and his grace, the role of the will and freedom (both categorical and fundamental freedom), the role of the supportive community of the People of God (the exorcism team) as social fundamental option.

- The nature of the moral subject is also on plain view. There are references to 'core personality' and the distinction between on the one hand, multiple personality disorder (MPD) with a number of personalities jostling for control, and on the other, in the case of clear possession, a core personality that is aware of the impact of an alien entity that is malevolent and threatens the orientation to the good.

- The moral orientation of the moral subject is on plain view. Peck describes the patients as potentially 'saintly' and of great courage, and further, suspects that their goodness may somehow be implicated in their possession. What does this reveal for the fundamental option? Is the fundamental option therapeutic in the sense that it restores this core personality? There is also the consideration that there is a prior moral orientation which is superseded by the fundamental option.

- With regard to sacrament, with the rite of exorcism the fundamental option is made, *ipso facto*, in an ecclesiological setting, insofar as

    i) sacramentals are used;

    ii) sacraments may also be used;

iii)the rite is performed in the midst of the people of God, ie, people who are qualified by their faith, their love and their hope, and in certain cases by office, who exercise a social fundamental option.

If a sacrament is an efficacious sign of grace, correspondingly, a successful exorcism is certainly an efficacious sign of grace, but if unsuccessful, it certainly is not. This is a striking example of the principle of *ex opere operantis*.

What did Rahner have to say of the role of sacraments *vis-a-vis* fundamental option? It has been noted that from a Rahnerian perspective the understanding of fundamental option "calls for a reconsideration of the manner in which baptism and penance can be said to justify their recipients."[220] It is argued that baptism and penance are perceived as 'symbolic realizations'[221] of grace in conversion in an historical context. It is bi-directional. The orientation of the recipient posits the sign, ie, the sacrament, while the sign strengthens this orientation. Rahner claims:

> Thus this concrete process of self fulfillment is itself all along and in all cases a 'real symbol' under which the individual brings to fruition this basic attitude of his, his *option fondamentale* [*sic*].[222]

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[220] A. Dulles: "Justification in Contemporary Catholic Theology" *Lutherans and Catholic in Dialogue VII* (ed) H.G. Anderson *et alia* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 267

[221] *ibid*

[222] K. Rahner: "Considerations on the Active Role of the Person in the Sacramental Event" *TI* XIV p 177 quoted in Dulles *op.cit.*, 267

Rahner has clearly linked the fundamental option to orientation for the sacrament, invoking in this case his concept of *real symbol.* Elsewhere, Rahner sees a sacrament as a basic act (read fundamental option).[223] He also deals with the question of *ex opere operato* and orientation (disposition). It is worth following Rahner at length on this question.

> The freedom of God's spirit distributing grace even in the sacrament according to his sovereign will, acts precisely (and only) through the fact that by his prevenient grace he is the Lord and giver of the disposition and its measure... On this basis, then it is at once evident that God freely disposes of the grace of the sacrament and its measure at least in this way, if the grace of the *opus operatum* depends for its measure on the disposition of the recipient of the sacrament.[224]

He continues to examine the nature of this orientation and free decision:

> Man always acts, in the particular spiritual, supernaturally elevated decision of his own by which as an adult he receives the sacrament, out of the totality of what he personally and supernaturally is and has become. And to the extent that he is a truly free and resolutely responsible being here and now, this totality of his intellectual, moral, supernatural condition is present in his action. If not explicit and conceptually conscious, it is at least there. The spiritual history of a human being is not a series of acts merely juxtaposed on the thread of a neutral, chronological time, all proceeding from a subject who remains unaffected in himself, and credited to his account in a purely juridical sense. Every spiritually free act disposes of the whole free subject... and always springs from the totality of his life

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[223] FCF, 417

[224] K. Rahner and A. Häussling: *The Celebration of the Eucharist* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 68-69

> history... if a man is acting at all with the spiritual freedom which involves his taking responsibility before God for this act as decisive for salvation (and he must act in this way when receiving a sacrament) he cannot avoid acting as the whole person he has become in the course of his whole history.[225]

As a final comment to this examination of fundamental option and sacrament Rahner sees the sacraments of both ordination and marriage as significant life events. He argues that they are decisive *existentiell* moments in the life history of the human person with regard to their history of salvation. They are also 'basic acts', i.e., fundamental option.[226] Rahner has not only yet again established the link between fundamental option and sacrament but he has also raised the question of fundamental option as life event. We now turn to this subject.

8.7.4 The Chronological Position of the fundamental option as a Life Event

There are a variety of understandings of the chronological position of the fundamental option in the life of the moral subject, viz:[227]

Rahner	initial fundamental option = 20 - 25 years of age
Fransen	fundamental option = preliminary, as yet immature groundwork
Maritain	fundamental option = definitive decision

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[225] *ibid*, 72-73
[226] FCF, 417
[227] cf. J. Fuchs: *Human Values and Christian Morality*, 92ff

Fuchs	fundamental option = mature act of self determination (but grows and deepens and can be reversed)
Boros	final fundamental option = mystery of death

(There are also further variations).

Rahner is only too aware of the impact of different stages of life on the human person.

> Each phase of life (childhood, youth, etc, and their different characteristics) has its own irreplaceable originality and hence its own role to play: to raise itself to the next phase and to integrate itself there as an abiding element. With this is set before us an eminently religious task, for the individual .... as well as the educator, and above all for the theologian. The task is to work out the differences which the various phases of life produce in their existential relationship to Christian truths and to the individual moral goal-commandments.[228]

As noted above, Rahner sees the sacraments of both ordination and marriage as significant life events and argues that they are decisive *existentiell* moments in the life history of a human person with regard to their history of salvation. They are also fundamental options.[229] Similarly, Häring sees great decisions that manifest or deeply affect the fundamental option, however the examples he gives of 'great decisions' are interesting insofar as although they are decisions of an adult life, their chronological position is not necessarily one of maturity, viz adult baptism, confirmation, marriage vows, vows of celibacy, choice of profession[230] and further, they

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[228] K. Rahner and H Vorgrimler: "Lebensphasen" in *Kleines theologisches Wörterbuck*, 220 quoted in J. Glaser *op.cit.*
[229] FCF, 417
[230] Häring: *op.cit.*, 189

are mostly sacraments. By way of extension Gaffney points out that once moral maturity is reached the fundamental option cannot be avoided or be definitely postponed, although he gives no reasons for this assumption. Again, although in *Catechesi Tradendae* the link between youthful decision and fundamental option is made there is no examination of how 'progress through life' brings this about.

Perhaps the most critical area of this issue is that of the final fundamental option. Gaffney refers to the final option as eschatologically decisive, which appears tautological, but again there is no hint of chronology in this. Oscar Wilde may have exercised a death bed final fundamental option but is it possible to exercise a final fundamental option at the age of twenty and still pursue a blameless life until receiving a telegram from the Queen before expiring at the age of 100. The whole issue bears a curious resemblance to that of death bed baptism in the early church, *à la* Constantine, in that to avoid penance, one was not baptised until death was imminent, and so avoided the risk of committing sin. In this case, the sacrament of baptism becomes the *deus ex machina* for the problem of the final fundamental option. How does the fundamental option become the final fundamental option? Peschke holds that "as long as man lives he can still repent. The final decision is only made at the moment of death. Schoonenberg holds the opinion that this decision is taken in the moment of the transition from time to eternity."[231] This is a very vexed area. There is a touch of the nebulous to these conclusions. There seems to be no convincing argument as to how the fundamental option becomes the final fundamental option. Grisez is only too *au fait* with the problem. "There is no basis in experience for thinking that people make or are in any condition

[231] C.H. Peschke: *Christian Ethics* Vol 1, 230

to make a choice at the moment of death."[232] He sees the real question as how mortal sin can be repented during this life.[233]

Fuchs is able to cast some light on the problem when he writes that "for at the end of the road of genuinely free acts, there remains only the sinner as he or she is. At this point, in the further depths of the person the fundamental option becomes a final option."[234] It would appear that Fuchs is more conversant with the problems of eschatology, whether imminent or realized eschatology. Fuchs may have pointed to a solution to the problem and may have also solved the problem of distinction of levels. At the apex of the hierarchy of genuinely free acts, the fundamental option becomes the final fundamental option.

8.7.5 The Nature and Typology of the Fundamental Option

It has been remarked that "much confusion" surrounds the actual meaning of fundamental option,[235] and that although as a concept it is 'legitimate', it is 'necessarily inferential', with the consequence that in itself this is "a reality which is not easily judged."[236] Finnis is more pointed when he asks where is the evidence for the fundamental option.[237] This is an issue as in the Rahnerian or transcendental account of the fundamental option, it is a matter of debate whether the fundamental option is not available cognitively to the moral subject because the fundamental option, *per se*, is not categorical but transcendental. Nonetheless, it is a weakness in the

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[232] Grisez: *op.cit.*, 446
[233] G Grisez: *op.cit.*, 445
[234] J. Fuchs: *Tablet op.cit.*
[235] Bohr: *ibid.*
[236] B. Kiely: *Psychology and Moral Theology*, 246
[237] Finnis: *op.cit.*, 142

transcendental account which Grisez attempts to exploit at considerable length,[238] as we have seen above (8.5.6).

However there is a more fundamental issue; is the fundamental option a general orientation of life or is it a particular very serious decision? It can be argued that these are not mutually exclusive in that, in particular, they may both determine our essential moral and religious situation, and that further, in the transcendental account of the fundamental option, the transcendental needs to be accomplished through the categorical. Nonetheless it is an area that is unclear and has made possible such nuances as that of O'Connell who asserts that the fundamental stance of the moral subject is more important than the fundamental option.[239] McDonagh also is sceptical of the 'grand dramatic choice' and opts for the gradual, historical mainly implicit quality of the 'basic moral orientation."[240] This pluralism of understanding of the fundamental option can be partially explained by the different typologies of the fundamental option that are current:

I. Johnstone's typology[241]
   - A. Transcendental (Rahner)
   - B. Existentialist/personalist (Thomist)
   - C. Biblical/metanoia

II. O'Keefe[242] advances a slightly different typology viz:

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[238] G. Grisez: *The Way of the Lord Jesus,* 31
[239] O'Connell *op.cit.*
[240] E. McDonagh: *The Moral Subject,* 12ff
[241] B. Johnstone: 'Fundamental Option' *The New Dictionary of Theology,* 407
[242] M. O'Keefe: "Social Sin and Fundamental Option" in *Irish Theological Quarterly* Vol 58 No 2, 86

A. Transcendental freedom (Rahner);

B. Thomistic/God as ultimate end (Fuchs);

C. Biblical/depth psychology (Häring).

III. Curran[243] sees a fourfold typology:

A. transcendental freedom;

B. Thomistic ultimate end;

C. personalist understanding of grace;

D. biblical notion of sin.

IV. Grisez has a twofold typology

A. Fundamental Freedom (Rahner, Fuchs, Glaser, Fransen, O'Connell);

B. Basic Committment (Flick, Alszeghey, Häring)

These typologies are not mutually exclusive within themselves, nor with one another but they do compound the difficulties in the understanding of the fundamental option. It should be noted that the Rahnerian/Transcendental Freedom typology appears as pre-eminent.

There is also the problem of the restriction of fundamental option to identification with one particular concept. For example, Häring equates the fundamental option with biblical concept of the heart of man,[244] but he also writes that if "it is active in love, faith is truly a fundamental option."[245] He has the support of Grisez. For the latter "Faith will be treated as the

[243] Curran: *New Look at Christian Morality,* 204f
[244] B. Häring: *Faithful and Free in Christ,* 185
[245] *ibid.,* 197

fundamental option of the Christian Life,"[246] and again "Faith has moral implications because it is the fundamental option by which one enters into the new covenant."[247] An unlikely supporter is Gula who also states that "the act of faith is the fundamental option."[248]

All this leads to the question is the fundamental option simply the act of faith? Notwithstanding considerable biblical support for the positive affirmation of this question it leads to the further question 'Is the fundamental option not only act of faith but also heart of man and basic intention and exercising of core freedom, or none of these?' What criterion are we to employ with these difficulties? To put it simply, this is one of the major unresolved issues of the fundamental option. However see Section 10.2 for the relevance of this for the link with virtue.

8.7.6 Fundamental Option and Conversion

Conversion is a concept readily accepted in biblical theology, in systematic theology and indeed in the psychology and sociology of religion, yet this is not the case for fundamental option. Conversion is a concept readily accepted in both Catholic, Anglican, Reformed and Orthodox theological circles, yet this is not the case for the fundamental option. However there is the following curiosity. The fundamental option at times is almost indistinguishable from conversion however what is it that sets it apart from conversion, or can they be construed as essentially the same concept?

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[246] Grisez *op.cit.*, 224
[247] *ibid*, 739
[248] Gula *Reason Informed by Faith op.cit.*, 79

Fundamental option and conversion have similar biblical antecedents. Rahner explicitly identifies fundamental option with *metanoia.*[249] Richter notes that *metanoia* can be rendered not only as conversion, but also contrition, doing penance and a change of heart or view.[250] Put simply, the biblical basis for both conversion and fundamental option has a very wide orbit. There is a need for greater theological precision.

One approach to the problem is to consider the definition of fundamental option and see how that squares with conversion. Kelly, *à propos* of Rahner, has defined the fundamental option thus:

> The dynamism of the self's inner core through which people are conditioned in full freedom by God's graced presence to make the choices in which they both find expression of who they are and give meaning to their life.[251]

From this definition it can be hazarded that the fundamental option is concerned with identity, freedom, grace, decision, ethics and teleology/life purpose. Does conversion have a similar constitution?

In a comprehensive volume on conversion edited by H Newton Malony and Samuel Southard[252], a contemporary and wide ranging perspective on conversion is offered. One possible way ahead in the understanding of conversion is by inductive procedures. The psychophysiology of mental life may reveal clues to conversion in such phenomenon as epilepsy or mystical trance. Different models of cognition may contribute to changes in

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[249] *Christian at the Crossroads* in Lehmann and Raffelt *op.cit.*, 102
[250] S Richter: *Metanoia* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1966), 11
[251] G. Kelly: *Karl Rahner* (Minneapolic: Fortress, 1992), 45
[252] *Handbook of Religious Conversion* (Birmingham: Alabama Religious Education Press, 1992)

identity that result from conversion as may models of memory.[253] In addition, perception, emotion and behaviour may have equal explanatory power to cognition, insofar as they are influenced by different psychological approaches to conversion such as the psycho analytic, the transpersonal or the holistic.[254]

Psychological studies on conversion suffer from the emphasis on the personal and interior, conversely sociological studies suffer from the opposite, for sociology has no means to deal with the supernatural. Nevertheless a variety of sociological approaches to conversion can have considerable explanatory power such as the 'strain theory' which illustrates the need for the marginalised to satisfy their social anxiety by conversion.[255] This may be augmented by approaches from social anthropology.

From the perspective of the biblical theology of conversion it is argued that it is apparent that there is one dominant biblical theme of 'transformation', especially in the New Testament. Conversion has the meaning of 'life transformation'. Its context is the encounter with the divine initiative of creation and redemption as well as human response to guiding spirit and salvation in Christ.[256]

From the perspective of systematic theology there are different confessional viewpoints. A Catholic viewpoint argues that the paradigm of Augustine's *Confessions* reveals that conversion is 'the turning of the individual heart to

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[253] *ibid,* 5, 147-158
[254] *ibid,* 5, 159-177
[255] *ibid,* 5, 178-191
[256] *ibid.*, 41-54, 93-107

God.'[257] However the Augustinian model was tempered by scholastic metaphysics with the result that the contemporary Catholic model of conversion is that of the unifying theme of the 'mystical body of Christ operating through the Church.'[258] A mainstream Protestant perspective has to contend with a diversity of approaches but its centre of gravity would most probably be conversion as the calling of the elect to receive salvation.

Malony and Southard conclude that

> conversion as known in the past is now the exception, rather than the rule, in religious life. Our conviction is that while the form may change, the substance does not. No doubt there is a constant need for religion to adapt itself to change. However there is a parallel imperative for religion to continue to call persons to alter their lives in light of transcendent truth.[259]

What is of considerable interest for our present purpose is that nowhere in the 311 pages of their book do Malony and Southard or their colleagues refer to fundamental option. This demonstrates the chasm between mainstream writing on such religious topics as conversion and the relatively narrow theological purview of fundamental option. Part of the reason for this chasm may be that contemporary Catholic writing has focused on the fundamental option to the detriment of conversion, and vice versa for Protestant writing. Charles Curran (in dialogue with Bernard Lonergan) gives several reasons for this Catholic neglect of conversion.[260] There has been the lack of a biblical orientation, the stress on universal norms at the

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[257] *ibid.*, 4, 108-122
[258] *ibid.*
[259] *ibid.*, 6
[260] Charles Curran: "Dialogue with Bernard Lonergan: The Concept of Conversion" *Catholic Moral Theology in Dialogue* (Notre Dame: U.P., 1976), 222

expense of existential encounter, and the influence of the manualist tradition. Curran also stresses that traditional Catholic theology had a limited understanding of the nature/grace relationship which contributed to a limited, overly optimistic, understanding of sin. In Curran's opinion, it was Bernard Häring who 'more than any other Catholic theologian has developed the concept of conversion'.[261] (By way of aside, what then of fundamental option and Rahner?). Häring argued that the manualist understanding of sin had to be superseded, from an understanding of an individual, external act to that of relationship with God neighbour, self and world.[262] In this enterprise Häring also linked up with the Lutheran anthropology of *simul justus et peccator.* Curran also notes that 'Häring's notion of continual conversion explains in a dynamic way the reality generally referred to as venial sin.'[263] Curran only seemed to refer to Häring's earlier work *The Law of Christ*[264] first published in 1959. He appeared unaware of Häring's later work *Free and Faithful in Christ*[265] where a section of a chapter is devoted to "conversion in the light of the fundamental option".[266] Here Häring argues that it is only those with a negative fundamental option who are in need of radical conversion. Ongoing conversion is necessary for everyone else.[267] The ongoing conversion which is necessary for all of us is the effective 'radiation' of the fundamental option or, rather, of the 'justification by grace' into all our faculties and attitudes.[268] So Häring has established an intimate connection between fundamental option and conversion. There is considerable overlap

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[261] *ibid.*, 225
[262] *ibid.*
[263] *ibid.*, 226
[264] *The Law of Christ* 3 Vols. (Cork: Mercier, 1961)
[265] *Free and Faithful in Christ* 3 Vols. (Homebush: St Paul, 1979)
[266] *ibid.*, 215-217
[267] *ibid.*, 215
[268] Curran *op.cit,* 226

here between Rahner and Häring. This is echoed in the more recent work of Timothy O'Connell and others who simply equate fundamental option with conversion.[269]

However Curran also noted that Protestant theology was "more open" to the concept of conversion,[270] because it has a more biblical orientation, and is more aware of human sinfulness. There is a need in the study of conversion for an integrated ecumencial approach that draws on the various branches of the psychological and social sciences. However this begs the original question, are fundamental option and conversion identical? The short answer is that although they have some features in common, eg, decision, grace, they are not identical, eg, conversion is not as concerned with philosophical issues such as ethics and freedom and has a more inductive approach to identity. To compound the problem Rahner's understanding of faith has been seen to be very close to Lonergan's understanding of conversion. We are left with the question, is conversion the *via media* between fundamental option and virtue?[271]

8.8 Conclusion

Rahner's use of the term *Grundentscheidung,* normally translated 'fundamental option', could carry a wider meaning, such as 'total self understanding' or 'disposiiton of the person as a whole'. However Rahner's understanding of fundamental option is directly linked to his

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[269] T. O'Connell: *Principles of Catholic Morality op.cit.,* 91
Mark O'Keefe: "The Fundamental Option and the Three Ways" *Studies in Formative Spirituality* vol XIII No. 1, Feb. 1992, 76
[270] *ibid.*
[271] cf. J.P. Boyle: *op.cit.,* 262

understanding of fundamental freedom, although he does incorporate an approach to fundamental option from the biblical concept of 'heart' and *metanoia.* The Thomist approach from *finis ultimus* seems to be at a discount for Rahner. Using fundamental freedom, he locates fundamental option within his anthropology. Categorical decisions of the human person are in some way grounded by the experience of the holy mystery of God. That is to say it is grounded in the divine gift of God himself by the gift of grace (supernatural existential) and freedom (fundamental freedom). Further, Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge is invoked where the transcendental horizon of freedom is seen as the fullness of being in God. In particular, the fundamental option is any exercise of fundamental freedom, where fundamental freedom is grounded in a biblical understanding of the free relationship of the human person with God, and again, elaborates this within a transcendental context of the drive towards holy mystery. The essential free decision is the antithesis of the spontaneous act of appetite, and of manipulation, particularly social manipulation. Rahner argues that, on the contrary, social freedom conditions 'religious' freedom.

If a fundamentally free decision prompts interiorization or withdrawal, the estrangement which results can be seen as the *entrée* to the human person's private hell. There is the further perspective that an act of fundamental freedom which is evil is fatally flawed because of God's sovereignty. Rahner's understanding of fundamental freedom at a basic level rests on the understanding of the priority of grace where the sovereignty of God precedes the dispensation of freedom.

For Rahner, the discernment of the choice between grace and sin in a concrete life situation, the very touchstone of the fundamental option, is understood not only in terms of his anthropology but also in terms of Ignatian discernment.

A number of objections have been raised against the Rahnerian fundamental option, but, just as with supernatural existential, I would argue that the Rahnerian theory of fundamental option is viable. The further consideration of issues surrounding the fundamental option provide examples of the richness and pluriformity of the theory of fundamental option.

CHAPTER 9
AND NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY, THESE THREE - RAHNER ON VIRTUE

..... if reflection ... has its necessary and rightful place in the area of moral freedom, we must constantly inquire into the virtues, however we may choose to do it and whatever be the terminology we use in dealing with questions of this sort.

Karl Rahner: "Plea for a Nameless Virtue" *TI* XVIII, 33

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I saw the infinite love of God. I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. And in that also I saw the infinite love of God; and I had great openings... so he it was that opened to me when I was shut up and had not hope nor faith. Christ it was who had enlightened me, that gave me his light to believe in, and gave me hope which is himself, revealed himself in me, and gave me his spirit and his grace which I found sufficient in the deeps and in weakness.

George Fox *Journal* 1647
The Journal of George Fox, ed. John Nickalls,
(London: Religious Society of Friends, 1975), 19, 12

9 AND NOW ABIDETH FAITH, HOPE, CHARITY, THESE THREE - RAHNER ON VIRTUE

9.1 Introduction - Rahner and The Recovery of Virtue

Karl Rahner always claimed to be a Thomist,[1] and, there has never been any demurral as to his familiarity with Thomas' thought. Because of his preconciliar Jesuit training he was conversant with the manuals and became only too aware of their limitations. However his command of Thomism, or strictly speaking, neo-Thomism is offset by the following consideration.

As explained above (at 3.1), over the last decade, moral theology has witnessed the phenomenon of the postmodern recovery of virtue. The landmark work of this phenomenon is Alasdair Macintyre's *After Virtue*, first published in 1981. One could also point to the work of Stanley Hauerwas and others[2], which in a sense preceded *After Virtue*, but it is generally acknowledged that the postmodern recovery of virtue began in earnest in the early nineteen eighties. Rahner died in 1984. If a theologian in the Rahnerian tradition such as John Macquarrie could draw on the work of Stanley Hauerwas to develop, for example, a theology of ministry, and was also in close dialogue with Rahner,[3] the critical question here is "Was Rahner aware of the recovery of virtue?" The answer appears to be no. In the final volume of *TI, Volume XXIII (Final Writings)* first published in English translation in 1992, but published as *Schriften zur Theologie 15:*

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[1] W.V. Dych: *Karl Rahner op.cit.*, 18

[2] S. Hauerwas: *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame: U.P., 1981)
: *Character and the Christian Life*
(San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1985)

[3] cf. John Macquarrie: "The Church and the Ministry" and also "the Anthropological Approach to Theology" both in *Theology, Church and Ministry* (London: SCM, 1986)

Wissenschaft und christlicher Glaube and *16: Humane Gesellschaft und Kirche von Morgen* in 1983 and 1984 respectively, there appears a seminal article "Plea for a Nameless Virtue", seminal in that it may have marked a new development in Rahner's thought, insofar as Rahner critically examined virtues, *qua* virtues, apparently independently of MacIntyre's work.

Now, in "The Plea for a Nameless Virtue" Rahner acknowledges that today, less attention is devoted to "catalogues of individual virtues"[4] for two reasons. First, because moral theologians and moral philosophers are concerned with "questions antecedent to these descriptions and catalogues of individual modes of moral behaviour."[5] Does this very response indicate that although Rahner may have been conversant with the concerns of the postmodern recovery of virtue, he was more concerned with the notion of moral agency and fundamental option? Unfortunately and infuriatingly, Rahner does not elaborate. Second, because "this kind of greenhouse of individual virtues is not particularly useful for real life."[6] Was this second observation a response to some of the more technical arguments in the recovery of virtue, namely lists of virtues? It is not clear.

I would argue on this evidence that Rahner, although developing his own lines of enquiry, in particular the elaboration of this "nameless virtue"[7], either seems unaware of the developments in the postmodern recovery of virtue in the English-speaking world or is indifferent to it, because he fails to specifically mention any of the authors or their works of the recovery of

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[4] *TI* XXIII, 33
[5] *ibid.*
[6] *ibid.*
[7] *ibid.*

virtue. This is doubly important as not only may Rahner have missed the opportunity of dialogue with Macintyre, Hauerwas *et alii* on the question of virtue and moral theology and philosophy generally, but he also most probably missed the opportunity to engage with developments in Thomism, the area of theology and philosophy that with Aristotelianism was to provide in large part the springboard for one approach to the postmodern recovery of virtue.

Both Macintyre and Hauerwas were only too familiar with Thomism, they taught the *corpus* of Aquinas at Notre Dame, but it did not stop there. Not only has Catholic moral theology been "profoundly influenced"[8] by work written by John Dedek, Germain Grisez, and Louis Janssens on Aquinas, but also Protestant (and secular ethics) has had to acknowledge the work on Aquinas done by writers such as James Gustafson, Stanley Hauerwas and Alan Donagan. Now, as Duffy[9] notes, responding to the criticisms of Taylor,[10] a big question for understanding Rahner is whether a modernized Thomism, Transcendental Thomism is truly possible.[11] It may be that Thomistic ethics (in particular virtue) can be examined in isolation from Thomistic metaphysics, but certainly Aquinas, as a source for the recovery of virtue, has been important, whereas conversely, Rahner appears to downplay the role of virtue in his own work. Although he gives constant attention to the individual theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, and their place in theology, he gives minimal attention to the virtues *qua* virtues. References to virtue in Rahner's work are almost as scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth. There are also difficulties in extracting these scarce references.

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[8] J. Porter: *The Recovery of Virtue, op.cit.*, 13
[9] S.J. Duffy: *The Graced Horizon, op.cit.*, 234
[10] M.L. Taylor: *God is Love, op.cit.*, 332 n.10
[11] Duffy: *ibid.*

This is demonstrated by the fact that although there is a substantial article on "Virtue" in *Sacramentum Mundi*, by contrast, in the *Foundations* (definitely Rahner's most systematic work) there is **no** mention whatsoever, **no mention whatsoever**, of virtue, *qua* virtue. This is compounded by the paucity of any references to virtue in the Rahnerian secondary literature, to the point that virtue is almost buried by the commentary on its far more glamorous, yet problematic, Rahnerian near neighbour, the supernatural existential. In a sense this flies in the face of Rahner's preference for the *via media*, in particular the *via media* between the inheritance of faith and modernity/postmodernity:

> Theology must be so presented that it encourages a genuine dialogue between the best of traditional thought and the exigencies of today.[12]

It would appear that for Rahner virtue theory was not a 'leading edge' concern as evidenced by his probable unawareness of the phenomenon of the recovery of virtue. Notwithstanding this unawareness, we have noted that Rahner carried with him a Thomist understanding of virtue and also gave considerable attention to the theological virtues. This may provide an *entrée* to the fundamental option. However, the task now is to examine Rahner's understanding of virtue, however much it may be a poor cousin of his other theological concerns.

9.2 Rahner's Definition of Virtue

Because of Rahner's unsystematic approach to theology, there are unsystematic definitions of virtue in his work insofar as they are framed in

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[12] K. Rahner in P. Imhof *et alia* (eds): *Karl Rahner in Dialogue, op.cit.*, 22

the context of "one-off" articles in TI or other of his numerous works. For example, virtues are defined in one of Rahner's later articles as ways of behaving that are morally good.[13] In another article Rahner writes that the theological virtues determine 'our direct relationship to God himself'.[14] Possibly the most systematic treatment by Rahner of virtue that we have is the account in *Sacramentum Mundi*, however there is also a 'shadow' article found in the *Concise Theological Dictionary* (written with the collaboration of Herbert Vorgrimler). These accounts sit oddly with the near silence of *Foundations* on virtue *qua* virtue.

Rahner tells us that virtue in the broadest sense is any perfectly or fully developed capacity of the human spiritual soul, will and intellect. He then gives the illustration that virtue can be found in the area of cognition, ie, intellectual virtues, or in wisdom or in science. Virtue can also be found in the development of that capacity for virtue itself. In the stricter or narrower sense, virtue is the competence or power or ability, skill or facility to accomplish or realize moral good, and to do so particularly with joy and gladness and with constancy and perseverance against opposition, and possibly at great sacrifice. The antithesis of virtue is vice.

Rahner then makes the distinction between the theological or supernatural virtues of faith, hope and love on the one hand and the moral, cardinal or natural virtues of prudence, justice, courage and temperance on the other.

The natural virtues are grounded in the human 'corporeal-spiritual' (or psychosomatic) nature, deal with the ability and readiness of human natural

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[13] K. Rahner: "The Act and Content of Faith" *TI XXI*, 33
[14] K. Rahner: "Hope" in *the Practice of Faith*, 219

powers and are developed by constant and correct practice (cf. *habitus*). These acquired virtues have a correspondence with the psychological substratum of the human person, of instinctive drives. These virtues perfect the natural character of the human person, are involved in moral formation and are the necessary defence against concupiscence and domination by instinct.

According to Rahner, the most basic and comprehensive of these natural virtues are the four cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, courage and temperance. He also notes that attempts have been made, by the use of various *schemata*, and with varying degrees of success, to reduce to the four cardinal virtues "the innumerable ways of objectively and subjectively appropriate moral action in relation to the whole of reality."[15]

Rahner then focuses on the role of grace with regard to the supernatural, or theological, virtues of faith, hope and love. Supernatural grace, which Rahner sees as God's self communication, "radically orders the whole being of the human person in knowledge and freedom to the triune God of eternal life",[16] enables the human person to tend toward this goal of life in the triune God. (As an aside, we can flag the proximity of the virtues to the fundamental option and supernatural existential in Rahner's theology of grace). The supernatural virtues, that is the virtues bestowed by God in justification, are spoken of as the "dynamism of sanctifying grace."[17] The supernatural virtues, infused by grace, order the moral and religious acts of the human person to a direct participation and sharing in the life of the triune God. These infused virtues do not belong to the essence of

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[15] K. Rahner: "Virtue" in *Sacramentum Mundi* Vol XI, 337
[16] K. Rahner & H Vorgrimler: *Concise Theological Dictionary,* 530
[17] *Sacramentum Mundi, ibid.*

humankind but are "bestowed by God as a loving favour in his free self-communication."[18]

This account in *Sacramentum Mundi* of Rahner's understanding of virtue is reliable because of its singularity and systematisation. There is no other account in Rahner's work (apart from the 'shadow' account in *The Concise Theological Dictionary*) that deals with virtue so systematically. This is reflected in the secondary literature in English on Rahner. Louis Robert's account of the Rahnerian approach to virtue in his *The Achievement of Karl Rahner*[19] is possibly the only detailed account available, although John Crossin's coverage in the introductory text *What Are They Saying About Virtue?*[20] is helpful in a more truncated way.

How does Rahner's abbreviated definition of virtue square with the definition of virtue espoused in the recovery of virtue? We will consider a variety of definitions from a number of different quarters.

Yves Simon, like Rahner, a fellow Thomist writing at the outset of the recovery of virtue, devoted an entire book to the definition of virtue.[21] Unlike Rahner, he started explicitly with Aristotle, ie, "Virtue, then, is a state of character concerned with choice, lying in a mean, ie, the mean relative to us, this being determined by a rational principle, and by that principle by which the man of practical wisdom would determine it."[22] The very fact that Simon, a Thomist, starts with Aristotle, reflects in an

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[18] *Sacramentum Mundi*, 338
[19] L. Roberts: *The Achievement of Karl Rahner* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967)
[20] J.W. Crossin: *What Are They Saying About Virtue?* (New York: Paulist, 1985)
[21] Y. Simon: *The Definition of Moral Virtue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986)
[22] NE 2.6.1107A cf. Y. Simon: *op.cit.*, 105

interesting way on Rahner's definition, which is distinctly Thomist but indicates no evidence of any direct concern with Aristotelian virtue. Although Rahner does give some attention to the (Platonist) Cardinal virtues he seems largely preoccupied with theological virtue.

How does Rahner's treatment of virtue compare with that of the trail blazer of the postmodern recovery of virtue, Alasdair MacIntyre? As noted in Chapter 4, MacIntyre considers at considerable length the practice of virtue in a variety of societies, from 'heroic' societies through to the contemporary societies of managers and aesthetes. He argues that the concept of virtue "always requires for its application the acceptance of some account of certain features of social and moral life in terms of which it has to be defined and explained."[23] As in Homeric society, virtue is secondary to that of a social role, in Aristotelian accounts that of human flourishing and for Benjamin Franklin's account it is secondary to that of utility. MacIntyre also invokes the concept of a practice by which he means any

> coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve these standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conception of the ends and goods involved are systematically extended.[24]

MacIntyre employs this original concept of practice to hammer out his definition of virtue. For MacIntyre, a virtue is an "acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those

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[23] A. MacIntyre: *After Virtue, op.cit.*, 186
[24] *ibid*, 187

goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods."[25]

MacIntyre's close colleague, Stanley Hauerwas, takes up MacIntyre's exhaustive account of social practice and virtue. Hauerwas argues for virtue being context dependent. He points to the differing definitions of virtue for Aristotle, Aquinas and Kant and argues that a more comprehensive list of definitions would not yield any satisfactory understanding.

> The very plurality of different notions of virtue indicates that any account of the virtues is context dependent. The significance of this point for my perspective cannot be overestimated, since I will make no attempt to develop an "ethics of virtue satisfactory for any society.[26]

This preoccupation with virtue as socially contextual has made not only Hauerwas but also MacIntyre vulnerable to the charge of moral relativism. However, Hauerwas, like MacIntyre, seemed to adopt later a more nuanced position where he focusses on the moral agency aspect of virtue. He writes "A virtue, however, clearly seems to entail some decisive relation to the self." The relevant consideration here is that by invoking the concept of practice and locating it in society, MacIntyre and Hauerwas have provided a social context for virtues which is at odds with Rahner. For Rahner virtue is theological virtue and the critique of his former student, Johann Baptist Metz is relevant, that Rahner's entire theology is metaphysically orientated rather than socially orientated. By way of correction it should be noted that MacIntyre himself gives less attention to the social perspective of the

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[25] *ibid*, 191
[26] S. Hauerwas: *A Community of Character, op.cit.*, 112

virtues in his later works, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry.*

How does Rahner's definition of virtue square with that of conservative theologians who are abreast of the postmodern recovery of virtue? Germain Grisez offers the definition that virtues are "aspects of the character of a good person. A good person's character is his or her whole self integrated around a set of upright commitments."[27] Here, Grisez subsumes virtues within character and character is then linked to the identity of the human person by means of moral commitments. This is an interesting tack with the potential to bridge the gap between metaphysics and social orientation, which does present a problem in the case of Rahner's definition of virtue. However Grisez is still faced with difficulties. How do commitments relate to disposition, what exactly are commitments and so forth. We are still left with the impression that Grisez, like Rahner, gives pride of place to the theological virtues and perhaps, through the use of the notion of commitment, to fundamental option (or commitment). A conservative colleague of Grisez, Carlo Caffara, provides a more extended definition of virtue.

> Moral virtue consists essentially in the perfection of the will and other faculties subject to its command, rendering them - will and subordinate faculties - permanently disposed to actualise moral value readily, unhesitatingly and with joy. In a word it is the perfection of freedom.[28]

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[27] G. Grisez: *The Way of the Lord Jesus, op.cit.*, 629
[28] C. Caffara: *Living in Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1989), 166

Caffara approaches virtue from a volitional perspective but his definition shares common ground with Rahner with regard to freedom, perfectibility and, possibly, values.

Now, Rahner's more traditional definition of virtue with its emphasis on the theological virtues may provide some comfort for the vexation induced by the attendant perplexities of the postmodern recovery of virtue. It has become apparent that the recovery of virtue with its plethora of definitions of virtue has been a mixed blessing. If the main areas of concern in the definition of virtue become obvious to the observer, ie, moral agency, state of character and the social context of virtue, this is offset by the attendant realisation that the recovery of virtue has also contributed to a wild flourishing of different understandings of virtue. As Sarah Conly writes:

> one's first impression on reviewing contemporary literature on virtue is that here, more than most places in philosophy, anything goes... different approaches [to Virtue Ethics] seem to be explained not so much by disagreement as by quite different ideas of what an ethics of virtue will do for morality that other theories cannot.[29]

Some attempts to cut through this pluralist plethora are marked by their lack of success. Edmund Pincoffs has attempted to arrive at a definition of virtue by an inductive approach. He comments:

> one point, overlooked by nearly every contemporary philosopher who attempts a definition, is that if we are to understand what virtue is it might be well to begin with a list of qualities that we intuitively recognise as virtues and vices.

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[29] S. Conly: "Flourishing and the Ethics of Virtue" in D.A. French (ed): *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* Vol XIII, 84

Pincoffs with the assistance of Robert Audi, derived a list of 222 terms that would refer to personal properties of the subject. Pincoffs argues that all these properties are dispositional, which is where the first problem arises as dispositions with regard to virtues have nearly the same controversial status as habits. Second, if we accept the definition that virtues are those "excellencies which enable the person to attain the furthest potentialities of his nature,"[30] then it suggests "at the outset no list of virtues can be made from neutral grounds that any list will reflect beliefs about human nature and its possibilities."[31] *Ergo*, Pincoffs approach, for all its exhaustiveness, is vitiated from the outset. This reinforces Rahner's comment in 'The Plea for a Nameless Virtue' that virtue theorists are concerned with "questions antecedent to these descriptions and catalogues of individual modes of moral behaviour".[32]

If an inductive attempt at a definition of virtue is a doomed enterprise, what then is to be done? There is a recourse to the examination of the components of virtue ethics and the matrix of ideas that support them. We have considered at length the classical tradition of virtue, particularly the Thomist Tradition (ref. Chapter 4). We now turn to Rahner's Thomist understanding of the components of virtue ethics, in particular *habitus.*

9.3 The Constituent Elements in Rahner's Theory of Virtue

This section will examine the constituent elements in Rahner's theory of virtue, viz. the role of *habitus* and disposition in virtue; the role of grace *vis-*

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[30] G.C. Meilaender: *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University Press, 1984), 6
[31] *ibid*
[32] *TI* XXIII, 33

à-vis virtue; and some aspects of Rahner's treatment of the theological and moral virtues.

9.3.1 The role of Habit, *Habitus* and Disposition in Virtue

The notions of *habitus*, and its close neighbour, disposition, are of considerable importance, (and also a source of controversy) in the postmodern recovery of virtue theory (ref. Chapter 4 *passim)*. Accordingly, it is important to examine what Rahner has to say in this area in order to see how his approach compares with these postmodern approaches in the recovery of virtue.

As previously noted (9.2), in his definition of virtue in *Sacramentum Mundi*, Rahner refers to virtue (in the widest sense) as "any perfectly developed capacity"[33] of the human person, or, not least, "the development itself."[34] He also refers to virtues in general as acquired and infused virtues.[35] In the narrower sense, he refers to virtue as the power, ability, skill, facility to realize moral good. A little further on in his account, when discussing the antithesis of virtue, (that is vice) he refers, curiously, to virtue as the "habitual [my emphasis JW] ability and readiness.. over and above the mere capacity"[36] (to realise moral good). This reference to 'habitual' is not repeated in the smaller *Concise Theological Dictionary* account, although at many other points it is a word for word repetition. This would indicate, I would argue, some ambivalence on Rahner's part to the notion of habit in virtue. The further difficulty is that the remainder of

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[33] *Sacramentum Mundi,* Vol XI, 337
[34] *ibid.*
[35] *ibid.*
[36] *ibid.*

Rahner's account of virtue is focused on the theological virtues, not virtue in general. The even further difficulty is the citations (and their chronology) of *'habitus'*, 'habit' and 'disposition' in Rahner's work. Although the 1991 ET edition of *Sacramentum Mundi* repeats the word 'habitual', and the 1983 ET edition of the smaller *Concise Theological Dictionary* (CTD) does not include it, curiously, the CTD does contain an entry on *habitus* (not habit), which the 1991 *Concise Sacramentum Mundi* does not. This is at odds with the consideration that both the 1991 *Concise Sacramentum Mundi* and the 1975 six volume *Sacramentum Mundi* contain an article on 'disposition'. It may be that the CTD represents a later approach to the problem of habit and disposition in virtue. Again we are faced with the possibility, as indicated by relevant inclusions and deletions, that Rahner betrays an ambivalence to both *habitus* and disposition. We begin with the article on *habitus*.

In the CTD entry on *habitus*[37] (NB *habitus* not habit) some problems with regard to the understanding of virtue are resolved, some simply compounded. It is here that Rahner's Thomist heritage is writ large. Rahner begins by stating that the term '*habitus*' derives from Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy (cf. entries in Chapter 4), in particular with regard to the determination of a potency. Rahner then states that the "natural foundation" of a *habitus* is a disposition. He extends this by elaborating that "a *habitus* based on a disposition can be 'acquired' by constant repetition (*habitus acquisitus*). If the (acquired) *habitus* refers to an objective moral good the good *habitus* thus acquired is called a virtue".[38] In the CTD entry, he then takes on the problem of grace and virtue by referring

[37] CTD *op.cit.*, 203
[38] *ibid.*

to the scholastic notion that grace is an "infused" *habitus* inhering in the soul.[39] It also needs to be recounted here that Rahner further elaborates that if the *habitus* inhering in the soul is not easy and stable then "the concept is close to that of existential."[40] Curiously, the last term in the sentence, "existential" is asterisked, with the intention of cross referencing it to the entry "existential" in the CTD, but there is no entry for "existential" pure and simple, only for the "existential, supernatural", and we are again knocking at the door of Rahner's understanding of grace. We have also had a further visitation of that recurring Rahnerian term, the supernatural existential.

We now turn our attention to Rahner's understanding of disposition. In the SM article on disposition[41], Rahner makes no direct reference to virtue *qua* virtue. It is also relevant that in the article on "virtue" in *Sacramentum Mundi* there is no reference to disposition. Does Rahner see any link between virtue and disposition? This shortcoming itself is illuminating, ie, Rahner is presumably using habitual and/or '*habitus*' to do all the work for the understanding of virtue, yet his consideration of this term "disposition" should not stop there. Rahner makes two interesting points, *inter alia.* First he gives a metaphysical grounding for disposition. He refers to physical, juridical and moral dispositions, how they stand in relation to potency to act, and the primacy of God and prevenient grace over disposition. Second, Rahner focuses on the doctrine of disposition with regard to the Catholic theology of grace and justification. In this doctrine he refers to certain free acts that are intrinsically ordained to salvation, ie, acts of faith, hope and

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[39] *ibid.*
[40] *ibid.*
[41] "Disposition" in SM *op.cit.*, 350

love in contrition. It has been claimed that[42] virtues are known by their acts, and acts by their objects, so in the present case, with an act of faith for example, we are obliquely talking about a theological virtue. In short, this is an entry via the back door to the discussion on virtue and disposition, and also possibly to fundamental option. What can be established so far is that in Rahner's later thought "*habitus*" is important for understanding virtue and is given a more prominent place than disposition, yet behind "*habitus*" stands "disposition". Behind both these terms stands not only Rahner's understanding of grace but also Rahner's metaphysics.

So we are left with the possibility that for Rahner the foundation of virtue, via *habitus,* is disposition. This is where the contents of the 'bag of virtues' are thrown into the bubbling pot. Are we left with a *consommé* of balance and refinement or are we left with a gelatinous mass that serves no purpose? We have arrived at possibly the most controversial aspect of virtue theory. How does Rahner's understanding of habit, *habitus* and disposition fare? To answer this question we need to examine the present debate on habit, *habitus* and disposition, but first, in order to understand Rahner's Thomist heritage we need to recapitulate the Aristotelian/Thomist basis for *habitus* and disposition that was dealt with in Chapter 4.

Some of the leading theorists on the postmodern recovery of virtue, in particluar MacIntyre, stress that Aristotle saw virtues as products of choice and paradigms of voluntariness, with the corollary that Aristotle clearly recognised the relationship between *hexis* (state of character, *habitus*) and freedom. The free act is one predicated upon the *hexis* of the use of choice

[42] A. Dulles: "Faith and Revelation" in F.S. Fiorenza & J.P. Galvin (eds): *Systematic Theology, op.cit.*, 106

by the moral agent, which is the determinant of virtue. Choice itself is a mix of will, emotion and cognition. Further, Aristotle presses into service his master virtue of *phronesis* (prudence, understanding or practical wisdom) which by use of cognition directs the emotional response of the moral agent to the right object. For Aquinas, like Aristotle, virtue is grounded in the total moral agency of the human person. Similarly, the 'mix' of emotion, cognition and volition is known as virtue. Virtue is predicated upon *habitus* which is a stable disposition, a middle ground between potency and actuality. It does not emerge from human identity in a mechanist, automatic way but is voluntarist and cognitional and has its ground in the relevant emotion.

What is significant here is that Rahner, although he gives a metaphysical grounding for disposition (with a decidedly scholastic cast to it, eg, the link with potency and act), appears entirely unaware of the considerable debate on disposition that lead up to the postmodern recovery of virtue. What is this debate? Perhaps its starting point is to develop a more satisfactory approach to virtue than that of habit. Given this Aristotelian/Thomist grounding, what is the state of the present debate on *habitus*/habit? Curiously, as is possibly evident in the material in Chapter 4, the issues have come to focus on Aristotle and Aquinas. However there have been some 'independent' contributions to the debate. For example Lester Hunt lists three important differences between virtues (character) and habits.[43]

[43] L. Hunt: "Character and Thoughts" *American Philosophical Quarterly* Vol 15 No 3 July 1978, 178

- There is "nothing odd - as such - about doing something one is not in the habit of doing",[44] but there is something very odd about acting out of character, "we are apt to want an explanation... though it is possible to act out of character, the character of an act seems to depend in some way on the character of the agent."[45]

- Habits do not seem to involve intelligence or reason, whereas virtues and character traits do. "To answer the question 'why did you do that?' with 'It's a habit' is not to tell one's reason for doing it, it is rather to deny that one has a reason."[46]

- Hunt argues that, in response to the query 'What are you doing?', we reply with a character description such as 'something courageous', rather than a description of something that can be done habitually such as gardening, running, etc., the questioner would still need further information.

> Obviously any adequate theory of character must be able to show just what the difference is between such things as being courageous and being cowardly on the one hand and the sorts of doing we are asking about when we as 'What are you doing?' on the other hand.[47]

Hunt sees the attractiveness of identifying virtue with habit because they are often referred to as sharing the same ontological status in that they are qualities of the moral agent which enable them to pursue certain courses of

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[44] *ibid*
[45] *ibid*
[46] *ibid*
[47] *ibid*, 179

action. However, the three differences listed above highlight the gap between virtue and habit. (It may be that disposition has more in common with *habitus* than does habit). For example, Lester Hunt argues that the concept that virtues or traits of character are "temperamental dispositions has one advantage over the concept that they are habits in that while habits are outward dispositions, temperamental dispositions could be perceived as interiorly orientated, thus strengthening the idea of moral agency." Hunt argues however that not all virtues or character traits are temperamental dispositions, and further, they are not natural in the way that temperamental dispositions are.[48]

Another example is offered by Pincoffs who introduces the subject by recapitulating the argument for habit rather than disposition. This means that since the moral agent learned, picked up or acquired the habit "he might have learned some other habit instead so that he is **responsible** for what he does as a result of the habit."[49] Pincoffs rebuttal to this is twofold.

First, habit is "a term of very narrow scope",[50] ie, there are traits, such as cleverness, or cupidity that are not habits nor the result of habits. Second, Pincoffs argues that when we speak of dispositions we buy in more readily into the language of character. He argues that habits are determinate but dispositions are determinable, for example, to show that an action under fire was habitual would not indicate courage.[51]

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[48] *ibid.*
[49] Pincoffs *op.cit.*, 79
[50] *ibid*
[51] *ibid*, 80

The debate also has produced arguments in favour of disposition *per se*. For example, Richard Brandt argues that a dispositional understanding of virtue would be acceptable to "most psychologists interested in the theory of traits of personality. Some philosophers, however are disposed [*sic*] to adopt a form of what I shall call the summary theory."[52]

Brandt sees two forms of the summary theory. First, the pure form maintains that there is an identity between the ascription of a character trait to a person and the occurrence of a corresponding form of behaviour. Second, the mixed form combines the identity of ascription and behaviour with a dispositional construal of character trait names. Brandt gives an exhaustive account of character trait names in his 1970 article and advances the claim that character traits "are relatively permanent dispositions of a **specific kind** - the kind of disposition that wants and aversions are."[53] He refers to this as the 'motivational theory of character traits which he believes would be contradicted not only by many philosophers but also by many psychologists. Brandt also discusses its rival, the direct disposition theory, which holds that "for a person to have a certain trait is primarily for him to be disposed to behave in the correlated typical way, in certain conditions, relatively frequently."[54] What this leads to is that a character trait can be regarded as a set of dispositions, not only a disposition to act but also to have certain emotions.[55]

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[52] Richard B. Brandt: "Traits of Character - A Conceptual Analysis" *American Philosophical Quarterly* Vol 7 No 1, January 1970, 25
[53] *ibid*, 27
[54] *ibid*, 51
[55] *ibid*

In a later journal article in 1988, "The Structures of Virtue",[56] Brandt returns to Aristotle but interprets him in such a way that a virtue is a "relatively unchanging disposition to desire an action of a certain sort."[57] Brandt examines the rebuttals of dispositional analysis by Von Wright, yet returns to a motivational dispositional analysis with the recognition that some virtues do not come within the purview of motivational analysis.[58]

What are these arguments against dispositional analysis? Stephen Hudson's arguments may be taken as a good example. He describes the view of virtues as wholly dispositions as "wholly bankrupt".[59] He sees the view as a key assumption of the argument that virtues, of themselves, cannot provide action guidance. Thus virtues would not be valuable in themselves, they would only be valuable for the acts that these virtues had a disposition to produce.[60] Hudson pursues the argument:

> Since virtues are not and cannot be valuable in themselves, we can only identify particular tendencies as virtues by reference to the right or good. It follows that the identification of particular dispositions as virtues depends upon a prior determination of the right or good. Hence particular virtues cannot themselves be determinants of the right or the good.[61]

Hudson sees the corollary that if value is not attributed to acts then the "moral value of the motives of the agent must be the sole basis for

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[56] *Midwest Studies of Philosophy* XIII (1988)
[57] *ibid*, 64
[58] *ibid*, 75
[59] Stephen Hudson: *Human Character and Morality* (London: Routledge and Regan Paul, 1986), 43
[60] *ibid*, 39
[61] *ibid*, 40

attributing value to the acts of virtue".[62] He argues that the latter view is patently false. Hudson returns to Aristotle and the character of a person.

> The elaborate and systematic unity of types of character underscores both the bankruptcy of modern views - that, for example, analyse such traits of character wholly as dispositions or desires - and the brilliance of writers like Plato and Aristotle, who maintained that character traits are best understood as the connected patterns of thought, feeling, and action that types of persons exemplify.[63]

Hudson's view is supported by people such as John McDowell and Gilbert Meilaender. McDowell also returns to Aristotle, whom he sees as approaching the question of virtue ethics in such a way so that "a conception of right conduct is grasped, as it were, from the inside out"[64], whereas if virtue is seen as a disposition then it has a secondary role, "the nature of virtue is explained, as it were, from the outside in."[65] This view of seeing virtue in a secondary role, that is, virtue as handmaiden to a more pre-eminent ethical view such as deontology (as argued by Frankena), is also criticised by Meilaender:

> Virtuous states do not correspond perfectly with a disposition to any set of acts and, in addition, the virtuous act may be achieved without the virtue. I may face danger without fleeing, but this does not make me courageous. It may, as Hobbes knew, only show that I am still more fearful of some other danger.[66]

The difficulty that arises here is that Meilaender approaches virtue from a theological perspective, yet is against the notion of virtue as disposition in

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[62] *ibid*
[63] *ibid*, 43
[64] J. McDowell: "Virtue and Reason" *The Monist* July 1979, Vol 62 No 3, 331
[65] *ibid*
[66] G. Meilaender *op.cit.*, 8

order to maintain the pre-eminence of virtue, and not relegate it to a second order ethical perspective. But is this essentialist position viable from a theological perspective? If the theological virtues are infused, does this infusion compromise first-order virtues theory?

We can conclude that the postmodern recovery of virtue theory has ushered in an intense debate on the role of habit/*habitus*/disposition in virtue theory. It would appear that Rahner's analysis of habit/*habitus*/disposition is problematic, and particularly so with regard to the role of freedom in virtue. Where the role of freedom is critical, of course, is in our understanding of fundamental option. We will return to this consideration in the following chapter on the link between virtue and fundamental option.

9.3.2 Grace and Virtue

The role of grace in Rahner's anthropology has a marked singularity. We have already encountered some of the dimensions of his understanding of grace in his resolution of the nature/grace debate with his development of the supernatural existential. We have also already encountered, briefly, his understanding of grace and the theology of the supernatural virtues at section 9.2. Let us recapitulate. Rahner sees grace as God's self communication which "radically orders the whole being of the human person in knowledge and freedom to the triune God of eternal life"[67], enabling the human person to direct his actions towards their goal of life in the triune God. The theological or supernatural virtues are bestowed by God in justification, and can be seen as the "dynamism of sanctifying

[67] CTD, 530

grace."[68] These supernatural virtues,infused by grace, order the moral and religious acts of the human person to a direct participation and sharing in the life of the triune God. These infused supernatural virtues do not belong to the essence of humankind but are "bestowed by God as a loving favour in his free self communication."[69] Now, Rahner refers to the scholastic notion that grace is an infused "*habitus*" inhering in the soul,[70] and if this *habitus* is not easy and stable "then the concept is close to that of an existential."[71] The question that looms large is how is a theological virtue infused by grace, which is an *habitus* and an existential, linked to that other retainer of grace, the supernatural existential, and to that other retainer of freedom, the fundamental option? We need to note this latter concern but postpone its consideration until the following chapter where we examine the link between virtue and fundamental option.

The question of the supernatural existential and the virtues can best be examined by looking at the role of virtue and of grace in general. Rahner does us the singular service in the CTD of giving us a location within his theology of grace of the supernatural virtues.

> The doctrine of the supernatural virtues is an essential component of [the theology of grace] ... which should properly take its place in dogmatic theology after the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of creation, Christology, soteriology and ecclesiology ... which as a whole provides the dogmatic basis for a moral theology that is dogmatic from the outset.[72]

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[68] SM XI, 337
[69] SM, 338
[70] CTD, 203
[71] *ibid.*
[72] CTD, 200-201

Rahner sees the principal topics of the theology of grace as:

- God's fundamental act of Trinitarian self communication.

- Derived from this fundamental act there is the concept of the supernatural grace of justification.

- The doctrine of the actual and existential realisation of this supernatural grace of justification includes, (besides the soveriegnty of grace and freedom's liberation by and under grace, and also knowledge and grace, etc.) the "virtue of faith, ... the virtues of hope and love and their embodiment in all the breadth of human life, in the so called moral virtues."[73]

Here we have not only a direct and central location for the theological virtues within Rahner's theology of grace but also a location that has a juxtaposition to the moral virtues and moral theology. Crossin takes this further. He argues that Rahner sees the supernatural virtues as orienting the natural virtues towards God but then "since, in the presently existing real order of salvation, the natural virtues already have a supernatural goal and the supernatural virtues are lived out in the harsh realities of daily life, the distinction between natural and supernatural virtues is not great."[74] Now Crossin's argument has a respectable Thomist heritage. Thomas claims that because of the pivotal position of the infused theological virtue of love all the moral virtues are able to be infused. "All the infused moral virtues .....

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[73] CTD, 201
[74] Crossin: *op.cit.*, 24

depend on charity."[75] It should also be noted that this infusion is teleologically ordered to the *finis ultimus* (cf. 4.7.3). What can be concluded is that although, through grace, the theological virtues have a pivotal position in Rahner's anthropology, again through grace, the moral virtues have a close connection with the theological virtues.

We now arrive at the further conclusion that there is a dynamic unity between the theological virtues and the moral virtues. Further, as Roberts notes of Rahner, and the supernatural existential,

> the theological virtues are in their unity the transcendental foundation of man's relation to God wherein God is given in Himself. God gives himself in an act which affects His being accepted. And this states what we mean by the theological virtues. For they only make specific in different terms what is meant by **uncreated** grace as the ultimate foundation for the grace laden self communication of God in its relation to created grace '... if the virtues are to be understood in their unity and difference, they may not be thought of so much as powers for different things. Together they form the one power of man's total relationship to God's self communication and differ among themselves in so far as they express phases of this one self-communication of God.'[76]

If Roberts has Rahner's measure then the intimate connection between virtue and supernatural existential becomes clear. If the supernatural existential is the human person's "capacity for the God of self bestowing love,"[77] that is to say, if the supernatural existential orients and directs the human person toward supernatural grace and is also the offer of grace then it bears an intimate connection with the theological virtues, which, in their unity and difference, are the foundation of the human person's relation to

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[75] *ST* IaIIae Q.65, A.2
[76] Roberts: *op.cit.*, 148
[77] TI, I, 312

God in his self giving (i.e., grace), yet are also the one power of the human person's total relationship to the divine self communication. Rahner has also identified grace with particular virtues, i.e., faith and love, therefore we now need to examine the 'phases' of this self communication which are the individual virtues.

9.3.3 Some Aspects of Rahner's Understanding of the Theological Virtues

We have seen how Rahner's theology of grace links the supernatural virtues through infusion to the moral virtues (and also the supernatural existential). What of the particular link between individual virtues? Does Rahner have some *schema* for the position of one individual virtue *vis-à-vis* another individual virtue? Given Rahner's Thomist heritage, the affirmative answer to this question is readily apparent.[78] Although love can be seen as the pre-eminent theological virtue, both faith and hope can be seen as a phase, or 'moment', in the movement of the moral orientation of the human person towards love. There is a dynamic unity of the virtues. It is in this sense that we can speak of distinct virtues yet we also gain an understanding of the unity of the theological virtues.

The infusion of the theological virtue of faith begins this progress. Here faith is seen as the faith of personal decision of the human person that is based on human experience, that is in addition to the explicit faith professed as believing Christians there is an implicit faith for the human person, for

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[78] for a useful account see
Crossin: *op.cit.*, 25-28 and
Roberts: *op.cit.*, 147-154

the 'anonymous Christian'.[79] Human experience at its most profound orientates the human person towards faith.

Rahner summarises faith as:

> *a virtue (habitus).* Insofar as faith, hope and love radically order the whole nature of that personal spirit which is man to the truine God of everlasting life in sanctifying grace (as God's self-communication) or as the "residue" of sanctifying grace, they are supernatural, "infused" virtues which make acts elevated by grace possible and are the source of such acts.[80]

Here Rahner stresses the unity of the theological virtues. However if faith is the starting point for the human person in their progress towards *beatitudo* and love is its terminus, what of the intermediate virtue of hope?

The second theological virtue of hope has always been regarded as a poor cousin of the other two theological virtues of faith and love. As Rahner says:

> hope is not merely a preliminary and provisional form of faith and love, not merely faith and love 'on the way' and before they have attained their goal, not merely, therefore, a form conditioned by that situation in human existence in which we are still making pilgrimage and therefore in danger. On the contrary hope is to be thought of as a unique theological virtue in its own right and one which cannot be reduced to the other two.[81]

What Rahner is concerned about is the view of the preconciliar theological manuals that hope is exclusively a 'mode' of the other two virtues.

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[79] cf. TI VI, 390ff
[80] CTD, 172
[81] "On the Theology of Hope", *TI* Vol X, 245

Rahner expressly rejects this 'modality' view and instead sees hope as being the orientation of "outward from self,"[82] it draws the human person out from himself and into that which is totally beyond his control. Rahner's understanding of hope is a development of his understanding of *beatitudo*, itself a development of the concept of mystery and the metaphysic of knowledge with love as the lamp of knowledge. Rahner sees hope as also providing the unifying medium between faith and love:

> If we can show this then we are justified in speaking of a triad, but at the same time we do not have to conclude from its existence that hope must be related to faith and love in precisely the same way as these two are related to each other.[83]

This hope works to unify the faith and love of the human person, but also works to convince us that grace is effective for the believer, that is, it augments faith which *per se* is insufficient to establish that grace is effective in the life of the human person. Hope also has a social dimension. The operation of hope brings about the perspective that the givens of the world are provisional, that is, it gives a dynamism not only to the interior life of the believer but also to their engagement with the world.[84] Rahner summarises hope as:

> a God-wrought ("theological") virtue, closely bound up as such with grace, but at the same time a genuinely human act (effected by God) and thus closely associated with personal faith and love, thereby forming a sort of intermediate stage in the historical development of *general* dogmatic faith into the absolute personal intimacy of love (1 Cor. 13:13; see Denzinger 1530f., 1545ff). Christian hope is ultimately not only a modality of faith and love for the time being but also the continual banishment of things provisional on the way to

[82] cf. *ibid*, 250
[83] *ibid*, 248
[84] cf. Crossin *op.cit.*, 26, FCF, 404-5

> the absolute and pure illimitability of God, the permanent destruction of appearance.[85]

What should be remarked upon here by way of conclusion in our dealing with hope is that Rahner does not dismiss the notion of modality but entertains it as a limited understanding of hope. What is far more important is the epistemological turn that Rahner gives to hope where a banishment of all things provisional leads to the *beatitudo* and the destruction of appearance. This is coupled with the progression to the terminus of the Corinthians setting of the 'absolute personal intimacy of love.'[86] We now turn our attention to the consideration of the third theological virtue, love.

Rahner argues that since:

> love is the total fundamental human act which integrates everything else, it is on the one hand the sum of the salutary acts that are required of man, but on the other hand love must declare itself in the multiplicity of those spiritual operations, distinct from each other and from love (Faith, Hope, Repentance, Justice, etc.) which when informed by love can provide it with a concrete presence in the world, a criterion of its genuineness and modes of growth without being simply identical with it...[87]

Here, Rahner has established the primacy of love, or first among equals, in that love as the 'total fundamental human act' which integrates all else is both the sum of the virtues yet 'declares itself' through these virtues. However there are other Rahnerian features of the theological virtue of love which should be emphasised.

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[85] CTD, 221
[86] *ibid*
[87] CTD, 282

Since commentators emphasise Rahner's perspective of love as self transcending love,[88] Dych argues that God is not encountered as just another object in the world. He cites Rahner, "God is not an object towards which the intentionality of man can be directed in the same fragmentary and particular way as it is towards the multiplicity of objects and persons encountered within the categories of intramundane experience."[89] What is posited here is that the human person is transcendentally elevated by grace, where God becomes present and is "experienced indirectly and implicitly in every act directed towards the world, and pre-eminently in the act of self transcending love."[90] This necessarily means that by loving one's neighbour, the human person automatically chooses and loves God because of the very option to love. Here, God is not loved as the neighbour is loved, i.e., in a thematic, objective way, but as the "formal object and horizon of the relationship."[91] So the theological virtues of first, love by which we love God and second, the theological virtue of faith by which know God, are 'mediated by our relationship to the world.'[92]

Roberts elaborates this when he claims that Rahner's *potentia obedientialis* is realised transcendentally in love of another person.[93] However this love by and of the human person is a response to divine love, which is God's self communication.[94] In short, as Rahner would have it, "the act by which the

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[88] Roberts: *op.cit.*, 150ff.
Dych: *op.cit.*, 137ff.
[89] "Reflections on the Unity of Love of Neighbour and Love of God" *TI VI*, 244
also Dych *op.cit.*, 137
[90] Dych *op.cit.*, 137
[91] *ibid.*
[92] *ibid.*
[93] Roberts: *op.cit.*, 153
[94] cf. FCF 404-5, also Crossin, *op.cit.*, 27

neighbour is loved is really the primal (though still non-explicit) act by which God is loved."[95]

It should also be noted that Rahner posited a further development in the understanding of the theological virtue of love. Love, *per se,* includes all human experience, and the totality of the human person as he is drawn to the *beatitudo.* Love, *ipso facto,* necessarily includes both "benevolent love and concupiscent love",[96] which are in harmony. As Rahner says "They are aspects of the same love, which are based on the transcendence of the subject which is capable of offering and willing the other."[97] Again, this transcendental aspect of love bridges the gap between not only neighbour and neighbour, but also between *éros* and *agapé.*

This scrutiny of Rahner's understanding of love brings us to the end of the examination of the theological virtues. The status of love as *primus inter pares,* as first among equals for the theological virtues, has been established, and also the procession to the *beatitudo* originating with faith, through hope and concluding with love. The moral virtues (and all other virtues) are secondary to this triad. The theological virtues, by grace, provide the orientation for the other virtues towards the *beatitudo,* but because of the supernatural nature of the *beatitudo* the lesser virtues are in a Thomist sense already ordered by grace.[98] Nonetheless, in the Rahnerian *schemata* of the virtues, the triad of the theological virtues is pre-eminent.

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[95] SM, 346 also Crossin, *ibid.*
[96] Crossin: *op.cit.*, 26
[97] SM, 340, also Crossin: *op.cit.*, 26
[98] cf. Crossin, *op.cit.*, 24

9.4 Rahner and Some Issues in the Contemporary Debate on Virtue

9.4.1 Rahner and Virtue Epistemology

The epistemological dimension of virtue has been mentioned briefly in earlier chapters (especially Chapter 4) and its relevance for mainstream virtue theory noted. It is useful to briefly recapitulate and draw together these previous references.

For Hellenic virtue in general, the question was whether virtue was the possession of a particular knowledge? In particular, for Socrates, virtue was knowledge, whereas vice was the absence of knowledge. Virtue was knowledge, and individual knowledge was virtue, with the consequence that all virtues were ultimately one. Plato echoed his master's approach when he held that virtue was grounded in the very nature of the soul through knowledge, in particular the knowledge of the form of the good. Aristotle, although denying the Platonist form of the good, saw the intellectual virtues as working in conjunction with the moral virtues to achieve the *telos* of the human person. The celebrated intellectual virtue of *phronesis* (understanding, prudence or practical wisdom) was necessary for the exercising of any virtue. For Aristotle it was the master virtue, which, integrated with cognition, directed an emotional response towards the right object. There is also the realisation that Aristotle argues that *phronesis* is not *a priori* or theoretical knowledge, but rather, the capacity to see what in general is good for the human person.

In the Christian tradition of antiquity, Augustine, pursuing his vision of the prevalence of love, saw the culmination of love's striving, not in virtue

itself, but in knowledge, in particular, knowledge of the Trinity. For Augustine, love integrated knowledge and virtue. Aquinas, although following Aristotle in his location of the intellectual virtues gave more importance to metaphysics than epistemology. However, he also followed Augustine in linking virtue to knowledge, that is the knowledge of truth. Aquinas set the theological agenda for the understanding of virtue in the Catholic tradition. What of the Reform? Kierkegaard stressed the role of virtue, especially theological virtue, yet obscured the epistomological issue somewhat with his use of the spheres of existence and his use of paradox.

The recovery of virtue in the last two decades has seen the important emergence of virtue epistemology, a strand of virtue theory that is important *per se,* yet is also important in a postmodernist context and may be important for the theology of Karl Rahner.

What is virtue epistemology? It has been a case of virtue theory 'cross pollinating' with epistemology. As we have just seen, its classical heritage is readily apparent, however it appears that Ernest Sosa introduced the notion of intellectual virtue onto the agenda for postmodern epistemology (if those terms can be seen not to be mutually exclusive), albeit in a cursory way.[99] Lorraine Code and James Montmarquet introduced a closer link between epistemology and virtue theory,[100] however the full derivation of epistemic virtue from an aretaic ethic appears to have been left to the work of Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski. She argues that "almost all epistemological

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[99] E. Sosa: "Knowledge and Intellectual Virtue" *Monist* 68 No 2 (April) 1985, 226-45
quoted in Linda Zabzebski: *Virtues and the Mind - An Enquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xiii

[100] L. Code: *Epistemic Responsibility* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England for Brown University Press, 1981)
J. Montmarquet: "Epistemic Virtue", *Mind* 1996: 482-97, quoted in Zagzebski *op.cit.*

theories are modelled on act-based moral theories".[101] In the history of moral philosophy considerable attention has been given to virtue theory, but intellectual virtue has been at a discount and the discussion is invariably confined to *phronesis*. Zagzebski argues that a true aretaic approach to epistemology requires a theory of virtue that gives the intellectual virtues their proper place, and attempts to develop a virtue theory that includes the intellectual as well as the moral virtues within a single theory. She then deploys this virtue theory to examine some of the "principal concepts in narrative epistemology including the concepts of knowledge and of justified belief."[102] What Zagzebski is doing is, in a sense, 'updating' epistemology to incorporate the shift in ethics from moral act to moral agency, an initiative which is completely consonant with the efforts in post-conciliar moral theology that have resulted in the theory of fundamental option. She does this by, amongst other things, arguing that intellectual virtues are forms of moral virtue with the intention of extending "the range of moral concepts to include the normative dimension of cognitive activity."[103] For Zagzebski, with regard to ethics and epistemology, "either discipline ignores the other at its peril."[104] She concludes that *à propos* of epistemology and ethics: "the justifiedness of beliefs is related to intellectual virtue as the rightness of acts is related to moral virtue in pure virtue ethics,"[105] with the corollary that for both cases the virtue component is more fundamental.

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[101] Zagzebski: *op.cit.*, xiii
[102] *ibid*, xiv
[103] *ibid*, xv
[104] *ibid*
[105] *ibid*

Why is virtue epistemology important for our examination of Karl Rahner and virtue and fundamental option? To begin, virtue epistemology could be seen as a response to some of the challenges of postmodernism, such as:

- the view that morality is aporetic;
- the questionableness of a rational foundation for choice;
- the repudiation of epistemology.

By invoking a shift from moral act to moral agency in both ethics and epistemology, and by linking ethics with epistemology, virtue epistemology may provide the possibility of a more coherent response to some of the challenges of postmodernism.

The question that now arises is, in what way does Rahner's anthropology lend itself to an approach from virtue epistemology? The answer to this question has two components, viz:

- Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge; and,
- Rahner's understanding of virtue.

We deal first with Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge and the possibility of its correspondence to a virtue epistemology. Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge, (cf. 7.3) as first explicated in *Spirit of the World*, is explicitly characterised as a Thomist metaphysic of knowledge. Of course, it is a Thomist metaphysic of knowledge with a Kantian and Heideggerian spin,

but it is ostensibly Thomist and as such, brings with it Thomas' understanding of virtue when he linked virtue to knowledge, that is the knowledge of truth. This is the first, if somewhat tenuous correspondence with a virtue epistemology, given that Thomas himself was more preoccupied with metaphysics than epistemology.

The second correspondence is that Rahner's metaphysics of knowledge is not strictly speaking an epistemology, but is something of a multi-faceted philosophical anthropology based on cognition. More importantly it advances a fundamental unity of knowing and being. (Ref. 7.3.1). This ontological dimension is cheek by jowl with the notion of moral agency in virtue epistemology. From being to acting is a small step, a small step to the foundation of ethics that acting constitutes, especially when seen in the wider setting of moral agency.

This leads on to the third correspondence. In *Hearer of the Word*, the metaphysic of knowledge is given a theological turn. Rahner begins with an examination of the "philosophy of religion as ontology of the obediential potency for revelation."[106] His anthropological starting point is obvious. He then comments "A theory of the human person always implies a theory of the manner in which we ought to act existentially."[107] Here, we have both an *entrée* for ethics and a link between ethics and epistemology. Now it should be mentioned here that at this point that in *Hearer of the Word* Rahner has already considered the question of epistemology and given it a metaphysical twist. He looks to Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and concludes "the

[106] *Hearer of the Word*, 1
[107] *Hearer of the Word*, 3

traditional name of this *epistéme próte* (first science) is metaphysics."[108] He also gives epistemology an anthropological turn. "Insofar as an epistemological question is also always an inquiry into the nature of science as a **human** activity, it is necessarily an inquiry into human nature itself."[109] Thus, *Hearer of the Word* demonstrates the anthropological and metaphysical component of the link between ethics and knowledge, ethics which, we have seen, are permeated by theological virtue.

With these three correspondences, what emerges is an intense theological anthropology that has a strong element of epistemology, and also of metaphysics. What then of virtue? As noted in the first correspondence, there is Thomist virtue in the background, but however, with the second and third correspondence there is an approach to moral agency which provides the *entrée* for virtue.

What now of the second component, of virtue, in the approach to virtue epistemology from Rahner's anthropology? In the definition of virtue in *Sacramentum Mundi* (ref. 9.2), Rahner, in a workmanlike way, acknowledges his Thomist inheritance and gives due recognition to the intellectual virtues.[110] He also attends to the question of the theological virtues and the role of grace, noting that grace "radically orders the whole being of the human person in knowledge [my emphasis JW] and freedom to the triune God of eternal life."[111] In particular, several commentators stress the role of love and knowledge. William Dych invokes the virtue of love when he observes that Rahner's anthropology is predicated upon an

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[108] *Hearer of the Word*, 2
[109] *Hearer of the Word*, 3
[110] Karl Rahner: "Virtue" in *Sacramentum Mundi, op.cit.*, Vol XI, 337
[111] Concise Theology Dictionary, 530

openness to grace with its destiny of "union with God in knowledge and love".[112] This Augustinian integration of virtue and knowledge by love is also invoked by Louis Roberts, who observes that the whole role of love in the human person follows as a 'necessary consequence' from Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge, where interhuman love is always ordered to God because of the graced transcendental horizon.[113] Gerald McCool extends this when he sees that in *Hearer of the Word* 'love is the lamp of knowledge' where the unity of love and knowledge in a 'single dynamic process' is brought about by the elevation of the human spirit by the supernatural existential where the human spirit makes its 'loving surrender to the horizon of its world'.[114]

Here, we have a relatively strong link between virtue and knowledge, with regard to both intellectual and theological virtue. In his final volume of *TI*, Rahner provides an extension to this link. In the article "Plea for a Nameless Virtue"[115] although refusing a name for this virtue, he posits a nameless virtue that may correspond to either an intellectual or moral virtue, that could be subsumed under prudence or wisdom, yet essentially is a virtue of "active respect" for "knowledge and freedom, and at the same time for their disconsonance."[116] This virtue steers a course between two epistemological extremes, that of 'weary' relativism and 'obstinate' fanaticism.[117] This can be seen as a further strengthening of Rahner's approach to a virtue epistemology, which posits the *via media* as a virtue *per se*. However Rahner is concerned not only with knowledge and

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[112] W. Dych: *Karl Rahner* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), 131
[113] L. Roberts: *op.cit.*, 150, 151
[114] G. McCool: *A Rahner Reader*, *op.cit.*, 211
[115] *TI* XXIII, 33
[116] *ibid*, 37
[117] *ibid*

freedom, but with knowledge in freedom, in that, because knowing is "only successful in an act of freedom",[118] it follows that "the knowing act achieves its wholly human meaning when in freedom it is integrated in loving intercommunication with a personal other".[119] Here then, Rahner has integrated virtue (love), knowledge and freedom.

It is also necessary to include here that a possible Rahnerian theological virtue epistemology cannot have knowledge as its terminus. If the human person with his approach to *beatitudo* perfects himself through love, it can be argued that this implies the self transcendence of knowledge in so far as the *beatitudo* implies far more than knowledge.[120]

9.4.2 Rahner and Other Issues in Virtue Theory

In the postmodern recovery of virtue, a number of issues in virtue theory have become evident. For our purposes, the most visible issues (besides *habitus/hexis* treated at 9.3.1 and virtue epistemology at 9.4.1) are:

- unity of the virtues;
- acquisition/source of the virtues;
- virtues and community;
- virtue and emotion.

The first two issues are relatively easy to resolve. Rahner's *schema* of virtue is dominated by the triad of the theological virtues with the further

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[118] cf. L. Roberts: *op.cit.*, 152
[119] *ibid.*
[120] *ibid* and 1 Cor. 13

consideration of the pre-eminence of love. Because of this dominance the issues of the unity and source of the virtues are subsumed by the theological consideration that grace through infusion is the source of the triad and also provides its unity, with all the strengths and weaknesses of this theological approach.

Another issue, that of the virtues and community, is less readily resolved. We have noted earlier that, in the postmodern recovery of virtue, such authors as MacIntyre and Hauerwas have provided a social context for virtues, which has met with its own difficulties. However the resolution of this problem of virtue and community, (i.e., how does the moral life of the virtuous moral agent bring about a community of virtue, and what is the pluralist/relativist dimension to this consideration?) may be resolved by the juxtaposition of the virtues to social fundamental option (which will be considered in detail in the next chapter).

What can be said briefly is that just as the notion of social sin has contributed to the emergence of the notion of social fundamental option so the notion of social sin may contribute to the notion of social virtue, with suitable cognizance of the role of the theological virtues.

The final issue for our consideration, that of the virtues and emotion, elicits two responses. First, Rahner is preoccupied with theological concerns, in particular with a theological anthropology, which means that of necessity his work is only too conversant with anthropological concerns, and in particular that although the emotions of the human person, *per se,* are never tackled by Rahner, they are not far from his field of view, particularly when one considers his work on concupiscence and natural law. Andrew Tallon

argues that in one particular respect, Rahner's idea of connaturality, or 'heart', (with its link to virtue) has its emotional context determined by metaphysics:

> [It] may not seem very emotional, and it isn't. He more than once has expressed misgiving ... about too much emphasis on feelings. Without going too far in the opposite direction he tries to place the affective in proper perspective, assigning to it its proper metaphysical meaning.[121]

This leads us to the second response, that these latter considerations of concupiscence and natural law are very Thomist in their heritage. In the previous chapter on the recovery of virtue (Chapter 4), we worked through the issue of virtue and emotion for both Aristotle and Aquinas. What can be said simply is that it is reasonable to assume that this treatment of virtue and emotion is readily incorporated into Rahner's work (even if it is not explicit) precisely because of his Thomist heritage.

9.5 Conclusion

Rahner, given his Thomist heritage, appears to have given only modest attention to virtue theory within his work, despite the postmodern phenomenon of the recovery of virtue with its camouflaged Thomist heritage. However Rahner has managed to present an extended and coherent definition of virtue. In the wider sense virtue is any developed capacity of the human person. In the narrower sense virtue is the ability to achieve moral good despite possible adversity. He distinguishes between the natural and supernatural virtues. The latter are infused by grace.

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[121] A. Tallon: "Connaturality in Aquinas and Rahner" *Philosophy Today* Vol XXVIII, No 2/4 Summer 1984

Rahner's understanding of virtue, when compared to other virtue theorists, is marked by a Thomist perspective with emphasis on the supernatural virtues and grace and is not preoccupied with a social context for virtue. Rahner sees *habitus* as underpinning virtue, and in turn, disposition underpinning *habitus.* The debate on *habitus* and disposition within the postmodern recovery of virtue has been intense and sustained. The question of voluntariness within virtue has become an important issue and renders Rahner's treatment of *habitus*/disposition problematic. Grace, within the focus of the supernatural existential, plays a dominating role in Rahner's understanding of virtue. The theological virtues are infused by grace, but, again through infused grace, are also linked to the moral virtues. The individual supernatural virtues constitute phases in the movement of the moral orientation of the human prson towards love, yet this triad of virtues constitutes a dynamic unity.

The dynamic unity of theological virtue has a strong link to Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge and may be regarded as a type of virtue epistemology. This virtue epistemology may engage with and modify some of the postmodern approaches to ethics such as a view that ethics is aporetic, and the repudiation of epistemology. It also reinforces the postconciliar shift from moral act to moral agency. It may also facilitate a better understanding of the role of affectivity in virtue.

CHAPTER 10

THE OPTION OF GRACE IN FREEDOM
THE LINK BETWEEN FUNDAMENTAL OPTION AND VIRTUE

... whether it is also my own view that personal becoming [*das personale Werden]*, becoming a person [*Person werden]*, is the central idea of my philosophico-theological anthropology.....

Karl Rahner

in the foreword to
Andrew Tallon: *Personal Becoming* published as a special edition of *The Thomist* Vol 43 No 1 January 1979, 1

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Ethics ..... is the chief locus of personal becoming.

Andrew Tallon *ibid* 8

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10 THE OPTION OF GRACE IN FREEDOM - THE LINK BETWEEN FUNDAMENTAL OPTION AND VIRTUE

10.1 Possible Approaches

This thesis has as its aim the clear definition and full understanding of the link between fundamental option and virtue ethics in the work of Karl Rahner in the light of the contemporary developments and debates in these subjects in contemporary moral theology and moral philosophy in the setting of postmodernity.

We have sketched the setting of postmodernity and examined Rahner's understanding of fundamental option and virtue in the light of contemporary developments and debates. How then are we to understand the link between virtue ethics and fundamental option? We are faced with three questions.

- There is the question that schematically there are three main possibilities in the work of Karl Rahner, either the fundamental option has no direct link with virtue ethics, or the fundamental option is identical with virtue ethics, or thirdly, there is overlap and complementarity between fundamental option and virtue ethics.

- There is the question of the specification of both fundamental option and virtue ethics in the work of Karl Rahner and how that determines the mutual link. For example, if the fundamental option is specified as faith and if the master virtue is specified as faith, is there an identity? Conversely, if the fundamental option is love and if the master virtue is

faith, what correspondence do they have? Again is the fundamental option simply the master virtue?

- There is the question of the determinants of fundamental option and virtue ethics, and further, what commonality do these determinants share? If the fundamental option is made in the context of grace and freedom, what is the role of grace and freedom in the acquisition of the virtues?

We will begin by briefly examining these questions in the context of different contemporary approaches to these questions and then note some of their predecessors in Christian thought. The focus then narrows to the work of Rahner himself.

10.2 A Typology of Different Contemporary Approaches to the Link Between Fundamental Option and Virtue Ethics.

By way of introduction, Farley has completed a survey of virtue in the biblical literature. He defines virtue as "an activity of the whole person in conformity with love of God and love of neighbour"[1] which leads him to observe that virtue is "subordinate to a way of life that subordinates its orientation to God."[2] Farley has, perhaps inadvertently, drawn our attention to the link between virtue and life orientation (i.e., fundamental option). Farley's biblical, evangelical perspective gives some degree of reinforcement to the acceptability of a link between fundamental option and virtue ethics, even if Farley never uses the term fundamental option and

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[1] B W Farley: *In Praise of Virtue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 160
[2] *ibid*

presumably is not familiar with it. Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas, from a more systematic perspective writes: "The clearest example of character is one in which a life is dominated by one all consuming purpose or direction."[3] Again, Hauerwas, like Farley does not use the term fundamental option and in fact has an aversion to it, but one is struck by the similarity between "all consuming purpose or direction" and fundamental option or basic decision. These two authors provide good examples of an almost subterranean link between virtue and fundamental option.

Although the available contemporary literature on the link between virtue ethics and fundamental option is minimal, it is not entirely a black hole. There are, in fact, a number of explicitly drawn links between fundamental option and virtue ethics. Several writers have given some sketches of the possible link and it is to them we now turn in order to place Rahner in context.

First, there are the writers who specify fundamental option as simply only one of the theological virtues, the two leading contenders being faith or love (hope seems at a discount, compare Rahner's rejection of the modality understanding of hope 9.4.2). This is almost written in stone. In *Veritatis Splendor (66)* there is the reference to a 'fundamental choice' which is a 'question of the decision of faith' which 'works through love' and cites Romans 16:26 for the former and Galatians 5:6 for the latter. This approach is supported by both conservative theologians such as Germain Grisez[4] and also by liberals such as Richard Gula.[5] This raises the

[3] S Hauerwas: *Character and The Christian Life, op.cit.*, 119
[4] R McCormick: The Critical Calling, 187
[5] R Gula: *Reason Informed by Faith* (New York: Paulist, 1989), 79

difficulty of which virtue has precedence and the problematic area of the role of a master virtue, and indeed the unity of the virtues.

Second, other writers take a more expansive, integrative view. One of the earliest exponents of the fundamental option, Peter Fransen SJ, refers to the fundamental option as a state of grace dynamically found in love, exercised in basic will, essentially expressed in freedom, and designating the leap of faith. In sum, the fundamental option is equated with the virtuous life.[6] Later exponents of fundamental option have echoed this. Mark O'Keefe refers to the fundamental option, with the prompting of grace, as driving the person in the growth of virtue, that is "habitual dispositions to choose the good."[7] Similarly, Timothy O'Connel refers to the fundamental option as the 'moral act of virtue', that is the positive fundamental option, as opposed to the negative fundamental option which is a 'mortal act of sin'.[8] The fundamental option, which he sees as conversion, is an 'act of self disposition'.[9] There are variations on this theme. David Bohr, for example, sees virtue generally as 'rooted' in the fundamental option of faith which 'manifests and promotes wholeness and salvation.'[10] In this case, one virtue, faith, is identified with the fundamental option but becomes the springboard for the other virtues. 'One is good in all virtues or good in none,'[11] what could be labelled the 'three musketeers' approach of all for one and one for all.

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[6] *The New Life of Grace* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1971), 96, 226, 237, 267, 315
[7] M. O'Keefe: "Fundamental Option and Three Ways" *Studies in Formation Spirituality* Vol XIII No 1, February 1992
[8] T. O'Connel: *Principles for a Catholic Morality* (San Francisco: Harper, 1990) (rev.edn.), 91
[9] *ibid*
[10] David Bohr: *Catholic Moral Tradition* (Huntington: Our Sunday Visitor, 1989), 194
[11] *ibid*

It becomes clear that although the coverage of the link between fundamental option and virtue ethics in the literature is cursory and minimal there is sufficient evidence that a number of writers do see a definite link between fundamental option and virtue ethics. However there is the curiosity that the approach is from the side of fundamental option not virtue ethics, that is those people writing on fundamental option have made the link to virtue ethics and not *vice versa*. On the contrary, it appears that some writers on virtue ethics are hostile to the fundamental option. Stanley Hauerwas has noted that the fundamental option, coming directly from German idealism, is not fundamental and is not an option, and has nothing to do with virtue.[12] There is also the postconciliar universalist perspective to fundamental option and the postmodern non-universalist perspective to virtue ethics. This would indicate that the problems for establishing a link between fundamental option and virtue ethics rest largely on the side of virtue ethics. One problem occurring on the fundamental option side is the reference to disposition, in particular, habitual disposition. This invokes the problem of determinism or at the least a lack of freedom. This problem will be dealt with in the discussion on Rahner. However all these writers have established a link, however cursorily, with some of the perennial concerns of theology, such as grace, freedom, sin, and the will. The way forward, at this point, is to narrow the focus and to examine the antecedents of this link in the Gospel Authors, Aquinas *et alii*.

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[12] Stanley Hauerwas: *"Veritates Splendor* - Why the Pope is Right", ACU Research Seminar, North Sydney, Australia, 29 June 1995

10.3 The Link between the Antecedents of Fundamental Option and Virtue in the Christian Tradition

10.3.1 The Biblical Antecedent of the Heart

Rahner explicitly refers to the origins of the fundamental option in the "biblical .... concept of the heart",[13] (cf. 3.1) however there is also the consideration that the concept of 'heart' also encapsulated the biblical ethic of moral agency and character, i.e., virtue (ref. 4.5). The link between virtue and fundamental option in the heart is made by simple juxtaposition, insofar as virtue and fundamental option are subsumed within the biblical concept of identity, i.e., heart. This Old Testament concept of 'heart' denoted the seat of motives, will, emotion, passion, appetite, understanding, thought processes, cognition and moral judgment. The New Testament expanded the moral dimension of heart by referring to a right state or purity of heart, and to the 'hardness' or 'softness' of heart, and to the *locus* for inward renewal and regeneration which constituted *metanoia.* The 'heart', as the biblical concept of identity, has gained a decided ethical perspective which has included an intimate link between fundamental option and virtue.

10.3.2 The Patristic Antecedents

We have seen the importance of the role of conversion in the early church (ref 3.2). Building on the biblical concept of *metanoia*, church doctrine developed an understanding of conversion that delineated its proximity to virtue. Conversion was seen to lead to the attainment of virtue, not

[13] "Theology of Freedom", *TI* VI, 186

withstanding the social dimension of conversion that implied adhesion or a more casual change in religious adherence, or possibly leading to cultic fanaticism rather than the cultivation of the life of virtue. However this possible cultivation of the life of virtue brought about by conversion *ipso facto* located virtue within the orbit of the then (as yet) unframed, undefined notion of fundamental option.

The Cappadocians gave more precision to the link. This established the primacy of choosing in the Christian life, that is, choosing either good or evil. This choosing was made in freedom by the will and led to the life of virtue. Here we have most of the components in skeletal form for the theory of fundamental option, moreover in close conjunction with virtue theory. It was left to Augustine to give further precision to the link. He developed the concept of *aversio*, the turning away from God, in effect, a negative fundamental option. This fundamental option was directly linked to the central Augustinian concept of love. The *aversio* could be seen as the negative fundamental option of self-centred love or otherwise, sin. The contrary was that of self giving love or virtue that is, a positive fundamental option. This could also be seen as being located within the biblical doctrine of the 'heart'. In summary, by the end of the patristic period, the Christian understanding of personal identity and becoming, starting from the biblical concepts of the 'heart' and *metanoia,* had pulled in such considerations as conversion, the life of virtue, volition, choosing, self giving and self centred love, all components for the emergence of the doctrine of fundamental option, but also providing the platform for the link between fundamental option and virtue.

10.3.3 The Thomist Antecedents

Aquinas took over and refined further many of the Augustinian tenets in the link between fundamental option antecedents and virtue. He included the biblical concept of heart and its related concept of *aversio* with the choosing between self giving love and self centred sin, that is, the choosing between virtue and vice. Love was also invoked in another role, that of the distinction between mortal and venial sin (ref 3.3.2). The argument ran that the main principle of the moral life of the human person was love, in particular the love of God. If this love was vitiated there was no comparable influence within the person to alleviate sin. In effect mortal sin overturned love which was the life of the soul. If this life of the soul was destroyed, only God could restore it. However, this life of the soul was not destroyed by only some sinful acts with the implication that there was some saving, healing principle which could reorder the life of the soul. This healing principle was none other than love itself. Here we have the virtue of love playing a pivotal role in that precursor of the fundamental option, the distinction between mortal and venial sin. That is to say, the pre-eminence of love acts as a principle within the human person, that is, it is a principle that does not rely on the three traditional conditions for mortal sin, (grave matter, full consent of the will and sufficient reflection) but on a principle that is exclusively inward.

There is an additional consideration for the link between the precursors of the fundamental option and virtue in the work of Aquinas and that is the *finis ultimus.* It needs to be included as it is the basis for one of the three principal 'types' of the fundamental option, (i.e., the 'heart'/*metanoia, finis ultimus* and transcendental freedom). However it should be stressed that,

curiously, Karl Rahner did not use the *finis ultimus* as the basis for the fundamental option.

As we discovered in sections 3.3.1 and 4.7.1, the human person makes particular choices within the context of the dynamic and innate orientation of the will. That is to say, there is a volitional dynamic of the human person, orientated to the *telos* of goodness or *beatitudo,* that, in freedom and knowledge, influences the making of particular choices. Now the *finis ultimus* also plays an important role in Aquinas' understanding of the virtues. His aretaic ethics is teleological. In the first Treatise within the IaIIae of the *Summa* i.e., the *Treatise on Happiness,* with the very first question, he posits the *finis ultimus* for the happiness of the human person (ref 4.7.1). However, the infusion of the theological virtues is teleologically ordered to the *finis ultimus*[14] (ref 4.7.1, 4.7.3). Now, two observations to be made at this point.

- Some contemporary Thomist scholarship has claimed that for scholastic theology, virtues were not located (*à la Scotus*) in the will (ref. 4.7). Our cursory review of the *Summa* would appear to indicate the contrary, that there is a volitional aspect to *finis ultimus* and virtue, however this interesting and controversial aspect of Thomist thought is not able to be pursued here.

- With regard to Karl Rahner, we are left with the question, why, as a (Transcendental) Thomist, did he exclude the quintessentially Thomist approach of *finis ultimus* to the fundamental option? Further, if there is

[14] S.T. IaIIae, Q63, A3

such a marked integration between fundamental option precursors and virtue from the Thomist *finis ultimus* perspective, would this approach, if pursued by Rahner, have in any way modified his anthropology? Again, because of the constraints of this thesis, we are not able to pursue this question, but to simply note that reservations have been raised about the coherence of the *finis ultimus* (ref. 3.3.1).

10.3.4 Kierkegaard and the Link Between Virtue and Fundamental Option

Although Kierkegaard was reluctant to use the term 'virtue', because he associated it with habit and the absence of freedom, he is regarded as being firmly in the virtue tradition. He is, in short, a virtue ethicist (ref. 4.8). He could say that the opposite of sin was not virtue but faith, however what was submerged from view was his equating of faith (in itself a virtue) with what we would regard as virtue. If Kierkegaard was a virtue ethicist but also, as acknowledged by Rahner, a forerunner in the development of fundamental option theory, what was the link between his antecedents of fundamental option and virtue?

If the precursors of the fundamental option in the thought of Kierkegaard were choosing and subjectivity we have a link with virtue when the latter is seen not in habit but in active resolution, in personal formation, conditioned in inwardness which have their source in the God given gifts of faith, hope and love, i.e., the primacy of grace. In this sense, Kierkegaard's thought provided one of the basic building blocks for the Rahnerian link between virtue and fundamental option. This basic building block provides an

emphatic rejection of habit as a component of virtue, but instead stresses inwardness and volition.

10.4 The Link Between Fundamental Option and Virtue Ethics in the Work of Karl Rahner

In chronicling developments in moral theology since 1940, Richard McCormick has noted from a liberal perspective that the fundamental option "pervades Rahner's writing on grace, sin, conversion, the moral life, in general and above all the spiritual exercises of St Ignatius."[15] He continues that 'such an anthropology has enormous repercussions on some very basic concepts of moral theology: sin, conversion, virtue ...'[16] What then is the link between fundamental option and that basic concept of moral theology, virtue ethics, in Rahner's work and what are the repercussions?

10.4.1 The Role of the Theological Virtues

We now examine the link with the fundamental option of the individual theological virtues. We begin with faith. Rahner has been seen as holding that, faith, in concrete terms, is the "exercise of a fundamental option for or against God"[17] and that the fundamental option for God "is constitutive of faith".[18] This view of faith is not the process of one decision following another, ie, of categorical choice, but is the 'disposition' of the human person themselves *in toto,* via the supernatural existential.[19] It is useful here

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[15] R McCormick: "Moral Theology 1940 - 1989 - An Overview" *Theological Studies* March 1989, Vol 50, No 1, 8
[16] *ibid*
[17] R Lennan: *The Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner, op.cit.,* 186
[18] *ibid*
[19] *ibid*

to recapitulate this in Rahner's own words found in "On the Situation of Faith".[20] He begins with freedom. Freedom is:

> the possibility of an inalienable disposal by the subject of itself as a whole in a basic decision [ie, fundamental option] .... In the concrete order of reality however such a decision is always either belief or unbelief in the theological sense of the term. The freedom with which a person disposes of himself in a fundamental decision is the freedom of a subject with a 'supernatural existential', with an enduring actual offer of God, an offer presented to freedom as the innermost subjective principle of the orientation of men to the immediacy of God.... If a person in his free, absolute self understanding does not withdraw in a culpable fear into his own finiteness but trustfully yields to the transcendentality of his mind oriented as it is to the incomprehensibility of God, he accepts himself in the transcendentality radicalized by grace to the immediacy of God: he believes and does so with an absolute assent.[21]

We can observe here that Rahner has locked in many of the components of his anthropology, viz. grace, supernatural existential, fundamental freedom, fundamental option, and metaphysic of knowledge, all having as their terminus the virtue of faith, ie, belief with absolute assent. Does this mean that faith is the master virtue or that it is the *entrée* to the fundamental option, or nearly indistinguishable from it? To answer this question we need to look at Rahner's treatment of the other theological virtues and fundamental option.

In the essay "Hope", previously unpublished but included in the anthology (ironically) *The Practice of Faith*,[22] Rahner deals with the theological virtue of hope. He begins:

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[20] *TI XX*
[21] "On the Situation of Faith" *TI XX*, 27-28
[22] (ed.) Karl Lehmann and Albert Raffelt (London: SCM, 1985), 219

> Christian revelation ... proclaims that the human being can reach out over this chasm [of separation from God] ... and grasp for God. Hope demands God himself ... It must love God himself. He must give himself. This is the outrageous claim of the divine virtue of hope.[23]

Rahner refers to it as an "act of hope",[24] in particular those acts of ultimate hope which do not appear on the surface, are experienced in the Holy Spirit of God, an experience proffered in freedom with the question

> Do we wish to accept it, or do we choose instead to barricade ourselves up against in a hell of freedom to which we damn ourselves?[25]

We can understand this "act of hope" as fundamental option. Although this essay was written with a much wider non academic audience in mind, it is clear that all the components previously discussed are there. In this piece, Rahner has given centrality to the virtue of hope *vis-à-vis* fundamental option, and in doing so dispenses with the singularity of the virtue of faith as the master virtue.

Finally, we consider the link between fundamental option and love. In "The Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbour", Rahner again invokes many of the components of his anthropology when dealing with fundamental option. He refers to the basic structure of the human person.

> This basic *a priori* structure is experienced in concrete encounter with a concrete thou. The one moral (or immoral) basic act [ie, fundamental option] in which one returns to himself and disposes of himself, is the loving (or hating) communication with a concrete

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[23] *ibid,* 220
[24] *ibid,* 222
[25] *ibid,* 223

> thou. In such a Thou one experiences his basic *a priori* relatedness to a Thou and accepts or rejects it. All else is open to, a moment in, consequence of, or approaching to, this act. In the present order of salvation this basic act is supernaturally elevated to God's self communication in uncreated grace and by the resulting theological virtues: faith, hope and charity. By its nature theological love integrates and assumes faith and hope into itself. Thus the one basic human act is love of neighbour as charity, ie, love of neighbour that is finalised toward the God of eternal life."[26]

What Rahner is saying in the "Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbour" is that the human person makes a choice for God through categorical acts which are a response to people and the dimension of his existence. These categorical acts are set in the context of a 'basic intentionality',[27] or fundamental option. Now the basic decision of the human person may be to respond to these people and other considerations on their own merits or the response may be to subordinate them to one's own egocentric, selfish requirements. The first basic decision or response is the positive fundamental option which contains "a loving surrender to a transcendent order of truth and value whose ground is God."[28] The second basic decision or response is the negative fundamental option of self, or concupiscence. The first basic decision or fundamental option implies not only love of God, but also love of neighbour, "thus our conscious love of our neighbour is the implicit act through which our implicit love of God is exercised."[29] In this Augustinian dichotomy of love, Rahner has forged a direct link between fundamental option and love.

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[26] "The Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbour" *Theological Digest* 15.89 (1967), 90-91 also *TI VI*
[27] G. McCool: *A Rahner Reader, op.cit.*, 239
[28] *ibid*, 240
[29] *ibid*

In "The Unity of Love of God and Love of Neighbour" Rahner has done us the problematic service of setting the theological virtue of love as the pre-eminent virtue where the fundamental option is supernaturally elevated by grace (cf. supernatural existential) with the resulting triad of theological virtues. Several of Rahner's commentators have reinforced this. Rahner argues that love both 'integrates' and also 'assumes' faith and hope into itself. Commentators on Rahner have reinforced this. William Dych refers to Rahner's theology of "The fundamental option of self-transcending love".[30] James Bresnahan sees love as a self surrender to Holy Mystery at the level of fundamental option.[31] However this pre-eminence of love would need to be tempered by the earlier comments made *re* faith and hope.

Although we have considered the link between fundamental option and the individual virtues we are now confronted with the earlier consideration that the triad of the theological virtues constitute a dynamic unity. (ref. 9.3.3). How does Rahner explicate the problem of the relationship of the fundamental option to the theological virtues considered as a unity? At the beginning of the essay "Hope", Rahner offers the usual formula that faith, hope and love, as the three divine theological virtues, are the three basic perfections of Christian existence which abide and last.[32] Infuriatingly, for our present purposes, Rahner says that he will not consider how these three virtues are interrelated, nor how they can be distinguished from one another, nor how they nonetheless constitute a unity "so that they condition one another to a greater degree."[33] We can at least say that these three basic perfections of Christian existence are interrelated, distinguishable, yet

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[30] Dych: *Karl Rahner: op.cit.*, 113
[31] J. Bresnahan in G. McCool: *op.cit.*, 177-8
[32] "The Practice of Faith", *op.cit*, 219 cf. 1 Cor. 13:13
[33] *ibid*

possess a unity, and condition one another. Rahner is talking exclusively about the theological virtues, no other virtues are even considered, and stresses their unity in diversity. However he was able to place the virtues within the framework of his anthropology, as can be seen from the readings above. Now Rahner commented that the theological virtues "determine our direct relationship to God himself."[34] Here we have a partial resolution of our problem. However, although we have already seen (in 9.3.3) that Rahner, as a Thomist, posits a dynamic unity to the theological virtues, this unity is not readily apparent. For example, Rahner pushes the view that hope is not simply a 'modality' of faith and love but is a "unique theological virtue in its own right and one which cannot be reduced to the other two."[35] Similarly, the theological virtue of love is established as pre-eminent in the triad, as first among equals. Nonetheless the dynamic unity of the virtues is established by Rahner through his theology of grace (see 9.3.2). Yet again, Rahner's theology of grace comes to the fore, and this necessarily invokes the supernatural existential.

If the theological virtues determine our direct relationship to God himself, does anything else determine our direct relationship to God himself? The answer is the fundamental option in the context of the supernatural existential. The immediacy and intimacy of the relationship between the theological virtues and the fundamental option becomes obvious. The link is established, in this sense, by proximity.

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[34] "Hope" in *The Practice of Faith op.cit.*, 219
[35] "On the Theology of Hope" *TI IX*, 245

10.4.2 *Habitus* and Fundamental Freedom

Rahner argues that *habitus,* if it refers to an objective moral good, then the *habitus* acquired is a virtue. If the *habitus* is not stable it is close to that of an existential with the implication of it being subsumed within the supernatural existential. We are then confronted with the possibility of a very close association between virtue and fundamental option via *habitus*/existential. However the natural foundation of a *habitus* is a disposition (ref. 9.3.1). Further, a *habitus* based on a disposition can be acquired by constant repetition. Now Rahner's colleague and contemporary, Bernard Häring, has argued that "virtue is genuine to the extent that freedom is basic to it."[36] More importantly, we are only too well aware that the basis for the fundamental option is fundamental freedom. The question that is writ large is what is the role of freedom *vis-à-vis* the role of *habitus* and also of disposition? Are they mutually incompatible? Is there a basic contradiction? Is the link between virtue and fundamental option vitiated in Rahner's anthropology? I would argue that, because, first, the relationship between fundamental freedom and fundamental option is explicit and is not able to be severed without reducing the Rahnerian theory of fundamental option to a shambles, and second, because there are strong arguments (cf. Häring) for the role of freedom in virtue, we are forced to scrutinize the understanding of *habitus.* We have seen in 9.3.1 that some of the leading theorists of the postmodern recovery of virtue saw virtues as paradigms of voluntariness. We have also concluded that Rahner's analysis of habit/*habitus*/disposition is problematic. What can be said is that Rahner gave scant attention to virtue theory in comparison to his treatment of other components of his anthropology such as supernatural existential and

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[36] *Free and Faithful in Christ* Vol 1, (Homebush, NSW: Paulist, 1979), 196

fundamental freedom. His ambivalence and paucity of formulation on virtue must be seen as a weakness. Perhaps he could have benefitted from a closer contact with Bernard Häring, and another fellow neo Thomist, Yves Simon. Nonetheless, given this weakness it is still possible to speak of a link between virtue and fundamental option in the work of Karl Rahner.

10.4.3 Rahner's Anthropology, the Link Between Fundamental Option and Virtue and the Priority of Grace

It has become apparent in the preceding sections that Rahner, in his treatment of the link between fundamental option and virtue, in particular his treatment of the theological virtues, has also invoked many components of his anthropology, viz. grace, supernatural existential, fundamental freedom and metaphysics of knowledge. It needs to be stressed that these components are interlocked, which gives a coherence and balance to Rahner's treatment of fundamental option and virtue (*habitus* and disposition notwithstanding). If we approach the link from the perspective of the theological virtue of love, we see the fundamental option supernaturally elevated by grace through the supernatural existential and the other theological virtues integrated into love (ref. 10.4.1). However, what exactly is the relationship between the virtues and the supernatural existential, and how does this impinge on the relationship between virtue and the supernatural existential? Is the role of *habitus*, as noted above, a red herring? As noted earlier, the theological virtues, **in their unity and difference** are the transcendental foundation of the relation of the human person to God. That is to say, they "form the one power of man's total relationship to God's self communication and differ among themselves in so

far as they express phases of this one self communication of God."[37] What this means is that the supernatural existential, which is the offer of grace and the potential to receive that grace, is augmented by the theological virtues which are the power of the total human relationship to this offer of grace. The content and the dimension of this power is the fundamental option, which operates through all these phases of theological virtue.

This leads to a further important consideration. There is a profound dichotomy in place within the fundamental option, of the positive and the negative fundamental option. The negative fundamental option has been characterised as the act of sin, the positive fundamental option has been characterised as the mortal act of virtue. Now, we have contemplated some of the dimensions of Rahner's negative fundamental option (ref. 8.6.4) and have become aware of its possible limitation, insofar as Highfield has argued that Rahner's fatal flaw is to transfer divine absolute sovereign freedom to the human person under the flag of grace, i.e., supernatural existential and fundamental freedom. This invokes some of the old chestnuts about nature and grace that we have covered at length in Chapter 7, however it should be stressed that, when discussing the link between virtue and fundamental option, we are only referring to positive fundamental option. Now we should also ask, what is the criterion for a positive or negative fundamental option? The answer lies in the orientation to God, that is to say the human person that is open and receptive to God has exercised their fundamental option, whereas the person that is closed to God has made a negative fundamental option. How do we know when we are open to God? When we have exercised love based on faith and hope

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[37] Roberts: *op.cit.*, 148

toward God and also neighbour (by implication, we have exercised a social fundamental option).

There remains the consideration of that other important aspect of Rahner's anthropology, his metaphysic of knowledge. In 9.4.1 we noted the interpretation of Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge within the context of virtue epistemology. This indicated the strong link between Rahner's epistemology (or epistemic ontology) and virtue. What then of fundamental option? We also noted Rahner's concern with knowledge and freedom, and also knowledge in freedom, in that knowing is only successful within an act of freedom. However, Rahner takes this further. Knowing only acquires a human dimension when, in freedom, it is integrated in "loving intercommunication with a personal other."[38] Rahner has integrated love, (i.e., virtue) and freedom, (i.e., fundamental option) through knowledge.

10.4.4 The Role of the Heart

We have already examined the biblical, Augustinian and Thomist understandings of the heart and its relation to fundamental option (ref. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3.4, 8.5).

Before attempting to establish the link between fundamental option and virtue in the context of Rahner's understanding of the heart, we need to delineate the link of virtue to the heart, notwithstanding the paucity of Rahner's writing on virtue.

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[38] Roberts: *op.cit.*, 152

Happily, a noted commentator on Rahner, Andrew Tallon has done us all the service of establishing this context. He finds virtue theory "a way not so much to demythologise or de-romanticise the heart but to retrieve its deeper meaning."[39] Tallon cites Pierre Rousselot as also following this interpretation because it "accounted for the spontaneity, facility and momentum we associate both with heart and habit [virtue]."[40] Tallon sees Rahner's contribution as foundational in that he presents the heart in terms of spirit. Now, as we noted earlier (8.5), Rahner has linked fundamental option to heart by the metaphysic of knowledge. Here we have a link of virtue to heart. The strength of Tallon's approach is its link to affectivity. Although Tallon acknowledges Rahner's downplaying of emotion, he argues that Rahner places affectivity in its proper perspective, "assigning to it its proper metaphysical meaning... if heart, unlike mind is affective .... then heart is the other in me as other ... accepted in faith as gift."[41] Tallon reinforces this affectivity dimension with the role of the theological virtues. "Faith, love and hope are truly only comprehensible as affective responses of the heart not in opposition to head as another faculty, but as the essential meaning of the idea of affective connaturality."[42]

The difficulty for Tallon's approach is that he equates virtue with habit. Although Tallon is aware of the Thomist position of habit between potency and actuality he stresses the idea of habitude in habit and virtue *per se,* and this presents considerable difficulties as we have already seen. Nonetheless we can see that it is possible to link virtue and fundamental option through

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[39] A. Tallon: "Connaturality in Aquinas and Rahner" *Philosophy Today* Vol XXVIII No 2/4, Summer 1984
[40] *ibid*
[41] *ibid*
[42] A. Tallon: "The Connaturalized Heart in Veritatis Splendor" in M.E. Allsopp and J.J. O'Keefe (eds): *Veritatis Splendor - American Responses* (Kansas City: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 149

Rahner's understanding of the heart, with the emphasis on the theological virtues.

There remains one other consideration. Tallon also invokes Rahner's use of Ignatius and the discernment of spirits. Tallon sees this as Rahner's most specific second contribution to the understanding of heart after his metaphysical grounding. Tallon cites Rahner's discussion in the *Dynamic Element in the Church.*

> Spiritual life consists of prayer and discernment; prayer (meditation, contemplation) is our direct relation to God and action based on discernment is our indirect relation with God through what we do every day ... Now... the experience of grace as grace is not something we can distinguish from some hypothetical state of pure ungraced nature, so we have to include reference to faith in order to do a theology of this experience of God through grace. But for a concept of head-heart developmental continuum, that presents no problem because faith, self-transcending love, and hope are the *par excellence* examples of just those higher operations beyond discursive reason and deliberate will.[43]

We noted earlier the importance attributed to the role of the fundamental option in the Ignatian spiritual exercises with its 'enormous repercussions' on the understanding of virtue. By way of conclusion Ignatian discernment and the heart may provide an equally, if not more, substantial *entrée* to the theory of fundamental option, than fundamental freedom.

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[43] *ibid,* 151

10.5 Conclusion

At the beginning of this Chapter we posited three possibilities for the link between fundamental option and virtue, either there is no link, or the fundamental option is identical with virtue or there is overlap and complementarity. It has become clear that in the anthropology of Karl Rahner that there is in fact a link between fundamental option and virtue, one of overlap and complementarity. Another question posed at the beginning of this Chapter asked how the specification of both fundamental option and virtue determined the mutual link (if any)? Again it has become clear that the specification of the fundamental option and virtue does determine their link, insofar as the exercise of faith, hope and love could be seen as a fundamental option, i.e., an option for infused grace. A third question was posed earlier, how do the other components of Rahner's anthropology influence the link between fundamental option and virtue? Again it has become clear that the link between fundamental option and virtue is predicated upon the play of certain components of Rahner's anthropology, in particular, the supernatural existential.

We were able to establish various differing accounts of the link between virtue and fundamental option in the theological literature and examine the link between the antecedents of fundamental option and virtue in the Christian tradition, noting the role of the *finis ultimus* in the Thomist tradition and its apparent neglect by Rahner. However Rahner stresses the role of grace for the link between the fundamental option and virtues. The infused theological virtues, in themselves, may be seen as a fundamental option, but they are virtues which are infused by grace, that in their unity and difference they are the transcendental foundation of the relation of the

human person to God, and in this wider dimension they constitute the fundamental option.

CHAPTER 11 - CONCLUSION
THEN WE SHALL BE SEEING FACE TO FACE

Christianity is a religion in search of metaphysics.

Alfred North Whitehead
quoted in S.J. Duffy: *The Dynamics of Grace*
(Collegeville, Minnesota: Michael Glazier, 1993), 332

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Christianity is *praxis*, a character - task.

Soren Kierkegaard: *Journals and Papers* IV 3864
quoted in D.J. Gouwens: *Kierkegaard in Religious Thought*
(Cambridge: University Press, 1996), 209

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11 CONCLUSION - THEN WE SHALL BE SEEING FACE TO FACE

In the first Chapter we set as the aim of this thesis:

- to define precisely and understand fully the link between fundamental option and virtue ethics in the work of Karl Rahner in the light of the contemporary developments and debates in these subjects in contemporary moral theology and moral philosophy in the setting of postmodernity;

- to examine the implications of this link between fundamental option and virtue ethics including the assessment of the continuing significance of Karl Rahner for theology in a postmodern setting.

In the preceding Chapters we pursued these objectives, and came to the following conclusions.

The Rahnerian theory of fundamental option emerged in the post conciliar period as a response to the manualist tradition of legalism, the concern with moral act rather than moral agency and with a particular concern for the distinction between mortal and venial sin. This postconciliar response to the manualist tradition, which produced the fundamental option, can be seen to have its origins in the biblical concept of heart, and also patristic developments such as the *aversio.* A further source could be seen to be Kierkegaard's notion of choosing in subjectivity.

In contra-distinction to the theory of fundamental option, the recovery of virtue has had its foundations in the classical tradition of virtue, particularly Aristotle. Some of the leading commentators on Aristotelian virtue have stressed that virtues are products of choice and emotion, paradigms of voluntariness, predicated upon the *hexis* of the moral agent. Virtue is integrated into the moral agency of the human person where affectivity, cognition and voluntariness all hold sway.

Biblical virtue is found within an ethic of character and moral agency which could loosely be described as the heart. This moral agency conforms to the *telos* of the human person which is found within the *Basileia* and is not dependent upon the exercising of virtue *per se,* but rather through the prevalence of grace. Biblical virtue is not monist or essentialist but is the result of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in freedom.

The Patristic sources elaborated biblical virtue. Augustine presented an approach to virtue which stressed volition and the primary theological virtue of love. Virtue generally is subordinate to the will and the will is subordinate to God. This is paralleled by the view that virtues are not monist, or good in their own right, their goodness is derived from the goodness of the theological virtue of love. The culmination of the virtue of love is found not in virtue itself but in knowledge, in particular, the knowledge of the Trinity.

Aquinas built on the work of both Augustine and Aristotle. For Aquinas, the Aristotelian *telos* of *eudaimonia* is transformed into the *beatitudo.* His approach also integrates the role of affectivity into the virtues. The passions function correctly when they make the human person approach

that object which is good and avoid that which is bad. Ultimately, passions can be determined by the virtue of love for the ultimate other, i.e., God.

Virtues are also dependent upon *habitus* which is seen as a middle position between potency and actuality. It is marked by both vitality and permanence. It is subject to the will and reason, yet is not mechanist or determined. Although Aquinas sources all the virtues in God, only the theological virtues are perfect because only they can direct the human person to God.

Kierkegaard provides an interesting perspective on virtue which he sees as invoking volition and skill not habit. Volition and skill are found in personal formation, not habit. Like Aquinas, Kierkegaard stresses the primacy of the theological virtues, where virtue is ultimately the God given gifts of faith, hope and love conditioned in inwardness and passion.

Karl Rahner's thought drew on a pluriformity of these and other sources, Aquinas, Kant and Maréchal Hegel and Heidegger, Ignatius and the Fathers, with a special primacy given to Ignatian mysticism. Under the influence of these sources, Rahner's theology could be described as a transcendental anthropology which rests on a theology of grace. The important component in this theology is Rahner's concept of the supernatural existential, the offer of grace and the means to accept this offer, which precedes the fundamental option. The fundamental option, or the acceptance of this offer of grace, itself precedes the components of Rahner's moral anthropology, such as natural law, and sinfulness. The viability of the fundamental option is dependent to a certain extent on the viability of the supernatural existential. The supernatural existential was Rahner's solution to the theological

problem of nature and grace, a solution which has been subject to intense scrutiny but has managed to maintain its viability. The grounding of the supernatural existential is found in Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge, which may provide the means for a possible engagement with some of the anti-metaphysical claims of postmodernity.

This transcendental anthropology applies to Rahner's treatment of fundamental option. The fundamental option is predicated not only upon the supernatural existential, but also upon his notion of fundamental freedom, which is the divine gift of God himself with the gift of grace, where the transcendental horizon of freedom is seen as the fullness of being in God. The fundamental option is any exercise of this fundamental freedom. The essential free decision is the antithesis of the spontaneous act of appetite and of manipulation by the other. Further, an act of fundamental freedom which is evil is fatally flawed because of God's sovereignty. This is understood in the context of the priority of grace where the sovereignty of God precedes the dispensation of freedom. Further, the choice between grace and sin in a concrete life situation, which is the very touchstone of the fundamental option, is understood not only in terms of his transcendental anthropology, but also in terms of Ignatian discernment, and also of the heart.

With regard to virtue, Rahner, in his published writings, devotes a minimum amount of space to virtue *vis-à-vis* fundamental option. He also appears to be unaware of the postmodern recovery of virtue. Nevertheless, Rahner on occasions presents an extended and coherent definition of virtue within the Thomist tradition. Virtue is any developed capacity of the human person that achieves moral good. Rahner sees *habitus* underpinning virtue, and in

turn, disposition underpinning *habitus*. This is at odds with some of the positions taken in the debate on the recovery of virtue where much importance has been given to the question of voluntariness which renders Rahner's treatment of *habitus* problematic, especially in view of the fundamental option and fundamental freedom. Also, Rahner appears to give little consideration to the role of affectivity in virtue. Rahner (as a Thomist) gives priority to grace and the theological virtues. The theological virtues are infused by grace, but again, through infused grace are also linked to the moral virtues. The individual theological virtues constitute phases in the movement of the moral orientation of the human person towards love, yet this triad of virtues constitutes a unity. This dynamic unity of theological virtue has a strong link to Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge and may be regarded as a type of virtue epistemology. This virtue epistemology may engage with and modify some postmodernist approaches to ethics such as the view that ethics is aporetic and the repudiation of epistemology.

We have been able to discover the link between virtue and fundamental option in Rahner's work, one of overlap and complimentarity where grace, working through the components of Rahner's anthropology, notably the supernatural existential, grounds the link between fundamental option and virtue. The infused theological virtues of faith, hope and love, in themselves may be seen as a fundamental option, yet they are also virtues infused by grace, and in their unity and difference they are the transcendental foundation of the relation of the human person to God. In this wider dimension they constitute the fundamental option. What stands behind the exercise of the theological virtues are all the components of Rahner's transcendental anthropology, *viz.* fundamental freedom,

supernatural existential, grace and metaphysic of knowledge. This triad of theological virtue lends itself via Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge to a virtue epistemology, to a recovery of metaphysics and they contribute to a contemporary philosophical psychology.

Thus we have seen how Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge, through the supernatural existential, underpins not only the fundamental option but also his understanding of virtue. This Rahnerian anthropological 'package', with its undergirding by a metaphysic of knowledge, may address some of the more pressing concerns of postmodernist thought. In particular, as we have been able to discern the link between fundamental option and virtue in the work of Karl Rahner, we can see that the possibility of a dichotomy between universalist postconciliar fundamental option theory on the one hand, and non-universalist postmodernist virtue theory on the other, breaks down. In Rahner's scheme of things, virtue, i.e., theological virtue, of necessity is universalist. Nonetheless, Rahner, with a legacy of Kierkegaard and Heidegger as well as Thomas, could be seen to be at least to possess understanding of postmodernist concerns, and further, may have opened the door a little wider for a more sympathetic postmodernist understanding of not only a universalist understanding of virtue and ethics, but also metaphysics and epistemology. In this sense, the thought of Karl Rahner opens a door for theology not only to the heritage of Aristotle, scripture, Aquinas, Kant and Kierkegaard but also to postmodernity.

How does Rahner's thought square with other particular issues of postmodernity? How relevant is Rahner generally for the dialogue of theology with postmodernism? Karl Rahner has been seen by some as a

foundationalist thinker[44] and by others as a quasi non-foundationalist thinker.[45] The most central element in postmodernism is the rejection of foundationalism. Foundationalism is, "an approach to philosophy which sees the primary task as the quest for the absolutely clear and certain foundations of human knowledge."[46] Conversely, anti-foundationalism has been characterised as follows:

> Questions of fact, truth, correctness, validity and clarity can neither be posed nor answered in reference to some extra-contextual, a-historical, non-situational reality, or rule, or law or value; rather, anti-foundationalism asserts, all of these matters are intelligible and debatable only within the precincts of the contexts or situations or paradigms or communities that give them their local and changeable shape.[47]

Now if Rahner has been seen in different quarters as both a "foundationalist" thinker and non-foundationalist thinker, and if postmodern approaches are completely anti-foundationalist, in this regard Rahner's ambivalent standing *vis-à-vis* postmodernist anti-foundationalist may be more nuanced, or balanced, insofar as Rahner was:

> not interested in defending any form of theological Cartesianism. On the contrary, [he] fought an Enlightenment concept of nature which gradually led to anthropologies fraught with extrinsicism. On the other hand, [he] thought that some foundationalist ontology is necessary if one is adequately to defend fundamental Catholic positions on doctrine.[48]

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[44] *ibid*
[45] R. R. Reno: *The Ordinary Transformed* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 8
[46] M. Charlesworth: *op.cit.*
[47] Stanley Fish: "Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies" (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1989), 354 quoted in Charlesworth: *ibid.*
[48] T. Guarino, *op.cit.*

Another central question for Rahner and postmodernity is the anti-realism of postmodernism. Postmodernism has been characterised as the anti-realist "plague ... that has affected literary and cultural studies"[49], as a 'philosophical virus' that is only susceptible to the cure of more philosophy, that "revives old theories that thought and language lack contact with a real external world, and can only refer to themselves."[50] By contrast realist philosophy would explain how "thought and language do connect to reality,"[51] a philosophy with its heritage not only in some secular philosophical schools, but also in Catholic philosophy. Rahner's Thomist heritage is unequivocally realist. We are left with the question how far did Rahner adhere to this realist heritage?

This raises the more global question of the philosophical input for Rahner's theology *vis-à-vis* postmodernity. The concern of this thesis has been largely theological, but it is a concern tempered by philosophy. Now, Zygmunt Bauman, a leading commentator on postmodernism has observed that the postmodern mind is "reconciled to the idea that the messiness of the human predicament is here to stay."[52] How do we proceed through the philosophical swamp? Rahner would agree that one of the more important roles for philosophy has "been to provide a medium for the expression and conveyance of the theological message."[53] As we have seen Rahner's theological anthropology was significantly influenced by a number of philosophical approaches, viz. Thomist metaphysics, Kantian transcendentalism and Heiddegerian existentialism. Although in the

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[49] W Franklin: "Casting about for the Philosopher's Stone" (*Sydney Morning Herald,* 31 Dec 1996), 9
[50] *ibid.*
[51] *ibid.*
[52] Z. Bauman: *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995), 245
[53] Erickson: *op.cit.*, 60

postconciliar period there has been a passing parade of various philosophies within theology, (idealism, existentialism, process philosophy) different areas of philosophy have assumed greater significance for theology, in particular linguistic analysis, metaphysics and ethics:

- Linguistic analysis and logic are still only too relevant for theology, particularly, in the area of exegesis.[54] Some postmodern writers have been seen as heirs however, as we have seen, Rahner appeared to display near indifference to linguistic and analytical philosphy.

- There is also the question of metaphysics, the Cinderella of philosophy for most of this century, which has been somewhat in tension with linguistic analysis. Rahner was an unapologetic advocate of metaphysics, "Metaphysics cannot possibly die so long as man has not degenerated into a clever animal or finally destroyed his own nature."[55] It has been claimed that postmodernism has opened the door (possibly unintentionally) to metaphysics:

> the time is right for rethinking metaphysics. If modernity's turn to the subject and epistemological foundationalism signalled the demise of classical metaphysics, then postmodernity's critique of modern subjectivity and epistemology has opened the door once again for metaphysics. This is not to say that we should expect a widespread revival of classical metaphysical speculation... While Modernity's attempt to reduce metaphysics to subjectivity and epistemology has not succeeded, it is also clear that postmodernity is still rather skeptical of metaphysics... The authors of the essays in this volume directly confront a variety of postmodern criticisms of metaphysical

[54] Erickson: *op.cit.*, 60
[55] *T.I.* XIII, 75

speculation, while nonetheless arguing that there is still a significant future for reflection on metaphysical questions.[56]

It is clear that metaphysics is back on the philosophico - theological agenda and is one of the main areas of contention for postmodernism. We can clonclude that Rahner's championing of metaphysics emphasises the relevance of his anthropology for the engagement of theology with postmodernity.

- Ethics has assumed a greater importance on the theological agenda. It is no coincidence that the first volume in James McClendon's recent systematic theology trilogy begins with ethics.[57] Similarly, Stanley Hauerwas has always regarded his primary agenda as theological and resists calling himself an ethicist since "so often this is meant to distinguish one from those who are real theologians."[58] By contrast, Rahner made many basic contributions to moral theology, eg, fundamental option, formal existential ethics, His moral anthropology has been central and pervasive not only for his own systematic theology, but for postconciliar theology generally. How does his moral anthrolopology fare with the challenges of postmodernity?

It is at this point that the encounter of ethics (moral theology in particular), with postmodernism reveals several weaknesses of postmodernism.

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[56] L. Gregory Jones & Stephen E. Fowl: Editorial Introduction to their *Rethinking Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), 1

[57] *Systematic Theology: Ethics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986)

[58] S. Hauerwas: *Character and the Christian Life* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1985), xviii

- By way of example, Michel Foucault struggles to avoid ethical relativism, although Jacques Derrida rails against what he sees as the totalitarian arrogance of the claims of reason. What is the contribution that postmodernist theorists have made to ethical theory? John Milbank sees the contribution of Nietzschean secular postmodernists, such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard, as an 'ethical nihilism'.[59] Zygmunt Bauman refers to the "hot headed 'everything goes' triumphalism of some postmodernists."[60] However, Bauman characterises the postmodern perspective on the moral condition as follows:

> Morality is incurably aporetic. Few choices (and only those which are relatively trivial and of minor existential importance) are unambiguously good. The majority of moral choices are made between contradictory impulses.[61]

I would argue that Bauman's comments constitute a challenge to Rahnerian fundamental option theory. If the fundamental option is based on the theological virtue of faith and also categorical choice, it can not be seen as being aporetic, that is the moral agent's choices are not ambiguous but are ordered teleologically to grace.

- The anti-foundationalism of postmodernism has had a considerable impact on ethics. As Charlesworth notes of this perspective:

> The only 'foundations' we have for knowledge or ethics are contingent ones, forms of life and language games that make sense in the 'local experience' of our 'community of interpretation' ... Anti-foundationalism leads to 'relativism' in the obvious sense that the meaning and truth of our judgements are relative to certain conventions, or local experiences, or what is acceptable in communities of interpretation. But it is one thing to say that

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[59] John Milbank: *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 278
[60] Z. Bauman: *op.cit*, 14
[61] *ibid.*, 10

> judgements are relative to a community, quite another to deny that there are any stable criteria whatever for the validity of our judgements and behaviour.[62]

Charlesworth has delineated quite clearly the impact of anti-foundationalism on ethics, and by extension, on Rahner.

- Does this postmodern perspective mean there is no rational foundation for choice? The evidence from other postmodern writers would seem to indicate this. Alasdair MacIntyre may have been claimed as postmodernist, however his position is far more nuanced, insofar as although he is acutely aware of the gravely disordered nature of modernist ethical theory[63], he is very much in the classical tradition of ethical thought. He has been seen as a representative of a benign postmodernism that shares some of the themes of a nihilistic postmodernism yet at the same time advocates a retrieval of classicism.[64] He is Aristotelian, teleological and a virtue theorist which is at variance with the postmodernist hubris of ethical choice, insofar as he discerns a rational philosophical foundation for ethical choice. This postmodernist lack of rational foundation for choice is clearly at odds with the very influential concept of fundamental option. Yet MacIntyre advocates the recovery of virtue which is narrative based and arguably context dependent, in short, it has a postmodernist ambience to it. We have seen how Rahner's Thomist heritage of virtue ethics has underpinned MacIntyre and the recovery of virtue ethics, yet we have also become aware of some of the problematic nature of Rahner's approach to virtue.

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[62] Charlesworth: *ibid.*, 196
[63] *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1992)
[64] J. Milbank: *op.cit.*, 326

- The relationship between epistemology and ethics constitues a further dimension to the problem of postmodernism. Charles Taylor observes that epistemology, "once the pride of modern philosophy, seems in a bad way these days."[65] He sees the challenge of Heidegger, the post-structuralists, Richard Rorty *et alii* as accelerating a trend "towards the repudiation of the whole epistemological enterprise."[66] He sees these and other critics as establishing a new moral outlook "through overturning the modern conception of knowledge."[67] However, all these critics, according to Taylor, share "a common basic form of argument, which finds its origins in Kant, and which one might call "the argument from transcendental conditions."[68] What he means by this is what Kant in short would refer to as "experience" or what Heidegger, in attempting to get beyond 'subjectivistic formulations', would refer to as "clearing" (*Lichtung*). For the student of Rahner all this sounds very familiar. Taylor himself seems unaware of Rahner's transcendental anthropology. Yet again we are faced with the possibility that Rahner may provide an *entrée* to this postmodernist perspective. Perhaps epistemology has rallied and arisen from the hospital bed of intensive care reserved for it by postmodernists. As we have seen there has been a recent concern with the moral basis of epistemology from the perspective of virtue ethics, in short a virtue epistemology,[69] As we have also seen Rahner's metaphysic of knowledge relates not only to fundamental option, via the supernatural existential, but also to virtue ethics. Rahner's metaphysic

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[65] Charles Taylor: "Overcoming Epistemology" in K. Baynes, J. Bohman and T. McCarthy (eds.) *After Philosophy - End or Transformation?* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1987), 464
[66] *ibid.*, 465
[67] *ibid.*, 473
[68] *ibid.*
[69] cf. Linda Zagzebski: *Virtues of the Mind - An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: University Press, 1996)

of knowledge is one link between virtue and fundamental option. Rahner's anthropology provides a significant contribution to the engagement of theology with postmodernism.

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